

**“Women and Political Empowerment through Panchayat Raj Institution”-A
case study of Qazigund Block of District Anantnag (Kashmir), India**

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ABSTRACT:

The term “Local Self Government” originated when the British regime ruled our country. The present study attempted to highlight the extent of the political participations of women and their electoral process at Panchayati Raj system and also the problems faced by women’s in the system. After the independence the 73rd amendment acts of the constitution, the massive development that took place through the three- tier- system and the 33% reservation of women’s. The study was conducted in July – August 2014 using a simple of 50 women respondents from the gram panchayat of block (Qazigund) in District Anantnag, J&K State, India. The finding was that there is a lot more to improve in women sphere especially field of education and backwardness of women.

Keywords: *Panchayati Raj, Decentralization, Women reservation, Women empowerment, Political awareness.*

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Introduction:

Since ancient times, number of systems of community-based management of local affairs had been evolved in India, among these institutions in most of the parts of the country were known as “Panchayat” which literally means a council of five persons. The introduction of Panchayat Raj Institution was a revolutionary step towards rural upliftment, “it was expected that panchayat could bring a change in all sectors of rural people and their participation at all levels”. It has been found even after the 73rd constitutional amendment act, some has been achieved but much has been remained to be achieved yet. Rural development has remained one of the constant and increasingly conscious goals of our public policy, but unfortunately this goal has been eluded us. Democracy is one of the fundamental concepts, with its long history and theory.

Democracy has played main role in development of panchayati raj system, even human beings with their thoughts, feelings and actions creating problems to democracy. A developing democracy like India needs the wider participation of people both men and women irrespective of caste, colour, creed and sex in order to provide the opportunities for the system of democratic decentralization through Panchayati Raj Institutions. Generally the term ‘Political Participation’ refers to those voluntary activities by which members of the society, both men and women directly or indirectly take part in the formulation of public policy. These activities are casting of vote, sucking information, attending meetings, hoarding decisions, women empowerment and formulation of public policy etc.

In India more than 70% of population living in rural areas, women population is little less than male population of the country. But even the independence for a long time rural women virtually remained unknown to politics due to religion, caste, traditions and male dominance in Panchayat. Male have played a dominant role in village Panchayat, ignoring the interests of women. This is true as far as the state and national level politics is concerned, A democratic country cannot progress without equality and active participation of women in local self government. Decentralization of planning and administration was accepted tool to achieve these objectives. The 73rd amendment act of the constitution is an important step to address the problems of women in local self government and to improve their leadership in rural areas.

Participation of Women in Panchayat Raj Institutions:

The socio-cultural practices in the society to a large extent determine the life of a woman, the issue of women's participation cannot be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in the society. Through the history we know that women were supposed to carry forward their traditions, culture, norms and values of society. Social, economic and political changes after the independence of India lived their position and role in local self government and gradually defines them about the importance and right to education too.

Through the process of socialization, globalization, liberalization. "The role and status of women has changed and developed too much and women's involvement of politics. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Indian national movements and the modern changes of democracy, the role of women in making a success of grass root level of democracy has been emphasized by the national and state level and recommended measures of Panchayati Raj System".

The women population of India is more or less than half of the population of the country. But the involvement of women in politics is very low as compared to men in India. Nowadays, we are seeing the participation and involvement of women in every level of government; it is through with the constitutional 73rd amendment act, 1992 to have made some real basis for bringing women into power from the basic unit i.e, Panchayat level. This act provides women 33% reservation of seats according to its article 243-D. There must be officers and chairpersons at the village level for women, SCs and STs that provide powers and functions for the betterment of women and backward classes.

Political Empowerment and Women of India

The concept of empowerment flows from the power and the 'Empowerment of Power' means political power in the hands of women and how they run and take the process of decision-making. The years of 2000 and 2001 were observed as the years of women's empowerment.

During the years much has been done and the landmark document has been adopted "The national policy for the empowerment of women" and the government has adopted many new schemes and programs. The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of

decision making. In India, the Ministry of Human Resources and Development and the National Council of Women have been working for women.

The economic and political empowerment in modern days made a progress in India. The importance has been highlighted by political thinkers, social thinkers, political leaders and reforms. “The newly formed Panchayat through the 73rd amendment as a self governing Institution by article 243-G. In the year 2000, the elections of Panchayati Raj, women members positively faced all the consequences and won their seats”.

At the central and state level, women are now progressively making a difference, today we have seen women as Chief Ministers, Women as President, Women as different political party leaders and head of civil services, etc. In India at present there are total 20, 56,882 lakh village Panchayats. Out of these, women members is 8, 38,244 lakh i.e., 40.45% of the total members.

