

A Review Paper on Women Empowerment through Panchyati Raj Institution PRIs

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Abstract

In India, local bodies have been a key part of village societies. Women constitute nearly fifty percent of the population of the world, but when it comes to their representation at political positions in the government, they account for only less than ten percent. The 73rd constitution amendment act, endowing PRI's with constitutional status, constitute a great landmark in the evolution of grassroots democratic institutions in India. There was also opposition to the reservation of seats for women, particularly for chairperson's positions. Viewing these as positions with authority, power and status and as the sources for making some extra money, the males and the political parties were very reluctant to give it up for women. Not merely would the women not be inclined to the ways of making money, they will also be inconvenient to be manipulated, particularly in the social context of the male-female divide and need to keep appearances with women.

Keywords: 73rd Constitution Amendment, Women empowerment, Political participation

1. Introduction:

According to 2011 Census, in India Women constitute nearly half of the total population. According to UN Women the development of a country is not possible without the development of its entire population. Government of India declared 2001 as 'year of empowerment of women' to boost the women empowerment and women participation. Indian constitution banned the gender discrimination and provides women's equal rights (political rights) to men. Nearly seven decades passed after independence, but the participation of women is remained outside the domain of political authority. We know that 73rd Constitutional Amendment increased the women's participation in local bodies but women participation in Parliament and State legislative assembly is still low. He also highlights the role of women in Indian society during various

stages of their life but many people think that women are psychologically and physically inferior to man (Vipin Kumar Singhal, 2016).¹

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment of Indian constitution provided reservation of seats for women and it raised a new hopes and entire country is in the process of making the local bodies to take up the new challenges.

2. Political Participation

The active participation of the people in the decision making activity of government is termed as Political participation. So participation is not a mere exercise of political rights like franchise, by the people. In India, after Independence all women have rights to participate in

¹VipinkumarSinghal (2012), women and urban Governance , Keshav Publication UP

election as a free and equal citizen. The participation of women in the electoral process is sign of women political awareness as well as their effective participation for their political empowerment. For the development of Democracy there is need of maximum participation of people at the lowest level. Since Independence, for democratic development Panchayat raj plays important role in political innovation.

According to layman's political participation play an important role in the policy-making process in a democracy through the exercise of political rights such as universal adult franchise or being a part of a pressure group buffeting the government for exchange in the policy framework.

According to Squires, women participation in policy-making empower the women and they become more active participant and promoting their equal rights and opportunities changes their socio-economic scenario as well².

According to NIMD (Netherland Institute of Multiparty Democracy)³, women participation is beneficial for both, their own communities and societies. The inclusion of women in political process is the key of real democracy.

According to Lester Milbrath, hierarchical framework of political participation, political participation varies with the extent to which a citizen affects or can affect the decision making of the government. Milbrath classified activities of citizens with respect to its influence on decision making and political participation. He classified activities into gladiator activities,

transitional activities and spectator activities.⁴

The overall participation of women in different level of education has been consistently increasing. The United Nation Development Fund for Women mention that women around the world control between 50-8 per cent of the systems that go into food production and marketing and run about 70 per cent of small enterprises. They are sole bread earners in about 35 per cent households. So we can say that women are equal to men in their contribution to society, but in contrary the status of women that they enjoy is not the same(UNDFW).⁵

All constitutional provisions as well as social laws, which were enacted with an aim to elevate the position of women, were launched with mainly two objectives- the first one is to curb the inhuman social practices against the women and the second one is to open new avenues for women to bargain for a better position in society(S NagendraAmbedkar&Shilaja SNagendra, 2011).⁶

According to LekhaChakraborty study, she reveals that South Asia witnessed the lowest rate of women's participation which is nearly less than 8 per cent in legislative and nearly less than 10 per cent seats in cabinets which is very low as compare to 33 per cent and she suggested that for elimination of women discrimination, women's required strength in decision making.(LekhaChakraborty's, 2019).⁷

⁴Lester Milbrath (1981), Political Participation, The Handbook of Political Behaviour, Springer

