



Graduate School of Development Studies

**VIOLENCE AGAINST DALIT WOMEN IN PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS**  
**The Cost of political participation**

A Research Paper presented by:

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(India)

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of  
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialisation:  
**Governance and Democracy**  
**(G & D)**

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September, 2008

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Acknowledgment:

I would like to thank following people for their support in the process of writing this paper, my supervisor Sylvia Bergh for the insightful comments and patience, Dr. Amrita Chhachhi for the assurance and motivation, Emma Sydenham from equal in rights provided me with reading material and discussed the paper, Jayshree Mangubai, George Mathew, Manjula Pradeep, Tony Fernandez are the people I consulted my paper and findings. I would also like to thank my discussant Sandhya ChandraShekaran for the enriching discussions we had.



Source: National commission for Dalit Human Rights, India

**“Ours is a battle not for wealth or for power, it is a battle for freedom, it is a battle of the reclamations of human personality” Dr. B R Ambedkar<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Picture source: from [www.ncdhr.org.in/ncdhr/campaigns/womensrights/](http://www.ncdhr.org.in/ncdhr/campaigns/womensrights/), [www.oliverohanlon.com](http://www.oliverohanlon.com)

<sup>2</sup> Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar also known as *Babasaheb*, was an Indian nationalist, Jurist, Dalit political leader and a Buddhist revivalist. He was also the chief architect of the Indian Constitution Born into a poor untouchable family; Ambedkar spent his whole life fighting against social discrimination, the system of *Chaturvarna* - the Hindu categorization of human society into four *varnas* - and the Indian caste system. He is also credited with having sparked the Dalit Bahujan Movement. Ambedkar has been honoured with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award (Wikipedia)

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## **Glossary/List of Acronyms**

PRIs: Panchayat Raj Institutions

PRIA: Society for Participatory Research in Asia

MS: Mahila Samakhya

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

India has seen the transformation from women in development to gender and development in its policy approaches, changes in knowledge and awareness. Affirmative action policies are made 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment is one such; at global level special measures have been designed to ensure women's participation, development and empowerment. These changes in awareness, expertise, policies, laws and women's voices are efforts of many actors. At grass-roots though translating this awareness, policies, expertise is important although hard. Violence against Dalit women is a challenge to the gender and development approach and to the millennium development goals. There is need of further development research for more inclusive policies which are sensitive to Dalit women's specificity.

## **Keywords**

[Dalit Women, Local Self Government in India, Panchayat Raj, Violence, Intersectionality]

## Chapter 1

### Dalit Women: Victim of Intersectional Violence

#### Introduction

The paper is shaped around the theme: Specificity of Dalit<sup>3</sup> women as a “different entity” entering into the Panchayat Raj Institution vis-à-vis women in general. The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment, the constitutional act 1992, came into force from April 1993 brought about an opportunity for Dalit and women, the marginalised of Indian hierarchical society to exercise their rights by participating. The amendment provided 33% reservation for women and Scheduled caste, scheduled tribes at rural local level, within this 33% it provided reserved seats for Dalit women on rotation. After almost 15 years since the act first came to enforcement the participation from Dalit community has been observed, women’s participation has been remarkably visible, but this is where we need to look critically at the term “Participation”, what is included in political participation? What are the role that the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act ensures to women and what role they end up playing? There is a clash between the expected role of women and Dalit women because of their social status and gender norms and 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment introducing them to public domain and a new role creates a clash between traditional norms and ‘achieved’ political rights by Dalit women.

Violence exercised against women and specifically against Dalit<sup>4</sup> women in the process of Political participation says a lot about the hierarchal dominant nature of Indian social structure. Vulnerably positioned at the bottom of India’s caste, class and gender hierarchies, Dalit women experience endemic gender-and-caste discrimination and violence as the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations (Irudayam et al 2006, pp.3). Within the oppressive social structure Dalit women become victim of violence if they transgress their rights and try to challenge their lower status. As gender violence, like any violence there are contexts, in relation to violence against Dalit women, the nature and dynamics of these contexts, relating to power and force, make them vulnerable and functions as a constrain to their agency and voice. This structural violence is an outcome of gender based inequalities perpetuated by patriarchal power relation also shaped, compounded and intensified by caste discrimination. Violence acts as a crucial social mecha-

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<sup>3</sup> Dalit literally means "broken to pieces" or "downtrodden" and it is the term now used to refer to those traditionally known as "outcastes" or "untouchables". This Marathi word is seen as a source of identity and pride and is, above all, the expression of a unified movement towards equality.

nism to maintain Dalit women's caste-gender subordination to men and that of the dominant caste men thereby subjugating both Dalit women and through them their community.

"Violence against women is gender-based and gender biased" (Irudayam A. et al 2006, pp.17) in the sense it devaluates women's status in social order perpetuated by patriarchy and justified on the basis of perceived differences between male and female sexuality. In Indian context the caste ladder descending from purity to pollution, purest Caste men being on the top of the ladder whereas the polluted caste placed on the lower rung women are pushed even further down to the lowest rung. It works against their integrity as an individual; this is a violation of women's rights, such as their identity as a woman and dignity as an individual. Therefore violence in this sense means denial of rights as an individual and hindering woman's development at various levels of integrity, as an Individual, as a woman in a family, a woman belonging to certain community and culture. Johan Galtung defines Violence as "avoidable insult to basic human needs": survival, well being, identity, and freedom (Galtung 1990 pp 292).

### **Being a Dalit and a Woman: Caste-Gender Nexus**

Dalit women face collective and public threat or act of violence which discourage them from demanding their rights, it is effects of structures on individual agency that results in the gap between potential and actual fulfilment of rights. Retaliatory violence is exercised in response to dalit women's assertions for their rights by defying caste, untouchability norms or asserting their rights to cultural, economic and political resources. Dominant caste women tend to be subjected to violence more within the family due to strict control over their sexuality and freedom of movement again due to the caste factors, in order to preserve the purity and status of their caste.

There have been movements through out the country making Dalits aware of their rights and also there have been feminist movements in India which took up issues of women subordination however looking at Dalit women as an "Imagined category" (Rao.2003, pp. 1)<sup>5</sup> and analysing the premises which prevent them from exercising their agency is yet the area of exploration. Imagining "Dalit women" as a different category as Bhagvat mentions is needed, because these feminist movements and Dalit movements lack a critical dimension from dalit woman's standpoint. Guru emphasises on this Point while he talks about "politics of difference" to bring out the specificity of Dalit women's subjugation. "This subjugation is characterised by their experience of two distinct patriarchal structures a Brahmanical form of patriarchy that deeply stigmatizes dalit women because of their caste status, as well as the control by

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<sup>5</sup> "Imagined Category" is a term noted by Vidyut Bhagvat in a two days seminar held at Pune University, emphasises at the need to critically look at the differences and specificities of Dalit women, same as Gopal Guru's emphasis on "Dalit women talk differently"



dalit men over the sexual and economic labour of “their” women” (Guru in Rao 2003 pp 1).

Political Participation for women means securing their entitlement to public resources, the economic resources they will avail as a result of participation for them and their community, the social and political benefits such as Development of the Dalit community in village, implementation of government schemes for Dalit more democratically due their representation. With the strong patriarchal biases against women and marginalised Dalit, the dominant caste male members would not want these sections to equally enjoy the resources over which they had monopoly since long.

There has a lot been written and debated around political participation of women and Dalits, conclusions are made that there has been fairly good representation in terms of number but the mere participation doesn't help these sections to exercise their rights. Nature of participation and effectiveness of the act has been assessed too, although with limited vision of looking only at the quantitative aspect of political participation. Very little has been studied on the gender-Caste nexus which denies the right of economic, political, social liberties to Dalit community as a whole and Dalit women within it. Political participation through Panchayat Raj Institution has given space for women to come out and talk about their grievances. The reservation has limited itself to space creation even though it implied the empowerment of women and there by making them equal partners in enjoyment of political, social, economical resource.

It is seen that the oppressive social structures have reaffirmed their superiority by attacking women through new ways of oppression such as criminalisation of politics, starting right from the election process to making women mere proxies of their male counterparts. Violence in the process of Political participation to ensure women's non- participate and exercise their agency is a crucial aspect to study and to enhance policies which will cut across the structural inequalities of caste-class-gender and give dalit women an equal status. I want to study Violence experienced by women at different levels of participation and look at the specificity of violence experienced by Dalit women being trice oppressed due to their marginalised status as a Dalit, as a woman and as a lower class.

Doing so my focus is at specificities of violence, Violence faced by women in general which is within their families and is built around the family prestige, there by controlling women's sexuality for the purity of their lineage and superior status. whereas dalit women not only face violence from their own family and community also from the dominant caste forces who ensure their superiority and control over resources by keeping the Lowest strata at its place who according to them are worth no social, economical and political rights.

### **Problem Statement:**

According to the 2001 census there are 167 million Dalits (referred to the census as “Scheduled Castes”) in India, who remain vulnerable to

discrimination, exploitation, and violence because of their socially marginal position assigned by Hindu social order. India's "Hidden apartheid" relegates Dalits to a life time of segregation and abuse. Caste-based divisions continue to dominate in housing, marriage, employment, and general social interaction—divisions that are reinforced through economic boycotts and physical violence (Hidden Apartheid 2007)<sup>6</sup>

The dalit woman faces Caste, Class and Gender discrimination because she is an untouchable, of a poor class and is a woman. (National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights 2006) Dalit women in India today number 80.517 million or approximately 48% of the total Dalit population, 16% of the total female population and 8% of the total Indian Population (Irudayam A. et al 2006). They make majority of unorganised labourer in urban settings and landless labourers in rural. They face discrimination on a daily basis, as a Dalit, as women and as a poor they are in extremely vulnerable position. Systemic violence against dalit women can be seen as a mechanism to keep dalit in a subordinated position. It is built in to the total structure of the dominant society, which does not acknowledge the basic human rights of Dalit in general and Dalit women in particular.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> -74<sup>th</sup> Amendments, former being for rural local bodies and later for urban local councils brought about radical changes in women's representation in local bodies. The method of co-option where women are elected for the reserved seats on the consensus of the members of local panchayat body or nomination, Balwant rai Mehta committee report proposed two women representatives each from Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe to be co-opted, these two procedures through which women's representation was ensured hitherto in the local bodies, has changed. Under the previous system, women's representation in local bodies was low and most women nominated to these bodies could hardly perform any functions. All the states except for Bihar (Santha 1999) had conducted the elections to the local bodies in accordance with the 73<sup>rd</sup>-74<sup>th</sup> Amendments act, 1992 and almost one million women have been elected to the Panchayat Raj institutions and urban local bodies (I am focusing only at 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment act 1992 and PRI's). This brought about a social change in terms of the traditional role of women; which used to be to take care of house hold chores and raise children and be inside the four walls all her life. Women's political empowerment finally seemed to be receiving some attention from both government and non-government organisations. Serious efforts are being made towards documenting women's political participation although it is limited to the Local self government. Questions of feasibility remain unanswered such as women's active participation, hidden domination (gender blindness) for instance in the budgeting process but also even in considering women as political entities,

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<sup>6</sup> Hidden Apartheid was produced as a "shadow report" in response to India's submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

many treated women elected through reservation as a temporary members in Local body. The consequences of assertion resulting in discouragement, fragmentation and discrimination inflicting violence are yet to explore.

