

GOVERNANCE

Theme: Engendering Governance

Engendering governance towards women empowerment is recognised, worldwide, as a development concept.¹ It is important to understand how mobilisation of women and their empowerment alter the state and the governance discourses; rearticulate the interfaces between the state and the social stakeholders; transform development; and reshape citizenship and popular politics under the neo-liberal governmentality.

One of the key criticisms of empowerment discourse is that it de-politicises poverty by rendering it into a technically manageable problem (Escobar, 1995; Harriss, 2002). Kabeer (1994) differentiates between the powerful and the empowered, arguing that those ‘who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, but they are not empowered... because they were not disempowered in the first place. It is in this premise of complex and engaging debates that one has to deal with the concept of engendering governance towards women empowerment, as it is a risky and a political act. Hence, it is desirable to describe it as a power relationship, which deserves careful scrutiny.

Despite the prevalence of patriarchy and male dominated political system- considered as potential barriers to women’s participation in local politics and process of governance -an increasing number of women are entering the electoral fray at the local levels in India (Niraja Jayal, 2009). Women who were only exercising their franchise have, after entering local politics, started to work as participants in the electoral politics – campaigning, canvassing, publicising – thus engaging with their subjective agency in the socio- cultural context.

Engendering governance and its explorations open up a plethora of emerging issues, which are complex and problematic, making it imperative to unravel how women’s inclusion into the hitherto unavailable domain of ‘formal politics’ intersects and, often, intervenes with their

¹ (see UN Millennium Development Goals coming with Gender Equality and Empowering Women; World Bank’s new ‘human’ face with poverty alleviation and empowerment; US Agency for International Development introducing Empowerment Programme ; Beijing Declaration and Government of India declaring 2001 as the Women Empowerment Year)

existing alternate identities and concerns. How do these women, in the new found locations of power in governance, negotiate with power structures in their local contexts? How, if at all done, such affirmative action alters the existing structures of governance? How do women's experiences as elected women representatives relate to existing discourses on gender and governance?

It is significant to explore and critically analyse the multiple ways in which women from their different historical subjectivities of class, caste and ethnicity negotiate with the patriarchal structures and hegemonic institutions of the society.

The session on Engendering Governance will focus, mainly, on issues and questions to the themes related to Policies, Institutions and Practices; Local Governance and Gender Politics of Development and understanding Engendering Governance in the context of Civil Society, Market, Media and Political Parties.

This session tries to understand the ways in which engendering governance and the process of democratisation speak with each other, and the resultant challenges and complexities at the regional, state and global levels.

i) Policies, Institutions and Practices

Policies, institutions and practices with a patriarchal ideology are, to a great extent, successful in confining women to specific 'habitus' (Bourdieu,1993), where they had internalised the hegemonic norms of gender power relations that conditioned them to occupy subordinate status and non- participatory positionalities. It is important to critically engage with the norms and guiding principles of the policies in the governance, and the ways in which it has made difference in the lives of the women and society. It is also important to understand the differential patriarchy across class, caste and gender, leading to multiple deprivations for women, especially in the governance process. One needs to pose here how far the engendering governance and engendering citizenship facilitate women in transcending the constructed restrictions of patriarchy and other power structures.

ii) Gender and Local Governance

Coupled with mainstreaming the most backward class/caste into politics, gendering of local self-governance institutions underwent serious debates in this decade. The decision of reserving 50 percent seats for women in PRIs impacted the body politic, substantively. The latest survey (2008) on EWRs in India, carried out by the Panchayati Raj Ministry, reveals that women have expanded their representation to unreserved seats. Women who are entering into the process of governance confront, negotiate or succumb to power structures at different levels and spheres- self, family, community, society, institutions of governance and state. Any study to understand women's positionality needs to reconnect the empirical data with their socio-cultural history to de-articulate the prevalent notions of 'ineffective presence' of women in local governance. The important question to understand and unravel is the relation between the 'politics of presence' of women in the governance (Anne Phillips, 1995) and the ways in which these are translated into meaningful processes in the democratisation of democracy.

iii) Engendering Governance Vs Civil Society, Market, Media and Political Parties

A participatory democracy demands a political culture and corresponding structures including State, civil society and market institutions that would enable subject citizens to develop, engage and advance positions on issues affecting their life-world (Young, 1990; Habermas, 1994; Dryzek, 1990). Foucault's (1991) concept of 'governmentality' is useful in understanding the (changed) analytics of power and its gender relations in the process of governance. The governmentality approach focuses on the integral link between the micro- and macro-political actors, and between the socio-political movements at the micro and macro levels. Moreover, it highlights the intimate relationship between 'ideological' and 'political-economic' agencies. The genealogy of the subject and the genealogy of the State, along with other institutions and structures of power, thus become important in understanding the representation and participation of women in local governance.

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