



Women Participation In Panchayati Raj Institution

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Abstract

In India, women make up roughly 50% of the population. In addition to their significance in the survival of the human race, women have played a crucial role in social structure by substantially contributing to socioeconomic advancement. Despite this, women had to face discrimination as a result of gender bias in social attitudes and behaviours that deny them equal status and opportunity in the social, economic, and political realms. The present research is done on the “**Women Participation in Panchayati Raj Institution**”. Local Self-Governance is not a new concept in India. It has existed since the ancient period. Although it may vary in form and structure during different eras. Participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution is not new. Women have participated in local self-governing institutions since ancient times. They have equal participation in these institutions, that is Sabha and Samiti. Women representatives are called Sabhavati. The condition of women in the Vedic period is very good. They are independent and also have the right to get an education. No evil customs are present at that time but in the later Vedic period the situation of women gets worsened and they are deprived of their rights. Now they have no rights and their participation in the political sphere decreases. Many evil customs against women have started the Sati system, veil system, child marriage, and polygamy. These evils further decline their role in the political field. Although some women from the elite class took part in the decision-making. But many social reformers work for the upliftment of women. Now again women have started to take participation in the political sphere. To increase women’s participation in the political sphere Himachal Pradesh Government has given 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institution

Key Words – Women participation, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Local Self- Governance,

In a broader concept, local self-governance can be defined as creating and implementing local collective action. The idea of local self-government is as old as humanity itself. It has just recently entered the more general discussion in academia and practices. India has been one of the forerunners in developing and strengthening local self-governance through decentralization. The history of local self-government starts with the Vedic

Period. The term "Panch-Ayat" refers to a group of five people chosen by the villagers in the Vedic Era. In a roundabout way, it alludes to the political structure that controls rural residents. It suggests that there was a system of self-governance. The word "*Panchayatan*," refers to a group of five people, including a spiritual man, and may be found in the ancient Sanskrit scriptures. But with time, the idea that a spiritual man might be a member of such organizations faded away (Rao, 2022, p.450).

Local Self Governance is not a new concept. In Indian history, there are traces of local self-governance. In the Vedic period, there was a 'Panch Parmeshwar' concept. They were considered equal to God. Institutions like Sabha and Samiti during the Vedic era were established. Women also at that time took equal participation in this institution. These were the democratic institution at the grass root level. During the Vedic period, the king also had to take approval from this institution regarding certain functions and decisions (Behra, 2022, p.29).

Then during the epic era of Ramayana, the administration was split into two parts: Pur and *Janapad*. The villages are called *Janapad* and the village people are called *Janapada*. At that time, villages were called *Gram*, big villages were called *Mahagram*, and groups of villages were called *Ghosh* (Rao, 2022, p.450).

In Manu Smriti, there is also the description of local self-governance. According to Manu village is the smallest unit and *Rakshak* is the saviour of villages. During the Maurya empire, Chanakya in his *Arthshastra* advised the king about local self-governance. The records of the Maurya period mention *Gram Sabha*, *Gram Janapad*, and *Panch Mandali*. Northeastern India contains small republics, and they are independent even though the king has the least interference in these republics. Then in the medieval period for administrative purposes there was *Makkadam* and for tax collection there was Patwari and there was Choudhrie for helping the *panch* in the settlement of disputes. In the medieval period, very few women were participating in the political sphere (Rao, 2022, p.451).

In the British era, there is decay seen in local self-governments. Britishers use these institutions for their benefit, and they have limited the working of these institutions. Lord Ripon played an important role in developing rural local administration. In 1882 Lord Ripon gave Ripon a resolution for the establishment of Local Self-Governance. He rejected the structure of Local Self-Governance present at that time, and he recommended that these Local Self-Governing institutions be divided into smaller units to achieve more (Jothiramalingam,2020, p.1078-1079).

