



Women empowerment: An emerging issue towards rural development

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Abstract

This paper consist of the impact of women empowerment for sustainable rural development in India that how it contribute for socio-economic reform. This study summarizes the concepts and consequences and prospects of women empowerment. Some objectives like analyses and participation of women in Panchayati Raj and its socio- economic effects. Questionnaire was prepared for data collection with the help of 100 sample size and it comprises data interpretation with the result that it is feasible up to some extent for economic reform.

Keywords: empowerment, Panchayati raj, constitutional amendments

Introduction

The past few decades have witnessed that women's representative along with their great political and administrative strength. The issue of women's political empowerment actually came to the forefront of the global debate at "United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing in 1995. Women's equal access to, and full participation in decision-making was emphasized in various platform was one of the critical areas of concern. It unequivocally declared, that "Women's equal participation in politics plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account" (UN, 1995).

Gender is not synonymous with women, nor is it a zero-sum game, implying loss for men; rather, it refers to both women and men, and to their status, relative to each other. Gender equality refers to that stage of human social development at which "the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female," in other words, a stage when both men and women realize their full potential (Mathus and Jain, 2008).

Women since pre-independence and post-independence, irrespective of caste, creed, religion and education have been exploited in many forms and were denied rights on the basis of feminist and inferiority. While there has been a revolution of sorts at different intervals and some recognition has been provided, which is not at all acceptable given the current status of women and their representation at different forums, is minimal, the governments, both state and national have been formulating various policies and legislations to eradicate gender discrimination and facilitate equal opportunity to women. This study is focused on the representation of women in political circles as it is necessary to have women leaders at the helm of affairs to present their problems and challenges with respect to equality. The research is aimed at studying the role of women in politics, their participation, rate of

participation, challenges they face to achieve equal participation in politics, etc.

Importance of Women Entrepreneurs

Empowerment of women appears to be a much publicized clichéd concept in the 21st Century. Though, this much discussed and debated by media, politicians and academicians, yet women are nowhere near to being full and equal participants in public policy choices that affect their lives. Amartya Sen makes a compelling case for the notion that societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help, and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, a view strongly buttressed by a body of evidence suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development.

The lack of adequate political participation in decision-making has far reaching consequences. It deprives women from their rights and responsibilities as citizens and expresses their viewpoints and perspectives in Governance. There was a widespread perception that with the improvements in social indicators, education and growing number of women in the various employment sectors, women would automatically gain space in the decision-making bodies. However, this doesn't appear to be happening and there is a growing opinion that an affirmative action to increase the number of women in representative bodies is required (Sushma Sahay, 1998). Many attempts have been made to trace the political empowerment of women in India with the impetus provided by the international developments, statutes, etc., and parliamentary initiatives.

Status of Women in India

The constitution of the Republic of India ensures equality of women and men in every sphere of life and activity. The fundamental rights of the Indian constitution has clearly delineated stating, "The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, caste, sex, colour,

place of birth or any of them”. Women in India have been given equality of opportunity in all matters relating to education, employment and legal status and they can aspire to grace the highest office of the state. However, this is truly not indicative of the existing position of women in general in the country, yet. Though, legally and constitutionally, all women have equal access to and right to venture in every walk of life, a vast majority of them are still illiterate and uneducated (Yadav and Gurjar, 1997).

Need for focus towards Rural Development

The pace of change in the entire Indian political system has increased since independence. The introduction of adult franchise, the steps taken for universal education, the national adult education programme through National Extension Service, land reforms, democratic decentralization and other programmes of rural reconstruction have created new awakening among the masses. The new forces of socio-economic change unleashed by the implementation of several programmes of planned social change in rural areas gave a blow to the traditional social structure and thereby generated new values and visions (Dube, 1958).

After 1947, India also inherited numerous socio-economic problems. Nearly 80 percent of the population of the country lives in the country-side and most of the problems are related to the rural society; most significant among these were the problems of acute poverty, mass illiteracy, insufficient and backward agriculture and lack of techno-industrial growth, presence of innumerable social inequalities and low level of political awareness and political participation. Therefore, by accepting the principle of social justice and egalitarianism, India attained the status of a welfare state. However, it was also realized by policy makers and national leaders that the fruits of independence were to reach the common man. In the process, the development of rural society assumes greater importance. Hence the introduction of numerous programmers of rural development were initiated and thereby to divert socio-economic resources towards this end. In this context the role of rural leadership assumes greater importance.

Objective of the Study

To study and analyses the Panchayati Raj system and participation of women in the wake of Constitutional Amendment (Seventy-Three) Act;

To study the socio-economic and political profile of the women in Bilaspur District.

Hypothesis

H₀₁: The 73rd CAA has resulted in empowerment of women with increased political participation at the grass roots level.

Methodology

Population

The present study is essentially an investigation to describe and analyze the operational dynamics of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions. For the purpose of this study, Bilaspur district in Chhattisgarh is selected.

Sampling Design

As the size of actual population is unknown, thus we have

decided to adopt non-probability sampling technique for this research. We are going to consider Bilaspur district formulated by government of Chhattisgarh as quotas and equal amount of data will be collected from each quota.

