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# Importance Of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act As A Catalyst For Women Empowerment In India : An Analytical Study

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## Abstract

When 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment act was introduced in the year 1992 it was described as the new phase in the political empowerment of women. Reservations for women in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) were seen as a way to boost women empowerment through increased political awareness, self-confidence, and involvement in development and social issues of the region. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts, 1992 proved to be catalytic, ushering in more than 15 lakh women into the position of leaders in India's local administration. These amendments, among other legislations, handed over the buttons of power to the population at the grassroot level with one-third reservation of seats and crucial positions within the panchayat for women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment Acts are no doubt important milestones in Indian history according to which 33 percent seats are reserved for women at the Panchayat and Municipal levels. This particular paper explores the impact on political representation, socio-economic empowerment, leadership development, and the challenges faced in the process. It further highlights the transformative potential of this Amendment in breaking gender stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive society. This paper is an attempt to understand women empowerment in grassroot level and how far it leads the way to their participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

**Keywords:** Political Empowerment, Women, 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, Panchayati Raj Institution, local governance.

## Introduction

"Woman is the architect of a nation's destiny. Despite being as delicate and soft as a lily, she has a heart far stronger and bolder than that of a man. She is the supreme source of inspiration for man's onward march." -Rabindranath Tagore

During the Freedom Movement Mahatma Gandhi provided the concept of swaraj wherein he mentioned – 'as long as women of India do not take part in public life there can be no salvation for the country. I would have no use for that kind of swaraj to which such women have not made their full contribution.' Women empowerment is a topic that comes up often in discussions about human rights and development. It is a vital precondition for almost

every society's overall growth. Even though women make up over 50% of the population in general, they are still oppressed and have uneven socioeconomic and political positions. Women in India who are submissive to males must be empowered enough to overcome social, political, and economic inequality. Since India's independence in the year 1947, there have been numerous initiatives to enhance women's status. The Constitution (Seventy-Third and Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992 is a significant step towards women's political empowerment through Panchayati Raj institutions. As a result, a substantial number of women who were formerly homemakers have gained access to participate in the decision-making bodies in rural regions. The 73<sup>r</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts, 1992, through which self-governance at local level was introduced in the form of a three-tier system of Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels and Municipalities in urban India, reserved one-third (33%) seats for women both in reserved and unreserved categories and also in the offices of the chairpersons on rotation basis. This amendment has eased women's entry in politics and their empowerment as women got included in the governance and policy making process and there are lakhs of women who got elected to panchayats and municipalities due to this reservation system. 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).

### **Women empowerment through 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act:**

Women's political empowerment begins with their full and active participation in political institutions. Women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is important to ensure the grassroots level of democracy. Women's experience of being involved with the PRIs has positively transformed many of them. They have gained a sense of empowerment by having control over resources, officials & most of all, by challenging men at the public realm. They have become articulate & conscious of their self power.

**Political empowerment:** 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 the election process directly and indirectly. It would be the nursery of creating and nurturing 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 over the years.

**Decision-making:** The participation of women as elected as well as non-elected members are rising due to the reservation for women. It acts as a pull factor for women to participate in meeting. They give their suggestions for various works and the common problems faced

by them. This further empowers them and enables them to take decisions in different spheres of life.

**Enhancing Leadership Skills:** The involvement of 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, such as access to education, healthcare, sanitation, and livelihood opportunities.

**Improving Socio-economic Conditions:** Women have also experienced improvements in their socio-economic conditions as a result of these Amendments. 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 centres, and infrastructure projects aimed at improving the quality of life for them.

**Empowering Women as Change Agents:** Women empowered through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act have emerged as change agents in their areas. 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 girls, breaking the cycle of poverty and empowering future generations.

**Raise in voice:** Despite the low-literacy level, they have been able to tackle the political & bureaucratic system successfully. They have used their elected authority to address critical issues such as education, drinking water facilities, family planning facilities, hygiene & health, quality of healthcare & village development.

**Empowerment of other women:** Women are acting as an agent of change in the society and raising voice against injustice and atrocities. Women's role has led to raise voice by women against various domestic violence and other atrocities. Women are being empowered to actively participate and generate awareness of women about their rights and power.

**Reduction in violence against women:** Domestic violence has substantially declined due to women pradhan or sarpanch. These women representatives take pro-active steps against such violence if occurred. The victims also feel free to share their grievances to women representatives in compared with male counterparts.

