

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS

Dr.B.Nagamani,

Dr.V.S.K.G.D.C. V.S.P.

Abstract

The women's participation in panchayat raj institutions has been tremendously increased from 1990. All the state governments have encouraged the women to participate in the local politics. Keeping on this view the author has formulated following objectives.

Objectives:

1. To focus the need of women's participation in local politics
2. To emphasize the government's encouragement of women to participate in the elections.
3. To pursue the women to raise their voice in the local bodies.
4. To draw the attention of the political society towards the problems of women in local bodies.

Methodology:

The researcher has adopted doctrinaire approach to complete her article. The researcher has consulted various books go's letters available in form of both primary and secondary sources. The researcher has consulted some of the experts of panchayat raj system. The researcher has attended gram sabhas to watch the role of women's to be performed.

Hypothesis:

The researcher has formulated of hypothesis on which she has conducted her study in the initial stages of the enforcement of the constitution women have less representation. After the observation of international decade for women in the beginning of women 1990, 33 percent reservation is provided which has been increased to 50 percent in the early days of 21st century. On the bases of these conclusions the study has been made.

Significance:

Present study has its significance in the modern days. Women's representation in the local bodies has been increased. The women's participation in the politics is welcomed by all the sections of the society. Number of voters among the women has been raised. The political skills among the women have been increased. Does present topic got its own importance. Theme of the paper:

The women are being elevated to high positions from the last decades of 20th century. But the participation of women the democratic process at grass-root level should be strengthened. The women participation is very low in the elections of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) right from 1960 to 1990. With a view to strengthen the Panchayat Raj Institutions 73rd Amendment Act has been passed by the union parliament. The 73rd amendment has changed the composition and financial position of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs).

Utilizing the provision that not less than one-third seats need to be reserved for women, some States had given a slightly higher quota for women. One has to however, ask whether this was due to recognition of women's power and contribution to social development of rural India or merely the assumption that women would be easily elected and could be later manipulated by the men, party and the community. In West Bengal, it is particularly interesting to note that in the 1993 Act while more seats were reserved for women as members, no reservation was made for women chairpersonship in any of the three tiers.

With so many elections having taken place since Independence, how much political awareness have the women acquired over the years? The recent elections to the Lok Sabha and Assemblies have witnessed that the high turnout of women voters had been responsible for the victory of AIADMK led by Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu in 1991 and TDP led by N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh in December 1994. The experience of many organizations which have undertaken such awareness camps is somewhat varies. Most of the women's organizations have reported a very enthusiastic response from the rural women. Their turnout in large numbers in these meetings clearly disproved the skepticism that women were not interested in politics or were diffident about it. The women themselves seemed to believe that illiteracy or social and customary restrictions were no disqualifications for standing as candidates.

'Democratic Decentralization' or panchayati raj as it is popularly known in India, aims at making the democracy real by bringing millions of people into the functioning of their representative government at the grassroots level. The main responsibility of panchayati raj institutions is to accelerate the pace of development and involve all people, both male and female in this process so that the felt needs of the people and their development aspirations are fulfilled. Involvement and participation of women in PRIs is essential for efficient, equitable and sustainable people-centred development. Democracy,

governance and gender are therefore interrelated. Democracy is a form of political system, governance is an institution to implement its principles, and gender is a part of governance, to be ensured by equal participation of men and women.

The passage of the Constitutional 73rd amendment Act 1992 marks a new era in federal democratic set-up of the country and provides Constitutional status to the Panchayat Raj institutions. The 73rd amendment, introduced in 1993, proposed that 30 per cent of government seats be set aside for their as a means of further guaranteeing women's representation in panchayat raj institutions. Similarly the 74th Amendment introduced the similar reservation for women in municipal council and Municipal Corporation in towns and urban areas. However such affirmative action are lacking at the state and central levels. Almost all states in India have implanted 73rd Amendment and provided 50% reservation in all urban and local bodies.

The Panchayat Raj as a system of self-governance was introduced for the first time in 1959 following the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report that recommended a three-tier structure of local self-government consisting of gram panchayats at the village level, taluka Panchayat samitis at the sub-district level, and Zillaparishads at the district level.

