



EMPOWERMENT OF ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF MORADABAD DIVISION

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Abstract

In India, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) assume great prominence from the point of view of democratization in the administrative system. Article 40 of the Indian constitution lays down that the state shall take necessary steps to unify village panchayats and bestow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. The architects of PRIs visualized that not only men but also women should participate in the village panchayat. In Indian society women traditionally considered as a weaker section. The status of women has been subservient to man subjugated, exploited and oppressed. She has been discriminated from womb to tomb. They have been constantly denied the right to express their views at various levels. After independence, it was felt this negligence of women power had been one of the most essential causes of India's backwardness. The 73rd and 74th amendment act is an important event in the Indian history in which 33 percent reservation has been given to women at the Panchayat and Municipal level. The reservation for women in panchayats have provided a possibility for thrashing traditional gender, caste and religious biasness but it is a long and difficult process for bringing about societal change. The question remains: whether the constitutional amendment will be able to contribute to women's empowerment or will the existing patriarchal structures continue to dominate in the society. This paper is an attempt to understand the instance of elected women in panchayat level representation and how far these types of representation lead the way to their development and empowerment.

Keywords: Elected women leaders, Participation, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

In a country like India, PRI assume great importance from the point of view of democratization in the administrative system. As Gandhi often pointed out, India lives in villages and unless village life can be revitalized the nation as a whole can hardly come alive. After independence, Article 40 of the Indian constitution enshrines one of the directive principles of state policy, which lays down that 'the state shall take steps to unify village Panchayats and bestow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.' The architects of PRIs predicted that not only men but also women should participate in the village Panchayat. In this race, women have been failed to involve actively in policymaking due to the existing social structure in the Indian society. As a result, they did not achieve an equal status in the society compared to their male counterparts.

In order to improve the structure of PRIs, Balwantraj Mehta Committee (1952); Ashok Mehta committee (1977); CAARD Commission (1985); Sarkaria Commission (1988); Sixty Fourth Amendment Bill were formed and finally 73rd and 74th amendment was enacted in 1992. The 73rd and 74th amendment acts are an imperative event in the Indian history in which 33 per cent reservation has been given to Indian women at the Panchayat and Municipal level. The reservation for women in Panchayat have provided a possibility for thrashing traditional gender, caste and religious biasness but it is a long and challenging process for bringing about societal change. The problem remains: whether the constitutional amendment will be able to contribute to women's empowerment or will the existing patriarchal structures continue to dominate in the society. This paper is an attempt to understand the role and participation of elected women leaders in general development process of panchayats and how far their representation helps in the way to their empowerment with special reference to Moradabad division of Uttar Pradesh.

All over the world the gender problem has augmented during the recent years. The gender issue has become a decisive point of argument. Rural women in particular did not have any voice in the family as well as the society. They have been constantly repudiated the right to take active part in the decision making process at various levels. So this negligence of women power had been one of the most significant causes of backwardness of rural India.

There is no doubt that in different countries of the world the nature of women's participation is restricted. In a country where women constitute half the population, in the administrative system which supports popular democracy and equality of gender, where both men and women are legally equally eligible for administrative participation, women participation should be equal to that to men. It conviction is not done, and then it signifies flaws within the administrative system. Representation is not only a means of certifying individual participation, but also a responsibility of the representatives to act on behalf of the citizens (voters) that include women, who elected them and to reflect the voter's ideas & aspirations. But disproportionate absence of women from administrative process would mean that the concern for half of the population of a country can't be sufficiently grace with presence to or acted upon. It is also not possible for the government to eloquent policies and programmes for women without their active and effective participation. It is true that true Indian lives in the rural villages. Its villages are as old as its civilization. The evolution and origin of village panchayat is an old system. According to H.D. Malviya - "It (Panchayat) has been so because the village is the unchanging backbone of Indian life". The word 'Panchayat' is a traditional, referring to the five elders in a village who mediated conflict and spoke on behalf of all the residents of village. The word 'Panchayat' has been retained for use after the 73rd amendment to the constitution. Panchayati raj was in existence during Vedic period in ancient India and was working well as the people



were carrying out their personal and official duties on 'Dharma'. The life of people was peaceful and faithful as there were limited desires of the people. In the medieval period Panchayati Raj lost its significance as feudal lords managed local affairs through dictatorship. They never bothered for the people and only acted in their own interest. During the British period, there were attempts to set up local government. Lord Rippon is considered to be the first person who came out with a resolution of 1882 to provide framework for local government. After this there were attempts to improve local government through the act of 1909, 1918, and 1935. However, there was no real intension of the Britishers to decentralize power. It was only an arrangement to suit their imperial requirements.