Violence against dalit women is utilised to deny them opportunities, choices and freedoms at multiple levels, undermining not only dalit women's dignity and self respect, but also their right to develop.

An intersectional caste violence and atrocities against Dalit women occur at two levels: as an inherent part of the caste system whereby violence is utilised to reinforce caste norms and dalit women are seen as legitimate target for all forms of violence, especially sexual violence, and when they transgress caste norms, such as caste endogamy or untouchability norms, or assert their rights over resources, public spaces or cultural spaces. In other words, the process of dalit women's empowerment itself is perceived as a challenge to caste and patriarchal structures, and provides fertile ground for punitive violence committed by dominant castes. (Irudayam, et al 2006)

Factors such as socio-cultural notion of women's role act as impediments in effective political participation hindering political empowerment of Women; When it comes to Dalit women these factors play much intense role and are specific for Dalit women due to their social status, denial and even no recognition to Dalit women's political rights result into violence. .

Cases such as denial from villagers' for flag hoisting by Dalit women councillors on Independence Day, not being allowed to sit on the chair along with other members let alone talking in the meeting, Ignoring while they talk, use of abusing and discriminatory language, and humiliation on daily basis are experienced by most of the Dalit women who participate as elected members in local political arena.

After encountering this reality one would question that would the thousands years old socially, culturally, economically and most importantly politically entrenched patriarchal caste system ensured the representation of disadvantaged groups in politics?

### **Rationale: Being a Dalit and a Woman**

My Interest in the issue of Dalit Women comes from several different sources; first and foremost me being a Dalit woman. Being brought up with this identity and background, I got exposure to the problem faced by elders of the family and community. I feel my study would contribute in critically assess structural inequality causing dalit suppression and specifically of the Dalit women in local politics.

In the name of social discipline, "social balance" and to maintain this "social balance" Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular are denied basic human rights. Dalit women who have the ambition to occupy a political position frequently encounter resistance from the whole society. General discouragement becomes violence as soon as they show too much initiative, speak up and gain support from the larger community. There fore on academic level, I believe there is an urgent need to explore the issue whether in the Indian context, political restructuring alone will restore power to a category

such as that of Dalit woman. To what extent passing of a constitutional amendment on paper will necessarily ensure implementation of democratic practice in this caste ridden society. The Central issue which need to be examined is to what extent these institutional arrangements of local governance have been successful in changing caste, class and gender relations, to examine this, it is relevant to study the stronger form of deprivation, the violence against Dalit women which ensures and maintains power in the hands of the dominant caste. There is a strategic need of Intervention quota alone will not ensure to weaken if not annihilate, the impacts of cultural, structural and direct violence as termed by Galtung.

There are very few studies available on the discrimination faced by women participating in Panchayati raj and even fewer focusing on the specificity of Dalit women therefore my objective for this study are:

- To bring out the specificity Dalit women vis-à-vis Women in General in India in terms of theory, policy and future study.

### **Research questions:**

The reports from the institutions mentioned above, literature and evidences of violence faced by Dalit community itself are the indicators that Dalit community is vulnerable to violence and with the introduction of political space for them they have faced tremendous challenges to exercise these rights equally. I will talk more about it in cases, Tamil Nadu for instance balances between the agitating history and the equally agitating present, past Dalit movements have made effort to bring in Dalit women in Political sphere but the path is hard and harder when they are assertive. I show in the case of Karnataka the efforts of Government project “Mahila Samakhya” and how Dalit women deal with the day to day violence, right from the family, community and state official and are asserting themselves through the collective actions.

Chakravarty remarks that the upper caste women regarded as a gateways of caste system in Brahmanical patriarchy are needed careful surveillance to prevent upper caste purity and thereby controlling their sexuality. Lower caste communities are inherently considered polluted and so sexual violence against women from lower caste to punish the community if a member of community deviate from the set caste norms automatically gets legitimised and thereby justified. . To study the intricacies of Gender-caste-class intersection resulting in a legitimisation and enforcement of violence for the Dalit women vis-à-vis women in general, also looking at the effect it leaves on their political participation I have the following research questions:

- What is the nature of Dalit women’s participation in the Panchayat of which they are members?
- Do Dalit women Panchayat members have any impact in local decision making?

- What are the factors that constrain Dalit women from fully participating in PRI system in India?
- What are similarities and differences of the violence that Dalit women face compared to those of the women in general from Dominant caste and their male counterparts respectively?
- How has this violence affected them and has it stop them from participating in local government?

### **Methodology**

The study is based on the secondary data sources, keeping the time constrain in mind. In the beginning of the study I contacted the organisation ‘Navsarjan’ in Gujarat working for Dalit Women’s issues and the organisation from The Netherlands called ‘Equal in Rights’ a research centre. Both the organisations are stake holders in the study of Dalit women’s participation in Panchayat Raj System and the systemic violence. Since their study is yet to come out, I could not get the data from the organisation and changed my regional focus from Gujarat to Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, the southern states. They have history of various political and feminist movements, and also the movements of oppressed classes. Local self Government and reservation experiments were implemented in these states since British rule. Karnataka for instance was the first state to implement reservation for women in Panchayat Raj. I focus on the specificity of violence inflicted against Dalit women who participate into Local government vis-à-vis the women in general.

Case of TamilNadu interests me because of its long history of Dravidian Movement<sup>7</sup> which gave power to backward castes; It today provides almost 69% reservation to backward castes in TamilNadu on the basis of their population, although the self respect movement made efforts for upliftment of backward castes, today those non-Brahmin caste have become the dominant castes, and the most backward face violence and discrimination not only from the upper caste but also the backward caste who have got economical and political power.

Karnataka, like several other states in India implemented a community development project “Mahila Samakhya” by Government of India focusing specifically on Women. They encouraged community groups of women to solve their day to day problems at community level in Karnataka Elected

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<sup>7</sup> Dravidian Movement, has its inception since 1917 when the Justice party lead non-Brahmin movement although it was founded by upper caste political elites the movement lead by backward caste in Tamil Nadu, for identity and self respect, also know as Self respect Movement, was founded in 1925by E V Ramasami Nicker known popularly as Periyar, it aimed at achieving the society where all backward caste had equal rights.

Women Representatives were capacitated by Mahila Samakhya training programmes.

As a secondary data source I have used the reports of PRIA, a civil society organisation, undertaking development initiatives. I have also consulted studies published by the Institute of Social Studies, Bangalore, Institute of Social Sciences, Delhi, and research studies which are published as books.

To sharpen my findings I have consulted with expertise from the field of Local self Governance, Working for the rights of marginalised and Dalit women in particular and a feminist writer<sup>8</sup>.

### **Limitation**

PRIA's regional reports 'Dalit in Leadership'<sup>9</sup> are State level independent research with specific study objectives. They don't focus specifically on Dalit women. PRIA being a NGO provides training to women for their active participation and brings out result oriented reports. Although they have gone to the intricacies of social realities in rural India the reports talk about the positive changes brought out through the PRIA's interventions or certain training programmes provided by PRIA, it is remarkable, however the grim reality of rural India is still that Dalit face atrocities and Dalit women are still the vulnerable target for suppressing their community, PRIA reports fail to bring this out explicitly since it is not being the main focus of research. To overcome this limitation I have used other supporting literature and have consulted the field workers in the area of Dalit women's political participation.

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<sup>8</sup> I have mentioned my special thanks to the people I consulted in acknowledgement, I have been in contact with Director of Navasarjan, Manjula Pradeep, Programme coordinator in Equal in Rights Emma Sydenham, one of the writers of 'Dalit women speak out' Jayshree Mangubhai, and George Mathew Founder Director, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi

<sup>9</sup> Dalit in Leadership are regional reports of the states where PRIA started their projects or action research, I have mentioned them in the list of references.

## **Chapter 2 Status of Women, Emergence of Local self government in India and 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment constitution act, 1992.**

### **2.1 (i) Women Globally:**

‘When Women achieve an equal share of political power, many things around politics will have changed profoundly. Some further breaking- down of the range of human resources available to meet society’s needs would have taken place. In this respect, women’s increasing political participation is both a source and a signal of social change. As a global trend, rising numbers of women in politics will indicate that human beings are making progress towards more humane world, not because women are necessarily more humane than men, but because any society that categorically excludes half its members from the processes by which it rules itself will be ruled in a way that is less than fully human’

The Beijing Declaration and platform for action adopted by 181 UN members state underlined “women realities and perspectives are central to all issues of global development” (United nations division for the advancement of women, 2000)

Marginalised status of women is an established historical phenomenon in the world. Women constitute nearly 50% of the population of the world, but when it comes to the representation at higher levels of political positions in the government, they account for only less than 10% (Singla, 2007, pp.1). Gender discrimination leads to the inequality against women in decision making. There have been attempts globally to ensure equality of two sexes. United Nations being a key forum for women’s advocacy upheld women’s rights. Its charter (1945) calls for equality of sexes and enjoins on the member states to eliminate discrimination based on sex (Dhaka 2005, pp.2). In 1979 the ‘Convention on all forms of discrimination against women’ (CEDAW) was formed. There were several international conferences held to discuss issues concerning women’s development, the four very important were at Mexico City (Mexico) in 1975; Copenhagen (Denmark) in 1980; Nairobi (Kenya) 1985; and Beijing (China) 1995.

Through the UN decade of women (1976-1986), and the international conferences and summits of the 1990’s women participated actively to shape economic, social and political development.

The Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) issued by UN Secretary General in 2001, reflects a global acknowledgment for the empowerment of women and the achievements of gender equality which are treated as a matters of human rights and social justice. Goal 3 of MGDs talks specifically about promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and all the other goals have incorporated gender equality (Women’s Environment Development

Organisation (WEDO) 2004) On the other hand women are still vulnerable entities in war and conflict areas, victim of ethnic crimes, human trafficking, are malnourished and under represented in social political and economical realm.. Majority of the world's poor are women, Of the 150 million children aged 6-11 who don't attend school, over 90 million are girls, Of the world's 876 million illiterate people over 15 years two-thirds are women; working women have less social protection and employment rights; a third of all women have been violently abused; over 500,000 women die each year in pregnancy and childbirth; and rates of HIV/AIDS infection among women are rapidly increasing (WEDO 2004). In such a situation the political empowerment will ensure women's development. Active political participation from masses, from grassroots and within it from women is the need for their political empowerment and development.

