
POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: Due to the Constitutional Amendment in 1992, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was came in to existence. As per the provisions made in the 73rd Amendment Act, all most all the states in India made amendments to the respective Panchayat raj Acts, facilitating a uniform pattern of Panchayat raj system. Among the major provisions of 73rd Act the reservation of seats to women in all the tiers of PRIs, is one of the most significant. Thus, women in India are taking part in the field of politics and sbwly participating in the process of development.

Introduction:Development today human development, The accent is on the formation of human capabilities such as improved health, knowledge and skills and the use to which these are put in order to improve the quality of life. The development paradigm, therefore, puts the focus of development on people and their participation. Human development implies that people are Alpha and Omega of development. Undoubtedly, human development and people's participation go together.

As the UN Human Development Report put it, "development must be participatory and for this people must have the opportunity to participate and to invest in the development of their capabilities. They also must have the opportunity to put their capabilities to use, to be fully involved in all aspects of life, to express themselves freely and collectively"

Therefore, in India, in recent past one can notice the significance of policies for women development, particularly under the 5th five year plans. It was a shift from viewing women as targets of 'welfare' policies in the social sector to regard them as 'critical' agent for development. Accordingly, the Government of India prepared the national perspective plan (1988-2000) which envisaged a multipronged strategy for integrating women in to the mainstream. The early 90's saw the reshaping of strategies of socio-economic development and the emphasis shifted from "development" to "empowerment. There was a realization that women have limited access to capital market, education, skill training, extension advice and participation in the decision making process. The subject of women's development is multidimensional, multisectoral and multidisciplinary. Hence, several credits, income generation, skill building programmes were started under various policies and programmes for poverty alleviation through women."

Accordingly, the government of India had introduced various policies and programmes with the intention of poverty eradication. Such as Integrated Rural Development (IRDP) training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) Development of Women and children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) Supply of Improved toolkits to rural Artisans (SITRA), However, all these programmes are concerned with the achieving of individual programme targets rather than focusing on the substantive issue of sustainable income generation, therefore to rectify the situation, the government

After 1947, a series of rural development programmes are launched by the Government. After Independence, the first and foremost rural development programme was launched by Albert Mayer. Mayer and his team travelled the villages of Uttar Pradesh and submitted their 'Pilot Intensive Project for Etawah District' in 1948. The project had established linkage between agriculture and industry. Soon after the commencement of the First Five year plan, central Government has instituted a Ministry of Rural Development to design, device, implement, manage, control and assess the rural development programmes of the country.

On 2nd October 1952, the Government had launched 'Community Development Programme' (CDP). It was based on trickle down hypothesis. National Extension service programme was also implemented during the First plan. The CDP covered almost all states and Union territories which consisted of 5026 blocks and each block covered 100 villages. But the programme failed due to lack of co-operation and coordination among the team and lack of Panchayat role.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, Indian Independence must begin at the bottom. The Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) was introduced in 1959 as a vehicle of democratic decentralization on the basis of the recommendation of Balwantrai Mehta Committee. In 1993, the 73rd amendment was made to the Constitution of India that gave not less than 1/3 of the seats reservation for women in local-self Government in India. These PRIs have taken the responsibility of the development of agriculture, rural industries and to carry-out the rural development programmes.

Fourth plan had used 'Direct Attack on Poverty approach as perspective of development. Under this approach, the government had implemented a series of anti-poverty programmes like SFDA, MFAL, DPAP, etc. The National Programme for Minimum Needs (MNP) was launched during Fifth plan to assure supply of basic needs for minimum consumption. It covered the basic needs like elementary education, rural health, nutrition drinking water, housing, slum improvement, rural roads and rural electrification. The Seventh Plan has integrated MNP with other rural development and anti-poverty programmes to create linkages in the delivery services. For the eradication of rural poverty, there was need for self-employment and wage-employment programmes. The Government had implemented a series of self-employment and wage-employment

generating programmes like Rural Works Programme (RWP), Integrated Dry Land Agricultural Development (IDLAD), Area Development Schemes (ADS) etc., The rural housing programmes like Samagra Awas Yojana, Indira Awas Yojana etc have been implemented to provide houses to the roofless rural poor. Antyodaya, Annapurna etc schemes have been implemented to help the destitute rural poor. The credit institutions like nationalized commercial banks, regional rural banks, co-operative etc have been instituted in rural areas to extend credit facilities to the rural poor.

