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The Journey of Women Empowerment through Political Participation in India – An Holistic Approach

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ABSTRACT

In India we are following the Parliamentary form of government in the parliamentary form of government constitution is playing the major role it guaranties the Political participation is the hallmark of a democratic setup. It having the several meanings it includes voting the election, attending the meetings of political parties, participating the election campaign and etc. It is an Effectiveness of democracy depends on the extent to which equal and effective participation is provided to all its citizens. Women comprise about half of the population in India, requires proper attention and due share in the political process. Citizens' active participation in political affairs strengthens the democratic fabric. Since women's presence is seemed to be low in Indian politics, it is important to make women aware of their rights and motivate them for participation in mainstream politics. The constitution of India under Articles 325 and 326 assure equal right to participate in political activities effectively. However, lack of space for participation in political process has not only resulted in their absence in numbers of decision-making bodies but also neglect their common issues and problems. For solid and successful democratic system, the participation of women is essential. There cannot be any real democracy if the voices and issues of women are ignored or sidelined. This paper analyzes the participation of women in politics and also analyzes whether or not women's voices and demands are articulated to the public as matters of importance.

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INTRODUCTION

"Women represents half the potential talents and skills of humanity and they're under representation in decision making is a loss for society a whole." – First European summit on women in decision making (Athens, 1992).

Political participation is complex phenomenon that requires understanding of the dynamics of the state, gender and intersectionality. The key to empower women is through representation and achieve participation of women in politics the political participation of women has continuously been minimal in the male-dominated political domain. There is a need to critically analyse 'dejure' and 'defacto' status of political involvements of women. The burgeoning literature suggests that women participation is political depends on socio-economic in political factors.

In a Democratic country people are more important they playing major role governing process. In this context, the women's participation in decision-making system is essential for effective governance. Therefore, democracy implies equality for all citizens either men or women. Empowerment of women is a holistic concept. It is a multi-dimensional approach and it covers social, political and economic aspects. Political participation is one of the vital indicators of women empowerment. Political participation of women in any country gives an overview of how women are treated in the society. Women empowerment is the key to all round development of a country which can be achieved through participation of women in politics. As against this basic notion of democracy what is normally seen is that women are generally excluded from different walks of life, and more visibly in Politics. The attainment of true democratic spirit better political participation of women shall be ensured. In Democracy Citizens participation in political affairs is important because a situation which results in high participation by members of a group normally has higher potential for democracy.[1] Equal treatment and opportunity to women in political life should start from the grassroots level. To provide training and practice in the process of decision-making, the rural democratic institutions are the ideal structures to begin with. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act is to accomplish this purpose. This amendment provides reservation of seats and posts of chairperson to women in all grassroots level democratic institutions in the country and this act has brought a silent revolution in the political empowerment of women in India. Therefore, it is very important to study those factors to our best knowledge no robust work has so far been done on this issue.[2]

Objectives

1. To know the meaning of Political Participation and Political Participation of women in India.
2. To examine the Constitutional provisions of Women participation in Indian electoral system.
3. To explore the Women participation Lok Sabha to Local Government
4. Finally going to examine the women's political participation should help the empowerment of women

Sources

The sources of this paper have been primarily linked upon secondary sources like Books, Journal, Government reports and Internet.

Meaning of Political Participation

Political Participation means people participate every step of the government. The activities includes the political participation are voting, seeking information, discussing and proselytizing,

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attending meetings, contributing financially and communicating with representatives. The more active forms of participation include formal enrollment in a party, canvassing and registering voters, speech writing and speechmaking, working in campaigns and competing for public and party office.

Political Participation of Women

In India, women have been given a magnified position in society. During ancient times they were treated at par with men even in political and philosophical circles. Notwithstanding, as the centuries progressed, the situation in society deteriorated and politically they were pushed to the background. It was uniquely in 20th century, especially during the freedom movement under the charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, that involvement of women was acknowledged as the natural course in India. Indeed, Gandhi's ideas and approach towards the part of women in the freedom struggle remained in sharp differentiation to the deep-rooted biases against them imbued in the Indian mind. The social condition of women was quite appalling in those times and it was primarily due to the conscious efforts of the leadership, at the forefront of the freedom struggle that women fought against the might of the British domain in partnership with men. Gandhi accepted that women have to play a much meaningful role in politics, making it more accountable, transparent and corruption free.[3] Writing in Harijan on 21 April 1946, he emphasized the need to ''enroll women as voters, impart or have imparted to them practical education, teach them to think independently, release them from the chains of caste that bind them so as to bring about a change in them…If they will do this, they will purify the present unclean atmosphere.'' He prophetically said, "as long as the women of India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country.'' Our freedom struggle was seen by the national leaders in a more extensive viewpoint of rebelling the socio-economic and future political set up, to give in it, in addition other things equality of both men and women. It is worth referencing that way back in 1920 Smt. Sarojini Naidu and Ms. Margaret Cousins led a group of women to demand equal rights of representation for the fair sex in the Indian Provincial Legislatures. Tilak was of the view that political action with respect to women could be independent of their social status and that political activity was conceivably more significant than social reform in empowering women.[4]

Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India adopted a parliamentary system of government and ensures equity, freedom and uniformity to all citizens (men and women). The Constitution not only grants equality of treatment to women but also calls upon the state to adopt measures favoring women neutralizing the socio- economic, educational and political disadvantages that they face. Therefore, adoption of our Constitution proclaimed a new era of equality for women of India. It ensures equivalent political rights including the right to vote to women. Almost all the provisions contained in the UN Convention on the 'Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women' are there in the Indian Constitution.[5] Not only does the Constitution guarantee equal political status to women, there is even a scope for 'positive discrimination' in their favor as is evident in Article 15(3) of the Constitution.[6]

Provisions of Constitution

- *Article 14* guarantees equality before law and equal protection of law with in the territory of India. Equal treatment at any situation same laws are applicable to any situation.

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- *Article 15* prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex and etc. It guarantees equal rights to every place.
- *Article 15(3),* nothing shall prevent the state from making special provisions for the benefit women and children.
- *Article 16* guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matter relating to employment or appointment to any post under central or state government.
- *Article 39 (a),* states that the State shall direct its policy towards securing equally to men and women the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- 39(d) enjoins the State to direct its policy towards securing equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- *Article 42* provides for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.
- *Article 51(A) (e)* refers to the fundamental duty of citizens to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have provided reservation of 1/3 seats for women in Panchayats and municipalities.
- *Article 325 and 326* guarantee political equality, equal right to participate in political activity and right to vote, respectively. While the latter has been accessed and enjoyed by large number of women, the right to equal participation is still a distant dream. The lack of space for participation in political bodies has resulted in their presence in meager numbers in this decision-making bodies.

Women in Panchayat Raj Institution

The 73rd and 74th amendment of Indian Constitution have brought about a silent revolution by the provisions related to 33% reservation for women in the institutions of local self- government. They have brought a drastic transformation in India as far as participation of women at the gross root level politics is concerned. Women in India are much better represented in the Panchayat raj institutions as compared to the parliament. States like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan have reserved 50 per cent seats for women in Panchayats and Sikkim has reserved 40 per cent seats for women. This indeed, makes a historic beginning for the effective participation of women in the decision-making process at the grassroots level. The efforts and work of several women representatives in Panchayats in Maharashtra, Gujarat and West Bengal have been widely acclaimed. Thus, women are making significant gains in the political sphere where increased participation is rapidly empowering women. However, women have not found an adequate representation in the Lok Sabha. The percentage of elected women Lok Sabha members has never exceeded 12 per cent. The presence of women in the Upper House has been only slightly higher overall, probably due to indirect elections and nomination of some women members.

Most political parties agreed to introduce 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures. When the Bill was introduced in 1997, several parties and groups raised objections. The objections focused around two main issues: first, the issue of overlapping quotas for women in general and those for women of the lower castes; second, the issue of elitism. The Bill was first introduced by Dev Gowda led United Front Government. The demand for sub- quotas for OBCs and minorities is seen a way of stalling reservation for women; there are no instances of

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political parties having such quotas in their own cadres. The Bill has already been introduced several times, but is stalled each time. However, the Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010, took a 'historic step' by passing this bill and provided one-third reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies for women.[7] The key feature of the bill is that one-third of all seats on the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will be reserved for women. The reservation will work as a quota within quota – 1/3 of the seats will be reserved for SC and ST women. Till today the bill neither have been passed by the Lok Sabha nor ratified by one half of the states before it comes into effect.[8]

