



A View on Women Employment in India

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Introduction

Women empowerment referring to the empowerment of women in our present society has become a significant topic of discussion in regards to development and economics. It can also point to approaches regarding other marginalized genders in a particular political or social context. While often interchangeably used , the more comprehensive concept of gender empowerment refers to people of any gender, stressing the distinction between biological sex gender as a role. It thereby also refers to other marginalized genders in a particular political or social context.

Every Society accepts existence of Right to women. It based on democratic values. Government of In India declared year 2001 as “Year of Women Empowerment “ and govt included 9 important points in their policy.

1. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- 2.The de-jure and de facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, social culture and civil.
- 3.Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social culture and economic life of the nation.
- 4.Building and strengthening partnership with civil society, particularly women’s organization.
5. Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels social security and other social services.
- 6.Changing social attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- 7.Mainstreaming a gender in the development process.
8. Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- 9.Strengthening legal system aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Women constitute about 50% of the country's population. But they are the largest deprived category in almost all aspects. They have been denied their rights & liberties by the male dominant Indian society due to which their social, economical & political status has remained relatively low. For centuries they have been discriminated in all walks of life & treated as "second class" citizens. Women of today are no longer content to remain peripheral as actors, and want to play their rightful role in all spheres of life. The society and the government at all levels have to attune themselves continuously to the changing needs of women as it is well perceived that the development of any nation of society is not possible if women are not empowered. Indisputably, the Government of India is committed to the cause is an arduous one. To make this journey possible, women's participation in the political process is of crucial importance from the view point of both equity and development.

Women's Political participation considered a major measure of women's empowerment. Globally, though histories of the world. We have records of very few regents, sovereigns, and active agents in nobility who were women. Champions of liberalism like John Stuart Mill, who advocated women's participation in governance by the struggle for women suffrage in the self avowed liberal west, very well illustrates the entrenched nature of patriarchal resistance to women's empowerment. In the last century more women heads of state could be counted in Asia as compared Europe and the struggle for women suffrage in India was physically less violent but this is not reflective of greater acceptance of women in decision making in public spaces. To measure women's empowerment now GEM takes 3 indicators, Women's participation in economic, political and professional activities. Within political power what is measured is mainly women in parliament, Judiciary or in local bodies.

The Constitutions of India promulgated in 1950, in its Article-40 stated that the "State should endeavor to organize village Panchayats and endow them with powers and authority as may be necessary for them to function as units of local self government". As regards representation in them, it was left to the state legislature to make changes in state Panchayat laws which encouraged the participation of women in panchayats.

Political Representation of women In India

The recent constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th constitutional Amendments) brought about significant changes in the political scenario of the country with regard to women's participation in politics. With the advent of these Acts, India today has more than 500 district panchayats, around 5100 block/taluka panchayats and about 2.25,000 village panchayats, 90 municipal corporations, 1500 municipal councils, and 1800 nagar panchayats. All these bodies would jointly elect three million representatives and a considerable number of them would be women. (Source: "Political participation of women: The case of women councilors in Kerala, India, "Journal of third world studies, Spring 200 by R. Sooryamoorthy)

Prior to the 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendments, only the state of Karnataka had reservation for women in institutions of local self-governance. The Janata Party Government in Karnataka in

1991 passed a bill to implement 25 per cent reservation for women in local elections. This spurred a national debate on the issue of reservation for women in several other states. (Source: "Women an political Participation in India, "www.iwraw-ap.org)

Without academic and social education, the political empowerment of women in certain parts of the country proved futile. In Panchayati Raj and other such representative bodies set up in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere in the country, the uneducated women are subjected to exploitation at the hands of government machinery. (Source: "Towards the empowerment of Indian women," www.ambedkar.org)

An overview on the role of position of women in these institution indicates that women have entered these institutions for the first time by introduction of the policy of reservation but, yet they have to go a long way to prove that they are equally capable as men. The policy of reservation provided for women is important not as an end in itself but a step forward in promoting women's participation in the grassroots of democracy. (source" "Political Empowerment of women At the Grassroots Author: Vidya, K.C.,"2007; www.easterbookcorporation.com)

Lack of space for participation in political bodies has not only resulted in the presence of women in meager numbers in these decision making bodies but also has resulted in the neglect of their issues and experiences in policy making. (Source" "Women and political participation in India,"(www.iwraw-ap.org)

Statistical records show that there has been only a marginal increase in the last few decades In the number of women candidates fielded during the elections. At the state level, their membership in the legislatures is abysmally low, lower than their numbers in the parliament.

Illiteracy , women's triple burden, patriarchal values, lack of access and control over income and other resources, restrictions to public spaces and insensitive legal systems continue to impair their effective political participation. This is compounded by the absence/inadequate availability of if infrastructural and support services to facilitate their participation.

