



Women Empowerment and Urban Local Self-Governance in the light of 74th Amendment

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Abstract: *This paper deals with the women empowerment through grassroots political participation. For more female representation in local bodies, affirmative action has swept the world as a revolutionary tool. This research suggests that the efficiency of quotas is provisional and depends on the electoral system, party system and on the top political inclination to enforce and comply with the quota. 73rd and 74th Amendment bills gave 33 per cent of key positions in local bodies to the females. Since then, women are empowered and exercising their rights in village and urban governance. Women are contributing to increase standard in the spheres of education, and health and addressing infrastructure problems. But this is just a beginning of the long journey still women are an oppressed class and often prevented to exercise their political, social, and economic rights. 33 per cent representation in local bodies is just an initiative or a maiden step towards women empowerment.*

Keywords: *Empowerment, Grassroot, Political participation, Affirmative action, Amendment*

Introduction

In India we have local self-government as third tier, on two levels- rural and urban namely, Panchayati Raj in villages and Municipal government in cities. In our country the number of cities has grown enormously that has created the problem of housing, lack of adequate public amenities and community facilities. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment is an attempt to strengthen the local self-government. The overwhelming response to the Amendments has been unprecedented in the history of the country. The 74th Amendment Act that is related to Urban Local Bodies has the prospective of supporting females to convert structure of state from inside and also is the primary move of promising new mass level governance. This is decisive in order to convert the nature, quality, and content of leadership for development. The participation of women indicates that they are ready to avail of the landmark opportunity provided to them. It is vital that combined plan and a policy be devised that tackles political, social, and economic empowerment of females holistically and concurrently along with the vibrant plans and programmes. If this is followed and efficient programmes and plans are put in place, it will be resulted and facilitate in extensive growth of females, this will be true empowerment for them.



Local Self Government in Other Countries and India

In the period of democratization, women comprise of more than half of the population and also the voters globally. Right to choose representatives is given to women by the respective constitutions and also to hold important political offices in many countries, but equal representation is still a distant dream for females in most of the democracies. In some of the Nordic countries the proposition of the men and women in decision making and public policy making is more or less equal but in most of the countries this is not the point. If there is no equality of women in administrative decisions it denies her of basic privileges and responsibilities as citizen. In the western world, only after countless demonstrations, hunger strikes, and active lobbying did women get the right to vote. Today in most of the nation's women have voting rights and to fight the elections but prejudice, tradition and sometimes undemocratic regimes hamper women in their quest for political power.

Affirmative action (solution for the yesteryears, a positive step to remove existing, and a check on forthcoming bias) can encourage opportunities for woman. Before 1991 in many Communist countries of Eastern Europe, quotas existed for women. Sudan has 10 percent minimum quota for female representation in all three tiers of government for regional, urban areas, and state government. Argentina realized the regulation for 30 percent quotas for women. Likewise, the 73rd and 74th amendments in Indian constitution provide reservation of electoral wards in the urban and rural local government for the weaker sections (SC & ST) and women. Practically most of the state governments have passed the bills to implement the amendment and kept one third seats and positions for women. The main objective of the Constitution of India is to attain and guarantee for all its countrymen equality of opportunity and status and political, economic, and social justice. The core idea behind the introduction of reservation for the marginalised classes of the society is that possibly this is the alternative to balance the unfair relationships. However, this is true that after nearly 43 years it was realised and recognised that females are, nonetheless another deprived class and they also need positive discrimination. Access to resources and political power is crucial and vital for women, as in human history females are denied equal opportunity in real terms and also exposed to prolonged subjection. Consequently, if we have women in positions of decision making, the more hope they generate for the rest, because it is presumed that less representation of women in political positions is responsible for their low status.

74th Amendment and its Significance

For urban local bodies following three categories were specified by the constitutional amendment 74th:

- Town Councils also known as Nagar Panchayats for urban areas those are in transition phase means which is transforming from a rural to an urban area.
- For small urban areas Municipal Councils.
- And for larger urban areas Municipal Corporations.

The 74th amendment in constitution also offers reservation of seats in Municipal Council and position of the chairperson for women, and other weaker sections in society Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes. For years together political participation of women was narrowly conceived and their presence in the formal political structure was found deplorable. Women now can take part in decision making which has so far remained a far cry for them. The power envisioned in 1992 by the 74th Amendment Act, has provided females the statutory rights to ponder, discussion and decide key policy issues which involve the day-to-day life of the people. They can work on their assertion in the process of policy formulations, planning & development and implementation of expansion programmes and allotment of funds. 74th amendment truly was the beginning of the transformation in the fields of decentralization,



empowerment of women and the gender equality principle also got the much-awaited recognition.

The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) recognises that women empowerment is the need of the Indian society, so the plan undertook the following measures to accelerate the process of women's political empowerment and participation in local self-government.

- For at least a year and a half woman Sarpanchs cannot be eliminated by a motion of no-confidence. And if a no-confidence motion is passed, the officeholder should be a female.
- In some of the states two child rule has been abolished because it was absorbed that the law was used against women. Female foeticide was also increased due to the two-child norm.
- Resource allocation was increased for the rights of women and gender sensitization.
- In State Planning Boards and Commissions efforts were increased to involve women and poor.
- Implementations of several schemes were initiated with an explicit importance on protection and benefits of women.
- Finances should be offered for women political participation in local self-government.

