



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT BY POLITICAL PARTICIPATION -A STUDY OF MUNICIPALITIES IN TELANGANA

Dr.E.Laxminarayana

Assistant Professor of Public Administration, Giriraj Government College, Nizamabad, Telangana.

Abstract

A wide definition of political participation is the process by which a person participates in their society's political life and has the chance to make decisions. The process via which individuals engage in political activity is known as political involvement. One of the most significant political actions of the populace is exercising their right to vote during elections. Women's involvement in this political activity is nearly equal to that of men. Several international conferences and symposiums have included women's political engagement on their agendas.

All international discussions on women's concerns revolved around women's political empowerment; India is by no means an exception to the rest of the world in terms of women's representation; in response, a number of initiatives were implemented in India. The present study will focus on Women political participation in Local bodies after 74th constitutional amendment act 1992 and its impact on empowerment in Telangana.

Key Words: *Political participation, Women empowerment, Local bodies, 74th amendment, Telangana.*

Introduction

As Mahatma Gandhi rightly said 'as long as women of India do not take part in public life, there is no salvation for the country.

The Constitution of India recognized political rights of women without any discrimination to or qualification participate in decision making process at all the levels. After six decade of strides in democracy and developments women participation and they role in public life has not made the desired head way. The field reality is that women's constitutional right in decision making at all the level whether national or local is still marginal.

Generally speaking the Indian society and its dominant culture over the centuries have downgraded the states of women, socially and economically depriving of opportunities for developments participation and management.

Political participation refers to actual participation in the voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rules and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public Policy (Srivastava Rashmi, 2000). Political participation is broadly defined as being a process through which individual plays a role in political life of their society, has the opportunity to take part in decision making. Political participation is a process by which people take part in political activities. Exercising voting rights during elections is one of the important political activities of the people. Participation of women in this political activity is almost equal to men. Political participation is not just casting vote. It includes wide range of other activities- like membership of political party, electoral campaigning, attending party meetings, demonstrations, communication with leaders, holding party positions, contesting elections, membership in representative bodies, influencing decision making and other related activities.



With this understanding of political participation, the evidence shows that in most of the countries participation of women is not impressive as the number of women participating in active politics is smaller compared to men. Women who are able to acquire decision-making power are mostly from urban and elite groups. Large mass of women are kept out of political arena due to various reasons. There was no serious attempt to accommodate women in politics. In many countries women had to wage long battles to get their rights. Despite that, they were not able to get rightful position in the arena of politics.

Women's political participation has been the agenda of various international conferences and symposiums. Various recommendations were made to improve the participation of women in political decision making. Women's political empowerment was at the center stage of all discourses on women's issues at the international level. India is in no way an exception from the rest of the countries with respect to the women representation. Corresponding to this, various initiatives were taken in India.

Constitution provisions for Women in Local bodies

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has added the following articles to the Constitution providing reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Article 243-(D) (2) states not less than 1/3 of the seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to S. C or as the case may be S.T.

Article 243-(D) (3)-extends political reservation to women not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat.

Article 243 (D) (4) extends reservation to elected offices as well. The office of the chairpersons in the panchayaths or any other level shall be reserved SC,ST and women in such a manner as legislature of state may by law provide.

The legal Constitutional framework in India would appear a combination of Communitarian perspective on one hand and that of liberal democracy on the other hand. In spite of such provisions in the Constitution, the decades following independence witnessed a decline in the women's participation in politics. These rights appeared illusionary as there was a shift from the aims of the Constitution. Gap started widening in all political spheres. Article 325 and 326 guarantees political equality, equal right to participate in political activity and right to vote, respectively. While the latter has been accessed and enjoyed by large number of women, the right to equal participation is still a distant dream. The lack of space for participation in political bodies has resulted in their presence in meager numbers in this decision making bodies.

The 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India with 33.33% reservation for women has given opportunity for the entry of large number of socially marginalized category such as women to enter into the domain of local institution and their performance is very encouraging. In the year 2006, 10,41,430 women were elected to the local institutions. These reservations or quota brought quantitative changes, facilitated women to be represented in local governments and deserved to be hailed as major achievement in the empowerment of women. Success stories of women in local governments indicate the qualitative changes that are coming forth. Increment list perspective would enable qualitative change in the performance of women in politics and governance. It would provide a way to bring a sense of equality in gender.



