

The Impact Of Seventy Third Constitutional Amendments On The Political Participation Of Women In Panchayat Raj Institutions In Tamil Nadu

K. Sivakumar

Ph.D Scholar

Post Graduate & Research Department of History

Kundavai Nachiar Government College for Women (A) Thanjavur

Abstract

Women's political participation is changing the world by bringing new priorities and perspectives to the political process. Historically speaking, Indian women actively participated along with men in the struggle for independence and the struggle for freedom was intensified in the phase of the independence struggle. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Nation, was instrumental in bringing thousands of women out of their homes to fight in the freedom Struggle. He asserted that amelioration in the condition of women was a necessary pre-condition to the regeneration of Indian society. So he mobilized women into the National movement, apart from working for their emancipation. In this paper, the following ideas and themes have been traced the constitutional amendments were let to strengthen the effective participation of women in panchayat raj institutions in Tamil Nadu.

Key words: Women, Panchayat raj, Politics, Equality

Introduction

Independence brought with it opportunities for equality in the social and political spheres, through the instrumentality of the constitution. The early years of independence were years of promise. They seemed to herald a complete social and political revolution in the wake of political emancipation. Women remained underrepresented in the decision making bodies after independence, even though they were part of the National movement, as well as various social reform movements. Their presence in the representative constitution was never commensurate with their strength in national life.

A democratic political culture depends on the level of representation by all its citizens irrespective of their sex, economic status, etc. As per the Indian constitution, we have a

democratic republic. Democracy is the rule by the people, for the people, and of the people. The specialty is that people should participate in more number that is a participatory democracy. Republic is considered a representative democracy. That is for the people.” Nowadays, the practice of participatory democracy reduced and representative democracy only prevails, people handover their share to the political class.

In the first place, there can be no real democracy, no real people’s participation in governance and development without equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and at different levels of decision making.

The issue of women’s participation in politics cannot be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in society.’ Political status refers to the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and the value given by society to the role of women.” Political participation is a process in which people try to affect the Government by taking part in the political process.

Women’s role in the political structure had virtually remained unchanged, despite the rapid growth of informal political activity by them. Broad-based political participation of women has been severely limited due to the nexus of traditional factors such as consideration of caste, religion and family status. Political participation involves an active role of the citizen in the political process of the state with the objective to bring about desired changes in the form of politics and decisions.” Against this background, the National Commission for women was formed in 1992 and the 73 constitutional Amendment, reserving one third seats for women in Panchayats, came into effect in 1993 in order to give more representation to women in the nation’s affairs.”

The issue of women’s political role in post-independence India has acquired three principal dimensions.” The first, made possible by the constitutional guarantee of equality, is participation in the decision making institutions from the grassroots to the national government. The second dimension is the operationalisation of women’s rights, economic, social and political, to translate the constitutional promises into reality.’ After being dormant for over three decades, this aspect has resurfaced and is being pursued with some vigor by women’s movement with varying degree of response from the government, political parties, media and public. The legal framework provides a strong base in this case, making it rather difficult for any institution or political group to adopt an overtly negative stance to the demands of the women

movement. Besides, the growing mobilisation of women's organisation is increasing women's visibility as a potential force that may need to be tapped. The third dimension is the purpose of women's participation, the nature of the impact that may or wish to make on the political process, and how they wish to achieve their aims.

According to 73 constitutional Amendment, the article 243 D of under XI-schedule describes the duties and responsibilities of women leaders. The 73rd Constitutional amendment act on Panchayat Raj transfers power, resources, and independence of functioning to these local bodies." Much development in health, family planning, land management, animal husbandry, dairy, etc. can be given a new thrust with the people's initiative and active participation as a critical element in whole process of development.

The 73rd amendment Act strongly supports women's participation in the election process as a representation through nomination and cooperation. The Act also stipulates that one-third of chairpersons at the three levels of panchayat administration should be women. This will involve about 8 lakh women in the political decision-making process at the grass-root level. Majority of the winning candidates among women were illiterate or poorly educated. In the beginning, they could hardly contribute anything substantially at the meetings.

To overcome this problem, training and awareness programmes should be undertaken on a priority basis. It is often criticized that the elected women members have no idea of what democratic decentralization means and what are the rights and responsibilities of the panchayat members. Voluntary organisations and audio-visual media may have to undertake a massive collective effort to make women's role to make participatory and democratically viable. The government should provide supportive measures to reduce drudgery in household activities so that they can freely participate in the Panchayat Raj activities. The local women's organisation can serve as the basis for women's training in the democratic procedure and decision-making process.

The policy of reservation raises specific very pertinent issues will one-third reservation of electoral in Panchayat bodies ensure more significant and meaningful participation, involvement and contribution of women in grass root institution and their decision makers." Women should take much more interest and see that the funds for panchayats are not flittered away." They can at least serve as the watchdogs and keep an eye on the people responsible for spending money and keeping accounts. woman, by nature, is an honest person and perfect in balancing the family budget. This quality could usefully be employed

in managing the financial aspects of the Panchayat Raj institutions as well. Given the opportunities, most women make better managers than men.¹⁰ Traditionally, women have a wealth of experience in the necessary skills of management at home. They are involved in planning the household by organising its activities and exercising control over them; they are better communicators than men and are better in human relations because of their feminine institution and a greater understanding of people's emotional needs. Thus all these characteristics must stand them in good stead while they are actively participating in panchayat raj institutions.