The reservation has provided the basis for the first time a significant quantity of females was elected to the rural and urban local bodies. This has also offered a generic platform for economic, social, and political advancement of women. Now females are part of the local political process and are tackling complicated situations while performing their responsibilities as local leaders. There are many activities, which can aid women in reaching gender equality in decision making of local governments. Females have been given a chance to redefine their power through two processes. By occupying positions in local self-government and by virtue of their position women are creating conditions to raise their status. When the administration bodies consist of a number of women of agendas and more creative methods and manage to be effective in government policies.

Present Status of Women in Urban Local Self Government

By taking part in the local self-government in terms of gender equality, almost seven lakhs of females take up posts as chairpersons and members at grassroot level organizations in democratic India. The amendment and the women's movement have led to motivating large number of women candidates to contest the local election. Some states have gone for a new initiative for women members. Post of vice chairperson is reserved for women according to Panchayat Acts of Odisha, Assam, and West Bengal if the reserved post of chairperson doesn't happen to them. The direct result of affirmative action for females has been the entry of overwhelming amount of women representatives in local self urban government. Undeniably women members are now younger in age; their knowledge about rules and procedures is encouraging. Majority of woman members tends to attend Municipal meetings regularly and even sign the minute books and keep personal records of the meetings. By this way women leadership is steadily being socially approved. This can be considered as the greatest event for women's empowerment. Today females are significant in numbers in the local bodies, and this is pivotal phase in electoral involvement and women's empowerment. Presently political participation is no longer remains confined to casting of votes, but it should be a way of life. 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment also breaks the hegemony of male chauvinism, especially in the rural areas. Today females who are chosen representatives are struggling on both the fronts at the same time. Not only at their homes that they are fighting for the position but also females fighting for the greater bureaucratic and political role in governance under the state agencies. Nevertheless, if the regional administration is to work according to the requirements of both males and females, it needs to work on capabilities and



experiences of both. It had been recognized repeatedly that local government has a value as education for democracy. By taking part in local government now women are closer to the common people on grassroots level. Now women can understand better by applying local knowledge to local problems. Undeniably women members of the municipalities are now younger in age, their knowledge about rules and procedures is encouraging and women's status does automatically improve with the outside exposure or economic contribution. Thus, the induction of women in political process is important for various reasons:

