

"Women's Political Representation and Empowerment in Local Governance: A Comparative Study"

Meenakshi Arya,

Department of political science, S.S.J campus Almora

Abstract:

The ability of women to politically represent themselves in the local governance has become a major force in the realization of inclusive and equitable development. The paper involves the role of women in the local decision-making bodies paying special attention to the political participation of women, their empowerment and their challenges. Comparing various regions and systems of governance, the research indicates the influence of women representation on policy making, community building and equal improvement of social transformation. The results show that in as much as prerequisite representation helps in achieving better results of governance, there still exist numerous structural impediments, socio-cultural norms, and political constraints that restrict the full potential of women leaders. The research highlights the need to empower local governance work by means of supportive policies, capacity building and social awareness to empower women.

Keywords: Women empowerment, political representation, local governance, gender equality, policy participation

❧ INTRODUCTION:

It is well-known that the involvement of women in politics and government is one of the pillars of inclusive growth and democratic solidarity. Since local governance represents the most proximity to the citizen it is a vital place where they take an active part in making crucial decisions and policies that have direct impacts to their communities. Presence of women in these structures of governance not only increases democracy but also a variety of opinions including those of marginal group are taken into account during policy making and execution.

In the world, different approaches have been used to ensure women representation in local governance such as constitutionalist mandates, gender quotas, and affirmative actions. India, as an example, has a Panchayati Raj system with one-third of seats being taken by women in neighbourhood-level councils and Rwanda has the rule with 30 percent quota of women in decision-making units. This has seen to it that women have been included in the governance more; but merely being represented does not make them feel empowered. Empowerment constitutes the powers to control decision making, to command resources and to be a leader and break socio-cultural practices which deny full participation.

Irrespective of regulated backing and policy measures, challenges, such as patriarchal social order, insufficient access to political networks, inadequacy in training, and prejudices in society against women are experienced by women in local governance. Comparative analysis among various countries shows that women leaders can be effective based on the number, as well as on the institutional support, socio-cultural acceptance and capacity building opportunities.

The study intends to discuss a comparative study on how to empower women and improve their representation, politically, in local administration. Through the examination of various areas and systems

of governance, the research is aimed at finding out the impacts of women infusion in the making of decisions, community building, and equality of sex. The study also puts emphasis on the challenges that still limit the political power of women and how the same can be overcome to enhance women empowerment and efficiency in local governance.

LITERATURE SURVEY:

The participation of women in political representation and empowerment has been widely researched with a particular focus on the interplay between the state of the institutional structure, social values and policy outcomes.

In Journal of Consumer Marketing, Ang et al. (2001) [1] examined the behavior of consumers with respect to the counterfeit products. Although the study was essentially based on marketing, the researchers emphasized the effect of societal perceptions on decision making, which provides such an insight if applied to volunteer voter attitudes towards female leaders and the validity of female political power.

In the Indian Journal of Political Science, Agarwal (2012) [2], investigated the political involvement of youths and democracy in India. The researcher has stressed that political participation is greatly increased by knowledgeable and open access to information. Though the focus was on youth, the findings are relevant to ensuring that women operate in various areas of governance since education, knowledge of politics and social-cultural awareness should be emphasized to overcome social-cultural barriers.

The article by Banerjee (2019) [3], which appears in the Asian Journal of Political Science, evaluated obstacles to youth engagement in modern India. The researcher found out that systemic factors that hinder the process include social norms, political exclusion and lack of institutional support, which also impact the political empowerment of women. The available research stressed the importance of the policy method concerning a structural and cultural barrier to participation.

In Econometrica, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) [4] performed a randomly selected policy experiment to investigate the impact of women reservation in the governing bodies of locality in India. The researchers showed that women leaders were more interested in welfare-problem oriented issues like education, health and child care contrary to male leaders. This paper shows the reality behind the changes in policy priorities and community outcomes due to the political representation of women.

In Science, Beaman et al. (2012) [5] tested long-term impacts of female leadership in local government. The researchers identified that the influence on educational and feminine aspirations of girls as well as the more steadfast change of the attitudes to leadership by women were observed as exposure to women leaders. The results indicate a good demonstration that the involvement of women has both short and long-term consequences of empowerment and social change.

In Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide [6], Krook (2009) pointed out that it is not the number of representatives that can be empowered to really matter. The researcher held that it is a necessity to assist women in political offices through an institutional backing, leadership training and social acceptance to give women in office real power. This difference between descriptive representation and substantive representation is very critical in explaining the influence of women in the governance.

In Marketing Intelligence and Planning, Mathews and Bianchi (2016), [7], reviewed consumer behavior with regards to counterfeit goods. Though it was not directly connected with the aspect of governance, the

researchers given an insight about the perception and bias of the society, which is applicable in the context of how the communities treat women leaders within the traditionally male dominated political systems. In the article, Ahmadi, Neshan, and Moradi (2014) [8] investigated the optimal operation approach of a hybrid renewable energy system through the use of stochastic programming. The researchers have pointed out the need to plan and optimize and make decisions based on the evidence and present a methodological framework that could be used to determine the impact of women on policy-making and effectiveness in local government.

