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Empowerment Of Tribal Women Through The 73rd Amendment: A Study Of Telangana

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Abstract:

The empowerment of tribal women is a vital aspect of inclusive development. The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, enacted in 1992, aimed to empower women by reserving seats for them in local self-governance bodies known as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This paper focuses on the empowerment of tribal women in Telangana, a state with a significant tribal population, through the implementation of the 73rd Amendment. The study explores the impact of political representation, socio-economic empowerment, leadership development, and the challenges faced in the process. It highlights the transformative potential of the 73rd Amendment in breaking gender stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive society.

Keywords: 73 Amendment, empowerment, leadership, local governance

Introduction:

The acceptance of Panchayati Raj was seamless as it aligned with India's ancient cultural patterns of administration through mutual consultation, consent, and consensus. The adoption of the 73rd Amendment by the Parliament in 1992 carried the potential for a revolutionary transformation, bringing genuine democracy to the grassroots level of Indian villages. It presented a historic opportunity to reshape rural India fundamentally. The amendment mandated the devolution of resources, responsibilities, and decision-making power from the central government to the rural grassroots, facilitated through Panchayati Raj Institutions. Its primary objective was to fulfill Mahatma Gandhi's vision of empowering the people through Panchayats, effectively reaching power to the masses. Philosophically, Panchayati Raj encompasses a multidimensional concept, encompassing diverse definitions and wider implications in the works of various thinkers. Emphasizing the ideology of Panchayati Raj, Gandhi believed that "India lives in her village" and advocated for starting the journey towards independence from the grassroots level, envisioning every village as a self-governing republic or Panchayati with full autonomy. He particularly emphasized the concept of Gram Swaraj (village self-governance) alongside Poorna Swaraj (complete independence).

The empowerment of women, particularly those belonging to tribal communities, is a crucial step towards achieving inclusive and equitable development. In India, where tribal women often face multiple challenges and systemic marginalization, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution holds significant potential for their empowerment. Enacted in 1992, the amendment aimed to provide political representation and opportunities for participation in decision-making processes at the grassroots level.

Under the 73rd amendment of constitution of Panchayati Raj Institution, one third of the total seats for scheduled caste, backward class, scheduled tribes and general caste women members in Sarpanch of village Panchayat, Block Panchayat, District Panchayat are reserved for women candidate. Conceptually, providing representation to women in Panchayati Raj Institutions could be accepted as an important planning approach regarding minimizing the traditional felling of people about the status of women in our society, particularly in terms of keeping women under the subjugation of men, imposing restrictions by the households and society against them in the availing of certain opportunities and several other social, cultural and traditional bindings dis-favouring them for improving personal life style and status in existing social and economic setting. Consequently this newly introduced policy would enhance the possibilities of increasing equalities in the process of socio-economic development, participation in different activities in mutual understandings, status and role to play in the house hold and the activities performed outside households and different decision making processes of the family among men and women. Factors such as the attitude and intention of elected women towards the initiation of various development programmes and capacity in making efforts in linking different segments of village population with the introduced programmes also matter very much in improving the status of women representatives in the social environment of the village Panchayats. As a consequence this process would lead to increase and strength of empowerment of women.

Background and Significance:

Tribal communities in India, characterized by their distinct cultural heritage and unique socio-economic challenges, have historically faced marginalization and discrimination. Within these communities, tribal women experience compounded hardships due to gender bias, limited access to education and healthcare, and restricted economic opportunities. Recognizing the need to address these issues, the 73rd Amendment sought to create avenues for tribal women's empowerment through political representation.

Salient Features of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act

The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, also known as the Panchayati Raj Act, introduced significant changes to the governance structure at the grassroots level in India. Some of the salient features of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act are as follows:

Establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs): The act mandated the establishment of PRIs as local self-government bodies at the village, intermediate (block), and district levels. These institutions are responsible for democratic decision-making, planning, and implementation of development programs at the grassroots level.

Reservation of Seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs): The act ensures the reservation of seats for SCs and STs in proportion to their population in PRIs. This provision aims to promote social inclusion and representation of marginalized communities in the decision-making process.

