



Political Empowerment of women through Panchayati RAJ Institutions in INDIA

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Abstract : Democratic decentralization simply means the division of power between the centre and the state . Women empowerment simply means the upgradation of the women in all the spheres whether political , social or economic. Role of women is restricted only to the domestic chores like cooking, washing, cutting etc. women's role in political field plays an important role because due to their participation in political field their leadership, decision making power can be enhanced . Panchayat works mainly at the three level Village level , block level and the district level .The introduction of the 73rd constitutional Amendment leads to the participation of the one third of the women in the panchayat election. Participation of women in the political field and in various decision making bodies is an important tool for the empowerment. The participation of women at all levels of governance structures is the highest need of this hour for women's actual empowerment .Women 's political empowerment , usually viewed as political involvement in government or elections which is essential to give a women a voice in the policies that affect their lives. Political participation of women in India is neglected since Independence .Political system and decision making process is seen clearly in the changes incorporated in the Panchayati raj institutions. The objective of bringing improvement in the socio – economic condition of women could be successful only by taking suitable initiatives and measures for empowering them . The 73rd constitutional Amendment in 1992 gave them not less than one third reservations in the panchayat reservation system at all levels . This has been enhanced to 50 percent in some of the states in the recent years .women participation has been increasing rapidly but it is not satisfactory . This paper examines the political empowerment of women with special reference to panchayati raj institutions in India and analyse the reasons for womens low level of participation and make the suggestions for their effective participation of women at grassroot levels in India.

Keywords Political participation, Empowerment , 73rd constitutional Amendment Act,1992 , Panchayati Raj institutions , Reservations , Women's representation .

Introduction : women is the builder of nation's destiny. Though delicate and soft as she is , she has a heart for stronger and bolder than that of man. She is the supreme inspiration of man's onward March.IN The history of human development , woman has been as important as man . In fact the status , employment and work performed by women in the society is the indicator of a nation's overall progress without the participation of women in national activities , the social , economic, or political progress of a country will be stagnated. The fact is that most of the women's domestic role is combined with economic activities and utilition of their skill and labour to earn extra income for the family , which makes the family to lead a decent life . women are regarded as the better half of the society and at par with the men's. Efforts are being made to realise that women are real better half in men's life. They share abundant responsibility and perform a wide spectrum of the duties in running the family , handling the household activities like rearing, feeding, attending to farm labour , tending domestic animals and the like ,and te most important role now women need to perform more responsibly is her active participation in the politics. Political empowerment of women should be one of her prime priorities and the Governments and the society must contribute steps in that way to make women participate in the political Arena. For that participation in the local self governments provide initial steps as they are closer to the rural folk. Panchayati raj institutions have always been considered s the good goernance and the 73rd constitutional amendment was effected in the hope that it would lead to the better governance and provide the political space to the disadvantaged sections of the society like the scheduled castes , scheduled tribes and the women. Panchayati raj institutions that work as the grass roots units of the decentralised democratized government have been considered as an instrument of socio-economic transformation in the rural areas. At the local level the 73rd constitutional AMENDMENT ACT OF 1992 Has made the two important provisions for the involvement of the women in the decision making and preparation of plan for the development . This Amendment has

made a provision that atleast one third of women would be members and chairpersons of the panchayats . Involvement of people at the grassroots level is the most important means of bringing about socio- economic development . Decentralisation of the power to the panchayati is a means to empowering people and involving them in the decision making process . Local Governments being closer to the people can be more responsive to the local needs and can make the better use of the resources . The democratic system in a country can be ensured only if there is mass participation in the governance . therefore to achieve this objective , a system of democratic decentralization popularly known as the panchayati raj has been introduced in the India . panchayati raj was easily accepted because it meant the administration by mutual consent , consultation and the consensus. It fitted closely into the ancient cultural patterns in India . The adoption of the 73rd amendment by the parliament in 1992 had a great revolutionary potential to create genuine democracy at the grassroot village level. It represented a historic opportunity to change the face of rural India .The Amendment mandates that resources , responsibility ,and the decision making power be devolved from the central government to the rural grassroot level people through panchayati Raj Institutions . their main objective was to realise Mahatma Gandhi 's dream of reaching power to the people through the panchayats . philosophically, panchayati Raj is a multi-dimensional idea. It has its pluralistic definitions and wider connotations in the writings of the different thinkers . Emphasizing the ideology of panchayati RAJ GANDHI Viewed , " India lives in her village . Independence must begin at the bottom , thus making every village a republic or panchayati ,enjoying full powers. He particularly envisaged and envisioned the concept of Gram swaraj along with the poorna swaraj Gandhiji had aptly remarked that Independence must begin at the bottom. And it is to emphasize that women's empowerment should also start from the villages , the grass root level units.

