Political participation of women in India

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ABSTRACT

Women are involved less in politics. In any political system, right from the developed to the developing countries, women’s participation is far less compared to men. Political participation means not only exercising the right to vote but also power-sharing, decision making, policy making at all levels of governance of the state. Participation of women in this political activity is almost equal to men. Women are not yet well represented in the political arena, for which they have to participate in the public sector such as membership in parliament and state legislative assembly. The Constitution not only grants equality of treatment to women but also calls upon the state to accept measures favoring women neutralizing the socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages that they face.

Keywords— Awareness, Politics, Women voters

1. INTRODUCTION

The 1950 Constitution of India promised in the Preamble to secure to all its citizens ‘JUSTICE, social, economic and political’, as well as ‘EQUALITY of status and of opportunity’ (Basu, 1991: 21). Even with this constitutional order to give equality, women in the public sector, including election politics, injustice, and discrimination. Thus, such discrimination has continued for women in India even after 70 years of independence. The survey for 2017-18 tabled in Parliament said factors such as household responsibilities; existing cultural attitudes regarding roles of women in society and lack of support from family were among main reasons that prevented them from entering politics. In India, in 1991 only 22 percent of the women were in the workforce as compared to 52 percent of the men (Gopalan and Shiva 2000, 119). Women’s active participation in electoral competitions is a valid indicator of the effective growth of democracy in any country of the world today (Nelson & South Asia Research Vol. 37(1): 58–77 Chowdhury, 1994; Thomas & Wilcox, 2005). This paper suggests that there may be very little understanding of the lower levels of political participation in Indian women. It brings closer to the demands of easy justice as well as the need for an essential condition for human existence as women’s participation is essential.

Political participation of women can be measured in three different proportions: their participation as a voter, their participation as an elected representative and their participation in the actual decision-making process. The overall participation of women in politics is not very satisfactory. In any political system, right from the developed to the developing countries, women’s participation is far less compared to men. In many countries, women have to struggle long enough to get the right to vote. Today the number of women voters has increased substantially, but their political participation is not equivalent to men and as a result, women are unable to get a similar share in the decision-making process. Women in the political arena are not considered as significant part, Men have dominion over the participation of each level of politics. The political partnership has been defined in a variety of ways. Political participation means not only exercising the right to vote but also power-sharing, decision making, policy making at all levels of governance of the state. Participation of women in this political activity is almost equal to men. Political participation is not just to cast vote. It includes a broad selection of other activities- like membership of the political party, electoral campaigning, attending party meetings, communication with leaders, holding party positions, contesting elections, membership in representative bodies, influencing decision making and other related activities. There is no denying the fact that greater participation of women in the political process would be a pre-condition for their economic and social liberation. However, even though a significantly large number of women voters in the country, yet only a few of them assume the reins of power.

Demographically, according to the 2001 census, the total population of the country was 102.70 cores. Out of this 49.5% were females. That is nearly 50% of the population. According to the 1901 census, the sex ratio of females (per 1000 males) was 979 and according to the 2001 census, it has declined to 933. This declining trend is because of the apathy towards the girl child. In fact, in 1991 the sex ratio had decreased to 927 and thereafter there was a slight improvement in 2001.

According to the 2001 census, out of every 1000 females, 542 females were literates (54.2%). This shows that 45.8% of females were still illiterates in India. In comparison with the male literacy rate, the female literacy rate has always been lower.
work contribution rate of women in 2001 was 25.68% and it consists itself 13.45% of rural women and 11.55% of urban women. 71.8% of the women employed were in the primary sector. These statistics show that literacy rate and work contribution rate of women are rising day by day but at a very slow speed.

Women are not yet well represented in the political arena, for which they have to participate in the public sector such as membership in parliament and state legislative assembly. The Panchayat Raj, a system of self-governance, was introduced in 1959, following the submission of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report of 1957. The 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament in 1989, which provided for 30% reservation for women. But it could not be passed. The Bill was defeated by a narrow margin in the Upper House. The Bill was reintroduced in September 1991, as the 72nd & 73rd Constitutional Amendment Bills with an additional provision such as one-third representation for women in chairperson positions. The Bills were finally passed on December 1992. Approved by half the states by April 1993, they came into operation as 73rd & 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India on 24th April 1993. But very recently Union Cabinet approved a proposal for amending the Constitution to increase the women reservation in urban local bodies from one third to 50 percent. To exit from the lower level of women’s participation in the deliberative organizations of the Government of India, in 1992, amended the constitution (73rd and 74th amendments) that would set to the side a third of the seats in the Panchayat including the Chairpersonship of these local bodies for women. The 73rd amendment to the Indian constitution was introduced in 1992 with the clear purpose of giving women a larger voice in the political process. The amendment would reserve, not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat for women and it would also ensure that a third of the chairmanships of the Panchayats would be reserved for women. Apparently, there has been evidence that due to reservation policy, certain women got elected into the setup, but they acted merely as the puppet of their male family members. Digital communication advances can be presented to get real participation in panchayat counting their attendance and counting their voting in panchayat activities.