### **2.2. (i) Women in India:**

Women constitute about 49% of India's population. Their position in a patriarchal Society has never been equal to that of men. There have been number of social reforms and efforts since pre-independence which tried to improve the status of women, but within the set customs and norms. Improving their status only to the extent to which women can serve as better housewives, mothers, Social reformists who carried out the reforms to improve women's status were limited to the mainstream women, women who became part of reform were also those who had their male counter parts in reform movements and were educated elites.

During the process of independence and afterwards, the efforts to bring women in social, economical and political foray removed a few gender biases but reinforced other. The constitution of India addressed the issues of women's development through special provisions for women in fundamental rights and directive principles of the state policy. Article 14 for instance talks about equality before law, and article 15 of no discrimination on the grounds of sex, specifically in the matters of gaining free access to public places, article 16 gives equal opportunity to public employment, article 42 ensures humane conditions of work and maternity relief for women. Such legislative measures continue to be an important mode to safeguard against women's oppression. There are several laws to protect women's rights and interests, the maternity benefit act, the medical termination of pregnancy act, the dowry prohibition act and marriage law are some such legislations. Besides these, the department of women and development was formed in 1985 as a part of the ministry of human resource development to ensure the development of women and children, this department undertook many activities to benefit women, including the setting up of committees and commissions (Sujaya, 1995 cited from Singla, 2007, pp.36) also some programmes introduced for the benefit of poor and asset less women such as economic programme for women in 1982, launched with assistance from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Support to training and Employment Programme for Women of 1987 (STEP) and the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh in 1993 (RMK)



The Indian policy framework also includes, efforts of The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Women & Child Development, Govt. of India which circulated The National policy for Empowerment of women 2001, The goals of this Policy are to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women, The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres - political, economic, social, cultural and civil; Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation. Swaymsidha 2001, is an Integrated Programme for Women's Empowerment with objective of the all-round empowerment of women, especially socially and economically, by ensuring their direct access to, and control over, resources through a sustained process of mobilization The Swarnjayanti Gram Swayrojgar Yojna (The Rural Self Employment Scheme)1999 aims at establishing a large number of micro-enterprises in the rural areas, building upon the potential of the rural poor, self help groups by women is one of the successful activity under this programme. These are some of the recent efforts aiming at women empowerment in general and rural women in particular to ensure direct access control over resources. The new approach focuses on improving women's own understanding of national issues and their contribution to the economy and policy. This is a very important shift in contemporary India which has potentials to "de-marginalize" women. One milestone of its kind is setting up of Ministry of Women and Child Development in2006<sup>10</sup>.

Despite of all these efforts the discrimination against women still persists these efforts have very little scope to get translated into reality with the strong hold of caste-class and patriarchy. It was to "de-marginalise" women and the oppressed section of society that the reservation policy was introduced in India. Political empowerment by the means of "space creation", i.e. giving women capacity to influence the decision-making process by integrating them into the political system was the main concern of Panchayat Raj. Political participation implied the empowerment and equality of women and marginalised, though case studies and discussion with J. Mangubhai<sup>11</sup> indicated that women and Dalit women in reality have not been given proper representation at rural local government levels, their rights are threatened at

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<sup>10</sup> The Ministry of Women and Child Development, a branch of the Government of India, is the apex body for formulation and administration of the rules and regulations and laws relating to women and child development in India. The Department of Women and Child Development was set up in the year 1985 as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. With effect from 30 January 2006, the Department has been upgraded to a Ministry

<sup>11</sup> Jayshree Mangubhai one of the researcher and writers of a study report Dalit Women Speak out: Violence against Dalit women in India. She is a research scholar at the University of Utrecht, has been involved in documenting violence against Dalit women.

every level of participation due to the criminalisation of politics, patronage of dominant caste and corruption entrenched in the system.

### **2.3. (i) Local Self Governments and Panchayat Raj in India:**

#### **a) History**

Traditional local self government is as ancient as Aryan civilisation in India. The Rig Veda's<sup>12</sup> mention the role of elected bodies like *sabha* whose task was to legislate as well as to reimburse justice. This community based management of local affairs was known as panchayat in most of the country which meant a council of five persons. Their functions were similar to the local governance like the Russian *mir*, German *Mark*, and the medieval *manor* of England. In most parts of India the panchayat system was based on the caste system<sup>13</sup> social status and family. During British rule in India, in 19<sup>th</sup> century the local self government (decentralised government) was introduced first in town and later in villages, it took more than 100 years for Local self government to become part of Indian Constitution. These bodies are called Panchayat Raj system. Although the Local self government functioned in India, it was highly based on 'Jat Panchayat'<sup>14</sup> where in the lower caste and women didn't have place to voice their grievances nor could they take part in decision making. Panchayat was held and monitored by the dominant caste male members.

During 1869, the British institutionalised these local bodies into quasi-official committees, but inadequate financial resources and provincial governments' oppositions made them fragile and ineffective. There were attempts to revive Local governments by few British viceroys such as Lord Ripon. He led the foundation of modern local government through his

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<sup>12</sup> Rig Veda: Literally means a compound of Praise, verse and Veda means knowledge, ancient Indian collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns dedicated to God, there are four Vedas namely Rigveda Yajurveda Samaveda Atharvaveda, Purush sukta in Rig veda mentions about the caste hierarchy the Varna system, and the divine origin of four castes from the body of Devine man Brahma. It also laid down to norms for each caste and punishment for the deviation.

<sup>13</sup> The Indian Caste system broadly divides the society hierarchically into two categories Varna and Jati, on the criteria of Purity and Pollution, Under Varna system there are Brahmins (Priestly class and teachers), Kshatriya (warriors and rulers) Vaisya (traders and Marchants), Shudras (peasants and Artisans) and atishudra/ Antyajas (outsiders therefore untouchables) the main characteristics are there is a single all India hierarchy without any variations between one region and another, there are only four Varna's and if we consider untouchable who are literally "beyond the pale" of caste are five, the hierarchy is clear and immutable. there are hundreds of jatis or endogamous groups in each of the linguistic area of India. M.N srinivas.

<sup>14</sup> Jat Panchayat is age old Local bodies in rural India, wherein upper caste male members are decision makers. An informal setting for the functioning of village

resolution in 1882. There were several legislations passed thereafter to democratise the local institutions.

Mahatma Gandhi had a strong faith in rural India, and his view was to achieve Village *swarajya*.<sup>15</sup> Masses who live in rural India should be decision makers of their own local bodies. He further questioned the possibility of such a democracy in a country with tight and centralised government which would be replaced by Indian elites after the British elite rule, which according to him meant that the educated elites involved in politics and in the making of state as an Independent India would decide for the entire country whereas Gandhi strongly pleaded for decentralization of economic and political power through the organization of Village Panchayats. He was of the definite view that Panchayat system in India, if worked on scientific lines, could not only build up the social and economic strength of the countryside but also strengthen the forces of national defence against the risk of foreign invasion (Narayan, S.)<sup>16</sup>

Ambedkar, a steadfast constitutionalist, who worked within the state and sought solutions to social problems with the aid of the state, being aware of an age old caste system, argued that local elite and upper castes were so well entrenched that any local self government would only mean the continuing exploitation of the downtrodden masses of Indian society. Nehru with his western liberal ideologies shared this view, total control of upper caste ruling elites in unregulated decentralised system, meant reinforcement of caste system and oppression of Dalits then called untouchables (Vayasulu 1999 pp.3678). Panchayat Raj was incorporated in article 40, in the new constitution of independent India, and is a directive principal of state policy. Despite the contradicting perspectives between strong leaders of independent India Panchayat Raj found its place in constitution and even developed further. In practice though, the setting up of village Panchayats stayed ineffective since there was no pressure on any state to set-up such a system. Later the provision relating to the establishment of Panchayati raj under the Indian constitution was relegated to advisory status leading to few states initiatives to implement panchayat.

#### **b) Balwant Rai Mehta Committee:**

The initiation of community development Programme in 1952 established Institutionalised Panchayat Raj. Objectives of community development programme were to promote self help and self reliance amongst rural people and to generate direct process of integrated social, economical and cultural change through transformation in social and economical life of village though the programme failed to mobilise the rural masses. It was more of government assistance than people's initiative. Recommendation by the Balwant Rai Mehta committee in 1959 observed lack of people's participation and suggested a set of institutional arrangements. The three tier system was thus introduced to

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<sup>15</sup> 'Swaraj' literally means "own rule", it implies freedom.

<sup>16</sup> Narayan S, wrote Preface to Book Village Swaraj, based on Gandhi's View on Village Democracy.

organise and manage the rural development activities and to make participation meaningful and effective. Jawaharlal Nehru First prime minister of India called it as the most Revolutionary and Historical step. After few years of enthusiasm this attempt of self government also stagnated. The committee on the status of women in year 1974 strongly recommended the establishment of statutory Women's panchayat at village level that would remove the cultural and social inhibitions and ensure initiative of women's participation through the exclusively women's bodies. It was recommended that the transitional measure be taken to break the traditional attitudes in rural society, by being integral part of panchayat raj system and claiming autonomy and resources of their own for management and administration of welfare and development programmes for women and children.(Santha 1999)

### **c) Ashok Mehta committee**

Ashok Mehta committee was set up again to revive the Panchayat raj in the year 1977 during the Janata Government<sup>17</sup> at the centre. It recommended creation of two tier systems, Zila Parishad at district level and Mandal Panchayat for cluster of villages there was no Panchayat Samiti at block level, as a link between Gram Panchayat and district administration, the three tier system proposed by Balwant Rai Mehta. Second the constitutional sanctioning of Panchayat Raj institution, also it proposed that the political parties should be given free role in the rural government. These recommendations were not accepted by many states, though this report created nation-wide publicity for Panchayat Raj.

Both the Balwant rai Mehta committee and the Ashok Mehta committee gave less emphasis on women's participation, if any. The former provided for the co-option of two women members in the constitution of panchayat, one from general category and one from SC/ST only two women were co-opted/nominated for their reserved seats alongside the male members in the group of 15 to 19 members. Besides a symbolic space for women, they couldn't exercise the rights they would as a result of participation, were still under represented the few who were co-opted were relatives of rural elite and were kept out of the day to day functioning. Co-option or nomination of women were not democratic, and served as a drawback, women were chosen by dominant caste male members who would choose elder women from their family these women would play as dummy without knowing what are their functions as a elected members, women from dalit background would be mostly the employee's of the dominant caste members and their economic dependency will highly determine their assertion. It meant protecting the interests of the dominant political and social groups as if women were not capable of running the Village government and they were treated as temporary members in local politics.

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<sup>17</sup> Janata Party (People's Party) was an Indian political party that contested *the* Indian Emergency (1975-77) and became the first political party to defeat the Indian National Congress in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections, forming the central government from 1977 to 1980.