Even with these recommendations, Britishers used these institutions for the protection of their imperial interest. At that time local self-governing bodies were just for sharing the burden of resources of central and provincial government. During this time local self-governing bodies go through many ups and downs. In the period 1938-1949, these self-governing bodies were reconstructed.

After independence, many legislative and administrative provisions were made for establishing local self-governing bodies. It was the dream of Mahatma Gandhi to establish *Ramrajya* in India and panchayat autonomy is an integral part of it. These contain the best features of different periods from Indian history and local self-governing bodies. Many provisions for the creation of local self-governing bodies were made by a constitutional assembly that's why they put it Under Article 40 of the constitution. Many committees were formed to get recommendations for the establishment of Panchayati Raj institutions such as Balwant Rai

Mehta Committee (1957), Ashok Mehta Committee (1977), G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985), and many other committees. And at last, in 1992 a historic decision was made, and Panchayati Raj Institution was constitutionalized through the 73rd and 74th amendments. Many provisions through this amendment had been made as Article 243(D) gives women 33% reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (Rao, 2022, p.452-459).

Women in Local Self-Governance during the Vedic Period -

The words "*Sabha*," "*Samiti*," and "*Vidath*" are used in the Rigveda to refer to local self-units. The panchayat then evolved into a group of five villagers chosen to resolve local conflicts. According to a Vedic proverb, it is done by five committed individuals, signifying the *Panchas*' holy conscience (Behra,2022, p.29).

The *Sabha* was referred to as the senior member of the Jana. Whereas *Samiti* referred to the political transaction and discussion carried out in the folk assembly, common men and women were included in *Samiti*. *Samiti* was in charge of choosing the king. *Samiti* also covered intellectual topics in addition to doing political business. For this meeting, prayers and religious rituals were of utmost importance. *Vidhata* was the oldest tribal assembly. In Rigveda, the word *Vidhata* was used 122 times. It was a very significant assembly for making choices for secular, military, economic, and religious goals. Women in Panchayati Raj Institution During the Rig Vedic Period, the state power was decentralized, and women took to have the right to took participate in all aspects of administration work during the Vedic period (Behra,2022, p.28).

In the Vedic period, women are considered equal to men. She was given equal respect to men. She had also a higher status. At that time women had the power of decision-making. Women take part in all religious activities. At that time, she was considered an *Ardhagini*. There is no difference between a son and a daughter. *Upnayan Sanskar* and educational rights are also given to women. Women also take part in public affairs. *Sabhavati* represents women's contribution to Local Self-Governance. This shows women have political participation during that period. At that time untouchability, *Sati Pratha*, and child marriage like evil customs were not present in society. Women are married at the right time and possibly they possess the freedom to select their life partner. Although widow remarriage is not done at that time. But they are equally respected (Rout,2016, p.47).

Women in the Vedic era were held to high intellectual and spiritual standards. In the Vedic age, there were several women philosophers. At that time, *Sati Pratha* and child marriage were not common. Women were free and held in high regard throughout the Vedic era. Women begin to experience a lot of discrimination in the later Vedic period. due to their lack of access to education and other rights. Evils like child marriage, *Sati Pratha*, and *Purdah Pratha* began to exist at this time. Polygamy makes the problem even worse (Paranthaman et al., 2019 p.259-260).

Epic Period-

In an epic era, women hold a respectable position. Women held a fair place in both the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Women are considered a source of Dharma, courage and perseverance. Valour of women like Kaikeya, Sita, Rukmani, Satyabhama, Savitri, Draupadi, and countless others. Women in the epic age were highly idealized. They were elevated by the values they upheld. The status of women gradually deteriorated. Women were no longer able to receive formal education. They received poor treatment. Women's

freedom was restricted. They were forbidden to read and recite the Vedas. Women are now required to live under their husbands throughout their youth, their sons during their old age, and their fathers during their childhood (Paranthaman et al., 2019 p.259-260).

