

WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION

- The **73rd and 74th amendment** of Indian Constitution have brought about a **silent revolution** by the provisions related to **33% reservation for women** in the institutions of local self-government.
- Women in India are much better represented in the Panchayati raj institutions as compared to the parliament. However, due to **poor socio-economic status of women and prevailing patriarchal set-up**, the intended benefit of emergence of women leadership at Panchayat level was not fully realized.
- The effective political power and decision making is wielded by husbands of elected women representatives. This phenomenon is referred to as '**sarpanch pati**'.

REASONS BEHIND THE EMERGENCE OF 'SARPANCH PATI'

- **Poor social status of women:** Women in general have poor access to education, they are restricted to domestic spaces, they lack economic independence, they are not allowed participation in decision making at family level.
- **Social barriers:** Indian society in villages is still traditional and conservative e.g. in rural areas tradition of parda or veil is very strong especially North Indian states, women are discouraged in public spaces, even government officials at local level avoid talking to women due to conservative outlook.
- **Lack of skills:** Raising the reservation for women to fifty per cent without showing any concern or efforts for their capacity building, training or inculcating confidence have led to such a situation.
- **Lack of government initiative:** Despite this widespread phenomenon, the government failed to act against the practice, either through a strong deterrence through law or through public awareness.

IMPACT OF 'SARPANCH PATI'

- **Lack of decision making opportunity:** This phenomenon reduces women's ability to participate in decision making at village level.
- **Poor implementation of law:** The emergence of this phenomenon effectively manipulates the law and prevents its implementation in letter and spirit. The rule of law in such a situation is casualty to social prejudices against women.
- **Failure to empower women:** This phenomenon hinders the intended empowerment of women which was one of the aims of 73rd constitutional amendments through reservation of seats.

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

- Their participation is **crucial in the policy formulation and regulation** as they represent nearly half of the total population.
- They could **act as role models for women empowerment** and **could bring behavioural change** in the society towards the women.
- **More focused policies relating to women safety, education, child care, MMR, child marriage, Domestic violence etc** if women are involved in decision making owing to their emotional quotient towards these issues.
- Places with women representatives have seen **less corruption and improved efficiency**.
- Various studies on panchayats have shown the **positive effect of reservation on empowerment of women**.

REASONS FOR LESS WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

- **Illiteracy:** It is one of the main hurdles in making women politically empowered.
- **Women are only vote banks:** For India's political parties, women matter, but only as vote banks. Across states, competing parties have wooed women voters with a wide range of promises including wages/allowances for "housewives", washing machines, gas cylinders, free public transport, and so on.
- **Work and family balance:** Uneven distribution of household work between men and women is also one of the important factors in this regard.
- **Lack of confidence:** It has been almost three decades since the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments paved the way for at least one-third seats to be reserved for women at the local level, thus creating a large pool of women with political experience.
- **Abuse and violence:** Women often face hostility, apathy and even abuse from their own parties. In a 2014 study by UN Women, more than half respondents (58 per cent) from India said that they faced violence and abuse from members of their own parties.