States like Karnataka took a drastic turn; it became the first state in the country to introduce the policy of reservation for women, in panchayat raj institution. The act of 1985 provided a reservation of 25% to women at the district level and at the Mandal Panchayat level. The southern state of Kerala provided women with 30% reservation out of the total seats in the district council. Panchayat Raj Institutions in Tamil Nadu came into force in November 1956, In North Madurai union, later Madras Panchayat act of 1958 and the district Development council's act 1958 were passed, which mentions co-optation of women, The panchayat raj system in Tamil Nadu is three tiered structure, Panchayat at Village, Panchayat Union at Block level, and district development councils at district level.

#### **2.4 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and Women's entry in Panchayat Raj<sup>18</sup>**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional amendment act enacted on 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1993 provided an opportunity for involving women and Dalit women in particular in mainstream political, social and economic decision making process.

There was a drastic change in women's representation in 1996 election after 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment was enacted. Overall participation in Karnataka was 46%, Kerala 37%, Haryana and Gujarat around 33%<sup>19</sup> the trend was the same through out the country.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment provided 33% reservation for women, article 243 D of the constitution provides for reservation of Scheduled caste (SC) and Scheduled tribes (ST) in all tiers and levels of Panchayat in proportion to their population in the region, at least one third seats reserved should be for women of SC, ST community. Following the provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendments state government amended their state panchayat Raj act. The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment resulted in to participation of a significant dalit proportion into panchayat system.

Local self government went through complex processes; women were brought into the system when local self government was yet finding its own functions. Different state government conducted their own experiments with local self governments as we can see from the cases of southern states, their historical background, and the shift in power from the traditional upper caste to the OBCs or intermediate caste as we see in the state of TamilNadu and Karnataka

Radical thinkers such as Ambedkar and Phule rightly pointed out the histories of exploitation, ritual stigmatisation and political disenfranchisement as constituting the lives of marginalised (Omvedt 1995). Ambedkar's (Gupta) argument about villages being a den of ignorance and units that strengthens, perpetuates dominance of patriarchal caste system stays valid today, India

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix for more detailed information on 73rd constitutional amendment, a document by government of India

claims of social change, it hails about the schemes and policies for rural and marginalised development but reports in newspapers tell different stories too, chains of events been observed through out the states of India such as Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar and southern state, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh Lady Sarpanch stripped naked, lady Sarpanch gang raped, Up-Sarpanch dalit panchayat member beaten up. Such a social forces make it evident that panchayat is a part of that larger society of which villages are part, the noble ideas of self-government would not translate into reality with the existence of the inequality. Panchayat Raj would be ineffective on the canvass of stringent caste system, gender inequality and feudal values. But we can not wait until these preconditions are fulfilled, the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment and consequent state acts guarantee reservation so as to lead to the empowerment of Dalit and women.

73<sup>RD</sup> Amendment act enactment is a major step towards women's empowerment, and recognizing their equal rights to participate. The participatory management of welfare schemes can be solved only when marginalized section of society come to play a major role in decision making.

The statistics showed in the beginning of this section suggested participation of women. Government reports brought out the success stories of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment; though they failed to see that women's rights to participate equally were being violated by making them mere dummies and proxies by the village dominant male members. Dalit faced different challenges such as their economical dependency on the land owning upper caste, caste as their social handicap didn't allow them to ask for their equal share in democracy.

### **Gender-caste nexus vis-à-vis Panchayat Raj**

Gail Omdvet and Gabriele Diertrich point out Morton class and dr. Ambedkar's view on, Caste as a marriage circle and the endogamy norms means of patriarchal control over women,<sup>20</sup> Which also regulates access over resources as well as exchange of services based on territoriality and kinship" (Dietrich 1992, 90 cited in Bhagwat,) though the analysis endogamous marriage norms and its relation

Descent and work based discrimination, untouchability and violence is arising out of caste system, historically Dalits have been excluded from enjoyment of social economic, cultural civil and political rights, rights denial and violations have been due to the customary restrictions imposed on them under the stratified social hierarchy, born into particular impure, polluted caste.

The supposed impurity polluted nature of the Dalit coming from the lowest rung of caste hierarchy operates as a tool for social exclusion and exploitation of the community. Dalits themselves are not a homogeneous group. In a caste-ridden social order, Dalits too have their caste divisions, and arising from them hierarchical ordering too. Understandably, the distinctions

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<sup>20</sup> Bhagwat Vidyut Dalit women: issues and perspectives Some critical reflections

arising from these tend to be region-specific, which makes it difficult to have a Dalit movement for the State as a whole.

The Socio- religious mechanisms to legitimize this exclusion has made Dalits most socially and economically vulnerable communities , lack of access to land ownership, lack of significant political participation and lack of free employment, over half of dalit workforce are landless agricultural labourers dependent on the dominant caste Ambedkar and Phule view that Caste hierarchies and patriarchies are intrinsically linked.

Violence and atrocities against dalit women occur at two levels: as an inherent part of the caste system whereby violence is utilized to reinforce the caste norms and dalit women are seen as available for all forms of violence, especially sexual violence.

Second is when they transgress caste norms, such as caste endogamy or untouchability norms, or assert their rights over resources, public spaces or cultural spaces. In other word process of dalit women's empowerment itself is perceived as a challenge to caste and patriarchal structures, here we can see the political participation of dalit women may put them into vulnerable situation. (Irudayam, et al 2006)

United Nations report on violence against women has also noted that dalit women "face targeted violence, even rape and death from state actors and powerful members of dominant castes, used to inflict political lessons and crush dissent within the community.

In a study report "Dalit women speak out" the dalit women's description of social conflict in their communities, autonomous dalit participation in electoral politics and local self governance emerges as a point of conflict with the dominant castes.

Attempts by Dalit women to participate independently in elections by contesting for office without dominant caste backing, or by simply voting, often provoke retaliatory violence, example is given in the book "when a Dalit woman and her son informed the polling booth official that someone had fraudulently cast votes in their names, the dominant caste men committing the electoral fraud openly admitted to their crimes, locked the mother and son in a room beat them up for thirty minutes, giving them serious internal injuries. The perpetrators won the election and were never arrested" (Irudayam, et al 2006P.101 case AP 89)

## **Chapter 3. Empowerment of different kind: Dalit women, Political Participation and Violence against them.**

This chapter is devoted to the theoretical framework, the theories I used are important to explain Violence against Dalit women in the process of political participation, I find them interconnected and are necessary to critically look at the specificity of Dalit women in Indian context and political participation as a tool of empowerment. I am explaining participation which connotes empowerment in the context of Dalit women this process of empowerment, their assertion or mere participation which could be called a beginning of their self realisation thereby beginning of empowerment causes them violence, violence which is culturally legitimised and entrenched in structures making them repressive. Intersectionality helps me in bringing out specificity of Dalit women's violence, as it's not only patriarchy alone or the caste system which oppresses them but it is intersection of these two cultural and social as well as class as economical factors.

### **3.1 Participation: Theory**

Defining participation in context of development has been argued by several authors saying it's impossible to have universal definition participation a working definition is put together by Oakley and Marsden (Singala, 2007:62) summarizes Participation with following features

Voluntary efforts, sensitization, response, involvement in decision making processes, programme implementation, sharing benefits, and evaluation, assessment need, initiative and control.

Participation is fundamental to social life. From Socio-psychological standpoint Warr and Wall have defined Participation as concepts like 'involvement', and 'influence' (Chell, 1985:1, cited from Singala, 2007:63) Vrum as quoted by chell, considers the amount of psychological participation as the amount of influence that an individual feels he has in decision-making'. Thus three elements are central to participation, which are inter-related due to non-unitary nature of concept participation, influence, interaction and information sharing.

Participation, at local level of governance, refers to the involvement of people of diverse background, pursuing particular or common objective, people however have different reasons to participate. There can be several reasons for women to contest the election it could be respect, the status, and the popularity, the satisfaction, or the chance to solve the issues affecting their village. There can also be monitory expectations, breaking away from traditional roles, or even escape from the rigors of daily chores, these reasons could be categorized in three types existence, relatedness, and growth as explained by Alderfer (Robbins 2002:161, Singla 2007:65) the existence needs can be psychological in nature such as payment, food, clothing, shelter and safety. 'Relatedness' has to do with those concerning interpersonal issues such as esteem, belongingness, Growth denotes one's personal development the



major preposition of theory when applied to context of participation of women in PRIs is that if the needs, because of which they participate in these institutions are not met, then they are likely to discontinue such a participation which could be non-attendance in meetings or reluctant to contest next election.

Sustainable economic and social development requires that people participate in the political process. India's enabling legislation made it mandatory for local government to include women, the barriers and impediments to full participation of women in political process. Taking the theory into account Political participation in context of Indian women and Dalit women in particular, the interaction between men and women in the process of decision making, and specifically looking the differences due to caste dynamics the participation of women is mostly hindered and discouraged and thus discontinued.

Kaushik (Kaushik 1993) prefixes the word 'political' before participation and associates political participation with the concept of power, she says politics is a study of an exercise of power and therefore political participation means exercise of power.

Further more she says that analysis of political participation of women would have to combine a few components, such as, extent, level and nature of women's participation in the political processes by way of both formal and informal institutions. Thus process of political participation is complex, and it's not clear that it is comprehensively inclusive. Reasons for non-participation could be apathy, to the sense of helplessness or denial of rights to participate altogether.

The impact and significance of such participation for women's right, living conditions and the type of feminist issues that are raised in the course of such participation. The point is quantity is not important they are means to achieving something more fundamental. There are several factors which impede the participation and keep it at mere representation level substantial proportion of women don't receive support from their families in the discharge of their political function. Addition of public sphere responsibilities with domestic work hinders active participation too.

### **3.2 Empowerment**

The Concept of empowerment as envisioned and propounded by Kabeer is pertinent to my study. Empowerment entered into development lexicon some three decades ago and has been widely used since then. It is important to see if Dalit women have scope to experience this dynamic process and its end results in acquiring social, political and economic power at a political, social and personal level. Empowerment for Kabeer is closely rooted in the notion of power and its reverse, powerlessness. (Barua 2006) Power could be attained through several different sources, for dominant castes in India, they have legitimised monopoly over power, and thus Dalit women portray their powerlessness. This powerlessness may not be observed by the Dominant caste male members or Dalit women also for that matter due to the gender biases.

“To be disempowered is to be denied choice while empowerment refers to process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. Empowerment thus implies a process of change” (Kabeer, 2003:3)

Bachrah and Baratz’s points out that *power* is not only the result of open decisive processes but can be obtained in ways which is unseen and hidden. Lukes takes this ideas further by not only looking at how people make decisions or who or what gets left out but is also about how *power* is able to operate without being perceived at all, in brief, the women are discouraged to put forth their views by constantly told they are not good enough and they come to believe their interest are of no value.

