



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Political Science

THE GRASSROOT REALITY: WOMEN ROLE IN POLITICS.

KEY WORDS: panchayati raj, social justice, grass root, gender

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ABSTRACT

Political participation of women is an essential tool for empowering them with their abilities and capabilities. In India, there have been an improvement over the years but still majority of women lag behind in political activities than men. In independent India, the bundle of rights, immunities and privileges are conferred upon women. Both at national and as well as at state level initiatives are being taken in the form of statutory provisions. This paper covers the aspect of women's role in political arena. With the enactment of 73rd amendment in our country a women gets opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator, a decision maker or a good leader. These grassroot institutions act as nurseries for upcoming good women leaders. Increased political accountability to women comes out only from increasing their number amongst decision makers. It must be linked to improved democratic governance overall.

INTRODUCTION

As the world's largest democracy, india has taken important steps to open opportunities for marginalized groups, including women, We reaffirm the power of gender roles and social norms to shape behavior. This contributes to our understanding of how quotas mandating women's representation on local governing bodies—the Panchayati Raj Institutions are playing out for the individuals who comprise them and for the policymaking process. We need strategies to achieve equality and democracy where girls will not need a quota system to achieve parity in their local, state and national governing bodies. There is growing momentum among governments and civil society to foster and ensure women's participation and leadership in the political arena, and specifically within local governance structures.

Establishing quotas for women's representation at different levels of government has become a strategic tactics in many countries. We confirm the value of gender quotas as an important tool for moving us toward our goal of gender responsive governance. So far as the mere presence of women cannot transform patriarchal frameworks. We need strategies to achieve equality and democracy where girls will not need a quota system to achieve parity in their local, state and national governing bodies. Yet we find that the simple adage of "add women and stir" is insufficient on its own .Women cannot be solely expected to carry the burden of transforming the governing process into a gender responsive ideal. Additional work needs to be done at the policy and at the individual level to transform into truly democratic and gender-equitable realms.

Women's leadership and effective participation is increasing on the development agenda of governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organisations, including women's rights groups. Evidence from programmes and research demonstrates that women are playing an important role as key actors and decision-makers in the development process across a wide range of sectors. In the political arena in particular, there is growing momentum among governments to foster and ensure women's participation and leadership in governance structures. In India, affirmative action for women and disadvantaged groups has been enshrined into the constitution. The Constitution (73rd Amendment Act), enacted in 1992, calls for the reservation of a minimum of one-third of seats for women (both as members and as chairpersons) within all of India's locally elected governance bodies commonly referred to as Panchayati Raj Institutions. More recently in 2009, the Government of India approved a 50 percent reservation for women in PRIs; and many states, including Rajasthan and Odisha, have passed similar legislation.

Practical gender needs are immediate needs such as water and healthcare, which fall within women's socially defined roles. While the importance of these issues cannot be undermined, attention to only these does not necessarily challenge women's status in society, transform power and gender relations to enable gender

equity and social justice. . But women face a number of barriers such as low literacy, poor preparatory training, a high household work burden and negative attitudes towards women in public office that constrain their ability. There is the need for the government and all actors committed to gender responsive governance to undertake a systematic review of the mandate of local governance bodies and of existing social justice structures and mechanisms within the local governance framework – such as the Nyaya Panchayats and the Gram Kachehri . State governments that offer training for new panchayat members must do a better job of equipping them to effectively fulfil their roles. These trainings must focus on the key concepts of gender equity, social justice and equitable development as core principles of panchayat functioning. They must promote the adoption of gender equitable attitudes among all elected representatives as well as how they can effectively respond to strategic gender issues like domestic violence. Given the huge expectation and need of the community for recourse on these issues, elected bodies and members must play a central role to ensure that responses in keeping with rights and justice frameworks and denounce biased and patriarchal efforts. Trainings must be made relevant for members with minimal literacy skills, and build perceptions of self worth and confidence to undo the impact of historic gender disparities. Discussions around rationale and content of laws, acts and provisions related to such issues as domestic violence, child marriage and education must be incorporated.

Programmers and policy makers must take into account the impact of gender related barriers and disparities and adopt specific strategies to enable women elected representatives to participate effectively and have political aspirations. The gender division of labour and attitudes towards women in public roles are important components for discussion with families, communities and administrators. At the village level, the most important provisions relating to participation and accountability are those governing reservations and the Gram Sabha.

Women sex ratio has increased from 964 to 982 females for every 1,000 males over the last decade, which is higher than both the state and national average. According to the Census Report 2011, the female literacy rate is 66 per cent, while the male literacy rate is 78 per cent. Indicators such as a sex ratio of 894 females per 1,000 males (Census 2011) and a starting gap in literacy rates (only 56 per cent of the female population is literate compared to 87 per cent of the male population) are reflective of extremely high levels of gender inequality. Population, and changes mandated by the Constitution (73rd Amendment Act) have been superimposed on the systems of community planning that have existed previously.

In India, reform movements before and after independence has helped women to gain some power in politics also. After independence they have achieved an unprecedented political break through with the reservation of seats for them in panchayats and other public bodies. It is heartening to note that Indian women were among the earliest to get their political rights (right to vote)

without any political movement like in many countries. They were among the foremost to take active part in politics even in pre-independence times. Indian women have a distinction to become Secretary, Prime Minister, Chief Minister and even President. By becoming Pradhan or a ward member in a Gram Panchayat or any other civic body, or a member of State Assembly or Parliament, it augments respect within the family as well as in the community at large besides increasing their self-esteem, confidence and self-respect.

