Women in Local Government: Problems and Prospects

¹Mushtaq Ahmad Bhat, ²Pirzada Mohd Amin,

¹Research Scholar, ²Controller of Examinations, IUST, J&K, ¹Department of Sociology, ¹University of Kashmir, J&K, India

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The local government in Jammu and Kashmir has been historically susceptible to the vacaries of state politics and as a result, the question of inclusion of marginalized sections of society especially women drew little attention. However, on 6th October 2020, consequent upon the abrogation of article 370, the central government amended the existing Jammu & Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act to facilitate the introduction of District Development Councils (DDCs) as the third-tier structure of local governance. Under the amended act one-third of Seats in the PRIs are reserved for SCs, STs and, women candidates at the Halka, block and, district level. The reform has been made with the hope to strengthen local democracy and open up political space for the disadvantaged groups of society, the present paper is an effort to understand the problems and prospects of women elected representatives in panchavat raj institutions at the Halka, block and, district levels. Following the purposive sampling technique, thirty women elected representatives were selected for the study. The sample was taken from seven blocks of district Budgam. The online survey, through the techniques of questionnaire and interview schedule, was conducted. The study found that due to illiteracy and inexperience most women lack confidence in handling their assigned tasks. Overlooking their views and not taking them seriously were also reported by some respondents. Family responsibilities and duties hindered many women's participation particularly, of those coming from nuclear families and, led to problems of absentecism and proxy. Some reported difficulties in traveling a long distance to attend a meeting. While some mostly word members (Funchs), complained about low and delayed remain or afform.

Index Terms— Local Government. Participation. Panchayati Raj. Decentralization. Reservation. Marginalization.
Women, And Jammu & Kashnoir.

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, women have been divested of any political personbood and relegated to the status of subjects mostly because of their biological makeup. They were restricted to the private sphere and their involvement in the public realm was highly frowned upon. However, with the registration of the importance of their role in social, economic, and political life and the rising political consciousness and activism among them, governments at the national and international levels have come up with different policies and legislation to enable women to be equal participants in social and policical life. Among these, the policy of affirmative action has been particularly prominent. Designed to eliminate the past discrimination of excluded groups, many countries across the world have resorted to this practice of inclusion over the course of time. Given the role of decentralization in opening up democratic space and extending opportunities for the marginalized sections of society to participate and express. their needs and demands, the process of devolving power and functions to the local levels has become a popular trend over the hat few decades. India is one of the largest democracies that have embarked on the project of decentralization (Robinson, 1998; Wildmilm, 2002) to ensure the participation of people in the national construction. On the recommendation of successive committees, set up to review panchayat mj institutions in the country, the government passed the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. Act in 1992 to formalize the institutions of local government. The act represents the beginning of an em of inclusion and representation of marginalized sections in PRIs and ending the monopoly of formerly privileged groups in local governance (Sukumar, 2019). In the Indian Union, the Former state of Jammu & Kashmir represents a unique trajectory of punchayat mj. It has experienced many resuscitations and dormancy in the institutionalization of local government. Concerning the reservation of seats for women, The Jammu & Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act 1989, amended in 2003 is crucial. Under this act, 33% of seats are reserved for SCs, STs, and women in the local punchayats. Recently, as a result of the cancellation of Article 370 and the subsequent, extension of federal provisions to the state, the act was further amended in 2020, to reserve 33% of percent of seats for women at the Halka punchayat, block panchayat, and district panchayats. However, given the profoundness of gender discrimination and stratification in society in general and the political instability and conflict process of the region in particular, it is worth to assess the impact of these affirmative actions and understand the challenges related facecol. The present paper attempts to understand the problems and prospects of women elected representatives at the Halka, Block, and District panchayats.

IL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Jones Manor and Richard Crook have defined decentralization as the wansfer of power away from a central authority to lower levels in a territorial hierarchy (Manor & Crook 1998). Stein Wildmalmdescribed it as the transfer of power from a political or

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