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Political Dimensions of Local Self Governance in India and in Karnataka State: Development of Excluded Sections

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Abstract

In the development process of India's rural areas; the process of self-governance and planning by empowering the people through Panchayati Raj system although started nearly five decades earlier, but 73rd and 74th amendments in the Constitution of India brought an historic change in the process of decentralisation towards the grass root level and participation of people both in the formulation as well as implementation of the plans. The paper explores how the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act (1992), provided certainty, continuity and strength to the PRI's for the welfare of the weaker sections through Decentralization. Uniform three-tier level of the village, block and district levels, direct elections to all seats and at all levels, indirect elections to chairpersons at intermediate and apex levels. Reservation on rotational basis for SC's ST's in proportion to their population, both for membership as well as Chairpersonships of the PRI's. Not less than one third of the seats and offices reserved for women. The present paper intends to discuss the political participation of weaker sections in panchayat raj institutions in Karnataka. Finally the paper discusses about the political participation of weaker sections and sought their opinion of their involvement in the process of political, economic development and social justice, with the transfer of the list of Eleventh and the Twelfth Schedule of the Constitution to the rural and urban elected local bodies, and the process of welfare activities for weaker sections through the Panchayat Raj Institutions has been discussed.

Key Words: Local Governance, Decentralisation, Social Inequalities, Dalits Political Participation

Introduction

Social inequalities existed in the villages and these have continued for centuries. Under these circumstances, soon after Independence the concept of social justice figured in the Indian constitution. Thus the constitution of India made an attempt to provide equal social opportunities for the development of personality of all the people in the society, without any discrimination on the basis of caste, sex or race. However, social inequalities continued for a long time in the Indian society. The reasons may be several. The people from higher social strata had received education, and they controlled and managed land. They took up income - earning activities. On the contrary, the lower strata people were denied education, and they were deprived of their right to manage and control land. Thus they were forced to take up low - income earning activities. Particularly in the villages the lower strata people took up supportive works for the people who had taken up agricultural activities, such as Carpentry, Blacksmith, Leather work, and labour.

Due to the above- mentioned reasons the marginalized became the weaker sections of the society. Therefore, after Independence, India was one among the countries which went in for social and economic transformation of the rural population. As a preferred condition, rural development became a definite strategy for the improvement of the living conditions of the rural poor. In this direction the Government of India made efforts to solve problems such as poverty, ill health, illiteracy, and backwardness of varied nature prevailing in rural areas, by giving greater attention to the uplift of the rural poor (Shivanna N. 1990) .

Further, the marginalized sections, i.e., SC, ST, and OBC have become an important component in defining of the development policies because of their socio-economic deprivation in the traditional society like India. The political involvement of the upper castes is still more in institutions like Assembly and Parliament. The reservation of seats was 15% in State Assemblies and Parliament. On the contrary there was no representation from the larger sections of the marginalized castes i.e., from the backwards (Singh S.N. 1996). As a result of this, at present, political participation in India is limited to only a few upper castes. As they manage and control the political system, land pattern. The upper caste people did not mind in formulating and execution of welfare and developmental policies intended for the weaker sections. It can be seen in the failure of several programmes. Among these are community Development Programmes (CDP) and National Extension Programme (NEP). These programmes were implemented in tune with the upper caste people in the rural areas.

Review of Literature

Sukla Deb Kanoongo (1996), in his research on women's leadership in the Panchayati Raj with special reference to the State of West Bengal, found that many of them, in spite of being educated, in spite of having a tradition of political activity in the family and of having great support from their respective parties, are unable to participate in the whole process in a meaningful way. Many are finding the responsibilities very demanding, some are thoroughly engaged in their domestic responsibilities and some do not maintain good health. He also felt that the socio-cultural factors acted as a deterrent in many cases.

