



## Empowerment of Women Through Decentralised Governance with Reference to Karnataka

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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper analyses the role of decentralized governance in bringing the empowerment of women and the position of women in Panchayat Raj institutions in Karnataka.*

*Women in India have made a considerable progress in almost all areas of life but they still have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male-dominated society. The patriarchal Indian society resists the progress of its women. It is unfortunate to know that India is positioned at the 29th rank among 146 countries across the globe on the basis of Gender Inequality Index. With the help of reservation and participation in decision making through politics there has been amelioration in the position of women, but their true empowerment is still awaited.*

**KEYWORDS :** Empowerment, Decentralization, Governance, Panchayat Raj, Local-self

### Introduction:

Swami Vivekananda says that, "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved, It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing". Therefore, the inclusion of Women Empowerment as one of the prime goals in the eight Millennium Development Goals calls attention to the relevance of this fact. Thus, in order to achieve the status of a developed country, India needs to transform its women force into an effective human resource and this is possible only through the empowerment of women.

Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Women empowerment does not mean 'deifying women' rather it means replacing patriarchy with parity.

### Empowerment of in Decentralized Governance:

According to Rajani Kothari, "Decentralized Governance could be defined as governance in which people have the ultimate authority to take decisions since there is no direct sharing of power along the federal dimensions"<sup>1</sup>

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act which came into effect on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1993, is a significant milestone in the history of parliamentary democracy in India. Article 40 of the Directive Principle of State Policy directs that the state should take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with powers and responsibilities to enable them to function as the units of self – governments. This led further discussion regarding enhancing women's participation in formal political system and adopting reservation policy to increase women's representation in all elected bodies. Because "there can be no true democracy, no true people's participation in governance and development without the equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and levels of decision making: and the goals of development cannot be achieved attained without women's participation ,not only in development process, but also in shaping its goals"<sup>2</sup>

In order to strengthen democratic politics and to ensure women's empowerment, in Karnataka the new Panchayat Raj Act was introduced providing 33% reservation to women in Panchayat Raj Institutions to improve the quality of their functioning and provide social justice by for their socio-economic and political development. "The new Act has come into force from 10<sup>th</sup> May,1993 to establish three- tier Panchayat Raj system in the state with elected bodies at the village, taluk and district levels"<sup>3</sup> This act was enacted in accordance with 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional amendment Act. In addition to reservation in local governance in Karnataka the department of Social Welfare was set up to deal with welfare programmes for women, children and the disabled of both sexes. The emphasis is on empowering women in

becoming self sufficient and economically independent. This would help women realize their full potential and make a better life for themselves and their family members. "The issue of women's empow-

erment is not concerned with a group of people we like to be benefited but with a type of social injustice we want to see eliminated"<sup>4</sup> Thus a workable solution could be to put economic, political and educational power within the reach of women with good guidance and support so that they enjoy meaningfully right to development and human dignity. Hence, "if men and women make different choices as to have to develop what economist call 'human capital' i.e their skills and abilities including their formal education and job training this is not due to innate gender prejudices and skill. e.g., that men are more competitive and aggressive and women more submissive. Rather it is realistic option that society and individual circumstance provide."<sup>5</sup>

Democratic politics has no meaning unless women actively participate in decision making process at local governance bodies. Because they constitute almost half of the population of Karnataka, according to 2011 census.

Women's political participation is a means to empowerment. "Political participation is means not only using the right to vote but also power sharing, profit sharing, co-decision making and co-policy making at all levels of government and within party structure"<sup>6</sup> In the absence of such an active participation there can be no equality and no true democracy. To strengthen democracy women should have equal share in all its activities. Democracy acquires its real meaning with women's equal participation in politics. This enables them to maximize their potentials and to contribute to democratic governance.

The main purpose of decentralization of democratic governance is to devolve the power to the people and involve them in decision making process. Thus the Panchayat Raj institution in Karnataka has contributed a lot towards the empowerment of people in general, particularly women's empowerment. In order to strengthen democratic politics, the process of decentralization was started in India by appointing "Balawant Rai Mehta Committee in 1957, Ashok Mehta 1977, C.H. Hanumanth Rao Committee in 1982, G.V.K. Rao Committee in 1985, Laxmi Singhvi Committee in 1986, P.K. Thungan Committee in 1989 and Hariyal Singh Khara Committee in 1990"<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, many committees were appointed in different states to recommend structural changes in Panchayat Raj institutions. Panchayat Raj Act was passed in Karnataka in 1993. As a result of this nearly 35% of women got an opportunity to in the local governing institutions. The exercise of power by women at grass root level contribute to women's empowerment and leads to transformation of the existing political which is dominated by patriarchal values.

### Position of women in Local Governance in Karnataka:

The position of women in local governance in Karnataka is worse than men not only in terms of sex ratio, literacy rate, and wage earnings but also in terms of access to power structure and decision making process. Women's access to political opportunities and participation and exercise of powers in decision making process are hindered by patriarchal system. Though the "UN convention on the elimination of

all forms of discrimination against women are adopted in December 1979, became law in September 1981<sup>8</sup>. Gender Inequality is a peculiar type of social, political and distributive injustice maintained in Karnataka as in other parts of India. Similarly personal liberty of women in local governance is considerably impaired by patriarchal values resulting in woman's seclusion from public life and their lack of political power. Though the empowerment of women and gender equality are the eight point millennium development goals at UN millennium summit held at Dublin, gender equality is still a mirage in Karnataka.

Women often face legal discrimination and restrictions that prohibit their participation in many spheres of life. Majority of women in local governance are not aware of their rights and duties. The knowledge of rights is of no use unless they are enforced. Gender discrimination often begins from tradition, rigid attitude and wrong interpretation of religion which hinder progress of women. Women are perceived as subordinate to men. They are conditioned for the roles as wives and mothers, while men are trained in skill and encouraged to develop the self confidence required for public life. Thus women often lack the self confidence and skills to function in the local governance such as ability to speak up and voice their opinions. Violence against women, psychological and physical, is a major obstacle which prevents women from active participation in politics. Due to illiteracy rural women have to depend on men. Women lack legal literacy also. The process of empowerment of women in Karnataka in political bodies aims at giving women proper position not only in governing bodies but also at domestic front also by enabling them with decision making power. Women hesitate to contest for seats in Panchayats. Many a times they contest because of the force of family members and relatives. Though many contest and win they have no knowledge of political responsibilities. In many places meetings are attended by husbands of the women members. Hence the purpose of reservation is not served. There is a necessity of leadership training for women.

There is a connection between human rights and women empowerment. Unless women enjoy basic human rights like right to dignity and right to development in social and political field, the reservation in political bodies does not serve any purpose and strengthen democratic politics in the country. Therefore at the grass root level women should be mobilized effectively. They should be educated and made aware of their rights and duties. They should also be sensitized towards means and skills of political action, in this process women will be enabled to perform their roles as politicians.

### Conclusion:

In Hindi language the word for woman is 'mahila' which means 'the strong one'. There is a need to acknowledge this strength of women. A country or a community in which women are not honoured cannot be called civilized. Women are deprived of their rights and development. Women need to voice their opinions and fight for their rights. Then only the problems like gender inequality, human rights etc will be solved.

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