

Women in Rural Politics and Empowerment

T.Girish Nayaka

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Government First Grade College, Holalkere, Karnataka State

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 15 March 2019

Keywords

Women, Panchayats, Empowerment, Political Participation, Reservation.

ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It involves the building up of a society wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. The present paper major therapy prescribed by woman empowerment advocates is empowering women through legislation for ensuring participation in political decision making. Such an approach provides the women with a constitutional platform to stand up to men, to raise their voice on issues concerning women oppression, subjugation and related issues and thus in effect, providing them with an identity in an orthodox male dominated socio-political set up. Finally, the paper will look into the dynamism of the process whereby women empowerment is achieved through legislation or women participation in the PanchayatRaj Institution.

1. Introduction

Society of India is unique in the world in many spheres like caste system, religious character and having diverse ethnic and linguistic base. Another uniqueness of this society has been the deprivation or exclusion of many sections including scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and women. In the centuries long journey these sections were on the fringe of the society having almost no notable identity. The present era of human civilization is however experiencing lot of changes in social system of the society and new social formation is taking place due to various factors like arrival of technology, exposure to other world, individual and governmental efforts. Indian state has also been providing lot of opportunities for redefining the identity of some deprived sections by way of reservation process and constitutional safeguards. Panchayatiraj is one of the important agencies which are becoming a tool for new identification by way of making the people partners in governance. Though the panchayath system of guiding and directing the process of development in the rural areas is not new, yet the unique feature of 73rd Amendment to the constitution of India brought new life to the institution by making it compulsory for women to get adequate representation in these bodies and even 29 government departments are brought under village panchayathraj under 11th schedule of article 243 G of 73rd Amendment to make panchayats more effective.

Athreya, V.B & Bhargava, B .S. & Bhaskar, Manu, defines political participation as the verity of ways in which people try to influence the political process. He has sought to identify the channels through which citizens attempt to influence the leaders as well as to isolate the kinds of citizens apt to use these channels on a regular basis¹.

India's record in growth and development has gone hand in hand with gender bias and indicators of welfare, capability,

work participation and income. However, in the present era, new openings are coming which are instrumental in breaking the old shackle not only for women but some other deprived sections also. The present investigation is an attempt to see the role of women in present PanchayatRaj in terms of effectiveness in decision making and attitudes of men towards women members and their emerging new identity. It is scarcely news that women are underrepresented in Indian politics. The issue has come sharply into focus for some years now, partly because of the thwarted moves towards providing one-third reservation for women in legislative bodies including Parliament, along with the more successful moves to enforce such reservation in elections to rural panchayats. Of course such an issue naturally becomes more apparent during a period of elections as well.

What has emerged quite clearly in the current very long drawn out election process is how little has changed at one level since Independence. The candidates fielded by the various political parties are still dominantly male: women account for only five to ten per cent of all candidates across parties and regions. This is the same broad pattern that has been observed in virtually the 12 previous general elections in the country.

2. Empowerment of Women

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, where women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Deepa Narayan in her edited book 'Measuring Empowerment' takes "Empowerment as the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives "

¹Athreya, V.B & Bhargava, B .S. & Bhaskar, Manu, 1992, *Women in Grassroots Democracy-A study of Kerala*, University of Kerala/ ICSSR, New Delhi.

Sushila Agrawal has written a book entitled "Status of Women" (1988). The constitutional provisions in India have been analyzed in the context of social reality and traditional value framework. Special provisions of Indian and criminal procedure codes for the protection of women who could be a victim of the offences in public and private life because of her sex have been examined.²

The Constitution of India is based on the principles of equality. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth. 73rd Constitutional Amendment act in the year 1999 introducing not less than 33 percent reservation for women in the PanchayatRaj institutions in rural areas. Undoubtedly it is a landmark legislative step in the direction of empowerment of women. With the passing It is acknowledged that the local self-government is an effective method of governing as well as designing and implementing the developmental schemes at the grassroots level. In the rural areas too a three tier structure has been adopted.

With the 73rd Amendment the reservation system has been put into practice. The elected representatives continue to hold office for a period of five years. With the introduction of reservation or quota system in the Panchayat Raj institutions a great beginning has been made in the direction of legislative empowerment of women and it is hoped that along with women's empowerment through collective voicing and participation in the development stream, it should go a long way in the real empowerment of women. But the critical question is as to how far this step has been really effective in involving women in the decision making process and raising the issues related with women community and getting them integrated with the mainstream of decision making? Has it really worked in solving the basic issues and problems faced by women in the society.