Kabeer explores the concept of empowerment through three closely interconnected dimensions of agency, resources, and achievements.

Agency in her view represents the process by which choices are made and put into effect. Resources are the medium through which agency is exercised and achievements refer to the out comes of agency.

Kabeer states that “agency in relation to empowerment implies not only actively exercising choices but doing this in relation to empowerment implies not only actively exercising choice but doing this in ways which challenge power relations”(Kabeer2003:2). Resources refer to the various materials, human and social resources that are distributed throughout society and positively influence the individual’s ability to make choices and “the term on which people gain access to resources are as important in the process of empowerment as the resources themselves” (Kabeer, 2003:3) Thus, resources and agency combine to invest people with the capabilities to live the lives they want and “their achievements refer to the extent to which this potential is realised or fails to be realised, i.e. the outcome of their efforts” (kabeer, 2003:4)

Kabeer also emphasises individual empowerment should lead to some form of structural change if systemic inequalities are to be addressed.

Women’s empowerment is seen as a key strategy for gender equality. Though literature shows there is much discussion over what empowerment means, how can it be measured since the current strategies are seen ineffective, considering the intertwining of two crucial factors such as caste and gender.

Empowerment may have come to mean different thing to different people but broad support for idea that women need to be empowered indicates a general agreement that they lack power and that power relation act to their disadvantage.

In the case of Dalit women one would be critical about the “*empowerment*” aspect in the whole process of Political participation of Dalit women, which is crucial and questionable. Even though the policies and acts have been enforced to encourage the participation there has been a little attention towards the implementation, specially the lower caste women who are victimized as a result of their *power* gaining through active participation. It’s a empowerment of different kind which violets their rights as an individual, challenges their integrity. Powerlessness of women is not merely because of their dependency on their male counterparts for material reasons, or them being illiterate but

there are systemic inequalities led by social, cultural and structural factors. At Individual level these factors could be self –confidence, awareness of self image of women and it relates to them being educated. But the societal structures play crucial role in women’s nurturing, and keeping them ignorant, thereby naturalising and routinising the marginalisation. Caste stratification in Indian society is one of the main reasons for backwardness of and deprivation of the marginalized sections of the Indian society. Women are the weakest amongst the weak, caste stratification when accompanied by gender inequality adds further to the already worse situation. While the affirmative action has brought women into decision making position, the “empowerment” still is a question

The culture of oppression has such an impact on Dalit community, making them feel inferior and so susceptible for discrimination, that discrimination becomes part of their everyday life. “Women’s Empowerment acts at a series of levels, from the cultivation of power within an Individual such that she has both the will and capacity to change, to the cultivation of power and solidarity within the community of women to confront structural obstacles to societal change and struggle for equity”<sup>21</sup>

Women who are assertive are denied nomination by threatening, there empowerment, assertive use of agency makes them get affected of violence resulting into other women learning the bitter lesson. Empowerment through policies and strategies is important at the same time it is important to also see complex nature of action that implies change in status quo. The extent of women’s formal participation is an important indicator of women’s empowerment.

Empowerment according to Kabeer is a contribution from grassroots; the perspectives evolved from grassroots experiences shows even though participatory development rhetoric the power remains in the hands of minority on top.

### **3.3 Violence**

The term violence is explained in general terms as ‘Violence is needs-deprivation’ (Galtung, 1996 pp200) or violence is ‘avoidable insults to basic human needs’ (Galtung, 1996 pp 197). In more detail Galtung’s understanding of violence is comprehensible with reference to three subgroups or ‘super types’ (Galtung, 1996 pp 199). Galtung offers a metaphor that is extremely useful for explaining the three ‘super types’. The analogy is when we consider an earthquake as a physical event - the shaking of the earth - that is quantifiable and obvious. The point at which the quake occurs is usually centred upon a fault line. Fault lines are constant and not themselves deadly - it is possible to conceive of a fault line that exists yet has never been the site of an earthquake.

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<sup>21</sup> Neema Kudva: Engineering Election: The experience of Women in Panchayat Raj in Karnataka, India International Journal of Politics, culture and society, Vol. 16, No.3, spring 2003

The relationship between the fault line and the event of a quake is tied together by means of a process. In this process none of the three aspects of an earthquake are the same as each other. Rather, they are possible to view as three substantive parts of a greater whole, and it is also possible to study and examine them as independent phenomenon (Galtung, 1996pp 199). In the same way as we understand the aspects of an earthquake we may also understand violence. Galtung describes it through a triangle of violence which involves a visible violence which is Direct in nature, and called direct violence Dalit women who are or intend to be member in PRIs face assault, use of abusive language against them, beating them and their community members, rape are all examples of direct violence against Dalit women. Human actions have roots, culture of violence such as patriarchy and structure which is repressive such as caste system are those roots of the violence.

Cultural and Structural violence causes direct violence; it is a vicious circle in the sense that direct violence reinforces cultural and structural violence.

Figure 1. source: <http://them.polylog.org/5/fj-en.ht>



Cultural Violence is any aspect of culture that can be used to legitimise violence in its direct or structural form Symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into the structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both” (Galtung 1990 pp294) Cultural violence is the unchanging difference between peoples, perhaps ethnic or economic divides that make one group of people obviously distinct from another. Cultural violence is represented by the fault line in the analogy and is considered the ‘legitimiser’ of both direct and structural violence. The caste-Gender nexus, where women are traditionally controlled by the patriarchal dominance and the caste hierarchy legitimises the violence against Dalit women.

### **3.3 Intersectionality:**

Intersectionality may be defined as a theory to analyse how social cultural categories intertwined, the relationship between gender, race ethnicity, disability sexuality class and nationality are examined. the word intersection means that one line cuts through another line, from the very beginning the Intersection was used to denote ways in which people of colour cross gender (Crenshaw 1989, cited in Knudsen), in my research I use this concept as a analytical framework to explain the discrimination faced by Dalit women as Women and also as Dalit, here gender crossing caste.

Interrelation between class, caste, and gender is considered essential in understanding such participation. The women from upper caste dominant family might come ahead and be assertive in exercising their rights but they would do it to benefit their community and family and would limit their awareness for the personal gain of family, community of which they are part, marginalising dalit and dalit women. Here comes the question of ‘universal sisterhood’ which homogenises women as one category, Interview with Jayshree also revealed that when Dalit women were paraded naked or a Dalit youth or men were being punished, women of upper caste community acted as a support to male members, here the caste overpowers the notion of gender and that is why it is crucial to look at Intersectional discourse.

Violence against women in India in general is structured by relationship of power embedded in caste, class and gender discrimination. Specificity about Dalit women is their socio-economic positioning at the bottom of caste-class-gender hierarchies, social exclusion. Intersecting caste-class- gender factor entail vulnerability to coercive violence utilized to maintain caste norms, caste-based gender norms vis-à-vis Dalit women. Retaliatory violence is exercised in response to dalit women’s assertions for their rights by defying caste, untouchability norms or asserting their rights to cultural economic and political resources. Violence functions as constrain to their agency and voice, to subjugate both women and through them their community.

## **Chapter4.Dalit women in Panchayat: Tale of two southern states.**

### **4.1Tamil Nadu:**

In Tamil Nadu State, Interior villages have Village panchayat as a formality. The traditional power structures of dominant caste and class are entrenched deeply. Village activities are under control of few wealthy land owning families as it is observed in other states of the country (Vyasulu 1999 pp. 3679) control over resources by this wealthy families and economic dependency of the Dalit community makes it possible for the dominant caste to decide the politics of village.

Dr. Ambedkar questioned when the “Village Swaraj” was proposed by Gandhi, why village should become locus of political structure? Villages ruled by its dominant elites and upper caste were very conservative and were based on traditional caste structure, which meant that local self government would be unites of elite captures which will exploit the downtrodden as grassroots. TamilNadu proved as an evidence (Palanithurai 2003 pp 27) to this argument the elected Panchayats didn’t exist for long in this state, elections of Panchayat were held in1986 and expired within three years term, resulted into Panchayat coming under control of Bureaucracy. Bureaucracy colluded with the land owning rural elite would function for their own good without any accountability towards villages.

The patriarchal values, in such a social set-up would not allow women to enter into politics. Studies show except for few, majority of women were proxies of their husband or other male relatives. Women were seen to be hesitant to come out and contest election (Palanithurai 2003 pp 28)

Women from upper caste, who were the so called Councillors, would be accompanied by their husband or even teenager/ grown up son for any meeting. Women would not answer questions without looking at husband for approval. Husband would interfere in answering. (Santha 1999 pp 61)

The study mentions there was instance where one of the ladies was questioned what she would be doing in future; in reply her husband said she is happy where she is now as a Panchayat president. He was critical about women’s participation in politics, he didn’t see the need for his wife to come in to politics, who would look into the household chores was his question. (Santha 1999 pp62)

Women would say they can not cope with household work and to attend the Panchayat activities so they would at the most attend the meetings held, but here too they are not involved in the decision making.

Another compulsory act is that women candidature would be chosen by Village elders, (male and from upper caste) which shows women themselves don’t have say in their own entry into politics.

It was seen that women’s mobility to talk and express was completely controlled by the village male elites. There were people who were presidents

for long period and they would mostly be the landlords, Women would admit these landlords were alone instrumental for them to get into politics and that they still serve as their mentor. In the case of Dalit women, who work in the fields of landlords (the landed caste, in TamilNadu Gounders comes under the most backward castes in India). This shows that the sub-castes amongst Dalits and hierarchy within them oppresses the most lowly and women who are the lowest of all.

When the seats are particularly reserved for the Scheduled castes women, they would be nominated by the upper castes. Most of the time these women and their families work at the landlord's place and face exploitation if they don't abide by the rule due to their dependency on the landlord for the resources and work.

My Focus on Tamil Nadu is also because of the long history Dravidian movement against caste discrimination, championing the cause of those once considered to be underdogs. The oppression that Dalits experience today is caused not only by the "upper castes", but by those who were once at the lowest level in the caste hierarchy, socially only slightly above than Dalits. The equality and justice that the Dravidian movement fought for, and to a measure achieved, were to be limited to the Backward Castes, it would appear. These caste groups, now in power, would like to see the former outcastes remain where they have always been.

The contemporary debate in women's group on the fraught and complex gender and caste and Dalit political militancy, the past speaks of the contemporary feminist concerns and anxiety, the questions of identity and possibility of justice for women in social context. Agitation started in Tamil Nadu in the beginning of 19th century it was "the backward classes movement" originated as a non-Brahmin movement, the term non-Brahmin was interpreted widely including not only Hindu but Muslim and Christians, and these were the elite sections from non-Brahmin communities who were voicing out against the dominance of Brahmins in higher education, in the new profession and in the bureaucracy. The demands for reservation was made by non-Brahmin communities to get into these new opportunities of professions came with the British rule, and Brahmin being at the higher status got avail of them keeping the others ignorant, from there on there were several milestones such as the list of non-Brahmin communities with the percentage of reservation provided to them, a government resolution was passed by then "government of Madras" (Now know as Chennai capital of TamilNadu)

The elitist group amongst these backward communities who could get hold of the benefits and the "more backward" still stayed deprived. And further movements such as the political movement of depressed classes criticising the "Non-Brahmin" Movement. The southern states, such as Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have divided the other backward castes into various categories of backwardness to ensure that each category gets their share.