Sampling Technique

To get easy access to the desired amount of responses, we have decided to adopt stratified random sampling method for collecting the data.

Sample Size

A sample of 100 respondents will be considered as sample size for this research. Research

Instrument

Structured questionnaire

Sources of Data

Primary data will be collected with the help of structured questionnaire through survey.

Secondary data will be collected from books, online and published journals, research papers etc.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Do you think that the women empowerment becomes absolute in order to rural development?

Table 1

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Feasible	27	15	37	12	9

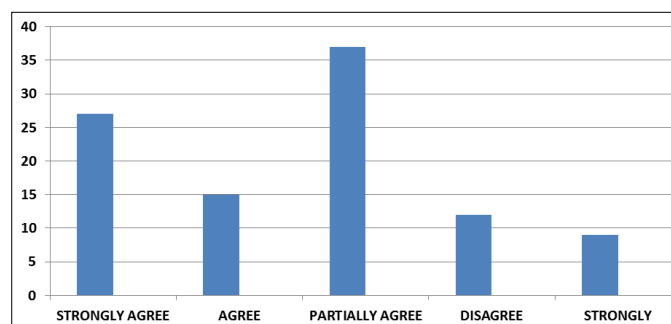


Fig 1

Out of 100 respondents, 37 % respondents are partially agree that women empowerment becomes absolute for societal development, 27% and 15% are strongly agree and agree and rest of the others are disagree and strongly disagree

Result

To make the participation of women in the PRIs really meaningful, it would be desirable that the percentage of reservation has to be raised to the proportion of women population. Further, conferment of judicial and police powers would go a long way in elevating the status and authority of the PRIs. Lack of education in the rural areas, social and family barriers and preoccupation with house hold duties prevent women from actively participating in the political process. However, it appears that defector women’s

participation in grassroots democracy will make its mark on the democratic structure of the nation sooner rather than later. The most significant aspect of women's participation in the decision-making process at the grassroots level is that it would throw up a trained younger leadership for the political mainstream, which has hitherto been restricted to men and a few elite women.

Conclusion

The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act provided a new constitutional platform which ensures the representation of one-third women in the PRIs. This legislation accelerated the process of the participation of women in the policy making bodies. In many areas of social and political development women now days are accorded more and more importance. It might be regarded as a traditional, benevolent point of view to state that women promote value codes and encourage in their own way a humane society, no matter whether this perspective can be taken at face value. It also has to be emphasized that women equally with men implement democracy as a way of life and generate economic resources. Hardly any country in the world has yet succeeded in fully implementing the equality of women and men. In India, women are the first and most to suffer from poverty and illiteracy from oppression and violence, from disasters and the infringement of human rights. Over and above, the same Indian women have proved on many occasions that they can be more accountable, equally skilled and less corrupt than men. Confronted with all possible social and political problems, they have demonstrated their social competence and their own income generating capacity. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act marks a watershed in the field of advancement of Indian women as they ensure one-third of total seats in all elected bodies of PRIs. This provides an opportunity to about one million rural women to enter as leaders and decision-makers at the grass-root level and enter public life through the existing 0.25 million bodies-rural and urban. Of these 75,000 will be chairpersons at the village, block and district levels. The participation of often illiterate rural women in the process of grassroots democracy has attracted both positive and negative views. The allegations are that these institutions are being misused by the predominantly male political structure which keeps women away from meetings, take their signature at their residence well before the meetings and operate through dummy candidates. Nevertheless, even the worst critics have acknowledged that this has caused some activity among rural women who are so far dormant. The fear that women's participation would not automatically lead to greater decision-making powers in the PRIs is not justified. This is manifested in the elections to the PRIs held in different states especially in the northern part of India.

The experience of the working of the PRIs in various states during the last one decade shows that very few states have transferred all the powers given in the 11th schedule to the PRIs. Even the powers that have been transferred, in reality, continue to be exercised by the functionaries under the supervision of the state government. The recommendations of the State Finance Commissions have also not been fully implemented in most of the states. The PRIs have also been reluctant to raise the resources of their own by using the

powers of taxation given to them. In this context it is generally argued that this has happened because of the loopholes in the provisions of the Constitution in which the word 'may' has been given instead of 'shall' in the Article 243G. This has left it to the discretion of the states to devolve or not the 29 functions given in the 11th schedule. This is why it is argued that maybe the word 'may' ought to be replaced by 'shall' by amending the Constitution. It has also been argued that in addition to the Union, state and concurrent lists, a list on the powers of the PRIs has to be inserted in the Constitution to ensure unambiguously the devolution of the functions on the PRIs. In this context, it should be obligatory for the state governments to accept the recommendations of the SFCs within 6 months of the submission of their reports. Further the state should earmark 50% of their budgetary allocation for the PRIs. Moreover the distribution of the resources among centre, states and the PRIs should be made on the recommendations of the Finance Commission appointed by the President instead of leaving it for the SFC to recommend the distribution of the resources between the states and the PRIs. Over and above, the PRIs can neither really be empowered through the amendments in the Constitution nor by the statues enacted by the state legislatures and notification issued by the state governments.

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