Reservation of Seats for Women: The amendment mandates the reservation of at least one-third of the total seats for women in PRIs at all levels. This provision aims to enhance the political participation and empowerment of women at the grassroots level.

Direct Elections and Adult Suffrage: The act introduced direct elections for members of PRIs, ensuring adult suffrage. This allows eligible voters in the respective areas to directly elect their representatives in PRIs, promoting democratic principles and participation.

Devolution of Powers: The 73rd Amendment Act empowers PRIs with specific powers and functions related to local planning, implementation of development schemes, and resource mobilization. It ensures the devolution of powers from higher levels of government to PRIs, enabling them to make decisions that directly affect their respective jurisdictions.

Finance Commission: The amendment act provides for the establishment of a Finance Commission at the state level to recommend the allocation of financial resources to PRIs. This helps ensure adequate financial support for the effective functioning and implementation of developmental activities at the grassroots level.

Five-Year Term: The members of PRIs are elected for a fixed term of five years. This provision promotes stability, continuity, and long-term planning in the functioning of PRIs.

Functioning and Composition of PRIs: The act outlines the structure, composition, and functions of PRIs, including the roles and responsibilities of the various levels of institutions. It also specifies the conduct of regular elections, meetings, and decision-making processes within PRIs.

Objectives of the 73rd Amendment:

The primary objective of the 73rd Amendment was to decentralize power and ensure effective local governance by reserving seats for women, including those from tribal communities, in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This reservation aimed to enhance the representation of tribal women in decision-making bodies at the village, block, and district levels. By doing so, it sought to address the specific needs and concerns of tribal communities, promoting their socio-economic development and overall well-being.

Implications for Tribal Women:

The implementation of the 73rd Amendment has had profound implications for the empowerment of tribal women. It has provided them with an opportunity to actively participate in the political sphere and contribute to shaping policies and programs that directly affect their lives. Through their representation in PRIs, tribal women can voice their concerns, prioritize community needs, and advocate for inclusive development initiatives targeting education, healthcare, infrastructure, livelihoods, and social welfare.

Tribal population in Telangana

Telangana has a significant tribal population, with various tribes residing in different parts of the state. As of the 2011 census, the tribal population in Telangana was approximately 31.9 lakh (3.19 million), accounting for around 9.34% of the state's total population. The state government recognizes 33 scheduled tribes in Telangana, including Gonds, Lambadas (Banjaras), Koyas, Yerukalas, Chenchus, Thoti, Konda Reddis, Kolams, and others. These tribal communities contribute to the cultural diversity and heritage of Telangana and have distinct languages, traditions, and socio-economic practices.

Context and Importance:

Telangana is home to various indigenous communities, including Lambadas, Gonds, Koyas, and others. Historically, tribal women have faced discrimination, limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, and have been marginalized from political processes. The 73rd Amendment aimed

to change this scenario by reserving seats for women in local self-governance bodies, known as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

Empowerment through Political Representation:

The 73rd Amendment mandates that at least one-third of the seats in PRIs should be reserved for women. This provision has given tribal women in Telangana an opportunity to actively participate in decision-making processes at the grassroots level. Through their representation, they can voice their concerns, prioritize their community's needs, and influence policies and programs that directly impact their lives.

Enhancing Leadership Skills:

The involvement of tribal women in PRIs has not only increased their political representation but has also played a significant role in enhancing their leadership skills. By holding positions of power and responsibility, they have gained confidence and developed the necessary skills to engage in public speaking, negotiation, and advocacy. These leadership qualities have enabled them to effectively address issues specific to their communities, such as access to education, healthcare, sanitation, and livelihood opportunities.

Improving Socio-economic Conditions:

Tribal women in Telangana have also experienced improvements in their socio-economic conditions as a result of the 73rd Amendment. With their active participation in PRIs, they have been able to mobilize resources, secure funding for development projects, and implement schemes focused on the welfare of their communities. This has resulted in the construction of schools, healthcare centers, and infrastructure projects aimed at improving the quality of life for tribal communities.

