

A Comparative Study on Women's struggles at different ages and status in Ancient Indian Society

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Abstract

Women consist of half the population of our country, so there should be nearly half of women as well in the political sector. Various committees have recommended for reservation of seats for women in Panchayath Raj Institutions(PRI), which are the back bone of Indian democracy. But with the passage of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, constitutional provision for reservation of seats for women was made and this has increased political participation of women in panchayaths and this has yielded positive results. Women representatives have demonstrated that they have the interest and ability to work for the development of the community. The Indian society like the number of classical societies were patriarchal in nature. When the Vedic period came to an end, women were deprived of social and religious rights. There was prevalence of the viewpoint among the individuals that males would be the assets and enhance the status and promote welfare of their family and the entire community (Mohapatra, 2015). The role and position of women in ancient India is determined by number of factors, these are, social structure, cultural norms, value system and social expectations. Changes do not come about in the norms, values, principles and standards of the society at the same pace, as the changes. The major aspects that were taken into consideration within the patriarchal society were, sexuality, reproduction and social production. The women were given recognition, because their role was considered important in the implementation of these functions.

Keywords: Reservation, Participation, Community, Panchayaths, Empowerment, Social revolution, Illiteracy, Women, Sacrificing, communication, Prevalence, reproduction,

I. Introduction

Women play a variety of roles in Panchayati Raj institutions, including participating in elections, decision-making, and rural development. They also aim to reduce violence against women and corruption, and to become agents of social change. The political functions can be put into operation in a well-organized manner, by possessing the essential information in terms of number of aspects. These include, decision making, leadership skills, managing, controlling, organizing and co-ordinating. Women, belonging to wealthy castes and princely states were the ones, who were held in high esteem. The wives and mothers of the rulers were given reverence to a major extent. In the implementation of politics and carrying out the administrative functions appropriately, men were the ones, who played a prominent role. But their wives and mothers could give them ideas and suggestions. For instance, in case of making of major decisions or when one has to put into practice the strategies and approaches, women able to contribute significantly. They were not only allowed to give their ideas and suggestions, but also implemented the methods. In some cases, it was believed that women were more skilled and wise as compared to men in the implementation of managerial and political functions. This was communicated through the legends highlighting self-sacrificing. Self-sacrificing the pure image of the women and through the prevalence of rituals and norms, women were given significance, as they were engaged in the performance of two important roles, the wife and mother (Status of Women in India, n.d.).

Despite these positive results, women remain largely excluded from the PRI and local governance structures. This paper brings out the journey of political participation of women and the role they have been performing. It also highlights the challenges faced by the elected women representatives and the efforts being made in this direction for the empowerment and active participation of women in panchayaths. It came into force with effect from April 24, 1993. It ushered a new era of women's participation in the local governance in India. Journey of Political Participation of Women in Panchayaths. However, the journey of political participation of women in panchayaths did not happen at a time.

we do not consider that members of any other special group need any special representation either by election or by co-option" It was followed by Ashok Mehta Committee, which was appointed in 1977. It recommended for the co-option of two women as members of both at Zilla Parishat and Mandal panchayath level. The Report also recommended for reservation of two seats for women in panchayaths and

two co-option women members in case they did not come through elections. The Committee also suggested for a committee of women to be set up within panchayaths to operate specific programs for women and children. That is why we must encourage women as India is the largest democracy in the world, and we must act like it. Women are supposed to be given their status in society, in which NGOs and universities play a massive role in it. This gives women the opportunity to have more control over the management and other women can benefit from it. In 1985, Karnataka introduced 25% reservation for women in the Mandal praja parishads with further reservation for women belonging to SCs and STs. Andhra Pradesh too, in 1986, had provided for reservation in Gram Panchayath.

Nearly 20 states namely Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal have made provisions of 50% reservation for women in Panchayath Raj institutions in their respective State Panchayath Raj Acts. Finally it was the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1993 which provided for reservation of seats in panchayaths. Clause (3) of Article 243D of the Constitution ensures participation of women in PRI. The Act provides for the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women (including the number of seats reserved for the SCs and STs). Clause (4) of Article 243D of the Constitution states that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women. This would be rotated among different Panchayats at each level.

Different Role of Women in Vedic Society and Panchayath Raj

Contest Elections: The Panchayath Raj Act provides for the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women and some states have provided 50% reservation and this has provided an opportunity for greater participation of women in election process. It is an attempt to ensure greater participation of women in election process directly and indirectly. It would be the nursery of creating women politicians for state and national level politics. Even the participation of common women citizens in various activities such as attending Gram Sabha meeting, etc. has reportedly increased, Women's contribution in Rural Development: Women are actively participating in rural development as per their capacity right from labourers to policy-makers. As they have the experience of the problems faced by the people in rural areas, women know very well the developmental works that need to be taken up in rural areas. As members of the local governments, they certainly give prominence to rural development which includes good water supply, toilets for each household, emphasis on improving animal husbandry and so on.

