

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN EMPOWERMENT OF SC WOMEN AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTION: PERAMBALUR DISTRICT

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Abstract

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It involves the building up of a society wherein in women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. One major therapy prescribed by woman empowerment advocates is empowering women through legislation for ensuring participation in political decision making.

Such an approach provides the women with a constitutional platform to stand up to men, to raise their voice on issues concerning women oppression, subjugation and related issues and thus in effect, providing them with an identity in an orthodox male dominated socio-political set up, in addition to providing a much needed forum to seek redressal of problems directly affecting them : the true essence of empowerment. The present paper attempts to look into the dynamism of the process whereby women empowerment is achieved (?) through legislation or women participation in the Panchayat Raj Institution. The study is based on primary evidence collected from Women Panchayats in various blocks of Perambalur District (as per 2005 elections) and attempts to analyze WHETHER political participation of women DOES IN FACT translate into concrete women empowerment : a state where women are able to carve a niche for themselves in the traditional male bastion and successfully find a forum for effective redressal of women\ gender related issues or whether increased political participation of women (more than 50%, as in case of Perambalur District), is but an eyewash, an essential dexterous jugglery of numbers with no female empowerment ramifications whatsoever.

The study largely reveals that increased political participation of women in village panchayats (in Perambalur District), does not have a significant bearing on women empowerment for by and large elected women representatives lack audible forums and fail in seeking redressal to women specific issues even as they are primarily (mostly), dummy surrogates subservient to the still vociferously dominant male class.