Initiatives of Indian Government for Women's Political Empowerment

The Government of India has declared the year 2001 as year for the Empowerment of Women. In India genuine efforts have been made for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through various departments of Women and Child Development Human Resource Development Ministry. When panchayat raj system was introduced very few women contested or got elected, Balwantrao Mehta Committee (1978) recommended that in the constitution of panchayats, provisions might be made for the co-option of two women members, "who are interested to work with women and children" Subsequently the Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) had mentioned that two women securing the highest number of votes among the women candidates in the election could take the seats reserved for them, a method of co-option by election. Though panchayat raj institutions were established in many states, women's representation did not exceed more than two or three.⁵⁴ It was only in 1976, after the publication of the Report of the Committee on Status of Women, there was a demand for the representation of women in panchayat raj bodies through reservation. Karnataka is a pioneer state in this regard. It was the first state in the country to introduce the policy of reservation for women in panchayat raj institutions. Yet politics proved to be a very inhospitable terrain for women and continues to be the male bastion into which the entry of women is severely restricted.

Women continued to remain invisible and marginalized in decision- making bodies. It was only with the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, September 1971) that the demand for greater representation of women in political institutions in India was taken up in a systematic way. The CSWI Report suggested a more meaningful association of women representatives in the structure of local administration. The report recommended the establishment of statutory women's panchayats at the village level. It recommended the reservation of seats in municipalities, constitution of permanent committees in municipalities to initiate and supervise programmes for women's welfare and development and those political parties should adopt a definite policy regarding the percentage of women candidates. However it was not unanimous in favour of reservation.

The question of reservation of seats was left to the National Perspective - Plan (1988) for women to take up. In 1988 the Department of Women and Child Development conducted a study which has been published in the form of a report titled 'National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000' which has come out with some significant recommendations on the role of women in panchayat raj institutions. The core group set up by government of India pointed out that political power and access of position of decision making and authority are critical three- requisites for women's equality in the process of nation building. Later with these feedback and objectives, reservation was given in local bodies which had provided an opportunity to women to raise their grievances and other related social and economic problems It recognized that political participation of women is severely restricted and suggested that 30 percent quota for women must be introduced at all levels of elective bodies. To encourage grass-root participation in politics, women's organizations too favored introduction of reservation in village panchayats.

Reservation Bill- 33.33 percent Reservation for Women: Above discussion makes it clear that women remain invisible and marginalized in decision- making bodies. Data shows that there has been only a marginal increase in the last few decades in the number of women candidates contesting elections and getting elected.

The National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988 recommended 30% reservation for women in local governments and other decision making bodies to encourage participation of women in grass root



politics.⁵⁹ This debate finally culminated in the passing of the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act, 1992. This paved way for the entry of more than one million women into the local governments as members, presidents and vice-presidents. The 73rd Amendment Act, provided a new constitutional platform which ensures the representation of 1/3 women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This legislation accelerated the participation of women in the policy making bodies.

During 1990's, the issue of women reservation was in the manifesto of various political parties, which was also a way of wooing women voters. Women reservation bill was first introduced by Deve Gowda led national front government in September, 1996 as the 81st amendment bill. Various political parties like Samajavadi Party, Janatha Dal, Lok Shakthi etc opposed the bill severely as it does not provide sub-quota for other backward classes and minorities. The argument put forth by the opposing group is that if the bill is accepted as it is, this opportunity will be encashed by the upper caste, urban elite women and have no effect on the patriarchal structure. In fact there is some truth in what has been argued here. Various studies have pointed out that those women who are in the forefronts of politics in India since independence have been mainly elite urban women. But, so far no serious attempts have been made to analyze this aspect.

