



## Democratic Participation and Women Political Empowerment in India

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### ABSTRACT

*In India, today, women appear to rule the roost. India as a nation is revered in a feminine form i.e. 'the Bharat Mata'. Women plays a very important role in the development of the country. But it is noted that women are lagging behind in education, poverty, health and gender discrimination. Gender discrimination prevails in almost all areas, be it social, cultural, economic or educational. An effective remedy for these evils needs to be sought in order to ensure the Right to Equality guaranteed by the Constitution of India, to the fairer sex. Gender equality facilitates the empowerment of women. Since education begins at home, the upliftment of women would be accompanied by the development of the family, the society and in turn, would lead towards a holistic development of the nation.*

*Women empowerment in India is dependent on different variables that include in rural & urban educational status, social status, employment etc., Policies on women's empowerment exist in the areas of health, education, economic, gender based violence and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. One of the major reasons for this gap in implementation of the policies is the existence of patriarchal structure in India.*

**KEYWORDS :** Women, Democracy, Empowerment, Politics, PRIs

### Introduction

Empowerment is the central issue that has been pervading the development debate after 1980s. Improving Dalit women status and empowering them would go a long way in accomplishing egalitarian gender relations in society. Women who are hitherto constrained by their structure for their self-expression constitute the target of most of the development programmes, which aim at bringing them into the mainstream of the development. India with its alarming growth of population, grinding poverty, widespread illiteracy, has not only been successful in achieving the place of a stable partner in the global competition, but also can boast of significant advances made in the fields of science, technology, biotechnology, communication and others with its capable human resources. In spite of remarkable advancements in various fields, there are other areas where India is lagging as a nation. A major cause of poverty among rural people in India is lack of access to productive assets and financial resources. High levels of illiteracy, inadequate health care and extremely limited access to social services are common among poor rural people. (Bandyopadhyay, K.R, 2007).

Since the day of Independence to present day the development of women in India there is no much change and development. The women are facing problems in one way or other in the society. They are facing problems in one way or another in the society from the upper caste at workplace, education, women harassment, violence etc., Empowerment of these section people at all levels is very much essential. Empowerment of women from these communities in Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered as a means to good governance and 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment was effected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantage section of the society like schedule caste, schedule tribes and women. Women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country. Participation of women in political arena is integral to the advancement of women. Their political participation means not only using the right to vote, but also power-sharing, co-decision-making, and co-policy-making at all levels of governance of the State. Women's equal status in every sphere is inextricably linked to country's progress and development.

### Empowerment Programmes through Development Policies

India has allocated six percent to seven percent of budgetary expenditures to its antipoverty programmes. The initiatives have supported mainly food subsidies, subsidized credit, improvement of rural infrastructure and rural employment schemes. Targets of the Government of India's Eleventh National Development Plan (2007-2012) include: i) improving access to and the quality of essential public services for poor rural people, including health and education,

by implementing and improving specific programmes and involving the voluntary sector, ii) creating a broader base for income growth by doubling the agricultural growth rate to four percent and iii) harmonizing the government's various selfemployment programmes, giving special attention to scheduled castes, tribes and minorities and especially to the economic empowerment of women in those groups. (Planning Commission, 2007a). Empowerment is the enhancement of human capability to intervene in policy and decision making in the public sphere. It means enabling the people to influence public policy and to take decisions in matters concerning them. It necessarily points out that empowerment through democratic participation refers to the capacity building of the poor so that they can voice their choices and exercise their options which are essential conditions of democracy and freedom. (Planning Commission, 2007b). Therefore, development inherently means democratic participation and empowerment.

### Democratic Participation

Democratic participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It is increasingly realized that local democracy could play an important role in promoting development. Article 40 of the Indian Constitution states that the State shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. Thus the efforts to institutionalize the participation of citizens in decision making, development planning and management by giving more powers and harnessing the utilization of local resources were realized through the democratic decentralization of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment. As per the recommendations of Balwantrai Mehta Committee (Government of India, 1957), 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment introduced three tier system of Panchayat Raj system from the village to the district level functionally interdependent with multilevel linkages. The institutions envisaged were Zilla Parishad at the district level, Panchayat Samitis at Block level and Gram Panchayat at the village level. The above mentioned rural decentralization is regarded as a process through which powers, functions, responsibilities and resources are transferred from Central government to local governments. The Constitution of India has spelt out its intention to the ruling political governments to utilize these democratic local governments not only as instruments of development but also as platforms for fighting against rural vested interests and raising the hopes of the people.

