



POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN URBAN LOCAL BODIES: A REVIEW

Dr.T.Ravindar

*Assistant Professor of Political Science, Government Degree College, Morthad, Nizamabd
Telangana.*

Abstract

The Political empowerment of women in urban local bodies (ULBs) has been significantly advanced by constitutional mandates for seat reservations, though practical challenges related to patriarchal norms, lack of training, and financial barriers persist. The Constitution of India recognized political rights of women without any discrimination to or qualification participate in decision making process at all the levels. After seven decade of strides in democracy and developments women participation and they role in public life has not made the desired head way. The 74th Amendment to the Indian constitution has served as a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in local government. This Amendment provides for reservation of 33, 1/3 percent of elected seats for women at local government level in urban and rural areas. Seventy Fourth Constitutional amendments is playing a vital role in more inclusion and increased political participation of women at grass root level. The political empowerment of women in ULBs has created an unprecedented opportunity for inclusive governance, but achieving true equality requires targeted efforts to overcome the remaining structural and cultural barriers. The present article will discuss on political empowerment of women in urban local bodies after 74th constitutional amendment act 1992.

Key Words: *Political Empowerment of Women, 74th Amendment, Constitution of India, Urban Local Bodies, 33, 1/3 Percent.*

Introduction

As Mahatma Gandhi rightly said 'as long as women of India do not take part in public life, there is no salvation for the country. The political empowerment of women in urban local bodies (ULBs) has been significantly advanced by constitutional mandates for seat reservations, though practical challenges related to patriarchal norms, lack of training, and financial barriers persist. The Constitution of India recognized political rights of women without any discrimination to or qualification participate in decision making process at all the levels. After seven decade of strides in democracy and developments women participation and they role in public life has not made the desired head way. The field reality is that women's constitutional right in decision making at all the level whether national or local is still marginal. Generally speaking the Indian society and its dominant culture over the centuries have downgraded the states of women, socially and economically depriving of opportunities for developments participation and management.

Political participation refers to actual participation in the voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rules and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public Policy (Srivastava Rashmi, 2000). Political participation is broadly defined as being a process through which individual plays a role in political life of their society, has the opportunity to take part in decision making. Political participation is a process by which people take part in political activities. Exercising voting rights during elections is one of the important political activities of the people. Participation of women in this political activity is almost equal to men. Political participation is not just casting vote. It includes wide range of other activities- like membership of political party, electoral campaigning, attending party meetings, demonstrations, communication with leaders, holding party positions,



contesting elections, membership in representative bodies, influencing decision making and other related activities. With this understanding of political participation, the evidence shows that in most of the countries participation of women is not impressive as the number of women participating in active politics is smaller compared to men. Women who are able to acquire decision-making power are mostly from urban and elite groups. Large mass of women are kept out of political arena due to various reasons. There was no serious attempt to accommodate women in politics. In many countries women had to wage long battles to get their rights. Despite that, they were not able to get rightful position in the arena of politics. Women's political participation has been the agenda of various international conferences and symposiums. Various recommendations were made to improve the participation of women in political decision making. Women's political empowerment was at the centre stage of all discourses on women's issues at the international level. India is in no way an exception from the rest of the countries with respect to the women representation. Corresponding to this, various initiatives were taken in India.

Review of Literature

Harsukhjiti Kaur Role performance of Women Leadership at grassroots level, IJPA Vol LIV, No.1, Jan-mar 2008, In this article author says about the leadership of women An adequate Explanation of the leadership pattern of women can be offered by making a close study of their socio economic conditions such as caste, age, educational level, political background of the families which they come from. These factors come in to a sharper focus in the context of women leadership in decentralized governance and their representation. This article discusses the role and performance of women leaders and also articulates ground realities.

Ravindrapasad D 'Women empowerment in Urban governance in India' IJPA special issues, 2014, According to author In urbanizing world women constituting half the population have a very limited role in urban governance – Policy and decision making as they are not adequately and appropriately represented in urban local bodies. The 74th constitutional amendment Act 1992 provided one third representation to women in urban local bodies. This has raised the question as to what key role they could play in urban governance. This article examines the role of women mayors, chair persons. Councilors and Corporations in City development and local governance. It argues there is no difference between men and women there are areas however, where Women can play catalytic role in promoting the causes of social development including women and child development. The number of women in council though critical is not sufficient enough to neither impact the policies and decisions nor empowerment women. It requires capacity building, awareness, training, sharpen their skills, motivation and confidence, and to engage in general and gender based urban governance issues.

Kannan Kp. 1993. Local Self-Government and Decentralised Development. Economic and Political Weekly, 2644-2646, this author deals with the framework for rural and urban local bodies laid down in the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution and the follow-up action that is required at the level of the states for them to function as institutions of self-government. From this perspective the situation in the state of Kerala is the focus of discussion. Important points taken up are: existence of an effective and politically competent local leadership as a prerequisite for realizing the full potential of local-level planning; necessary expertise and most importantly the vigilance and will of the people for the successful working of the PRIs. It also looks into the obstacles like the structure and behavior of the bureaucracy, the reluctance of the ministers to share powers and the increasing sectarian interests of the political parties in the proper functioning of the local self-government institutions.



