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## POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT WOMEN THROUGH PANCHAYATH RAJ INSTITUTION IN KARNATAKA

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**Abstract:** Modern era of the participation and administrative state many writers has voiced their concern over the problem of responsiveness of the administrative state to the norms of democratic procedures. To safeguard individual rights and liberties against bureaucratic or arbitrary abuse an increase in women's vigilance and participation in politics is necessary. Modern state should show "concern for individual people in the criteria used in making decisions; as an effort to assign each women's need equal weight in policy deliberations and as an effort to make as broad as feasible the opportunities for women to participate in the decisions that affect them." The term 'political participation' refers to those voluntary activities by which members share in the selection of rulers and, directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy. These activities are like casting vote, seeking information, holding discussions, attending meetings, making financial contributions to political parties, staging strikes and demonstrations, communicating with the legislators and other leading figures and the like. It follows that political participation "is the involvement of the individual at various level in the political system. Political activity may range from non-involvement to office-holding. It is also important to stress that participation "may result in the motivation for increased participation, including the highest level – that of holding various types of offices - which involves the process of political recruitment. The idea of political justice and equality is explained in article 1 of the Universal Declaration of 1948 in these words, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood

**Key words:** Women Political, Empowerment, Democratic, Participation

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**Introduction:** It is now widely accepted that self governing institutions at the local level are essential for national growth and for effective people's participation and that they are an integral and indispensable part of the democratic process. "Grassroots of Democracy", based on small units of government, enables people to feel a sense of responsibility and to inculcate the values of democracy. At the same time, it also offers a unique opportunity to participate in public affairs, including development work. In a vast, diverse and complex, subcontinent, decentralization is also a political and administrative imperative. Participation is an ingredient of every political system whether traditional or modern, democratic or totalitarian, large or small. The political system may be of any kind. Self governing rural local bodies are described in the Indian context as institutions of democratic decentralization or Panchayat Raj. This was considered a political and administrative innovation of far-reaching importance when it was first introduced in 1959. It was depicted as a mechanism of popular participation. The Panchayat Raj bodies were expected to awaken political consciousness on the countryside and to engender a democratic process in rural India. Initially, people evinced keen interest in the Panchayat Raj system and their representatives participated actively in local affairs, including developmental activities. With the passage of time, the initial enthusiasm and public participation had gradually diminished.<sup>1</sup>

**Importance of Women Participation:** Women's participation may be used both for support by an agency and as a control device by the law-makers. Participation may be direct or indirect, formal or informal; it may be political, social or administrative in nature. Women's participation in Panchayat Raj institutions may take many forms. It refers to all those activities which show the women's involvement in the processes and administration, that is, participation in policy formulation and programme planning, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes meant for development target groups. In developing societies the traditional definition of people's participation often becomes irrelevant due to lack of time, initiative, and resources of the citizen who fails to show the necessary enthusiasm or cooperation towards governmental programmes meant for their benefit. The state not only plays the key role in attempts at socio-economic transformation and modernization but also in promoting, what is called institutional participation. Government aid the government sought to create an institutional infrastructure to promote popular participation.<sup>2</sup> Panchayat Raj and community development programmes were introduced mainly so solicit women participation in the development administration of the government. The community development programme was a method of soliciting community participation to assist the government authorities in improving the

social, economic and cultural life of the women in the rural areas.

**The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1993:** The Panchayats got a constitutional status in 1993, the Gram Sabha found place in it as the Vidhan Sabha of the village. Women/SCs/STs/OBCs got reserved seats to take part as chairpersons and members in the decision-making at the PRI level. Schedule XI, containing 29 powers, was laid down for devolution of powers to the PRIs. The District Planning Committee was proposed for preparing the plans for economic development and social justice at the district level.<sup>3</sup> With the implementation of the State Acts as per the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, a clear-cut role of the PRIs in rural development has been envisaged and the Government of India and different states are now increasingly seeking the assistance of the PRIs in implementation of various schemes and developments programmes. The government of India have invariably sought a meaningful involvement of the PRIs and carved out a specific role for them in the context of the XI Schedule and the five-year plans. Karnataka started many development schemes such as 'Swasthi', 'Nirmala Karnataka', 'Ambedkar Ashrya Yojana', 'Gram Gana Rajya Vedike', etc. Swasthi is programme to improve soil, water, agriculture, trees, sanitation, housing and infrastructure. It aims at convergence of services at the village level. Nirmala Karnataka has made it compulsory to construct a toilet by all the Panchayats. It will set an example and bring an attitudinal change in public leaders. The rule has also been upheld by the High Court of Karnataka. Ambedkar Ashrya Yojana aims at construction of 2 lakh houses for the homeless people during 2000-2001. Grama Gana Rajya Vedike is a forum of 150 voluntary organizations and people's movement to organize jathas for empowerment of the Gram Sabhas and decentralization of political and economic power.<sup>4</sup>

