



The Role of Women in Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike(BBMP)

Smt.Vanaja
Prof. K. J. Suresh

Abstract;

Women's political participation plays an important role in establishing the status of women in any particular country. Women are revered as an epitome of sacrifice and power in India. But when it comes to entrusting power into their hands. There is a hesitation from the male counterparts, as it poses a serious concern of overpowering their strengths and abilities. Women has excelled in all fields but her presence in politics makes the majority apprehensive. The reasons for this outlook can be contributed to the dominance of women in the area which is by and large become the Man's territory. The focus of this paper is women in urban local level governance. The author in this paper wishes to concentrate on the urban local bodies and the impact of the 33% reservation on the participation of the women in the local level politics. She also wishes to delineate the barriers of political participation. However, women remain seriously underrepresented in decision-making positions. The central objective of this study is to examine challenges and opportunities of women political participation in urban local bodies. Women to govern half of Bengaluru with 97 of 198 wards reserved for them.

Keywords: Empowerment; Women; Participation: Urban Governance; Challenges.

Introduction: - Women were from ages the nurturer, but what help can it do, when she cannot use her abilities to change the world. She had a lot of struggle to come to par with her masculine counterpart. But she is high on her emotional intelligence, the reason behind her excellence in all fields. But can our gendered society accept her empowerment? She is pushed into the dark and is incapacitated. Politics has become a man's word and Man's world. But in India, we have witnessed women rulers who were known for their righteous and transformational leadership from the ancient times up to the present. The success of the historical women send shivers down the spine of the men. They contemplated empowerment to women but relegated political empowerment to their pockets. They saw politics as a means to meet the desirable ends. Political vote banks was what they sought for. The autonomy granted in this area will be a hurdle to their victorious reign in the political arena.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the level of participation of women in urban local governance
2. To examine the challenges and obstacles, if any face by women representatives related to their empowerment.

Research Questions: What are the challenges or obstacles faced by women related to their empowerment?

Significance of the Study: Women empowerment is the need of the hour to ensure comprehensive growth in present society. Urban governance is an important platform for empowering women politically. In fact, women representatives are recognized as an important part of the urban local bodies. Unfortunately, not many women are coming forward to take part in local decision making bodies. Unless and until women representatives are empowered politically, urban governance cannot be strengthened. Thus, it is very important to study the empowerment of women through urban governance

Women will govern half of Bengaluru, with 97 of the total 198 wards in the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) council reserved for them. The question is what can women bring to the table that this male-dominated institution -which ran aground in its previous term, with a host of corruption charges against it -could not? The previous BJP-ruled corporation council had 66 seats for women.

Biocon chief Kiran MazumdarShaw, who heads B.PAC, welcomed the increased number of seats for women with a word of caution: "Let's hope it is not just proxy seats. There are many capable women civic leaders who can deliver change."

Three of the eight Whitefield wards -Dodda Nekkundi, Varthur and Bellandur -are reserved for women. "Some voters we spoke to in Varthur are afraid that they may get a benaami woman corporator," said Anjali Saini, a founding member of Whitefield Rising, a citizen movement. Saini believes that genuine women corporators would be more approachable. "Such candidates are very much there, but the onus is on political parties to find them."

Social activist and author Dr. Vasundhara Bhupathi agrees. "Public toilets, for example, is something women would look into. Also, issues such as lack of street lighting and general cleanliness will catch their attention. It is only natural for women to have a motherly approach," she said.

City-based Bangalore Development Committee has announced that its volunteers will campaign and support active women who want to contest. Kathyayini Chamaraj, executive trustee at CIVIC Bangalore, has written to all resident welfare associations and NGOs to ensure women with some record of service contest the election. "Husbands have been so audacious that they would preside over ward committee meetings in place of their wives who were elected as corporators!" she said.

They face the criticism of not talking in BBMP council, while not being available over phone to the citizens of their wards. This time they outnumber men corporators in BBMP. What to expect from women corporators in this council?

Women cooperators have outnumbered men in the new BBMP council. Pic: Akshatha M

"As a teacher, I have always practised discipline, cleanliness and hygiene. This does not satisfy me enough; I want to render my service across Bengaluru. Hold the vision, trust the process." These were the words of an aspiring corporator candidate who filled our Candidate Survey form, before BBMP elections. A B A-Tch graduate, she appeared to be a confident and strong woman in the candidate information form. The form was quite impressively filled.

Now she has won the election and is a corporator. With a hope to strike an interesting conversation with her about women corporators in BBMP, I rang her up. The phone number was given to us by BBMP, hence it must be her official number.

