



EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH URBAN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

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Abstract

Empowerment of women is a worldwide issue and conversations on the political freedoms of the women and their place in dynamic cycles are at the front of the majority of the nations of the world. Obviously women have the limit and nature of driving the general public in right and formative way, whenever allowed an opportunity. The concept of women empowerment has turned into a middle point in the bigger political situation. The participatory governmental issues have been monstrously contributed by it. Tragically, not numerous women know about their strengthening, their social and political freedoms and furthermore about the operations of metropolitan nearby administration however they is half of the metropolitan populace. The successful interest of women can reinforce the metropolitan administration. Thus, it is appropriate to concentrate on the issue of women strengthening through metropolitan administration.

Keywords: Empowerment; Women; Participation: Urban Governance; Challenges.

Introduction

Women Empowerment is a multidimensional active process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in every aspects of life such as social, political, economic and basically in decision making institutions. In the context of India, basically after the Indian independence various developments have taken place in the field of participatory politics of women. The truth is that empowerment should entail a power to participate in the decision making process in all spheres of society, with no separation of the public and private and in all social, economic, political and cultural processes. The capacity and capabilities of women mostly remain unrecognized and their contributions remain unnoticed. . In present India, although local government is a subject of the state government, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments make it obligatory for the state governments to organize local bodies, to hold regular elections to them and to give them appropriate finances. After the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India, one-third of the wards were to be reserved for women candidates and in the recent amendment fifty percent of wards would be reserved for women candidates. Apart from the reservation of women candidates, some other wards were reserved for candidates from socially backward sections. As per the latest Election Commission of India (ECI) data: As of October 2021, Women represent 10.5% of the total members of the Parliament. The scenario for women Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) across all state assemblies in India is even worse, with the national average being a pitiable 9%.

Empowerment of women is the need of the hour to ensure all round growth in contemporary society. Fundamentally, empowerment of women is the process of developing the economic, political and social position of women. Contextually, it means possession of assets, knowledge and know-how, will and capacity that enables one for independent decision making which is quintessential for advancement. Basically, participation of women in political activities can contribute a lot for the cause of women empowerment.

Urban Local Government in India

In India the urban local government functions in towns and cities through municipal institutions which include municipal corporations, committees, councils, municipal town and notified area committee. It



somewhere serves as a reservoir of talents for local and national leadership. It was only during 1980's that the Central government had taken momentous decisions in setting up the Ministry of Urban Development, appointing National Commission on Urbanization and introducing Nagarpalika Bill in 1989 and 1991 in the country.

The state conformity legislations provide three types of Urban Local Bodies as per the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act- municipal corporations for larger urban areas, municipal council for smaller urban areas and nagar Panchayats for transitional areas (Article 243 Q(1)). In case of nagar Panchayats, the nomenclature varies. In the states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, they were called as Town Panchayats and in Odisha, they were called as Notified Area Committees.

Women's participation in local government

The concept of Political Participation can be considered to the activities related to electoral politics like voting, campaigning, holding party offices and contesting elections. The social status of women mostly depends upon the political participation, representation and share in decision making bodies. Women play a dual role in politics – as voters and political representatives. On the voting front, though adult franchise was granted in 1937, it was the progressive spirit that pervaded the making of the constitution that made it a reality. The Constitution of India guarantees equal rights to men and women as voters and citizens. Generally, in India, registration and participation of women as contestants is less than that of men. In recent past, records show that there has been an increase in the percentage of women who vote. Such participation is also contingent on the mobilization efforts made by political parties, NGOs, Action Groups and the general awareness among the community of the importance of women exercising their franchise. Again, a note of caution is required, lest it be assumed that political participation always indicates political awareness on the part of the woman voter. Usually, however, countries that do hold regular elections show an improved recognition of women as a political constituency and parties and candidates tend to adopt pro-women stances and appeal specifically to women's votes, especially at the time of elections. This becomes very evident when we look at consecutive elections in the Indian context, wherein there is a growing consciousness of the need to woo the woman voter and the need to pay attention to the needs and issues of women, in the election manifestos of political parties. The active and effective political participation of women is a constitutional right and is a significant precondition for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