In addition, the emergence of women's participation in politics can be traced back to the 19th-century reform movement. In the early 19th century, social reforms and educational programs started by various social reformers work with social evil prevailing in the community. The social reform movement is believed to be the key to the development of modern India. They thought that social change can be started by educating women and by making progressive laws. Social evil can be defeat by raising consciousness and making people sensitive to the injustice done to women. In the context of feminist problems, pour aspects production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization of children have been studied. In India's context males generally dominate in all the four spheres, though women carry out major responsibilities in these four areas. In general, it has been observed that due to all the above factors they have low self-esteem and lack confidence in themselves. Many women accept that politics is man’s world and they have no role to play in it. The traditional approach of family members, as well as their own beliefs, stop them from participating in active politics.

The Constitution not only grants equality of treatment to women but also calls upon the state to neutralize the socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages that they face. The Constitution not only provides equality to women but also urges states to take up favorable steps to affect the socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages facing by women. The constitution has different provisions that ensure equality between men and women. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the law in the territory of India. This Article stands for lack of any is crimination by law or in their organization.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth. It is a guarantee against every form of discrimination. According to article 15(3), nothing shall prevent the state from making special provisions for the benefits women and children. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in a matter relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state. Secondly, no citizen shall, on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth residence or any of them, be eligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the state. Article 39-(a) guarantees right to a sufficient means of livelihood for all citizen. Article 39-(b) guarantees equal pay for equal work for both men and women. (c) That the health and strength of workers, men, and women, and the tender age of children are not battered and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter occupations inappropriate for their age or strength. Article 42 guarantees justice and human condition of work and maternity relief. This is in accordance with Article 23 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 51-A clause (e) says that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India- to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, go beyond religious, linguistic and religious or sectional diversities, to renounces practice critical to the dignity of women. Article 243-(D) (2) states not less than 1/3 of the seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to S. C or as the case may be S.T. Article 243-(D) (3)-extends political reservation to women not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be set aside for women and such seats shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat.

These rights seem illusionary as there was a move from the aims of the Constitution. The gap started widening in all political spheres. Article 325 and 326 guarantees political equality, equal right to participate in political activity and the right to vote, respectively. While the latter has been accessed and enjoyed by a large number of women, the right to equal participation is still a far dream.

Reservation Bill - 33.33% it is clear in the debate for the protection of women that women remain invisible and landmark in decision-making organizations. Data shows that the number of women candidates contesting elections in the last few decades has increased slightly. The Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974 (CSWI) observed that ‘the rights guaranteed by the Constitution have helped to build a reference of equality and power which is often used as an argument to refuse to accept protective and accelerating measures to allow women to achieve their just an equivalent position in society’. The committee came
out with the finding that women's participation as voters is increasing at a faster rate than men but representation as candidates has the opposite trend. In other words, women are still not active participants in the local political process despite the constitutional amendment that requires active participation by women in the electoral process. It has been suggested that a respondent's caste influences the attitudes of women and that forward caste women are more likely to be conservative and accept positions similar to those of men. Lower caste women are, on the other hand, more independent and, it is assumed that there is a freedom associated with marginality that lower caste women may enjoy.

This paper builds on this existing research and suggests that the lower levels of participation of women in political life can also be accounted for by their role in the household. In particular, this paper argues that women who can exercise independence in and from the household are more likely to be active participants in political life. Political activity takes place in the public area. Political participation is basically a public act – for men and for women. In many parts of the world, however, the public space is still inhabited and dominated by men. For example, political demonstrations in many parts of the world are still the domain of men as our legislatures. Women still do not have a place in the public space. Political participation of women has the potential to change societies. For women to be politically active they need to be in the public arena. For this to happen women need to be able to “step out of the household.” Women must have an existence autonomous of the household - households, which Hartmann (1981) noted (perhaps echoing Aristotle), are still the sphere of male dominance and also Cultural environment puts the highest emphasis on men. Apart from it criminalization of politics and the political environment of instability and personal.

2. CONCLUSION

This paper has noted that Political participation by women levels of participation in India is low. India should work towards empowering women economically through microfinance programs and also encourage greater participation of women leaders in panchayats. The increase in the number of women in the legislature will not bring sudden changes in the status of women. It is silliness to think that it will solve the entire problems faced by women and bring equality instantly. The problem is in fact deep-rooted as is to be found in any patriarchal society, of which India is one of the best examples. It is also true that powerful women leaders in our politics have failed to do much to the women in India for this purpose Political party should come forward to increase women representatives. Efforts need to be taken to enhance the participation of women in governance in large numbers. The 73d amendment gave them new opportunities. Women panchayat members have to be trained to analyze and understand their roles and responsibilities given in the 73rd amendment act. Many women are, however, still not aware of the reservations made for them in local elections. While a woman’s socio-economic status has a bearing on her interest in politics and political activity the impact of a woman’s position in the household cannot be denied. Whether a woman can negotiate space for herself independent of the household is an important determinant of whether she is an active participant in politics or not. This highlights the fact that political participation is a public act and that for women to be equal participants in the public arena they need to be able to step outside the household– a sphere of male dominance in many parts of the world. Women’s leadership and communication skills need to be improved by increasing female literacy, especially in rural areas. Indeed, economic and social empowerment cannot be continued unless women are politically aware, active participants in all levels of decision making. It is thereby imperative that women are politically mobilized and engaged with political processes, and for this to happen they must believe that their voices are being heard within the legislative spaces. It is said that, to educate one man only one man is educated. However, when a woman is educated the whole family is educated. Similarly when one woman is empowered the whole family is empowered.

3. REFERENCES