

Restructuring Grassroots Democracy through the reservation policy for Women in India

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Abstract. Grassroots democracy is the main source of democracy, where a power reaches the local or village level of society. It is only way to ensure power directly from people. The grassroots democracy is an important political role in the process of the democratic decentralization in the India and developing World. It is a real forum of citizen which they can participate in elections, governance and decision making process. In addition, it is a major tool in ensuring effective local level governance. Local level participation and the development of democratic local governance continue quietly to spread throughout the World. In India, the grassroots level democracy is the main pillar of the people participation in democratic institutions. This article examines that women representation for restructuring grassroots democracy through the reservation policy. It mainly focused on 73rd amendments of the Indian constitution. It also examines that women participation in Panchyath raj and democratic institutions.

Keywords: Grassroots democracy, 73rd Amendments, Women reservation in gross roots level, Women participation.

1. Introduction

After independence, India was faced several social and political problems of the society. During this period India has an adopted the

concept of the welfare state and through this India has to solve the social, economic and political problems. The objective of the welfare state nation are to elimination of poverty, ignorance, diseases and inequality of opportunities and providing a better and higher quality of life were the basis premises upon which all the plans and blue-prints of development were built in the gross root democracy.

India's democratic structures of the governance were setup in national, state and local self government. Above three stages were most necessary to provide the opportunity to development of the people. The National and State government looks at the development of the nation, and local self government to reach the people at the grassroots level. As a Gandhi as pointed out India lives in village and unless village life can be revitalized the nation as whole can hardly come alive. Gandhi wrote, "Democracy becomes an impossible thing until power is shared by all, but let not democracy degenerate into mobocracy". After the Indian independence, Indian government has made determined effort to promote the creation of panchyaths and to make them effective units of local self government.

After the final debate of the Indian Constituent Assembly, the Indian Parliament was agreed to start Panchayt in local level in each State. According to the Indian Constitution Article 40

declares that “the State take necessary actions to organize village panchayats and to endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government”. The aim was to foster democratic participation, to involve villages in the development of the community and to reduce the burden of higher level of administration.

2. The 73rd Amendments

The 73rd Amendments of the Constitution of India provide the legal basis for direct democracy at the grassroots level, both in rural and urban areas. The amendments stress the need to bring people belonging to marginalized groups in to the political process by reserving seats especially for women and for people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It is also provided that to involvement of marginalized groups in decision making process. It is also envisaged that by mandating not less than one-third of the seat for women in local government’s bodies.

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3. The Panchayat Raj System and Grassroots Level Democracy

The Panchayath Raj and grassroots democracy is relating to decentralized planning are gaining wide interest among the social planners. It is universally agreed that local problems have local solutions and a blanket strategy cannot even within a district. The major emerging challenges in the development process are Gender equality and gender equity. Social scientists and development activist are debate in these issues.

According to Amartya Sen “Democracy is not only goal of development, it is the primary means of development. Women’s participation in political process is important for strengthening democracy and for their struggle against marginalization, trivialization and oppression. Emergence of women as a strong group would change the prevailing political practices, the nature and content of debates in the legislature and women issues can be taken care of from the feminist perspectives both in policy formulation and implementation.

The development of the gross roots democracy is through the establishment of the Panchayth Raj institutions. It is the instruments for participatory democracy and decentralization process in the local self government. Democracy means people’s participation in running their affairs, then it is nowhere more direct, clear, and significant than at the local, where the contact between the people and their representatives, between the rules and the ruled is more constant vigilant and manageable. Lord Bryce said the best school of democracy and the best guarantee for its success in the practice of local self-government.

4. Women Reservation in Panchyath Raj Institutions

Women reservation at the Pachyath level is an important avenue of the political participation and it has opened the doors of the political arena for emergent women to democratic politics and introduces change at local level. Women in rural societies have been portrayed as most inferior. Even women believe in the dogma that as women, they should lead their lives very differently and be subordinate to male wishes. After the established of the Panchayati Raj institutions were mandated as local self-governing bodies by virtue of the 73rd amendment. The legislation aimed to improve the social service by bringing decision –making closed to the people and constitutionally empowering local village leaders. It also ensured reservation for women and Scheduled Caste and Tribes to prevent historically powerful groups from claiming political, economic, and social resources. Specifically, the amendment

mandated that one-third of the head of a village directly elected decision making position were to be reserved for women in every state.

Before Indian independence women's are marginalized and excluded from the development process. The main reason of the women excluded is too upheld of social ideology and poor in economic status within the society. These ideological constructs of women have also obscured the fact that women in no way constitute a homogenous group; the social fault lines that run through the society makes women as much into a heterogeneous category as it does the man. Some groups of women therefore suffer greater exclusion such as Dalit's, tribal women, poorer women, women of lower castes and so on.

According to Michael Edwards

"Exclusion is the result of three interlocking sets of process; exclusionary economic; social discrimination; and lack of political voice. These three things come together to keep certain groups of people poor."

