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EMPOWERING PERSPECTIVES: ASSESSING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to delve into the intricate dynamics of women's involvement in local self-government in India, focusing on political participation and the resulting empowerment outcomes. By examining the roles played by women in various tiers of local governance, the study seeks to unravel the challenges, successes, and transformative impacts on individuals and communities. Through a comprehensive analysis of policies, electoral processes, and socio-cultural factors, this research endeavors to contribute valuable insights into the ongoing efforts to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment in the realm of local governance in India. India, renowned as the world's largest democracy, boasts a three-tier governance structure comprising the central government, state government, and local city/village governance. The electoral process for all these tiers is overseen by the independent body of the Election Commission, distinctively constituted at both the state and central levels. Although the 73rd amendment has paved the way for increased women's participation in village governance, it falls short of granting them the authority to define program priorities or manage natural resources. Gradually, women elected to panchayats are asserting themselves, injecting fresh vigor into grassroots governance. The political involvement of women can be evaluated across three dimensions: their role as voters, their representation as elected officials, and their engagement in the actual decision-making processes. Voter participation data for women is meticulously recorded at the booth level, the smallest unit in the Indian electoral system. Against this backdrop, this paper explores the affirmative impact of the 73rd Amendment Act, which has empowered women and marginalized sections, fostering equilibrium through the decentralization concept. Additionally, the paper delves into the empowerment of women within Panchayat Raj institutions, specifically examining their participation in decision-making processes while occupying executive positions across all three tiers. In conclusion, the paper anticipates that over the next decade, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women will likely continue making significant strides in their social status, leadership roles, economic positions, educational levels, and political awareness and achievements.



KEYWORDS: Decentralisation, Decision Power, Empowerment, Women, Social Justice.

INTRODUCTION

Aligned with the constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) in India, the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) bears the responsibility of ensuring social justice and fostering economic development. The limited space for women's participation in political bodies not only results in their meager representation in decision-making bodies but also contributes to the neglect of their issues and

experiences in policymaking. At the grassroots level, the local self-governments, known as Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), are under the jurisdiction of State Governments. In rural areas, a three-tier structure consisting of Village Panchayats, Taluk Panchayats, and Zilla Panchayats has been implemented.

India has boldly embraced affirmative action by mandating one-third reservation for women in all local self-governance institutions. This provision extends to reserved posts for Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons in Panchayats and Committees within Nagara Palikes. The elected officials serve a term of five years in all elections. However, it's noteworthy that the affirmative action is currently absent at the higher echelons of governance in the State and Central levels.

Reviews

The work of UMA and of Indra Hirway on Gujarat's Panchayati Raj Institutions has revealed the enhanced role of women from dominant castes such as the Vokkaligas and Lingayats, while Dalit and tribal participation has been muted. Male relatives usually coach women to speak at meetings, or actually do the necessary paperwork when the women are illiterate.

Political participation is generally defined as being a process through which individual performs a role in political life of the social order, has the occasion to take part in deciding what the common aim of that society are and the most excellent way of achieving these goals. Political participation refers to actual participation in these voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rules and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public policy.

Rajesh Kumar Sinha (2018) Reservation for women in PRIs provided by 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and subsequent increase in the quota by States has brought an unprecedented huge number of women in governance arena in India. Women's political empowerment of such magnitude is among the best in the world. A quarter century has passed since the above-mentioned Act came into force and in most of the States fourth or fifth generation of Panchayats is in place. Women leadership in Panchayats which started with a shaky beginning has definite signals of getting well established and recognized. In capacity building of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) governments must also invite and involve civil society organizations, women's groups, academic institutions (particularly centers for women's/ gender studies), corporate social responsibility foundations and also international organizations like UN Women. A multi-stakeholder's, collaborative, multi-pronged, systematic efforts to enhance capacities of EWRs are required.

Pattanaik (2010) studied functioning of EWRs in many panchayats and found "it is clear that women's leadership in panchayats is transforming India. These elected women-now role models to the other women in their communities- are altering the development agenda to address issues critical to village life. The success stories number in millions. Women throughout India- from Orissa to Assam to Uttar Pradesh to Bihar- are ensuring that roads are repaired, electricity is brought to their villages, schools are built, latrines installed, medical services are available, water sources are made safe, local savings groups are formed, and the list goes on and on."