A man picked up the call. When I told him I am a journalist who wanted to talk to the corporator, he bluntly said, "I am the acting corporator. You can talk to me instead of her." Despite trying to convince him that I need to talk to her as she is the corporator, he insisted that I talk to him. Well, he was her husband!

Majority women corporators in council:

Women corporators have outnumbered men for the first time in the history of BBMP. Of the total 198 corporators, 101 are women and 97 are men. Thanks to 50 per cent women's reservation, a large number of women were able to contest in the recently held civic polls and made it to the power corridor.

Of the 100 elected BJP corporators, 61 (61%) are women, while only 39 are men. Even among 14 JD(S) corporators, 8 (57%) are women and only six are men. Congress has 76 corporators of which 30 are women.

Women corporators have often been stereotyped as proxies for men in the family, who have won the election with the backing of their husband or father. We wanted to see if these stereotypes are real, and found that they were mostly real, indeed.

Will this team of women corporators perform independently? How well-versed are they in handling the affairs of their wards? Is being a corporator more challenging for women than men? *Citizen Matters* tried to find answers from women corporators themselves.

During the course, we came across a few outspoken and confident women as well as a few second time winners who still were not vocal about their aspirations. Sometimes our expectations turned turtle. Like for instance in the case of the above-mentioned teacher-turned-corporator or another police constable-turned-corporator. In both the cases it was their husband / father who picked the call.

Police constable turned corporator

I called up this corporator who quit her police job to enter politics. Her father picked up the call. Even as I began explaining to him about my intention, he went on praising his daughter. “She has 12 years of work experience in the police department and she has worked closely with the BJP for six years. This will help to prove her mettle. She will work independently and I will not interfere in her works,” he assured.

If that is the case, why not give her phone number for official purpose, instead of your number, I asked. He replied, “We live under one roof. So people can call me and I will help them to address their problems. What is the need for calling her directly?”

Independent, to what extent?

“Yes, we are independent, at least many of us are,” asserts Gangambike Mallikarjun. This second-time corporator from Jayanagar ward agrees that it was indeed a bit challenging for her initially when she was elected as a corporator in 2010.

“For a woman corporator with willingness to learn and work, six months is sufficient to get the hang of administration. I used to refer to KMC Act book or interact with engineers for clearing doubts about administration. All we need is confidence and family support,” she adds.

So, for the confident and independent woman she is, does she take decisions related to the ward on her own or does she allow male members of her family to interfere in her work? “I take suggestions from them, but final decision is always mine,” she says.

Deputy Mayor Hemalatha Gopalaiah, who is the wife of JDS MLA Gopalaiah, too says that she will allow her husband to guide in her work. “Chief Minister guides the Mayor of Bengaluru, so what is wrong if my husband who happens to be an MLA tells me what is right and wrong. I will consider his opinion before taking decisions,” she affirms.

In fact, the opinion of almost all women corporators whom *Citizen Matters* spoke to was the same. They were okay with their husbands suggesting and guiding them. However, it’s not sure if this ‘guiding’ process also means taking decisions.

Bharati Ramachandra, a first time corporator from Hongasandra ward, is okay with husbands calling the shots instead of wives. “We are not just corporators, but also are housewives. Hence, we may not be in a position to respond to citizens all the time. That is one of the reasons why many women corporators give their husbands’ phone number for public use. Husbands will take the call whenever we are unable to respond quickly,” she contends.

Irshaad Begum, second time corporator from Niagara ward said that she and her husband will “work hand in hand.” “It was an unexpected and huge responsibility when I became corporator for the first time in 2010. So I was largely dependent on my husband. We used to work together for the ward,” she says. On asked how confident she is after five years of tenure, she says she is less hesitant now, but she will continue to take the help of her husband in addressing people’s problems.

Raising voice in the council.

In a mostly male-dominated council, will the increased number bring a change? Yes, say the women corporators. “We might have been alleged to be proxy candidates, but when it comes to raising voice in the council can husbands talk on our behalf? No, right? I will definitely talk in the council whenever the need arises,” promises Ulsoor corporator Mamatha Saravana.

While agreeing that there is little scope for women corporators to raise their voice in the council, Gangambike Mallikarajuna emphasizes the need for women corporators to make space for themselves. “Often the male corporators who occupy the first row grab the opportunity to speak and sideline the women. This should be stopped and equal opportunity should be given to all. I will make sure that I speak at the council if the officials fail to respond to the problems of our ward,” she says.

Women corporators’ plans for women

With majority of women corporators in the council, it is a good opportunity for them to bat for women’s issues. “We will certainly use the chance to address women’s safety issues. In the backdrop of increased number of women harassment and chain snatching cases, we have planned to install CCTV cameras in chosen areas of all wards,” says Deputy Mayor Hemalatha Gopalaiah.