After independence, government of India under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi was committed to set up Panchayati Raj system to provide real swaraj to the people of rural area. Acc to Gandhi – "A truly independent and democratic Indian, he envisioned gram swaraj or village self-rule". For Gandhi true village autonomy meant that all adult women and men work together to ensure their villages self-reliance in meeting basic needs. A developing democracy like India needs an extensive participation of the people irrespective of caste, colour creed, sea etc. in its administrative process. In order to provide this opportunity the system of democratic decentralization through PRIs has long been introduced in our country. As the women constitute a very substantial portion of the total population of Indian, their participation at grass root entity is so essential to make the democratic governance more successful. The question of their participation arises because of their long standing neglected social status in male dominated Indian society. Immediately after framing the Indian constitution, constitutional maintain along with the provision of reservation of seats in legislative bodies, public office and institutions were provided to them for their upliftment.

With the down of the 21st century the worldview about the rural women has undergone a marine change. The rural women are now observed as hard working prolific adults. With this changed perception there is a growing realization that there can be no successful development planning without encouraging equal participation of women. Panchayatis that of government where women can enter administrative life with affluence. Panchayat are good training ground for women representatives who want to reach higher levels of elected or appointed in government. The central purpose of women's participation in Panchayat is to change their socio-economic and administrative status. Keeping these facets in mind, adequate provisions had been made in shape of constitutional amendments and rules and regulation in panchayati Raj system to encourage and ensure the participation of women in the local governance system. The 73rd constitutional amendment act 1993 has made an effort to give some special powers to women in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj. The Act has reserved one- third of the total seats for women in PRIs. Administrative empowerment of rural women will have affiliated multiple impacts on the other sphere of social life. Empowerment of rural women

is observed as the key solution to many social problems like high population, growth rate & low status of women.

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee -: Community development programme was inaugurated in 1952. It was essential for development that the initiative should have come from the below, the masses of people and in fact from the grassroots. A committee for the review of CDP was constituted in 16 Jan. 1957. Balwant Rai Mehta, a member of parliament, headed the committee the committee's view was that without an agency at the village level real progress in rural development could not be achieved. The recommendations of the committee favoured democratic decentralization through the setting up of PRIs. The committee suggested that the villagers should be given power to decide about their own felt needs and to do planning and implementation of the programmes accordingly. The village self-sufficiency could not be attained without the active involvement of the village people. The Mehta committee suggested a three-tier structure for panchayat raj. These tiers considered of gram sabha, which was constituted on the basis of population size. This was the lowest tier of panchayati raj. The second tier was constituted at the tehsil or taluka level. The third tier was at the district level. The pattern of panchayat raj was thus developed on the co-ordination between the officials and non-officials. While Balwant Rai Mehta committee recommended three-tier panchayati raj system for the country did not consider women's participation as an issue of considerable significance. In fact, its genesis and terms of reference gave it no scope to consider the question seriously. The committee however, considered the conditions of rural women, and argued that they should be supported to find way to increase their incomes. There was a section in the report dealing with the measures to be taken for belief purpose. It had also recommended for the appointment of gram sevika and women social extension officers to facilitate effective implementation of women's welfare programmes and co-option of two women in the panchayat bodies at the block and district levels. It seemed to have considered the women's participation in panchayat primarily for implementation of women and children development programmes. They were interested in making improvement of the housekeeping function of the women. Clearly they had taken a conservative attitude to women. Women as participants in the decision making process did not pay adequate corroboration of the committee. Following the recommendation of the committee, women joined panchayat in the same status as co-opted member. But the result was not encouraging. They were neither able to play an essential role in the decision making process in general nor in matters pertaining to women and children, women's representation become one of what may be called tokenism.

