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Status of Women in Panchayati Raj Institution

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It is a tradition in almost all societies that politics is mainly an affair of men and that women should fall in line with them politically. Traditional mindset of people supports exclusion of women from political life.

- Milbrath

Evolutions of Panchayat Raj Institutions in India

The analysis of development of Panchayats in India is presented in three sections

viz.,

1. The Vedic period to Mughal period
2. The British period, and
3. The post independence period

The Vedic period to Mughal period

Either elevated to the status of Goddess or relegated to the status of non human being.

The British period

With the advent of the British ruling the villages lost their self governing character. The state began to deal directly with the villages instead of through the village assemblies or Panchayats. Later they realized the importance of Panchayats.

The different commissions constituted to bring administrative change in local self

Governance during British rule are as follow:

The famine commission of 1880

Paved the way for the development of village local self government.

Lord Rippon's Resolution (1882)

Lord Rippon's resolution recommending a progressive extension of local self government with a view to impart political education to the people and ensure administrative efficiency.

Royal commission (1907-08)

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The commission considered that village should be the unit of administration.

Women in Panchayati Raj (Post independence period)

Initiative towards providing an opportunity to women in the form of associating them with the village Panchayats were first mooted by Balawanta Rai Mehta Committee in 1957. In 1978, the Ashok Mehta Committee provided the same co-option opportunity for women in PRIs.

The constitution (Seventy third Amendment) Act 1992

The act envisaged that the Gram Sabha serve as the foundation of the panchayat Raj system, it envisaged a three tier panchayat system *i.e.*, village level, intermediate level and district level.

The salient features of the act are:

- Establishment of three tier panchayatraj institutions
- Holding of Grama Sabha in each village
- Reservation of seats for SCs, STs, BCs and women
- Reservation of offices of chairpersons to SCs, STs, BCs and women
- Constitution of state election commission
- Constitution of state finance commission

On the one hand being women, they have to face a volley of problems in Panchayati Institutions and equally they have to swim against the current while taking up the cause of leadership against the traditions. They have to cross several barriers and obstacles to emerge as leaders. How to define Women Empowerment? In the simplest of words it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Women want to be treated as equals so much so that if a woman rises to the top of her field it should be a commonplace occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the gender. This can only happen if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women. Thus it is no real surprise that women empowerment in India is a hotly discussed topic with no real solution looming in the horizon except to doubly redouble our efforts and continue to target the sources of all the violence and ill-will towards women.

Challenges

There are several challenges that are currently plaguing the

issues of women's rights in India. A few of these challenges are presented below. While a lot of these are redundant and quite basic issues faced across the country, these are contributory causes to the overarching status of women in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India.

Education

While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since its independence where education is concerned, the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. Not only is an illiterate women at the mercy of her husband or father, she also does not know that this is not the way of life for women across the world. Additionally, the norms of culture that state that the man of the family is the be-all and end-all of family decisions is slowly spoiling the society of the country.

Data Source: Census of India 2011

Health & Safety

The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned. In its 2009 report, UNICEF came up with shocking figures on the status of new mothers in India. The maternal mortality report of India stands at 301 per 1000, with as many as 78,000 women in India dying of childbirth complications in that year. Today, due to the burgeoning population of the country, that number is sure to have multiplied considerably. The main causes of maternal mortality are:

- Haemorrhage: 30%
- Anaemia: 19%
- Sepsis: 16%
- Obstructed Labour: 10%
- Abortion: 8%
- Toxaemia: 8%

While there are several programmes that have been set into motion by the Government and several NGOs in the country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not. Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications with local quacks giving ineffective and downright harmful remedies

to problems that women have. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.

Need to take action for the Empowerment of Women

The United Nations Development Programme constituted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for ensuring equity and peace across the world. The third MDG is directly related to the empowerment of women in India. The MDGs are agreed-upon goals to reduce certain indicators of disparity across the world by the year 2015. The third MDG is centered towards promoting gender equality and empowering women: “Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education by no later than 2015”

Ministry for Women & Child Development

The Ministry for Women & Child Development was established as a department of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in the year 1985 to drive the holistic development of women and children in the country. In 2006 this department was given the status of a Ministry, with the powers to:

Formulate plans, policies and programmes; enacts/ amends legislation, guiding and coordinating the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organisations working in the field of Women and Child Development. It delivers such initiatives such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) which is a package of services such as supplementary nutrition, health check-ups and immunization. As mentioned earlier, the empowerment of women begins with their safety and health and this Ministry is committed to providing them.

National Commission for Women

The National Commission for Women is a Department within the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It was set up exclusively to help women via the Constitution – by reviewing Legal and Constitutional safeguards for women, recommending remedial legislative measures, by facilitating quick redressed of grievances and by advising the Government of India on all policy matters affecting women.

Swami Vivekananda once said “arise away and stop not until the goal is reached”. Thus our country should thus be catapulted into the horizon of empowerment of women and revel in its glory.

Women Panchayat Leaders: constraint and support

Constraints

Support

Illiteracy	Training
Ignorance	Awareness Generation
Lack of Confidence	Training and Awareness Campaign
Hesitation	Exposure
Apathy at personal level	Personal interest, involvement and commitment
Family	Family support
Mobility	Family support and Economic support
Patriarchy	Family, community and Gov. Support
Poor Economic status	SHGs and other Income Generation Programmes
No-confidence Motions	Governmental and NGO support
Male Panchayat secretary/ officials	Gender sensitive administrations.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Men's positive attitude towards women's entry into politics.
2. An attitudinal change in both men and women.
3. The women should also be encouraged to organize themselves.
4. Incentives for ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making.

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