The Act also spelt out to use the forum to: (1) discuss and review all development problems and programmes of the village, (2) select beneficiaries for beneficiary oriented programmes, (3) plan for the development of the village economy and its people which included minimum needs, welfare and production oriented activities. Attempts

have been made in recent times to strengthen PRIs by adopting measures to promote good governance and accountability through enhanced people's participation, citizen orientation, responsiveness, improved service delivery, improved financial management and greater downward accountability. The PRI system has been steadily evolving in the State and there are constant efforts to ensure that the powers of the Panchayat Raj bodies are not eroded and more functions are devolved to them in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Constitution. Many socio-economic development programmes have been channelized through these democratically created institutions because one of the main objectives of rural decentralization is to regenerate the rural economy and it mainly depends on the employment generation programmes as employment is one of the instruments of empowerment. Therefore, local governments have been important channels through which many employment generation programmes are implemented.

### **Empowerment of Women :**

In present day context empowerment of women is very much essential. Women in India are lagging behind in the areas of education, health and agricultural, financially when compared with other developing countries. They are not able to take self decisions in concerned to the their family and society problems. To overcome this issues the empowerment of women especially in the rural areas is very much essential.

Women can only be empowered if they have enough educational and employment opportunities. Achieving equality in education is critical if women are to be fully engage in society and in the global economy. The girls education is essential for promoting sustainable development in present days. The rate of urbanization in India according to 2011 census is 31.16% and rural is 68.84% of the country. Therefore empowerment of rural women should be a particular concern for the country. Urban women and, in particular, urban educated women enjoy relatively higher access to economic opportunities, health and education and experience less domestic violence. Further the level of women's education also has a direct implication on maternal mortality rates, nutrition and health indicators among children. The literacy rate when compared with men in India is very less. As per the reports the literacy rate in 2011 of men is 82.14% and women is 65.46% the gap is 16.68%.

**Social Empowerment** - Create an enabling environment through adopting various policies and programmes for development of women, besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potential.

**Economic Empowerment** – Ensure provision of training, employment and income generation activities with both forward and backward linkages with the ultimate objective of making all women economically independent and self reliant. Gender Justice – Eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus enable women to enjoy not only de jure but also de facto rights and fundamental

**Political Empowerment** - Political empowerment is very much essential for ruling over them selfs. Women must come forward to take participation in the politics. women constitute only 17 per cent of legislature. Women's reservations will help those coming from influential political families. The ordinary women folk cannot avail this facility. This argument is partly true. But one should keep in mind the simple truth that law alone cannot change the society. But a conducive legislative atmosphere is essential for a progressive social change. It is true that influential people would utilize these reservations at the beginning. But in due course political leadership will emerge. This is also the experience with scheduled caste and scheduled tribe reservations. At the initial stage landlords have fielded their henchmen and enjoyed power by proxy. But the things have changed substantially over a period of time.

### **Political Empowerment of Women through PRIs :**

Empowerment of women from these communities in Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered as a means to good governance and 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment was effected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantage section of the society like schedule caste, schedule tribes and women. Women constitute more or less than half of the

population of any country. Participation of women in political arena is integral to the advancement of women. Their political participation means not only using the right to vote, but also power-sharing, co-decision-making, and co-policy-making at all levels of governance of the State. Women's equal status in every sphere is inextricably linked to country's progress and development.

Since the PRIs have potential to start the process of women empowerment from the village level, it can change the social scenario of the village. The PRIs provide village women, the opportunities for leadership and to take part directly in the decision making in the process of development. It will also help in managing the violence against women. Women are changing the governance in India. They are being elected to local councils in an unprecedented numbers as a result of amendments to the constitution that mandate the reservation of seats for women in local governments. If the overall scenario of Panchayats was largely despairing, another disquieting aspect is that almost one half of rural population was virtually kept out of Panchayat arena. In the traditional Caste Panchayats, Village Panchayats and in the British Scheme of local governments women remained entirely excluded.

