

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

Dr.P. Nagarajan

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai- 625 021, TamilNadu, India

Abstract: Women constitute about half of the Indian Population. In the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992, the Panchayat Raj System was established in India. This system provided grass-root level democracy. Particularly, rural women were not getting their due segment in the development process. But these amendments made provision for one-third of reservation for women participating in Panchayat Raj institutions. Hereafter, only the Women got due share in policy making at all level, as well as illiteracy among them could be reduced, They came out of four walls of houses and played a crucial role in the development of nation-building and also gender discrimination also reduced. They became more aware of their role and rights in the home and entire society. Several women's held higher positions in the state as well as national politics in past and present such as President of India, Prime Minister, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Union Ministers, Governor, Chief Ministers as well as Member of Parliament, Member of the legislature and also local panchayats. Apart from that, many cases of women have been used as rubber-stamps. Actual decisions are being taken by their male partners and his family members. Elected women representatives have reportedly been reduced to representations of their male relatives and are under the control of the male-dominated political system.

In this backdrop, this present paper attempt to make some recommendations to the governments along with the support of political parties, NGO's, Stakeholders, academicians and general public take a necessary action such an conduct free and fair election, create the political awareness among the women particularly in rural areas, special training and refresher courses for women representatives conduct from time-to-time, Make special provisions for the women representatives and give them more powers as compared to male counterparts and educate them about their powers. It helps them to work efficiently and effectively.

Index Terms - Amendments, Empowerment, Panchayat Raj, Representation, Women Participation

I. INTRODUCTION

Panchayat Raj is not a new phenomenon in India. Its illustration in history goes backbone to more than 1000 years. Panchayat Raj has its grassroots in ancient Indian institutions when the rural areas were slight democracies governed by their Panchayats. During this period, it was not that women could not join politics, but the fact was that they did not take importance in it due to a male-dominated setup. The British rule through their hardnosed method of revenue collection and the introduction of Zamindari land tenure system nearly devastated these ancient republics and as well the participation of women in politics. The British were of the view that "Vote of Women" would be precipitate in the Indian Society and continued to implement purdah and prohibition against women's education (Bhagat, 2004).

After Independence, India is the largest democratic country in the world where the women widespread establish almost half of the total population. Empowerment of women is enormously the practices of upliftment of social, economic, and political status of women in the society; women were traditionally deprived ones, in the society. It involves the building up of a society wherein women can act without the fear of repression, mistreatment, anxiety, discrimination and the general feeling of maltreatment which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated construction. The political contribution of women can be regarded as one of the confirmed strategies for the empowerment of women. Panchayat being the nearest form of government to the people can play a crucial role in their empowerment by safeguarding actual participation of them (SudiptaBiswas, 2015) Women with disabilities have been largely abandoned. Also due to several societal rules and regulations, they have been never a part of the decision-making process in the home and entire society. Apart from that, nowadays women are enjoying equal status with men as per our constitution and legal provisions but still, they have a long way to go. It is true and proved that "a country succeed if its women succeed". Hence women's empowerment is crucial towards the development of the entire society. 'Empowerment' means 'to authorize'. In this perspective of the people, they have to be authorized to have control over their own lives. Empowerment is an only effective answer to oppression, mistreatment, injustice and other descents of society. In short, Women empowerment means to give women the opportunity to fulfill their innovative proficiencies, requirements and the process of decision making by alone.

II. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Several International Institutions, Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations took the initiative to motivate the socio-economic and political status of the women in the entire society. Equality in all the provinces is inseparable from the essential participation. In 1946 the UNO recognized a commission on the status of the women. The major aim and focuses of the commission were to promote the implementation of the principle that ‘men and women shall have equal rights’. Subsequently 1948 the United Nations delivered its Universal Declaration of Human Rights which has been protecting “the equal rights of the men and women,” (Trivedi, 2010, pp. 41-43). The problem of empowerment of the women came to the forefront with the convention on the ‘Political Rights of women’ (1952) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights in 1966, envisioned at providing equal opportunity to women in their public life. The First World Conference was held in 1975 in Mexico City and United Nations declared 1975 as the International Women’s Year and 1980 as the year for ‘Development of Women’. In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was implemented by the UN General Assembly. In 1985 the world conference on Women in Nairobi, advocated the “onward looking strategies for the expansion of women’s”, (Singh, 2003, p.257). Subsequently formation of various developmental programmes and plan of action for women empowerment at the national and international level.

2.1. Gender Equality and Empowerment

The concept of gender equality is protected in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policy. The Indian Constitution not only ensuring equality to women but also empowers the State to remedial measures of positive perception in favor of women. Subsequently the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78), India has been making a marked shift in its method to women’s concerns from welfare to development while keeping the enablement of women as the central issue in responsible their position in the society (Sunita Singh, 2013, p.3).