Dr Carole Spary, deputy director, Institute of Asia and Pacific Studies at the University of Nottingham, has been studying 'Women MP's and the Indian Parliament' for a few years. She had recently held a workshop for researchers, scholars, academics and activists in the city. She discussed about women in Indian politics. In her discussion she pointed out that despite high profile women leaders including Sonia Gandhi, Jayalalithaa, Mamata Bannerjee, Mayawati, Sushma Swaraj etc, the representation of women in Assemblies and Parliament is miniscule. An increase in women's participation is seen only in the municipal and Panchayat level elections, especially since the reservation in the 1990's.

There is no dearth of women leaders in India but the problem is bringing them to the forefront in a party that comprises mostly men. More women are contesting elections now, but because men too are contesting in large numbers, the rise of women is slow. While lineage and capital are important to bring women into politics (just as it is for men), there's no guarantee that a party with a woman leader will give space for more women.

During the last two decades the writings of many women writers have been acclaimed by the institutions of international repute. There are many women in the field of journalism which was previously dominated by men. Now, she blogs and networks using it for the freedom denied so far to voice her angst, express outrage and disapproval, fulfill the need for acceptance and approval.

The ink-stained polls of the world's largest democracy have delivered their verdict and India waits with bated breath to learn whether second administration will be different than the first. While India exults after yet another peacefully concluded election, one question remains: What is the role of women in Indian politics? The answer is both big and small. Typical of India, it contains contradictions.

Women's representation bill is still pending in the Parliament. President Pranab Mukherjee and Vice-President Hamid Ansari have called for reviving the Constitution (108th) Amendment Bill to reserve for women one-third of seats in Parliament and the State legislatures. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been less forthcoming in revealing whether his government has any plans to pilot the Bill through the Lok Sabha. This is particularly disappointing. The Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha in March 2010 amid obstructive theatrics from parties such as the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Samajwadi Party, but also with an unusual level of cooperation among the national parties, especially the Congress, which was leading the United Progressive Alliance government, and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Thereafter they could not or would not overcome similar odds in the Lok Sabha to deliver on their stated support for the Bill. Six years on, Mr. Modi's BJP commands a clear majority in the Lok Sabha. It is therefore in a position not only to get the Bill passed by mopping up the support of just a few more MPs, but also to force the Congress and the Left into reaching out across the aisle in a polarised Parliament to affirm fidelity to a long-voiced promise. Every session of Parliament must serve as a reminder that the real stumbling block to the Bill has not been political from parties opposed to it, but essentially patriarchal within the very same parties that have affirmed support to it.

India falls in the lowest quartile with respect to the number of women in parliament (9.1%). Even the UAE, with 22.5%, has more women representatives, according to the UN's 2008 survey of women in politics. The recently concluded 15th Lok Sabha elections have delivered a record 59 women as members of Parliament, the highest since independence, raising their

parliamentary participation to 10.9%. Seventeen of these women are under 40. And representation of women leaders at the grassroots level in India is nearly 50%, especially since the passing of the 73rd amendment in 1992, which allotted one-third of all seats to women. The panchayati raj, that bedrock of rural government, has fostered more and more women participants and leaders. Some states, like Karnataka, had inducted women into rural politics even before it was mandated by the constitution. Several states, including Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar and most recently, Uttarkhand, have allotted not just the required 33% of seats for women but increased it to 50%.

At grassroot level, Panchayat women leaders have been especially active in bringing education to their villages even though they are frequently held hostage by caste politics and quotas. Rural education is a quagmire of poor policies that nobody in government seems to have the will to change. The recent Administrative Reforms Commission repeats a long-standing recommendation that the selection of school teachers in rural schools be delegated to each panchayat instead of making it state-wide and therefore subject to caste-based selection. Deploying state-selected teachers to rural schools in areas where they have no caste-based affiliation makes it a losing proposition from the get-go, according to some experts. Detractors contend that delegating teacher-selection to each panchayat will make it subject to bribes and corruption. But as one official in the Administrative Reforms Commission put it, small-scale rural corruption (with some accountability) is better than the large-scale corruption (with no local accountability.) Panchayat leaders who don't have a say in the kind of teachers their village-schools attract end up focusing on infrastructure and other issues within their purview. Women panchayat leaders talk the number of female drop-outs after puberty. They bring safe drinking water to their students. All these are not just palliatives, but are necessary developments in rural education.

Conclusion

Government can only make laws, rules and policies for the welfare of women but she only by herself can take the stand to remove all the fears and hesitations and step out for her recognition. Nothing can help a woman until or unless she helps herself. Providing women with opportunities and support systems has the potential to put into motion a sustainable process for change in gendered power relations which can allow women slowly but steadily break the shackles of existing boundaries. Without greater representation of women in politics, it is difficult to achieve participatory, accountable, and transparent governance which can ensure political, cultural, social and economic priority goals of the wider society. Besides every human being has the right to participate in decisions that define her or his life. This right is the foundation of the ideal of equal participation in decision-making among women and men. This right argues that since women know their situation best, they should participate equally with men to have their perspective effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making, from the private to the public spheres of their lives, from the local to the global. Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government policy-making is feasible. In this respect, women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.

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