Political Empowerment and Women of Block Qazigund

Qazigund is a block of District Anantnag in Jammu And Kashmir State, The state which is known as “Paradise on Earth”. According to Indian Census 2011, the Block of Qazigund has a population 40,244. Males constitute 55% and females 45% of the total population of the Block. The block Qazigund has an average literacy rate of 76% higher than the state average literacy rate which is 74%. In this block, male has the more literacy rate than females. The male literacy rate of the Qazigund is 80% and female literacy rate is 64%.

The state was under Dogras before independence of India. After independence, it became an integral part of India. The town of Anantnag is known as “Gateway of Kashmir”. This town is famous for Chinar trees, lakes and springs. The name Anantnag has come out of springs because this district is also known as Town of Springs. Historically, this district has been a Muslim majority district. The rulers of India such as Mughal Emperors made the District a famous Tourist Spot of the State. Under the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, the J&K state has been conferred a special status as compared to other state of the country. The state has its own constitution which works for the development of the state and local self government. The block Qazigund works under the state laws of development for panchayat both men and women.

Methodology:-

For the present study of women in panchayat, both primary and secondary data was used. Primary data which was the base for our study by collected by surveys like interview. In order to

select the respondents of the Block, different wards of the village, Stratified Sampling Method was used. The data which was collected by the Primary survey were analyzed into tabulation. The secondary data was collected by various govt. records like census, specialized books, internet, magazines and other sources. An interview schedule was framed upon primary data, 50 respondents were analyzed, 25 respondents from each ward.

To understand the socio-economic background of the women and respondents, we analyze the age, education, family type and income of the respondent

Age group classification of Respondents (Table-1)

Age Group	Number	Percentage
Young Age (18-30)	30	60%
MiddleAge (31-50)	15	30%
Above 50 Years	05	10%
Total	50	100%

(Source: From Primary Data)

The Table -1 represents the age wise classification of the respondent, out of total sample of 50 female representatives.

Education qualification of the respondents (Table -2)

Education qualification	Number	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	03	6%
Metric	13	26%
Senior Secondary	15	30%
Graduate	14	28%
Post-Graduate	05	10%
Total	50	100%

(Source: From Primary data)

The Table-2 shows the educational level of the respondents of total numbers 50 and shows how much education is necessary, essential to bring awareness among the respondents in PRI's.

Source of Income of the Respondent's Family (Table-3)

Occupations	Number	Percentage
Agriculture	20	40%
Govt Job	08	16%

Private Job	05	10%
Other	17	34%
Total	50	100%

(Source: From Primary data)

The Table-3 shows income from different Occupations of women respondents.

Awareness of the Respondents about the Panchayati Raj (Table-4)

Awareness	No. of Respondents who know Saying 'Yes'	Percentage%
Knowledge of Panchayat Raj Act 73 rd Amendment	18	36%
Sources of income of Panchayats	14	28%
Power & Works of Panchayats	13	13%
Seats reserved for women in PRI'S, Assemblies and Parliament?	23	23%

(Source: From Primary data)

The Table-4 shows that the Respondents have very little knowledge about Panchayati Raj Act, power & work of Gram Panchayat

Electoral participation of woman in Panchayat Raj elections in the given block (Table-5)

Ser No.	Participation	No. of Respondents Saying 'yes'	Percentage
1	As a Voter	22	44%
2	Supporter of Political Party	16	32%
3	As a Campaigner	05	10%
4	As a Candidate	07	14%
	Total	50	100%

Findings:-

- When we analyzing the data collected from the respondents, we find majority of women respondents participating in the electoral process as voters in the elections.
- In J&K, the 33% reservation of seats for women in panchayat, the winning of women candidates is very thin compared to male candidates. We can say that women still are not equally participating as male, when April 23,1993 was a red latter day for Indian women.

- We find some factors which prevent the women in taking the active part in panchayat of the state. Such factors are caste, illiteracy, parda system and male dominance of politics.
- During the survey we find most of our respondents have favoured the party and cast their vote to that candidate whom their husband has chosen.
- From the studies we find that respondents have not much awareness about the panchayat raj act of 73rd amendment, they have very little knowledge about Gram Panchayat.
- The respondents hardly know policies and programmes of the block, how the block works for the betterment of villages and how much fund they are going to utilize upon them.

Conclusion:-

In a vast democracy like India, decentralization of government is an absolutely necessary especially in the state of J&K. The state of J&K has a newly developing panchayat raj system through its own constitution. Meaningfully, participation of women in the decentralized governance is a pre-requisite for ensuring equality at all levels. The political parties which are the pillars of the democracy should engage their practices giving more space to women to get into the governance and uphold the value of democracy. Panchayat raj institutions with 33% reservation and the best engines through which good governance can be ensured democratically and the process of developed can be achieved.

The 73rd constitutional amendment act in India focused the structures and process of rural India, participation of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions, the elected women's participation in decision making and the process of the state.

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