Ashok Mehta Committee-: The three tier pattern of panchayati raj began to crumble down. PRIs were dominated by the privileged section of society. It limited the utility of Panchayati raj for common villager. In view of this a 13 member committee headed by Shri Ashoka Mehta was set up in 1977 to suggest measures to strengthen the PRIs. He suggests



changes in the pattern of Panchayati raj. In 1977 Ashoka Mehta committee recommended a fundamental change in the Panchayati raj system. It asked for transformation of the panchayat from an implementing agency to administrative institution. The committee recommended a two tier set up – District level and mandal level covering the population of 15000 to 20000 and suggested the abolition of block as the unit of administration. The committee also suggested holding of regular election compulsory items of taxation in their jurisdiction and transfer of land revenues collection to them. It was also felt that a constitutional provision was necessary to strengthen Panchayati raj system. The main recommendation of committee was considered at the conference of chief minister in 1979, which advocated for the continuance of the existing three-tier-system. The committee also laid stress on the need for or recognizing and strengthening women's role in the decision-making process of panchayats. Committee recommended reservation of two seats for women in panchayat. The committee had also felt the need for an institutional arrangement in the form of committee with all women member of the mandalpanchayat represented on it. It would ensure that decision was taken by women themselves on priorities and choice in welfare and development programme specially meant for women. The Ashok Mehta Committee had acknowledged the need for associating women with the process of decision-making, but could not give a clear direction. This had resulted in a cumbersome proposal about the participation of women in panchayat. 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act:- Prime Minister P.V. Narashimha Rao decided to draw up a fresh constitutional amendment bill for PRIs. The 72nd amendment bill, 1991 came into existence. The bill was later on referred to a joint committee. The joint committee offer detailed deliberation presented its report to parliament in July 1992.

Taking into consideration the consent evolved during the meeting of joint committee, the question raised by the various leaders of different administrative parties during the debate held in December 1992, necessary amendments were made by Government. The 73rd constitutional act emerged which was passed with unanimity by Lok Sabha on 22nd Dec 1992 and by the Rajya Sabha on 23rd Dec 1992. The act came into force from 24th April 1993. The 73rd constitutional amendment act raj article 243 D and 243 T of constitution provide that not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for belonging to SCs/STs) of the total number of seats to be free by direct election in the local bodies. (Panchayat and municipalities) would be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituents in the local bodies. This makes a beginning for effective participation of women in decision making process at grass root. It is a fact that in the election to these local bodies' one million women has been elected every five years. This portrays a very boosting development for women empowerment.

Women in Panchayati Raj and a case study of Amroha district: As may be expected, the experience of women in

panchayatiraj has been speckled. Many are substitutes for husbands and fathers who could not contest because of the reservation. Some were put in place by the wealthy and powerful, for their malleability—a kind of puppet to serve the vested interest while appearing to be an elected representative. It has led to many problems that have been extensively discussed in the literature and form the basis for an excellent film, sponsored by UNICEF, called Shansodhan. Yet, it must not be forgotten that this experiment in local self-government is being undertaken in a society that is predominantly illiterate. Many of the people elected, especially those in the reserved categories are very poor. In attending meetings of the gram panchayats, they often have to give up a day's wages. To use terms popularized by Amartya Sen, the entitlements of the actors in this great drama of democracy are way below what they should be. As a result, their capabilities to play these roles are low as these are in uncharted territory.

Objective of the Study

To understand the case of elected women leaders in PRIs; And how far these types of representation lead the way to their development and empowerment.

Research Methodology

The pilot study was conducted in the five districts (namely Bijnore, Moradabad, Rampur, Amroha and Sambhal) of Moradabad division, U.P. to understand the role of elected women representatives in the general development process of Panchayati raj system. Therefore, here we are presenting the field level experiences of women in panchayatiraj system in Moradabad division. To understand the participation of women and their role in general development process in PRIs, we have interviewed five women representative in five districts of Moradabad division (one from each district).

A focused group conversation was conducted with the elected women leaders so as to gather the viewpoints regarding the participation of women in panchayats and development of PRIs. The data was collected by making visits personally by the investigator during the month of October-September 2016.

The findings of these six case studies are discussed below.