Salient Provisions of 73rd Constitutional Amendment

The constitution 73 amendment act, 1993, which will be legislated upon in all the states, incorporates salient provision concerning political participation of women in local government. (i) In all the panchayats one third of the seats will be reserved for women; (ii) One third of the seats reserved for SCs and STs will be reserved for women; (iii) One third of chairpersons of panchayats at all levels shall be reserved for women and (iv) Women and child development forms part of newly added 11th schedule of the constitution. "

The new act provides for (i) Preparation of area plans by village Panchayats (ii) Addition of the 11th schedule to the constitution with a detailed list; and (iii) Provision of share in finance from state commissions to be established.

Women in Panchayats

The percentage of women at various levels of political activity has shifted dramatically as a result of this constitutional change, from 4-5 percent before PRI to 25-40 percent after PRI.¹¹ At the local level, the number of women representatives has increased from no more than 6 in each assembly, usually less than percent in these bodies and that too as nominated or co-opted member, to a total of 330,000 and a presence sometimes in excess of the mandatory one third, the highest proportion being 43 percent. In other words, in some cases, women have moved out of reserved constituencies."

Women's participation in Panchayat Raj has immediate as well as long-term implications in as much as their leadership in quantitative terms is just too much below their population in the country at present. There is no work in urban or rural areas, which is the sole preserve of menfolk. Both work together in unison with no discrimination of any sort, and

as such, both are equally important to contribute their mite in government dispensation as also in political activities.

Goals to be achieved

A multi-pronged effort needs to be taken as a relatively long term strategy so that even the poorest of the poor women become active participants in the decision making bodies in villages. This would involve the formidable task of educating all women in all the intricacies of the rural polity. Moreover, some provided for instance, the drudgery of housework has to be removed by making adequate arrangements for childcare and domestic work, A culture of sharing household responsibilities among men and women would need to be created so that the cultural edifice of non-productive work as an exclusive domain of women gets dismantled. Daycare centers and women's hostels should be set up for providing facilities to women for enhancing the quality of their participation in Panchayat Raj institutions. Serious efforts will need to be taken to keep the women folk away from petty politics of political parties or the powerful groups functioning in rural areas.

The 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution (1993) mandated that 33% of local Panchayat (Village Council) seats be reserved for women. This measure has brought great opportunities for women's visibility at the grass-root level in politics. However, women's participation in the Panchayati Raj system is not up to the mark. The formal reservation for women in Panchayati Raj structure is not a sufficient condition for their active participation unless and until it is supplemented by measures which help in resolving the socio-economic pressures inhibiting them.

Participation of women in Panchayati Raj system gives them a status in the contribution of women not only in the rural development process but development. It also gives the opportunity to work in groups, developing programmes, participate in decision making women needs. The effectiveness depends on how the elected Ives and how they are perceived in turn as participants in the decision-making process.

Notes and References

1. Rashmi Thakur, "Women and Political Empowerment", Employment News, 24-30 June. 2000, Vol. XXV. No. [3,
2. Ibid.,
3. Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox (eds.), Women and Elective Office: Past, Present and Future, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, p.73.

4. Rashmi Thakur, "Women and Political Empowerment", Employment News, 24-30, June, 2000, Vol. XXV, No. 13,
5. P. Manikyamba, Women in Panchayat Raj Structures, New Delhi, Gian Publishing House, 1989, p.54.
6. Deepti Agarwal and Indu Grover, "Women in Politics and Governance", Social Welfare, March, 1999, Vol.45, No.12, p.15.
7. Aparna Srivastava, "Reasons for Low Participation of Women in Politics", Social Welfare, March, 1999, Vol.45, No.12, p. 12.
8. Vina Mazumdar, "Women's Participation in Political Life in India", Paper presented at the seminar held at CWDS, New Delhi, 1987.
9. Ibid.
10. K.B. Saxena, "Women and Panchayats", Kurushetra, February, 1997, Vol. XLVIII, No. 5, p.48.
11. Adityasen, "A Review of Women's Role in Panchayat Raj", Kurushetra, June, 1994, Vol. XLIX, No.9, p.61.
12. Neela Mukherjee, "Rural Women and Panchayat Raj Institutions", Kurushetra, June, 1994, Vol. XLII, No.9.
13. Uma Joshi, "Women's role Imperative for strong PRIs", Kurushetra, June, 1994, Vol. XLIII, No.19, p.20.
14. M.S. Kirtikumar, "Strategies for Empowerment of Women in PRIs", Kurushetra, June, 1994, Vol. XLIII, No.9, p.5.
15. George Mathew (eds.), Status of Panchayats in the States and Union Territories of India, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 2000. p.39.
16. Mira Seth, Women and Development, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2004. pp 75.
17. Sakunthala Narasimhan, Empowering Women, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2001. p.45.
18. Census of India, 2001.
19. G. Palanithurai, Empowerment of Women, Gandhigram, p.12.
20. Puran Chandra, Political Dynamics of Women, New Delhi, Akansha Publishing House, 2005. p.11.
21. Ibid., pp. 46-48. 7