

Gender and Urban Governance- A New Domain

Smriti Paul

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science

Cachar College, Silchar

ABSTRACT:

Though the women, half the population in the urbanising world, but had a very limited role in urban governance—policy and decision-making as they were not adequately and appropriately represented in the urban local bodies. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 for the first time provided one third representation to women in urban local self-government institutions. This big change in the political picture in India has raised the question as to what key role they could play in urban governance. This article focuses the role of women representatives in urban governance, but the topic is ‘Gender and Urban Governance- A New Domain’, not ‘Women and Urban Governance- A New Domain’. The usage reflects the recognition, that both men and women are alike in the proper function of the society. There are not significant differences between males and females (beyond the biological differences of chromosomal and genital sex that are used to define an individual as either male or female). It argues that there are areas, however, where women can play a catalytic role in promoting the social development including women and child development. It requires capacity enhancement to build awareness, training, sharpening their skills, motivation and building confidence, and to engage in general urban governance issues.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Equality, Urban Governance, Seventy Fourth Amendment Act, Civic services.

INTRODUCTION:

The world is urbanising and is projected to two-thirds of total population by 2050 from its present 54 per cent. Women share almost half the world as well as in urban population. But the dominant role of the patriarchy values has denied women equality and opportunity in socio- economic and political spheres. The United Nations after declaring 1975-85 as the Decade for Women Development observed that “women performed two-thirds of the world’s work but receive only ten percent of the world’s income and only one percent of the means of production. Women are thus the world’s largest excluded category”. It is also observed that until very recently, the political thought has been built around a conceptual distinction between the ‘public’ realm of politics - military affairs, and administration, and the ‘private’ realm of family and domestic life. Women’s role has typically been associated with the ‘private’ realm, and men’s role with the ‘public’ realm. This public/private distinction continues to influence both theoretical and empirical work, with the result that women’s efforts to gain a voice in governance have often been ignored. Meanwhile, several International organisations favour the cause of equal representation to women in policy and decision-making bodies at national and local levels, but the progress has been slow. The third Millennium Development Goal adopted by the UN in 2000 directs promotion of gender equality by women participation in policy and decision-making levels and all other goals like eradication of poverty, child and maternal health, environmental sustainability, etc., also relate to women in one form or the other and significantly impact them more than men. The international agency’s efforts to formulate gender sensitive schemes and projects for aid sharpened the focus on women’s participation in community level projects like water.

The World Declaration on Women in Local Governance, 1998 noted that the problems and challenges facing humanity are global (from environmental degradation to mass poverty), but these problems have to be dealt with at the local level. To fight these problems and to meet the challenges of sustainable human development, it is critical that women are empowered and involved in local governments as decision-makers, planners and managers. It is found that in many countries women predominate in urban informal economy where they pursue survivalist activities. The economic contribution of these women has remained largely unacknowledged and unmeasured. This failure to support to women’s active

contribution can negatively affect the urban economy as a whole. Therefore, in this era of liberalization, a number of countries have passed legislations to facilitate women's participation in local governance. The experiment of local government reservations has had a number of good results, showing that women can learn political skills on the job and become effective supporters of women's interests.

URBANISATION TRENDS—INDIA:

India's urbanized picture shows that in 2011 the urban population of India stood at 377 million constituting 31.16 per cent of the total population. The 12th Five Year Plan estimated that by 2031 India's urban population would be about 600 millions; an increase of over 200 million in the next two decades. Urban growth is bound to lead to economic, social and ecological disruptions, adversely impacting living conditions of urban population. This also results in pressure on the delivery/provision of basic needs. Again, growth of informal sector and increasing unemployment, crushing pressure on civic services which lead to crime and violence in the society. Women are the worst sufferers in the absence of basic civic services.

In India, women constituting half of the population and have an integral part of social structure principally due to their contribution to the socio-economic sphere of life. Despite their large numbers they had a very limited role to play in all the level of Indian multi-federal structure, i.e., national, state and local government. Here it is very pertinent to mention that the local government is very close to people and the working of these bodies directly affected every man and woman as well. But, women in urban governance—policy and decision making, they were not adequately and appropriately represented until 1992. Though the municipal bodies are closest to the community and these are the best places to involve women in local policy and decision-making so as to enable them to participate in the policies and decisions that impact provision of civic services and quality of life. But, several factors including gender discrimination, family burdens, financial constraints to contest elections, cultural-social factors, etc., come in the way of women participation.