Case 1-Rayabhur Gram Panchayat (GP) is a medium size village located in Thakurdwara of Moradabad district, U.P. Around 1494 population are come under the jurisdiction of this Gram Panchayat of which 763 are males and 731 are females as per population Census, 2011. The GP is divided into 07 wards. As per Constitution of India and Panchayati Raj Act, Rayabhur village is administered by Sarpanch (Head of village), who is elected representative of village. Rayabhur village has lower literacy rate compared to U.P. In Rayabhur village, male literacy stands at 51.44% while female literacy rate was 37.54%. In the recent GP election, Smt. Malti is elected as a president of Rayabhur GP because the post of GP president is reserved for an OBC woman. She passed just fifth standards. Since she is an elected president, all six members of this GP must obey her decisions. However, two female members were found not to satisfy with the



deeds of the president. They complained that president is irregular in the Panchayat and Gram Sabha meetings. Her husband was found to attend in meetings. All of the decisions of the Gram Panchayat were taken at her home. Finally, president of the Rayabhur GP call for a special meeting and raised her problem of irregularity in the Panchayat meetings. She said that her family members are not willing to go outside. Besides, shamefulness, family constraint as well as outmoded outlook were found to be the reason for irregularity. Now question is that does a mere reservation for women bring any social change? Reservation has brought to prominence a person who would never have attained such a position under "normal" conditions. Does the policy of reservation give a chance to the male members to exploit this opportunity? If so, under what conditions will they play a positive role, as in this case?

Case 2-Madhan Gram Panchayat is a medium size village located in Asmoli Tehsil of Sambhal district, U.P. In recent Panchayat term, Gram Panchayat women members were found to show their level of dissatisfaction against the government officials. They were found to state that Gram Panchayat secretary (Government official) never noticed their issues rose in the Gram Panchayat meetings. Though the current President of this Gram Panchayat is a woman (Navisha), all of the decisions of the Gram Panchayat were found to take on the advice of her husband (erstwhile president of Madhan GP) and vice-president (male). In the Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha meetings, male members were found to be a kingmaker of all decisions. It is worth mentioning that Navisha was found illiterate. The findings of this study shows that Navisha is clearly a "dummy" candidate and she contested in the election because her husband could not contest due to the reservation of women. It also shows that in a traditional society, it is difficult for men to accept women in positions of authority.

Case 3-Razopura Gram Panchayat is located at Kotwali Tehsil of Bijnore district. The post of President was reserved for woman and Kavita Rani became the President. Other two women elected members were also found in the GP through the policy of reservation. Kavita Rani and other two women members were found to pass class tenth and eight standards respectively. During the period of field study, it was found that women members were found irregular in the Panchayat meetings. They were found to send their family members like husband, brother in the Panchayat meetings. It was also found that their family members did not have any chance to participate in the important decisions of Gram Panchayat as they are not representatives of Gram Panchayat. As a result, it can be said that women are not active in the panchayat. Regarding the causes of non-participation, it was found that women members have no salary by which they would give their service. Besides, all the financial power is concentrated in the pocket of president. So, the seats of ward member are nothing but like a designation only. Thus, it is cleared that women members are not willing to involve in voluntary works as legislation.

Case 4-In case of this study, Mrs. Manju Devi who was found to be continued her second term as a member of

Bahadargarh Gram Panchayat in the Bilaspur Tehsil of Rampur district, U.P. with total 42 houses. Bahadargarh Gram Panchayat is a small size village located 17km away from the headquarter Rampur. The Bahadargarh village has a population of 229 of which 122 are males while 107 are females as per Population Census, 2011. She was found to enthusiastic to contest the election to the legislative assembly of Moradabad. She is an unmarried woman and completed her education upto Graduation. Being a literate woman, she would like to do something for the women in her village and started a Mahila Mandal. This was the beginning phase to start her administrative career. When the policy of reservation enacted in the PRIs, the village became her base and she was elected to be a president of the GP. She completed her five-year term and learnt a great deal about the functioning of local government in the process. She established good links with officials from the local area. Women like her would have found it impossible to make a mark in the system without the reservations. Yet, she argues that this is only a first step. From this case study, it is cleared that without educational qualifications, women will find it challenging to work the system. She showed the system of reservations for women and for depressed sections of society operational at its best. But how many such cases are there? Question is that under what conditions such reservations will lead to positive results, especially where women are concerned? How will establish officials react to the emergence of representatives like her?