Participation in decision-making: The participation of women as elected as well as non-elected members is rising due to reservation for women provided in the Panchayath Raj Act. It acts as pull factor for women to participate in the local body meetings. They not only give their suggestions but also show their involvement. With the main purpose of estimating the role of women in politics and their position in the ancient society, a brief reference about the stratification system through the varna and the caste system is attempted here. The varna principle of categorisation of society is into four groups, i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Brahmins occupied the top position of power and authority, ritually and ideologically. The principle of stratification acquired normative significance, thus legitimizing the over-lordship of the Brahmins. The varna scheme was empirically expressed through various caste groups. These groups indicate the adjustment of the system to the needs of the society. A good deal of controversy in terms of the caste system centres around its origin. Scholars are divided in their perspectives and viewpoints with regard to the emergence of the system of social stratification. This system has been influential upon both the religious and secular activities that have been an integral part of the Indian society. The most popular and the comprehensively prevalent theory refers to the origin to the Aryan invasion in India and forms a link to the process by which the invaders could subordinate the indigenous inhabitants and integrate them as peasants and slaves within the stratified society. Thus, the twice-born castes are regarded as descendants from the non-Aryans (Status of Women in India, n.d.).

Agents of Social Revolution: Women are acting as agents of change in the society and raising voice against injustice and atrocities. In many panchayaths, women members have shown courage to ban liquor in their panchayath area. Example for this being Usha Mishra, a Sarpanch of Atkoha village in Chhatarpur district. She has prohibited the sale of alcohol in her village. **Reducing Corruption and Violence:** Due to women representatives, nexus of officers and male-elected representatives is breaking, which has a direct impact on reducing corruption.

The role of local muscle power has substantially reduced due to the active participation and awareness of women about their rights and power

Reduction in Violence against Women: Domestic violence has substantially declined due to women Pradhan or Sarpanch. These women representatives pro-actively take up such violence. The victims also feel free to share their grievances to women representatives. Reduction in Violence against Dalits: The dominance of upper caste patriarchy is substantially declined, hence the shackles of caste is subsiding. Practicing Participatory Democracy: Growing participation of marginalized section in general and women in particular, is transforming our democratic setup from representative democracy to participatory democracy.

Women's Challenges and Role

The challenges and concerns that elected women representatives have to face in their line of work are many, as it is a process of social change, and social change does not come about easily. These include: Lack of Knowledge: Most of the elected women representatives enter into public life for the first time and do not have enough knowledge regarding the Panchayath Raj Act. As a result, they depend upon their male counterparts or the officers of the panchayath and this is taken as an advantage by them. Illiteracy: Most of the women members who get elected are illiterates and they depend more on the officers and staff. This would make them vulnerable and cannot take decisions on their own.

T On many occasions, women representatives attend the panchayath meetings with their male relatives and they act on their suggestions. Caste System: Hierarchical caste system in rural India makes it difficult for women from SC and ST communities to function independently. Rotation of Terms: Rotation of reserved seats and posts of chairpersons hinders consolidation of leadership qualities among the women representatives. By the time they learn to manage the affairs and start functioning effectively, their term will be over. This also acts as a hindrance to the participation of women in Panchayaths. Other challenges include gender prejudice from predominantly male staff who work in the system, restrictions around women's mobility and non-conducive work environments.

Women's Participation

Ministry of Women and Child Development also conducts training for Trainers to elected women of Panchayathi Raj to deliberate upon issues related to the empowerment of women and functioning of PRIs. Women should be given education in order to broaden their outlook and bring awareness about their rights and responsibilities.

Mental attitude of the males need to be changed and they should take pride in sending their female relatives as elected representatives. They should also lend their support to the women in order to usher in a new era where both men and women representatives co-ordinate with each other in order to bring development that come about within the social structure with the advent of technology, modernization and globalization. Within the Indian society, practices such as, giving away daughters in marriage and sending them to their marital homes after marriage is one of the most common aspects that are related to women. The male members are also regarded as significant as her are the wh heart and lineage The practice of child birth is also regarded as the one that makes them inferior to men in status (Mohapatra, 2015). In the perspective of Man, women are viewed to merely perform the roles of the mother and As a mother, she is responsible for the implementation of tanks and functions and when Aid held derdependent Whereas, as a wife, she is responsible for fulfilling all the tasks and implement all responsibilities. The widows were not revered. They were neglected number of respects and were not allowed to render a significant participation in social, cultural religious functions. It was also believed that the sight of the widow would be a barrier within the course of achievement of goals and objectives.

Position of Women in the Hindu Dharma

The roots of Hindu religion are in the Aryan society of the patriarchal system. The family unit was regarded as the significant one. In the ancient times, there was prevalence of the joint family system. Joint family system is referred to as the family system in which two or more nuclear families are residing under the common roof. This family system comprises of grandparents parents, children, grandchildren, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. In the Aryan family, the birth of the son was welcomed to a major extent. The individuals possessed this viewpoint that male children would render an effective contribution in promoting well-being of the family and community. On the other hand, women were not provided freedom. In the Hindu Dharma, there is prevalence of the viewpoint that man and woman represent the two aspects of one person. Scriptures say that Lord Shiva consists of the body in two halves, one is of the male and the other is of the female. Woman is considered to be more

powerful and is regarded as Goddess of Shakti (power). The society was governed by certain established norms and customs.

In ancient India, religion was given major significance. The education also put primary emphasis upon religious scriptures. It was believed that individuals would be able to enrich their lives by inculcating the traits of morality and ethics. Women were given recognition within the society and participated in all activities and functions along with men. At the same time, women were under the protection of their fathers before marriage and of their husbands after marriage and sons in old age (Chapter 2, n.d). The dependence of women upon their fathers, husbands and sons was primarily due to the reason that they did not have the right to property. They were no longer independent and became dependent upon the male-dominated society. In this manner, the social, cultural and religion, backbone of the Indian society is based on the patriarchal structure. The patriarchal structure provided secondary status to women. The women were supposed to obey the instructions and follow the rules of the male members of the family. The philosophy of the patriarchal family is based on the principle that the family tree grows up with the male only. This enables him to acquire significance and protection within the family. Another important aspect in this philosophy is marriage, in which women were given a subordinate status. In their subordinate status, women were made to experience number of hardships. They were not allowed to say anything regarding their rights and there had also been prevalence of practices of female foeticide and female infanticide (Chapter 2, n.d).

Women were encouraged towards attainment of education, the reason being, they were the ones, who were merely responsible for the well-being of the family and community. They rendered a significant contribution in terms of areas such as, implementation of household responsibilities, health care, child development, taking care of the needs and requirements of the elderly family members, preservation of the environment and so forth. The women were vested with the responsibility of making provision of knowledge in terms of morals and ethics to the individuals. Hence, in order to carry out all these tasks and functions in a well-organized manner, it is vital for women to acquire knowledge and upgrade their skills and abilities. The acquisition of education enabled women to live a life of dignity and respect. Learned and knowledgeable women were given respect and appreciation within the society. With the acquisition of education, women developed self-confidence among themselves and as a result, they were able to protect themselves against any form of abuse or mistreatment.

The status and conditions of women were much better in the Vedic period than any other period. If any women wanted to acquire education and did not give their consent for marriage, then too, they were permitted for education without any restrictions. Most of the girls, belonging to well-to-do families had the privilege of acquiring education. The Upanayana or the initiation ceremony was organized for both girls and boys. During the Aryan period, which is also called as the poetical period, it can be stated rightly that the education of women was being given recognition. There was not any prejudice regarding the education of women. The individuals were concerned regarding the righteousness of women within the social order. Through the Vedas, it has been noticed that.

the whole Aryan race was co-operatively aware in terms of promulgating codes and laws and uplifting the conditions of women. It contributed to a major extent towards the collective forces of the general mass. They were provided with educational opportunities, they were engaged in teaching professions and also developed their skills and abilities in carrying out the administrative and political functions. One of the major causes of decline in the number of girls was prevalence of the practices of female infanticide and female foeticide. Within the course of time, these practices were regarded as criminal practices and measures and programs were formulated that would prevent them from taking place. Women experienced number of factors that imposed detrimental effects upon these

II. Conclusion

Over the years, we have noticed that the elected women representatives have become more articulate, conscious of their power, and have learnt to effectively tackle bureaucratic and political hurdles. They are also known to bring in greater transparency and efficiency to their daily administration and implementation of duties. There have been many notable instances where they have played an important role in bringing real change to the ground. Nowadays educated women have been contesting and getting elected to the panchayaths. They have a vision of their own and are bringing in lots of changes. This gives us a clear-cut idea that women representatives are taking this profession seriously and seeing these elected women in action chairing meetings, taking decisions, tackling social issues, and leading the development of their villages - inspires other women and girls who aspire to become leaders themselves one day.

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