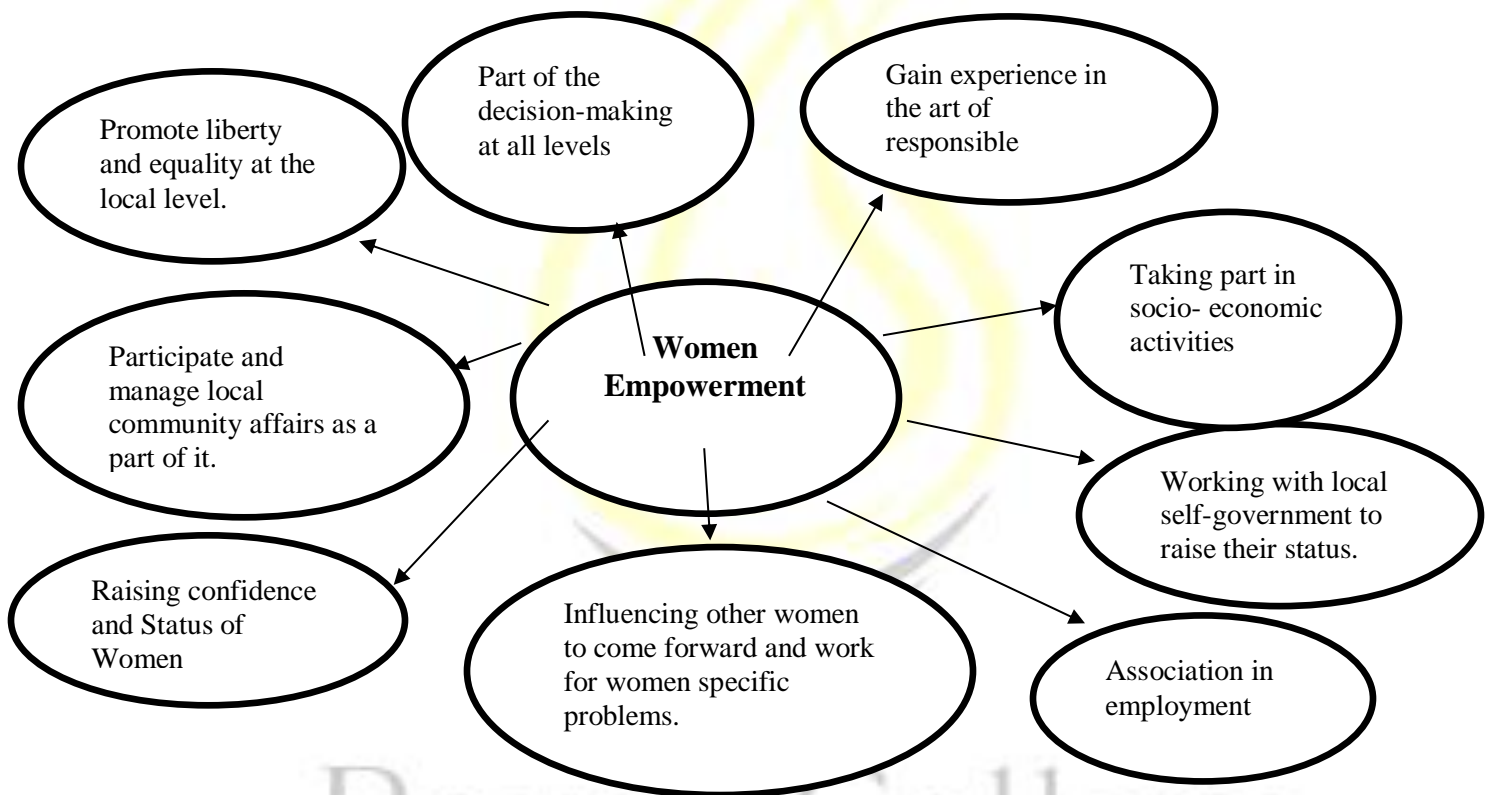
- Influencing other women to come and work for women specific problems.
- Women are also motivating the community.
- Women reported to have worked for improvement in health, family welfare, banning of liquor, better water management etc.
- Now women are contributing their perspective in the development decisions.
- Today there is a visible change if we take women as mark of welfare policies to their emergence as a critical factor in all development related work.
- Elected women leaders are one amongst them so she is near and close to the local electorates, as she resides in the same locality and regularly communicate with them, is simply reachable to them, and accessible whenever they are in need, they can register their grievances and complaints, make demands, and elected representative is ready to assist them in comprehending and redressing problems with the help of bureaucracy thus the whole process gives her a sense of responsibility and confidence.
- With strong motivation and direction, emerging young women leaders are growing. They are open to the demands and desires of the electorates. They visit their constituencies and locality regularly.
- Women representatives are displaying deep interest in regional matters and their number in the local bodies and wards are growing with the time.
- By taking part in the municipal council women leaders are also learning about the procedures of work, rules and regulations and municipal local laws.
- It would help and better co-ordinate among various women's development programmes at the level of implementation.
- Representation of women is also supported for the anti-corruption cause. It is observed that women are motivated to politics by altruism and concern for community welfare. They are basically honest and balance in nature so this quality can be tapped to manage for the political cause and for their own empowerment.
- Without effective participation in political decisions on the grassroots level itself the disabilities of women cannot be resolved and redressed.

Importance of Women Empowerment on the Grassroots Level

No doubt participation of women in urban local self-government will allow them to develop as efficient front runners and to act as motivation for others by encouraging, growing confidence, decisiveness and providing impetus for societal modification amid other womenfolk. But this is also true that India ranked 149 in women's participation in Parliaments below countries like Haiti, Rwanda, Congo, Chad, and Zambia. In local self-government women have assumed position only through the backdoor of reservation. Already there has been the tendency to put onus on women to prove their worth. This is also significant that women are puppet of husband, son, father, and father in-law they are attending the



meeting but are not allowed to speak. It is irony of the fate that every political party agrees in principle to provide reservation in local self-government for women, but still male dominance is there. Women councillors also need to come out of their local problems and subjected to outside changes and bigger countrywide complications, so their vision expands, and comprehensive approach should be adopted. For that adequate training programmes should be organised by the government especially for the newly elected women councillors. 112th Amendment Bill of the Indian Constitution offers for fifty percent reservation for females in Urban Local Bodies. 112th Amendment Bill was initiated in lower chamber of the parliament on November 24, 2009. This will enhance reservation for women up to fifty percent seats reserved SCs, STs and fifty percent reservation of females in Local Bodies but the bill is listed for the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Urban Development. It would yield better result if passed, representation of women will be improved in Urban Local Bodies and is probably to produce substantial advantages in terms of significance to women's concerns in grave sections of urban control.



No doubt participation of women appears to have progressed in comparative position but yet elected female members are to overcome a substantial number of obstacles. The dichotomy is likely to dissipate only gradually. At the grassroots only a beginning has been made and acceptance on state and central levels is still to come by. In fact, Indian women have now realized their potentialities, inherent energy, and power and one can hope that they would be able to fulfil the desired and ambitions of millions of Indian women in near future. Though there are no shortcuts to ensure women's empowerment in the complex social structure in India, with its gender and caste-based hierarchies,



training in the correct perspective and reaping full benefits of reservation would facilitate emergence of a strong leadership among Indian women.

Conclusion

Today women are breaking the boundaries and also balancing domestic as well as professional life at the same time. Contribution of females in decision making bodies is increasing specially after the affirmative action introduced by various countries. Panchayats and Municipalities are at the grassroot of democratic system in India. Today females are getting better prospects and also bearing responsibilities accordingly. An opportunity in local self-government means a platform to improve their position in society as well as in politics of India.

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