The provisions for women in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment are:

- To provide a three-tier system of Panchayat Raj Institution for all states having a population of over 20 lakh.
- To hold Panchayat elections every five years.
- To provide reservations of seats for women, SC and ST not less than 33.3 per cent.

But recently all states in India including Andhra Pradesh have enhanced women reservation upto 50% though it is not mandatory. In Andhra Pradesh all panchayats have adopted this rule. With this the women participation in the rural politics has been increased. Since the women are backward in Indian society due to lack of political economic and social benefits. So the women have to raise their voice regarding their problems in the legislatures and local bodies. For this purpose the Government of India decided that women should be given reservations to fight for the equal opportunities including political power. Women's participation in local bodies is appreciated by the present day political society. Their representation in the politics is necessary as their number is less in the representative bodies.

The participation of women in the Panchayat Raj institutions, which were considered to be the most effective instruments for realizing the goals of economic betterment and social justice for the least privileged, was felt essential. The CSWI (Society for Children and Women in India) report suggested the establishment of all-women panchayats at village level, with autonomy and resources of their own for the management and administration of welfare and development programmes for women and children, as a transitional measure to break through the traditional attitudes that inhibit most women in articulating their problems or participating actively in the local bodies. Active involvement of women in Panchayat Raj institutions has been recognized as a step towards equality. The Committee on the Panchayati Raj institutions, 1978 recommended the reservation of two seats for women in panchayats and to co-opt women in case they did not come through elections. It is also suggested that a committee of women be set up within panchayats to operate specific programmes for women and children. Unfortunately, the co-option of two women members in panchayats, has not brought any perceptible impact on women's participation in the Panchayati Raj bodies. It seemed as if Co-option is done only in letter and not in the spirit of getting the women involved in panchayat activities.

It is widely believed that enhanced representation is likely to remove the isolation of women and give them visibility and strength to be more assertive and to take part in decision-making. The women representation in decision making bodies is very low. There is no uniform law to provide reservations to the women in local bodies. The local body is the subject of state list. Hence the States have a choice to provide reservation to the women in their respective states. Some states have provided 33.3% reservation to the women in local bodies through the executive order. Some states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal etc., even enhanced the reservation to the women at the local bodies upto 50%. But all the states are making efforts to enhance the reservations to the women in local bodies.

The introduction of 'Democratic Decentralization' (democratic decentralization is the division of power between the center, state and local bodies) resulted in the establishment of Panchayat. But in most of the Panchayat Raj legislations enacted by different State Governments, women were to be coopted under special category. This did not result into the development of village leadership among women and their participation in the decision-making process. In this connection the committee on the Status of Women in the Panchayat Raj Institutions has not been effectively either in articulating women's needs, or in mobilizing women for adequate participation. Taking note of this fact the Committee on panchayat Raj Institutions recommended:

- (a) increasing representation of women in these institutions; (b) establishing a special committee of women Panchayat members and powers and funds to ensure that the decisions are made by women themselves in on priorities and choice in welfare and development programmes specifically for women and children; (c) provision of institutional finance and budget support for rural industrialization projects for women, and (d) strengthening the constructive decision-making and managerial roles; (e) Mahila Mandals to ensure full access to development resources and services. The Panchayat Raj System can be regarded as a training centre for the women to participate in the politics. The village is a small unit. Face to face contacts are possible by which the women can understand the feelings and their whims and fancies. As per the interests and disinterests of the people the policies would be made at village. The women can part play in the Grama Sabhas. The women Surpanches have played a vital role in the development of the villages.

It is a matter of pride that the Andhra Pradesh government has implemented the not only 33.3% reservation and 73rd amendment as per the directions of central government. But also increased the reservation to 50% in 2008 under Article 243-D inserted in the Constitution by 73rd Amendment deals with reservation of seats and political offices for women in PRIs. The main features of Article 243-D are

One third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats maybe allotted by rotation to different constituencies in panchayats(Art.243-D(i));

One-third of the total number of seats reserved for women under Cl.

(i) shall be reserved for women belonging to SCs & STs (Art.243-D(2));

One third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayat at each level shall be reserve.

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4. Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj 1965.