ABSTRACT

In this study of women Empowerment through Panchayat raj, Empowerment may be understood as a process by which people developed the ability or capacity to become aware of their rights and opportunities by sharing power and participating in decision-making so as to control resources and circumstances and bring about change. Since, the power is the root of the term “Empowerment”, it is necessary to define power. The origin of the term ‘empowerment’ can be traced to the concept of power to see the relevance of it’s use for the study of people empowerment. The concept of power in political sociology can be best understood by max weber who had the largest influence on the sociological study of power to which he assigned a wide significance in every major social domain. He wrote, “Now: classes”, “status group” and ‘parties’ are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community. Weber off-quoted definition of power is as follows: “In general, we understand by ‘power’ the chance of man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in action”. The conception of power referred as which some have over other’s, corresponds to what may be called the zero sum approach to power. Some have power to the extent that other’s are without it, the more power some have, the less other have of it. The
concept of empowerment becomes relevant when those in power share power with others so that they participate in decision-making.

The history of people’s empowerment in modern India can be traced back to the period immediately after the mutiny of 1857 when Sir Syed Ahmad Khan wrote a book “Causes of Indian Revolt” in which pleaded for the participation of Indian in councils to bridge the gap between the people and the rulers in order to prevent such mutiny. Attempts for people participation in decision-making were made in pre-Independence period by then British Viceroy Lord Ripon (1882) in local-self-government Act, Royal commission upon decentralization (1909) and Government of India Act, 1919. The question of representation of different population groups such as women was not considered and was limited to the resident male. This reflected the prevalent ideology of patriarchy which did not address the questions of women’s participation. It was Gandhiji un-equivocal support to the enfranchisement of women and their massive participation in National movements which led to the demand for immediate acceptance of adult franchise without sex discrimination which was accepted by the Indian National congress in the Karachi session in 1931. Attempt’s were made for people’s empowerment in post Independence period by the constitution of India, Balvantray Mehta committee report and Ashok Mehta committee report.
The Promise of adult franchise without sex discrimination made by the congress earlier was fulfilled by Indian constitution for granting equality in all spheres including their rights to vote. Article 40 of the Indian constitution stated the organization of panchayats as a directive principle of the state policy but did not grantee political representation to women in decision-making bodies. Both Balvantray Mehta committee and Ashok Mehta committee reports suggested the provision for the co-operation of two women members should be indirectly elected by the village panchayats. There was very little participation in decision-making bodies in post independence period. This led to the demand of women empowerment. Women’s empowerment refers to the process by which they develop a ability or capacity to became aware of rights and opportunities by sharing power and participating in decision-making so as to challenge patirarchical structure and to bring about a change. The socio-religious reform movement of the 19th century in India such as Brahmo-Samaj, Arya-Samaj, Ram Krishna Mission and Prathna Samaj which were led by enlightened Indian were an attempts to challenge the patriarchal structure and bring about a change in the inferior status traditionally assigned to women. The National movement led by Gandhiji also enabled women to break the shackles of traditions and this new awakening among them become the basis for their social reform. These
movements influence the British Government to get laws passed and giving equal rights and ensuring justice to women. Subsequently, the Indian constitution accepted the principle of equality of sexes and its preamble spoke of equality of status and opportunity and of social, economic and political justice irrespective of sex. This legal and constitutional framework did not bring about a change in the status of women.

The national level planning in India initiated various programmes for the betterment of women and their analysis revealed various approaches for the implementation of programmes for them. The concept of "welfare" to "development" and to "empowerment". The first and second five year plan were welfare oriented but the third, fourth and fifth five-year plan (1961-79) recognized women as equal partners for national development rather than as targets for welfare policies. In the sixth, seventh and eight five-year plan (1980-97) the long term objective of development programmes for women was to bring about change in all aspects of life. This was the result of the submission of the report of the committee on the status of women in India (CWSI) entitled "Towards Equality" constituted by the government of India in 1971 and submitted in 1974. The overall task of the CWSI was to undertake a comprehensive examination of all aspects relating to the rights and status of women and
it was found that development adversely affected women and they were suffering from various imbalances and disparities in all aspects of life such as declining sex ratio, lower expectancy of life, higher maternal mortality, declining work participation, illiteracy, rising migration, decline of the equal right’s to women for divorce and re-marriage and increasing incidence of violence against women. This was due to the fact that development programmes which gave women great deal of work but less control over their lifes and basic resources. In what may be called development without empowerment. There was a need of women empowerment so that their participation in development could also bring about change in all aspects of their life. The sharing of power and participation in decision-making bodies was considered a very strong instrument to achieve the goal of women development and social instrument to achieve the goal of women development and social change.