The Role of Panchayati Raj in Women Political Empowerment

Article 243 D of the constitution provides that not less than one-third of the total number of seats in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women including chairpersons in every panchayats and such seat may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies/Panchayats at each level.

The 73rd constitutional Amendment provided for the increased participation of women in the political institutions at the village, taluka and district level. This has enabled several women, who had never been in power and even those illiterate, to enter politics.

There are 27,82,293 elected representatives in Panchayats out of which 10,42,282 are women which constitute to 37.46% in states like Kerala, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Madhya Pradesh , the number of women elected in Panchayats is quite high.

To further facilitate the process of women's Empowerment in the panchayats, which is, of course, related to greater empowerment of the panchayats themselves, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj is implementing a scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojana. The Ministry has also initiated the Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan. (*Source: women representation and empowerment in Panchayats, " May 3, 2007*)

Karnataka tops the country in the representation of the women in the Panchayati Raj institution with women winning 43.7 per cent of the seats in gram Panchayats, 40.2 per cent in taluk Panchayats and 36.4 per cent in Zilla Panchayats. (source:Women excel in stat panchayat bodies,"January 21 2007;www.thehindu.com)

Bringing women into politics through the Panchayat Raj Institutions system (PRI) was an act of positive discrimination. Crucially, PRI has helped to change women's perceptions of themselves. Women have gained a sense of empowerment by asserting control over resources, officials and most of all, by challenging men. PRI has also given many women a greater understanding of the workings of politics, in particular the importance of political parties.

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Some of the ways in which women, through PRI, are changing governance are evident in the issues they choose to tackle; water, alcohol abuse, education, health and domestic violence.

Women are also taking action against child marriage and child domestic labour, whilst promoting girl-child education. As with education, women have used their elected authority to address quality health care as a critical issue.

(Source: "PANCHAYAT RAJ:WOMEN CHANGING GOVERNANCE," Devaki Jain (September 1996) ; www.sdnj.undp.org)

The mechanisms to facilitate and protect women in political participation are not in place, such as a strong supportive constituency particularly for women, increased awareness of their rights and responsibilities as elected members, training and information dissemination on governance processes, gender sensitization of the male elected members, and soon.

The lack of representation of women in decision making positions results in women's agenda not getting reflected and addressed in politics and programmes. Lack of critical numbers of women elected representatives impedes them from negotiating for important portfolios such as finance, home, defence, etc., which are generally termed as key portfolios and primarily controlled by men.

It has been observed that women are allotted soft portfolios such as those related to women and children, information and culture, social welfare, etc which are relatively less important and have correspondingly lesser resources both financial and human.

Women politicians point out that even within the political parties, women are rarely found in leadership positions. In fact, women candidates are usually fielded from 'losing' constitution where the party does not want to 'waste' a male candidate.

The representation of women in the Lok Sabha has basically remained stagnant. It reached a "high" of 8% in 1984. This figure went up by a mere 0.2% in 2004. This despite the fact that all major national parties in recent years have declared through their manifestos that they would implement a 33% reservation for women in all legislatures. (source: "The road not traveled," January 2002; www.indiatogether.org)

In its first ever gender gap study covering 58 nations, the world economic forum has ranked India a lowly 53. The report is based on United Nations Development Fund for Women's findings on global patterns of inequality between men and women.

The report cities political empowerment women in India as a key development which augured well for the future. In India we ranked 24th in terms of women's empowerment in politics, both at the parliamentary and grassroots level.

(source: www.rediff.com, "what women empowerment? India's 53rd", May 17, 2005)

The 81st Constitution Amendment Bill

The Women's Reservation Bill (WRB) was first introduced as the constitution Amendment (81st) Bill on 12th September 1996 by the United Front government particularly after the effective implementation of the 73rd and 74th constitutional. The Bill envisaged that:

- A nearly as may be one-third of all seats in Lok Sabha and state Legislative Assemblies shall be reserved for women.
- Reservation shall apply in case of women seats reserved for scheduled castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) as well

- Seats to be reserved in rotation will be determined by draw of lots in such a Panchayat is identified as democratic decentralization. It means democracy at the “GRASS ROOTES” LEVEL. Mahatma Gandhi advocated the system of village panchayats as the foundation of democracy on which must be based the other layers of govt. with progressively diminishing power & authority. The idea behind this concept was the people must be associated with decision making at every step. He believed that “Society would be meaningless without reform of the social structure and upliftment of the weaker sections namely the women and the lower social state to a position of equality with others”

The empowerment of rural women is crucial for the development of the Rural Bharat Brings women into the mainstream of development is a major concern for the government of India, which is why 2001 has been declared as the “year of women Empowerment”.

Rural leadership has a great importance in our village dominated set-up. In this context the role of rural women leaders is extremely important as they can initiate the changes in the rural society of our country. The panchayat Raj institution should also be given adequate and real powers. Positively it has been noticed that due to reservation of seats many women were elected to local bodies. Reservation has created a space for women’s needs within the structural framework of politics & legitimized the identity of women and their presence in the public life.

