



ROLE OF WOMEN IN DECENTRALIZATION RURAL GOVERNANCE

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Abstract :

Women constitute half of the total population. So, without their representation in governance of the country, it is impossible to bring about successful participatory democracy. Without adequate participation of women, institution of decentralized rural governance in the form of Gram Panchayat (GP) cannot take the test of real democracy. Most of the women representatives of the GP considered that, their social status has been enhanced after being elected as GP member. All women representatives give more effort to the formation of self-help group, health awareness programme, child development programme, and old age pension scheme, and pulse polio programme, construction of village road, rural employment scheme and primary education of the village child. It is also observed that majority of the women members have a good understanding on different aspects of women and child development programmes, though they have little knowledge about other activities of the GP.

Key Words : Decentralization, development, governance, participation and democracy.

Introduction :

In the late fifties the Panchayat as an institution of decentralized rural governance in India established on the basis of recommendations of the Balbant Mahta Committee (1958) with the objectives to involve the people in decision-making process of government-initiated programmes, to facilitate the implementation of development projects and to foster democratic values among the people. The West Bengal Panchayat system has very often been considered as role model for the rest of country. Primarily based on the experience of West Bengal and the policy of democratic decentralization the government of India passed 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 to give Constitutional status to the local self government institutions; as Zilla Parishad at the district level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level and Gram Panchayat at the village level.



Women in Decentralized Rural Governance:

Women constitute half of the total population. So, without their representation in governance of the country, it is impossible to bring about successful participatory democracy. Without adequate participation of women, institution of decentralized rural governance in the form of Gram Panchayat (GP) cannot take the test of real democracy. It is not enough if only the male members participate in decision-making while women members only remain at receiving end. The 73rd amendment of Constitution in 1992 took a positive step towards women representation (reserved 1/3 of total seats in all three tiers of Panchayat including S.C. and S.T. women). In West Bengal reservation of 1/3 seats for women was ensured in all their tiers of the Panchayat (including S.C. and S.T. women) just before the 73rd Amendment Act(1992). In 1993 when election of Panchayat was held, provisions for reservation of women were taken into consideration. As a result, the numbers of women representatives were increased by a big margin. But gender discrimination is a universal phenomenon. Both inside and outside the households women are excluded from the position of power. They are denied opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. Even when the decisions are to affect their well-being, they are only passive observers. The primary challenge facing women today, therefore, is to increase their participation so that they get hold of the situation and become actively involved in the process of decision-making (Chakraborty, 2008). The West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act (2013) has reserved 50% of total seats for women in Panchayat. On the basis of this act election of Panchayat was held and the numbers of women representatives were increased than before.

Status and Developmental Role of women in Decentralized Rural Governance

Most of women representatives considered that the attitude of their family members are positive in order to discharge their duties as Gram Panchayat(GP) elected member. Their Family member takes initiatives so that they can play effective role as GP member. Their family members accompanied them in different activities of the GP. Few women representatives told that their party leaders help them to perform their duties effectively.

Most of the women representatives of the GP considered that, their social status has been enhanced after being elected as GP member. All of them told that now villagers often come to them for getting suggestions on different aspects of village life and benefits of GP. In the family their relatives give them more importance and recognition after being elected as a member of GP.

Awareness of the elected women representatives are not so good, especially the women who belongs to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe community are still lagging



behind the general community members.

All women representatives give more effort to the formation of self-help group, health programme, child development programme, and old age pension scheme, and pulse polio programme, construction of village road, rural employment scheme and primary education of the village child. It is also observed that majority of the women members have a good understanding on different aspects of women and child development programmes, though they have little knowledge about other activities of the GP.

Problems :

It is observed that, most of the female representatives in GP are not aware of the rules and regulations of the GP, as they cannot read Panchayat manuals or books. Sometimes they have sign or give consent of any matter of the GP without knowing and understanding details of programmes. Lack of education of the women members is another problem to play their appropriate role. Most of them depend on their husband, party leaders and anybody else. Women members of the GP are not efficient in the management technique in conducting the meeting of Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad. Their presence is very low in the GP meeting, due to lack of time, lack of consciousness about importance of the meeting. It is also observed that, women representatives get little space for discharging their role independently. Before GP meeting, the leaders of the political parties decide that, which types of programmes are to be undertaken by GP, who will get benefits and what types of agenda should be fixed for the GP meeting.

Suggestion and Conclusion :

To develop their reading and writing skill, a functional course should be introduced for newly literate and primary educated women representatives. Continuous guidance and time to time training is very useful for raising awareness of women representatives. The training programme should be based issue basis and programme oriented. Participation of women representatives in self-help group activities is a welcome trend. This should be encouraged particularly for poor women representatives as they should get an opportunity of economic empowerment. Government should take some important steps such as awareness building, capacity building, skill development, etc. There is need to bring about attitudinal change of the society as a whole towards the participation of women in politics and administration.



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