



From Margin to Mainstream: Women's Political Participation in Local Self Governance in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

The Women participation is an essential element in the countries progress; however, their role is considered as insignificant in all fields compared to the men. Various social reforms in the twentieth century had brought certain changes for the empowerment of women in the society. Under Article 243D of the Indian constitution claims 50% reservation of women in local self-government. This constitutional amendment is regarded as path breaking to empower women at grassroot level. The study aims to explore the participation of women in local self-governance in Kerala. The finding of the study emphasizes the influence of family background, predecessors, influences of social group and government interventions entering in the political field. It indicates collective approach among participants in making contributions, focusing on policy advocacy for various community issues. However, participants faced challenges including insufficient funds, criticism, and difficulties in equitable resource distribution leading to negative perceptions. The study concludes by recommending inclusive and participatory governance in local self-governance.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Political Participation

Introduction

The women constitutes around half population, by their level of involvement is insignificant compared to men. In a democratic country like India cannot exponentially progress unless the women participate in the work and further in the governance. Hence the active participation of women in all the dimension is essential for overall development of society and the country (The Statesman, 2023).

The women empowerment is defined the need to make the women realize about their self-worth and abilities to determine their own choice and shaping the society where they can enjoy equal rights like other person (Roy, 2022). This involves creating a balance of power between both genders, where neither one has superiority over the other. The Gender equality is one of the sustainable development goal which focus on human rights issue. It points out in providing equality to both genders especially women in different spheres of life. Political power involves women's ability to assess, coordinate and stimulate social change within their environment. The political status of women reflects the degree of freedom and equality they have in participating and sharing power in politics (Palanithurai, 2003). Through participating of women in politics beyond having the right to vote, involve them in decision-making, power-sharing, and policymaking, which creates opportunities for the advancement of both women and society as a whole.

The Government of India in the year 1993 introduced the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution, which required that 33% of local political seats be reserved for women. This policy means that women's participation in local governing bodies is much greater than in state and national parliaments. Since it was an introduction of the reservation system in India and later the government also approved an increase in the reservation of women in Local Self Government Institutions through Article 243D of the constitution. This proposal increased the reservation to 50 percent. This had made a significant change in women political participation in the local self-governance. As per the reports India is one of top-most country that promote the participation of women in local self-governance comparing to other countries (Basu, 2022).

The Article 243D of Indian constitution had significant changes in the reservation policy and participation of women in the political field, but they face problems in the current scenario. The incident in Madhya Pradesh is one of the evident examples in which that family members of newly elected women representative are taking oath and assuming the charges of the office (Newsd, 2022). The article investigates the analyzing the problems faced by women who participate in Local Self-Government Institutions (LSGIs), and the changes that occur as a result of their involvement.

Review of Literature

Varghese (2020) had conducted study on the topic "Women's Political Participation and Leadership in India: Examining the Challenges". The aim is to study the challenges faced by the women representative in the political leadership in India. The findings of the study is that participants agree that holding

the responsibility in home and children is a significant barrier for them to be active in the political field. They increased their confidence after entering in the political carrier and more freedom to take decision in their homes and community. Apart from that they face different challenges, the most participant agreed that lack of financial security is the greatest concern for entering in the political field. The other issue is the discrimination in patriarchy society still exists in Kerala where the women have less access to higher positions at the meeting of the party and decision. The lack of cooperation from male counterparts limits the women leaders to implement various policies. The lack of training is the other issue where they are having any experience in the administration work and the delegation. The most of the participant agreed that they face challenges while implementing development initiatives due to the influence of their political party in decisions making. The most of the participants faced gender-based violence such as humiliation, harassment, abuse, criticism about their family in their personal lives. These are the factor in which women lose interest in participating in the political field.

Rani (2021) had conducted study on the topic “Women’s Struggle for a Voice in Local Governance: Challenges for Veiled Women in Haryana, India”. The aim of the study is to examine the barriers of the women participation in local self-government institution in the Haryana, perception of women as a voter and the representative and to know how they resist the barriers in the system. The finding of the study that women of upper caste face barriers irrespective of social such as wearing traditional dress which prevents them in decision making process, achieving economic independence as their controlled physically and ideologically

Malheriya (2020) conducted a study on the topic “A study on women’s reservation and participation in local self-governance in Anand District”. The aim of the study the impact of reservation policy in political participation of women in local self-governance.. The findings of the study shows that majority of the participants were illiterate. The many participants agreed that reservation of women had helped them in participating the politics. Through participation they received support from the family members and the society. Where certain others said that the reservation do not help them in the political field and few others were in the neutral position. The study indicates the male domination in the decision-making power. The majority of women entered in political field and contested in the election due to the reservation policy for the empowerment of women. Moreover, this study reflects the domination of higher in the decision-making process in the Grama Sabha meeting. This shows that caste system is still prevailing in the current scenario were the elements of patriarchal exist in the society.