Kaval Bhairasandra corporator Netra Narayan believes that making women financially independent is an urgent need. “I have already interacted with women in my ward and have asked them to form groups of 10 members each. These groups will be given vocational training, so that they can earn while at home,” she says.

Ramamandira ward corporator Deepa Nagesh has plans to organize workshops for women on grievance redressal mechanisms, women empowerment etc.

Training needed to hone administration skills:

Over 40 of the 61 BJP women corporators are first timers. Since a large number of women corporators are first-timers, they are in need of a training about administration and functioning of BBMP. "Training will help women to come out of the shades of their husbands or fathers," points out Netra Narayan.

All the women corporators we spoke to underlined the need for training in administration. "I have studied for UPSC and KPSC exams due to which I know a little about the laws and public administration. Since most of the women corporators are housewives, there is a need for training us," says Deepa Nagesh.

With that opinion, we asked the BJP and JD(S) leaders, if they intend to conduct trainings for women corporators. These two parties have highest number of women corporators. BJP's Bengaluru City President Subbanna said that the party has decided to conduct training for new corporators this month.

"Apart from educating them on how to behave in the council and taking up ward-wise works, we will also give them advice on how to balance family and work. The society has not yet completely accepted giving power to women, hence we want to ensure that it does not result in family rifts," he said. He also assured that women corporators from his party will give their own phone numbers and appear before public confidently in 2-3 months.

JD(S) City President Pratham Singh too said that they have plans to conduct workshop for first time corporators and they are waiting for the completion of the party office construction. "For the time being, I have decided to write to all the corporators about do's and don't's. I will specifically direct women corporators to share their personal numbers with public and also attend the work," he said.

Separate course for women corporators

Venkatesh Kadagadkai, Director, State Institute for Urban Development, Mysuru which conducts training programmes for corporators, said that so far he has not received any request from the BBMP to conduct training. "After 2010 election, we had organised a three-day training for first time corporators as per their request. We are ready to train them even this time provided they ask for it," he said.

The training module comprises of talks on KMC Act, Solid Waste Management, procedure for convening meetings, engineering test procedures for roads and transport etc. Apart from the common module for corporators, the Institute also has a separate module for women corporators which deals with issues of gender sensitivity, addressing grievances etc.

The table shows the number of women corporators elected from different political parties in the recent election.

Party	Female	Male	Total	Female %
BJP	61	39	100	61 %
INC	30	46	76	39 %
JD(S)	8	6	14	57 %
SDPI	—	1	1	0
Independent	2	5	7	29 %
Total	101	97	198	

Women participation in politics is pivotal to the social, economic and democratic growth of any nation. That is why it is pertinent to embrace all forms of positive measures that will stimulate as well as sustain women's interest in political participation. One of these ways is implementation of quota allotment reserved for women. The problem of making laws and not implementing them is affecting virtually all sectors and this has also fast-tracked underdevelopment for women in politics. It is important that percentages seats in government as recommended by different notable bodies be adopted and thoroughly implemented. In addition, to sustain women's participation in politics, there is the need for unparalleled training and retraining with a unique innovative approach to impact knowledge and equip them with required resources for optimal productivity. With knowledge comes power and information for liberation; information cutting across all spheres of political participation, to motivate, support and encourage. This social sensitization should be extended to the general public as it would correct various stereotypical notions that could cause retrogression in women political participation, Civil city organizations are caught in the

web of encouraging and equipping women to participate in politics. In the same vein, active grooming and mentoring will go a long way in advancing women political participation and representation. Proper coaching and orientation would birth attitudinal change in women and break them from the patriarchal shackles imposed by the society. Some women are definitely interested in contributing their quota of proper representation in governance but they need concrete escapism to stay above the social limitations. Therefore, a mentorship scheme would position them in the right perspective to achieving this feat. This 74th Amendment of the Indian Constitution ushered in a new era in the democratic process in India. It not only provided constitutional status to the municipal bodies but also provided an enabling environment for women to take part directly in the process of local self-governance. It brought women to the forefront of city development. The 74th CAA has laid foundations for the emergence of strong bottom up women leadership who could climb the ladder to occupy positions of power at the state and national levels. Our country saw an increase in the number of EWR's in comparison with the previous years. It is often easier for women to participate in local than at the national level, because of the flexible eligibility criteria's and the local government is the closest to the women's sphere of life, and easier to combine with rearing children. It serves as a springboard to national politics, by developing capacities and gaining experiences. Local level politics can be more interesting to women as they are well acquainted with their community, the line of Argument for Women's Political Participation Politics by and large has become a man's world. There are has been different arguments to assert her participation in the political sphere.