⁵<https://www.unfpa.org/icpd>

⁶ S.N. Ambedkar&ShilajaNagendra(2011), Women and Panchyati Raj, ABD Publishers

⁷LekhaChakraborty (2019), A Case Study of Gender Responsive Budget in India, The Commonwealth

² Judith Squires (2009), Gender Quotas and Models of Political Citizenship, Cambridge University Press

³Netherland Institute of Multiparty Democracy

Another study on women participation in local bodies, WandanaSonalkar, states that introduction of women's in local bodies is a big step of decentralization of powers. We know that women work in everywhere either villages or towns and given them work as a political representation and they work in policy or decision-making is a great opportunity for them to uplift their socio-economic-political status. In her paper, she also highlights on questions raised against the women reservation in local bodies election i.e. why women of OBC or Muslim women got reservation but why Muslim or OBC men do not have any quotas in local bodies (WandanaSonalkar, 1999).⁸

Another study on participation uncovers that women's participation has been at low ebb. The undeniable purpose behind such a situation is to a great extent because of the prevailing constraints – psychological, social, social and male dominance in the political field. The reality remains that disregarding constraint a couple of political women in the state have come up in their own specific manner by their difficult work and sincere participation in numerous political activities.(Raja Lakshmi's 2015).⁹

According to Barbara C. Burnell, if a women gain a greater role in politics, they must be educated. We know women have rich history of political participation and their efforts make them active and engaged in political process. She thinks that without participation of women in politics, we can't achieve the aim of democracy and

feminism plays an important role in the women empowerment.¹⁰

3. Women Empowerment through Political participation

For women empowerment, their political participation is very important for them. Through their political empowerment, women get equal space in society and their political participation strong the democracy. When women representation increases then it encourages other women to take part in political process and play an important role in decision making process(AnandMathur, 2010).¹¹JS Mill states that participation represents a process by which goals are set under the means chosen in relation to all kinds of social institutes. According to Mill participation is an educational device which by the citizen learn various rules regarding the civic life.

According to Almond and Verba (1963) political participation is define as the active participation in a political process, process in which decisions are made. Political participation is a process by which people take part in political activity with more or less choice or performance.

The social and political thinkers always has been supported the involvement of women in various development process and in decision making process. To provide greater opportunities to women in decision making process, it is needed to find out the

⁸WandanaSonalkar(1999), "An Agenda for Gender Politics", Economic and Political Weekly.

⁹Ram Lakshmi's (2015) "Grass Roots Leadership: A Study of Leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions", Ashish Publishing House.

¹⁰Barbara c. Burrell (2005), Women and political participation, sage publication.

¹¹AnandMathur(2006), Women's Empowerment :Politics and Policies, VedamseBooksoale;u

true nature of socio inequalities(CSWI 1974).¹²

Oakley (Oakley, 1991) ¹³started the alternative development strategy. This strategy was based on human approach which focused on people centered rather than capital centered. This approach states that millions of dollars were seen to be not bearing the desired results, primarily because the projects were planned and implemented without the involvement of the end-beneficiaries or bottom of the society and thus did not touch their problem. Participation was thought as the only viable solution for resolving the problem.

According to Mishra (Mishra, 1984) the study of participation involves three dimensions namely- What kind of participation, who participates and how is participation occurring. Participation occurs when the persons who participate, is fully aware of his/her responsibilities, and it involves personal determination on the participant.

According to Oakley (Oakley, 1991) the non-participatory development was characterized by certain features which includes besides other aspects, the difference in the seating arrangement of the administrators of development project and the beneficiaries. Secondly community participation was non-existent wherein the people were not informed of the implementation of the project in their area

According to the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IIDEA), women facing obstacles throughout the globe for their effective participation in politics, and we know that across the globe women facing same condition i.e. they are not in position of fully and equally participation in policy-making as male counterparts, and it is seen that all top position in decision-making dominated by male.(NirupamaPrakash, 2010).¹⁴

Women participation in politics and decision-making is influenced by the actions of political parties and the extent to which parties are committed to the promotion of women's involvement in politics. Quotas and reservation are a first step in increasing women's participation in the political world (UNIFEM 2005).¹⁵

