

Panchayat Raj and Women Empowerment

Meenakshi B

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science
Government First Grade College, Hirekerur, Haveri, Karnataka, India
psmeenakshib@gmail.com

Abstract: *Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) are viewed as solution to all the problems of rural development and is linked to empowerment of the marginalized section of society, especially women. This paper presents a thematic review on the empowerment of women representatives in PRIs with reference to decentralisation process and the 73rd constitutional amendment in India covering the level of awareness among representatives about panchayat functioning, capacity to take self-decision, participation in community activities, changes in their socio-economic conditions, decision making power at panchayat level and their political participation. The participation of women representatives including members from weaker sections appears to have increased substantially over the years mainly on account of affirmative action. Various studies indicate that women leaders are less corrupt, are able to provide more public goods of equal quality at effective price and consider women's preferences to improve overall governance. On the contrary, studies have also found that women representatives are illiterate; depend on husbands and male officials, especially in taking decisions with regard to village development programmes. The review suggests that the political journey is not smooth for women in a patriarchal and caste-ridden society on account of which women members face a lot of problems in the village panchayat. Women representatives are not comfortable to work at the panchayat level due to dominance of male representatives and they take a longer time to prove their capacity as compared to male representatives. Moreover, it was found that male representatives spend more time on political activities while, women spend more time in carrying out household chores. Overall, affirmative action through 73rd amendment has given women and the marginalised communities a sense of empowerment though they are yet to reach an equilibrium level. As assumed by many researchers, in the next decade or so the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women are bound to make further progress in their social status, leadership role, economic position, educational level and, political awareness and attainment.*

Keywords: Panchayat Raj

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