

Indian women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: The starting of a new era.

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Abstract:

Women in India even today are not visible in the political arena remarkably. Government's great initiative through the panchayat raj institutions have been taken by the last three decades. Women now, not only the part of a household but also the part of nation wide progress history and political participation of women are related very closely. Panchayati Raj Institutions is a great tool today to make sure the political participation of Indian women at all the level like national, state and district specially threetier Panchayati Raj Institutions. Ahuge amount of success gained by rural women in local level , but in spite of this, they have to put themselves in a journey of thousand miles in this field . By the result of long political journey of Indian women a real socio- economic progress of India will be established in future.

Key Words:

Women empowerment, all round development, Sarvodaya, feminism ,decentralization of politics , community development programme, local bodies, rural development , Panchayat Raj institutions, decentralization of government, decentralization of politics, democratic liberalisation, liberal democracy, village self Reliance, Gram Sabha, gram Sansad, self help groups, village panchayats , gender inequality ,political entrepreneur, domestic violence, mental violence, economic reliance.

In India the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are a grassroots democracy now a days. Panchayati Raj Institutions have provided a healthy structure to the development of rural society and democratic decentralization in directly. By the grace of PRIs the rural development and maximum utilization of human and material resources is possible very easily. The meaningful functioning of these body depends on the environment and participation of both male and female. Our women are not adequately participated at all the three levels state central and local, even today rural women are the greatest group of backward citizens .Now, their participation is very important to make our democracy successful.

The initiative of one third reservation for women in PRIs in the 73rd Amendment Act is a milestone for the journey to the socio economic development of rural women in our country. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was a remarkable person by the passing of 'the Hindu code bill not only the Hindu code bill' but also the participation of the women in rural politics be treated as if positive step for the development of grass root democracy and women side by side. PRIs is now a days, are torch bearer to the rural women, no doubt.

Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Sarvodaya is a great idea for the development of socio economic status of Indian women. Gandhi argued for the development of women by his idea 'village Self Reliance'. First Five Years plan itself shaped on this idea in the following words:

" for democratic planning to succeed, it will have to energize the entire community. The crucial factor here is leadership at the top but at all levels."¹

In India they have been, occasionally some great attempts at soul - searching which lead to the constitution of committees to inquiry into the reasons for the trady progress of plan projects in the longest part of our country. The report of Balwant Rao Mehta committee was published in 1957 ,the report begins with a great motto:

" so long as we do not Discover or create representative and democratic Institutions... and invest them with adequate powers and assign to them appropriate finance ,we will not be able to Evoque local interest or local initiatives in the field of development".² But, this committee note on the existing situation a vast gulf between the ideal and the reality then in India rural area was needed a great practice of Democratic decentralization of the women.

Now the question is where do we stand after the forty five years of the report accepted? women still now not deeply interested in to the panchayat raj Institutions. Rural women are very satisfied by their domestic and household work. All women still not allowed to the rural politics and election competition. Male members of their family dominating them. Some progressive and laborious women fighting against all types of obstacles of their participation at the rural politics, who are directly involved to the concept as institutions have been dominated by their husband for taking any decision to their environment. Only the upper class women are allowed freely to the political atmosphere but their number is very few.

Following the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta committee the three tier system of Panchayat Raj was adopted with much fanfare function in many regions of the country in the early sixties. But the enthusiasm lasted only for the first term of five years plan and in the second term the panchayat raj Institutions began to drag their feet. The seventies saw these Institutions generally suspended all over the country. It needed a change of government to call for another interspective exercise over the dismal failure for the experiment. The rueful review given by the Ashok Mehta committee regards as follows: "the number of developments in the past have conspired to undermine the panchayat raj structure and made them ineffective..."³

It is very hard to make sure the participation at the local level politics in India. An average village has been found to be too small and its resources too slender for effective planning. States like Kerala opted for a basic unit with a population of about 15,000. West Bengal and Assam too have chosen similar basic units for the panchayat raj. Their success in working of Panchayat Raj Institutions seems to have mainly influenced the Ashok Mehta committee to prescribe "... a basic unit with about 20,000 population and an Apex unit at the level of the district with an average population of one million".⁴ It is legitimate to ask why the Ashok Mehta committee did not accord a statutory status to search gram sabhas making for a three tier system.

The Ashok Mehta committee observed that, the panchayat raj institutions have suffered due to have the absence of regular elections and perfectionary Audit. As a result of this fact, the committee recommended the reservation seats for various categories of our weaker sections in rural India. LM Singvi committee suggested they should have more financial resources and that there should be judicial tribunals in each state to adjudicate controversies about election to these local bodies their desolution, including other matters relating to their functioning".⁵

To secure effective participation of women in the decision making process at National, state and local levels by the government the NDP made several recommendations at sectoral level of which two pertain to special measures for recruitment of women candidates to the panchayat raj Institutions as under:

1. Reservation should be made up 30% seats at village panchayat zila Parishad level and local Municipal bodies for women.

2. Thirty percent of executive heads of all bodies from village panchayat to Zilla Parishad level and a certain percentage of chief executives of Panchayat Raj Institutions at lower middle and higher levels must be reserved for women.