The basic concept of empowerment happened with the civil rights movement in the USA, in 1960. The International Conference on Population and Development was held in Cairo, in 1994 and afterward, in 1995 the ‘Fourth World Conference on Women had been organized in Beijing. Both conferences renowned the significance of women empowerment and reiterated that procreative health is an essential part of women’s empowerment. The Government of India also executed this agenda. As an outcome, the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCW) made efforts to make women resistant, cognizant, and attentive about their rights, health and social development (*Hilary Rodham Clinton, 1995, p.4*),.

III. STATUS OF WOMEN HELD HIGHER POSITIONS IN INDIA

Our constitutional provisions of equality ensured women political rights by legitimizing their role for participation in public life, within the formal and legal framework. After various decades of independence, there was little development in women’s active participation in politics. Women have continued outside the province of power and political authority. Only a few women have been competent to extend the higher decision making position in the legislature. Smt. Indira Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister in 1966, after the four epochs Pratibha Devi Singh Patil was a first woman President of India in 2007. In 2009, Meera Kumar became the first woman Lok Sabha Speaker of India. In this respect, India is at least ahead of the U.S.A, where no woman President has been elected as yet in the history of modern USA. After independence, many women have held berth in the council of ministers and also held an important position of the Governor and Chief Ministers of the Indian states. The prominent women Chief Ministers who led their state governments successfully include Sucheta Kriplani and Mayawati (Uttar Pradesh), Shashikala Kakodhar (Goa), Satyavati (Orissa), Janki Ramachandran and J. Jayalalitha (Tamilnadu), Rajinder Kaur Bhattal (Punjab), Uma Bharti (Madhya Pradesh), Sushma Swaraj and Sheila Dixit (Delhi), Mamta Banerjee (West Bengal), Vasundhara Raje Sindhia (Rajasthan). In this line Anakin Patel became the first woman Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2014 and in 2016, Mehbooba Mufti was a first woman Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. The women Governors include Sarojini Naidu (Uttar Pradesh), Vijay Laxmi Pandit (Maharashtra), Padmaja Naidu (West Bengal), Jyoti Vanketchaylam and Ram Dulari Sinha (Kerala), Sharadha Mukherjee and Kumud Ben Joshi (Andhra Pradesh), Chandrawati, Rajendra Kumari Vajpai and Rajni Rai (Pondichery), Sarla Grewal (Madhya Pradesh), Justice M. Fatima Bibi (Tamil Nadu), Sheila Kaul, Prabha Rao and Urmila Singh (Himachal Pradesh), (Shukla, 2007, pp.112-113).

IV. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATS

The active participation of the women in Panchayat Raj Institutions was carried on attention in the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee’s report in 1957, which was recommended that motivation of the two women members in Panchayats carry out the specific programmes for women and children. The Committee on Status of the women in India was constituted in 1971 to look into all features of the women’s status in India, especially their political participation. The committee in its report submitted in 1974 recommended the establishment of statutory women’s Panchayats at the village level with self-rule and resources of their own for the management as well as administration of the welfare and development programmes for the women and children. Provisions were made for the direct election of women representatives by the women of the villages and rights were given to them to send their representatives to the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad, (Sabanna Rao, 2011, p.38). In 1977, again a committee under Ashok Mehta placed stress on the need for the identifying and reinforcement women’s role in the decision-making process of the Panchayats. The National Perspective Plan (NPP) for women 1988-2000 A.D. clearly recommended 30 percent

reservation of seats in the favor of the women at the village Panchayats to the ZilaPanchayat level and at the municipal bodies, (Ahmed, Nilofer&Parveen, 2008, 662). A historic movement arrived for the women of India on 24th April 1993 when the 73rd Amendment Act related to Panchayat Raj Institutions came into force. This Act constitutionally empowered the women by giving them 33% representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as reserving one-third of the chairperson's post in the three-tier system. Apart from that, the government adopted the National Policy for the empowerment of the women on 20th March 2001. The main objective of this policy is to bring about the encroachment, enlargement, and empowerment of women and to safeguard their effective participation in all spheres of public life and activities, (Raju in Rao, 2011, p. 143).

4.1. Role of Women activities in Panchayat Raj Institutions

The active participation of collective women members in numerous activities such as attending Gram Sabha meeting, Women are actively participating in rural development programmes as per their capability right from laborers to policy-makers. Participation of women as elected as well as non-elected members are rising due to implementation in the reservation for women at all level. It acts as a pull factor for women to participate in the meeting. They give their suggestions for various works and problems faced by them (GadadharBehera (2017, pp.1-5). The rural women actively participating in the activities related to the welfare and upliftment of women in their area as being the members of PRIs. The main activities of women through PRIs mostly take part of as abolition of dowry and female illiteracy, reducing the domestic violence and violence against women and Dalits to stop female foeticide, eradicating discrimination against female child, enrolment of girl child in schools and other educational institutions, to promotion of women in seeking employment in government developmental schemes, to assistance women in obtaining economic support for running small scale business, to consolidate self-help groups and co-operatives among the women, to make awareness among the women about the voting and other political rights as well as assisting better mother and child health care facilities and implementing family planning programmes and etc. (Srivastava, A.K, 2009, p.364)

