

Role of Political Participation in Women Empowerment - Focusing on Panchayatraj System in India

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Abstract: Panchayati raj system established to bring formal political representation and making the people to participate in political decision makings. This system gave opportunity to the vulnerable groups in the society to participate and make decisions. When we see women, this provisions are made women to come out of home and participate in decision making process. It is considered as turning point in women's development especially rural women, apart from voting panchayat raj gave provision to participate formal politics and decision making provision and it helped women to move towards empowerment. Women empowerment includes different domains in that particularly political participation is playing major role in empowering women. In this present paper researcher will be tried to explain how the panchayat raj system is playing role in empowerment of women in India. This will be completely based on reading sources like government documents (73rd amendment) and some studies conducted in India. Present paper puts an effort to explain how women are entered into politics and how political participation is providing opportunity to move towards empowerment at grass root level in India. Specially keeping in mind of 73rd amendment where women are entered to formal political system which is known as Panchayati raj system.

Key words: Empowerment, political participation, Panchayatraj, economical life.

1. INTRODUCTION:

India is a home for 1.31 billion people and it is world's second highest populous country. It contributes 17.85% of population in world, in that 50% of them are under the age of 0-25 years. Where the male population resides 680 million and females are 638 million. Sex ratio is 943 for 1000 (Census 2011). India is a unique country which includes different kind of cultural practices. Along with different dynamic nature in its functions country faces different problems by the particular group of people specially those who belongs to vulnerable groups. The most vulnerable including all the aspects and those groups are poor, women, children etc. Among these, women and children are more vulnerable.

Indian families are patriarchal in nature where male are dominating in higher positions and domination in social, political and economical life. Women are always discriminated and kept reserved for household work and taking care of family members. As the days passed slowly women started entering into different domains in the society. It is the efforts of many movements and which took place in India for women rights and women welfare. Increasing participation of women in politics made remarkable achievement in women's life, this provision is due to the legal aids which are introduced by the government. As per studies shows that women are participating in local governance without discrimination due to 33% reservation. Specially in Panchayati raj system. Whereas women are treated like they are only meant for doing kitchen work and taking care of the whole family. Since from many decades Women are treated unequal and injustice manner. Even though our legal frame work provided freedom and equal opportunity to women but still it is not reaching with its full effort. Over the past 40 years. This type of injustice, unequal treatment and violence in women around world has been brought in to consideration by few international organizations took initiation for conducting conferences and different programs for women in different parts of the world on addressing the gender inequality, women's right, women role in developing country, women workforce, women economical growth and women empowerment etc. Many international and national leaders took initiative to promote women participation in all areas and making women's to get their rights. When we see the approach of policy during this past 40 years was during 70s the welfare concept was used, in 80s development concept and from 90s onwards empowerment concept. But at present giving more importance is on inclusion of women in decision making and their participation at policy formulation levels. That is by providing opportunity to participate in formal decision making process especially in political circumstances (3 tier system panchayat raj institutions).

2. RIGHT TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA:

The right to political participation refers to citizens' right to seek to control public affairs. Political participation is in many forms, in that the most famous one is voting in elections, but also including joining a political party, standing as a candidate in an election, joining a non-governmental advocacy group, or participating in a

demonstration. The primary legal expression of this right can be found in the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it has been further formalized and elaborated in later treaties, most notably the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

3. 73RD AND 74TH AMENDMENT ACT OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION:

The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution brought in a Local Government system as the third tier of governance with focus on economic development and social justice. The States have moved ahead on the agenda of transferring functions and responsibilities to the local governments at good pace. The state governments effectively enjoyed power in the holding of elections to local bodies. The 73rd and 74th amendments take away an option that the state government previously had though it chose not to exercise it. And in politics, as in finance, options have value even if not ultimately exercised.

