

EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION

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Abstract: Democratic decentralization is a good policy approach because it is about good governance. It increases participation of citizens in governance at the grass root levels. In many countries decentralization has resulted in government's affirmative actions to ensure inclusion of women in the political sphere of life. Strengthening women's participation in all walk of life has gained enormous popularity in economic and social development discourses in the last decades. International and bilateral development agencies have designed woman specific policies to integrate them better in to economic and social processes.

Introduction: The Indian constitution confers special right upon women. Taking in to account the subordinate position of women in the society, the constitution maker made some efforts for upliftment of women. The state is also empowered to make special provisions for the betterment of women in the society. The women have fundamental right to privacy, to health, to primary education, to free legal aid etc. The right to development is one of them. As per the U.N declaration, the right to development is an undeniable human right. The right to development indicate that every person and all people are entitled to participate in and enjoy economic, social, cultural, political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.

Democratic decentralization is the transfer of powers and resources from the centre to authorities at the lower levels, which are representatives of as well as accountable to the local populations. Decentralization provides greater opportunities for the citizen to participation in governance at the local level and hence could be a good policy option for enhancing women's political participation. It does so by increasing descriptive representation of women, which in turn leads to women's responsive policies. Decentralization as mentioned above is a tool to enhance women's descriptive representation both in local and national politics. Once they get a more or less equitable representation in the decision making structures, they can best take part in the decision - making process and hence can best influence the formulation of policies affecting them.

Objectives Of The Study:

- To analyze the empowerment of women through the process of decentralization
- To find out the number of factors hinder women's participation in politics

Literature Review: World Bank (2001) states that 20th century has witnessed some improvements in gender equality, gender disparities still persist in most of developing countries. In most all developing countries, women do not possess the same legal, social and economic right as do men. Similarly, gender gaps are widespread in access to and control

over resources, in economic opportunities, in power and political voice.

Akki (2002) in his study on women's participation in local government in Ghana, found that due to the institutional and legal framework there has been an increase in women's participation in local government. One-third of the seats have been reserved for women in the councils. However, affirmative action alone could not help to increase women's participation. Efforts are needed to change gender norms at the local level.

Siahann (2005) in her study on decentralization in Indonesia find that decentralization harms women in regions with strong patriarchal set ups. The measures she suggest for decentralization to more effective in such regions include the undertaking of comprehensive programs for gender education, public awareness of the domestic violence as a crime, change in religious leaders attitudes and collection of gender sensitive data.

Ohene-Konadu (2001) points out that the current state of women's participation in politics and public decision making is disappointing. He calls it a global phenomenon. Even from history, it is evident that men have always monopolized and dominated strategic decision making positions. Despite considerable efforts, women still remain marginalized and under represented in those areas of public life where important decision and policies are made. Constituting almost half of the world's population and making half of the electorate, women do have an important role to play in politics

Methodology: The study (democratic decentralization: challenges of women governance) is exclusively based on the analysis of secondary data. The secondary data sources are collected from various publications, books, journals, etc. The present study aims at analyzing the empowerment of women through the process of decentralization and to find out the number of factors hinder women's participation in politics

Data Analysis: The present paper **DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION: CHALLENGES OF WOMEN GOVERNANCE** is an attempt to highlight the

Empowerment Of Women Through The Process Of Decentralization And It Also Discuss About The constraints faced By The women In Political Participation.

This can be discussed under the following headings.