Problems faced by women representatives in Panchayat Raj Institutions

- Non-co-operation of male members they are predominantly based on the basis of gender discrimination during the implementation of programmes at panchayat level
- Unnecessary political intervention by the male domination from the ruling political parties in the functioning of panchayats.
- Intervention of male members in the family of women representatives
- Husband's interventions 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.
- Lack of political, constitutional and legal awareness, among the women in rural areas.
- Negative public opinion regarding women's leadership and capacity in political participation in rural areas.
- Lack of literacy and low level of education among the women particularly in rural areas is a cautious coalition.
- Insufficient training courses and awareness programmes especially for women representatives at the panchayat level.
- Domination and atrocities of elected male members of the panchayat level.
- Violence against women has seen an increase by politically motivated by a male-dominated society and etc.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The Indian Constitution, there are certain requirements for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social and economic status in the country. The government of India passed the 73rd constitutional amendment, which was followed by the 74th amendment mandating reservation of 1/3rd of the seats of women in all village block and district level elected bodies. Apart from that such requirements exist only in pen and paper for millions of economically and socially deprived people in India particularly SC's, ST's and Women. Women are in much nastiest position than men not only in terms of sex ratio, literacy rate, workforce involvement, life expectation, but also in terms of their evaluation to a power structure which controls and guides the development programmes of a society. Since access to political opportunities and participation in the political decision-making process are important mechanisms of competence and self-sufficiency, discrimination in this admiration leads. The government needs to take an essential action in such an intervention of political parties and elections should be conducted free and fair.

Women should be involved in decision-making process in order to bring their demands on the national agenda. In order to safeguard empowerment of women in the political ground, the issue of reservation of 1/3rd of the seats for women in grass root levels of the organizations was taken up by different women's organizations and social thinkers. In rural areas political and legal awareness and rights among the women's are negligible. It is the duty of the state government and local administration along with NGO's, legal and political activists, academicians and stakeholders to educate the women about the political and legal issues and create the awareness about effective participation, special training and refresher courses for women representatives should be conducted from time-to-time. It gives them confidence and creates political awareness and power.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ahmad, S Nilofar. and Parveen (2008), "Women's Political Participation and Changing Pattern of Leadership in Rural Areas of Uttar Pradesh", The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. LXIX, No. 3, p.662.
- [2]. Bhagat, N (2004), Women in Grassroots Democracy, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi.

- [3]. Chandrasekhar Banasode et al (2017), "Women's Participation in Panchayat Raj Institution of Belgaum District in Karnataka State", International Journal of Research in Commerce, IT & Management, Volume 3 Issue 8 pp.112-114.
- [4]. Gadadhar Behera (2017), "Hindrances of Women Participation in Panchayati Raj Institution: A Study of Nilgiri ITDA Block of Balasore District in Odisha" Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 22, Issue 8, pp. 01-05.
- [5]. Hilary Rodham Clinton (1995), "Investment in Women and Children," Address at the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation in New Delhi on March 29, Span, vol. XXXVI, No.4, p.4.
- [6]. Raju, Naga A. and K.A.S.P Raju Rama (2011) Women in Indian Parliament- A Historical Review in D. retrieved from PullaRao, Political Dimensions of Women Empowerment. Ambala City: The Associated Publishers, p.143
- [7]. Rao, Pula D (2011), Women Empowerment Emerging Dimensions in the 21st Century. Ambala: The Associated Publishers, p.38.
- [8]. RupashriSinga et al (2002), "Women Participation in Panchayat Raj for improving health status: A Case for Uttar Pradesh", The Journal of Family Welfare, Vol:48, Special Issue, 202
- [9]. Sasireka R & Revathi Thomas (2018), Transformation and Status of Indian Women in the Modern Era, Universal Review-Journal, Volume 7, Issue XII, P.871
- [10]. Shukla, A.K (2007), Women Chief Ministers in Contemporary India, APH Publishing Co, New Delhi, pp.
- [11]. Singh, Mohinder (2003) Democratic Decentralisation in India after 73rd Amendment: Some Issues and Challenges, Ambika Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, p.257.
- [12]. Srivastava, A.K. (2009), "Bureaucracy and Corruption: Social Action, Vol. 59, No. 4, p. 364.
- [13]. Sudipta Biswas (2016), Empowerment Of Women Through Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Critical Analysis, Asian Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Studies, Vol.4, No.1
- [14]. Sunita Singh (2013), " A study on socioeconomic factors affecting women participation in gram panchayat activities in Haryana" Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis submitted to CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Haryana"
- [15]. Trivedi, B.R (2010) Constitutional Equality and the Women's Right, Cyber Tech Publication, New Delhi.