### **Role of Panchayat Raj Institutions**

The gender representation in the local self government or the PRIs has been more than satisfactory. Though only one-third of seats were reserved for women by the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment, the actual representation is much more at all levels. The percentages of women at district, tehsil and village levels of Panchayat are 41, 43 and 40 respectively. Though there is a belief that these women leaders are only proxies for men, yet these women gradually become independent. In fact they have begun to contest from unreserved seats also. It has led to empowerment of not only those women who are in the Panchayats but also in the rural areas of India. However much more needs to be done to empower women in local self governments so that they can play a more proactive role in decision making and by their very presence encourage more and more women to come forth and demand their rights. For this capacity building is required through knowledge and education and training in diverse areas pertaining to women- such as laws and rights, programs for women etc.

### **Telangana State : Political Participation of Women**

Telangana is a newly formed state bifurcated from the united Andhra Pradesh on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014. The Telangana state is backward educationally, unemployment, economically and politically. It is very much essential to empower the citizens in these areas. Women empowerment is very much important for the newly formed Telangana state. Political empowerment of women in this newly formed state is essential. Not only in the area of political but also in the areas of educational, economical and agriculturally.

Telangana State government had successfully completed 1 year, But even today there is no chance for Women Political Leaders (MLAs) in the Cabinet Ministry. Even though most of the women who elected are educated and politically strong the TRS Government did not give any chance for the women in the cabinet. This shows the difference between the men and women in the politics.

There is a need of Political Empowerment of Women in Telangana State, So that they can also take place in the Cabinet Ministry and involve in decision making of policies and programmes for the welfare of the state and women.

### **Issues for lack of Political Participation of women in Telangana State :**

#### **1. Freedom of Speech and Expression**

The Constitution provided with the right to freedom of expression to every citizen but most of the women are unable to use this right in the meetings. Mostly women were not found meek or mute, they usually raised their point and view in the Panchayat meetings. They were not free to put forth their view points.

#### **2. Gender disparity**

Gender disparities was found to be the major reasons for not entertaining their view points as male members view points were preferred in male headed Panchayats. Most of the women are unable to express their views in front of the male members.

### **3. Non-Motivation by other members**

Majority women leaders are facing the Problems in motivation from their family members and society. Due to lack of motivation they are away from the political participation

### **4. Non- Cooperation**

The women representatives are facing the problem of non-cooperation from the upper community authorities towards the dalit women. The women representative thus felt hurt for not having been heard or supported and even if they presented befitting and relevant arguments.

### **5. Women's reservation**

The reservation for women is the most important factor that motivates and facilitates women to come forward into political life through Panchayat Raj Institutions serving in their own village.

### **6. Political interest:**

Women who are having the interest to serve the society and politics are entering into politics through PRIs. But due to domination of men and higher community they are unable to come up in politics especially women belonging to deprived communities like SC & STs.

### **Suggestions :**

After a this study, it is noted that most of the women are not participating in the political issued from the grassroot level ( Gram-panchayat). Involvement of women politicians in decision making of laws and policies is very much important in present situation. The government should not show any difference among the politicians men & women in the state.

- Women representatives must be given chance in the cabinet.
- Electoral reforms should provide for state funding for women contesting for elections to Parliament, state assemblies, urban local bodies and PRIs
- Greater attention needs to be placed on how central and state policies can promote local governments to monitor the meaningful participation of women on the PRI
- Increased resources need to be placed in the political skill- building of women within the PRI.
- Greater efforts should be made towards the inclusion of poor and other excluded women on state planning boards and commissions.

Allocate funding for time- series evaluation of the impact of women on the PRI and what policy and other contextual factors promote and enable women's political participation

### **Conclusion**

In today context women political empowerment in politics is very much essential. So that she can develop the society in a better way. Women empowerment the physical presence of women members in panchayat meetings was widespread, but majority neither spoke, nor cast their votes. A majority has attended meetings after prior preparations. Only a small proportion participated in panchayat deliberations, and majority did not feel capable to undertake panchayat work. To stop violence's against them, it is very much essential that they must empower towards sustainable development in achieving their rights. By fulfilling its national and international obligations to protect women from violence, complemented by adequate focus on improving the socio-economic conditions of women. The goal of women's empowerment will not be accomplished by reservations alone, and there are a number of obstacles identify the women politicians and give them good opportunity in the politics.