Richa Shanker (2014) The status of women in India has seen many ups and downs since ancient times - from at par status in ancient history to be in veils (Parda System) during the Medieval period. In the post independent India, the status of women regained its strength and has been on a rise ever since. Women in post independent India have been participating in almost all types of economic activities, day-to day household chores, voting for a better governance and also in active politics. India has elected a woman prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and a woman president, Pratibha Patil. In the present central government, women comprise roughly quarter of the Indian cabinet with portfolios like external affairs, commerce and human resource development. At the ground level, India has a significant proportion of women in local level politics which has been achieved by reserving seat for women.

While understanding the meaning of panchayat Mahanta and Sinha (2007) explain that the word panchayat traditionally means a body of five elders in a village who were accountable to resolve the conflicts and to give punishment to the offenders. In this traditional conception of a panchayat, women and lower castes were not allowed membership. Omvedt (2005) also explains the traditional

working of panchayats (village level governmental intuitions) as caste communities which were controlled by men from the rural elite.

Women empowerment in general and poor women in particular, is the thrust area of development initiatives in India today. Empowerment of women is a process whereby women are able to organise themselves in community based participatory groups to increase their own self confidence, self reliance, assert their independent rights, counter and challenge the disparities and barriers against them, make prudent choices and also control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their subordination thereby bringing a beneficial social- economic and political change.(Khan; Nisha; 2014).

Nambiar (2001) in her study of 'Making the Gramsabha work' noted that majority of the women reported that they were not informed or invited to meetings of the Gram Sabha and were hesitant to attend meetings either due to the presence of village elders or because attending meetings would cause them to lose their day's wages or neglect household duties. Despite the 50% reservation for women in all three tiers of PRIs in Himachal Pradesh, empowering women to play their roles in PRIs actively, productively, independently, collectively and in a sustainable manner, is a big challenge due to prevalent gender inequality and gender based discrimination in outreach and service delivery mechanism.

Fernandes (1999) if the PRI's are the postmodern institution that we look up to, to affect a potent socio-economic rural transformation, lack of public participation and support render them redundant as most Gram Sabhas lie somewhere between the twilight zone of rule of the few and rule of many. Popular Governance has therefore, reached a 'crises' this is the second significant challenge to Panchayats people's participation and support.

The History of Women's Inclusion in Political Representation in India

- 1946 There were 16 women out of 150 members in the Constituent Assembly.
- 1957 When Panchayat Raj was first introduced, the concept was to co-opt two women "who are interested in work among women and children" (Balwantraji Mehta Committee Report).
- 1961 Maharashtra Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Act of 1961 provided for the "nomination of one or two women" to the Panchayat bodies "in case women were not elected".
- 1973 West Bengal Panchayat Act, also provided for co-opting 2 women.
- 1976 The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSWI) demanded representation of women in Panchayat as well as the establishment of "All-Women Panchayat at village level".
- 1978 In Maharashtra Panchayat, only 6 women were elected although 314 were nominated. In most parts of India, women were brought into Panchayat only through co-option.
- 1983 As many as 25 percent of seats were reserved for women in the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayat and Nyaya Panchayat Act of 1983. Elections under this Act were delayed for various reasons and could only be held in 1987. Some 14,000 women were elected out of 30,000 candidates who contested.
- 1988 Elections were held in Uttar Pradesh for 74,000 village Sabhas, the first elections for 22 years. There was provision made for the co-option of only one woman.
- In Panchayat elections, less than one percent of women came through elections.
- 1991 Orissa Panchayat Samiti provided for "not less than one third of the total number of seats to be reserved for women". Elections were held in 1992 and over 22,000 women were elected. In Kerala Districts Councils elections, while 30 percent seats were reserved for women, 35 percent seats were won by women.
- 1993 About 71,000 women candidates contested elections and with 33 percent seat reservation, 24,900 women came in through the ballot box.
- 1994 In Madhya Pradesh 150,500 women were elected to village, block and zilla Panchayats.
- 33 percent of seats were reserved for women in village Panchayat and women captured 43 percent of the seats.

Women's experience of PRI has transformed many of them. The elements of this transformation include empowerment, self-confidence, political awareness and affirmation of identity.

