

STUDY ON THE RURAL POLITICS IN INDIA

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Abstract: Rural politics in India are characterized by a complex interplay of factors including caste, class, gender, and the role of local governance structures like Panchayats. Elections, both national and local, are a key aspect of rural political participation, with significant turnout rates, though issues of social norms and potential biases persist. There are a great variety of factors that influence the individual's political participation. Defining these factors and investigate in what way they affect the individual's possibility to participate is of great importance. More abstractly, the purpose of this research is to increase the understanding of factors that influence the individual's possibility of political participation.

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Introduction: On the opening address of the Asian Foundation seminar, Theresa Loar (1999) said that "Women's political participation is a key component of democracy". The political consciousness and active participation in political process could be considered as obvious among the citizens of a democratic nation. Political awareness includes knowledge of the political system - knowledge about the state legislative assemblies, legislative council, Governor, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, The President, Parliamentary democracy, party system, ideologies of different political parties, the process of election, the franchise as well as the knowledge of local (urban and rural) self governments. It could be a good tool to know that how much women is socially active and concerned about the political setup and change in that area. In case of women it's important as this is directly associated with their development. Unfortunately throughout the history women in general have been kept outside the public domain of politics as most of the political thinkers and philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, John Lock, Thomas Hobbes and Hegel considered that women fit only for domestic roles in the private sphere and maintained that there was no place for women in politics because of their suitability in caring roles as mothers and wives. The public private divide remains as the foundation of the various forms of world democracies (Phillips, 1998 and Rai, 2000). Keeping women away from the public sphere and confined them to home and family, was observed by scholars as an outcome of man's feudal chauvinistic mentality.

Patriarchy as a system of male domination shapes women's relationship in politics. It transforms male and females into men and women and construct the hierarchy of gender relations where men are privileged (Eisenstein-1984). But system can't remain static, deviation is inevitable and this deviation in socio-political sphere has been perceptible since the second half of the twentieth century. End of colonial era, industrial and technical advancements, change in political systems, acceptance of non gender biased constitution by several countries, spread of education, growing job opportunities, implementation of social reforms by society and law, and emergence of power full women front forced the society and political system to give more room to the women in public system. But existing system was not the only challenge; there were several age old socio-cultural bindings for women which were not easy to break of. Developing world in general and India in particular where inclinations towards the cultural values are very strong, these bindings were and are, tough enough to ignore. Farzana Bari (2005) says, in some of the countries, particularly in South Asia, women also face cultural constraints on their mobility. The mechanisms of sex segregation and purdah are used to restrict their mobility. Women find it hard to participate in politics due to limited time available to them because of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. With their primary roles as mothers and wives and competing domestic responsibilities and care work, they are left with little time to participate in politics. Indian freedom struggle was the first

major political event in which after a very long suppression of medieval period, women in general got an opportunity to come out from their strict familial and social premises. After independence, technically constitution and government gave equal opportunities to male and female in all sphere of socioeconomic and political life but in practical women yet have to cover a long way. Changes are perceptible in urban areas, but in rural areas still women are witnessing the same gender biasness and hurdles in their development. These problems get aggravated when an area is having a tough terrain, harsh climate and poor accessibility. Himalaya, The youngest, the highest and the most unstable mountain of the world poses extreme challenges to its natives. Throughout rural Himalaya life is tough and survival is challenging. It become rather more important for the villages of Kumaon hills, which are suffering with excess male dominated out migration and in many cases women are the de facto head of the family.

IMPORTANCE OF VILLAGE IN POLITICS

In Rural Sociology it is very important to study the role and importance of village in the political life of the nation. Though, as a rule, villagers are less active and interested in politics than towns dwellers and the political life of a nation is controlled more or less by city people, the villagers do play important role. Their political power and influence are tremendous, though dormant. If and when their dormant energies come to surface there can be little doubt that Indian politics would be completely dominated by villagers. As a matter of fact the reverberations of village power in Indian politics is being already felt. The villagers had played a significant role in independence struggle and it is natural that they should participate in national political after independence. In all movements launched by Mahatma Gandhi like Civil Disobedience, non-cooperation, Swadeshi etc., villagers had participated whole heartedly. They also took active part in Quit India movement of 1942.