Even as C.P.Bhambhri reiterates that the logic that women should participate in the decision-making process gets diluted if participation is on the basis of their religion or caste because they are reduced to the level of sectarian leaders and not women leaders. Veena Nayyar, too on the issue contents that the talk of quota within quota is a blatant attempt to divide the women. That they forget about OBCs when it came to the 73rd Amendment because it concerned only governance at the village level and there was no need for considering a system of proportional representation where by the legitimate political aspirations of each group can be satisfied without breaking down the whole system with competing quotas. Caste and communal card was used to confuse the whole issue. What is essential today is the general involvement of women at all levels of power structure to ensure a true society, without any quota within quota for political leverage. The politicians, women activists and thinkers are divided on the issue of women's reservation bill.

74th Constitutional Amendment Act

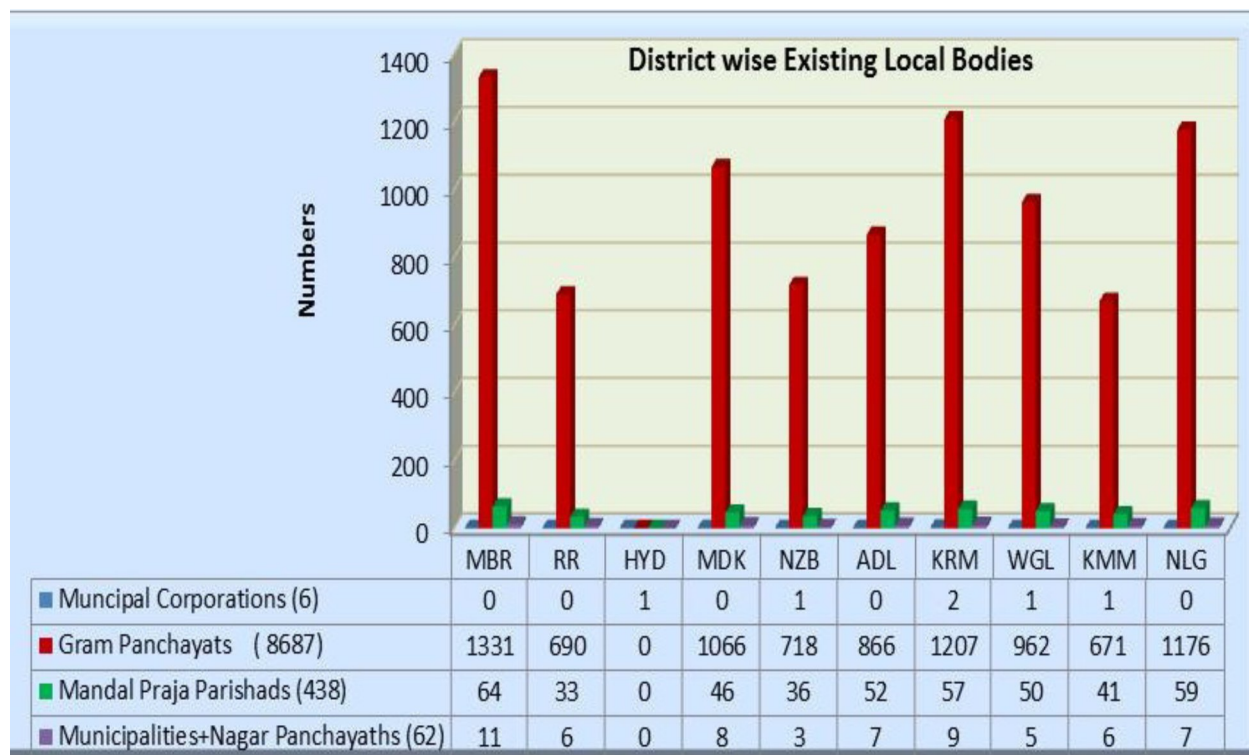
The 74th Amendment to the Indian constitution has served as a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in local government. The constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 aims at constitutional guarantees to safeguard the interests of urban local self government to enable them to function as effective democratic and self governing institutions at the grass roots level. This Amendment provides for reservation of 33, 1/3 percent of elected seats for women at local government level in urban and rural areas (R. Letha Kumari, 2006).