Case 5-Kailsa Gram Panchayat is a medium size village located in Amroha Tehsil of Amroha district, U.P. it is situated 10km away from sub district headquarter Amroha. Around 3852 population are come under the jurisdiction of this GP of which 2035 are males and 1817 are females as per population Census, 2011. There are about 665 houses in Kailsa village. A women's march from a simple housewife to a public figure can be recognized in case of Sunita Devi. She is a general category woman of 32 years of age with three children was simply a housewife concerned only with running her household property. Being a simple and homely woman with absolutely no idea of panchayat and rules, she was hesitant to do so but pressures exercised by her husband and neighbours made her to contest the seat and she was elected.

For one year, she remains completely ignorant about her duties and powers and participated in panchayat meetings as a silent spectator and listen carefully of other members of the panchayat. She began to realize the importance of being a member of the panchayat. She felt honoured when she was addressed as "membered" and realized that she also has some powers and, therefore, decided to do something that can gratify her ego and build her image among the people. She also availed opportunities to participate in panchayati raj training subsequently organized by government and non-governmental agencies. Interestingly, when she sought consent to attend training, her husband readily agreed and assured her to look after the household in her absence. The training exposure has made her aware about the role she is expected to play in panchayats, rules and procedures of



holding panchayat meetings, nature of issues being discussed in such meetings, powers and revenue sources of panchayats and the like.

Subsequently, she has made it a point to participate in all the meetings of the panchayat and took keen interest in panchayat work. She was motivated to intervene wherever things are not going well. She first took up the case of poor functioning of anganwadi, made inspection of the anganwadi and noted that the worker does not attend it frequently and the mid-day meal is also not served every day.

She along with other women members paid visits to the anganwadi and collected information about the attendance of anganwadi worker, supply of midday meal, and irregularities. She observed that the anganwadi remained closed for most days; mid-day meal is also not served regularly. Therefore, she got the warning issued to the worker who was and advised to mend ways failing which matter will be reported to the higher establishments. She along with other women members visited schools as well and the teacher in charge was cautioned about serving of burnt chapattis during the mid-day meal. Things have improved since then.

The first success she encouraged to take up other issues as well. She noted that some panchayat land was under illegal occupation of some villagers. She organized a joint action and succeeded in getting that land vacated from illegal occupation and raising on it a kitchen garden.

However, the success women members accomplished, and the activeness they displayed in panchayat affairs did not receive much appreciation from male members. She is conscious also of comments male members make against them but is feel undeterred and determined to work for the wellbeing of women, children and the village as a whole through panchayat. Now she started attending panchayat and gram sabha meetings without any escort and participates in panchayat deliberations without feeling hesitant. The community thus found in her a dedicated women leader.

Conclusion and Recommendation

To conclude we can say that the participation of women in PRIs particularly in Moradabad division is just satisfactory and for their activities they are many times dependent on others. Most of the time, they are not in a position to take a decision on their own and are not able take constructive decision. The findings of these case studies shows that the role of elected women representatives in PRIs is slow and it will take more time to accomplish women's objective. Women are irregular in the Panchayat accomplishments due to worth missing their daily wage and concern about their crying babies and family relations. It is also fact that the women who have come in under caste reservation have come out 'with their social and economic hindrances – mostly have primary educated and some are illiterate, with little fruitful assets, largely dependent on wage labour and into a rural society that has fixed places for various castes and gender. In the course of conducting the study it is realized that some measures are required to be taken to promote

women's participation in general development process of legislation. So it may be suggested that elected women in each district may develop a linkage among them and hold meetings and discussions on routine basis about necessary measures to promote their participation and development of PRIs and neutralize male domination in local-self bodies. The present study presents low level of education in this case study which is not a worthy sign for a healthy democracy. Thus, it is significant to make extra educational training programmes related to legislation for enhancing knowledge of elected women members on government policies and programmes, bureaucratic structures and the issues of local concern. For this, government may make provision for obligatory attendance of an awareness programme/ orientation programme by members of PRIs. Sensitization of male members in PRIs is equally imperative so that they listen to women patiently, converse politely, recognize their suggestions in the meetings and implement them wherever feasible. It would lead to psychological empowerment of women and development of PRIs.

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