**Education and Women Empowerment:** The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grass root problem. According to Mahatma Gandhi, "If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate an entire family." Our predominant patriarchal system doesn't provide enough chances for women to have higher education even if they wish. Girls should be motivated to take up higher education. Universal education for all below 14 years should be strictly implemented. Gender sensitive curricula should be framed at all stages of primary education to address sex-stereotyping menace. It is also necessary to sensitize the other sex towards women. It is important to usher changes in the societal attitudes and perceptions with regard to the role of women in different spheres of

life. The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.<sup>5</sup>

**Panchayat Raj Institutions and Women Empowerment:** The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India recommended statutory status for all women's Panchayats with clearly demarcated functions and resources and active links with Gram Panchayats. However, it was apprehended that all women panchayats may also lead to marginalization of gender issues on women's concerns and would not get reflected in these bodies. Therefore, it was thought that collective empowerment through representation in democratic process would give them voice and feeling of solidarity. New interests groups and issue-oriented groups will emerge giving rise to new local women leadership actively participating in the decision-making and mobilization. This became a reality with the enforcement of 73rd Constitution Amendment Act and large number of women joined election fray as candidate as grassroots level.

**Women in Panchayats:** The goal of decentralization of powers through enactment of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act would have been half achieved without removing gender imbalance and bias in the institution of local self-government at the grassroots level. Moreover, women in India have been waiting for this rightful share in political power. Constitutional guarantee of equal political rights has been achieved only partially due to socio-economic set-up of Indian polity. Women were exercising only right to vote meekly. Equal opportunity to hold political posts and positions rarely came to them. They remained marginalized politically, socially and economically and subjected to various types of oppression. Justice eluded them and deprivation became prime.

**Stepping forth as leader:** In the first, after election, women participate in a Women's Leadership activities that (a) awakens women to their selfhood and human rights, (b) educates them about their powers and responsibilities as panchayat leaders, (c) builds their capacity to create a vision and plan actions to achieve it, and (d) links them with government and other resource people in their area. This is reinforced through needs-based programmes that women request to strengthen their skills in communication, finances, and knowledge of laws and government programs.

**Leadership for development:** In the second, they work with Panchayats to create bottom-up plans (or "micro plans") for villages to meet basic needs. These plans are not a wish list; bottom-up planning means assessing available resources and creating strategies for actions that people can take themselves. When resources from local government are required, such

as for improving schools or health clinics, planning includes establishing good partnerships with local officials.<sup>6</sup>

**Creating federation for a great voice:** As villages take action, they inevitably run up against bureaucratic obstacles. The best way to overcome these obstacles - and to sustain villages' process of empowerment on their own - is to form federations of elected women representatives. These are formed at the block, district and state levels. Block-level federations are able to provide regular monthly forums for mutual support, and state federations are able to rally massive numbers of elected women annually to demand change at the policy level.

**Changing policies / delivering results:** By four, with plans and federations in place, The Hunger Project focuses on ensuring that panchayats have successfully implemented their plans and that lives have truly improved on a sustainable basis. In addition, where leaders have run up against major legal obstacles, this is a year when women are powerful enough to demand policy changes and sometimes even engage in public-interest litigation. For example, in Bihar in 2004, The Hunger Project mobilized 2,000 women to protest the failure of the state government to implement key provisions of the 73rd amendment, and then followed up with successful litigation for change.

**Increasing women participation in election:** In the run-up to elections, The Hunger Project carries out massive campaigns to encourage the participation of women both as independently minded voters and as candidates. As the reserved seats rotate to different areas each term, new women are encouraged to step forward to run for those seats. In addition, women

who have already served are encouraged to stand for reelection against men in unreserved seats.

**Implementation via partnership:** India is enormously diverse - with 22 official languages and hundreds of dialects. In addition, since the Freedom Movement days of Mahatma Gandhi, India has been blessed with the existence of more than 35,000 local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with highly committed leadership. "Determinant of political participation: women and public activity" explained that participatory and non-participatory orientations results from the environmental stimuli and the psychological resources of the relation between these resources and political activity<sup>7</sup>.

**Conclusion:** However, the prevailing situation in clearly asks for serious thinking and programmes to realize the provision of the 73rd constitutional amendment opened gates of opportunities in different fronts for women. The policy of political empowerment of women aims at eliciting their active participation in decision-making process in these institutions. However, the goal of political empowerment of women does not end up only with their induction into the power positions in PRIs. After getting elected for positions in these institutions, their real role begins. These are the bodies where decisions are taken democratically. Regular meetings are convened for this purpose. Village, block and district level problems are identified and discussed. Rural development programmes - of both central and state governments - are implemented through these institutions. Therefore, achievement of goal of rural development depends on the efficiency of PRIs. How efficient are the members in PRIs is therefore important.

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