Non-Brahmin being the most heterogeneous group, the struggle to make sure that the reservation reaches to the most deprived section of the society isn't yet fulfilled. Even though Tamil Nadu succeeded in almost providing 69%

of reservation to weaker section including SCs, STs and OBCs in the matter of job facilities in government sector and education by the constitutional amendment in 1994, there are serious lacunas in these 'Compartmental reservation', by this I mean setting of quota's for the caste meant they will limit themselves to the reserved quota, getting 'ghettoised' and so the backward castes will be fight amongst themselves for this limited quota not having place within the general category in terms of political participation, education and jobs which according to my finding lead to dominant backward castes amongst Dalits oppressing the most backwards caste today. Reservations for SC/ST communities and awareness amongst Dalit communities about their socio-economic rights, and their demands for fulfilment of this rights coming from one part of the Dalit community resulted into oppression of the other much vulnerable, resource less poor Dalits, and Dalit women amongst them.

It has been interesting how the awaking of the backward castes took place in Tamil Nadu, as called by Gabriel Almond 'bargaining culture', which he considered necessary for the development of a legitimate and stable democratic culture in India (Radhakrishnan P.in .Srinivasan)<sup>1</sup> Tamil Nadu was also one of the first few states which consciously got women in to the movement, the Suyamariathai Iyakkam (self respect movement) started by Periyar E.V.Ramasamy Naicker in 1925, was radical in terms of emancipating women's rights.

In July 1998, Dalit youths attempted to celebrate K.R. Narayanan's President Ship, as first Dalit becoming the First Citizen of the country. They faced objection by upper caste and a clash followed, finally resulting in twenty Dalit huts being torched and over a hundred dwellings of Dalits being damaged (Vishwnathan S, page 99). On Independence Day 2003, the Dalit Panchayat president of a village in one of the southern districts of Tamil Nadu was "assaulted and humiliated in public because he hoisted the national flag at the Panchayat's official function (*ibid*).

The Indian government's 1996-97 annual report for the Ministry of Human affairs states caste-related incidents in 1996 in the southern state of Tamil Nadu increased by 34% over previous years (Human rights Watch 1999). The majority incidents of clashes took place between scheduled caste and other backward communities, and when I write this I would interpret it as a change in caste dynamics, one would say that the other backward caste are trying to strive towards the upward mobility by identifying themselves upper than the Dalits, and second is Dalit getting avail of reservation, the other backward castes have to share the resources with those considered worthy of enjoying social, political and economical freedom.

The report also says that the clashes in certain southern districts of Tamil Nadu have been largely attributed to the increased economic and political autonomy of the Dalit community namely *pallar* since mid1990. The *pallars* have begun to support a new political leadership, unaligned to the mainstream political parties and promoted by two movements namely Dalit panther of



India (DPI) Tamil Nadu and Devendra Kula Vellaral Federation (DKVF) led by Dr. K. Krishnaswamy, a member of legislative assembly. The political movement provided an organised platform for resistance to still prevalent norms of untouchability in the state.

Dalits demanding for equal treatment and access to temple festivals, their denial to carry out ritually demeaning tasks, equal share in public and village property resulted in Upper castes affirming their superiority by reinforcing the old caste custom. It is in this state that one of the members of parliament funded for the building the hall for women to seat out during their menstruation, as a task performed for ritual purity, and the justification was that there are evils in the village because we have forgotten our old rituals. Government statistics from 1995 stated that 91% cases of the coercive enforcement of untouchably practice were perpetrated by *Thevar* (upper caste community). In such communal clashes, coloured by caste norms violence against women becomes a small part of communal clash and doesn't get attention as violence against women per se. The Melavalavu murders of 1997, a clear case of Dalit progress inviting retaliation by higher castes. The president ship of the Panchayat of Melavalavu village, close to Madurai (District) was reserved for Dalits. They faced resistnace during the process of elections but under police protection, the election was conducted and Murugesan, a Dalit, was elected president. Members of the higher caste made it difficult for him to operate from the Panchayat office. Murugesan went to Madurai to make a representation to the District Collector. On his way back, he was murdered along with six of his followers. This created threat in Dalit community, Jayshree Mangubai who documented the incidents and followed up the community responses shared her findings, there was fear in Dalit community to contest election for the next term and example of Melavalavu village was given to the community to threaten them. Violence is used as a mechanism to ensure the non-participation, these issues affected women's and Dalit women's participation to great extent. Although this is a reality there is an exception I want to mention to say that violent structures can only be changed by violence; but that violence will lead to new violent structures (Galtung 1990) and so political democracy is a hope and not the violence, In Tamil Nadu particularly, where the original radicalism of the Dravidian parties seems to have evaporated almost completely, Dalit resurgence is expanding the base of democratic contestation. Parvati, an elected president of a Panchayat reserved for Dalits. She had to confront a hostile and influential vice-president from the dominant Marava community. She was stopped from conducting meetings. Parvathi sought the help of the police and was successful to conduct meetings despite the resistance. Her courage and determination enabled her to go ahead with her task and win support in the village even from members of the higher castes. She was re-elected for a second term in 2001 (Vishwnathan page 231).

#### **4.2 Karnataka:**

Karnataka is regarded as one of the more progressive states in India far ahead in development and other issues of welfare administration as compare to rest

of the India. It has been exceptions when it comes to decentralisation and Panchayat Raj, it is the first state which pioneered the gender quotas in 1983; with state legislature the progressive step of 25% reservation for women is one of the characteristics of Karnataka Panchayat. The then Panchayat Raj was two-tier system, Zillah Panchayat at district and Mandal Panchayat at the local level the mediator Panchayat Samiti at block level came into existence only after the 1993 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment.

The political participation of women in Karnataka has seen mixed results; women are more visible, decreased levels of corruption in Panchayat Raj institution, and increased self-efficiency of women representatives<sup>22</sup> The discrimination is prominent in both public and private sphere.

Women would be prevented from exercising their power even when they are provided opportunity to participate in politics. The existences of disparities would be much severe because of rural women's poverty illiteracy, poor health status also the vested interest groups, criminalisation of politics, control over women's mobility both from family and from the party , women's dependency on male members as a new arrivals in politics, lack of education and resources. Moreover the barriers posed by patriarchy, caste and class oppression are much entrenched at village levels. Respondents of study (Narayan pp303) agreed that segregation is operating on caste basis, but they mingle freely in meeting with higher caste. Women respondent shared their lack of self confidence as inhibiting factor from participation, reservation for women since 10 years (in the year 1995) made families take women's role in Gram Panchayat seriously.

Mahila Samakhya is a programme of the department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development of Government of India. National policy on education in 1986 realised status of women was unequal in the sphere of development and women who were affected were rural women and marginalised. Mahila Samakhya was initiated first in Karnataka; in 1989 with Dutch assistance along with Gujarat and Utter Pradesh. Objectives of the programme were to play a positive and interventionist role in bringing out it changed Karnataka experience a bit, Study done by Institute of Social studies Bangalore in 1995 showed Gram Panchayat meetings were held properly and that all the members despite of their caste and gender participated in the meetings, interesting enough even though caste discrimination prevails in villages it did not seem to hinder Participation.

There is persistence of violence against Dalit women during the process of their political participation, after their assertive Political Participation, as a result of Gender-Caste bias, or even within the Family, Community, state

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<sup>22</sup> Neema Kudva: Engineering Election: The experience of Women in Panchayat Raj in Karnataka, India International Journal of Politics, culture and society, Vol. 16, No.3, spring 2003

actors. Karnataka Mahila Samakhya (henceforth MS) started the process of change and there by the empowerment process. To weaken and then annihilate structural Violence is a long process, but the small achievements of collaborative efforts are strengthening and building the hopes for women. MS targets the poorest women of the villages and in most of the cases the poorest and resource less are the Dalits. Specificity of Dalit women should be consciously addressed, it should be recognised that a rural poorest of poor are actually Women of marginalised Caste, the caste-class nexus should be studied critically. MS carried out many innovative and women-friendly training programmes, it focused on the facilitating and capacity building on women Sangha (groups) for Elected women representatives, later after evaluation they realise it was also necessary to capacitate women members who were active and had potentials to be the women PRI member. There were several 'all women elected representative' Panchayat villages in Karnataka, women in this Panchayats carried out the tasks attentively learning through the trainings, although Mahila Samakhya has done a very good work, the process to get to this level has been of struggle, there have been examples provided by Narayan, the disapproval of women's gathering from the male members of family, of community and also from dominant caste men, and how women used their daily mechanisms to overcome these issues and not let it affect on their participation, they also had material incentives from MS, their self help groups monitored by MS, capacity building training, discussions gave them sense of self respect. To mention few instances Sangha member (Member part of MS group) would question in the Gram Sabha (Village meeting) and would ask for the schemes and implementation which initially annoyed the villagers, this resentment took a serious form since the young son of this woman was beaten up when he was alone, she was harassed by villagers (Narayan 303) though she didn't give up. Karnataka relatively has seen positive impact of PRI in certain district though there are other dimension to this reality too, being poor exploitations of different sorts is a reality for women who are directly affected by exploitation women come into local self government through caste reservation are in social and economic disadvantageous situation, mostly non-literate, very little productive assets at their stake, dependent on male of the family or daily wage labour. With the rural society that fixes places for various castes and gender, such a situation is yet to completely annihilate although MS is doing efforts to make the grassroots equal and democratic. Giving space for Dalit women in Panchayat is good, though the traditional institutions have not given space to women, factors hindering women in systems still exists, and legal system being part of larger social structure doesn't change much in such a situation there s need of fundamental changes, political democracy with sensitisation of its citizens for equality is needed, and as it is said we can not wait until all the structural problems and fundamental lacuna's are overcome but efforts like Mahila Samakhya, Civil society organisations women's group which would be sensitive of Dalit women's specificity and the differences could work for the empowerment and development of women.

## Chapter 5.A Way Forward

The analysis of caste based violence against women reveals The increasing visibility of Dalit women in power structures such as Councillors, as a member of Panchayat and new knowledge making process, Sarv shiksha abhyan (Education for all), adult education, midwives for Public health post, cooking midday meals for government schools in village has lead increased backlash against them, it is expressed through the range of humiliating practices, not allowing children to eat the midday meal, banning Dalit lady from cooking, the higher degree of violence is to rape women or killing of their kinsmen, the very well known case is of Bhanwari Devi from Rajasthan, who was a Sathin (a friend) of the community raising awareness in the community about education and stopping child marriages who was raped and didn't get justice.