### **Challenges and Problems in Women's Participation in PRIs**

Despite the reservation system for women, effective participation in PRIs has miserably failed due to misuse and manipulation by the local power-brokers. Sometimes ignorance of women about their rights and about their potential and responsibilities has kept them far

behind in the local bodies. It is very much doubtful that mere increase in the number of reserved seats for women in local bodies is likely to increase the participation of women. Unless structural changes are brought about, and sincere effort is made to educate women and the power structures existing in rural areas are neutralised, nothing much can be achieved. Women representatives often feel hesitation to speak especially when they are in large male dominated assemblies. It has been observed that in some cases, women are invited only to complete the quorum. The family, community and the state (represented by the officials) have together created a situation wherein elected women representatives are facing many operational constraints while playing their roles and discharging their functions in the PRIs. Some common obstacles faced by women are listed below:

- Illiteracy and low education levels of the majority of the women elected to the PRI's.
- Women are overburdened with family responsibilities.
- Introversion due to the lack of communication skills.
- Poor socio-economic background with which the women have come into the system and poor capacity building.
- Male family members and also leaders from the caste group/community come in the way of the affairs of the Panchayats.
- Indifferent attitude and behaviour of officials working in the system.
- Misguidance by the local bureaucracy.
- Mounting pressure from the political party which has vested interests in the gender reservation for positions in the PRI system.
- Undue interference by the male family members (acting as proxy sarpanch) of women representatives, treating them as mere dummies.
- Widespread use of corrupt practices among the male members and local bureaucrats.

### **Efforts to proliferate women's participation**

Even though India has succeeded to legislate representation, it is merely the first step towards women being able to make decisions at par with their male counterparts. To empower women in the public sphere, representation alone is not sufficient, and unless it is reflected at active participation, it stays restricted. The government has also been active in the implementation of several initiatives, including the Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme, which aims to empower rural women via community involvement to create an environment where they may reach their fullest potential. Training of trainers of elected women representatives of Panchayati Raj is also conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to discuss issues related to women's empowerment and the functioning of PRIs, describe participatory planning processes in the local governance, and enable women to identify their leadership potential to contribute effectively as change agents.

The following initiatives and training programs must be implemented to increase women's participation and decision-making in the PRIs.

- Measures must be implemented to increase the number of women participating in the governance process. The elected leaders of these institutions must be literate to guide and inform the villagers about the various provisions of the PRIs Act.
- Literacy is also very much important in educating rural women and making them learn about the governance system. As a result, steps to improve female literacy, particularly in rural areas, are urgently needed.
- Women's leadership and communication skills must be developed to increase social mobilization.
- Making women familiarise with the state and federal governments' rural/women/child development programs. In terms of planning, such as scheme selection and placement, there should be no factions or party politics; rather, genuine project implementation is required to strengthen decentralized planning.
- Systematic awareness is required to improve rural women's capacity to assume their new roles as local legislators. Furthermore, literature on the various provisions of rural development should be provided to Panchayat leaders as well as common villagers so that they are more familiar with their functions and various development schemes.
- Women Panchayat members should be trained based on their local experience, and their participation in developing a framework that will allow them to analyze and understand their roles and responsibilities by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act should be encouraged.

## **Conclusion**

Women need to be empowered in the arena of political decision making to facilitate their real empowerment. With the establishment of the PRIs in India, a woman gets an opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator, decision-maker or a good leader. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 is a significant milestone in this regard. It provides women a chance to come forward and make a change for the society. Government should encourage research and development in effective implementation of provisions of these amendments. These amendments are proving to be a big success particularly by providing opportunity to women to come out of their home and participate in the administrative and political field. It has to be considered that the inclusion of qualified women in Panchayats at the initial stage of the would be an important instrumental measure in planning for empowering women. Women constitute half of the population of our country. It is our duty to encourage the women in such a largest democracy of the world. To give a proper status to the women, Government, NGOs, and Universities have to play a vital role in this regard. This group of women, if provided proper representation at the Panchayat level can strongly rise and handle the issues related to the betterment of women, can play a dominant role in the decision making process and can no doubt make suitable recommendation for improving the status of women. Good number of women competing with the men in local politics,

forwarding gender related agendas is viewed as a way towards the path of gender equity. To conclude, it can be said that 33% reservation for women in the PRIs is a very good initiative but it should be supplemented with some effective measures that ensure the qualitative aspect of women's participation. There is no doubt that Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have increased women empowerment but it varies to place and circumstances. Panchayati Raj Institutions in which women representative observe the matters, take active participation in decision-making process themselves and make development programs of society accomplish and maintain by external agencies then it can be said that women empowerment has been done. On the other hand, if women representatives are not allowed to go outside, they cannot lift or remove their veils of ignorance, and they are making signature only by the order of her husband or male relative then it can be said that women empowerment has not been done in its truest sense. In India, both types of situations are being prevailing in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Thus, the result and quantity of women empowerment has been significantly different at different places and in different circumstances.

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