Transforming Women towards Empowerment

PRI is a success story. But the measures of this success must be somewhat different from the indicators that are commonly used to identify success stories. Examples of such commonly used indicators include the capability (vision, insight, commitment) of organisations of women, or NGOs, to establish movements which generate ideas and prototypes for people-led development activities (e.g. the Green Belt Movement in Kenya and the Sewa Movement in India), or the success of organised advocacy and pressure groups, such as the "Support Stockings" in Sweden and the National Women's Coalition of South Africa, in transforming political representation by putting direct pressure on the State from outside.

The success of PRI lies in the possibility of women transforming the State from within. This new arrangement provides the first step to converting grassroots leadership into State leadership, which many feel is the key to ushering in equitable, people-led development. What appears to be happening is that as women enter the structures of governance in large numbers, they are changing these structures so that they reflect more closely the concerns of women.

This is different from the usual process by which a small number of grassroots representatives are elected and can easily be isolated and forced to make compromises. The sheer number of women that PRI has brought into the political system has made a difference. But the difference is also qualitative, because these women are bringing their experience in governance of civic society into governance of the State. In this way, they are making the State sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice. Measuring and assessing these qualitative changes is not easy, however. Furthermore, the immeasurable is sometimes invaluable. Thus, while much in this document is subjective and preliminary in character, it gives a strong indication of positive outcomes for gender-equitable governance, and is very suggestive of areas for future research.

Problems in Women's Participation

Women representatives often run into barriers and are hindered from participating effectively. They feel inhibited to speak especially when they are in large male dominated assemblies. Those who muster up enough courage and strength to speak receive very little respect or attention. It has been observed that women are invited to attend meetings only to complete the quorum. Further the officials also pay heed to the needs of upper class women in preference to the needs of peasant women. The rights women thus get systematically nullified by the local bureaucracy. Despite being represented in large numbers in Karnataka is merely a token and not at all effective. In some regions of the country women have become aware of their problems and needs but alas not of their rights. In Karnataka it was observed that women were concerned with their responsibilities to a greater extent than men who were more concerned with the exercise to power.

It is a global experience that in any political system, right from the developed to the developing countries, women's presence in the political process is marginal and low except a few countries (the Nordic countries). Women's movements for their rights started in the later half of the 19th century and continued till the first half of the 20th century, ultimately crystallizing to a demand for the 'right to vote'. Women in many countries had to wait long and grim battle to get this right. In most countries, they go this from the second decade of the present century. Despite their struggle for a long period, women have not yet been able to attain a rightful position in the arena of politics.

Radical feminists have gone beyond just the right to vote, maintaining that the demand for right to vote came from women of the elite class to find some room for themselves in the established power structure. There is now an emphasis on the right to participate in the political decision-making. And it is here that the crunch lies. The percentage of women as voters have increased considerably creates a niche for themselves in the policy-formulating and decision-making bodies. Their political status remains secondary.

Barbare Nelson and Najma Choudhury, the editors of the book: *Women and Politics Worldwide*, maintain that a study has been carried out in 43 countries on women's political engagement, which reveals the fact that women everywhere have a secondary political status. They maintain that there have been women of substance in politics, holding on their own, but such women are exceptions and it's not the rule. They also imply that it does not mean that all women experience their subordinate political status in a similar way, or all groups of women are subordinate to all groups of men in a similar way. In most cultures there is a complex matrix of political power, composed of many social hierarchies, of which gender is only one component. Nevertheless, men of any group are more able to be active in politics than women of their group. They emphasize that demonstrates how politics is intertwined with other aspects of life. They see politics, economics, culture, religion and law as mutually constitutive, each creating itself and the other at same time.

The public/private dichotomy has resulted in women being marginalized in all spheres of activity- social, economic and more specifically, political. Rationality, self-discipline, competition, universality to mention a few are the prized qualities of political parlance. These are inherent in male. On the contrary, irrationality, indiscipline, particularly, submissiveness, impulsiveness are some of the qualities associated with female nature.

Levels and areas of Political Participation

Participation of women in the political process has been very low. Their presence in the legislative and decision-making bodies is scarcely above 10 per cent except some Nordic countries. It has been stated that the personality traits of women (lack of self-esteem to be precise) and the socio economic cultural environment is to a great extent responsible for women's marginal participation in politics.

