



WOMEN REPRESENTATION AND RURAL POLITICS

Dr. M. Yariswamy

Associate Professor

Department of Political Science, Karnatak University, Dharwad, India

Email: dryariswamy@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53724/jmsg/v3n2.05>

Nagesh.T

Research Scholar

Department of Political Science, Karnatak University, Dharwad, India

ABSTRACT

The Panchayathraj system has been playing an important role for development of the social economic and political life of the rural Women representation of rural politics. Village is the basic unit of social life in India. This is fact that more than three-fourth Indian population still lives in the villages. The concern of the government for the life, liberty and prosperity of the rural masses, soon after independence, was reflected in various measures adopted by it to better their lot. As a matter of fact, the prominent leader's freedom struggle such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Jai Prakash Narian indicated that the major task of Independent India would be to take democracy to the grass-roots level and to involve the rural masses in the task of national reconstruction. According to Mahatma Gandhi, true democracy could not worked by twenty men sitting at the Centre. It has to be worked out from below by the people of every village. The author concludes with a suggestion that the village Grama Panchayathiyats are not the relic of tribalism of feudalism but are the results of mature political thinking through ages. Village Grama Panchayathiyats in India could really succeed in bringing about decentralization of economic and political power under the conditions of social and equality. Firstly, interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected one's should be encouraged. Secondly, these women could be taken out to the urban areas and their interaction with educated urban elected women representatives be arranged.

Key words: Political Participation, Awareness, Women, Panchayats, Reservation, Empowerment, Local Governments, Equality, women participation

1. INTRODUCTION

The Panchayathraj system has been playing an important role for development of the social economic and political life of the rural Women representation of rural politics. Village is the basic unit of social life in India. This is fact that more than three-fourth Indian population still lives in the villages. In Indian Constitution, there are provisions for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social and economic status. However such provisions exist only in pen and paper for millions of economically and socially disadvantage people in India especially SC's, ST's and Women. In India



women are in much worst position than men not only in terms of sex ratio, literacy rate, work force participation, life expectancy, but also in terms of their access to power structure which controls and guides the development programmes of a society. Since access to political opportunities and participation in political decision making process are important components of capability and autonomy, discrimination in this respect

Dr. Kulwant Gill He goes on to discuss the position of Hindu women from Vedic period to modern period. He takes the question of Hindu women's right to property in different forms including women's estate; He has analyzed beautifully the problems faced by women.¹

The Panchayat Raj system has been playing an important role for development of the social economic and political life of the rural people populace. Gaur reviewed numerous studies on Grama Panchayat Raj system in India covering variety of problems and topics on historical macro levels, regional level as well as almost on all general aspects of Grama Panchayats. He further reviewed both theoretical as well as empirical parts of the studies. He pointed out that in the present development context in India, rapid changes are taking place on the economic scene which brings in their trail for reaching changes in social, cultural, and political aspects of life Thus there is still need for micro studies which remain even green and having a bearing on policy issues.

Ideally speaking all men is free and equal, by virtue of them being human beings. There may be a lot of differences among human beings, which is inevitable. Because absolute equality is impossible to achieve. Not only there exist differences among different social, racial, religious, linguistic groups, difference also exists between men and women. This difference appears to be artificial in nature as it is the creation of men in society. Women throughout the world have been heaped with innumerable injustices from time in memorial. Every society at one time or the other has treated women in an injustice manner.

“It is scarcely news that women are underrepresented in Indian politics. The issue has come sharply into focus for some years now, partly because of the thwarted moves towards providing one-third reservation for women in legislative bodies including Parliament, along with the more

¹ Dr. Kulwant Gill, Hindu Women's Right to Property in India; Deep and Deep publishing House, New Delhi, 1986.



successful moves to enforce such reservation in elections to rural panchayats. Of course such an issue naturally becomes more apparent during a period of elections as well”.