Vijay Kaushik and Bela Rani Sharma Said there has been worldwide awakening about the rights of women. The United Nations has been doing commendable work in this direction. There is more and more awareness about improving the working conditions of women and for providing them proper place in political field³ Political parties are keen to associate more and more women with their functioning. All these issues have been discussed in this book. Although governance is a generic term which could mean good government or management, the governance values, types of government, the nature of political processes, the political parties and organizations, which/whose interests are represented and protected, and the extent of power that the masses have to challenge the state or in suggesting alternatives in methods of governance etc. may vary in different political systems. Liberal democracy is founded on reason, law, and freedom of choice but the position of different social groups in the social and political space where power is located is not always equal in practice. This is particularly so in the case of women. The nature of society or state has a decisive impact on the extent and effectiveness of women's political presence and participation of urban politics.

3. Conclusion

² Sushila Agrawal, "Status of Women" Rawat publications, Jaipur (1988)

³ Vijay Kaushik and Bela Rani Sharma, "Women's Rights and World Development" (1998)

The adoption of legislative approach to women empowerment through the reservation of seats in PanchayatRaj institutions and that too at a time when the government has shown a keen commitment to implement various employment and poverty eradication schemes at the very grassroots levels and increasing the role of local self governments in the implementation of plans, is definitely a desirable and welcome move and should ideally prove to be effective. The study reveals a mixed reaction to women's reservation policy. In a state with twenty-eight years of left rule the patriarchy has been challenged and women feel more comfortable in exercising their political rights. Women's disapproval to this policy indicates their inability to change their mindset and to accept politics as a domain of both men and women.

Despite the fact that women's effective participation in the PRI institutions leaves much to be desired and also recognizing that women representatives are mostly either subservient to the militantly dominant male class or at best dummy surrogates planted to serve the vested interests of their masters, to conclude that women's reservation in the PRI (and the subsequent enhanced political participation of women) has not made a mark in terms of improving the grim scenario faced by women in general and poor and low caste women in particular, would be an exercise in fallacy. More so if we take into account the short period of time that has elapsed since reservation for women in PRI's was initiated and particularly when reservation for women at the state and union levels is still elusive. "Women's effectiveness at promoting women's rights once in public office, however, is dependent upon many other factors besides their numbers. Institutional changes are needed in civil society, the media, political parties, legislatures and the judicial system in order to support women's policy agendas and to make the transition from policy to practice".

References

1. Ashish Bose, (2000) – 'Empowerment How and When' EPW, Aug. 19, Page-3006.
2. Field, Norma (1991): In the Realm of a Dying Emperor: A Portrait of Japan at the Century's End, Pantheon Books, New York.
3. G. Kumar & B. Ghosh, 1996, West Bengal Panchayat Elections, 1993. A study in Participation. New Delhi, Concept.
4. Gail Omvedt, (1990) "Women Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Raj, Chandwad to Vinter," EPW, Aug.4.
5. Lietai G. K. and Ravi Srivastava (1999), Unequal Partners, New Delhi. Sage.
6. Isaac T. M. and R. W. Franke, (2001), Local Democracy and Development, New Delhi, Naya Rasta. p .37.
7. Ishrat Shamim & Ranjana Kumari: (2005) Gender and local Governance A New Discourse in Development www.saneinetwork.net/pdf/SANEI_11/Gender_and_LocalGovernance.pdf
8. Iwao, Sumiko (1988): 'The Japanese Portrait of Change' in Japan Echo special issue 15.

9. Khor, Diana (1999): 'Organising for Change: Women's Grassroots Activism in Japan', *Feminist Studies*, 25, No 3, pp 633-61.
10. Mahipal (1994) "Yojona", Vol 38 No. 3.
11. Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay: (2005) Decentralisation and gender equity in south Asia. An Issues paper
12. Mathew George (1997) Women in Public Life *Social Welfare* Vol 44 No 5-6.
13. Mohanty Bidyut (1995) Panchayati Raj, 73rd Amendment and Women Economic and Political weekly Dec.30.
14. Nakane, Chie (1970): *Japanese Society*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, p 6.