Women fall mainly into the group of those who are apathetic to politics because of the group of those who are apathetic to politics because of (i) their low status in society (ii) lesser exposure to education (iii) very low economic status; (iv) the restraining cultural norms; and, (v) the unhealthy political environment, the nature of political structure, such as party structure, process of political succession, which supports or opposes the recruitment of women to political offices.

Women in India entered the political process in the early decades of the present century, through their massive participation in the national struggle for freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji was able to reach out to women and draw them into the vertex of the freedom movement. Though Gandhi could not fully abandon gender bias and in some way perpetuated the traditional image of the Indian women, he did manage to appeal to women to join the movement. Women played a very important role in the Civil Disobedience Movement, the salt satyagraha and the Quit India Movement of 1942. Together, with their participation in movement against the colonial rule, the educated women were simultaneously struggling to get the right to vote and right to get elected. Generally, it is maintained that the women participating in the struggle, especially, those who were in key positions were from the elite class. Not much has been written about thousands of infamous women, who were poor and had rural background, but who in their own humble way had participated in the national freedom struggle.

The 2011 United Nations General Assembly resolution on women's political participation also called on the United Nations Member States for taking a variety of measures including to review the differential impact of their electoral systems on the political participation of women; to encourage strongly political parties for removing all barriers discriminating against the participation of women; to promote awareness and recognition of significance of women's participation in the political process; to investigate allegations of violence, assault or harassment of women elected officials and candidates for political office, to ensure accountability and to take appropriate steps for prosecuting those responsible; to encourage greater involvement of women in decision-making as well as participation in the politics at all the levels.

No doubt today, there is considerable increase in the percentage of women as voters. The participation of women as voters is almost equal to men. But the political participation (as a whole) of the women is not equal to men and so they are still not able to get a share equivalent to men in organization that require decision making. Still politics is dominated by men at every level of participation and women have not been regarded as significant part of the political arena. The representation of women as policy formulators and decision makers in the legislative bodies is very low. In legislative bodies women have been demanding more space but most nations in the world have failed in providing due space as well as representation to women in their political system. Thus, from local level to global level, leadership and participation of the women in the political fields are always compromised. Women are always underrepresented in leading positions, whether in civil services, academia, elected offices or private sector. Such kind of situation prevails despite their abilities and capabilities which has been proved as leaders and their right of participating at par with men in democratic governance.

Challenges of Women Political Participation

Narayana Billava; Nayanatara S Nayak (2016) In there paper, an attempt has been made to present a thematic review on empowerment of women representatives throwing light on the levels of their awareness about the functioning of panchayats, capacity to take self-decision, participation in community activities, their socio-economic conditions, decision making power at panchayat level and political participation after 73rd constitutional amendment.

Table No. 1: Local Bodies in India - 2015 (Local Self Government)

Number of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Elected Representatives in India						
Year	Village Panchayats		Intermediate Panchayats		District Panchayats	
	Number	Elected Representatives	Number	Elected Representatives	Number	Elected Representatives
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2001	227590	2739666	5906	147701	474	15389
2002	234251	1630327	6007	72156	534	10927
2004	234676	2073715	6097	110070	537	11825
2006	233251	2657112	6105	157175	539	15459
2007	232855	2645883	6094	156794	633	15613
2008*	232855	2645880	6094	156557	633	15581
Source : Ministry of Panchayati Raj						
(a) Elections to the Local Bodies are yet to be conducted.						
(b) Intermediate Panchayat does not exist (2 Tier).						
(c) District Panchayat does not exist.						
(d) Meghalaya, Mizoram & Nagaland have Traditional Councils.						
(e) Panchati Raj System is yet to be revived.						
(*) As per the latest(2012) available information.						

The Citizens' Report on Governance and Development, 2010 based on the review of State Finance Commission, State Election Commission, District Planning Committee and three centrally sponsored programmes viz., Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNURM) concludes that governance is far from effective and there is long way to go before decentralised local governance can produce real gains for the marginalised sections of the society, produce inclusive development and facilitate democratic practice.