Indian society is one of the most ancient civilizations of the world. At one point of time women treated equally in India. But however from the latter part of the Vedic period to the modern times, women have been treated unequally. This is more in case of the right to property. Women have been deprived of their right to property in substantial way and have been made more vulnerable to the wished of the male members of the society. Some efforts were made by the British Indian Government to provide justice to women by passing certain Acts before India independence. However, the constitution of independent India has made for the first time provisions giving equality to women; it is unfortunate that even after 50 years of the implementation of the constitution justice to women is still a far cry.

II. Political Participation of Women:

Political participation may be defined as voluntary participation in political affairs through membership, voting and partaking in the activities of the political parties, participation of Grama Panchayat Sabha`s, Gramasabha`s, ward Sabha`s in rural politics, member of legislative bodies and politically motivated movements. The Constitution of India guarantees adult franchise and provides the framework for women to participate actively in politics. Article 15 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. It is a pity that women have not substantially availed of the constitutional provisions. The successive election statistics shows that the number of women who exercise their franchise has increased from election to election. For the last two decades almost equal numbers of men and women have gone to the polling booths to vote.

Without proper representation of women in the legislative bodies and political participation of women at all levels, issues concerning women would remain neglected. According to the Indian Constitution women being the weaker section are eligible for reservation wherever necessary. Till date, women`s representation in the legislative bodies is literally being obstructed by male domination. Constitutional and political action has to play a positive roll to solve the problem.



Changing status and Role of Women in rural Politics. Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. Governance relates to a set of rules, institutions, and values that are involved in the management of state and society. Governance institutions and processes include political parties, parliaments, government and their interactions with society. Although governance is a generic term which could mean good government or management, the governance values, types of government, the nature of political processes, the political parties and organizations, which/whose interests are represented and protected, and the extent of power that the masses have to challenge the state or in suggesting alternatives in methods of governance etc. may vary in different political systems. Liberal democracy is founded on reason, law, and freedom of choice but the position of different social groups in the social and political space where power is located is not always equal in practice. This is particularly so in the case of women. The nature of society or state has a decisive impact on the extent and effectiveness of women's political presence and participation of rural politics.

The number of women in politics at the local level had been very small, and their influence negligible. As stated by Rao, Nirmala (1998) The women in local politics were generally either politicians who had lost membership of higher institutions, and those who were given such an opportunity to serve the purpose of publicity². In many cases, the motive was partially also to satisfy the aspirations of these few women, since they could be kept under virtual control and India Report denied higher aspirations. The insignificant presence of women at these levels was an important indicator of two basic facts: one that women who are planted at the top often lacked the kind of training required for effective participation, secondly, the society was unable to accept women in politics, particularly at the grass-root level. If we examine the reasons for low participation, as stated by Nath, Kamle (1997), down the age's women have always been treated as subordinate to men in every aspect of life. Their place of work was confined to the domain of the household with household chores and rearing of children. Her identity was attached to that of her father, husband or son, i.e. she was given a status in accordance with that of her male partner. It is not that women in the past have not contributed substantially in politics, but because of their secondary status and low esteem, most of them were denied entry in political decision-making.

² Rao, Nirmala (1998) 'Representation in Local Politics: a Reconsideration and Some New Evidence', Political Studies, xl(vi): 19-35



Athreya, V.B & Bhargava, B.S. & Bhaskar, Manu, defines political participation as the verity of ways in which people try to influence the political process. He has sought to identify the channels through which citizens attempt to influence the leaders as well as to isolate the kinds of citizens apt to use these channels on a regular basis³. I have tried to see political participation as a process in which people try to affect the government by taking part in the voting behavior; by persuading others to vote;

Sushila Agrawal has written a book entitled “Status of Women” (1988). The constitutional provisions in India have been analyzed in the context of social reality and traditional value framework. Special provisions of Indian and criminal procedure codes for the protection of women who could be a victim of the offences in public and private life because of her sex have been examined.⁴

Vijay Kaushik and Bela Rani Sharma Said there has been worldwide awakening about the rights of women. The United Nations has been doing commendable work in this direction. There is more and more awareness about improving the working conditions of women and for providing them proper place in political field⁵ Political parties are keen to associate more and more women with their functioning. All these issues have been discussed in this book.