Ujwala Hiremath (1997) conducted a survey of 40 women members of ten village Gram Panchayats in Karnataka. Her studies show the same trend that is seen at the national level politics-members of influential families always seem to have an edge over the rest. Majority of the members were illiterate-thumb impression ones. However, it was interesting to note that all these women had a manifesto of development items for the village-shelter for the poor, electricity, toilets, roads, schools, water facility, doctors for primary health centers, sewing machines for young girls and many other things, including old-age and widow pensions, employment for youth, girls education, transport facilities, etc.

Sudha Pai (1998) cautioned, after brief study of three villages from Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh, that female literacy, independent voting rights and change in the status in the family and society are required for women to play active role in the village politics. The Pradhanis played an almost insignificant role in the functioning of the gram and block Panchayat level bodies. They have never attended any meeting or made any decision about allocation of funds to individuals or schemes.

Nagendra Ambedkar (2000) in his book on “panchayat raj at work” explained the origins and growth of panchayat raj institution in India and structural patterns of panchayat raj in Rajasthan. The author also has given importance to electoral system of the local bodies. Further, he analysed the socio-economic and political background of the panchayat raj elite, their perceptions and orientations of various issues, pertaining to the panchayat raj institution, finally he analyzed the leadership in panchayats and the qualities, attitude of the leaders towards weaker section of the society.

In other study Aziz (1994) found more or less the same phenomena. While dealing Buch, Jain and Chaudhary (1999) conducted Study on Women in Panchayati Raj in Madhya Pradesh. The study was conducted in three district socio-cultural zones where the ST, SC was others are numerically dominant. So far as their socio profile is concerned, the study documented that maximum number of PRI leaders (307 out of 343) are from the marginalized groups. 283 women and 80 men participated in the study. Majority of the leaders are above the age of 25 years they are engaged in agricultural work. In fact, either they are the wage earners or cultivators. Although, there is slight district wise variation but majority of the respondents are from below the Poverty line. More than 50 per cent are illiterate. Even in the case of chairpersons out of 72, 23 are illiterate. Most of them had no affiliation with any of the political parties in the formal sense. 53 respondents are landless but a good number of them (126) Possess either or more than 5 acres of land. It is interesting to note that a good number of respondents have discontinued labour work after becoming PRI leaders but even today 92 are engaged in this work. The study concluded that PRI is numerically imitated by the leaders of lower Socio-economic status in M.P.

Similar observation was made by Lele (2001) In course of the Comparative Study between Traditional Village Panchayat and the modern Gram Sabha in Maharashtra from the point of view of empowerment of the weaker sections, the author opined that of course platform of statutory Gram Sabha is theoretically opened for the marginalized but in the real sense it is not. In fact, alienation from the political processes seems to prevail and that is why even reservation has not helped to make the marginalized more vocal. This then creates the right conditions for the domination of traditional power of the upper castes and classes. The other factor is economic dependence of the marginalized on the dominants. For those who work on the fields or run small shops or are service providers, opposing the gavki is unthinkable. They would be digging their own graves by opposing the upper castes and rich farmers on whose fields they work and earn their daily wages. Beside personal loans are also made available by the same people, those who constitute the gavki. Thus opposing the gavki could mean starvation as a result of boycott by the rich peasants and others.

Committees Appointed from Time to Time

After the Community Development Programme was launched in 1952, it was realized that without an agency at the village level, which could represent the entire community, assume responsibility and provide the necessary leadership for implementing development programmes, real progress in rural development could not take place. It was against this background that a Committee headed by Balwant Rai G. Mehta was appointed in 1957 to make recommendations for revitalization for the Panchayati Raj system define its role in the development process. The report of the Committee recommended that public participation in community works should be organized through statutory representative bodies. Community Development can be real only when the community exercises necessary powers through its chosen representatives. Therefore, it recommended the establishments of statutory elected local bodies.