Das (2013) in his study on Dalit and tribal leadership in Gujarat found that only one-third of the Dalit women were able to win the panchayat elections independently. He finds education, experience in social issues, motivation to bring development to their community, prior performance in panchayats, family support, personal relation with villagers, economic stability and family's political contacts as factors responsible for women to access panchayat positions, which indicates that the road to success is not easy for those without such background. Thorat (2002) also feels that despite several constitutional provisions, the problem of caste-based violations of human rights in modified form continues to persist leading to exploitation of Dalits, especially in rural India as the underclass are yet to be fully politically mobilised against the dominant class. Some of the Challenges women are facing are as follows:

- While the women got political representation, the real power was usurped by their husbands, "The Sarpanch Pati" depriving them of any meaningful gains.
- The caste and gender-based discrimination are still prevalent and also despite earning political position women are denied their due respect.
- Gram Sabha's are unruly and women are not allowed to speak there freely.
- Widespread illiteracy and ignorance further inhibit their capacity to perform.
- Many women leaders in Panchayats have been attacked and some casualties too have been reported as their actions are seen as stretching the conservative social fabric.
- The recent change in Rajasthan regarding the inclusion of criteria to participate in PRI election like education up to 8th and 10th standard can be another setback to women empowerment through PRIs

Table No. 3: Status of Representation of Women in PRIs - 2015

Sl. No.	States/ UTs	Elected Women Representatives(EWR)			
		Gram Panchayat	Block Panchayat	District Panchayat	Total
1	Andhra Pradesh	71996	569	33	78025
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2966	62	6	3658
3	Assam	12100	110	21	13410
4	Bihar	51998	534	54	57887
5	Chhattisgarh	91469	159	22	93287
6	Gujarat	68880	258	52	71988
7	Haryana	28060	125	18	29499
8	Himachal Pradesh	13409	86	12	14398
9	Jammu & Kashmir	11169	-	-	11169
10	Jharkhand	27664	281	28	30757
11	Karnataka	48335	201	53	50892
12	Kerala	8360	110	16	9630
13	Madhya Pradesh	192669	339	42	196490
14	Maharashtra	118496	198	1005	121490
15	Manipur	836	0	3	86
16	Mizoram	828	-	-	82
17	Odisha	49840	327	43	53551
18	Punjab	31373	91	11	32393
19	Rajasthan	66823	311	58	70527
20	Sikkim	493	-	5	54
21	Tamil Nadu	37310	242	23	39975
22	Tripura	2760	19	5	3006
23	Telangana	48267	324	21	51735
24	Uttarakhand	34106	163	21	35957

25	Uttar Pradesh	246038	25664	1031	272733
26	West Bengal	24991	474	42	30157
27	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	43	-	4	4
28	Daman & Diu	82	-	1	9
29	Goa	499	-	1	51
30	Chandigarh	49	6	3	5
31	Lakshadweep	32	-	9	4
32	A & N Island	262	2	1	30
	Total	1292203	75620	8091	1375914

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Basic Statistics of Panchayati Raj Institutions, 2019.

Women in panchayats: the Impact Perhaps the most significant aspect of the entry of women into provincial politics is that many social myths are beginning to be shattered. Those who were initially cynical about the induction of women into the roles of power had argued that women would be forced to serve as dummies for their husbands. They felt that, one way or other, women would be unable to exercise powers as administrators either because of her own ignorance or other limitations imposed on her by domestic duties. Even in states like West Bengal and Kerala, where politicisation of the lower levels had already taken place, the general impression was that women would be mere rubber stamps.

"By and large, women sarpanchs or members attend panchayat or block level meetings by themselves and are not represented by their male relatives," says Chandan Dutta of the Delhi-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), Participatory Research in Asia. There has also been a perceptible improvement in administration at the gram panchayat level mainly because women sarpanchs hold meetings during the day and no dubious deals are struck late at night. They are also more accessible than men who are often not around. Due to these factors there is much more honesty and transparency in local administrative matters.

Vignettes obtained from villages across the country about the way these women are functioning in are quite encouraging. In Kanthipad village in West Bengal's Midnapore district, Uma Maiti stood up against corruption in allocation of funds under the Indira Awasan Programme. A handicapped person, Ratna Roy Choudhury of the same village fought for and obtained funds under the same scheme. "Can you call a woman like Tahmina Bibi, who has hardly any formal education, a rubber stamp when she stood against the men in her panchayat of Barogharia village in north Bengal and insisted on the construction of a culvert?" asks Seema Chatterjee who works for an NGO. At a gram panchayat meeting in Kolar district of Karnataka, a woman member suggested some measures on where to buy land and this helped the panchayat save Rs 20,000.