This means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. It involves power to, power with and power within. Some define empowerment as a process of awareness and concretization of capacity building leading to greater participation, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making, power and control leading to transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on our concerns. With reference to women the power relation that has to be involved includes their lives at multiple levels-family, community, market and the state. Importantly it involves the psychological level women’s ability to assert them and this is constructed by the gender roles’ assigned to her especially in a culture which resists change like India . An other level of understanding women’s participation as both voters and candidates for the Panchayat raj institutions is at grass root level. The arguments given in favor of reservation for women in the legislative bodies at the state and central level are:

1. That the declining trend in women’s representation was the result of the reluctance political parties to sponsor women candidates which, however, offers real obstacles in making the few legislators act as spokesperson for women’s rights and opportunities.
2. That in a situation of political parties reflecting the established values of male dominated society, certain structural changes in the sociopolitical set up were necessary to make room for process to change their condition of life, women might ‘opt out’ of the political system and become either passive or rebels.

3. That a system of reservation of a proportion of seats for women in elected bodies would pave the path for a fairer deal to nearly half the population in the various units of government and
4. That, a system of reservation could increase the woman legislator's sense of responsibility and concern for woman specific problem and this would lead to increasing mobilization of woman both in the electorates and within the political parties. Social scientists associated with the committee also hold the view that improvement in the political status of woman constituted an integral aspect of the overall It was pointed out very forcefully that a 30 per cent reservation of seats in the legislative bodies will alter the very character of our legislature and will compel the political parties to change their strategies and tactics and induce them to give women their due.

There was opposition on this issue from the representatives of the political parties and most women legislators. The Towards Quality' 1971 committee rejected the suggestion for a system of reservation for women to state assemblies and parliament. However, it recommended "Statutory women's panchayats at the village level to ensure greater participation by women in the panchayats at the village level to ensure greater participation by women in the political process as an integral part of the panchayat raj structures. The recommendation was passed on to state government, received mostly negative response and was, therefore, buried within the government.

The National perspective plan (1988) proposed 30% reservation to all elective bodies to be filled, at least in the initial years, by nomination or co-option. The debate organized by the national women organization refused the proposal for reservation in the state assemblies or Parliament but recommended 30% reservation for women in panchayati Raj institutions" with due precautions to ensure representation of the weaker sections of women sections of women especially Dalit and tribal. The women organizations were however emphatic on the need for elections to ensure emergence of a new leadership from gram roots.

The 64th Amendment bill introduced by Rajiv Gandhi was a step further in this direction. The 22nd Amendment bill in 1990 proposed one-third reservations for women in the panchayat bodies with an additional provision of one-third among the reserved categories of scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes and amount office bearers. Ultimately, the 73rd Amendment was passed by the parliament on December 22, 1992 providing for 33% reservation of seats for women in pantheist bodies It was ratified by half the states by April 1993. Undoubtedly, this Act is most significant for the reservation provided to women along with the scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes. If fully implemented, as many as 7.95 laky women including those belonging to schedule castes and Tribes can become pinch & serpent (member an chairperson) in the panchayats. 73rd constitutional Amendment Act led to emphasis on 4 important points. Constitutional status, Obligation Right to Deprived section and provisions. The Provisions of the act are:

1. Not less than 1/3 of the seats will reserved for women (including schedule castes & Tribes) and these may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies of the panchayat.
2. In the seats reserved for schedule castes and schedule Tribes, not less than 1/3 total number of such seats to be reserved for women.
3. Not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats for the offices of the chairperson at each level would be reserved for women. This would be rotated among different panchayats at each level.

The 73rd constitutional Amendment Act has provided necessary conditions to usher in the vibrant local governance institutions and has helped women in challenging deeply entrenched traditional power structures like those of patriarchy, Castesim and feudalism. However the 73rd constitutional amendment act 1993 opened a new chapter in the history of democratic decentralization in India by development power to the people and gives opportunist to women folk to express their voice in the decision making process. Empowerment is now increasingly seen as a process by which the one without power gain greater control over their lives. The recent Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIS) Act does have the potential to include women in a very good proportion to male at the grassroots level political institutions. Presence of 33% women is likely to affect and influence the political process of decisions making policy formulation at this level. It will not only enable them to give a women's angle to the decision policy formulation activity, it will also awaken them to the problems facing the community as whole. It will train cadre of women political activists for partaking in the affairs of state and federal politics. Total sharing and equality in decision making may not happen for years to years to come, but PRIS showed a path towards the goal. When women armed with physical presence of a size able proportion reach the position of a critical mass their voices cannot be ignored. They have to be heard. It could be a road to women's political empowerment. The experience of Orissa and west Bengal testify that women are capable of efficient political performance given the chance.