Empowerment is a social action process that promotes participation of people, organization and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1988). Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation of the redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology.

Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision making power and control, and to transformative action (Karl, 1995:14). It is "the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power". The goals of women empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality, and to enable poor women to gain access to and control over, both material and informational resources (Batliwala, 1994:130). Empowerment is a multi-faceted concept. It is both a process and a goal. It is a power which involves capacity to take decision at family, group, community and national levels. It also includes influence over the rules and norms in a society. Thereby it awakens self-esteem and self-confidence. The application of the concept of empowerment depends on relationships, roles, responsibilities and inequalities between women and men. It is not something that can be 'done' to people, rather women need to be the agents of their own empowerment. There are many dimensions to women's empowerment including personal, collective, national and global as well as economic, political and social. Finally, empowerment means different things to different women.

According to FAO estimates although women produce more than 50 percent of the food grown worldwide, they have less empowerment over the resources and decisions making on the use of agricultural technologies. Not only in agriculture, but women have unequal participation in education worldwide this is because girls begin helping out at an early age in the developing world. Sustainable development could be achieved in rural India on a sustainable basis until and unless its women are developed and empowered socially and economically. It is well understood today that without economic and social liberalization of women, no true liberation of women is possible and also without the provision of equal economic and social opportunities to women no

emancipation of women truly occurs, household activities and these responsibilities increase as they grow older and so less time to participate in education. Due to customs, traditions and attitudes in society there is more preference for boys' education than the education for girls. More importantly poverty is above one of the important causes. It means poorer a family is, the less likely it is that girls are sent to school because their labour is required at home and in the fields. Lack of education, training and low level of literacy not merely excluded women from social, economic and political power but from power of knowledge as well. Therefore, while comprising half of the humanity "contributing two-third of the world's work hours, she earns only one-third of the total income and owns less than one-tenth of the world's resources". The human development reports of the UNDP published annually have declared that women's empowerment is not merely important but crucial if development is to be sustainable. In a developing society, women in particular and more specifically rural and illiterate women never get portrayed as agents of change. Women in India constitute 48% of total population in which 43.88 lakh women are engaged in organized sector and 17.77 lakh in private sector.

In the decade of 1960's the issue was for the welfare of the women. In 1970's there was a shift from the welfare to development of women. In 1980's and onwards the shift took place from the development to the empowerment of women. The major landmark in the field of women empowerment was brought by 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts in the Parliament which brought 33% reservation to the women in the Panchayats and Municipalities. These amendments have empowered about 100,00,000 women and gave them political power for taking social, economic and other development measures for the all-round growth of their women counterparts. 93rd amendment was passed in the parliament which changed its colour from Directive Principle under Article 45 to Fundamental Right under Article 21A for free education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years.

The international conferences sponsored by the United Nations started from Rio through Vienna, Copenhagen and Beijing have generated a lot of interest on the social development and highlighted the growing feminization of poverty and possible impact on women of the structural adjustment process. The 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995), reveals that women's empowerment and their full co-operation on the basis of equality in also improves the living standards of the rural people by alleviating poverty. It makes easy access to institutional credit facilities and mobilize rural savings. It makes optimum utilization of rural resources. More importantly, it engages rural people in the development process of the country and eliminates exploitation done by the money lenders.

Empowerment of women is a holistic concept. It is a multidimensional in its approach and involves a basic

realization and awareness of women powers, potentialities, capabilities & competences, rights and opportunities of all round development in all spheres of life. Women empowerment therefore is a process which enables women to have access and control over various factors necessary for their economic independence, political participation & social development. But such political participation and social upliftment would be meaningless & almost impossible if their economic independence is not achieved. The process therefore, involves several challenges, which need to be properly addressed at different levels both individual levels &

collective levels. Empowerment is process which generated changes in individual ideas & perception & creates awareness about one's rights & opportunities for self development in all important spheres of life. Empowerment of women may normally mean equal access to & control over important productive resources. Women empowerment, therefore, may normally describe as a process by which women would be able to develop their confidence level & increase their inner strength & self reliance to decide and determine their important choices in life.

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