GENDER AND URBAN GOVERNANCE:

The 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, 1992 (CAAs) has widened the base to provide representation to weaker sections of the community, including women, in local self-government institutions (both rural and urban level respectively). This work argues that traditional bias against women and their inability to govern should pave the way for positive thinking. This article focuses the role of women representatives in urban governance, but the topic is 'Gender and Urban Governance- A New Domain', not 'Women and Urban Governance- A New Domain'. The usage reflects the recognition, that both men and women are alike in the proper function of the society.

There are not significant differences between males and females (beyond the biological differences of chromosomal and genital sex that are used to define an individual as either male or female). It argues that there are areas, however, where women can play a catalytic role in promoting the social development including women and child development. The data has collected from Indian Constitution, books, journals, magazine, report and various municipal records. The observational and analytical methods are employed to analysis the role of women in urban governance.

The 74th CAA has laid foundations for the emergence of strong bottom up women leadership who could climb the ladder to occupy positions of power at the state and national levels. The provision provided opportunities as also challenges for women to engage in local governance. The 74th CAA entrusts, through the 12th Schedule, important development functions to ULBs viz., urban planning, planning for economic and social development, water supply for domestic purposes, public health and sanitation conservancy, slum improvement, urban poverty alleviation, provision of urban amenities and facilities like parks, gardens, playground etc., protection of the environment, safeguarding the interests of the weaker sections of society, which have a major bearing on the development of women and children. The ability of the local bodies to undertake these functions, particularly those relating to poverty alleviation, safeguarding the interests of the weaker sections would, to a great extent, depend on the composition of the members of the councils who can influence the local decision-making process. Here, reservation of women made a substantial difference in the composition of the ULBs and the decision making process in

the urban governance. Thus, for the first time a large number of women's representatives are entering the local governance which was hitherto forbidden for them for a variety of reasons. There are some of the questions that are often raised in the context of the 74th CAA like how effective would women be in the local bodies? Would they able to play a positive and constructive role to further the cause of women's development? The reservation has introduced a big revolution in the local political arena.

This has called for actions at different levels to empower the women members to enable them champion the cause of city development, in general and women and child development, in particular. It is commonly believed that women are unable to make meaningful contribution on municipal matters either due to illiteracy or lack of awareness. But studies show that there was not much difference in the educational status of men and women, thereby indicating other reasons like dominating role played by the male members and presence of their husbands in municipal meetings which nullifies the possibility of women's participation in local governance. Often, non-member husbands' interference was identified as negative factor. The other factors coming in the way of women's participation is ignorance of Municipal Acts and rules. Often women members feel that due to these factors, they have not been able to be accountable to the community which elected them and get disappointed and disillusioned resulting in their non-participation.

GENDER AND 'GOOD' URBAN GOVERNANCE:

In recent years there has been a paradigm shift from urban governance to 'good' urban governance underpinning sustainability, decentralisation, equity, efficiency, transparency and accountability, civic engagement and security. Though the role and contributions of local representatives to achieve good urban governance (GUG) is common to both men and women, but there are specific gender aspects that should be understood, which can be seen from the Table 1.

TABLE 1: GOOD URBAN GOVERNANCE AND GENDER DIMENSIONS

UG Feature	Gender Dimension
Sustainability	Access to basic services that allows women to pursue livelihood strategies and manage their households.
Decentralisation	Involvement of women in urban planning processes and management.
Equity	Equity relates to representation and access to services and resources. Much of the development resources target men unless specific gender provisions are made.
Efficiency	Effective delivery, targeting and financial performance to help support women in their livelihood strategies (water and toilets in the house), mobility (better public transport), rights achievements (access to education and health care) and participation.
Transparency	Greater participation of women in public life reduces public sector corruption and increasing women's engagement in public planning. Transparency promotes inclusiveness.
Accountability	Transparency strengthens accountability—political, administrative and social actors and stakeholders should show interest towards gender policies and their implementation.
Civic engagement	Women's organisations play a crucial role in advocating for better services for women. Local authorities must encourage full engagement of women.

