Issues in Political Socialisation and functionalism of stakeholders in Local Bodies Elections in India.

Abstract:

It is mostly observed that a almost on an average thirty five per cent of citizens do not participate during the elections in India. The scenario in any democracy is almost the same. The maximum turnout is just above 65% in most mature democracies too. The reason for this is incomplete socialisation of individuals and groups within the community. The reason of this non participation is largely attributed to the apathy, anomy and indifference towards the political processes in general and not political agencies in particular. Hence, one can say that the political orientation or political culture that we experience amongst these individuals and groups is parochial political culture. Therefore it becomes imperative to understand the role of various stakeholders in both rural and urban setting who can influence participation of citizen in the political process in India.

Introduction

73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were passed by Parliament in December, 1992. Through these amendments local self-governance was introduced in rural and urban India. The Acts came into force as the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 on April 24, 1993 and the Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 on June 1, 1993. These amendments added two new parts to the Constitution, namely, 73rd Amendment added Part IX titled "The Panchayats" and 74th Amendment added Part IXA titled "The Municipalities". The Local bodies–'Panchayats' and 'Municipalities' came under Part IX and IXA of the Constitution after 43 years of India becoming a republic.

Democracy in India is a borrowed concept which came to be know to the people only after the british through its various acts, trained the citizens to participate in political process. During independence, India was largely underdeveloped, feudal economic system. Political system was at an infant state as the constitution for Independent India was yet to be drafted. The first Elections to the Parliament were governed according the the newly made constitution and relied more on the democratic customs and practices.

The local self-government had a long history of pre vedic age, the society in which it was actually operating was extremely stratified and discriminatory. The governing systems were governed according to the basic social ethos and therefore the governance was also discriminatory and biased. The last strata both socially and economically were excluded from the political process. Hence we can say that there was incomplete socialisation and therefore the system experienced dysfunctional syndrome. Discrimination continued through these structures as there was no constitutional status to the local bodies. Elections were irregular to these bodies, the local influence of a caste, religion, or family dominated the political process of the Panchayat system. The political socialisation that people got exposed to was not only incomplete but was illegal and illegitimate. this attempt of the government was to manifest the true spirit of Democracy.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were introcued with much fan and fair and big slogans like "Power to the People". But what was central to this act was peoples participation in the issues concerning them directly.

People can participate as individuals or groups. In a democracy, individuals participate as voters or political activists. Often they participate more and more effectively through group action as members of a community organization or a trade union or a political party.

Since participation requires increased influence and control, it also demands increased empowerment in economic, social and political terms. In economic terms this means being able to engage freely in any economic activity. In social terms it means being able to join fully in all forms of community life without regard to religion, colour or sex or race. In political terms it means the freedom to choose and change governance at every level from top to bottom. All these forms of participation are intimately linked. Without one the others will be incomplete.

Participation from the human development perspective is both a means and an end. Human development stresses the need to invest in human capabilities and then ensure that those capabilities are used for benefit of all. Greater participation has an important part to play there. It helps to maximize the use of human capabilities and is thus a means of increasing levels of social and economic development. But human development is also concerned with personal fulfilment. So active participation which allows people to realize their full potential and make their best contribution to society is also an end in itself.

Participation, a much accepted and appreciated concept by activists, academics, development practitioners and progressive thinkers, has radicalized the operationalization of development practice by empowering the poor to engineer their own development (Frazer, 2005). That being said, it is vital to acknowledge that participation is characterized in different typologies. Cornwall (2005) iterates Arnstein and Pretty's typologies which start off at 'manipulative/passive participation' and end at transformative participation (self-mobilization/ community mobilization). These typologies describe shift from control by authorities to control by people (Cornwall, 2005). In manipulative and passive participation, citizens are usually at the receiving end of projects and programmes (Cornwall, 2005). People are usually only asked questions for information gathering while decision making is done by external professionals (Cornwall, 2005). Information gathering and consultations just legitimize already taken decisions and really just used for moral authority (Cornwall, 2005). On the opposite side of the ladder exists transformative participation which enables the poor to make their own decisions and carry out their own action (Cornwall, 2005). An example of transformation is self-mobilization . In self-mobilization, people in a community steer their own development independent of external institutions to change systems (Cornwall, 2005). However, Cornwall states that "self-mobilization may or may not challenge power relations" (Cornwall, 2005, pg. 2). She says "self-initiated mobilization only works if the state wants to encourage self-initiated mobilization as part of neo-liberal approach to development". This essay contests the argument made by Cornwall by illustrating that self-mobilization challenges social and cultural norms which ultimately challenges power dynamics and the status quo.