The 73rd constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 and implement on 24th April 1993 all over India in order to gave women a share in power and ensure participation in decision-making in Panchayati-raj to make women an instrument of development and social change. Its marked a watershed in the empowerment of women because it brought women in large numbers in Panchayats. The implementation of 73rd constitutional Amendment Act must be examined to find-out the extent to it has empowered women in the
sense that sharing power and participation in decision-making has made them aware of their rights and opportunities and has enable them to challenge the patriarchal structure and bring about change.

In this study of the implementation of 73rd constitution Amendment, exploratory research design was followed to find out the extent of empowerment of twelve (12) women Pradhan of lodha Block of Aligarh District. Aligarh District consist of twelve (12) Blocks and lodha Block consist of twelve nayay Panchayats which consist of 60 gram panchayat and 20 were headed by women. The researcher selected one women Pradhan from every nayay-panchayats. The case studies method was used with the help of interview-schedule and participation observation.

The case studies of twelve (12) women Pradhan have shown interesting results. These case studies were carried out to find-out the sociological parameters of women’s empowerment through panchayat raj. It was found that some women Pradhan were empowered by their participation in these decision-making bodies. The analysis of these case studies reveal’s that education, older-age, prior experience of political participation, freedom for the performance of house-hold chores and exposure to the world out-side family were some of the sociological parameters that led to the empowerment of women through Panchayati-raj. It was found that those women Pradhan who were educated up to
High School (10th Class) or twelve class (12th class) had no problem in handling Panchayat paper works and they did not depend on their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their family to read-out for them panchayat documents and so were able to challenge the Patriarchal structure. Older age was also an important sociological parameter as it was found that those women pradhan who’s age was fifty (50) or above were free from the house-hold chores because their daughters and daughter-in-laws were there to look after it, so they had a lots of time for Panchayat work. Another important sociological parameter was prior experience of political participation such as, they were they Pradhan, member of Block development council member (BDC member) and member of Panchayat samities. These women pradhan who had prior experience of political participation were themselves were very keen and came forward willingly to contest Pradhan election. They were very active and went to door to door and argued for their canditure and most of them won the election by a comfortable margin. Another sociological parameter was the exposure to the would out side family such as involvement in social services like Aganvani worker, working as teacher and ANM’s etc. These women Pradhan did not have any restriction on their movements and were able to talk to others and were more articulate in the meetings of Block and
chaired Panchayat and gram-sabhas meetings regularly and could meet the village secretary and could enquire about the progress of development work from the higher officials such as BDO, CDO and other higher officials of the districts. All these women Pradhans look after the development work in their respective gram-panchayats. All these women Pradhan also went to Thana (Police Station) with the village people for the solution of their personal problems. These women got more respect after being elected as a Pradhan of their respective gram panchayats. People’s of their village gave them more respect and they also got more respect in the families and had more say in the decision making process such as education and marriages of their childrens, Buying and selling of properties and freedom in the house-hold expenditure etc. This showed their ability to challenge the patriarchal structure. These women Pradhans also wanted to contest election even for higher post like zilla Panchayat member (highest body of PRIs) and MLAs (Member of legislative Assembly).