The report of the Committee was influential in creating a three-tier Panchayati Raj structure with District Panchayat at the top and Grama Panchayat at the bottom. The intermediate tier was co-terminus with Community Development Blocks. Most of the States amended their laws to conform to the recommendations of the committee. However, the Panchayat raj institutions could not function well as elections were either not held or were frequently postponed or they were denied funds or in most of the cases superceded. The Ashok Mehta Committee Report in 1978 was influential in bringing about a shift in emphasis between the first and second degeneration of panchayats from development per se to local Government in its full meaning. Originally, panchayats found a place only in the Directive Principles of State Policy. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments revitalized the Panchayats and Urban Bodies by giving them Constitutional status, providing for regular elections and reserving 1/3 seats for women and introducing representation for marginalized groups.

73rd Constitutional Amendment Act

To provide the constitutional support to the Panchayati raj institutions, a Constitutional Amendment Bill was introduced in 1989 by Sri. Rajiv Gandhi the then Prime Minister with an intention of transferring power to the people; it relates to part IX of the constitution. This bill was passed by the Loka Sabha on the 10th August 1989. However it failed in Rajya Sabha and could not become the part of the constitution. After the defeat of both the bills, another bill that is 73rd constitution amendment Bill was introduced in the Lock Sabha. The attempt extending the constitutional benefits to the Panchayat Raj Institutions, thoroughly the 64th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1988 and 74th Amendment Bill of 1990 did not succeed. Another attempt was made by introducing the Constitutional Amendment Bill on 16th September 1991. After the series of discussions in the parliament, the matter was referred to joint select committee of parliament for detailed examination. Accordingly joint committee presented its report to parliament in July 1992. The Lok Sabha finally passed the bill on December 22nd 1992 and the Raja Sabha on December 23rd 1992. The President of India accorded this asset on April 20th 1993. Finally the 73rd constitutional amendment act of 1992 came into effect on April 24th 1993 (Panchayat Raj at a Glance: 1964). There shall be three tiers of Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels. So, only those states having population not exceeding 20 lakhs have the discretion not to constitute the panchayats at the intermediate level. Under Article 243 the president can make special dispensation for Union Territories.

Direct Elections: All seats in a Panchayat at every level are to be filled by direct elections from territorial constituencies demarcated for this purpose, with the ratio between the population of such constituency and the number of such constituency and the number of seats allotted to it being the same throughout the Panchayat area. *Reservation of seats:* There shall be reservation of seats at every level for SC/ STs in proportion to their population in a given Panchayat area and for women to the extent of not less than one- third of the total number of seats. Likewise, the office of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women, to the extent of not less than one-third of the total numbers in the office of Chairpersons of Panchayats. In addition, the legislature of any state can make provision for reservation of seats in any panchayats at any level in favour of the backward classes.

Five Year Term: The term of office of panchayat at every level shall be for five years and if dissolved earlier or on expiry of the term, elections must be completed within six months from the date of dissolution or expiry.

Finance Commission: By 24th April 1993, that is, the coming into the effect the constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 and thereafter at the expiration of every fifth year, a finance commission shall be constituted in every fifth year. A finance commission shall be constituted in every state to go into the governing principles of the distribution and revolution of financial resources between the state and the panchayats at every level and the measures to improve the financial position of the panchayats.

State Election Commission: The direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of all elections in the panchayats shall be vested in a state election commission, to be constituted by the state concerned.

Eleventh Schedule: Finally, the XI Schedule comprising 29 items has been added to the Constitution which ought to provide an effective role to the PRIs in the planning and implementation of works of local significance. Activities ranging like drinking water, agriculture, land and water conservation to communications, poverty alleviation programmes, family welfare, education, libraries and cultural activities, maintenance of community assets etc.

Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993-Salient Features

The 1993 Act establishes a three-tier Panchayat raj system in the state with elected bodies at Grama, Taluka, and District level for greater participation of the people and for more effective implementation of Rural Development Programmes. The three tiers of the Panchayat Raj System are:

- 1) Gram Panchayat/Village Panchayat.
- 2) Taluka Panchayat.
- 3) Zilla Panchayat.

Outstanding Features of 1993 Act

As a part from the creation of three-tier panchayat system in the state based on population as per published data of census, the features of 1993 Act are as follows (The Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act: 1993).