Political Empowerment of Women

Empowerment of women in all the spheres and in particular the political spheres and in particular the political sphere is crucial for their advancement and for the foundation of gender equal society. It is central to the goals of equality, development and the peace. The Indian Democracy which is more than half a century old has entered the next century. But a large mass of women are kept out of political arena still. There can be no true democracy , or no true people's participation in governance and development without equal and proportional participation of Women in political life is integral to the advancement of women. A general Acquities in societies around the world is that women's major role is to cook food, take care of the children and the household. Different societies have different social norms and the values . In some societies both men and women are assigned specific roles and duties . In most of the developing countries ,only the reproductive role of the women is recognized. Under such circumstances , it is not possible for women to participate in the public sphere of life . cultural factors therefore offer constraint to women participation in politics. Institutional factors may also impact women's political participation. Electoral system with more seats per district and proportional formula for allocating seats can enhance women's participation .Quota system is the another important institutional device that can guarantee a minimum number of women seats holders in the legislature. Women are changing the governance of India . They are being elected to local local councils in an unprecedented numbers as a result of the amendments to the constitution that mandate the reservation of seats for women in local governments or the panchayati Raj institutions system (PRI). The women women whom Panchayati raj institution has brought into politics are now governing be it in one village, or a larger area such as 100 villages or a district . This process of restructuring the national political and administrative system started as recently as the JANUARY 1994 , and thus it is too easy to assess the impact of women's entry into formal structures of the government . The sheer number of women that Panchayati RAJ institutions has brought in to the political system has made a difference .The percentages of women at various levels of political activity have shifted dramatically as a result of the constitutional change , from 4-5 percent before to 25-40 percent after. But the difference is also qualitative because these are bringing their experience in the governance of civic society. In this way they are making the state sensitive to the issues of poverty, inequality and gender justice .

Article 21 of the universal declaration of Human RIGHTS States that everyone has the right to take part in the government of the country ,directly or through the freely chosen representatives . A Proper representation of women in the political affairs will ensure their views and needs reflected in public policies that affect their lives most . Political empowerment can be defines as the capacity to influence decision making process, the capacity to influence decision making process, planning , implementation and evaluation ,by integrating them into the political system. It implies the political participation which includes the right to vote , contest, campaign, party membership and representation in the political office at all levels and effectively influences decisions thereby leading to the political empowerment. Political empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par with men, to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity . Political empowerment denotes a distinct role for women in the formation of the policies and influencing decision making process by integrating them into the political system. Indian women have had little representation in the institutional politics since independence . There was more concern in the last two decades towards increasing the women's participation in the political institutions thereby leading to empowerment .Affirmative action has been accepted as a means to political empowerment . Leadership is not just necessary to govern but to change the nature of governance .

Women and Panchayati Raj

Political empowerment of women starts with the active participation of women in the political institutions. The grass root level democracy entails due importance to initial participation of women in the panchayat raj institutions .even though in today's political system where some reservations have been provided to women in the local bodies, that has been misused by some . women have been used as the rubber stamps . Actual decision are being taken as by their family members . women may have stormed the male bastion under the panchayati raj system , but in many cases it is the husbands or the male members of their families calling their shots. Elected women's representatives have reportedly been reduced to proxies of their male relatives. Such system of defacto rule by male counterparts have to be checked and due importance has to be given to women in panchayat raj institutions . political system and decision making process is seen clearly in the changes incorporated in the panchayat Raj institution. The objective of bringing improvement in the socio – economic condition of women could be successful only by taking suitable initiatives and measures for empowering them. Empowerment of women will not be possible unless they are provided proper representation in the political system. This objective should be achieved at desired level through making the provision of linking and associating maximum number of women in the political affairs even at the lowest level of political activity. In recently introduced panchayati raj institutions , the policy for reservations in favour of women has therefore, been thought as an important approach to maximize their participation in the local level.