III. CONCLUSION

It is evident that men’s attitude towards women’s entry into politics has begun to change from that of total rejection to limited encouragement and in some cases even to active encouragement. This trend needs to be strengthened through orientation courses and training programmes for officials and elected representatives, both men and women. Besides there is a need to train the women leaders at regular intervals to enable them to manage the responsibilities assigned to them in the Grama Panchayats at all the levels. Since the hard up women members found it difficult to forgo their wages for attending training Programmes, these must be organized at their doorstep and some of the articulate Grama panchayathiyat leaders should be involved as the trainers. Another important effort required for real empowerment of rural women is to bring about an attitudinal change in both men

³ Athreya, V.B & Bhargava, B .S. & Bhaskar, Manu, 1992, *Women in Grassroots Democracy-A study of Kerala*, University of Kerala/ ICSSR, New Delhi.

⁴ Sushila Agrawal , “Status of Women” Rawat publications, Jaipur (1988).

⁵ Vijay Kaushik and Bela Rani Sharma, “Women’s Rights and World Development” (1998).



and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and rearing children needs to be transformed into a feeling of equal partnership of women and men. To inculcate this they should be imparted education for bringing about social and political awareness among both. Studies on women in politics have emphasized that contact with outside world makes women more alert and also active in the political process. There could be two ways of doing it. The women should also be encouraged to organize themselves. The Mahila Mandals in the village can be effectively used as instruments to mobilize them for this purpose. Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making. It has been noticed that there are certain very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Grama panchayathiyats, who have been successfully implementing the developmental schemes and have ensured overall development of their constituencies. Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honoring them in public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives and their success stories and good practices will get replicated. The media both print as well as electronic can play an important role in creating awareness in the rural society. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.

From India's point of view, we cannot expect an outstanding socio economic background in rural set up and demanding high expectation from them in a very short span of reform. Rather my study reveals that education and annual households are not at all affecting the development role of women leaders. The JRY work has been done wonderfully in the Grama Panchayat from not so educated agricultural background and politically inexperienced women. We cannot expect more morality from an educated fellow as now we are facing so much corruption at the high level. Another instance can be taken to prove my stand that the women Member of the Grama Panchayat denied to open the Grama Panchayat office and made logical argument before the collector demanding more relief for the Grama Panchayat. It certainly proves that they can do anything to the extent only acceptability as leaders is the need of the hour. So enormous expectations without attending a proper institutional frame work is certainly not a good trend perhaps, rather we have to be satisfied with this fact and figures for another few years.

So the present study disclosed for the women respondents, not elitist background, family obligation and domination not much determined. Education and occupation have no significant bearing on women's participation. Right from the attendance in the Grama Panchayatraj meetings to



their effort in JRY is up to the expectation. As such the study departs from the result of similar studies elsewhere. Some of the specific suggestions given by the members, both men and women for improving participation of women are as follows:

- Training on various aspects of the PRS should be provided to the women members. Provisions of the 73rd Amendment, writing records, conducting meetings, understanding of bureaucratic structure, government schemes for the rural poor, unemployed, education, public distribution system, etc. are some of the areas in which training could be given.
- Family and Government support. This was identified as an important area requiring attention. Encouragement by the families in the form of appreciation of their official work, their decisions and ensuring their presence in the meetings would help and similarly the government officials need to be more patient towards them and cooperate with them in their work and enabling them to understand their work.
- A minimum educational qualification criterion should be laid down for the future contestants, particularly the women contesting for the grama panchayathiyathi elections. This will facilitate the aspiring contestants to take education seriously from an early age. The importance of education in better administration cannot be denied.
- Compulsory attendance in the meetings.
- Creation of a feminist consciousness, which makes the women, identify with themselves and the characteristics so specific to them.

To conclude, the findings of the study are indicative of better participation from the women members in future. This will put them in better control of their lives, which is good for the development of the country.