However there are caste and class difference both in the nature and intensity of discrimination and exclusion that women face. Dalit women face far more discrimination even in the hands of upper caste women. But it is in general true to conclude that women do from a part of the excluded others". Therefore the 73rd amendment made way for one third reservation of seat in panchayths for women, both in general and in the SC and ST's category.

The 73rd amendment to the constitutional of India has served as a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in political power structures and provided for reservation of women at level of governance. This amendment has initiated a strategy of affirmative action for providing the structural framework for women's participation in political decision-making and provided an opportunity to bring women to be in the forefront and centre of development through grassroots level leadership.

The Act has made the empowerment of women a constitutional mandate. However, women have

to achieve equality of opportunities in both political and administrative system, equal access to resources, basic social services, equal reward for equal work, and elimination of discrimination by gender and prevention of atrocities against women. There is a need to empower and mobilise the women through the legal back-up, administrative reforms and awareness to ensure their active participation in development decision and activities, like sanitation, drinking water supply, education, health etc.,

Panchayath Raj act was bringing women into politics through the act of positive discrimination. Panchayath raj helped to change women's perceptions of themselves. It has given many women a greater understanding of the working of politics. It also helped to change local government beyond simply increasing the numerical presence of women. Some of the way in which women, through Panchayath Raj Institutions changing governance are evident in this issues they choose to tackle; education, health and domestic violence etc. Despite this hard reality, it is easy for them to be called as village head, but this new idea of having their own identity, respectability and status empower them enormously.

The participation of women in panchayths has given rise to new developmental priorities and has enriched gender friendly governance. It has changed the lives of numerous women in the countryside and has created conditions for their equal participation in local government. "The patriarchal attitudes prevalent in the society and family, denial of formal education to women etc. were the biggest deterrents to their political participation reservation of women in panchayth raj came as a way to ensure conditions not only for gender equality in the political sphere but also a pivotal role in the empowerment and socio-economic upliftment of women. This has encouraged more and more women into the political arena". The policy of reservation provided for women is important not as an end in itself but a step forward in promoting women's participation in the grassroots of democracy.

Before the panchayth Raj existence, the women participation is very less but still the situation was changing more number women are participated in the elections. "The average of women representation in panchyath raj across the country is 36.54 percent. However, a few states have gone beyond the mandated 33 percent and provided more reservation for women. for instance Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uattakahand, Rajasthan have reserved 50 percent seats for women in panchyath and Sikkim has reserved 40 percent seats or women. The Constitution's 110th Amendment Bill 2009 provides reservation for women form 33 percent to 50 present in Panchyath Raj institutions. The bill seeks to amend the Article 243 D to enhance the quantum of reservations for women form on third to one-half of the total seats in the panchyaths". The Participation of women in Panchyath Raj institutions has been recognized as a step towards equality.

Women have, however, not found adequate representation in the LokSabha." The percentage of the elected women in LokaSabha only 4.4 percent in 1952, in 2014 LokaSabha election 11.41 percent women are elected. The RajyaSabha does not fare much better, with 29 women members comprising 11.9% of the total membership in 2014. Both national and regional parties are following the policy of exclusion of women in allotting seats. The reasons for not giving tickets to women candidates at the national and state level are based on the perception that they lack the win ability factor".

According to India Economic survey report 2018, says "that more representation of women in decision making process in the country, their political participation has been low despite them accounting for 49 percent of the population. The survey for 2017-18 in parliament said factors such as domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding roles of women in society and lack of support from family were among main reasons that prevented them from entering politics. In a country like India with around 49 percent of women in the population, the political participation of women has been low it noted. The survey said there are developing countries like Rwanda which has

more than 60 percent women representative in parliament in 2017

5. Conclusion

Today, Women encounter many problems and challenges to gain access to political power and empowerment in Karnataka. Socio-economic obstacles are lack of adequate financial resources, limited access to education and health. Psychological barriers include women's low self-esteem and self-confidence, endorsed by certain cultural patterns that do not facilitate women's access to political careers. Political obstacles are lack of party support. It is necessary to increase women's representation in the parties and legislature. The political leadership of women is of crucial significance in the present political landscape to ensure empowerment of women, gender justice and gender equality in Karnataka.

Women are coming out in large numbers over ecological degradation price raise protests, protests against police repression etc. while there is an increased participation in grass-root political movements; it is not getting translated into a growing share of women in the formal political structure of the country. Among the several reasons for such a situation is the growing money power and muscle power required to contest elections in India. Women have also been treated as subordinate to men in every aspect of life. Because of her secondary status and low esteem, most of the women were denied entry in political decision-making.

The political representation of women is crucial for eradication of social evil like gender inequality and usher in women empowerment in the society. This time there are around 49 percent women voters in Karnataka and in 10 districts of the state, they surpass the men voters. It is for the first time in Karnataka that the Election commission has decided to set-up pink booths for the convenience of female voters.

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