73rd and 74th amendments Act has passed in 1992 and in April 1993 this act has come in to force. These amendments have been created uniformity in the political structure of Panchayati raj and Nagarpalika system. 73rd amendment is for Rural local governance and 74th amendment is for Urban local governance. As this paper is looking in to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). Before 73rd amendment was not a response to pressure from the grassroots, but to an increasing recognition that the institutional initiatives of the preceding decade had not delivered, that the extent of rural poverty was still much too large and thus the existing structure of government needed to be reformed. It is interesting to note that this idea evolved from the Centre and the state governments. It was a political drive to see PRIs as a solution to the governmental crises that India was experiencing. The Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act, passed in 1992 by the Narasimha Rao government, came into force on April 24, 1993. It was meant to provide constitutional sanction to establish "democracy at the grassroots level as it is at the state level or national level". Its main features are as follows The Gram Sabha or village assembly as a deliberative body to decentralized governance has been envisaged as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj System.

4. PROVISIONS UNDER 73RD AMENDMENT:

- Direct elections to all seats in the panchayats at all levels (Article 243C).
- Compulsory elections to panchayats every five years with the elections being held before the end of the term of the incumbent panchayat in the event that a panchayat is dissolved prematurely, elections must be held within six months, with the newly elected members serving out the remainder of the five year term (Article 243E).
- Mandatory reservation of seats in all panchayats at all levels for Davits and Advises in proportion to their share of the panchayat population (Article 243D).
- Mandatory reservation of one-third of all seats in all panchayats at all levels for women, with the reservation for women applying to the seats reserved for Davits and Advises as well (Article 243D).
- . Indirect elections to the position of panchayat chairperson at the intermediate and district levels (Article 243C).
- Mandatory reservation of the position of panchayat chairperson at all levels for Davits and Advises in proportion to their share in the state population (Article 243D).
- Mandatory reservation of one-third of the positions of panchayat chairperson at all three levels for women (Article 243D).

This act has made a drastic change in the political structure and function. This act provided an equal opportunity to all the people to participate in political system. At present situation we can see women are participating without any discrimination and accessing the services fully. When we see the present statistics related to political participation of people in Panchayati raj system it around 3 million elected representatives from all over gram panchayats, among that women are highly participating. These members represent more than 2.4 lakh (240,000) Gram Panchayats, about 6,000 intermediate level tiers and more than 500 district panchayats. Spread over the length and breadth of the country, the new panchayats cover about 96 per cent of India's more than 5.8 lakh (580,000) villages and nearly 99.6 per cent of rural population. This is the largest experiment in decentralization of governance in the history of humanity. The Constitution visualizes panchayats as institutions of self-governance. However, giving due consideration to the federal structure of India's polity, most of the financial powers and authorities to be endowed on panchayats have been left at the discretion of concerned state legislatures. Consequently, the powers and functions vested in PRIs vary from state to state. These provisions combine representative and direct democracy into a synergy and are expected to result in an extension and deepening of democracy in India. Hence, panchayats have journeyed from an institution within the culture of India to attain constitutional status. This is one of the biggest democracy in the world where village level democratic structures are functioning for their development. This act played a vital role in empowering people in the country specially for women's. This provision has played a vital role in empowering women in India.

5. EMPOWERMENT:

Empowerment is not a new term it has emerged from different words which we are using previously like welfare and development. It seems to be more fashionable word in the present world the actual meaning of this word is decentralization of authority and power. It aims at getting participation from deprived section of people in the society especially in decision making process. In simple way like giving "voice to the voiceless." Initially it is because of activists who struggled a lot and gave voice to the voiceless people. Activists want government to empower poor people including women by legislative measures and welfare programs and today it is all due collective efforts of activists who made the vulnerable people to move towards empowerment.

Empowerment is a process of which the disempowered or the powerless people can change their circumstances and begin to have control over their life (Kuldeep 2001). It results in a change in the balance of power, in the living conditions and in the relationships. Unless capacity is built in these sections in reality the power is used by others rather than the section for which they are meant.

When we talk about women empowerment which more specifically equal treat without doing any kind of discrimination. In other words providing equal status, opportunity, and freedom to develop herself. The main focus in empowerment is equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self esteem and make them to face any difficult situations and they should be able to participate in the process of decision making.

6. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:

Women empowerment refers to creating of an equal environment in which women can make her own decisions which is good for her development and also for the society. Women empowerment also refers to improving the social, economical, political and legal strength to women and to provide equal right to women and make women more confident enough to claim their rights. According to Jakarta declaration "women empowerment is not only an equity consideration, it is also a necessary precondition for sustainable economic and social development. Involvement of women in political arena and in decision making process in an important tool for women empowerment and also monitoring standards of political preference.

According to Indian constitution there is special provision for women, which explains women are treated to be equal in all spheres of society. India has taken numerous steps to provide constitutional safeguards and institutional frame work for activists for women welfare. Since from the independence women have become the central focus of development.

Indian government has declared the year 2001 as a year for the empowerment of women. Where as in current situation Women are still struggling to break the chains which are binding them and challenging them the unequal distribution of power in society

7. WOMEN IN POLITICAL SYSTEM:

For getting a participated in voting also women struggled a lot. There were many ups and down situations faced by women's in participating politics. There were movements took place during 1917 and women fought to get the right to vote. Finally in 1929 women has got right to vote, but that was restricted only particular category women's those who are married (wifehood), having property and educated women are allowed to vote. Government of India act 1935 provided the provision for women to vote all women over 18 years are allowed to vote provided they fulfilled the condition to play a significant role in less conventional political activities such as environmental movement, anti-alcohol agitation, peace movement and even in revolutionary activities which equally affect power relationship as they have capacity to influence the state. Still politics proved be a very inhospitable environment for women and continues to be the male stronghold into which the entry of women is harshly restricted. In 1971 the committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) puts a greater demand for participation of women in political institutions in India.

political participation is not only just having a power to vote or right to vote simultaneously it is related to active participation in decision making process, political activism, conscious of political system, and co-policy making process. When compare to men women are less participating in voting, political parties and running public offices. Political participation is broadly defined as a process through which individual plays a role in political life of his/her society, opportunity to take part in decision making and deciding what are the common goals of the society are the best way of achieving those goals. According to Srivastava Rashmi Political participation refers to actual participation in these voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rules and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public policy. The special bill's related to women are played major role in providing space for women in politics.

8. WOMEN RESERVATION BILL:

The reservation bill supporter said that reservation will provide and good opportunity to women's stand in the society and also help her to fight against violence, abuse etc. women reservation bill has been political sphere many

years which created a debate around. Although the bill was introduced but it could not succeed because of lack of political consensus. The proposed 33.3% seat reservation in parliament and state legislatures was first drafted by Deve Gowda and that bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on 12th September 1996. After the bill has passed the 33.3% seats are reserved for the women and the participation of women in parliament and in local governance has appreciated and promoted. Many studies which are conducted on panchayat raj institution and reservation of women shown that. The effective implementation of 33.3% seats reservation and it maintained in gram panchayat raj institution and women experiences being a member of the political system is more encouraged. It is great achievement which helped to mobilize women, participate and promoted for empowerment in world.

9. WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE:

People are living and enjoying their life in local level where they engage on a daily basis with the state, public services, markets and the political system. Their empowerment requires participation and accountability in local governance and decision-making effective and inclusive local citizenship. The local level is where development policy becomes reality through execution. Poor people face problems such as limited access to basic social services and economic opportunities. Social and political empowerment at local level can be a means to overcome these obstacles. Empowerment at the local level can be a stepping stone in the direction of empowerment at a higher level. When people become self-assured in their ability to change local policies or overcome local obstacles, women subsequently feel empowered to deal with challenges at a wider, possibly regional or national, level. Empowerment in the administration of basic services can lead to engagement in more political processes.

Women's participation in decision-making is important for women's interests to be integrated into governance. It has been widely experienced that governance structures which do not provide for sufficient participation of women, often undergo from state interventions which are neither inclusive nor democratic. Including women, especially in local governments is an necessary step towards creating gender equal opportunities and gender responsive policies (Richa Shankar). The participation of women in local governments serves as a support for other women to enter miscellaneous professions and leads to breaking stereotype of women's roles in society and public space. People had gain self-confidence in women as good public administrators and local government legislative body after seeing women making a constructive difference in other people's life.