Women are also making substantial contributions in giving suggestions for raising educational standards, addressing water sanitation and fuel problems - areas which were generally not discussed by men. A woman panchayat member from Yavatal district of Maharashtra organised a camp for women to discuss issues like dowry and also convinced women to implement improved stove and biogas systems.

Though issues relating to natural resources are not getting the attention they deserve, due mainly to the fact that most of the issues are outside the ambit of the panchayats, there are exceptions. The women pradhan of Kashlog near Darlaghat in Himachal Pradesh, for instance, has opposed limestone mining by Ambuja Cements in the area. According to L B j V Subrahmanyam, director, panchayats, in Hamirpur, the programme of planting fodder plants is picking up in Himachal villages with the help of funds diverted from the Employment Assurance Scheme. Says Kulbhushan Upmanyu, an activist in Chamba, "Mahila mandals all over Himachal have responded to the scarcity by planting and protecting small patches of forests near villages."

Because of the increasing awareness among women of their potential, they are slowly gaining the confidence to overcome social stigmas. Kantibai Dhurve, a disabled adivasi (tribal) woman in the Savalkheda gram panchayat of Madhya Pradesh, was elected as president by 273 votes even though

seven men had opposed her. In the last four years, Kantibai has been instrumental in the construction of a road in the village apart from setting up many handpumps. "If the government helps us we can do much more."

Initial reports from women-run panchayats seem to suggest that they are more convincing and effective than men in the fight to check corruption at the grassroots level. Majah Wankhede, sarpanch of the village Metikhede in Maharashtra's Yavatmal district, says: "Getting elected was not difficult, what was difficult was what we had to deal with after getting elected, particularly dealing with government officials." According to her, the block development officer demanded one tin sheet from each one of the 40 boxes they bought. In spite of facing such demands at every level of her dealings with the government, Wankhede built toilets in the school building, 40 biogas plants and provide smokeless chullahs (stoves) to many houses. She suspended two gramsevaks on charges of corruption in spite of a warning from the block development officer that she would get a terrible reputation if she insisted on suspending workers. "I retorted that the next person I would suspend would be him," says Wankhede.

CONCLUSION

Deep poverty is a social and political phenomenon as much as an economic problem and thus requires political and social change, particularly within the sites of power. The quest for equity cannot come about without wider representation of all groups; especially those currently denied access to power, and the presentation of all points of view in the process of decision-making. Revision of the current administrative and political structures, and their rules, is necessary in order to facilitate this broader representation and its translation into political power for those who are currently marginalised.

PRI reminds us of a central truth; power is not something people give away. It has to be negotiated, and sometimes wrested from the powerful. Enshrining political change within the law has forced both the pace and direction of such change. Democratic politics is, in reality, the interplay of vested interests and PRI's great achievement has been to mandate a vested and mutual interest, between women and the political process. The lesson of PRI is clear: if the wisdom of grassroots organisations, especially the courage and clarity of women, is to become policy, it will not be through the art of intellectual persuasion but by the arrangements made within a political system for their voice to have power.

Bringing women into power is thus not only a matter of equity, of correcting an unjust and unrepresentative system. The World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen 1995, addressed itself to the removal of poverty, the achievement of full employment and social integration. Many believe that these questions cannot be effectively addressed without the kind of democratisation of the representative process that has been discussed in this paper. Political restructuring is a key to economic growth with justice. PRI is also demonstrating that transforming local councils into representative bodies means they are likely to be more environmentally protective, as the new members have a greater stake in their local natural resources.

The sheer number of women that PRI has brought into the political system has made a difference. By 1994, 330,000 women had entered politics as a result of PRI and many more have been elected in the last two years. The percentage of women at various levels of political activity has shifted dramatically as a result of this constitutional change, from 4-5 percent before PRI to 25-40 percent after PRI. But the difference is also qualitative, because these women are bringing their experience in governance of civic society into governance of the State. In this way, they are making the State sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice.

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