

ISBN 978-81-931984-0-7



**"Two Decades of 73<sup>rd</sup>  
Constitutional Amendment:  
Experiences, Issues and Challenges"**

Editor

**Dr. Abhijit Anand Pillay**



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# Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions

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## Abstract

After more than six decades of planning in India women are far below their male counterparts because they have not been involved as participants and decision makers in development. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act enables women to take decision in the area of their concern as well as total development of rural area. This amendment has made a provision that at least one-third of women would be members and chairpersons of the panchayats at three levels viz., Grampanchayat level, Panchayat Samiti level and District Council level. These women also include from schedule caste and scheduled tribe communities. This paper attempts to look into the significance of the women's participation process in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

## Introduction:

The institution of Panchayati Raj is recognized as an important mechanism for decentralization of power and community participation in development activities. It has received the special emphasis after 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment which made the democracy and transfer of power to the most basic document of our country i.e. The Constitution of India. Before this amendment, the Panchayati Raj system in India was not very effective. Its power was limited. The institution itself could be dissolved by three district authorities. The elections to the Panchayats were not regular. At the same time a number of committees and commissions were established from time to time to study the problems related to the functioning of the Panchayati Raj. Balwantrai Mehta Committee, Ashok Mehta Committee and GVK Rao Committee, these are the some committees to name. Subsequently, the LM Singhvi Committee was set up in 1986 which attached great importance to the Gramsabha. The Sarkaria Commission of 1988 which was primarily concerned with the Centre-State relationship also recommended regular elections and strengthening of Panchayats both financially and functionally. By the end of 1988 a sub-committee of the Consultative Com-

mittee of the Parliament under the chairpersonship of PK Thungon also recommended a constitutional status for Panchayati Raj institutions. Similarly, a Congress Committee headed by VN Gadgil in 1989 recommended a three-tier system, a fixed term of 5 years and reservation for SC/STs and women. It was against the backdrop of these recommendations by various committees and commissions that the Constitution (64<sup>th</sup>) Bill was drafted.

Rajiv Gandhi was the first top leader of the nation who realized the importance of women in politics and development. Being young and having heard of UN led national and international movements for women empowerment and slogans like Women in Development (WID) and Women and Development (WAD), he gave the largest number of tickets to women in the 1985 election to the Parliament and State Assemblies. These elections were the ones in which the largest number of the women became representatives in the Parliamentary and State Assemblies. Before him Congress had never bothered about bringing women into politics in a major way. Pt. Nehru had always opposed any reservations for women even before independence. Indira Gandhi was also not seriously considered political role of women through reservations. It was Rajiv Gandhi who was a truly gender sensitive politician and conceived the idea of a 33% of reservation for women. He felt that he could implement his idea at least at the panchayat level where politics is highly male dominated. Unfortunately, he died and it was only after his death that the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment took place. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment has given new status and significance to the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

## Salient Features of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment

This Amendment of the Constitution is known as the Constitution (Seventy Third Amendment) Act, 1992. This act was brought into force by a notification dated 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1993. It has following Salient Features: