

Concluding Observations and Suggestions

M.K. Gandhi's dream of future India of a country with highly decentralized polity encompassing the degree of political and economic autonomy ultimately ushered to the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institution in free India. The 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 has further introduced a mechanism to foster the proper representation and thereby proper participation from all segments of the society, especially women and those who have been kept aside from the body of polity as well as public life since long back. The privileges and opportunities provided by this act were to make a shift in the paradigm of development especially in rural areas. But in real case it depends largely upon the ways as well as degrees of utilization of those scopes. The era of reservation of seats in local bodies in the history of growth of Panchayati Raj System in free India can be stated as a transmission process of change from exclusive to inclusive local-politics. The present study here has taken the issue of the prevailing condition of common rural women, one of the targeted group of this transmission process and lays emphasis on finding out of the reasons which obstructs the achievement of goals of this revolutionary step (the 73 Amendment Act).

The entire writing of the present study is actually an inter-weaving of concepts, ideas, histories, aspects and culmination of prevailing situations through separate topics, to establish the fact that women universally possess an inferior position to men; and India is not an exception to it. But notable thing in India in this regard is that Government acknowledges this backward status of women in all spheres and ahead of many developed countries as India provides for all the necessary supportive legal provisions towards facilitating women's equal entitlements. Since the pre-historic period, women have been undergoing through under-privileged conditions of life universally while the nature of suffering varies depending upon the variety of society. India also has undergone various periodic shifts regarding the nature of women's repressiveness and in free India the Government framed lots of supportive legal Constitutional provisions. But quite disappointing is that the goal of making women at par with men is not yet fully achieved. The latest measure which receives a worldwide discussion is the clause of the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, providing reservation of seats for unprivileged segment of the society in local self-government, which brought about a sudden change especially in rural areas. The State of West Bengal since independence has been pioneering in step for establishing Panchayati Raj truly with

the vision of democratic decentralization as well as mass participation. Thus being motivated by two facts, viz. being of West Bengal's pioneering with regard to PRI set-up and Government's objective of delegating power to the people in general and women in particular, the researcher moved to explore the impact of this governmental initiative, which is also pioneering to the rest of India, in rural areas where rate of progress regarding achievement of any policy is usually low even in favourable situation. The focal point of study here is to measure the degree of fulfillment of objective of reserving seats for women particularly in rural areas i.e. participation of rural women in politics as well as empowerment of them. Jhashodhara Bagchi in her edited volume entitled as "The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal, 1970-2000, The Challenged Ahead", has already upheld the fact that the situation of rural women is much more dismal than that of women in urban areas.

Observations

From an intense study which was conducted in the selected Gram Panchayats (selection was done by using multi-staged sampling method) and from the analysis of data collected (through various means of hypothesis testing using the qualification obtained from extracting those data) the study reaches a host of conclusions including both positive as well as negative facets of reality which are as follows:-

1. Reservation policy has immensely increased the scope of participation for unprivileged sections of women in local politics especially in rural Bengal.

Scholars on gender studies in India and their studies in different parts of India also accord the same view that reservation policy has opened up the door to join local politics to the common rural women where the maxims of prejudices are prevailing dominantly even today although the presence of immense advancement of satellite communication and usage of other modern techniques in day-to-day life. Kuldeep Mathur endorsed that the policy of reservation of seats for all disadvantaged sections of the society has expanded the democratic base for the targeted population. He opined that it (reservation policy) also addresses the issue of gender-disparity graver in rural areas.¹ Dr. C Paramasivan, has emphasized on the protocol of quota i.e. stipulation of number in terms of seats in local bodies for women. He says that women in developed countries also got proper representation only with the help of mandating quota for

them. Author also showed that India, while being a developing country, is not in a position of backdrop regarding the representation of women in decision-making bodies starting from ground-level to top. India is also maintaining equal proportion of women representation as maintained in developed countries. Legal-constitutional mandate to maintain quota for women has proven itself as a successful mechanism for bringing women in public forum.² Dr. Krishna Gupta's editorial presentation namely 'Empowerment of Women; emerging dimensions' has established the fact that stipulation of one-third seat for women in local bodies by 73rd Amendment act has increased participation.³ Nikunjalata Dutta also felt that the objective of democratic decentralisation behind 73rd Amendment Act is being realised through creating the opportunity to access decision – making authority by means of participating it. By this it is also promoting the self development of the participant.⁴ Scholars S. Nagendra Ambedkar also says that reservation has extended the opportunity to join local politics and thereby local decision-making body to the weaker section of the rural society more especially to women. But this whole process it is moving towards the establishment of equality in village societies.⁵ Rakesh Prasad's Study in the State of Bihar also accepted that fact that the 73rd Amendment Act has increased women's participation in grass-root level political authoritative body and has generated the scope of equal access of it by both men as well as women.⁶ Prabhat Dutta, in his article 'Political Empowerment of Rural Women in India', has observed that the reservation of seats has provided the opportunity to women to take decisive as well as important part in local decision-making process. It has widened the scope of breaking the hegemony of rural reach and patriarchy. Tulsi Jain has also mentioned that the 73rd Amendment Act can be marked as landmark of paradigm shift in history of village Panchayat in India, as it delivered the opportunity from "exclusive to inclusive" towards weaker sections of society especially women.⁸

Thus it can be said that the policy of reservation has been through statistical as well as circumstantial evidence an effective corrective method for society like rural India where women and other many sections of society traditionally is being kept apart from political sphere.