1. The act facilitates the constitution of grama sabha in each village.
2. It provides for reservation of seats in favour of SCs and STs in proportion of their population and subjected to minimum of 15 and 3% respectively at all levels.
3. The Act provides for reservation of 1/3 of seats to women at all levels.
4. It also provides for reservation of 1/3 of seats to persons belonging to Backward Classes.
5. The Act also provides for reservation of 1/3 of seats in each category (SCs, STs, and Backward Classes and General) at all levels for women. The seats reserved shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in panchayat area.
6. The office of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairpersons are also reserved at all levels for the persons belonging to SCs, STs and Backwards Classes and Women.
7. The Act envisages the constitution of state election commission, the finance commission and district planning committee. The finance committee is to recommend periodically the policy on finance to Panchayat Raj Institutions.

8. The new law stipulates that the elections to Gram Panchayat are to be conducted on non-party basis. This is intended to minimize the local conflicts during election time. However, participation of political parties has been allowed for upper level Panchayats.
9. The new Act substantially increases the power of State governments to supervise and control Panchayat Raj Institutions. The Secretary of Panchayat Raj Department and the Divisional Commissioner are empowered accordingly for this purpose. They are entitled to issue instructions, conduct enquiry, and call for proceedings of Zilla Panchayat and performance of Panchayat Raj Institutions. The government is also authorized to add or delete any programme or scheme in the functions of Panchayat Raj Institutions.
10. All the Adhyakshas of Taluka Panchayats can be members of Zilla Panchayats. All the MLAs, MLCs, and MPs can be Members of Zilla Panchayats and Taluka Panchayats.
11. As regards to finance, every Gram Panchayat will receive annual grant of rupees one lakh towards development activities.
12. The proceeds of heavy cash levy, on land revenue and surcharge on stamp duty will be passed on to Gram Panchayats and Taluka Panchayats. The Panchayat Raj Institutions will receive resources from State Government also.

Local Self-Governance and Political Dimensions

In all our debate on federalism over the past 50 years, the most neglected aspect is local self-governance. There cannot be true federalism without the local people having near-complete control over their destinies through their elected governments or empowered stake-holders' groups over all matters of day-to-day concern to them. The locally elected governments at all levels, viz., village, town, city, sub-district or district must be completely autonomous and must be recognized as tiers of self-governance on par with the Union and the States. They must have their own local legislatures to deal with subjects under their jurisdiction and their own elected executives. The local bureaucracy must be totally responsible to the local elected governments alone. Just as the Union-State relations are highly skewed, local self-governance has been either non-existent, or where it exists, has been severely eroded by States.

The much-talked-about 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India are but very hesitant initial steps in the direction of true democratization of our polity. These amendments, with the new 11 and 12 Schedules in the Constitution, now make constitution and periodic election of local governments mandatory. They also prevent dismissal of local governments en masse on political grounds whenever a new party ascends to power in the States. The Constitution also provides for appointment of a State Election Commission in each State as an independent institution to conduct and monitor elections to local governments. A State Finance

Commission is appointed in every state to recommend to the State government the distribution of resources between the State and local governments Jayaprakash Narayan (2004).

These provisions, incorporated in 1992, are long overdue and salutary. However, several States have shown little inclination to implement these provisions in true democratic spirit. Elections have not been held for local bodies for years despite the constitutional prescription. Their reluctance to constitute local governments is predictable, given the culture of centralisation in the country, and unwillingness to share power with local tiers of government. Eventually, all States have to fall in line and conform to the constitutional directives. However, the real lacunae in local self-governance stem from the inadequate and feeble provisions even in the 73rd and 74th Amendments. The 11th Schedule lists 29 subjects that may be entrusted to the Panchayats (rural local governments) by the State Legislature, at its absolute discretion. Similarly, 12th schedule lists 18 subjects for urban local governments. As we have seen, the 7th Schedule which contains List II pertaining to States guarantees that the State has full legislative and executive powers except in respect of emergency powers etc. However, the extent of powers of local governments even in respect of subjects listed in the 11th and 12th Schedules is entirely dependent on the State Legislature, and they have no independent powers. Again, predictably few States are willing to part with real control of these subjects. In effect, the local governments have titular role in governance and all effective power vests in States.

