

Name of the Scholar: Mehjabee Ara
Name of the Supervisor: Prof. Furqan Ahmad
Name of the Faculty: Faculty of Social Sciences, Jamia Millia Islamia,
New Delhi -25
Title of the Ph. D: Impact of Women Participation in Urban Local
Governance Since 1994 - A Case Study of Delhi

Abstract

The entrance of women representatives into local governance polity through elections to the rural and urban local institution at all level in massive numbers is a relatively new political phenomenon in our country. Earlier the presence woman in local level governance was very few in numbers.

The study reveals that apart from reservation for women provided by 74th Amendment Act, some other factors like education, marital status, family structure, political affiliation of family, party affiliation of members, support of party, and economic background of family have played an important role with regard to women's participation in local governance of Delhi.

On the basis of analysis of data collected from the field regarding the role and level of women's participation, it is found that majority of the women elected representatives take their responsibility seriously as they regularly participate in meetings of local governance in Delhi. On examining the experience in raising the important issues of their constituency, it has been found that some of the women members have gained confidence and experiences in raising the issues frequently. However, many other women Members have a very rare experience of raising issues because they are first timer or inexperienced. It has been observed that basic reasons behind this have been the low level of education and lack of public exposures. In presence of highly educated person, they hesitate to speak in the meetings.

On the issue of empowerment, majority of women representatives replied that yes they feel empowered as councilor and they are interested in continuing their present position. It is important here note that majority of them not only desire to continue in present position but also wish to contest the election for MLA's and MP's in future. They feel that by occupying higher political position they are getting prestige, power, popularity, identity and the opportunity to serve the marginalized and poor people. These women are proud of their new position and see it as an acknowledgement of their capability.

On analyzing the perception of male members on the nature and role performed by the women, it is found that majority of the male elected representatives have positive view towards participation of women. However, some male elected representatives have expressed their dissatisfaction regarding women's role and participation in the governance. This dissatisfaction can be attributed to the fact that the majority of women have still not been relieved from their household duties. From the study, it has been established that majority of the women elected representatives are spending very little time in the constituency per day.

It has been observed that in many cases, the relatives of elected representatives interfere in the official activities of elected women representatives. Though in some cases the relatives of a newly elected representative might play a role in nurturing, encouraging and lending support to her, in many cases male relatives even started participating in official proceedings on behalf of women sidelining them. It has been observed during the study that except official meeting of Municipal Corporation of Delhi majority of women representatives are being represented by the male members the meetings. The biggest question before the local bodies was to take steps to

ward off proxy participation of male members related to women representatives in corporation meetings. Now the male member of women representative has been debarred from entering into the meeting hall by law passed by the MCD in 2011. Therefore, now proxy representation in the meeting sessions of Delhi local body has been reduced.

It has also been found during the study that the responsibility of household work is one of the important reasons for the absence of women elected representatives from the different meetings. This is so because women representatives have to play dual roles; first they have to look after the household works and secondly have to fulfill their responsibilities as elected people representative. This implies that in our society despite various changes in so many areas, the traditional outlook has not changed so much so as to do away with the dichotomous division of our society. The private world with its narrow restricted boundaries is still considered as the right place for women. The primary role of women is still considered as wives, mothers, child bearers whatever may be their level of education and professional career.

It has also appeared in the present study that majority of the women representatives of local government in Delhi are economically dependent either on their husbands or other male members of their family. It has been observed that due to the economic dependence of the women representatives on male members of family their position in both families as well offices is affected. This implies that economic backwardness of women is one of the reasons of their poor political record. This also indicates that without economic empowerment, for women, equality with equity in political sphere will not convey much many.

Further, we see that most of the women members of Corporations contested election not on their own will but under the pressure from family members. This leaves an impression that our socio-economic and political structure is such that it leaves little space for the women members to be in domineering presence. In local election in Delhi it has been found that majority of the women members are promoted by their husbands to contest in election. The study also reflects that men still play a proxy role through the female representation in grass root institution in Delhi.

It was also observed that all the elected women representatives of MCD have been facing problems due to departmental rigidity of different government offices. The various Government departments do not release the development funds timely, which creates problems for the women members. It has been also reported by the elected women representatives that attitude of government officials towards them is not very cordial. The official staffs of various departments do not provide proper and timely information to them regarding available developmental schemes. Besides these, women representatives are found facing problems in the allotment of schemes and later in the release of funds in favour of allotted schemes. Too much interference of state government and high level political leaders is also another problem for the women members. This shows that 74th Amendment Act has been accepted in letters but not in spirit.

It emerged that political parties have direct bearings on women's participation in ULBs. It is unfortunate that political parties always do not want to field women candidates for these unreserved seats. Adding to this problem is that women do not want to contest as independent candidates, as that they feel lessen their chance to be reelected. Therefore, it is required that political parties to establish consensus among party leadership to promote women's electoral participation.

To conclude, until and unless structural change occurs at all levels of social-economic, political, mental and attitudinal set up of our society, the goal of women's empowerment through political representation will remain unfulfilled.