Self-mobilization, also known as community mobilization, challenges power dynamics because it allows the local community to be autonomous and engineer their own development (WHO, 2006). Community mobilization is defined as "a capacity building process through which community individuals, groups, or organizations plan, carry out, and evaluate activities or a participatory and sustained basis to improve their development on their own initiative" (WHO, 2006). Although regarded as a fluid term, community mobilization allows a local community to self-organize, evaluate it own needs, undertake collective action using pragmatic strategies, manage resources and enhance its own standards of living (WHO, 2006). Local communities develop contacts with external institutions for resource and technical advice (WHO, 2006). Within this framework, local communities are no longer

passive participants and passive recipients of development practices. They have full ownership over their own development. They are able to transform and set their own rules of the game. With community mobilization, there is no longer a mismatch between the interest of different stakeholders; the local community determines its own network of stakeholders (WHO, 2006). In this way, it fundamentally transforms power relations and brings institutional changes in the way stakeholders (such as government, consultants, donors, development practitioners, and NGOs) interact with each other and the roles they play within the framework of development practice (Cornwall, 2005). The power is shifted from the hands of donors and consultants (rich stakeholders) into the hands of community members (Cornwall, 2005). When a community doesn't mobilize, the development practitioners, donors, and consultants dictate the development interventions which are often culturally and socially inappropriate. They take decisions based on their own notions and definitions of development which often leads to undesired results and no increase in community well-being. Whereas, in community-mobilization the community empowers itself (WHO, 2006). Community mobilization creates a powerful space for poor communities by legitimizing their own voice and interests (Tarrow, 1994). The grass-roots approach is central to effective governance which didn't exist in tokenism. Grass-roots approach facilitates changes in stakeholder roles in order to allow the local communities to consolidate their own governance and operationalize their own development (Tarrow, 1994).

In the above background it becomes imperative to discuss the role of stakeholders in both the Rural and Urban ecology. In the rural setting, Social institutions like the Community based orgaisations, the self-help groups and community government structures like the Primary Health Centers van play an important role. for the urban setting it is essential to integrate corporates, Media, NGOs, Political parties Academic institutions Civil Society Organisatios in promoting democratic ethos. For the purpose of this study we may call these groups as stake holders.

All individuals by the virtue of being the citizens, do have a duty to participate in the political process including contesting elections, the role of these stakeholders increases when it comes to enthuse other group members to participate in voting. It will be interesting to understand the way the political life of the rural communities revolve around the political process. In fact one can say that the social pressure of participating (voting) in the elections is more in the rural areas. In a rural setting the idea of 'moral legitimacy' plays and important role in making the others behave in the same manner as the locally influentially group may do; or we

may also say that the less influential group imitates and follows the more influential group merely to get acceptance from the former. This cycle continues and subtly the pressure is maintained on the groups who do not wield influence.

In fact the same analogy should be used for the local awareness of individuals in the rural areas. After twenty five years of the 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendment, a new era of political awareness must begin to leave promote the process of elections without involving politics. It means that the same principle of 'moral legitimacy' should be used to make sure that the entire village votes on the polling day.

