

# EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM IN EAST SIANG DISTRICT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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## ABSTRACT

*Women constitute about half of the Indian population. In the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992, the Panchayat Raj System was established in India in the year 1968 when the NEFA Panchayat Act 1967 was passed in Arunachal Pradesh. This system provided grass-roots level democracy. In particular, rural women were not getting their due segment in the development process. Women's equal participation in political activities plays a pivotal role in the development of the country's political system. In the political participation of the country, women are still behind. The status of women in terms of political participation is very low in India as well as in Arunachal Pradesh.*

*In the state, the provision of the 73rd Amendment Act was implemented only after the enactment of the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1997. After the implementation of the 1997 Act, three-tiered Panchayat structures were constituted in almost all the villages. Unlike earlier, it is now constitutionally mandatory to constitute Panchayat bodies. The power and function of the reservation of seats for women in the Panchayat bodies at different levels are clearly provided under this Act. If equal opportunities are given to women to take part in Panchayati Raj, it will lead towards women's empowerment in particular and social development in general.*

*In this present paper, I attempt to make some recommendations to the governments, along with the support of political parties, NGO's, stakeholders, academicians, and the general public, to take necessary actions such as conducting a free and fair election; creating political awareness among women, particularly in rural areas, special training and refresher courses for women representatives, particularly in rural areas; Make special provisions for the female representatives and give them more powers as compared to their male counterparts and educate them about their powers. It helps them work efficiently and effectively.*

*Keywords: Amendments, Empowerment, Panchayat Raj, Representation, Women Participation, Arunachal Pradesh.*

## INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women is the process of strengthening the economic, social and political status of women in society by which they have dignified and well-regarded life. One of the major interventions used by women empowerment promoters is to empower women through the panchayat raj institutions (PRIs) thereby to ensure their participation in the process of political decision making. The 73rd constitutional amendment is a milestone mainly for two reasons: a. it facilitated local empowerment and b. it ensured women's empowerment. It provides 33 percent (one third of the total number) reservation in Panchayat seats for women. This act also provides reserved seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in proportion to their population. Same proportions (one third) of the offices of chairpersons of panchayats have been reserved for women. Currently the reservation quota for women is set at 50% at PRIs level at central level as well as for the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

## RESERVATION FOR WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PRIS

According to the Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, affords for elective supports for women. It has been provided that not less than one-third reservation of a total number of posts of Members and Chairpersons at all three tiers of PRIs (i.e. Gram Panchayat, Transitional Panchayat, and District level Panchayat) shall be reserved for women. The women reservation has been announced adherence in the mind the maximizing participation of women in the process of decision making in Panchayati Raj System. Considering the participation of dominance on women in the civilized society, it is estimated that the outline of reservation policy on Panchayati Raj system may be an important influential step to reinforce the participation of women in the political system. In this circumstance, the enablement of Rural Women is essential for the enlargement of Rural India. Conveying women into the mainstream of development is a key concern for the state of India, the perseverance of which 2001 has been acknowledged as the "Year of Women Empowerment" (Minaketan Bag & Manjulata Jagadala, 2016).

### Role of Women in Panchayats

- **Participation in Election:** The Act provides for the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women. It is an attempt to ensure greater participation of women in election process directly and indirectly. It would be the nursery of creating women politicians for national politics. Even the participation of common women citizens in various activities such as attending Gram Sabha meeting, etc. has reportedly increased (68-78 percent).
- **Participation in Rural Development:** Women are actively participating in rural development as per their capacity right from labourers to policy- makers.
- **Participation in Decision-Making:** The participation of women as elected as well as non-elected members are rising due to reservation for women. It acts as pull factor for women to participate in meeting. They give their suggestions for various works and problems faced by them.
- **Agent of Social Revolution:** Women are acting as an agent of change in the society and raising voice against injustice and atrocities.
- **Reducing Corruption and Violence:** Due to women representatives nexus of officers and male elected representatives are breaking, which has a direct impact on reducing corruption. The role of local muscle power has substantially reduced due to active participation and awareness of women about their rights and power.
- **Reduction in Violence against Women:** Domestic violence has substantially declined due to women pradhan or surpanch. These women representatives take pro-actively take up such violence. The victims also feel free to share their grievances to women representatives.
- **Reduction in Violence against Dalits:** The dominance of upper caste patriachs are substantially declined, hence the shackles of caste is subsiding.
- **Practising Participatory Democracy:** Growing participation of marginalised section in general and women in particular, is transforming our democratic setup from representative democracy to participatory democracy.

### Difficulties Faced by Women Representatives in PRS

- Political intervention in the functioning of Panchayats.
- Women act as proxies for men.
- Husband's intervention of elected woman in her functioning.
- Lack of political awareness among the women in rural areas.
- Negative public opinion regarding women's leadership capacity.

- Illiteracy or low standard of education among the women in rural areas is a stumbling block.
- Lack of training courses especially for women representatives.
- Dominance of elected male members of the Panchayat.
- Politically motivated violence against women has seen an increase.
- **Efforts by Government to proliferate women's participation**

One pertinent initiative made by the government includes increasing the reservation threshold from 30% to 50% women in parliament in decision making. Even though India has managed to legislate representation, it is only the first step in a long way ahead for women to be on par with men as decision makers. Representation alone is inadequate and until it is manifested as participation, it remains limited in its capacity to empower women in the public sphere. Government have also involved in implementing lot of schemes **Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra**, which will empower rural women through community participation to create an environment in which they realize their full potential. The Ministry of Women and Child Development also conducts **Training of Trainers of Elected Women Representatives of Panchayati Raj** to deliberate upon issues related to empowerment of women and functioning of PRIs; describe processes of participatory planning in local governance; and enable women to identify their own leadership potential to contribute effectively as change agents.

#### **Suggestions for Effective Participation of Women In Panchayati Raj System**

- Political parties intervene in the election and functioning of Panchayats, creates hostile environment for the women contestants and women representatives. The government should take a strict action in such an intervention of political parties and elections should be conducted free and fair.
- In rural areas political awareness among the women is negligible. It is the duty of the state government and local administration to educate the women about the political issues and create awareness among them.
- Special training and refresher courses for women representatives should be conducted from time-to-time. It gives them confidence and creates political awareness and power.
- Government should make special provisions for the women representatives and give them more powers as compared to male counterparts and educate them about their powers. It helps them to work efficiently and effectively.
- There should be a provision to give honour and financial rewards to the women members for their exemplary works.
- The rotation term of reserved seats should be made after every at least 10years. It would help women representatives to fix their feet in the panchayats.

#### **CONCLUSION**

- With the establishment of PRIs in our country a woman gets an opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator, decision-maker or a good leader. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 is a milestone in this regard. It provides women a chance to come forward.
- This experiment is proving to be a big success particularly by providing opportunity to women to come out of their houses and participate in administrative and political field.
- However, in many areas of our country this system has been captured by some elite people. The government should provide extra financial, administrative or political assistance to women for the success of the provision of the Amendment.

- Government should encourage research and development in effective implementation of provisions of 73rd amendment.

We must remember that empowerment as a process is slow but self-perpetuating. Providing women with opportunities and support systems (such as reservations & other affirmative action) has the potential to put into motion a sustainable process for a change in gendered power relations allowing them to slowly but steadily break the shackles of existing boundaries.

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