SPECIFIC ROLE OF WOMEN IN URBAN GOVERNANCE:

As representatives of ULBs, the women members, have access to the resources of the body and will be able to influence the bodies decisions relating to distribution of resources between wards and beneficiary groups. They take up issues relating to women, demand resources for women and child development.

Their position and actions legitimise the cause of women and children in the eyes of the community. Women as a group exert pressure in the council on a variety of issues confronting the city particularly those relating to environmental cleanliness, water and sanitation, pre-school education, preventive health care, etc., whose absence is felt more intensely by them as home-makers. Women can play a positive and supportive role which would facilitate mass movement against discrimination and struggles to gain gender equality. It is also being recognised increasingly that eradication of poverty, achieving sustained economic growth and social development, environmental protection and social justice require the involvement and active participation of women as agents of change.

The critical areas where women can play a positive, constructive, and significant role are: eradication of poverty (by enhancing the access of women to economic resources by strengthening linkages with banks and other financial institutions and encouraging innovative savings, thrift and lending practices and improving access to women to vocational and technical training for skill formation and development); protecting women against violence and discrimination, organising legal and administrative literacy programmes to educate women on various aspects of their rights; protecting the rights of children particularly the girl child; ensuring access to education to all with a view to eradicate illiteracy, particularly among women and children; skill development, training, self employment and establishment of market and trade networks. etc.

With the success of women's involvement in urban affairs after 74th CAA or as a matter of political strategy, it was decided to increase women representation to 50 per cent in local bodies and the Constitution (112 Amendment) Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on November 24, 2009. The Bill seeks to amend the Article 243 T to enhance the quantum of reservation for women from one-third to one-half of the total seats in ULBs and this is also applicable to chairpersons. The Standing Committee of Lok Sabha to which the Bill was referred noted that major states supported the proposal for enhancing reservations to women. The Government of Assam, has already enhanced reservations to women from 33 to 50 percent, some states also maintain the same level. The Standing Committee agreeing with the proposed amendments felt the enhancement of women's reservations would not only ensure their increased representation and participation in ULBs, but would also go a long way in articulating the voice of women and ensure that their concerns and problems get reflected in policies and programmes of urban development.

STEP FORWARD:

It is reality that in spite of all the legal and constitutional assurances, there is an urgent need to create a suitable environment for the women to enable them to play meaningful roles as responsive and responsible local leaders of the post – 74th Amendment Act era. There is a need for orientation/training to empower them to function effectively as public representatives, policy-makers, changing agents and political leaders. Only periodic training can motivate them and increase their confidence to take up the new and changing roles in the local self-government and women's development. Secondly, there is need for frequent interaction among women representatives of towns at state and national level for exchanging their experiences. Thirdly, official as well as the non official functionaries must be sensitised towards gender issues with a view to establish a harmonious working environment. This helps in overcoming the problems of understanding the needs of women.

Fourth, women representatives must involve themselves and continuously monitor the implementation of development programmes particularly those having a bearing on the critical areas referred to earlier. Based on monitoring, the effectiveness of the system can be understood and new ways of working can be established, wherever necessary. In recent years urban development strategies are articulated through Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation). The programmes are mostly gender neutral and do not focus on specific problems of women in cities and towns. Though it talks of inclusive planning but does not specifically focus on participation of women. There is a need to reform the mission objectives to bring women issues into urban development agenda and process.

The 74th CAA has facilitated the emergence of new women leadership. It is a fact that some of the women members were hitherto unfamiliar with the dynamics of politics as well as development. Many of them are first time entrants to the civic politics. They need strong support from higher level political institutions as well as from the executive to play a very constructive and positive development role. The present number of women is sufficient enough to make impact on the policies and decisions in the councils. But it by itself does not empower women and require capacities to actively participate in mostly male dominated urban governance in the country. It requires follow-up actions like awareness building, training, sharpening the skills, motivation and building confidence, etc. It requires capacity enhancement to engage in general and gender based governance issues.

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