1. Community organisations: the community organisations especially in the rural setting is very important as they assume informal legitimacy. 'empowered' citizen emerges gradually, often through local-level debates around jobs, housing or other tangible issues, Election can be one such issue where the rural society which is generally 'duty centric' can be pursued to discuss elections. Another major characterstic of the rural society is that it has a tendency of imitation. Such debates can be replicated in different villages and talukas, thus finally covering the entire state. Civil society organizations, even if they are not overtly political, can therefore provide the building blocks with which their members may engage with political processes in future, should they wish to.

2. Self-Help Groups: Self-help groups in the rural areas are considered to be the agents of change. These groups are assumed to be empowered groups and there is a likelihood of influencing the people at large especially the women. These groups have emerged as contenders of political power as they are economically independent and have caused a blow to the patriarchal structures. While they wield local influence, one may expect the voters turnout to increase. Mostly these self-help groups have to be working as apolitical groups and can also begin their work right from the voters registrations to awareness about the elections.

3. Primary Health Centres: Another important strategy of awareness about the elections can be enrooted through the Primary Health Centres. These primary health centres are government structures. On an average 80 to 120 patients visit these structures on a daily basis. A long campaign regarding the awareness can be conducted in the premises of the PHCs. Further, every PHC has its field officers called as the ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers. The capacity of the term can be fully explored as it talks about the social health. These health workers work in villages and have a coordinating role in terms of rural health. ASHA workers can be entrusted with the duties of spreading awareness amongst

all the adult citizens in the village. They can be entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out the awareness, registration and ensuring 100% registration of villagers. This is a very close nit body. The government may also come with some incentives in terms of maximum (100%) registration and 100% turnout models.

In the urban setting the scenario is different.

The urban setting is more vibrant and there are a lot of agents of political socialisation. But they suffer from incomplete socialisation. As Freid Riggs calls it, urban society is more structured and 'detracted' society. By 'detracted', he means that the institutions in the urban society are more specialised in nature. Hence, it becomes very challenging to device mechanisms to infuse another role into these institutions as they are not trained in the process.

However, due to technological developments and maximum use of computers and computer aided work, if a proper intervention strategy is devised, these structures can give results. Further, these structures are also very tight linked and show a tendency of cooperation. Thus the corporates, Media, NGOs, Political parties Academic institutions Civil Society organisations have to be integrated with the governmenta process of the Election Commission. Few strategies are suggested to increase awareness amongst citizens with the help of the above stake holders.

Corporates:

It is said that ideas and institutions are influenced by the market forces. Corporates have the ability to percolate into every bit of the society. Therefore it is essential that the corporates unitedly stands with the Election Commission of India and the State election Commission and have an integrated approach of awareness. The corporates can emerge as the foremost agency of awareness. for instance, retail shops managed by the private corporates can be the part of the awareness campaign in the following manner;

1. All the corporates may be pursued to observe election awareness month. In this month they should mention election commission on their brandings, as they have an ability to go into maximum households. Retail grocery units like the D Mart, More, Reliance Fresh or Reliance Digital and Croma which have emerged as the one destination shopping, should be partner in the awareness campaign. They may also think of some incentives to the citizens for early registration.

3. Corporate Cartels can be made which can look after the awareness process without indoctrinating or influencing the people to vote in a particular manner. The role of the cartels shall be sharing the responsibility in various wards in terms of municipality jurisdiction or talukas, Districts in the rural setting.

4. It is observed that in corporate towers, not less than 5000 people work. These people have synced computer Ids. There can be a system of continuous reminders everyday before signing in for the daily work. Until the employees register as voters, they can be reminded for the same. Further, all those employees register as voters can be communicated to all the others on the internal communication networks.

5. Details about voter registration from new recruits can be obtained while filling the initial documents. If the new recruit is not a voter, the HR department can first get the Voter registration form filled from him/her and send it to the voters' registration department and then only can one be given the login Id or be allowed to sign his muster on the first day.