Indian Political scene is gradually changing as more women are entering into politics across the country irrespective of their educational, regional, socio-economical background. Panchyati raj institutions have played a key role in empowering women to a considerable level. There also exists a view that says providing women's representation through reservation may change the nature of political competition. Indians are not averse to having women leaders but the overall system will be governed and run by the menfolk, and second is that women leaders themselves are not very keen on the question of women's political participation. Media play an important role in projecting women leaders but do not question their

¹²https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/unpd-cm7-2008-11_p06_unifem.pdf

¹³ Peter Oakley (1991), The Concept of Participation in Development, Urban and Landscape Planning

¹⁴www.idea.int

¹⁵https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/unpd-cm7-2008-11_p06_unifem.pdf

accountability and commitments as far as women issues are concerned (KamlaKumari, 2009).¹⁶

According to AshaBhandari an affirmative action through 73rd constitutional Amendment Act bring big rise in the numerical strength of women in Panchyati Raj Institutions. Both Individual and Institutional factors in the mechanism that has put women in a disadvantaged position, affecting their chance to get involved in political decision making. In individual factors, women are less interested in politics, they have not learned to develop political capacities, because it's mindset that public sector activities are usually for men. Institutional factors are related to the organization of society, its norms and values.

Reservation has succeeded the women of rural India into political main stream. Reservation for women in local bodies can be enabling them for the participating in the electoral for the development of civilization, one must check the status and position of women in that society. From ancient period to present scenario women facing many challenges for their empowerment and for the their political participation.(Mohd. IshaqKhanday, 2015).¹⁷

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women is a more inclusive term than merely the infrastructure created by the government, and it includes mechanisms and strategies to increase political participation of women. It includes reservations, governmental

structures with a mandate for women, government sponsored agencies devoted to women's issues, parliamentary committee, local government institutions, mechanisms and plan like gender budget and component plans, women's bodies and groups, federation, unions and co-operations (Nayanthika R. and ShreyaGarg).

According to John Friedman¹⁸, moral rationality of growth have inequality and excluded large people from the benefits of development. He states that political empowerment and political empowerment is possible by effective participation. For women empowerment can relished them from household's drudgeries and make them political active.

4. Reservation

Reservation is a method where certain percentage of seats in the legislature are reserved for a particular section of the society, it is provided to that section of the society that have been left behind in the process of socio-economic development as well as their political modernization.

According to Rajesh Sinha (2018),¹⁹ adoption of 73rd Amendment had a great potential to develop a democracy at grassroots. He focussed on the empowerment of women, according to him after Independence nearly 45-50 years, women representation at grass-roots level is very low and they are kept out from politics. For advancement of women participation is the key part of true democracy. There are some social, cultural factors which are blockage on women

¹⁶KamlaKumari, Women in India and Central Asia, Gyan Publishing House

¹⁷Mohd.IshaqKhanday,(2015) empowerment of women in India- Historical Perspective," European Academic Research

¹⁸John Friedman (1992), Empowerment- The Politics of Alternative Development, Wiley

¹⁹ Rajesh Sinha (2018), Women in Panchyats, Kurukshetra

empowerment in society. Women's role for formation of policies and decision-making process through various political representation for their empowerment.

According to Krook and O Brian²⁰, more than one hundred countries have started policies for promoting women in politics. There is no systematic patterns for adaption of these policies and have different type of measures like party quotas, reserved seats and legislative quotas.

Another study on women's participation revealed that education can plays an important role for upliftment of women in politics. Women empowerment through political participation enhances their socio-economic status as well as their involvement in decision making process. In his study he focussed on the women education and he stated that without the moral understanding of people on women they will not be empowered (Gangeswar Kalita, 2011²¹).

Political parties across the globe have adapted the party quotas to ensure the women representation. In India, Indian parliament passed the 73rd and 74th amendments acts to provide 33 per cent reservation to women. These amendments strengthen the local govt. and strengthen the women in terms of their political representation as well as their social status (Krook, 2003).