Rao, D. Pulla (2011), 'Women Empowerment Emerging Dimensions in 21st Century'. this book is a collection of the papers in which an attempt has been made to address several issues concerning the women. The author opines that the socio, economic and political development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered as equal partners in the progress with men. Women empowerment is multidimensional approach and covers social, political and economic and social aspects. Since independence, the Government of India has been making various efforts to empower the women. The government has amended the Constitution to incorporate clause enabling women to participate in decision making process at all levels. Therefore, the understanding of the women empowerment has become more important.

Chakraborty, Lekha S. (2001), in the work "Gender bias in South Asia" reveals that women are comparatively perceptible in local governance in South Asia. Twenty percent members in local governance are women. In the milieu of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment in India, one third of the seats in Panchayats are reserved for the women. Reservation of women has led to recognized empowerment of the women in panchayats and emergence of women leadership. It has formed an urge to become a component of conventional political, economic and social life. In spite of many social and cultural limitations, women have verified better leaders than their male counterparts.

Constitutional Provisions and Women Empowerment

The Constitution of India, one of the greatest documents ever produced came into force in the year 1950 guarantee justice, liberty and equality to all citizens. The preamble of the Constitution of India resolved to secure to all its citizens justice, social, economic and political, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and to worship, equality of status and opportunity and to promote among them fraternity assuring the dignity of individual and the unity of nation. To attain this, the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights. Specific articles and amendments have been enacted to ensure that women and children enjoy the Constitutional rights. The Constitution not only grants equality of treatment to women but also calls upon the state to adopt measures favoring women neutralizing the socio- economic, educational and political disadvantages that they face. The following are the various provisions in the constitution which ensures equality between men and women.

Article 51-A clause (e) says that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India- to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, transcending religious, linguistic and religious or sectional diversities, to renounces practice derogatory to the dignity of women. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has added the following articles to the Constitution providing reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Article 243-(D) (3)-extends political reservation to women not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat.

Article 243 (D) (4) extends reservation to elected offices as well. The office of the chairpersons in the panchayaths or any other level shall be reserved SC,ST and women in such a manner as legislature of state may by law provide

The 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India with 33.33% reservation for women has given opportunity for the entry of large number of socially marginalized category such as women to enter into the domain of local institution and their performance is very encouraging.



Initiatives of Indian Government for Women's Political Empowerment

The Government of India has declared the year 2001 as year for the Empowerment of Women. In India genuine efforts have been made for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through various departments of Women and Child Development Human Resource Development Ministry.

Women continued to remain invisible and marginalized in decision- making bodies. It was only with the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, September 1971) that the demand for greater representation of women in political institutions in India was taken up in a systematic way. The CSWI Report suggested a more meaningful association of women representatives in the structure of local administration. The report recommended the establishment of statutory women's panchayats at the village level. It recommended the reservation of seats in municipalities, constitution of permanent committees in municipalities to initiate and supervise programmes for women's welfare and development and those political parties should adopt a definite policy regarding the percentage of women candidates.⁵⁶ However it was not unanimous in favour of reservation.

Reservation Bill- 33.33 percent Reservation for Women

Above discussion makes it clear that women remain invisible and marginalized in decision- making bodies. Data shows that there has been only a marginal increase in the last few decades in the number of women candidates contesting elections and getting elected. The National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988 recommended 30% reservation for women in local governments and other decision making bodies to encourage participation of women in grass root politics. This debate finally culminated in the passing of the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act, 1992. This paved way for the entry of more than one million women into the local governments as members, presidents and vice-presidents. During 1990's, the issue of women reservation was in the manifesto of various political parties, which was also a way of wooing women voters. Women reservation bill was first introduced by Deve Gowda led national front government in September, 1996 as the 81st amendment bill. Various political parties like Samajavadi Party, Janatha Dal.

74th Constitutional Amendment Act

The 74th Amendment to the Indian constitution 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 roots 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 (R. Letha Kumari, 2006).

Local-Self institutions introduced in India in 1959 have paved the way to spread the roots of democracy to the grass root level. These institutions facilitated wider participation of people in decision making, thereby making democracy successful. The Indian constitution through Fundamental Rights have provided for political equality of all the people irrespective of caste, creed, community, language or sex. On the other side the Directive Principles aimed at providing social and economic justice to the people. Article 40 of the India Constitution suggested the implementation of local self institutions to achieve the avowed objective of social and economic justice. The present study sheds light on the Empowerment of Women through their participation in Urban Local Bodies. Universal Adult Franchise was laid as the foundation for dissemination of power in local bodies. 73rd & 74th Constitutional amendments have reflected the spirit of Directive Principles by giving 30% reservation



for women in Rural and Urban Local Bodies respectively. The history of a nation is created by the milestone events, which drastically change the way society is governed, organized and bequeathed to the new generation. The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 has become the milestone in the history of urban administration in India. It recognized municipalities as Constitutional bodies forming the third tier of the federal polity of India. The decentralization initiative in urban areas was first mooted by the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee, constituted by the Government of India in 1963, however it took nearly 30 years to concretize in the shape of the Constitutional Amendment in 1992. The Constitutional 74th Amendment Act, envisaged a systematic change in the pattern of municipal government in the country with a view to enabling cities and towns to play a critical role in economic and social development and signified the beginning of a historic reform to decentralize power to the people.