6. As there are safety drills in the corporate houses on regular intervals, there should be mock elections drills.

7. Many companies organise family outings for their employees. While these outings are organised, many leaflets containing information, some vouchers etc., are given. These leaflets and vouchers must contain awareness themes. (E.g, many companies give Sodaxo Coupons to its employees. These coupons are transferable and redeemable, they can have some awareness themes)

Academics:

1. Democratic practices are taught to the students right from the schools. Schools appoint students as prefects and monitors, association head etc. when the students are studying in std IX itself, a practice of elections to these posts should be carried out. These elections should be conducted on one day in all the schools. This would bring mass awareness and is considered to be a different activity altogether. This is the first time when the children students get exposed to the electoral process and may look forward to such an event as all the schools go for this process at one time. This activity may bring mass awareness amongst the students and the parents at one time.

2. As per the lyndodh Committee recommendations and the Maharashtra Public Universities Act 2016, the Government of Maharashtra Government has declared that the elections to the Students Council shall be conducted every year. For this purpose all the students who are above 18 should be allowed to vote if they are registed voters only. The current practice is that the students can vote by showing their valid I-Cards. All students who are bonafide students form the electoral roll. Instead, the election commission should extend a helping hand to the Universities in all the universities to register the voters and on the basis of this which a electoral roll be prepared for the college and University Elections.

3. Similarly, for the graduate constituencies of the Senate and the Legislative Council elections, the same registration may be used if the student completes his/her graduation. This would also bring some sort of parity amongst the candidates contesting the elections to the above mentioned bodies. The current practice is that the candidates register their voters and are responsible to bring the voters to the polling booths on the day of election. Those parties which are more structured and have a large network or have enough money can make sure their candidates win the elections. Instead, the voting card/ voters registration that is done at the time of college elections can have a unique identification number, which can be used for all the elections that a citizen wants to participate.

4. The awareness programmes in the academic institutions in the colleges and universities have to take adequate steps in terms of having atleast one programme every semester.

5. All colleges have their festivals, during these festivals, atleast one awareness dives have to be undertaken by the colleges and universities.

6. Students have to be taken to local bodies institutions for a field visit. This can have a two way learning process of knowing the electoral practice on the one hand and

Media:

Electronic media have played a central role in politics almost since their introduction. The role of media in election campaigns is often seen as the origin of media and communication studies. The variety of political systems worldwide, the wide range of media systems that operate within them, and the extensive array of regulatory schemes that govern this association raise thought-provoking questions about the role of media in democracy. The media–politics–capital triad has raised concerns about the effect of money on the health and fairness of political and media structures.

The Internet offers many additional groups cheap access to the public sphere and new possibilities for information and discussion. Accordingly, much of the most "impactful" money is spent "online," calling on expertise in building networks, conversations, and communities using social networking platforms, combined with applications designed to amplify messaging.

Civil Society Organisations: these organisations are formed with the intent of awareness only. Today we come across many interest and advocacy groups. Some international civil society organisations like the Bill Gates Foundations and the like may be entrusted with the voting awareness programmes.

The civil society organisations are most innovative groups. They know the society very well and can influence the people to do or not do a particular thing. Further, these organisations work with those communities (meaning slums or locality and not necessarily it mean caste and religious groups) for fairly long period of time. The SEC can take advantage if this to make sure that each and every individual is aware of the elections and the voters registration.

Civil Society organisations are trained to educate the masses. Along with other education like sanitation, malnutrition, health practices etc, if they are able to impress upon the people that the above problems will be less than half if they vote intelligently. This means that when the access to public good is been talked about, it should be linked to political process. The utilitarian ideas may enthuse the citizens to understand their responsibility.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it is clear from the above discussion that various stakeholders can certainly play an important role in generating an atmosphere of awareness amongst the masses in the society. An integrated approach of these stakeholders will certainly benefit in increasing the voters awareness, which will increase the number in voters registrations which in turn will bring about a change in the voting turnouts.

Higher voting turnout is the characteristic of a mature democracy. Democracy cannot be enlarged and amplified by the government agencies like the State Election Commission. In fact, the State Election Commission is merely the facilitator of deepening democracy in the state. It is the responsibility of each and every individual and institution (formal or informal) pledge for democratic practice and democratic ethos.

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