It was found that other women pradhans were not empowered. The analysis of these case studies reveled that lack of education, younger-age, lack of prior political participation, performance of house-hold chores and lack of exposure to the world out-side family were some of sociological parameters that prevented women empowerment through panchayati-raj.
All those women pradhan who were illiterate had a great problems in handling panchayat activities. Even in the periods of more than three years in office they did not knew any thing about panchayat work. All the panchayats papers were sent in the homes and they just thumb or sign on the dotted line because of inability to read panchayats documents. So they were un-able to challenge the patriarchal structure. Younger-age was also a major stumbling block for all these women pradhan who were comparatively younger than the other’s pradhan. They were having more problems with the panchayat works. Their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their families look after the panchayat related activities because these women pradhan were always busy in the kitchen and look after the small children. Another sociological parameter which prevented women empowerment through panchayati-raj was the lack of prior experience of political participation such as they never became pradhan, Block Development council member (BDC member) and Panchayat samiti members etc. All these women Pradhans who had lack of prior experience of political participation were forced by their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their family. So, they reluctantly agreed to contest the pradhan election. They never went out for any election campaigning but they still managed to win the pradhan election quite comfortably due to the efforts of their husbands,
father-in-laws and other elder male members of their family. Lack of exposure of the world-out-side family such as involvement in any type of social services like Aganvani worker, working as teachers and ANM's etc. All these women pradhan had a restrictions on their movements and hardly went to the Block meeting. They never went to Block other than meetings days with their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male member of their families spoke on their behalf. All these women pradhan never discussed panchayat matters with their village secretaries because they had not met them face to face and did not know their names. All these women Pradhans never chaired panchayat and gram-sabhas meetings because they never allowed by their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male member of their families. Non of these women pradhan knew about the progress of development work in their respective gram-panchayats because all the development work was look after by their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male member of their families. All these women pradhan never went to Thana (Police Station) when it was needed and on their behalf their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their families discharge the duty. All these women pradhan considered themselves as Dummy/name-sake pradhan and did not consider as a real pradhan and they did not noted any change in their lifes after being elected as a pradhan of their respective gram-
panchayats. All of them were busy in the household chores before elected pradhan and still now they were bust with the same. Thus they were unable to challenge patriarchal structure.

It also emerged from the analysis of these case studies that all sociological parameters must be taken together for understanding the empowerment of women through panchayat raj and one or two sociological parameters alone cannot regarded as being more important for empowerment. Some women were not empowered due to the sociological parameters such as lack of education and lack of prior experience of political participation but they were empowered due to other’s sociological parameters such as older-age, freedom for the performance of household chores and exposure to the world-out-side family. Lack of education led to the dependence on their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male member of their families to read-out panchayat document because of their inability to read. Lack of prior experience of political participation was also a sociological parameter which made them dependent on their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male member of their families. They were forced by them in Pradhan election and they reluctantly agreed to contest. They never outside for any election campaign but still managed to win the election by a comfortable margin due to the effort’s of their husbands, father-in-laws
and other elder male members of their families. This shows that they were un-able to challenge the patriarchal structure. The other sociological parameter such as older-age makes them free from the house-hold chores because their daughter and daughter-in-laws were there to look after the house-hold chores and they could get enough time for panchayat works. Another sociological parameter was the exposure to the world out-side family such as they were Aganvani worker, Teachers and ANM’s etc. These women did not have any restriction on their movements and were able to talk to others and were more articulate in the meetings of panchayat and gram-sabhas chaired them regularly and could enquire about the progress of development work from the higher officials of the district. These women pradhan also look after the development work in their respective gram-panchayats. They also went to Thana (Police station) with the village people’s for the solution of their personal problems. These women pradhan did not considered themselves as a Dummy/name-sake pradhan and consider themselves as a real pradhan. These women pradhan got more respect in the villages after being elected pradhan and they also got more respect in their families and had more say in the decision-making process such as education and marriages of their children’s, Buying and selling of property and freedom in the house-hold expenditure etc. It was found that these women pradhan also wanted to
contest election even for higher post like zilla panchayat member and even MLA's. These women pradhan did not like their dependence on their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their families and considered them to be interfering in panchayats matter. This shows that to some extent they were able to challenge the patriarchal structure even though they were un-educated and had no prior experience of political participation. The sharing of power and participation in panchayats had made them aware of rights and opportunities. Thus the others sociological parameters led to the empowerment of these women through panchayat raj. Participation in Panchayats enhanced the capacity of these women to bring about change in their own life and to change village lives for the better. This shows that it is not necessary for women to be educated and experienced to bring about change but the sharing of power in decision-making bring about change. This demonstrates the hidden potential of women empowerment through panchayat raj.