Empowering Tribal Women as Change Agents:

Tribal women empowered through the 73rd Amendment have emerged as change agents in their communities. They have become role models for other women, inspiring them to actively engage in community development and decision-making processes. These empowered women have also initiated programs to promote education, skill development, and entrepreneurship among tribal girls, breaking the cycle of poverty and empowering future generations.

Challenges and the Way Forward:

While the 73rd Amendment has been instrumental in empowering tribal women in Telangana, there are still challenges to overcome. These challenges include social prejudices, limited resources, and bureaucratic hurdles. To address these issues, it is crucial to provide capacity-building programs, sensitization campaigns, and support systems for tribal women. Additionally, sustained efforts should focus on strengthening the implementation of the 73rd Amendment and ensuring the effective utilization of funds allocated to PRIs.

Recommendations:

Implementing these recommendations, Telangana can further enhance the empowerment of tribal women through the 73rd Amendment, leading to sustainable development, gender equality, and social inclusion in tribal communities.

- Conduct awareness campaigns to educate tribal communities, especially women, about their rights and opportunities under the 73rd Amendment.
- Promote gender sensitization programs to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes within tribal societies and foster an inclusive environment for women's empowerment.
- Provide training programs and workshops to enhance the leadership, governance, and negotiation skills of tribal women elected to PRIs.
- Focus on skill development initiatives tailored to the specific needs of tribal women, such as entrepreneurship, financial management, and project implementation.
- Ensure that adequate resources are allocated to improve the quality of education and healthcare facilities in tribal areas, with a special focus on girls' education and maternal health services.
- Establish community-based initiatives to address the challenges of education and healthcare access faced by tribal women, including the provision of scholarships, residential schools, and mobile healthcare units.
- Facilitate access to livelihood opportunities for tribal women through vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and microfinance schemes.
- Promote the creation of income-generating activities in tribal areas, such as organic farming, handicrafts, and ecotourism, to empower tribal women economically and reduce dependency on traditional occupations.
- Improve the infrastructure and capacity of PRIs to effectively implement welfare schemes and address the specific needs of tribal communities.
- Establish mechanisms for regular monitoring and evaluation of the functioning of PRIs to ensure transparency, accountability, and effective utilization of resources.
- Foster partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based organizations to provide comprehensive support to tribal women, including legal aid, counseling services, and mentorship programs.
- Encourage the formation of self-help groups and cooperative societies to promote collective decision-making, resource-sharing, and economic empowerment among tribal women.
- Advocate for policy reforms to address the unique challenges faced by tribal women, including land rights, forest rights, and protection against violence and discrimination.
- Strengthen the implementation of the 73rd Amendment by streamlining administrative processes, ensuring timely release of funds, and conducting regular capacity-building programs for PRI functionaries.
- Conduct research and gather data on the impact of the 73rd Amendment on the empowerment of tribal women in Telangana to assess the effectiveness of existing initiatives and identify areas for improvement.
- Utilize research findings to inform evidence-based policymaking and program development, ensuring a targeted and holistic approach to tribal women's empowerment.

Conclusion:

The empowerment of tribal women through the 73rd Amendment holds immense significance for achieving gender equality, social justice, and inclusive development in India. It provided a platform for the empowerment of tribal women in Telangana by enhancing their political representation, leadership skills, and socio-economic conditions. The active participation of tribal women in PRIs has enabled them to address the specific needs of their communities and bring about positive change. It has enabled tribal women to voice their concerns, influence decision-making processes, and contribute to policies and programs that address their specific needs. However, challenges persist in ensuring the sustainable empowerment of tribal women, including societal prejudices, limited resources, and administrative barriers. To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to continue supporting and strengthening the implementation of the 73rd Amendment, while also addressing the broader socio-economic and cultural factors that hinder tribal women's empowerment. By recognizing the importance of tribal women's empowerment and implementing supportive measures, Telangana can serve as an exemplary model for the upliftment of tribal communities across India.

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