Violence against women curtails women's access to basic human rights such as food, shelter, livelihood, security and health, diminishing their opportunities for political participation due to the vulnerability. Political aspirations of Dalit can be seen due the reservation but issues of women lack its place on the agenda. Even though reservation is necessary condition for engendering governance, it is not sufficient to ensure women's participation in political processes. Reservation is only enabling device, Sen A. (UNDP 2000) talks about intersection of women's wellbeing and her agency which needed to be worked on and intervened.

There is a lot to be studied and explored on the topic of Violence, Dalit women, and political participation the topic is broad and my objective behind it is to make it open for future studies, research thereby policy formulation more Gender- Caste Inclusive. There are following three issues which are basis of my analysis of cases which have come up in literature review and also in the case studies:

- Intersectional Dynamics of Gender –caste-class in social structure with cultural Violence
- New processes of Violence Dalit gaining power causes them Violence, and further marginalization.
- Dalit women's specificity as a Dalit is the centre point to these analyses of theories and there is a need to critically study these differences as to include them consciously into policies and future study, researches.

The invisibility about Dalit women existence is so deep that we are unconscious when we refer to marginalisation of women in development process we actually refer to Dalit women. In women's movement there has been tendency to play down the caste factor while uniting women as a victim of violence control over women and control over lower caste as their subordinated status connection could be understood but question of untouchability thereby specificity of Dalit women should be confronted.

.Most women irrespective of their social background are at disadvantages due to gender order. Household isn't entirely women's domain; Violence against women and Dalit women is directed at the physical and mental integrity of women. Perpetrators of violence range from the women's family to general community to the state their purpose is to deprive women of equal enjoyment, exercise and knowledge of human rights and fundamental freedom in such a manner as to maintain women in subordinate roles and contribute to their low level of political participation, education, skills and work opportunities. Violence against women is directed at their identity and dignity as woman and targeted at the integrity of their personhood. The patriarchal structure determines the nature of discrimination in man woman relationship, and is effective through distinction, restriction and exclusion of women.

Paradoxical though is precisely the legal inclusion of the Dalits and the progress that they have made and continue to make that constitute the Dalit problem today. Once Dalits were excluded and suppressed. Now they are included and oppressed.

My line of argument has been since the beginning of this paper that Dalit women face violence in the process of political participation because of them exercising this right to participate provided by the state, if they transgress and assert for the rights the violence is inevitable and it is specific about these women being Dalit, my cases and literature support this view, the theory of Intersectionality talks about the intersection of caste-gender-class puts Dalit women to high risk since violence reinforces cultural legitimisation and structural repression.

Going back to questions I intended to answer in the beginning of paper the nature of participation of women varies from being proxies because of helplessness, ignorance also due to economical dependency at this level being elected representative, the theory of Participation and the dynamics involved in it as observed in the case of TamilNadu, created threat amongst women impedes their participation.

Dalit women are threatened and discouraged from participating right from the process of election, in such a situation there have been only few cases which came across in the secondary data sources spoke about Dalit women impacting local decision making, the example from Karnataka, where her questioning during village meetings affected her and her family.

Factor constraining Dalit women's participation is the theme of this paper it's the legitimised Structural violence against them, and which has varied dimensions Intersectionality of Gender-caste-class being one of them, Violence exercised right from the family community and state actors affecting woman's integrity, self esteem and making her part of system by victimising her.

Women in Rural India face violence and with respect to the violence caused by political participation for women in general could be seen at her family level, where she is brought into the politics by family as surrogate to her husbands, this is a form of violence where she is kept ignorant of her own rights, she is not allowed to speak out in the family. Women in General face

violence more at family level; she has less opportunities of mobility as women are considered pride of family in these dominant caste families and they should fulfil their duties being wise wife. Whereas Dalit women are victim at every level of social institutions, their social mobility due to economical factors (most of Dalit women work as labourer) becomes cause of the violence, their men allow them to work out because of economical need but they bear burden of household work as well as working outside the house, where they become prey of landlord's violence (in rural setting). Contesting election is transgressing from their caste norms. They are also asked to play surrogate (proxy as a elected representative) to their male landlord and we have seen in the cases how it is ensured that woman is discouraged from active participation.

Studies 'Dalit women speak out' and my discussion with Manjula pradeep gave me insights to come down to this conclusion about effects of violence on Dalit women members of Panchayats, there are certainly inverse effects of violence, which are also discouraging factor. Vishwanathan says in his studies it is observed that the violence against Dalit and Dalit women has seen the increase since they started to get recognition in public domain; through the reservation policy (73<sup>rd</sup> act) women and Dalits came into political arena at local level. This Violence is to place Dalit back to their traditional status; it has and would hinder the participation of women.

### **While Concluding...**

This is where the future studies, and research are needed, with the limited methodological tools only depending on secondary data sources I could touch upon few aspects of caste dynamics, violence and Dalit women's status. There is a stronger need of further studies about "Dalit women" as an Imagined category as is said by Chakravarty and mentioned by me in the beginning. It's now when they are entering into the politics the deep-rooted interconnecting factors impeding women's development and Dalit women's development in particular are critically observed and mechanisms should be formed for development and empowerment which is inclusive.

Constrain and experiences of Dalit women in political participation democratic political development and social development of an individual freedom are a lengthy process. Dalit woman as an individual of the democratic state and has equal rights have many fissures to come true. A long history of exclusion from political power needs conscious efforts to bring change in dominant social order. The articulation of the interests and needs of Dalit women are, even exercising the rights as elected representative are constrained due to social and political systems. Their late arrival into politics puts them into disadvantageous situation and it's a long way to come need therefore is strategic intervention, which will be area of further studies and exploration.

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*Appendix* source: <http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend73.htm> (Last Visited 8th September 2008)

## THE CONSTITUTION (SEVENTY-THIRD AMENDMENT) ACT, 1992

Statement of Objects and Reasons appended to the Constitution (Seventy-second Amendment) Bill, 1991 which was enacted as the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992

### STATEMENT OF OBJECTS AND REASONS

Though the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been in existence for a long time, it has been observed that these institutions have not been able to acquire the status and dignity of viable and responsive people's bodies due to a number of reasons including absence of regular elections, prolonged supersession, insufficient representation of weaker sections like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled tribe and women, inadequate devolution of powers and lack of financial resources.

2. Article 40 of the Constitution which enshrines one of the Directive Principles of State Policy lays down that the State shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. In the light of the experience in the last forty years and in view of the shortcomings which have been observed, it is considered that there is an imperative need to enshrine in the Constitution certain basic and essential features of Panchayati Raj Institutions to impart certainty, continuity and strength to them.

3. Accordingly, it is proposed to add a new Part relating to Panchayats in the Constitution to provide for among other things, Gram Sabha in a village or group of villages; constitution of Panchayats at village and other level or levels; direct elections to all seats in Panchayats at the village and intermediate level, if any, and to the offices of Chairpersons of Panchayats at such levels; reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population for membership of Panchayats and office of Chairpersons in Panchayats at each level; reservation of not less than one-third of the seats for women; fixing tenure of 5 years for Panchayats and holding elections within a period of 6 months in the event of supersession of any Panchayat; disqualifications for membership of Panchayats; devolution by the State Legislature of powers and responsibilities upon the Panchayats with respect to the preparation of plans for economic developments and social justice and for the implementation of development schemes; sound finance of the Panchayats by securing authorization from State Legislatures for grants-in-aid to the Panchayats from the Consolidated Fund of the State, as also assignment to, or appropriation by, the Panchayats of the revenues of designated taxes, duties, tolls and fees; setting up of a Finance

Commission within one year of the proposed amendment and thereafter every 5 years to review the financial position of Panchayats; auditing of accounts of the Panchayats; powers of State Legislatures to make provisions with respect to elections to Panchayats under the superintendence, direction and control of the chief electoral officer of the State; application of the provisions of the said Part to Union territories; excluding certain States and areas from the application of the provisions of the said Part; continuance of existing laws and Panchayats until one year from the commencement of the proposed amendment and barring interference by courts in electoral matters relating to Panchayats.

4. The Bill seeks to achieve the aforesaid objectives.

NEW DELHI; G. VENKAT SWAMY.

The 10th September, 1991.

THE CONSTITUTION (SEVENTY-THIRD AMENDMENT) ACT, 1992

[20th April, 1993.]

An Act further to amend the Constitution of India. Be it enacted by Parliament in the Forty-third Year of the Republic of India as follows:-

1. Short title and commencement.- (1) This Act may be called the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992.

(2) It shall come into force on such date as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint.

2. Insertion of new Part IX.- After Part VIII of the Constitution, the following Part shall be inserted, namely:-

PART IX  
THE PANCHAYATS

243. Definitions.- In this Part, unless the context otherwise requires,-

(a) "district" means a district in a State; (b) "Gram Sabha" means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level; (c) "Intermediate level" means a level between the village and district levels specified by the Governor of a State by public notification to be the intermediate level for the purposes of this Part; (d) "Panchayat" means an institution (by whatever name called) of self-government constituted under article 243B, for the rural areas; (e) "Panchayat area" means the territorial area of a Panchayat; (f) "population" means the population as ascertained at the last preceding census of which the relevant figures have been published; (g) "village" means a village specified by the Governor by pub-

lic notification to be a village for the purposes of this Part and includes a group of villages so specified.

243A. Gram Sabha.- A Gram Sabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village level as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide.

243B. Constitution of Panchayats.- (1) There shall be constituted in every State, Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels in accordance with the provisions of this Part.

(2) Notwithstanding anything in clause (1), Panchayats at the intermediate level may not be constituted in a State having a population not exceeding twenty lakhs.

243C. Composition of Panchayats.- (1) Subject to the provisions of this Part, the Legislature of a State may, by law, make provisions with respect to the composition of Panchayat:

Provided that the ratio between the population of the territorial area of a Panchayat at any level and the number of seats in such Panchayat to be filled by election shall, so far as practicable, be the same throughout the State.

(2) All the seats in a Panchayat shall be filled by persons chosen by direct election from territorial constituencies in the Panchayat area and; for this purpose, each Panchayat area shall be divided into territorial constituencies in such manner that the ratio between the population of each constituency and the number of seats allotted to it shall, so far as practicable, be the same throughout the Panchayat area.

(3) The Legislature of a State may, by law, provide for the representation-

(a) of the Chairpersons of the Panchayats at the village level, in the Panchayats at the intermediate level or, in the case of a State not having Panchayats at the intermediate level, in the Panchayats at the district level;

(b) of the Chairpersons of the Panchayats at the intermediate level, in the Panchayat at the district level;

(c) of the members of the House of the People and the members of the Legislative Assembly of the State representing constituencies which comprise wholly or partly a Panchayat area at a level other than the village level, in such Panchayat;

(d) of the members of the Council of States and the members of the Legislative Council of the State, where they are registered as electors within-

(i) a Panchayat area at the intermediate level, in Panchayat at the intermediate level;

(ii) a Panchayat area at the district level, in Panchayat at the district level.