Women were actively started involving in the movements, voting and participating in the politics is because of reservation policy. The process of reservation initiated during Rajiv Gandhi's prime Minister. The entire issue took on a political tone as it became a controversial point whether the introduction of reservation at the level of panchayats and urban local bodies was really meant to give increased representation to women or was populist measure aiming to create a women's constituency at a time when congress party needed to resurrect its image.

10. PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Panchayati raj system is not a new phenomenon it existed in non formal system in olden days. Initially our society has a non formal kind of structure which sets some rules and regulations for the community people to follow for the betterment of community. As we our society is male dominating so all the powers are in males hand women's are limited to only house hold work. As the days are passing changes have made, for getting a certain positions in the society women were struggled a lot. Mainly the legal provisions made women to participate in the formal political system. In India Women are highest participated in Panchayati raj system than in parliament positions. When we see that percentage women participated in Gram Panchayats had 37.8% women members, in Intermediate Panchayats 37% women members and the District Panchayats 35.3% women members. over all 36.87% women's participation in three tier system which shows the effective implementation of article 243D of Indian constitution reservation of 33% in PRI system. The new reservation bill formulated for providing 50% reservations for women in political system, but many people are arguing about this bill and some critics reported in Rai Manoj's paper suggested that women are mere proxies for men who does the actual decision. Whereas other studies which are conducted in different states have shown that women in Panchayats helping to address about the concerns which are directly impacting on women like education, water and problems related to accessing public goods (Ban, Radu & Rao, Vijayendra,). Also studies shown that this reservation made women to get relief from house hold work and self decision making, and reproductive health and participation in other fields effectively so this is step towards a empowerment this made women to be empowered in deferent dominos of life.

The increase in reservation from 33% to 50% is providing opportunity to women get fully empowered. Example states which are implemented 50% reservation for women in India are Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Kerala.

Case study:

Mallama (name changed), 34 year old study only 5th class, an got married at the age of 19years, her husband is a member of gram panchayat when they got married, Mallama is having 3 children and engaging herself in the household activity. As the panchayat raj system rules once in every 5 year panchayat election should be conducted

and as a part of that people are getting opportunity to participate in the local politics and perform effectively. As Mallama explained in her husband's family every election on or another person will participate and win the election it may be position of member or president. When the reservation of women in panchayat raj system is getting more popular and women are getting chance to participate then her father-in-law decided that why Mallama can participate. Even though in her family they never allowed her to go out and participate in any programs. In the house her father-in-law and other male members use to take decisions. It is time when panchayat election has been announced and this time already her husband served 5 years as a member in their gram panchayat. Also this time as per the local governance rule president position is reserved for a women. By keeping all these things in his mind, her father-in-law decided that Mallama will participate this time for president position. They have

Studies on women in politics have emphasized that contact with outside world makes women more alert and also active in the political process. There could be two ways of doing it. Firstly, interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected one's should be encouraged. Secondly, these women could be taken out to the urban areas and their interaction with educated urban elected women representatives be arranged. Other than legal provisions NGOs are playing major role in empowering women by promoting women's to participate in political system. Nongovernmental organizations were conducting capacity building and skill training to women and making aware and teaching the importance of right to political participation.

11. CONCLUSION:

Women are empowering by entering in to every field and showing their ability to achieve and getting success. Political participation is one of the major areas where women are more visible and their participation is appreciated, but in other hand the real power is still sticking in men's hand. When we see there are cases where in rural area the women are participating in politics by force or some time by choice, but the after electing the power will be on men's hand. In decision making process it is important that women should participate but men are not allowing. And there are successful stories, model villages where women are leading and making decisions for the welfare of the society which shows women empowerment by political participation. Hence women are achieving empowerment if not completely but going achieve it very soon.

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