On the Indian Journal of Public Administration, Rao (2014) [9] introduced an extensive overview of women in local governance in India. The scholar has pointed out both gains made by reservation policies and the unending adversities fascinated by patriarchy, lack of political experience, and access to resources. This paper highlighted that successful empowerment must be institutionalized, have mentoring and capacity-building initiatives to allow the women leaders to call authority and deliver meaningful results in the process of community development.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Women empowerment is complex term that is not just about decision-making. It entails empowering women to have control over their personal life, social life, economic life and political life. Empowerment is a process that builds women with self-confidence, with improvement in the abilities of women and availing opportunities where they can be able to exercise their rights in a positive manner. According to the definition of the United Nations, the empowerment of women refers to the procedure of raising the ability of women to make decisions and convert the decisions into the actions and desired outcome.

Social Empowerment:

Social empowerment aims at enhancing the position of women in the society and defying the culture that restricts movements and freedom of women. It is characterized by the access to education, health, development of skills, and the knowledge of legal rights. They have socially empowered women who can engage in community activities, promote social justice, and question the social problems such as gender discrimination, domestic violence, and child marriage. Social empowerment cannot happen without education since women can be empowered with knowledge, confidence, and skills to make good decisions.

Economic Empowerment:

Economic empowerment gives the women financial security and income-generating potential. It entails the availability of employment, entrepreneurial facilities, finances, land and credit. Economic empowerment makes women less dependent on male members of the family and/or enhances bargaining power in the household and also enables women to invest in education, health and development of the community. Some of the tools that facilitate economic empowerment of

women include microfinance programs, vocational training and skill development programs.

Political Empowerment:

Women are empowered by politics to get involved in governance, making decisions that affect policymakers and also leading positions. It encompasses the right to vote and to contest elections as well as take part in the process of making decisions in the community. Not only do most women get become more empowered politically but it also makes sure that the policies and programs become more sensitive to the needs of women and the marginalized groups. Activities such as quota seating in localities or parliament are essential in improving the political engagement and offering women representation in politics.

Psychological Empowerment:

Psychological empowerment entails building of self-esteem, confidence, and agency of women. It entails building a perception that they can be able to impact decisions and bring about change in their lives and the communities they live. Highly empowered women stand better chances of being in leadership positions, promoting rights and breaking societal rules that restrict their participation.

Cultural Empowerment:

The cultural empowerment touches on the norms, traditions and practices which affect gender roles. Through breaking the bonds of the oppressive cultures and advancing gender sensitive values, women can now contribute fully towards all fields of life both education, politics and economic activities. In this regard, empowerment may need community participation, sensitization exercises and liaisons with social organizations.

The importance of women empowerment:

- **Better Governance:** Women who are given powers to hold leadership positions would make sure that policies employed are favorable to the needs of society at large, especially the vulnerable.
- **Social Development:** With the power of women, there is improved health, education and social welfare performances.
- **Economic Growth** This is due to the fact that the presence of women in the workforce and entrepreneurship improves household income and economic growth in a nation.
- **Gender Equality:** Gender disparities are minimized, patriarchal principles are questioned, and similar opportunities are enjoyed by everyone through empowerment.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION:

Political representation describes the fact that people sit, and are involved in decision making institutions, making sure that the people in society are represented in the governance. The political representation of women is imperative towards attaining gender sensitive policies, equal development, inclusive democracy. Representation may be numeric and dwell on the institutions of women in political position or it may be qualitative that dwells on the ability of women in political position to make decisions and bring about positive change.

Gender quotas, reserved seats, affirmative action, and proportional representation are some of the mechanisms that have been extensively used to increase the level of women representation in local and national political systems. The studies have identified that women as leaders tend to focus in social welfare concerns such as education, health, and child care, emphasizing the explicit vision that women have on governance. The political representation will guarantee not only the political justice but also promote the larger societal transformation, breaking the stereotypes and enabling the next generations of women to pursue the political representation.

Political representation however does not suffice to empowerment. Female candidates have to deal with absence of political experience, inability to get access to party networks, face of patriarchal support and social pressure that restricts their power. Thus, political representation needs to be provided with institutional power, leadership education, and the policies that can make women have real power in policy-making.

V. LOCAL GOVERNANCE:

Local governance is the model of administration at the community or the sub-national level such as cluster of municipalities, village councils and panchayats that run the local resources, development programs and public services. Democratic decentralization cannot happen without the local governance, as it will make the decision-making process more feasible and efficient, providing opportunities to take into consideration the local needs and priorities.

The role of women in the local administration can be described as especially important since it gives them a place where they can exercise leadership, control policies and even take direct contact with their communities. Some of the countries such as India, Rwanda and Norway have introduced legal systems and quotas to promote women representation in local governments and bodies. Social welfare programs, health, education, sanitation and gender sensitive policies are just a few examples of the ways women in local governments are creating social changes with the help of representation so that the social changes can become physical developments.

