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IMPLEMENTATION OF RESERVATION POLICY AND POSSIBILITY OF EMPOWERING WOMEN IN TAMILNADU

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ABSTRACT

The announcement of the implementation of Panchayati Raj System in Tamilnadu is considered to be one of the few states that give equal status for women. It is clear from its gender equality and development index. Following the passing of 1993 Panchayat Act, all the states passed Panchayat Acts. Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act was passed in 1994. As per that direct election was introduced in Tamil Nadu Panchayats. Reservation policy introduced New Panchayati Raj System could be an important of women for empowering and bringing desirable developments in their socio-economic and political status. In this regard to the policy of reservation of one third seats for women in village, block and District level Panchayat's was introduced. The provisions were also made to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions by providing various administrative rights and duties, financial powers and the freedom to make initiatives for generating finance locally from different sources. The motive of policy introduction on empowering women would mainly depend upon its implementing process, socio-economic and political background and characteristics of elected women representatives in the village Panchayats. The announcement of the implementation of Panchayati Raj System in Tamilnadu is considered to be one of the few states that give equal status for women. It is clear from its gender equality and development index. Following the passing of 1993 Panchayat Act, all the states passed Panchayat Acts. Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act was passed in 1994. As per that direct election was introduced in Tamil Nadu Panchayats. When people at the village level were informed that the proposed village panchayats will be provided larger financial resources and additional administrative powers the election took place in almost all the village Panchayats for both village pradhanas as well as it's members .With the nomination of a larger numbers of candidates from each social groups an entirely new political environment has given birth to groupism, social clashes and conflicts. As a consequence traditionally maintained co-operation and friendly environment among different groups of population has begun to deteriorate. In fact, several groups emerged and the households were divided into various groups and division during the election period.

However, once the process of formation of Panchayats was completed the general public as well as the representatives of the village panchayats found that no new benefits are appearing in the introduction of this revised Panchayati Raj System. The traditional system of co-developing in various villages. Only a major change was reported by the local people in terms of providing representation to women in the new form of Panchayats though a significant number of male populations have shown dissatisfaction over the introduction of reservation policy in favour of women.



KEYWORDS- *panchayati raj-act-1993-94- women.*

INTRODUCTION :

It is believed that planning initiatives for achieving the goal of increasing participation of women through the recently introduced Panchayati Raj System could be an important instrument measure for empowering women and bringing desirable improvements in their socio-economic and political status. In this regard the policy of reservation of one third seats for women in village, block and district level panchayats was introduced. The provisions were also made to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions by providing various administrative rights and duties, financial powers and the freedom to make initiatives for generating finances locally from different sources. The announcement of the implementation of Panchayati Raj System in TamilnaduTamil Nadu is considered to be one of the few states that give equal status for women. It is clear from its gender equality and development index. Following the passing of 1993 Panchayat Act, all the states passed Panchayat Acts. Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act was passed in 1994. As per that direct election was introduced in Tamil Nadu Panchayats

Implementation of Panchayati Raj System in Tamilnadu started with the preparation of houselisting of every village. In most of the cases existing Gram Sabhas were converted into a village Panchayat. However, there were larger numbers of village Sabhas having small size of population and were earlier provided the status of Gram Sabha due to the existing geographical and topographical problems in their locational settings, the village panchayats were formed by merging two or more such small village sabhas into single village Panchayat. In the initiation of such procedure the option was left open for the inhabitants of concerned villages to suggest and provide collective choice and preference about the merger of their villages. Beside this, the locational aspects related to the geographical and topographical situation of identified villages was also considered as an important element for the merger of villages in forming village Panchayats.

When people at the village level were informed that the proposed village panchayats will be provided larger financial resources and additional administrative powers the election took place in almost all the village Panchayats for both village pradhans as well as it's members .With the nomination of larger numbers of candidates from each social groups an entirely new political environment has given birth to groupism, social clashes and conflicts. As a consequence traditionally maintained co-operation and friendly environment among different groups of population has begin to deteriorate. In fact, several groups emerged and the households were divided into various groups and division during the election period.

However, once the process of formation of Panchayats was completed the general public as well as the representatives of the village panchayats found that no new benefits are appearing in the introduction of this revised Panchayati Raj System. So, the traditional system of co-developing in various villages. Only a major change was reported by the local people in terms of providing representation to women in the new form of Panchayats though a significant number of male populations have shown dissatisfaction over the introduction of reservation policy in favour of women.

LOCAL PERCEPTIONS FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN:

a) Women Status: The women have been regarded as a backbone of the region in terms of the role they have been playing in the development and prosperity of the Tamilnadu for the past several generations. However, in most of the cases they lack equal treatment, behavior and status as provided to their male counterparts. They have been participating in different activities at household and outside household level along with male members of the family. In fact certain activities are performed only by the women at household level. Along with male members of the family, in fact certain activities are performed only by the women at household level.

(b) Participatory role: Moreover, the domination of women in population, workforce, local environment and economic development process is quite evident in almost the entire mountain areas of the region. The close association of women, directly or indirectly, with different activities at household, social, cultural, community and regional levels has been a long history in the tradition of area specific socio-cultural system. This deep rooted association and linkages of women with social and cultural environment had been a channel of encouragement for maintaining the traditional value system and ideology of the region. The system of co-operation and friendly

atmosphere in the behavior of mountain people prevailing has been maintained without any hesitation and without any basic shortcoming for the past several generations. Even in currently increasing situation of socio-economic conflicts among local masses influenced by the forces outside Tamilnadu, is also only as short term phenomenon and the women folk are engrossed in a battle against this evil and should be able to overcome the situation without much problem.

In most areas of Tamilnadu the women are well aware about their basic responsibilities duties and the way they can devote their energies in the interest and welfare of the region. In this context the mass participation of women in various social movements organized for imposition of ban on the opening of wine shops in the region, environmental and economic movements, The reasons and factors associated with motivating active participation of women in different socio-economic and political movements in the past have been the rise of those activities which have gone against the interest of women largely. They have felt that the increasing rise and development of such activities which were carried out under protection of local unsocial elements for their self interest and the inability of Government to intervene and impose ban on those activities would ultimately create problems in the peaceful socio-economic and environmental setting of the region, also they would be the main sufferers if development of such undesirable activities is carried out. For instance the cause of mass participation of women in SHG movement has been the result of excessive and increasing deforestation by the forest mafias and contractors belonging both to Tamilnadu and outside Tamilnadu, mismanagement of forest department, lack of intervention on the part of Government to impose ban on over exploitation of various forest products. The influential local men and contractors have also started participating with the forest mafias in deforestation merely for obtaining short term financial gains. In the mean time, women had realized that the increasing deforestation would create serious problem for them in obtaining fodder for animals, fuel-wood for cooking and heating, timber for house construction and different forest products for various purposes. The ultimate sufferer of deforestation would be women because the collection of forest products is the responsibility and prime duty of women. As a result women have established various women societies and organizations to fight against deforestation and they have succeeded to a considerable extent in their efforts.

Similarly, lack of introducing developing planning according to the acceptability of local geographical, topographical and related local conditions and thus marginalization of the region in planning for development resulting in increasing un-employment, increasing dependency of Government upon the natural resources of the region for satisfying the demands of outside region without providing any incentive and development gains to the local areas in exchange of exploiting area specific local resources have motivated the women volunteers to organize collectively for demanding separate statehood of Tamilnadu.

Agitation of women for imposition of ban on the supply of wine and other alcoholic products is another most popular movement initiated in almost all mountain areas of the region during eighties. This movement had been successful in achieving its goal in 1977 when the Government had restricted the use and supply of wine and related items in the region, though local mafias and businessmen had started supplying alcoholic products in the name of ayurvedic medicines. This issue was brought into notice of judiciary by the women organizations and a ban was imposed on the sale of these alcoholic products. Again the women's movement received mass co-operation and assistance from students, N.G.O.'s and various social workers in 1991-92 when the Government had permitted the wine contractors to open wine shops even at tensile level and in small towns. The most important factors behind the mass level participation of women in different movements could be the domination of women in different activities, maintaining traditional social systems and cultural values, more responsibilities as compared to men in performing household related activities, high incidence of male migration resulting in a majority of households being headed by women and relatively higher literacy rates of women in the region as compared to state and national level.