Women in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha

The 17th Lok Sabha General election 2019, 716 women candidates are contested out of these 78 women members are elected. While it has crossed almost 14.4%. It is almost 3.2% average is increased compared 2014 General election in India. The Rajya Sabha does not much better representation, with just 29 women members comprising 11.9% of the total membership in 2014. Again, while this is an improvement from the 2009 figure of 8.97%, it is far below the world average of 19.6%.[9] It comes as no surprise then that India is ranked 141 in the world rankings of women in national parliaments, compiled by the inter- parliamentary union. India's rank is one of the lowest in the region and falls below her neighbours, Nepal ranked at 40, Afghanistan at 45, China at 71, Pakistan 86.[10]

Strategies to Create Women's Empowerment in India

a. Equal Representation of Women's:
b. Need to Separate and Speed implementation of Laws for Crime against Women's:
c. Create Social Awareness and awareness of Women Rights

a. Equal Representation of Women's

We are living in democratic setup within democracy needs to survive means we need to give equal opportunities every were without difference of anything. Likewise United Nation Millennium Development Goals also initiate the gender equality and it needs the equal opportunities in accessing the education, employment, decision making authority and all other higher authorities. Because the women's in patriarchal society women's remained ignorant of their fundamental civil and constitutional rights. Majority of them are forced to accept the traditional practices that are detrimental for both their and their children's development. Although women have acquired a level of financial and political autonomy and consciousness about their rights, yet they experience helplessness in bringing about basic changes for eliminating gender inequalities from the society.[11]

b. Need to Separate and Speed implementation of Laws for Crime against Women's:

The Crime against women we need to create separate laws. A multi-layered strategy need to be developed to assess the core causes of violence against women. The state and society must provide instantaneous support to victim-survivors to ensure that the victims can carry on with their daily life. In dealing with the problem of violence against women innovative levels of coordination and integration must be developed between government, society and the family. The state possesses a focal situation in starting positive policies to end discrimination against women. The National Commission for Women is doing enormous effort to eradicate the crime against women it needs to create separate criminal code for women and enhanced punishment for offences against women. The proposal for creating a separate criminal code for women was designed to provide quick justice to

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the aggrieved women and speed up the conviction rate. However, this proposition neglected to gather uphold among the public authority and have been retired.

The country has sufficient laws however the main issue emerges in its execution and implementation. As indicated by the United Nations report on gender equality India is still behind the rest of the world significantly. As mentioned earlier we have sufficient laws but Poor implementation of laws often lead to inefficiencies and crimes in the society. They still lack an effective implementation. Adequate resources must be allocated by the Government for the effective implementation of existing laws, improve conviction rates and guarantee that equity is done.

D. Create Awareness of Women Rights

Both Government and society are responsible to create empower women by changing the attitudes of the harmful traditional practices. One of the most vital tasks of the various women organizations and NGOs is to help women in rebuilding their lives and confidence. These goals can be achieved only if the women are adequately educated about their legal rights and are economically independent enough to take independent decisions of their own life. Such programmes if done within shelter homes can provide both counseling and a connection among the women's who were victimized.

Violence against women can be curtailed only when cultural norms and attitudes towards the women can be changed for which change should be made in the school curriculum. Curriculum that educates the students at the school, college and university level on issues like human rights and gender issues should be included in their study material. "Curriculum reform that works towards eliminating the gender stereotyping in schools (teaching about women's contributions in history class, eliminating sex stereotypes in textbooks, promoting girls' participation in sports) are important steps in achieving gender equality".

CONCLUSION

"Equality means you put aside social class, gender, race and sexual orientation. Equality is to give everyone an equal opportunity to express themselves. Equality is to support the idea that everyone, no matter whom, has an opportunity to make the most of their talents and what makes them unique." In India it was state which initiated the first reform measure when after lot of debate it reformed the Hindu Succession Act in 1956 in which women were given equal right to inheritance. Continuous extensive unconditional financial as well as emotional assistance must be provided to the women by both the formal set-up of the state like legal system, police, medical and health care sectors etc., as well as from the informal networks such as family, friends, fellow citizens, and local community groups. The idea of self-reliant independent women taking independent decisions of her life can be achieved only by educating women that will help them in achieving economic independence, as well as knowledge and awareness about their rights. Special emphasis must be provided in educating women on the legal and Human rights provided to them by the constitution. Women's empowerment can positively influence the lives not only of women themselves but also of men, and of course, those of children. Political parties cannot remain indifferent towards women who constitute 586.5 million population and nearly 48.46 per cent of the electorate (2011census). Although almost all political parties have attempted to build women organizations to secure their support. It is necessary to make it mandatory for all political parties to nominate at least a-third of women candidates in their party organizations and laid the foundation of

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political participation of women. Women are the legal citizens of the country and have equal rights with men.

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