2. Wholehearted support from the family members is essential for making effective participation of women in public activities. A study of Goutam Battacharya also tells the same fact that attitudinal change in men and women can establish a better way women's participation.⁹ L. C. Jain also focused on the issue that the nature of declining participation of women is due to the

absence of requisite family support.¹⁰ More over the removal of inferiority complex of the women member is also requisite factor for upholding her position both within the sphere of family as well as Panchayat, as the process of empowerment begins from the private field to public. M. S. Kulhari has also accepted the similar fact and feels, as the researcher of the present study, that most of the rural women feel subordinate themselves to the male members of their family and this attitude must be changed to put women as at par and parcel of both family as well as Panchayats.¹¹

3. Requisite support as well as motivation from administration is also an important determinant of women's participation in Panchayats. The degree of effective participation by women largely depends upon the supportive measures from the administrator. Dr. Rabi Goswami in his book 'Panchayati Raj in India' has identified some factors, which can accelerate policy implementation, like legal provisions, national politics and programmes, initiative by local administration. The positive gesture from the local administrator definitely could increase the level of performance of this untrained new-comers.¹²

4. Large section of elected women representatives are not sufficiently educated and trained on the issue of governance in other words they are under equipped to perform the vast tasks related to sustainable rural development. So, proper education and training programme should be taken to build up the capacities of elected women representatives of PRIs'. These are essential for enhancing their self-confidence and performance level. Many of recent studies have also identified the lack of training and education which is responsible for their lack of knowledge and awareness, as the factor behind the level of women's participation. The study of G. D. Bhat in Sikkim, the M. S. Kulhari in West Bengal, the Rakesh Parshad in Bihar, the study of Lalit Yadav in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the works of Shalini Rajneesh in Karnataka and so on are the works which favour the aforesaid statement that training in the concerned field and education in general are two important factors to make women vibrant in Panchayat-works.

G.D. Bhat in his book 'Panchayati Raj and Women Leadership in India' declares that despite the availability enormous legal provisions for the women's participation in public field aimed at achieving equality for women, a distant gap still remain in the status of women while participating in Panchayats due to various factors among which illiteracy is one of the major of them.¹³ M.S. Kulhari feels that despite of the enactment of the 73rd Amendment the

dissatisfactory status of women representatives in Panchayats is an effect of composite phenomena of several reasons among which education is a vital one.¹⁴ Rakesh parshad puts forward the statement in almost similar way that for empowerment of women and for bringing self-reliance among them, the essential conditions are literacy along with health facilities and economic security.¹⁵ Lalit Yadav has shown by his study in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh that the level of education is a determining factor above all socio-economic factors behind the level of performance of women in grass-root level.¹⁶ Dr. Shalini Rajneesh has expressed her findings that women in panchayats are still carrying wish of their in-laws in Panchayat works, are not educated and economically independence which means that a good level of education and economic independence can lead to effective participation.¹⁷ Kuldeep Mathur too has upheld the fact that “patriarchal ordering society, illiteracy leads to tokenism and surrogate representation”.¹⁸ Hence it can be stated that not only the present study but also many other studies in different parts of India has inferred similar conclusion that the education is the most important determinant and training is pivotal mechanism in the process of empowering women. Not only this, the researcher here has found out that education is the positive catalyst in the said process. It enhances the scope to get every situation to act conveniently to their hope and aspiration. It is the key to the effective participation on which that achievement of power by the women rests on. Education contributes to the women’s capacity building in ways especially to interact with others. Interaction with the society also raises the faculty of promptness and acting suitably depending on the situation. However the importance of education has understood by women villagers. It is clear from their statement. This urge for education can be said as an effect of reservation policy as the increasing social introduction as well as share in public life are the complementary out-put of it. Women has realised need of basic education for a good livelihood.

6. Spontaneity of the women to join party-politics is almost negligible and their voluntary to Panchayati Raj Institutions is not also up to the expectation. Many other recent studies also reveal the similar facts in the other parts of our country. Dr. Shalini Rajneesh experienced, during her study carried out in the district of Dakshina Kannada of the Sate of Karnataka, that women representatives in Panchayats are not in a position to raise as well as establish their voice and more surprisingly that they did not join the politics voluntarily rather to satisfy reserved seats in Panchayat election. For her term in Panchayat she remains a puppet of either their family members or local leaders.¹⁹