(4) The Chairperson of a Panchayat and other members of a Panchayat whether or not chosen by direct election from territorial constituencies in the Panchayat area shall have the right to vote in the meetings of the Panchayats.

(5) The Chairperson of - (a) a Panchayat at the village level shall be elected in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide; and (b) a Panchayat at the intermediate level or district level shall be elected by, and from amongst, the elected members thereof.

243D. Reservation of seats.- (1) Seats shall be reserved for- (a) the Scheduled Castes; and (b) the Scheduled Tribes, in every Panchayat and the number of seats of reserved shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in that Panchayat as the population of the Scheduled Castes in that Panchayat area or of the Scheduled Tribes in that Panchayat area bears to the total population of that area and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

(2) Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes.

(3) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

(4) The offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide:

Provided that the number of offices of Chairpersons reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the Panchayats at each level in any State shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of such offices in the Panchayats at each level as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the State or of the Scheduled Tribes in the State bears to the total population of the State: Provided further that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women: Provided also that the number of offices reserved under this clause shall be allotted by rotation to different Panchayats at each level.

(5) The reservation of seats under clauses (1) and (2) and the reservation of offices of Chairpersons (other than the reservation for women) under clause (4) shall cease to have effect on the expiration of the period specified in article 334.

(6) Nothing in this Part shall prevent the Legislature of a State from making any provision for reservation of seats in any Panchayat or offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at any level in favor of backward class of citizens.

243E. Duration of Panchayats, etc.- (1) Every Panchayat, unless sooner dissolved under any law for the time being in force, shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer.

(2) No amendment of any law for the time being in force shall have the effect of causing dissolution of a Panchayat at any level, which is functioning immediately before such amendment, till the expiration of its duration specified in clause (1).

(3) An election to constitute a Panchayat shall be completed-

(a) before the expiry of its duration specified in clause (1);

(b) before the expiration of a period of six months from the date of its dissolution:

Provided that where the remainder of the period for which the dissolved Panchayat would have continued is less than six months, it shall not be necessary to hold any election under this clause for constituting the Panchayat for such period.

(4) A Panchayat constituted upon the dissolution of a Panchayat before the expiration of its duration shall continue only for the remainder of the period for which the dissolved Panchayat would have continued under clause (1) had it not been so dissolved.

243F. Disqualifications for membership.- (1) A person shall be disqualified for being chosen as, and for being, a member of a Panchayat-

(a) if he is so disqualified by or under any law for the time being in force for the purposes of elections to the Legislature of the State concerned: Provided that no person shall be disqualified on the ground that he is less than twenty-five years of age, if he has attained the age of twenty-one years;

(b) if he is so disqualified by or under any law made by the Legislature of the State.

(2) If any question arises as to whether a member of a Panchayat has become subject to any of the disqualifications mentioned in clause (1), the question shall be referred for the decision of such authority and in such manner as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide.

243G. Powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayats.- Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Legislature of a State may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to-

(a) The preparation of plans for economic development and social justice;

(b) The implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

243H. Powers to impose taxes by, and Funds of, the Panchayat.-The Legislature of a State may, by law,-

(a) authorize a Panchayat to levy, collect and appropriate such taxes, duties, tolls and fees in accordance with such procedure and subject to such limits;

(b) assign to a Panchayat such taxes, duties, tolls and fees levied and collected by the State Government for such purposes and subject to such conditions and limits;

(c) provide for making such grants-in-aid to the Panchayats from the Consolidated Fund of the State; and

(d) Provide for Constitution of such Funds for crediting all money received, respectively, by or on behalf of the Panchayats and also for the withdrawal of such money there from, as may be specified in the law.

243-I. Constitution of Finance Commission to review financial position.-(1) The Governor of a State shall, as soon as may be within one year from the commencement of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, and thereafter at the expiration of every fifth year, constitute a Finance Commission to review the financial position of the Panchayat and to make recommendations to the Governor as to-

(a) the principles which should govern-

(i) the distribution between the State and the Panchayats of the net proceeds of the taxes, duties, tolls and fees livable by the State, which may be divided be-



tween them under this Part and the allocation between the Panchayat at all levels of their respective shares of such proceeds;

(ii) the determination of the taxes, duties, tolls and fees which may be assigned to, or appropriated by, the Panchayat;

(iii) the grants-in-aid to the Panchayats from the Consolidated Fund of the State;

(b) the measures needed to improve the financial position of the Panchayat;

(c) Any other matter referred to the Finance Commission by the Governor in the interests of sound finance of the Panchayats.

(2) The Legislature of a State may, by law, provide for the composition of the commission, the qualifications which shall be requisite for appointment as members thereof and the manner in which they shall be selected.

(3) The Commission shall determine their procedure and shall have such powers in the performance of their functions as the Legislature of the State may, by law, confer on them.

(4) The Governor shall cause every recommendation made by the Commission under this article together with an explanatory memorandum as to the action taken thereon to be laid before the Legislature of the State.

243J. Audit of accounts of Panchayats.- The Legislature of a State may, by law, make provisions with respect to the maintenance of accounts by the Panchayats and the auditing of such accounts.

243K. Elections to the Panchayats.- (1) The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats shall be vested in a State Election Commission consisting of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor.

(2) Subject to the provisions of any law made by the Legislature of a State, the conditions of service and tenure of office of the State Election Commissioner shall be such as the Governor may by rule determine:

Provided that the State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of a High Court and the conditions of service of the State Election Commissioner shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment.

(3) The Governor of a State shall, when so requested by the State Election Commission, make available to the State Election Commission such staff as

may be necessary for the discharge of the functions conferred on the State Election Commission by clause (1).

(4) Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Legislature of a State may, by law, make provision with respect to all matters relating to, or in connection with, elections to the Panchayats.

243L. Application to Union territories.-The provisions of this Part shall apply to the Union territories and shall, in their application to a Union territory, have effect as if the references to the Governor of a State were references to the Administrator of the Union territory appointed under article 239 and references to the Legislature or the Legislative Assembly of a State were references, in relation to a Union territory having a Legislative Assembly, to that Legislative Assembly: Provided that the President may, by public notification, direct that the provisions of this Part shall apply to any Union territory or part thereof subject to such exceptions and modifications as he may specify in the notification.

243M. Part not to apply to certain areas.-(1) Nothing in this Part shall apply to the Scheduled Areas referred to in clause (1), and the tribal areas referred to in clause (2), of article 244.

(2) Nothing in this Part shall apply to- (a) the States of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram;(b) the Hill Areas in the State of Manipur for which District Councils exist under any law for the time being in force.

(3) Nothing in this Part-(a) relating to Panchayats at the district level shall apply to the hill areas of the District of Darjeeling in the State of West Bengal for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists under any law for the time being in force; (b) shall be construed to affect the functions and powers of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council constituted under such law.

(4) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,-(a) the Legislature of a State referred to in sub-clause (a) of clause (2) may, by law, extend this Part to that State, except the areas, if any, referred to in clause (1), if the Legislative Assembly of that State passes a resolution to that effect by a majority of the total membership of that House and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of that House present and voting;(b) Parliament may, by law, extend the provisions of this Part to the Scheduled Areas and the tribal areas referred to in clause (1) subject to such exceptions and modifications as may be specified in such law and no such law shall be deemed to be an amendment of this Constitution for the purposes of article 368.

243N. Continuance of existing laws and Panchayats.-Notwithstanding anything in this Part, any provision of any law relating to Panchayats in force in a State immediately before the commencement of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, which is inconsistent with the provisions of this Part, shall continue to be in force until amended or repealed by a competent Legislature

or other competent authority or until the expiration of one year from such commencement, whichever is earlier: Provided that all the Panchayats existing immediately before such commencement shall continue till the expiration of their duration, unless sooner dissolved by a resolution passed to that effect by the Legislative Assembly of that State or, in the case of a State having a Legislative Council, by each House of the Legislature of that State.

243-O. Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.-Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,-

(a) the validity of any law relating to the delimitation of constituencies or the allotment of seats to such constituencies, made or purporting to be made under article 243K, shall not be called in question in any court;

(b) no election to any Panchayat shall be called in question except by an election petition presented to such authority and in such manner as is provided for by or under any law made by the Legislature of a State.'Constitution, after sub-clause (b), the following sub-clause shall be inserted, namely:-"(bb) the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;".

Constitution, the following Schedule shall be added, namely:-

#### "ELEVENTH SCHEDULE

(Article 243G)

1. Agriculture, including agricultural extension.
2. Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation.
3. Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development.
4. Animal husbandry, dairying and poultry.
5. Fisheries.
6. Social forestry and farm forestry.
7. Minor forest produce.
8. Small scale industries, including food processing industries.
9. Khadi, village and cottage industries.

10. Rural housing.
11. Drinking water.
12. Fuel and fodder.
13. Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication.
14. Rural electrification, including distribution of electricity.
15. Non-conventional energy sources.
16. Poverty alleviation programme.
17. Education, including primary and secondary schools.
18. Technical training and vocational education.
19. Adult and non-formal education.
20. Libraries.
21. Cultural activities.
22. Markets and fairs.
23. Health and sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centre and dispensaries.
24. Family welfare.
25. Women and child development.
26. Social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded.
27. Welfare of the weaker sections, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
28. Public distribution system.
29. Maintenance of community assets.

*Appendix 2*

**Statistics on Atrocities against Dalits**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total No. of Crimes</b>	<b>Murder</b>	<b>Rape</b>	<b>Arson</b>	<b>Civil Rights Protection</b>	<b>Total of Col. 3 to 6</b>
1990	15250	463	672	260	2788	4183
1991	18368	523	655	323	2944	4445
1992	24922	616	849	406	2900	4771
1993	24973	510	798	369	2531	4208
1994	33910	546	992	533	1731	3802
1995	32996	571	872	500	1528	3471
1996	31440	543	949	464	1417	3373
1997	27944	513	1037	389	1216	3155
1998	25638	516	923	346	724	2509
1999	21469	445	879	303	575	2202
<b>Total</b>	<b>256910</b>	<b>5246</b>	<b>8626</b>	<b>3893</b>	<b>17779</b>	<b>36119</b>

(Source: PUCL Bulletin, December 2001)

A Government of India Link to

<http://sje.rajasthan.gov.in/Related%20Acts/POAAct1989.htm>

A Government of India Link to Protection for Civil rights

[http://www.mha.nic.in/uniquepage.asp?ID\\_PK=464](http://www.mha.nic.in/uniquepage.asp?ID_PK=464) (Last Visited 9<sup>th</sup> September,2008)