All the twelve women pradhan considered education to be important because this was the way be to become independent of their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their families to read-out panchayats documents for them. All the women pradhan considered political support to be a important because without it they could not fight the pradhan election. All these twelve case studies reveled
that they considered Training Programmes and experience in Panchayats to be more important for effective participation. They considered training programmes to be a substitute for education even un-educated women pradhan could take advantage of training programmes to become independent of their husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male members of their families. They considered experience of panchayats to be a substitute for political support because it could enable them to fight panchayat elections even without political support. Thus training programmes and experience of panchayat could make even those women who were Dummy/name-sake pradhan as effective participant who could attend Block meetings and could chaired gram-panchayats and gram-sabhas meetings regularly and participate in Panchayat discussions. In this way they could also know the progress of development work in their respective gram-panchayats, discussed with their secretaries. This means that women empowerment through Panchayati-raj was possible for such women and they could became aware of their rights and opportunities to be able to challenge patriarchal structure and to bring about change.

On the basis of the results of the study it is possible to suggest guideline and policy implication that can take the form of action strategy to empower women.
A) Importance of proper Training:

In order to ensure effective participation of women in panchayat raj it is essential that women should be trained about day-to-day procedure of panchayat raj and various provisions enshrined in the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act. Women must be informed of various development policies and programmes, as well as those pertaining specifically to women and children. The study showed that training programmes could be a substitute for education so that even-uneducated women pradhan could take advantage of training programmes to become empowered.

B) Exposure to the world out-side family:

Women must be encouraged to come out of their families and get expose to the world as Aganvani worker, teachers and ANM’s etc. It is only through this exposure that women can become free of restriction on their movements and be able to participate in meetings and be articulate in discussions. This would prepare the ground for their empowerment by ensuring more effective participation in Panchayat raj.

C) Need for experience of political participation:

Women organizations such as Mahila Mandal, Mahila Manch and Mahila Welfare societies must mobilize and encouraged women to participate as voters and member of gram-sabhas. This experience of
political participation will pave the way for fighting panchayat election and getting more responsible position and lead to their empowerment. The study showed that experience is substitute for political support because it enables them to fight election even without political support.

**D) Mandatory Participation of Women and emphasizing on women and child related schemes**

Making the participation of women representatives in Panchayats mandatory will lead to decision-making by women without interference of males member of the families. Emphasis should be given on development and welfare schemes related to women and child. As this would strengthen the participation of women in decision making. So that they may be free from the house-hold chores. The study showed that dependence on husbands, father-in-laws and other elder male member of their families was a stumbling Block in the empowerment of women. Mandatory participation of women in Panchayats will remove such dependence. The study showed that the participation in house-hold chores prevents women from Panchayat works. Emphasis on development programmes and welfare schemes related to women and child will encourage women to participate in Panchayats.
Aims of the study:

➢ To find-out the extent to which women empowerment taken place through Panchayat raj by determining the awareness of right’s and opportunities, their ability to challenge the patriarchal structure and capacity to bring about change.

➢ To find-out the sociological parameters which leads to women empowerment.

➢ Consequences of women empowerment on family and society.

➢ To suggest the guideline and policy implication that would form of an action strategy to empower women so as to improve the working of panchayat raj, this will make research both empirical and paraxological.

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through panchayat raj. Participation in Panchayats enhances the capacity of these women to bring about qualitative change in their own lives and to change village lives for the better. This shows that it is not necessary for women to be educated and experienced to bring about change but the sharing of power in decision-making bring about change. This demonstrates the hidden potential of women empowerment through panchayat raj.

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