In this regard, the Sarkaria commission also made some recommendations for fostering self government at the district level and objective mechanism for the devolution of funds to the district, the commission lays down "it is very necessary to evolve a mechanism like finance commission at the state level to enable the state government to take an objective view of the resources to be evolved transferred to the districts"⁶

According to Ram Reddy-"... the panchayat raj Institutions are viewed more as agencies of the government for the execution of its development program rather than as autonomous bodies".⁷ Balwant Rai Mehta committee also noted that "... the local bodies must be the instrument of expression of a people's will with regard to local government".⁸ Marcus Frandain his book tries to sum up the paradox in which the country seems to be caught - "The Western liberal democratic solution to India's local government problems would be simply to make each administrator feel responsibilities to elected for electricians at every level..."⁹.

How can India overcome from this paradox? people's participation can be the only way out from this dark situation. People's participation and rural democracy are internally related to each other having no doubt, more participation more democracy may be the future. Moreover women would be the key factor. C T Kurian examines that the nature of planning at the district level and concludes with a negative comment, - "... the point to note however is that 80% of the district plan outlays is disaggregated and appreciated among departments at the state level itself..."¹⁰.

Now, we are on the prelude of a transitional period of political and administrative power to grassroots with all the states completing the process of enacting fresh legislation for a strong PRIs. In this

journey, all Indian states are directed by the 73rd constitutional amendment act of 1992 to legislate they are existing Panchayat laws to bring them in confirming within one year this new direction of Panchayat Raj system provides an opportunity to the country a whopping 22.5 lakhs elected representatives with reserve seats for SCs/STs in proportion to their population and women who are allowed 33.3 per cent representation for the three tier system.

The 73rd constitutional amendment act of 1992 which will be legislated up on in all the states, incorporates salient provisions concerning political participation of women in local self government:

(a) one third of the total seats will be reserved for women to all the level of three tier panchayat system.

(b) one third of seats reserved for SCs and STs to be reserved for women for the progress of local self government.

(c) at the all level of Panchayat system at least one third offices of chairperson salary reserved for women representatives.

(d) women and child development forms part of newly adopted 11 th schedule of the Constitution of India.

In India in 1992 the Constitutional Amendment Act visualizes three tier Panchayat system as a vehicle for the drastic change at the greatest roots levels of our rural land the newly act provides:

(a) the preparation of area Plans by gram panchayats.

(b) the new addition of 11th schedule of constitution with a detailed and elaborate list.

(c) provision of a share in finances from States commissions to be established.

Notwithstanding, this statutory provision, past record clearly brings out the lip -service paid to panchayats in the progress of power, the progress of functions and the progress of resources this may be came a healthy reality for the programmes of women health, women education , and women self sufficient economic growth. History is a milestone and proof to the fact that gradually since 1958 functions powers and personel pulled out of panchayats one pretext or the other with a few exceptions. This is corroborated by the Ashok Mehta committee and GVK Rao committee on administrative arrangement for rural development. In such cases, invariably the axe feel on programs and personnel for women development programs.

In respective to implement the new Act in letter and spirit ,a strategy for the human resource development programs needs to be evolved in order to strand than women role and participation in Panchayat Raj system, training is needed for leaders and workers at various levels:

1. Level of Gram Sabha for adult women.
2. level of Panchayat for members and chairperson
3. policy and administrative level for functionaries.
4. the main components of the panchayat training should be practical.
5. orientation on provisions of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 and members responsibilities.
6. orientation programs on three tier Panchayat Raj system and development of programs.
7. Management development of chair persons.
8. Management development of women leaders
9. Gender sensitization of leaders to make change attitudes and beliefs.
10. Intensive training of the trainers.

In this existing situation non government organisation (NGOs) could be utilised for the training programs of women leaders and women representatives at local Panchayat level across the country to make our democracy more and more fruitful. In this regards, the use of audio visual aid and advance level of Technology may takes a greater role to the women who are still not well experienced at Panchayat level but interested to make a progress in spite of having too many obstacles to them. Gender taining has to remove Gender stereotypes and misconceptions that women are subordinate to men . The national progressive plan recommended that it is essential to set up a new committee to the training needs of women panchayat members and leaders.

The key factors in any decentralization would be to mark the points, responsibilities and powers the state government identifies to develop on the panchayat bodies and what financial supports are placed at their disposal. side by side, the reforming of Bureaucracy would be the most important part of any process of political and administrative decentralization. There would inevitably be some resistance from the Bureaucracy to the attempt at restructuring. It is a very important point that government cannot deliver any negligencies regarding the issue of women attachment to the panchayats. A greater degree of accountability is imperative that can be ignored in the ending, it may be said that Indian women two day are not what they are just ten years before and they cannot be after ten years what they are now with a very positive members in Panchayat Raj institutions. They have changed their own platform of social and economical

by their own effort and sincere activity played to the political field at the all levels of Indian politics .With the fast changing socio- economic scenario being witness today,coupled with the political empowerment by the truth of the century, they are not going to be what they are today in our socio economic and financial atmosphere.

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