Political system and decision making process in the activities of rural INDIA

Under the 73rd Amendment of constitution of panchayati raj Institutions , one third level of the total seats for the scheduled caste, backward class , scheduled tribes and general caste women members , in gram panchayat of village panchayat , block panchayat , district panchayat are reserved for the women candidate . conceptually, providing representation to women in panchayati raj Institutions could be accepted as an important planning approach regarding minimizing the traditional felling of people about the status of women in our society , particularly in terms of keeping women under the subjugation of men , imposing restrictions by the households and society against them in the availing of certain opportunities and several other social, cultural and traditional bindings disfavours them for improving personal lifestyle and status in existing social and economic setting .consequently this newly introduced policy would enhance the possibilities of increasing equalities in the process of socio – economic development , participation in the different activities in mutual understandings, status and role to play in the household and the activities performed outside households and different decision making processes of the family among men and women. Factors such as the attitude and intention of elected women towards the initiation of various development programmes and capacity in making efforts in linking different segments of village population with the introduced programmes also matter very much in improving the status of women representatives in the social environment of the village panchayats. As a consequence of this process it would lead to increase in the strength of empowerment of women.

Initiatives for active participation of women in panchayat Raj institutions

Following initiatives and the training programmes have to be adopted to improve the participation and decision making power of women even at the grass root level of governance and enhance their number in the panchayat Raj institutions.

1. Measures have to be adopted to enhance the participation of women in governance in the higher numbers.
2. The elected leaders of these institutions need to be atleast literate, so hat they could guide and tell the villagers about the various provisions of the panchayati raj institutions .
3. Literacy plays an important role in educating rural women and helps to detail about system of governance . Hence steps to improve female literacy particularly in rural areas is the need of the hour.
4. Need to develop women's leadership and communication skills for enhancing social mobilization.
5. Essentially to train them , find ways and means to interface with the other layers of local self government within the state and claim the panchayat entitlements .
6. Familiarize them with the rural/ woman/child development pogrammes of state and central governments .
7. There should not be any functions and party politics in terms of planning , selection and location of schemes rather genuine implementation of the projects are necessary for the strengthening of the decentralized planning.
8. To empower them to identify and break cultural barriers and improve their socio economic condition.
9. Systematic awareness is needed for enhancing rural women's capacity to take up their new responsibilities as local legislators.
10. Besides, literature related to the various provisions of the rural development should be provide to the panchayati leaders as well as to the common villagers so that they will be more acquainted with their functions and the various developmental schemes. Further all the guidelines of the rural development programmes should be made available to the panchayati leaders and common villagers.

11. The women panchayati members should be trained based on their local experience and elicit their involvement in preparing a framework that will enable them to analyse and understand their roles and the responsibilities in accordance with the 73rd constitutional Amendment.
12. In the ongoing electronic era , a board and wide scope of importance has to be given to technology while making women empowered in all the fields with due importance to the political field. In the context of Digital India , women representatives of the panchayat raj Institutions should also be actively involved in the utilizing of the technology for their own self and the village development .

Issues and challenges of women participation in panchayat raj Institutions system

1. Lack of support from the male members they are predominantly based on the basis of gender discrimination during the participation and implementation of the programmes at the Panchayati level
2. Political intervention by the male domination from the ruling political parties in the functioning of the panchayat activities.
3. Intermediation of male members and his relatives in the family of the women representatives.
4. Husband's intervention of an elected woman in her functioning in her panchayat welfare activities and also mostly actual decisions are being taken by their male partners and his family members.
5. Husbands, family members or other village headmen performance and significant role in the decision making process of panchayat activities .women representatives are considered to be the rubber stamps.
6. In sufficient political, constitutional, and the legal awareness ,among the women in the rural areas.
7. The negative public perception of the women's leadership and the capacity in the political participation in the rural areas.
8. The negative public perception of women's leadership and capacity in the political participation in the rural areas.
9. Illiteracy and the low level of the education among the women particularly in the rural areas is a cautious coalition to insufficient knowledge and conscious about leadership .
10. Inadequate training resources and the awareness programmes particularly for the women representatives at the local panchayat level.
11. Dominance and atrocities of the elected male members of the panchayat , legislative and the parliamentarians.
12. Violence against the women has seen an increase by politically motivated by a male dominated society.
13. Moreover the women are facing a lots of issues and challenges to implementations of their goals in the panchayati raj institutions . The financial situations of the panchayati raj institutions are also not so well. As a result , women are incapable of implementation appropriately and the efficiently the 29 items assigned to them. In such a circumstance ,their development objectives will continue on paper. If the size of the resources is significant in comparison to the local necessities ,it consequences in the scarcity of the funds for an enormous number of the activities . generally panchayat raj institutions have a low level of interior funding as compared to their local necessities . The representatives are frequently reliant on the outside funds , which are in the arrangement of the grants disseminated over a large number of panchayat RAJ Institutions and are quite insufficient to cater to the monumental task of strengthening local base.