As of now, the State Finance Commissions, even where appointed, could not make much headway. Except in one or two States, there is no serious effort to devolve adequate resources to the local governments. Most crucially, the local bureaucracy is appointed and controlled by the State governments. Thus, neither authority nor resources are available at the local level.

Political Participation of Women and Weaker Sections

Women comprise nearly half of the national population of a country. Of course, the globalization provided opportunities of education and employment to urban women and helped them to develop and possess all the rights equally with men. But the problem is that the women in rural areas are still backward in education, social status, economic background, political matters, etc. Hence, the development of the country is inescapably linked with the status of development of rural women. Economic empowerment is one approach to enable women to realize their inherent are shining examples from the developing countries to illustrate women entrepreneurs who started small and grew to large enterprises. Women are considered as a focal point and the unifying force in the family. While their contribution to the family and society is considerable, they are subjected numerous constraints undermining their potentials. They receive only small share in development opportunities and are often excluded from education, better jobs, participation in political system and better health care, decision making, etc. Besides, they suffer from physiological, psychological, social and cultural

barriers, which hinder their empowerment. In rural areas, women are preoccupied with mostly household work including the bearing and rearing of children. Accordingly, the opportunities for improving their conditions are limited.

To improve conditions of rural women, one of the viable strategies, quite often talked about, is the role of enterprise to empower them. Promotion of rural enterprises makes full use of family labour; requires less capital in production and uses locally available raw material. In addition, family ties and kinship linkages help in promoting rural enterprises. Thus, enterprise development has been considered, among other factors, a powerful tool to eradicate poverty especially among rural women in India.

It is widely believed that the analysis of age, education, Caste, family structure, occupation, income, land holding, party affiliation, etc., are important in determining the nature of leadership. The socio-economic conditions play an important role in characterizing the social life and behaviour of an individual. The socio-economic status of an individual affects the patterns of interaction in the society. It is therefore, essential to analyse the socio-economic background of the relationship between the leader and the environment. In a developing society like ours where forces of caste and kinship influence the social life and acute disparity in the standard of living and sub culture among various groups and regions are existing, a study of the socio-economic conditions of SC , ST and OBCs respondents would help reveal sociologically significant dimensions (Singhi, N.K. 1974).

The socio-economic, educational and political background of the leaders would also enable us to anticipate as to what they are capable of doing, what we should expect from them and how well they are equipped to discharge the responsibilities developed upon them by the electorate (Sashilata Puri 1978). Knowledge of socio-economic background of a community is an indispensable prerequisite, for the understanding of the thought or behaviors of its members. This holds good for all human communities, and more so in the case of SC/ST and OBC communities, which are intrinsically more traditional in their structure.

Conclusion

Social inequalities existed in the villages and these have continued for centuries. Under these circumstances, soon after Independence the concept of social justice figured in the Indian constitution. Thus the constitution of India made an attempt to provide equal social opportunities for the development of personality of all the people in the society, without any discrimination on the basis of caste, sex or race. Therefore, after Independence, India was one among the countries which went in for social and economic transformation of the rural population. As a preferred condition, rural development became a definite strategy for the improvement of the living conditions of the rural poor. In this direction the Government of India made efforts to solve problems such as poverty, ill health, illiteracy, and backwardness of varied nature prevailing in rural areas, by giving greater attention to the uplift of the rural poor. By this case study we came to know that the representatives belonging to weaker sections are able to implement welfare policies for the development of SC, ST and OBC in the study area. Due to the illiteracy and ignorance of weaker section's representatives, several welfare policies intended for the welfare of SC's, ST's and OBC's are not implementing properly in the institutions of Panchayati Raj and suggest for effective implementation of these policies for the welfare of weaker sections and bring them to the main stream as well as equal opportunity as stipulated in the Indian Constitution.

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