POSSIBILITY OF EMPOWERING WOMEN

Considering the involvement and domination of women in different activities, historical experiences regarding their participation in various regional movements associated to different motives. Level and pattern of awareness about the regional development and maintaining traditional value system and having relatively better educational attainment it is expected that the introduction of Panchayati Raj System and reservation

policy for women in the Panchayat could be an important instrumental measure for achieving improvements in the socio-economic status and strengthening the empowerment of women in Tamilnadu. Moreover, the policy and planning for empowering women could be more successful in Tamilnadu as compared to other areas and states in view of the higher literacy, better awareness and active participation in the local level movements in the region.

However, the motive of policy introduction on empowering women would mainly depend upon its implementing process, socio-economic and political background and characteristics of elected women representatives in the village Panchayats. Factors such as the attitude and intention of elected women's towards the initiation of various development programmes and the capacity in making efforts to link different segment of village population with the introduced programmes also matter very much in improving the status of women representatives in the social environment of the village Panchayat. As a consequence this process would lead increasing improvement in strengthening empowerment of women.

IDENTIFICATION OF RESERVED VILLAGE PANCHAYATS

The procedure for identification and fixation of locations as reserved for women candidates adopted at village panchayat level have already been highlighted. However, the time devoted in identification of reserved village panchayats for women pradhans and reserved locations/constituencies for its women members was very short. Limited duration of two months between the announcement of election and the actual dates fixed for final election had limited the scope of a large number of women having relatively better socio-economic and political background, better educational level and social outlook as compared to most women elected as members and the pradhans in the various village panchayats. It would have been more appropriate to initiate the measures for providing knowledge and awareness among villagers in general and women in particular about the reservation of seats for different sex and social groups of population in different village panchayats so that most eligible women candidates would have found the opportunity of contesting election for these positions.

A majority of the identified villages brought under the reservation for women pradhans had the representation of well educated women. Some of the women in few villages had even participated in social movements organized at regional level in the past. However, in certain villages the well educated women could not contest election either for the post of Pradhan or members of the village panchayats because of restrictions imposed by their heads of households due to higher work load, social backwardness, lack of awareness about the duties, benefits and role of elected women in the Panchayats, etc. Procedures adopted for the fixation of reservation of village Panchayats as reserved for women candidates was not based on the local condition of geographical and topographical settings of villages but it was base on the same pattern or criteria as adopted in the plain areas of the state. Several village panchayats which were identified for reservation of women pradhan are located in remote, inaccessible and away from the nearest road heads and block headquarters. This has been creating a serious problem t women pradhan to participate in meetings regularly which are organized outside their respective villages and at block office. On an average, reaching the block office from some of the respective village panchayats takes more than one day. Therefore, irregularity in most of the meetings organized at Block Panchayat and District Panchayat level was a common phenomenon.

In the process of identification of village panchayts for implementing reservation policy for women candidates the locational aspects of concerned villages in terms of topographical, geographical and accessibility situation should have been given top priority. This was the beginning of implementing a new policy and introduction of any new policy basically requires maximum support and participation of local people. Care could also have been taken to include flexibility options based o locally acceptable conditions and prevailing situations for the successful implementation of the concerned programme. So, selection of village panchayats located in better accessible areas and neighboring to block headquarter for reservation of women pradhan would have been a important element in maximizing the participation of women pradhans in different meetings held outside their respective village panchayats.

Similarly, the procedure adopted for the identification of reserved village panchayats for women pradhans and locations/areas within the village panchayats for women members should have provided greater opportunity to the well educated women and t those having higher contribution in the various regional

movements an local level social reform activities as compared to the women who have actually, it is rather difficult task for a less qualified women and new enternets in political system and who have never participated in any dominant role in the male dominated meetings for any decision making process. So, the identification of reserved village panchayats and locations within village panchayats for women pradhans and women members respectively, should have been undertaken purposively by keeping in mind the availability of suitable women candidates in different village panchayats at the initial stage of the introduction of Panchayati Raj System in rural areas would be a important instrumental measure in planning for improving social status and empowering women. This group of women, if provided representation at village Panchayat level can strongly raise the issues related to the betterment of women, can play a dominant role in decision making process and make suitable recommendations for improving the status of women in the meetings.

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