

Women and Panchayati-Raj

Dushyantraj Sahibram Mallick^{1*}, Dr.M.Rajiakodi²

¹Research Scholar Department of Rural Development Economics School of Economics Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India

²Former Dean Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai- 625 021 Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Mahatma Gandhi would have insisted upon women's equal participation and devolution of power to the institutions of local Self-Governance and the Village Panchayat. The Panchayat Raj Act provides for people's active participation in the local administration by granting them power to question and by requesting their participation in planning for development of their villages. Great thinkers predict that in the twenty first century, great importance will be given to women and spiritualism. Though women from historical days had played a dominant role in every aspect of human life in India, not much has been highlighted and stressed. They still remain a neglected segment of the society in India. The reservation of 33% under the Panchayati-raj Administration is a great milestone in the women's movement in India. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) of the Indian Constitution is considered as a breakthrough towards ensuring equal access and increased participation in political power structure for women.

Keywords: Panchayati-raj, 73rd and 74th Amendments, Women Political empowerment, Women Economic development, local self-government, WSHG, Village Panchayat or a Union or a District Panchayat.

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly whole of Mahatma Gandhi's life was dedicated to struggle for the freedom of the country. Not only did Gandhi desire to free the nation from foreign exploitation, he also wanted to remove the bonds of superstitions and ignorance, which had made the society static. In such a society, the position of women was very bad. That is why Gandhiji took up the cause of the women. As an ardent lover of humanity, he was an enemy of injustice and inequality. He had an understanding of women and their problems and had deep sympathy for them. Gandhiji's efforts towards liberation of women were reflections of his beliefs and attitude towards them.

Women in India

In the Indian context the women in general are considered to take up the role of 3 C's i.e. cooking, caring and child bearing. Only in the sixth plan a separate chapter was allotted for Women and development, which was the outcome of the recognition for the need of rural women development. Plan of action for women was referred in the Prime Minister's 20 point programme also. Women are given importance for the first time only in the National Commission's report on Agriculture (1976). DWCRA (1979) was the first scheme launched by the Indian Government particularly for women and it focuses on the rural

women from poor families. The IX plan (1997-2002) had made in its objective 'empowering women as the agent of social change and development'. National Policy for Empowerment of Women is being designed by the Government for the upliftment of women. Women Development Corporations were set up in different states. Several steps are taken by the Government to empower the deprived section of the society. But empowering a deprived section is not an easy task in a pluralistic society like India. Women in all sections of the society are the most deprived section. Each sections of the society need different types of empowerment strategies and process.

Political Empowerment of Women

Mahatma Gandhiji would have insisted upon women's equal participation and devotion of power to the institutions of local Self-Governance and the Village Panchayat. The Panchayat Raj Act provides for people's active participation in the local administration by granting them power to question and by requesting their participation in planning for development of their villages. The Self-Help Group women are mentally ready now and have moral courage to contest the local and Legislative election. There is every possibility that the growth of Self-Help Group in the future will provide large number of women leaders in India. The 73rd and 74th Amendments [4] to the Indian

Constitution is considered as a breakthrough towards ensuring equal access and increased participation in political power structure for women.

Great thinkers predict that in the twenty first century, great importance will be given to women and spiritualism. Though women from historical days had played a dominant role in every aspect of human life in India, not much has been highlighted and stressed. They still remain a neglected segment of the society in India. The reservation of 33% under the Panchayati-raj Administration is a great milestone in the women's movement in India. There is also a lot of talk and propaganda on women empowerment. All these programmes are sweet to listen. But the crucial questions are.

- Is the male dominated Indian society wholeheartedly supporting these movements and legislative measures?
- Have the women equipped themselves with the requisite knowledge, Skill, Energy, Outlook and forward looking character to assume the responsibilities assigned to them by various civic administration?

Even today there are people who criticise that the new measures cannot empower women. They also say that women are deeply rooted in tradition and old beliefs and will not come up to the expectations. Any impartial observer will have to admit that the women of India have crossed thousands of hurdles and prepared themselves to face any challenge in the developing nations like India.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to describe the individuals, community, society and any other units under investigation. The basic thrust of this study is to gain familiarity and the insight to the role of women representatives in the Local Self Government (Panchayat Raj) in Thane district, Maharashtra.

From these thirteen Panchayat Samities the researcher made a study among the female panchayat presidents at village level in Thane district.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings of a research study conducted in the Thane district. The findings show that all elected women representatives are doing good work and involving themselves in the development activities in the villages. However, there are a few bottlenecks. In general a woman presiding over the Village Panchayat or a Union or a District Panchayat has to meet a number of difficulties.

- She has to have the full support of her husband

- She has to have the full support of her family members
- She has to have the support and rapport of the officials.
- Lastly she has to have the support of the society in which she lives.

In many cases all the above mentioned support cannot be expected. A study of Prof. Abdul Aziz on "Nagar Bala and Women participation in Karnataka State" founded by the World Bank has found that all is not well in the system. The women involved in Panchayati-raj System have to cross many hurdles.

These are all passing events and have to be tackled by means of number of measures like literacy for women, periodical in-service training in Panchayat administration to women elected representatives, providing awareness programmes etc. Literacy for rural women is an essential component of any rural development strategy. They have been carrying the burden of household activities, partnering their husbands in the times of Weal or Woe and taking care of the children. They have undergone countless sufferings. It is time that they are given their rightful due in the process of Rural Development and Nation building.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

On the basis of the data collected and the conclusions reached in this study, it is observed that the women representatives need to be politically socialized by way of making them participate in an exclusive political oriented occasions. This would certainly pave the way for building up of their own self-confidence and thereby the overall control over the subordinates shall be maintained. This will be of great moral boost for the women representatives in order to fulfill their commitments in tune with expectations of rural masses in the respective pockets. It is worth quoting the words of wisdom of Gilbert Etienne, who spent nearly 30 years in traveling around rural India while undertaking social research (India's Changing Rural Scene, 1963-1979). "What a sight, in November or December, when the hard work on the soil is temporarily put aside, to see long processions of bullock carts going to the Ganges for the sacred bath. The men lead the bullocks, the women, wearing bright saris, sing to Gangaji, symbol of fertility and purification

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