



2

Political Leadership and Entrepreneurial Development of Women in India through PRIs and SHGs:)

APRAJEETA SINGH

MA (MASS COMMUNICATION), UGC NET-JRF



2015



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND ENTREPRENEURIAL
DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA THROUGH PRIS
AND SHGS

Aprajeeta Singh*

ABSTRACT

Any society that aims to empower itself and develop needs to focus on its weak sections. Women are the building blocks of a nation and therefore they need to have a choice in their lives. They need to have a say in decision making in their families. Empowerment of women also entails awareness and cognition of political rights and behaviours. It leads to Political Socialisation which is the study of developmental processes by which people of all ages and adolescents acquire political cognition, attitudes and behaviours. This paper examines the role of PRIs and Entrepreneurship industry in the development and upliftment of women. How can Self-help groups help in achieving financial independence and how can it lead to entrepreneurship abilities will be the area of concern. Further, how can Panchayati Raj Institutions help in political empowerment of women and how it leads to their participation in national affairs will also be discussed. This paper studies the role of PRIs and SHGs in the promotion of political and economic empowerment of women. Political and economic stability adds emphasis to the social relevance of women thus empowering them financially, socially, economically and moreover morally making them stronger and efficient in highest degrees. Political empowerment and economic stability will lead to much improved living standards for women thus helping them to engage themselves in participatory activities and thus making their existence more meaningful.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, PRIs, SHGs, Political Socialisation, Entrepreneurship.

* **MA (Mass Communication), UGC NET- JRF**

1. Introduction:

Democratic decentralization is one of the very important concepts that have dominated the politics of grass-root participation in third world development scenario. Panchayati raj Institutions have become the backbone of Indian villages since a very long period of time and 24th April, 1993, constitutional status was accorded to the Panchayats. Three tier system was introduced to ensure people's participation in rural reconstruction. When this status was accorded, the elections were to be held after every five years. State Finance Commissions were also to be appointed for providing financial powers of the Panchayats. District Planning Committee was also to be constituted for preparing draft development plan for the whole district. These measures reflected the strategic approach of the administration for strengthening the Panchayat system in India. The concept of Panchayats originated from the idea of the villages becoming self sustained and decentralization of power, functions and resources. This paper is an attempt to examine the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Self help Groups in facilitating women empowerment with special reference to Bihar. Political empowerment and financial empowerment of women lends them the ability to have a strong foothold in the much talked patriarchal society thus strengthening the pillars of our democracy.

2. Panchayati Raj Institutions:

When we speak of decentralization, we mean to redistribute power and the inclusion of government plans in remote areas far away from national capital. Decentralized planning is the base of decentralized democracy. Today the Panchayats have been transferred the role of state functions at levels of district, taluk and village level. **Gram Sabha** is one term that has formed the base of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Constitution has defined Gram Sabha as "a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the areas of Panchayat at the village level." The gram Sabha acts as an assembly of villagers as it is elected for a village or a group of villages. It acts as a platform for the villages to encounter the issues persisting in their environment. The Gram Panchayats have to conduct Gram Sabha once in every six months to coordinate the developmental activities of the village which is presided by the **Pradhan** of the Gram Panchayat. Gram Sabha has numerous functions as follows:

- a) Promoting development schemes of the village

b) Coordinating labour force in village

Functioning of Gram Sabha has faced hindered growth and progress due to numerous problems like poverty, absence of political will and attitude of the corrupt bureaucrats. Panchayati Raj Institutions have a historical background which has claims that Rig Veda has concepts like Sabhas. Various committees have given their recommendations on these democratic institutions. Ashok Mehta Committee gave its recommendations for improving the performance. Some of them are:

- a) The three tier system should be replaced with the two tier system. Zilla Parishad at the district level and below it, Mandal Panchayat.
- b) A district should be the first point of decentralization.
- c) The committee also proposed that seats for SCs and STs should be based on their population.
- d) Zilla Parishad should look after developmental activities.
- e) The voluntary agencies should play a crucial role in mobilizing support of the people for the Panchayati Raj.

There is ample literature on democratic participation provided by various scholars. Mehta (1957) emphasizes people's participation in planning and stresses on the fact that the increased people's participation in development programmes reflects their firm faith in the community development programmes. Rajni Kothari (1960) states that change in power structure among centre, state and lower bodies leads to a stable democratic structure involving balanced participation. Narayanan (1964) proposed that Panchayati Raj Institutions should act as units of self-governance in villages, blocks and district level. Muthalib (1973) opines that democratic decentralization is an outcome of planned development. Capacity Building and Training (CB&T) forms an important aspect of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Under the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, funds are provided under various schemes like Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA). Villages can benefit only when a feasible model plan is introduced before the Gram Sabha towards which the people can act collectively and design solutions for the improvising of their social community. Balwant Rai Committee suggested decentralization of power structures that lead to a greater equitable participation of people in Panchayats.