A system of reservation of a proportion of seats for women in local bodies would provide an impact to both the women as

well as political parties to give chance to nearly half of the population in the various form of government. Reservation may also increase the women's interest in the problem related to women's concern and ensuring their presence in local bodies, increase the political mobilization (Karunakar Singh, 2012).²²

5. 73rd Amendment Act

Women's empowerment is one of the major objectives of 73rd constitutional amendment. It provides for reservation of one-third of total number of all posts at all three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Women participation in PRIs is considered as the most significant aspect of their empowerment. Their political participation ensures the democratic process and realizing the development goals for women. The empowerment of rural women is important for the development of rural India (S Nagendra Ambedkar & Shilaja S Nagendra, 2011).

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provided the platform for the women empowerment and helped them for challenging the social problems like casteism, patriarchy. The 73rd Constitutional amendment act was the key step for decentralization of power or give the equal opportunity to all section of the society specially Schedule Casts, Schedule Tribe or Women to express their voice in the decision making process (C Prahlaad, 2011).²³

²⁰Krook and O'Brian (2010), The Politics of Group Representation, Quotas for Women and Minority Worldwide, Comparative Politics

²¹Gangeswar Kalita (2012), Rural Women's Participation in Electoral Politics, IJCAES

²²Karunakar Singh (2012), Panchyati Raj Institutions and social inclusion of Dalits, Social Action

²³C Prahlaad, (2011) Women Empowerment and Panchyati raj, edited by D Pulla Rao in Political

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment act mandate that it is compulsory to reserve one third seats for women in local bodies election has a step to move towards power.(WandanaSonalkar, 1999).²⁴

Rural Indian society is hierarchical and iniquitous and enmeshed in feudal ethos. According to Parry, the encompassing ideology of hierarchy permeates every sphere of social life and lower casts as per their place in social hierarchy are supposed to serve the dominant casts and remain loyal to them.

Another study emphasized the implantation of 73rd Constitution Amendment in Assam. In his study, he identifies that out of 23 districts in Assam, only two fall under scheduled areas and others remaining districts fall under the 33 per cent reservation under 73rd Amendment act. He found that in most of villages, women regarded Panchayats as helping people in need. In some areas, there is strong presence of women in PRIs and they are concerned not only women issues but also on other issues related to social and environment. His study highlights that elected members i.e. women have had a very little knowledge of 73rd Constitutional Amendment and its 33 per cent mandatory reservation in Panchayati Raj Institution (Sujata D Hazarika 2006).²⁵

Another study (SusheelaKaushik²⁶) on Panchayati Raj in action and challenges to women's role-mainly explains about 73rd Amendment act and its provision in Panchayati Raj. She further explains the process of decentralization and local self-government in Panchayati Raj. She also elaborates violence against women in Panchayati Raj Institution and focused on experienced of elected members of PRIs to empower the women.

The Cairo, International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD 1994) gave emphasis to women empowerment and stated that all countries should ensure the complete access to primary or equivalent level of education without gender discrimination in any case before 2015. Those countries have achieved primary level goals to extend their goals to training and education at higher level of education (ICPD 1994²⁷).

The 73rd Amendment of Indian Constitution has been considered significant and one of the greatest attempts for transforming the politics in India in the direction of decentralization and democratization(Vasanthi Raman²⁸).

6. Conclusion

With the provision of 73rd Amendment women representatives have ample scope for involvement in the process of local government. The involvement of women representative in the decision making

Dimension of women Empowerment, The associated Publishers

²⁴WandanaSonalkar(1999), "An Agenda for Gender Politics", Economic and Political Weekly

²⁵Sujata D Hazarika (2006), the political participation of women and the dilemmas of 73rd Amendment, The Indian Journal of Political Science

²⁶SusheelaKaushik(1995), Panchayati Raj in Action challenges to Women's role, FES Publication.

²⁷<https://www.unfpa.org/icpd>

²⁸Vasanthi Raman (2016), The Women's Question in Contemporary Indian Politics, Asian Journal of Women studies

process is not effective and local elites minimize women representative role in the Panchayati Raj Institutions by exerting control over them. The seats reservation in PRIs is not enough condition for women's elective participation and till it is help in solving their socio-economic conditions in PRIs.

There are some key factors for enhancing the women participation and women empowerment follows as: Basic Education, confidence for running Panchayats, experience for govern Panchayats and motivation and encouragement from family and society.

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