Negi and Singh (2019) conducted a study on the topic “Women Changing the Face of Rural Governance: Evidence from Rajasthan”. The aim of the study to examine the level of participation of elected women representatives and their contributions and understand the backdrop political representation and participation in the local self-governance. The study was conducted was conducted in Bhim Block, Rajsamand District of Rajasthan. The findings of the study shows that representation of the women in panchayat raj institution has equal gained the response of success and failure. The study highlights the proactive of women in changing the face of rural governance. The one of the factors contributing their success is that carrying out their responsibility and work in progressive manner and their education skills. All of women representative are educated and are aware about their rights and duties of the member in panchayat. They received the social and the family support which leads to factors of accomplishment.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the motivating factors behind women's engagement in elections for local self-government.
- To study the changes experience by women while engaging in the local self-government.
- To examine the challenges faced by women representatives in local self-governance.

Factors Motivating the Participation of Women in Local Self Governance



The family affiliation to the particular political party motivated women decision in contesting the elections in local self- governance in order to uphold the family political presence or legacy (Varghese, 2020). The government intervention consists of MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), Asha workers (Accredited Social Health Activists) helped in gaining the community level experience enhancing the confidence and leadership abilities encouraged them to contest in election and participate in the local self-governance (Babu and Jose, 2020). Moreover, the involvement of the women in the SHG (Self Help Groups) had become a support system encouraging providing them a safe space to discuss about social issues and shaping a public opinion instrumental in encouraging the women to participate in the local self -governance.

Changes Experienced by Women through engaging in the Local Self Government



The previous studies had indicated the significant changes experienced by the women while engaging in the local self-government institutions. The public recognition and acceptance aided in self-appreciating the skill and abilities of women representatives (Babu and Jose, 2020). Moreover, this helped them to contribute better in decision making at the home and work in the local self-government institutions. Therefore, the balancing of family responsibilities and carrying out the welfare activities were initiated through maintaining the time accordingly and the family support.

Challenges Experienced by Women Representatives in Local Self Government



The previous studies indicated the challenges experienced by the women representatives in the local self-government institutions. The lack of knowledge is faced by the women representatives in the local self-government institutions (Raheena and Neena, 2017). The shortage of fund hindered in the implementation of the developmental activities of the panchayath (Babu and Jose, 2020). Moreover, the benefit distribution issues are another problem in which target on providing into most deserving, but at times the people expectation favoring were faced by women representatives. Therefore, the health challenges were experienced by women representatives; travel long distance and health problems related to covid 19.

Suggestion

1. Implement training and capacity building programs on governance, leadership, financial management and legal procedures can enhance their capacity to function effectively in local self-governance. Therefore, training programs can help build the skills and capacity while involved in local self-government institutions.
2. Emphasize the importance of community consultation and encourage the representatives to address local issues and concerns through regular interaction with the community and the social groups.
3. Promote the role of self-help groups such as Kudumbasree in empowering women and providing information to marginalized people lack access to phones or social media platforms.
4. Integrate with the working group and grama sabha as a mechanism in prioritizing the list and facilitating the panchayat member in providing the benefit to needy people by avoiding situations of conflict and hampering of reputation.
5. Ensure equal distribution of funds provided for the developmental activities of the ward should properly allocated despite differences between opposition and ruling parties leading to diverse unity of governance
6. Provide counselling services to individuals facing mental stress and provide emotional support while balancing both personal and professional life and social workers can play a vital role in carrying out the process.

Conclusion

The participation of women in local self-governance has significantly increased through reservation policies, enhancing their leadership and decision-making roles. Despite facing challenges like limited resources, social barriers, and lack of training, women experienced positive changes such as public recognition and improved confidence. Strengthening capacity-building programs, ensuring fair resource distribution, promoting self-help groups, and providing mental health support can further empower women representatives. Encouraging inclusive and participatory governance will enhance women's contributions, fostering sustainable development and social inclusion.

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