The All India Congress Working Committee appointed a village Panchayat committee with Dr. K.N. Katju as its Chairman to review the progress of Panchayat system. Some of those recommendations were:

- a) Panchayats provide a firm basis for the establishment of healthy democratic structures in India and therefore States should provide support to these institutional tools of democracy.
- b) Panchayats should be elected unanimously within Panchayats.
- c) Adults should form a Gaon Sabha and the election of Panchayats should be done by adult franchise.
- d) A definite scheme should be formulated for training of Panchayat personnel.

3. Decentralization and Community Development Programme:

Women's participation is very important in any democratic structure and the participation may be direct or indirect, and it may be political, administrative or social in nature. Panchayati Raj Institutions have a long history where villages were represented by their Panchayats. Decentralization is a very important concept when it comes to the political structure of the Panchayats. It is the transfer of authority from higher levels to lower levels of the government.¹ Whereas delegation is an altogether different concept which connotes that power is delegated to someone for better functioning and that power can be taken back if required. Panchayats have been conferred upon the status of self government bodies by article 243(d) and 243(g) of the Indian Constitution. The Seventh Plan accredited the role of grass root level participation of local people in rural development.

Rural Infrastructure development is one of the most important tasks of the Gram Sabhas as it has the executive power of village development. Rural development is a multidimensional process that requires utilization of resources. Women were provided 33% reservation in local bodies. In Bihar, through Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 2006 the reservation was extended to 50% in election of 2006. PRIs have acted as source of empowerment to women in villages all over India. Sikkim increased the reservation percentage of women to 40% in 2008. Chattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya

¹https://books.google.co.in/books?id=aNAkjN1b9xQC&pg=PA36&dq=women+and+panchayati+raj+in+india&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=women%20and%20panchayati%20raj%20in%20india&f=false

Pradesh and Uttarakhand have passed laws increasing the women reservation to 50 %. Various committees have been formed to check as to whether Panchayati Raj Institutions have served the medium for women empowerment.

4. Rural Credit and Women Empowerment:

Financial empowerment is an essential element in women empowerment and it can be done through provisions of credit and generation of savings. “Swarna Jayanti Grama Swarozgar Yojana” which involves Self help groups has been launched for providing self employment and economic empowerment to the rural poor on the initiation of Ministry of Rural Development. Self help groups are a great platform for providing women the financial stability and it lends them their own individuality. Prior to 1990s, there were hardly any credit schemes for rural women. The UN commission on status of women observed that women receive a low income compared to their male counterpart. Empowerment of women is a socio-political concept that goes beyond formal political engagement and conscious rising. The economic empowerment requires the control over financial resources while political empowerment requires the ability of women to organize social transformation.

5. Self Monitoring:

Self Monitoring has been introduced by Self help Groups in a staged manner to make women own their movement completely. There is a representative for each village at the Mandal level. These groups identify training and financial needs and try to solve their village problems through developmental departments.

6. From Welfare to Empowerment framework:

Women were seen as the targets of welfare earlier but when sixth five year plans came, they were objected as agents of development. When we speak of empowerment what do we mean by it? According to Adams(1996), “ Empowerment is the means’ by which individuals, groups and communities take control of their circumstances and achieve their goals, thereby being able to

work towards helping themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives."² Stromquist (1995) argues for cognitive, psychological, political and economic components of empowerment.

7. Community Development through Women Empowerment:

A community is sensed as a social system composed of people living in some spatial relationship to one another, who share common facilities and services, develop a common psychological identification with the locality symbol, and together frame a common communication network. Community development cannot happen without the real empowerment of its people. It requires an effort of social change. Community organization is one of the means of directing the welfare initiatives and social planning. Financial empowerment can lead to developmental changes and thus act as a catalyst in society improvement. Empowerment deals with empowering the people to confront their own problems and solve them systematically and this is what community development plans also aim towards. It strives to build the competence of its people in facing and resolving their real problems.

8. Need and Importance of SHGs:

Self help groups are a great medium for overcoming exploitation and create confidence for rural people and thus benefit from them. By creating a common fund through their small savings, these groups help to create a financial base for the members of these groups. Self help groups take the help of NGOs and thus maintain a flexible system of operation and thus manage their resources. As these groups are informal in nature and are created on voluntary basis, social and economic problems are discussed on an open basis.

Conclusion: Women of any country need to be empowered as they are the building blocks of that country. Empowerment not only means to earn and have a say in decision making but it also denotes freedom from the feeling of being deprived and having a sense of self reliance. Panchayati Raj Institutions help in lending voice to the local people thus empowering the grassroot level and Self help groups help in providing financial stability to the participant members. Money and political strength help in carving out a meaningful place to the women thus helping them to lead a better society with an improved vision.

²https://books.google.co.in/books?id=1szNM7hwc9gC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Self+help+groups+and+women&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Self%20help%20groups%20and%20women&f=false

References:

1. G. Sreemulu; 2006; Empowerment of Women Through Self Help Groups; Gyan Books.
2. B. Suguna; 2006; Empowerment of Rural Women Through Self Help Groups; Discovery Publishing House.
3. S. Baluchamy; 01 Jan-2004; Panchayati Raj Institutions; Mittal Publications.