Barriers to Women's participation in politics These include:

Fundamental Inequality While women are bestowed with the constitutional rights they are not seen as equal, their roles are limited to their reproductive and household activities, Politics and community affairs are seen as incompatible for them. In many countries women face obstacles such as culture and tradition (the view that men are superior to women), religion, political turmoil, violence, money, workloads and lack of opportunities. Demographic statistics, particularly in the

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike is the fourth largest Municipal Corporation in India, after the city corporations that administer Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai. The BBMP is responsible for infrastructural assets of the Greater Bangalore Metropolitan area, spread across 741 km (square), with a population of 6.8 million.

Its roles and responsibilities include the "orderly development of the city" — zoning and building regulations, health, hygiene, licensing, trade and education, as well as quality of life issues such as lung spaces, water bodies, parks and greenery.

While welcoming the majority women members in the BBMP, my personal feeling is that not all of them are Council-Savvy and need to be thoroughly trained to access working knowledge of governing system of BBMP. How many of them know about quorum, resolutions? Political parties and family members of leaders are making gullible womenfolk scapegoats for their party / personal needs. Invariably, while council sessions are held, family members of the councilor will be sitting at the back of the members or even next to them (with understandings) and help their relative to take part in the proceedings of the council meetings. Same is the case in Gram Sabhas under the Panchayat system in villages. Many women members are found in tears during such meetings due to the onslaught of oral and even insinuating remarks passed either by their colleagues in the opposition or by male members. It is a pitiable situation they will be putting into themselves. We feel sorry for them and if they have to overcome and prove themselves that they are not fallible but capable, they must make up their mind, learn things, face the world of chauvinism, overcome such situations and prove themselves. They do not need sympathy. It is our duty to empathize with them. This does not apply to all the members; some are very knowledgeable, strong, committed and are highly capable of being worthy members. They also must help their colleagues to face the world. Another plus point of having women members is that they are less corruptible and are capable of being clean handed in dealing with public affairs. . .

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) (Eng: Greater Bangalore Municipal Body), is the new administrative body responsible for the civic and infrastructural assets of the city of Bangalore, India. It was formed in 2007 by merging 100 wards of the erstwhile Bangalore Mahanagara Palike, along with 7 City Municipal Councils(CMC) (Rajarajeshwari, Dasarahalli, Bommanahalli, Krishnarajapuram, Mahadevapura, Byatarayanapura and Yelahanka), one Town Municipal Council (Kengeri) and 111 villages around Bangalore.

The BBMP represents the third level of government, (the Central government and State Government being the first two levels). Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike is run by a city council. The city council comprises elected representatives, called “corporators”, one from each of the wards (localities) of the city. Elections to the council are held once every 5 years, with results being decided by popular vote. Members contesting elections to council represent one of more of the state’s political parties. However, elections to the newly-created body are yet to be held, due to delays in delimitation of wards and finalizing voter lists. There are expected to be about 150 wards, up from the 100 wards of the old Bangalore Mahanagara Palike.

Roles & Responsibilities:

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike is the fourth largest Municipal Corporation in India, after the city corporations that administer Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai. The BBMP is responsible for infrastructural assets of the Greater Bangalore Metropolitan area, spread across 741 km (square), with a population of 6.8 million.

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BMP (Bangalore Mahanagara Palike) has killed over 25 lakhs (2,5 million) stray dogs from 1939 to 1999 for population management and rabies-eradication.

Structure

A mayor and deputy mayor of the council are also elected for a period of 1 year, though not by popular vote. The post of the mayor and deputy mayor are filled through a quota system to a Scheduled Castes and Tribes candidate or to an Other Backward Class female candidate from among the elected Councilors. However, in the absence of an elected body, the BBMP is run by an Administrator and a Commissioner, who are appointed by the State Government. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike is responsible for civic and infrastructural requirements of the city. It often works in conjunction with other civic bodies such as the Agenda for Bengaluru Infrastructure Development Task Force (ABIDe) and the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) to design and implement civic and infrastructural projects.

Conclusion:

Women’s participation in decision making bodies plays a very significant role in the process of enhancing women’s participation in public life. Reservation policy for women in local governance has provided women a chance to participate in political arena. It would lay the way for acquiring political power at the local level and enabling participation in decision and policy making at the higher levels. Women would be a part in the project of planning, execution and implementation of development schemes if they were empowered politically. But, still lots of work have to be done related to the women empowerment in a plural society like India; if history’s longest oppression is to be seriously tackled.

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