Local-Self institutions introduced in India in 1959 have paved the way to spread the roots of democracy to the grass root level. These institutions facilitated wider participation of people in decision making, thereby making democracy successful. The Indian constitution through Fundamental Rights have provided for political equality of all the people irrespective of caste, creed, community, language or sex. On the other side the Directive Principles aimed at providing social and economic justice to the people.

Article 40 of the India Constitution suggested the implementation of local self institutions to achieve the avowed objective of social and economic justice. The present study sheds light on the Empowerment of Women through their participation in Urban Local Bodies. Universal Adult Franchise was laid as the foundation for dissemination of power in local bodies. 73rd & 74th



Constitutional amendments have reflected the spirit of Directive Principles by giving 30% reservation for women in Rural and Urban Local Bodies respectively. A step ahead, at present 50% reservation for women in Urban Local bodies is already in vogue in 14 states, and Gram Panchayats of 17 states.



The history of a nation is created by the milestone events, which drastically change the way society is governed, organized and bequeathed to the new generation. The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 has become the milestone in the history of urban administration in India. It recognized municipalities as Constitutional bodies forming the third tier of the federal polity of India. The decentralization initiative in urban areas was first mooted by the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee, constituted by the Government of India in 1963, however it took nearly 30 years to concretize in the shape of the Constitutional Amendment in 1992. The Constitutional 74th Amendment Act, envisaged a systematic change in the pattern of municipal government in the country with a view to enabling cities and towns to play a critical role in economic and social development and signified the beginning of a historic reform to decentralize power to the people. The Act prescribes a common legal institutional frame work for the efficient and effective delivery of municipal services and comprises of the following mandatory institutions:

1. State Election Commission (Article 243k).
2. Elected Municipalities: Municipal Corporation (for larger urban areas), Municipal Councils (Smaller Urban areas); and Nagar Panchayats (for transitional areas) (Article 243Q).
3. Ward committees and other committers (Article 243R).
4. State Finance Commission (Article 243I).
5. District Planning Committee (Article 243ZE).
6. Metropolitan Planning Committee (Article 243ZE).



Until recently, local government in India was organized on the basis of the ultra-virus principle and the state governments were free to extend or control the functional sphere of the local bodies through executive decisions without amendments to the legislative provisions. Through the 74th Amendment Act an attempt has been made to improve the performance and ability of ULBs. The important provisions of the Act include constitution of three types of municipalities, devolution of greater functional responsibilities and financial powers to them, adequate representation of weaker sections and women, regular and fair conduct of elections, and constitution of Wards Committees, District Planning Committee, Metropolitan Planning Committee and State Finance Commission. It further provided a basis for the state legislature to guide the state government in the assignment of various responsibilities to ULBs and strengthening of municipal governance.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act seeks to introduce fundamental changes in urban local bodies. Its salient features are:

1. introduction of the 12th Schedule which lists the functions of urban local bodies, covering planning, regulation and developmental aspects;
2. establishment of District and Metropolitan Planning Committees responsible for the preparation of development plans at district and metropolitan levels;
3. establishment of ward committees in areas having a population of over 300,000;
4. specification by law of the powers and responsibilities to be entrusted to municipalities and ward committees;
5. holding of periodical and timely elections, if municipality is dissolved for any reason it should be reconstituted within 6 months;
6. Specifying by law the sources of municipal finance and their periodic review by a statutorily constituted SFC and by making it obligatory on the part of the Central Finance Commission to recommend measures needed to augment state resources to assist the municipal governments.

Restrictions on the power of state governments to do away with democratically elected municipal governments: Reservation of one third seats for women and weaker sections (SC/ST/OBC's as proportion of reservations) in municipal bodies.

The mandates of various local government institutions as prescribed by the Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 are as follows:

1. State Election Commissioner to superintend, direct and control the preparation of electoral rolls and conduct all elections to the rural and urban local bodies (Article 243 O);
2. Municipalities to function as institutions of self government, prepare plans for economic development and social justice, perform functions and implement schemes as may be entrusted to them by the state government including those related to the Twelfth Schedule [Article 243 (W) (a)].
3. Ward Committees and Special Committees to take municipal government physically closer to the people and carry out the responsibilities conferred upon them including those in relation to the Twelfth Schedule [243 (w) (b)].
4. State Finance Commission to review the financial position of the rural and urban local bodies, and make recommendations regarding the principles of devolution of resources from the state to the local bodies and the measures needed to improve their finances and functioning [Article 243(1)].