Medieval Period-

Women find the mediaeval age to be a very depressing period. Their situation deteriorated even more. Muslim invasion changed Indian society by bringing it a new culture. Now, they treated women like their property. They are regarded as her father's, brother's, and husband's property. Women have no legal authority to act as they like. All of this led to the emergence of several new ills, including child marriage, *Sati Pratha*, *Jauhar*, and the denial of education to women. Women were now educated in doing home responsibilities, including cooking, recitation, and many other subjects (Paranthaman et al., 2019 p. 261-262).

Mughal Period -

During the Mughal period, women had to face many evils. Polygamy was practiced by the men. They treated their wives as their property. The *Purdah Pratha* was strictly followed by females. Women lack education as a result of adhering to these cultural customs. Both Muslim and Hindu women suffered a lot. *Sati pratha* was also very strong at that time. Women of that time cannot claim their property rights. At that time women are at their lowest social status. This depicts that there is very less participation of women in the political sphere (Sharma,2021 p. 3162).

British Period –

Women had to deal with several injustices throughout the British era, including the *Sati Pratha*, *Purdah Pratha*, female infanticide, child marriage, and many others. In all of India, women are in the same condition. However, there are rare exceptions, like Rani Laxmi Bai, who battled for India's independence. She was a real test case for female empowerment. She excelled in both administrative work and bravery. Women, however, had to endure the cradle cave. Women's conditions were getting worse with each passing day. Many social reformers were enlightened by this, and they now strive tirelessly to end all of these atrocities against women. Brahma Samaj was founded by Raj Ram Mohan Roy to advance women's rights. They resisted practices such as *Sati Pratha*, which was later outlawed on December 4, 1829 thanks to all of his efforts. Laws were also developed to prohibit *sati pratha*. Later, the minimum age for girl marriage was fixed at 14 years by the Civil Marriage Act of 1872. Child marriage ended in this manner. The situation of women was sad at the time.

Around 10 lakh women received voting rights through the Montague-Chelmsford reform before India's independence in 1909. Only Around 10 lakh women received voting rights through the Montague-Chelmsford reform before its independence in 1909. Women first gain access to the legislative branch in 1926. Madras' Muthu Lakshmi Reddy, the first woman to be nominated for the Madras legislative assembly. To protect women from leading degraded lives, Sarojini Naidu later introduced the Devadasi Bill during the Karachi session of the Council in 1931. In the national legislature, many women were elected. Renuka Roy, Annu Swaminathan, and Radha Bai Subbaraya were chosen. The first female legislator was elected in 1926. Madras' Muthu Lakshmi Reddy, the first woman to be nominated for the Madras legislative assembly.

Numerous legislative initiatives were launched after the United States gained its independence to help women regain the status they had enjoyed. They now have the right to equality (Article 14–18). Following the

Declaration of Independence, numerous legislative initiatives were launched to restore women to the status they had in antiquity. They now have the right to equality (Article 14–18). The ability to vote for women was granted (Srinivas&Surap,2018 p.230-231).

Post Independence –

Nowadays women’s participation in politics is a very trending topic among people. It is also debatable whether women are participating in politics or not. Although Government has made many provisions for increasing the role of females in politics. After getting freedom Indian government has done an effort for enhancing women’s participation in politics. This is clear from the preamble of the Constitution that it brings Justice, liberty and equality to the citizens. Women are given equal rights to men. Equal political rights, equal access to political participation opportunities, and the unabridged right to vote are all guaranteed by Articles 325 and 326. Following the release of the Committee on the Status of Women in India's report, the desire for more women to hold elected office in India was given significant consideration. It was claimed that increasing female representation in political institutions, particularly at the grassroots level, would require a policy of seat reservations for women. In its initial draught in 1988, the National Perspective Plan for Women recommended that women be given a 30% reservation from the panchayat level to the parliament. However, the reservation was later limited to the panchayat level in the final draught. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment, which established a 33 percent reserve in institutions of local government, was adopted in 1993 as a result of the national consensus behind this issue (Srinivas & Surap, 2018. p.231).

Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 - Himachal Pradesh was established on 15 April 1948 by the emerging thirty hilly states. Since a substantial portion of the people of Himachal Pradesh live in rural areas. It became important to understand the importance of the Panchayati Raj institution. It draws the attention of policymakers to the creation of Panchayati Raj Institutions. In Himachal Pradesh, the Panchayati Raj institution was established through Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act 1953. Later Panchayati Raj was reestablished in 1968 with the Panchayati Raj Act of 1968 which came into effect on 15th November 1970. By this act, Panchayati Raj Institution will include Zila Parishad as an advisory body at the district level. Panchayat samiti at block level as corporate bodies. With the passage of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act in 1994, Local Self-Governments were finally established in Himachal Pradesh, and several parts of the Panchayati Raj Institutions were defined (Balokhara,2020. p. 969-974).

50% Reservation for women In Panchayati Raj Institution in Himachal Pradesh --

In Himachal Pradesh, there is a policy of allocating 50% of reserved seats to women. Since independence, various efforts have been made to elevate the social standing of women. The 73rd Amendment act to the constitution is a significant stride towards the political empowerment of women in rural region using the Panchayati Raj Institution. Leading to the involvement of women in decision-making. The 73rd constitutional amendment enabled women to have 33% reservation in local self-governance Almost half of the population of Himachal is comprised of women. The family and society benefit greatly from their significant contribution to social and economic advancement. The state government has prioritized the well-being and progress of women recognizing their crucial role in society. On the 8th of March 1999, the Women's Commission was founded by the State Government. The primary goal of establishing this commission is to enhance the ability

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of women to tackle their issues. Additionally, it is the responsibility of this commission to guarantee the involvement of women in all developmental projects. In addition to its role in stopping crimes against women, this commission has also been effective in promoting equal job prospects for them. To enhance women's involvement in politics, the Himachal Pradesh administration has given women a 50 percent reservation for urban and local body polls starting in 2008. As a result of this legislation, women's participation in these administrative bodies has risen. Women are now significant contributors to household decision-making, in addition to the Panchayat. Women's ability to make decisions has influenced how families make decisions regarding girls. In Himachal, it is now commonplace for women to make important decisions, such as those related to education and career, within the confines of their households. This results in a rise in the number of women in all kinds of job categories. Women are significantly contributing to various departments such as education, health, and police, from the state secretariat to provide their services. Women are actively serving in various departments, including the state secretariat, education, health, and police.

In the 2021 elections of Panchayati Raj Institution held in Himachal Pradesh, roughly 53.3 percent of female candidates emerged victorious. Moreover, approximately 15,450 women have emerged victorious as representatives in the panchayats. What is uplifting is that women accounted for 46% of all nominations in the previous election but managed to secure over 53% of the total victories. It is encouraging to note that during the recent election, almost half of the nominations were women. Furthermore, more than half of the women who ran were successful in winning their races. Half of the seats in panchayats are specifically allocated for women. Women are victorious in obtaining more seats than the ones that are predetermined. *Mahila Gram Sabhas* have been arranged on Women's Day to boost women's involvement. The idea of local self-government has been present in India for a long time. Local self-governance has existed in India since ancient times. At various points in history, local self-governance has been significant, with varying degrees of emphasis placed on it in different places. After independence, the Panchayati Raj system was granted constitutional recognition through 73 amendments to the Constitution in response to its relevance at the time (State Election Commission, Data Profiler Management Information, 2023).

Conclusion - The essay illustrates how women's conditions changed over time. How women were treated equally throughout the Vedic era. Later in the mediaeval era, things got worse, and now women don't get treated nicely. They have to deal with a lot of evils including child marriage, Purdah Praths, and Sati Pratha. This demonstrates clearly that women's status was deteriorating. The problems in Indian society persisted under British control, and numerous reformers, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy Due to the efforts of Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, these atrocities were put to stop. Many initiatives have been launched to empower women and increase their political engagement since the nation gained its independence.

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