❖ **Empowerment Of Women Through The Process Of Decentralisation:**

- **Empowerment:** Empowerment is the most recent policy approach to women in development. It takes in to account not only both the practical and strategic gender needs of women but also recognizes their triple role in development. Rowlands sees empowerment as a bottom-up process that cannot be formulated from top-down. To Rowlands, empowerment does not only mean to have access to decision-making but also being able and entitled to occupy the decision-making space. Empowerment has a number of dimensions with political participation as being one of them. Women's political presence and empowerment have some obvious links. e.g. by having political presence in decision-making structures, women can influence the formulation of policies affecting other women in the society.
- **Decentralisation And Women's Empowerment:** Political participation can help women empowerment in a number of ways. It can help them to achieve an equitable representation in decision making structures, both formal and informal. In doing so, they can influence the formulation of policies affecting their societies. Absence of women from the structures of governance would mean that policies designed at the national, regional and local levels for the allocation of resources etc, would lack input from women such policies can only benefit men, thus making women more marginalized. Women empowerment thus depends up on level of participation in politics.
- **Decentralisation And Women's Descriptive Representation:** Descriptive representation of women means election or appointment of women to position of political authority. Decentralization pushes government to a regional level of government. Regional governments are more accessible to women due to three reasons. First, local government is geographically closer to home, which makes it easy for them to carry out the burden of family responsibilities. Second, the less stringent criteria of eligibility at the local level make it easy for the women to be part of the local government. Third, local government more likely address issues of direct concern to women.
- **Descriptive Representation And Women's Responsive Policies:** Decentralization as mentioned above is a tool to enhance women's descriptive representation both in local and

national politics. Descriptive representation of women means election or appointment of women to position of political authority. Women's descriptive representation is important in a number of ways. First, it indicates the political inequalities between men and women. A comparison of both women's presence in population and their political representation stands at about 15 percent indicates that women are not equal in power to men. That is, in case women are underrepresented in the government, it will adversely affect their decision making power. Ultimately, they will not be able to safeguard the interests of women.

- ❖ **Constraints Or Challenges To Women's Participation In Politics:** It is very common observation that women are discriminated against in all strata of society. Various aspects of woman's life ranging from her child hood, to schooling marriage and employment, roles and cultural practices offer secondary status to women in the society. It is a perilous path through which women passes, such as, pre -birth tests abortion of female foetus, negligence towards girl child, early marriages, teenage mother hood etc. More over women are exposed to domestic violence. Though various laws have been enacted including the family court act, 1984, yet women are to be at receiving end. Women's discrimination is always seen in employment opportunities. The participation rate of women in labour force is very low. Besides this the segmentation of labour market is not conducive for the women. The technological progress has unfavorable implications in respect of women. Women workers have no strong union. More over the policy towards women's employability and productivity through training is lacking. Women lose their income in the period of unemployment. It is the significant reason of women's poverty. The consequences of unemployment are not limited to reduction of income, but it leads to ill health and death of a women. Due to un employment and poverty, it becomes very difficult for women to compact against discriminations.

Major Findings:

- Political presence to a great extent can empower women in different ways. The two assumptions (WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DECENTRALISATION AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION) to support the above argument are being tested using democratic decentralization as a policy approach.
- However, women being considered as a marginalized group in societies around the

world, contribute very little to the process of development. One of the policy approaches that can help women contribute equally and more efficiently to development is the empowerment approach.

- It is very common observation that women are discriminated against in all strata of society. Various aspects of woman's life ranging from her childhood, to schooling marriage and employment, roles and cultural practices offer secondary status to women in the society.
- Various factors responsible for excluding people from the affairs of the government in less developed countries include higher levels of illiteracy, livelihood patterns and poor communication systems.
- Decentralization pushes government to a regional level of government. Regional governments are more accessible to women because it is geographically closer to home, which makes it easy for them to carry out the burden of family responsibilities. Local government more likely address issues of direct concern to women.

Conclusion: It is stated that if a woman is economically productive it would completely reduce her dependence and enhance her social status. It is

assumed that increased income is quite enough for social justice and her empowerment. It must be taken into account that the biggest obstacle to women's access to political participation is gender inequality and absence of freedom. This dichotomy puts constraints on women's activities and functions. Women cannot get human rights without social justice...women should be enabled to participate in economic, social, and cultural, political decision making. Women should be given top priority in poverty eradication programmes. In nutshell, an atmosphere should be created which helps to overcome the feeling of powerlessness. She should come out from the comforts of dependency and should be able to face the challenges of autonomy by enjoying basic human rights.

Suggestions:

- Ensure that decentralized system respond flexibly and accountably to the diversity of women's identities, needs and interests, as well as the diversity of contexts of decentralization.
- Strengthen women's movements, organizations and other advocates of women's rights influence over the design of decentralization from a gender equality and equity.

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