District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the Panchayats and the municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole [Article 243 D(1)].

Metropolitan Planning Committee to prepare draft development plan for the Metropolitan area as a whole [Article 243 E(1)].

Significance of the Study

1. History demonstrates that out of all deprived groups in the world women have suffered the most.
2. They have victims of abuse molestation, violence, rape, malnutrition, ill treatment, in a word all sort of deprivation but until recent on scholarly attention was not focused on subject related to empowerment of women.
3. Women are treated unequally and cannot participated in democratic activities equally with men
4. Democracy become meaningless and paralyzed unless 50percent of its population participate in the democratic decision making process and join in the economic, social, and political activities.

The Methodological Framework

The primary aim of the present study is to examine the Women Empowerment through Political Participation in Telangana. The study has been conducted in Four Municipalities of Nalgonda district in the Telangana State. Methodology adopted for this study is both the primary and secondary data collection, the primary data is collected through questionnaire from the field work and the secondary data collected from the existing sources like Reports, documents, Journals, Books from various libraries and also from websites. The methodology covers the selection of area of the study, universe, sampling procedure, the various methods.

Sampling

In the present study a multistage stratified random sampling frame has been adopted in selecting the selecting the sample households for the collection of primary data through a structured interview schedule. The sample size is selected as 150 out of which present public representatives are 100 they represent all selected four municipalities each 25 size. And next former public representatives and different women leaders like Self help groups and other social leaders selected 50 members. As stated above totally 150 households in four Municipalities of Nalgonda District selected for the collection of primary data by using the Stratified random sampling method.

All the representative samples are constructed based on type of occupation, income level, education standards, caste, and type of house and other political information of the women leaders. A representative sample of household has been chosen at random from each house types. In view of the stratified random sampling frame used, the sampling result is expected to be representative of all the rural households in the selected study areas.

Tools of Data Collection

This study relies both on primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected with the help of an Interview schedule and discussions with the respondents used to analyze the implementation of 74th constitutional amendment act, 50% reservations to women candidates in Municipalities of Nalgonda district. The respondents are selected randomly comprising of different positions and parties. Some case studies also collected from the women political leaders.

Secondary data were collected from various sources like Government Gazettes, public policies and previous studies; published material in various journals; magazines and newspapers and the information



from books and websites are also used for the analysis. Interview schedule was designed and were conducted among the women public representatives of four municipalities to obtain the primary data. The researcher has also visited the fields and interviewed the women leaders. Also the discussions were made with the different political leaders of elected members of the respective municipalities.

Several organizations, institutions, and web-sites have also been visited to gather the necessary information and the secondary data was framed. By using the data from primary and secondary sources a final draft was framed. After pre-testing, it was edited, modified and finalized.

Data Processing and Analysis: After data collection, processing the data was done with computer. All the data collected are framed in the form of simple tables using the computer. Further, the data in the tables were analyzed by applying various statistical techniques, and also through simple tabulation and cross tabulation methods by identifying the independent variables and dependent variables. The independent variables includes class, caste and education and the dependent variables consists of total benefits received, type of house, income level; type and amount of land owned and awareness about the programme. Also the methods like modern scientific statistical and quantitative techniques, especially SPSS package have been used. On whole the defining terms such as mean, median, correlation etc have been calculated by implementing the above methods. The deficiencies in this study were fulfilled by observational facts.

Conclusion

The researcher selected Nalgonda district as case study from that out of 8 municipalities only four municipalities were selected as part of research study Nalgonda, Devarakonda, Chandur and Nakrekal were selected due to time and financial constraint researcher permitted for this study. After careful observations and field study data analysis it is found that after constitutional amendment act 74 the participation of women in urban local bodies has been increased and many women candidates come forward and actively participating in elections in municipalities in Telangana state. There is great impact of women reservations for empowerment in Municipalities.

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