The active and equal participation of women at all levels of decision making processes and political involvement is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy and the inclusion of their perspectives and experiences into the decision-making processes. Though political participation is a constitutional right and Article 15 of the Constitution of India prohibits discrimination on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, still the women are facing obstacles in their political participation especially in India. Moreover, women around the globe at every socio-political level find themselves under-represented in parliament and far removed from decision making levels. As noted in the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2019), women's equal participation with men in power and decision-making is part of their fundamental right to participate in political life, and at the core of gender equality and women's empowerment. Strategies to increase women's participation in politics have been advanced through conventions, protocols and international agreements for gender mainstreaming, but they are yet to prove effective in achieving gender parity in the highest government.



Women's role in decision making is one of the most important questions for consideration in the movement for their empowerment. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1992) to the Indian Constitution have served as a major break through towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in political power structures. This Amendment provided for reservation of one third of seats for women at level of local governance in urban areas. There is also a one-third reservation for women for posts of chairpersons of these local bodies. This amendment has initiated a powerful 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 forefront and centre of city development and develop new grass-root level leadership. There are about 1 million elected women representatives in Panchayats and Municipal Bodies in India.

Laws/legislation promoting the participation of women in local government

The 74th Amendment to the Indian Constitution, 1992 has served as a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in local government. The Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 aims at Constitutional guarantees to safeguard the interests of urban local self government to enable them to function as effective democratic and self governing institutions at the grass root level. This Amendment provides for reservation of 33 1/3 percent of elected seats for women at local government level in urban and rural areas. There is also a one-third reservation for women of posts of chairpersons of these local bodies. A very active role for women in local governance is envisaged as compared to governance at the state and national levels in India. These provisions have provided great opportunities and challenges to women in India, particularly in the local government field. This is of great significance, since this grass-root level participation has considerably broadened the base of women's participation in politics at city level.

Strong and dynamic women who would not dream of appropriating privilege are today talking of reservation because they have come to recognize that they will not give "easy entry" in the corridors of power without reservation. This hierarchy is so rigid that the natural processes of democracy and constitutional guarantees have not been able to make a dent in these fortresses of power. The demand for reservation should not therefore be seen as either a gift or a privilege that women are seeking. For most women it is the last straw and a desperate measure to ensure their coming into the political mainstream. Their participation becomes vital in the context of the adoption of development strategies that are negative and harmful to women. Today most of the political parties in India have initiated some initiatives to activate political participation of women and develop their capacities. However, most of the political parties have not yet developed any special programmes to meet the special requirements of women in urban or rural areas, despite the fact that most of the women activists felt that if planned efforts were made, they could be easily mobilised. Different debates concerning struggles of women as well as various actions by women's groups and NGOs on local as well as national problems have forced the mainstream political parties to accept women's concerns in their political programmes. The political parties started changing their attitude towards women which is reflected in their election manifestos, their attitudes towards women candidates, speeches and slogans.

Conclusion

Women's participation in decision making bodies plays a very significant role in the process of enhancing women's participation in public life. Reservation policy for women in local governance has provided women a chance to participate in political arena. It would lay the way for acquiring political power at the local level and enabling participation in decision and policy making at the higher levels. Women would be a part in the project of planning, execution and implementation of development



schemes if they were empowered politically. But, still lots of work have to be done related to the women empowerment in a plural society like India; if history's longest oppression is to be seriously tackled. This particular 74th Amendment of the Indian Constitution ushered in a new era in the democratic process in India as it not only provided constitutional status to the municipal bodies but also provided an enabling environment for women to take direct part in the process of local self government and brought women to the forefront of city development. The 74th Amendment mandated reservation of one – third seats in municipal bodies for women. There is also one third reservations for women in position of chairpersons of these local bodies in India. A very active role for women in local governance is envisaged as compared to governance at the state and national levels in India. These provisions have provided great opportunities and challenges to women in India. The challenge now is to transform this large presence of women at local government level supported by the real delegation of power and responsibilities.

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