SUGGESTIONS :

Here are some suggestions for the better involvement of women in the Panchayati raj for the betterment as well as the progress of the state .

A . An important requirement for bringing about empowerment of rural women is to bring about an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and bearing children needs to be replaced by a feeling of equal partnership of women and men . To inculcate this ,they should be imparted education for bringing about social and political awareness among both .

B. Studies on the women in politics have emphasized the contact with outside in the political process. There could be two ways of doing it. Firstly interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected women leaders be encouraged. Secondly these women could be taken out to the urban areas and their interaction with educated urban elected women representatives be arranged.

c. There should be increased emphasis on ensuring the participation of women in the meetings of the panchayats at all the levels. This is needed to promote and enhance their leadership qualities and self confidence . It will help to perform better in the panchayats to ensure their better participation in the meetings. Attendance of all women must be made compulsory from Gram panchayat to zila parishad.

d. The women should also be encouraged to organize themselves . It can be effectively used as instruments to mobilise women of the village . Some successful women's organisations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging women,s participation in social and political activities. The Government should provide financial support and infrastructure to some of the successful women organizations to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives . This

task could also be taken up by the leaders of women's movement in the state .They can also provide support to sensitize the rural women.

e. Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision -making. It has been noticed that there are very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of the panchayat , who have been successfully implementing the developmental scheme and have ensured overall development of their constituencies. Such leaders needs to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honouring them in the public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives and their success stories and good practices will be publicized.

f. The genuine NGO'S Be identified for entrusting the tasks of training, encouraging, organizing, emblazing and guiding the elected women 's representatives.

g. National literacy mission and other organizations engaged in the sarva shiksha abhiyan should also be assigned the responsibility of educating the rural women and men regarding the significance of panchayati raj and empowerment of women .

h. The media , both print as well as electronic can play vital role in the restructuring the rural society . it can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.

i. The curriculum for the students at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels should be so modified as to promote gender sensitivity among the students. There should be chapters on panchayati raj and women empowerment in all the classes at the school level and compulsory questions be set on these in the eamination.

J The unfinished agenda of women emopowerment be finished by enacting an Amendment for providing reservation for women in the National parliament and state legislatures. The reservations at the local level not enough for the women empowerment .

Thus women's engagements and participation began virtually from a scratch in panchayat raj institutions . The journey of women leadership in local governance is not so long . she is still in her learning phase to take up roles tht were never of her concern in the past.

It is true that only women can effectively voice up their pent up feelings , requirement and perspective in development process .Thus preparation of the women is very important to voice needs and ideas of this fraction of society in the development .

Conclusion

With the establishment of the Panchayati raj institutions in our country a woman gets an opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator , decision maker or a good leader . the 73rd constitutional amendment ACT ,1992 IS A Milestone in this regard. It provides the women a chance which is a milestone in this regard. It provides a women to chance come forward . this experiment is proving to be a big success particularly by providing opportunity to women to come out of their houses and participate in the administrative and the political field. It has to be considered that the inclusion of well qualified women in the village panchayati at the initial stage of the interlocution of the panchayati raj institution in rural areas wold be an important instrumental measure in planning for improving social status, and empowering women. Women constitute half of the population of our country . It is our duty to encourage the women in a largest democracy of the world. To give a proper status to the women, government , NGO'S And the universities have to play a vital role in this field . This group of women , if provided representation at village panchayati level can strongly rise and handle the issue related to the betterment of women , can play dominate role in decision making process andmske suitable recommendation for improving the status of women in the meeting. It creates the opportunities for the women to exercise more control over design and provisions of the services and the management of the resoures it may benefit . good number of women competing with the men in the local politics , forwarding gender related agendas is looked as a way towards the gender equity .