IMPORTANCE OF VILLAGES IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

After independence the importance of villages in Indian political scene has increased multifold. This is obviously due to the fact that India is a democracy and villages far outnumber townsmen. India is a democracy in which the elected representatives of people govern the country. And when 76% of India population lives in villages it is

but natural that levers of political powers should be in the hands of villagers. In India elections are conducted on the basis of adult franchise under which each adult, irrespective of his qualifications and status, has a single, vote. The political rights of people are unaffected by their sex, Adult is to count for one vote and none less and none more. In view of these facts, it is clear that in due course Indian politics will be fully controlled by villagers. The Indian villagers are quite conscious of their political power and as can be seen from election statistics they are regularly and consciously making use of this right. As a matter of fact women, old and sick, show remarkable enthusiasm during voting, some people are lifted on their beds to polling booths in order to vote. It is very obvious now that the future politics in India should be dominated by villagers. A factor that goes in their favour is that they have more spare time than their city counterparts.

The study of rural political life is important in another respect, too. The village happens to be the primary political unit. Therefore, the feelings and thinking of villagers are bound to influence greatly the national politics.

THREE ASPECTS OF RURAL POLITICS

We may study rural political life under these aspects-

- (1) Study of Rural Administrative machinery.
- (2) Study of the role of political parties in villages.
- (3) Local Politics.
- (4) Political behaviour of villagers.

RURAL AUTONOMY

As far as official administration is concerned, we find its two types. In villages on the other hand autonomous agencies. The autonomous agencies are Gram Sabha, Gram Panchayat and Panchayati courts. The executive branch of a gram panchayat is known as gram sabha the panchayat looks after general administration. Its main functions are the maintenance of roads, water-supply, cleanliness, cottage industry development, defence, education, medical aid etc. The President and Vice President of gram panchayat are direct election for the President and Vice-president. It is so provided that whosoever is elected President will preside over both gram panchayat and gram sabha and that the Vice-President will preside over both gram panchayat and gram sabha and that the Vice-President will assist him. The dispensation of justice is entrusted to panchayati courts. A panchayati adalat (court) is comprised of five representatives of gram sabha.

These judges are elected by direct voting. In every court there are twenty to twentyfive panchas, of these one is elected sarpancha. The judgements of panchasyats are final and normally these are non-appealable.

OFFICIAL INTERFERENCE IN PANCHAYATS

According to Panchayati Raj Act, state governments have a right to supervise and, if need be, to interfere in the functioning of panchayats. Panchayat Inspectors, Panchayat Controller and other officials look after the functioning of panchayats on behalf of the government. It is necessary to seek the sanction of Panchayat Controller for formulation of Panchayat budget. The government is authorized to suspend or dissolve a panchayat if its functioning is so corrupt or bad as to be unjust or if its acts are likely to ensure social harmony or peace. The government also gives financial assistance.

As the government has the right to look after which included right to interfere and enquire or investigate it is natural that there is clear impact of official policy on panchayats. The problems of rural administration are now part of overall national administration.

OFFICIAL ADMINISTRATION

Besides autonomy of administration in certain respect, the rural administration is connected and involved in general national administration. This connection is provided by the fact that the village is part of tehsil and through tehsil of a district. Besides members of gram panchayat, gram sabha and gram panchayat adalat (court). The village administration is also connected with and under tehsildar, kanoongo, police, officials. Deputy Collector or District magistrate. On behalf of police administration there is one Chowkidar in every village who is supposed to maintain peace and quarters there are Ziledar and Pataraul who collect water tax from villagers. For measurement of land holdings and collection of maps there is one Patwari in each village. The village Chowkidar is under his province and also keeps a watch on administration. Similarly, Sub Inspector of Police. Tehsildar collects revenue from all village under his province and also keeps a watch on administrative diarchy in villages, that is, villages are ruled by a double tier system of administration. On the one hand, we have a rule of officials and, on the other, a rule by elected representatives of people. The diarchy creates a host of problems. If there is no harmony in the two tiers of a administration there is likely to be harm to village interests. Occasionally, the government officials look down upon the elected

rural representatives. This is unjustified and immoral. Indeed government official should give due respect to the unpaid elected representatives of people.

POLITICAL FACTIONS IN VILLAGES

As we have mentioned above the primary source of political strength in India is village. Therefore, each political party tries to dominate the village politics and swing the villagers to its fold. The main political parties like Congress, Lok Dal, Communists and Jan Sang have their ramifications in villages. The Congress party has maximum influence. Actually every party these days is concentrating on building hold over villagers. The congress being the oldest party which is credited with having won independence for Indian naturally enjoys advantage in this respect.

LOCAL POLITICS

The local politics in villages is dominated by caste and creed considerations and each caste wants to get maximum power in the village set-up. The groupism in rural politics is entered around certain factional leaders, each being usually representative of a particular class and caste. Thus we have in village groups like Pandi group, Chamar group, Jat group etc. Within each political party these flourish and that is why there is cross voting.

POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

In rural political behaviour all kinds of behavioural tendencies are to be seen. While some persons try to gain power by constitutional and valid means, others try to gain it by illegal, nay, immoral means. In villages political struggle sometimes degenerates into cut-throat competition in which people do not shirk from using violent methods to low down opponent. In south in Telangana farmers had launched violent struggle to eliminate rich farmers. The Naxalites preached and practised violence in villages. They launched movement for violence in villages. With the spread of democracy and official administration rural violence is now less and people recognize the value of peaceful competition in power. The spread of democracy is the best means of introducing self rule in villages.

INTERRELATIONSHIP OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES IN RURAL SOCIETY

Change is the order of things. Changes in the rural society are very few and gradual and more often introduced by outside forces. The various facts of rural life are intimately interconnected. In fact there is no specialization as such. So changes in one aspect or rural life are bound to affect other factors of life. Thus, as long as the economy was self sufficient and dependent upon conventional methods

of production, Indian village panchayat was a self-sufficient institution of rural polity. The introduction of mechanisation into agriculture converted it into a large scale economy which had to depend upon the town or national markets to dispose off their surplus. This made the village panchayat an insufficient and self-perpetuating unit. Thus the villagers began to depend more and more upon courts and national governments for their problems of administrations outside the rural framework. As a result the village economy became a part of the national economy, the village polity fitting itself into the national political framework. In some countries colonialism subordinated the village polity under it as hegemony and consequently made the village economy a part of the colonial economic system. Thus the Britishers brought the whole of India under their hegemony and invalidated the power of panchayats and disrupted economic self-sufficiency by inducing the villagers to grow cash crops and by destroying the ingenuity of the village artisan. Recently, national governments are trying to make the village economy a part of their national economy and village acts as a unit of democratic decentralization.

In another way also the village economic structure may affect its political structure. Thus in the traditional Indian villages, the landed upper castes dominated the village panchayats and had the over all power and privilege in the village panchayat. Their representatives were the "panchas" and the voice of the lower castes and classes were never heard. But British rule and recent land legislation has created in our villages a new wider-bodied middle class of the new landlords. They mostly come from the middle peasant castes and from the major part of the village population. They are now demanding an equal share of power in the village panchayat and have to an extent succeeded in relegating the hitherto dominant castes in many villages. The political and economic factors have a closer relation with each other and change in one will effect a change in the other.

THE EXAMPLE OF NAMHALLI

Now let us see the interplay of political and economic changes brought about by the impact of external factors in Namhalli a village near Bangalore in Karnataka. In 1830 under the traditional system of revenue collection the headman whose position was hereditary collected land revenue and acted as a mediator between government and the villagers. Namhalli originated as a one-housed settlement of the headman. Gradually, the cultivating and artisan castes moved in. But initially all these families were dependent upon the headman. The land surplus and

labour shortage created by the famine and consequent government project left large acreages of uncultivated land in Namhalli. The famine reduced the capital assets in the village while it increased land taxes. Scarcity of capital made it difficult for the headman to play his traditional role and this role was assumed by the state government which distributed food, clothing and bullocks directly to the villagers. A further blow to the power and prestige of the headman came in 1886 with the introduction of the Ryatwari land settlement under which taxes were directly collected from the landowners by the British government. Other village officials also suffered a loss of prestige and income as their rent-free lands were taken away or entirely made taxable. The aftermath of the famine and the subsequent land settlement thus effected a moderate decentralization of authority and of economic power in the village.

In the early year of 20th century urban influences became increasingly important. During this period in Namhalli the social and economic role of the headman had been filed by a group of six large families. These six large families constituted the village panchayat. The village panchayat composed of members of different castes maintained unity of the village and arbitrated disputes.

Changes in the relationship of this village to the outside world became increasingly significant after World War I. Urban impact and war time inflation induced intensive cultivation of land and the cultivation of cash crops such as bananas, potatoes and peanuts. As land increased in value some of the economic aspects of political power in the village shifted instead of demanding free labour. Village money lenders began charging interest on loans. For the first time villagers began to make use of law courts to settle disputes among themselves. Thus the authority of the village panchayats was reduced as external governmental authority extended over the village. The role of inheritance of property within the family was altered and resulted in the division of family property. This increased the use of methods of intensive cultivation. The introduction of new types of occupations has reduced occupational specialization in the village.

Thus in Namhalli changes in the economic and political life of the village go hand in hand. The conversion of Namhalli into a part of the national government has induced the cultivation of cash crops and has changed the system of land tenure and taxation.

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