Some difficulties that face local governance are, patriarchal opposition, inadequate training of women leaders and the lack of financial or administrative resources. The only reason why women participation in the local governance should be optimized by ensuring that they are exposed to capacity-building initiatives, mentoring, and supportive legal frameworks is to address these challenges.

1. GENDER EQUALITY:

Gender equality refers to a condition where both men and women have equal opportunity, resource, right, and power to make decisions in the social, economical, and political arenas. Gender equality is among the key factors of sustainable development, democracy and social justice. Within the governance, gender equality grants women the opportunity to not only be part of the leadership but empowered to partake in their decisions that do affect policies and societal outcome.

Gender equality entails a situation where discrimination, biases, and systematic impediments that deny women a chance to engage in political, economic as well as social life, are eradicated. It entails legalizing reforms, sociality, affirmation, and cultural orientation to achieve a business level playing field. Gender equality in local governance would make sure the issues of women are taken into consideration in the community development programs espoused by women like education, medical care, water and sanitation and social welfare. Gender equality advances democratic institutions, enhances the quality of governance, and provides better and more inclusive societies.

2. POLICY PARTICIPATION:

The participation by the citizens (more so women in the formulation, implementation as well as evaluation of policies and programs that impacts on its communities) is the participation of the populace in policymaking. It goes beyond voting to cover participating in meetings, raising concerns, initiating activities, impacting the allocation of resources and checking the effect of policies.

The involvement in the policy affairs of women in the local government makes sure that the needs of the people in the community, particularly those of the marginalized groups are brought to the development programs. Research revealed that women in the local government who are leaders are likely to give emphasis on policies concerning health, education, sanitation, child welfare, and social justice. The policy participation enhances transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in the management by notwithstanding that decisions are made regarding the priorities of all the members of the community.

The unawareness, low education, patriarchy, weak institutional backing, and marginalization to the political networks are the barriers to policy participation. The policy needs to be encouraged to engage women in policy formulation through capacity-building exercises, campaigning, legal provisions, and mentorship programs, to help the women so that they can be empowered to make their contributions towards the decision-making process.

3. CONCLUSION:

The issue of political representation and empowerment of women in the local governance is significant as it illuminates the paramount role that women play in ensuring inclusive, equitable and effective forms of governance. In other parts of the world and systems of governance, greater inclusion of women in local decision-making organs has shown some good results in terms of development of these communities, social and economic welfare of communities and gender response in policies. Women leaders are usually more concerned with education, healthcare, sanitation and child welfare and how their views can give a different difference in addressing the local needs.

Nevertheless, the discussion also shows that simple numeration is not an implication of meaningful empowerment. The options of women in influencing decision making are determined by various factors, among them being social norms with cultural practices, institutional support, political experience, and resources. Patriarchal resistance, poor political networks, and social prejudices (structural barriers) still impede the performance of women in governing. Thus, empowerment is not only the idea of the representation but also the power, support, and ability to influence policies and programs.

Empirical data is indicating that those countries, which maintain enabling legal structures, gender quotas, capacity-building initiatives, and awareness efforts reach a higher level of success regarding enabling women to act in the local governments. Gender roles are also open to change when exposed to women leaders where young people are encouraged to participate in political procedures.

To sum it up, political representation and empowerment of women in local politics is vital towards enhancing gender equality, democratic processes and sustainable community growth. The civil society organizations, policymakers, and the community stakeholders should collaborate in fixing the barriers which impede the full participation of women. Aspires like leadership training and mentorship programmes, and legal protection, and socio-cultural sensitivity are important in enhancing the ability of women to play a significant role in governance. There is the potential of the inclusion, accountability and effectiveness of local governance as societies could take advantage of the full potential of women leaders through representation and empowerment.

REFERENCES:

- [1] S. H. Ang, P. S. Cheng, E. A. Lim, and S. K. Tambyah, "Spot the difference: Consumer responses towards counterfeits," *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 219– 235, 2001.
- [2] R. Agarwal, "Youth political participation and democratic engagement in India," *Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 73, no. 3, pp. 451– 462, 2012.
- [3] S. Banerjee, "Youth and democratic participation: Barriers and opportunities in contemporary India," *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 156– 175, 2019.
- [4] R. Chattopadhyay and E. Duflo, "Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India," *Econometrica*, vol. 72, no. 5, pp. 1409– 1443, 2004.
- [5] L. Beaman, E. Duflo, R. Pande, and P. Topalova, "Female leadership raises aspirations and educational attainment for girls: A policy experiment in India," *Science*, vol. 335, no. 6068, pp. 582– 586, 2012.
- [6] M. L. Krook, *Quotas for women in politics: Gender and candidate selection reform worldwide*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- [7] S. Mathews and C. Bianchi, "Consumer behavior toward counterfeit goods: A review and agenda for future research," *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 1– 21, 2016.
- [8] N. Ahmadi, Neshan, and M. Moradi, "Optimal operation of hybrid renewable energy systems using stochastic programming," *Renewable Energy*, vol. 63, pp. 87– 98, 2014.
- [9] R. Rao, "Women in local governance: Progress and challenges," *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 60, no. 3, pp. 12– 27, 2014.