The provision of 30% reservation in 73rd amendment endowed rural women with a platform to enter into the purview of decision making and planning. Their leadership is still to climb many steps to be able to contribute equally in the political affairs like men. Reason for this is lack of preparation of women to take up responsibility of governance. Traditions of rural areas can be one of the reasons, which don't allow women to exhibit able leadership. Apart from this there may be other factors, which influence participation of women as leaders of village. The factors influencing women leadership may be of two kinds-internal and External. Internal factors like lack of knowledge and awareness about the systems and procedures regarding functioning of panchayats lead to subdued leadership on women's part 2nd thing is exposure. Exposure directs people to think rationally and build greater confidence. For rural women it helps in boosting up the confidence of women representatives to undertake public activities and improving the social skills of women is helps in boosting up the confidence of women representatives to undertake public activities and improving the

social skills of women. For example Ms.Kiran Devi Pradhan resident of Akbarpur khurd village in Khairabad development block of Sitapur, before becoming Pradhan she was closely associated with SSK field officer and she got an opportunity to explore the external world . slowly but steadily she gained insight and confidence to work After being throned as Pradhan, She worked for the betterment of her Gram Panchayat with great ease. Education is the next key that opens the door of life , which is essentially social in character. In Present society, capacity to understand the issues and problems facing the community and ability to communicate one's ideas to other are important qualities of a leader. Educated rural women become members of a very important institution. They understand their roles and responsibilities with regard to Panchayat Raj.

External factors influencing women participation include her family. Society, traditions, occupation, panchayat representative government, etc and another factors are responsible for the low participation of women in the political decision making: the most important are illiteracy , prejudices, economic dependency and the unfavorable social settings in term of opportunities, with its high rate of predominantly male incumbency and slow turnover the fresh faces in the political arena at the local level. While chalking out the factors influencing women leadership, her family would be the important factor. It is observed that panchayats but also render them support tend to become efficient leaders. In contrast, women who do not get support and permission from the family become dummy candidates with no contribution in panchayat development. But this becoming a thing of past. Women are becoming more effective and confident, think rationally and are playing a nes role in political process.

Of course there is no doubt that election to PRIs has brought rural women to the fore, who are showing enough maturity to closely align themselves with the political power structure, however, women participation is yet not entirely visible and effective as their potential remains largely unrecognized and their contributions are often underlined. Achieving the goal of equal participation of men and women in decision making will provide a balance that would more accurately reflect ion the composition of the society. It will expand the range of human resources available to meet the needs of the society. At present the increasing participation of women in political arena will be a source, as well as signal for social change.

Suggestions: The real empowerment of women at the grass roots level would be meaningful only when some steps are taken in this direction.

1. At the panchayats level, NGO's should be empowered to pursue cases of violence against women and solve their problems with creative efforts. The government should also take serious measures to eradicate this evil.
2. Illiteracy rural women require proper education and training .After that rural women should be made aware of their powers and duties. NGO's and social organization should also develop leadership quality in rural women.

3. The Panchyati raj Institutions should also be given adequate and real powers. The power that is often vested with the state government in almost all matters requires decentralization. There is need to involve women representatives in the planning and execution of various development and welfare programs of the government to provide them opportunity and learning of the process of development planning and programs implementation at the local level.
4. The media can also help a lot in achieving the objectives of the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Moreover, National level seminars and workshops should also be highlighted. Through these seminars and workshop, old myths such as male superiority, hesitation of women to work in public life, economic dependence on men, etc should be broken.
5. Women representation need to be well informed on various developmental policies and programs by disseminating necessary information. Education, awareness and training on policies, legislations and day to day rules and procedure and processes prevailing at the local level are necessary towards the direction of women empowerment. It will be unfortunate the elected women representatives do not know what to do solve problems they encounter in their area.
6. Networking women members of the panchayats is especially important because of their small number per village. Networking can give otherwise isolated women representatives a feeling of collective strength and exposing them to the experiences of other women representative thereby increasing their participation. Participating in a forum can also give them the bargaining power versus panchayat members needs to be encouraged so as to share the experiences which would make them more aware and empowered.

Conclusion

Experience awareness, education and competence, willingness, confidence self motivation, encouragement from family and society contribute to developing the leadership in local governance is not long; she is still in her learning phase to take up roles that were impediments that hinder her from participating in panchayats. Women in spite of all the stumbling blocks, are trying hard from to make space for themselves in political arena. Women panchayat members in large numbers are emerging out of their social boundaries to take up political responsibilities. Some emphatic changes are already visible. Reservation is just a means towards equality and not an end in itself. At last empowerment is not a single day process. Firstly we should change our attitude for empowerment. The great feminist writer Simon De Behavior wrote "Equality with Discrimination" for women empowerment.

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