The Act prescribes a common legal institutional frame work for the efficient and effective delivery of municipal services and comprises of the following mandatory institutions:

1. State Election Commission (Article 243k).
2. Elected Municipalities: Municipal Corporation (for larger urban areas), Municipal Councils (Smaller Urban areas); and Nagar Panchayats (for transitional areas) (Article 243Q).
3. Ward committees and other committers (Article 243R).
4. State Finance Commission (Article 243I),
5. District Planning Committee (Article 243ZE).
6. Metropolitan Planning Committee (Article 243ZE).

Until recently, local government in India was organized on the basis of the ultra-virus principle and the state governments were free to extend or control the functional sphere of the local bodies through executive decisions without amendments to the legislative provisions. Through the 74th Amendment Act an attempt has been made to improve the performance and ability of ULBs. The important provisions of the Act include constitution of three types of municipalities, devolution of greater functional responsibilities and financial powers to them, adequate representation of weaker sections and women, regular and fair conduct of elections, and constitution of Wards Committees, District Planning Committee, Metropolitan Planning Committee and State Finance Commission. It further provided a basis for the state legislature to guide the state government in the assignment of various responsibilities to ULBs and strengthening of municipal governance. Restrictions on the power of state governments to do away with democratically elected municipal governments

Reservation of one third seats for women and weaker sections (SC/ST/OBC's as proportion of reservations) in municipal bodies.

The mandates of various local government institutions as prescribed by the Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 are as follows:

1. State Election Commissioner to superintend, direct and control the preparation of electoral rolls and conduct all elections to the rural and urban local bodies (Article 243O);
2. Municipalities to function as institutions of self government, prepare plans for economic development and social justice, perform functions and implement schemes as may be entrusted to them by the state government including those related to the Twelfth Schedule [Article 243 (W) (a)];



3. Ward Committees and Special Committees to take municipal government physically closer to the people and carry out the responsibilities conferred upon them including those in relation to the Twelfth Schedule [243 (w) (b)];
4. State Finance Commission to review the financial position of the rural and urban local bodies, and make recommendations regarding the principles of devolution of resources from the state to the local bodies and the measures needed to improve their finances and functioning [Article 243(1)];

District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and the municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole [Article 243 D (1)]

Impact of 74th Constitutional amendment

Policy Impact: Studies show that women representatives often prioritize issues directly relevant to women and communities, such as water, sanitation, healthcare, and education. Their presence in decision-making roles is crucial for creating more gender-responsive and inclusive urban spaces.

Role Models and Awareness: The visibility of women in local leadership roles serves as an inspiration for other women and helps to challenge long-standing stereotypes.

Changing Societal Mindset: Awareness and sensitization campaigns are necessary to challenge conservative perceptions and foster a supportive environment for women's leadership.

Conclusion

India has a rich history of increasing political participation of women since its independence. Political empowerment of women is a major path to the women in decision-making process or increased decision making power that will lead to women's empowerment in the true sense. Decision making power gives greater opportunities to influence matters that affect our lives in the community and the society at large scale. Participation in decision making process is the mile stone for gender equality in policy framework changes in India. Seventy Fourth Constitutional amendments is playing a vital role in more inclusion and increased political participation of women at grass root level. The political empowerment of women in ULBs has created an unprecedented opportunity for inclusive governance, but achieving true equality requires targeted efforts to overcome the remaining structural and cultural barriers.

References

1. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), 1992 – Women in Politics: Forms and Processes.
2. Barry, Trudie, Sneha Palnitkar (1996) Women and Local Politics in Mumbai and London : The quota Innovation' Third IIAS International Conference (International Institute of Administrative Sciences) – Beijing, China 8 –11,
3. Sahay's (1998): Women and empowerment; Approaches and Strategies, Discovery Publishing House New Delhi.
4. Jha S.N. & Mathur (P.C.): Decentralisation and Local Politics; Sage Publication New Delhi.
5. Shrivastava R.S. (2001): Women empowerment some critical issues; Rawat Publication New Delhi
6. Rajput P. (2001): Women's Political Participation in India: An agenda for empowerment in Promill Kanpur (ed.) empowering the Indian women, New Delhi. Ministry of information & Broad Casting.
6. Prasad R.R. (2002): Women Participation & empowerment – Kuruchetra; A Journal on Rural Development New Delhi.
7. Vishwanath R. (2003): Empowering Women – Yojna a monthly Journal of Ministry of Information and Broad Casting New Delhi.