

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA: PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL SYSTEM

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Abstract: In the contemporary political system, the political status of women in India has attained an almost equal position to men. The traditional role of women has been altered along with the changes made by the impact of globalization. In the modern perspective, after various agitations and legal amendments, their socio-economic and political participation were completely available to women. But, women were not fairly treated by the patriarchal society. In the medieval period, the status of women had raised up by the various reformers both men and women. Contemporary India, only sizeable numbers of women had been held the highest position in the political system that President of India, Prime Minister of India, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, Union Ministers, Governors, Chief Ministers, Several ministers for various departments in state governments, etc. Apart from that, the 73rd Amendment Act related to Panchayat Raj Institutions came into force and constitutionally empowered the women by giving them 33% representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as reserving one-third of the chairperson's post in the three-tier system. The several articles of the Indian Constitution protected women rights through equality, dignity, and freedom from discrimination. Formation of numerous National Commissions, International conventions, legal enactments, and guidelines have been mostly attempting to protect and in favor of the empowerment of women. While they have not yet the politically empowered and decision-making authorities alone and also dominated by male members within their families and the whole society. In this backdrop, this paper is a modest attempt to analyze the women empowerment through political participation in India: problems and challenges in the contemporary political system. The study has been adopted descriptive research design and information's are gathered from various books, journals, online sources, government reports and etc.

Index Terms- *Women empowerment, Political Participation, Political Representation, Women Leadership,*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary political system, the political status of women in India has attained an almost equal position to men. The traditional role of women has been altered along with the changes made by the impact of globalization. In the modern perspective, after various agitations and legal amendments, their socio-economic and political participation were completely available to women. But, women were not fairly treated by the patriarchal society. In the medieval period, the status of women had raised up by the various reformers both men and women. Contemporary India, only sizeable numbers of women had been held the highest position in a political system such as President of India, Prime Minister of India, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, Union Ministers, Governors, Chief Ministers, Several ministers for the various department in the state and central governments, etc. Apart from that, the 73rd Amendment Act related to Panchayat Raj Institutions came into force and constitutionally empowered the women by giving them 33% representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as reserving one-third of the chairperson's post in the three-tier system.

1.1. The Concept and Definition of Political Participation

The term 'political participation' has a precise wide suggestion. It is not only deliberate on 'Right to Vote but simultaneously relates to involvement in the decision-making process, political engagement, political awareness, etc. Role of women in India participate in voting, run for public offices and political parties at lower levels more than men. Political activism and voting are the most solid areas of women's political participation. To fight gender inequality in politics, the Indian Government has established reservations for seats in local governments.

Political participation is mostly defined as being a process through which individual plays a key role in political life of his society, who has been the opportunity to take part in deciding what the common goals of that society are and the best way of achieving these goals. Political participation refers to actual participation in these voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public policy (RashmiSrivastava, 2000, p.206).

II. STATUS AND PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN IN EARLY AND MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

In ancient India, devotion was given to women as a mother's image, a representation of life, strength, and transparency, with an enormous capacity for persistence, sacrifice, and sufferings. Women were treated like deities. In the Vedic and Upanishadic time women enjoyed significant freedom so far as social, political, cultural and educational activities were alarmed and thus enjoyed a status and respect in the society. In homes, women were given the superior position to that of men as they were treated as the embodiment of goddess of wealth, strength and wisdom (Raj Bala, 1999). Women were portrayed as 'Kali' 'Saraswathi' 'Lakshmi' 'shakti', and it was a recognized belief that where the woman is respected, there is a heavenly presence. According to Manu, since where women were neglected, all rites and ceremonies are fruitless and that family quickly perishes, but where women do not grieve that family always prospers (Vidyaben Shah, 1993). Moreover, during the medieval epoch, the practice of Sati was widespread in many states in India. The devadasi system seemed to have held a significant position in the Tamil Country. In that epoch, many parents used to offer their daughters to the temple priests during the times of hardship and famine. Child marriage, sati, the prohibition on widow marriage, infanticide and divorce, to name a few atrocities against women. The capability to challenge the reduction was completely affected by the omission of women from positions of power in all its expressions. The leaders of both pre and post-independent India paid nothing but lip service to the upliftment of women in various walks of life including rightful representation in the legislatures, both at the union and in the states, with the result that uniform now women do not enjoy the place of pride in the power centers of legislation, administration, and party leadership. At the international level also, on women's issues, women's political empowerment was at the center stage of all the discourses, but still, in any political system, the participation of women is very low as compared to men right from the developed to developing countries. No doubt, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution (AnurathaChadha, 2014).

III. WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN POST INDEPENDENT PERIOD

After various movements and fought in different decades, the Indian Constituent Assembly was constituted in December 1946 and 14 women were included as members. They were AmmuSwaminathan, DakshayaniVelayudhan and DurgabaiDeshmukh from Madras, Hansa Mehta from Bombay, MaltiChowdhury from Orissa, SuchetaKripalani, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Purnima Banerjee, Kamala Chaudhuri and Begum AizazRasul from Uttar Pradesh, Sarojini Naidu from Bihar, Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz from Punjab and Lila Roy and Begum Ikramullah from Bengal (Kiran Devendra:1985:41). Indian women had been asking for the authorization and the constitution of India gave it to them impatiently. This brought women on an equal strength with men. The adult franchise rights granted in the article was the least the constitution makers could do to eliminate gender discrimination. (RanjanaKumari, 1993, p.5). In the past few decades, it has been increasingly realized that the Participation of women is far from satisfactory, either by way of voter out or candidature. There have been fluctuations, though there is a general trend of traditional women coming out to Vote. This increase in the turnout of women voters, particularly of the lower classes and castes from rural areas, can be recognized to a high degree of mobilization rather than to one's own political realization. This mobilization of women voters did not, of course, mean much of an increase in their participation in the decision-making process either at local, state or national level. Many studies on women in politics, however, had pointed out to the lack of their political empowerment and the limitations and challenges before them, disabling them from playing a decisive role in the political affairs of the country. There are numerous domestic and public factors that hinder women's likelihoods in electoral battles of democracy (SushilaKaushik 1999, p. 245).

IV. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION FOR WOMEN

The Constitution of India ensured righteousness for social, economic and political, freedom of thought, and equality to all citizens. Constitution provided for equality of women and called State to take actions to generalize the socio-economic, educational and political disadvantage faced by women.

Article 14: It has been ensured equality before the law and equal protection of law within the territory of India.

Article 15: It has been prohibited discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, color, ethnicity and etc. According to article 15(3), the State can make special requirements for the benefit of women and children. Article 16: Equal opportunity for all citizens in the matter relating to employment. No citizen can be deprived of employment on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth residence or any of them.

Article 39(a) delivers for an adequate means of livelihood for all citizens. Article 39 (b) has requirements for equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Article 39 (c) has provisions for safeguarding the health and strength of workers, men and women, and not to abuse the tender age of children.

Article 42: It ensured just and humane condition of work and maternity relief. Article 42 is in agreement with Article 23 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 325 and 326: They assurance for political equality, equal right to participate in political activity and right to vote, correspondingly. Article 243 (D): It delivers for the political reservation to women in every panchayat elections. It has extended this reservation to elected office as well. In spite of the above requirements, the participation of women in politics has not improved considerably. These are conflicting with the aims of the constitution (GK Today, General Affaires, 2019).

The Government of India engaged state and local governments to encourage equality by class and gender containing equal pay and free legal aid, humane working environments, and maternity relief, rights to work and education, and nurturing the customary of living. Women were significantly involved in the Indian independence movement in the early 20th century and advocated for independence from Britain. Independence carried gender equality in the preparation of constitutional rights, but historically women's political participation has continued low (Praveen Raj, 2011).

V. WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

The nearly ending of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century we could say several women who had and have been held the highest positions in the state and national politics in India. Such as India Sonia Gandhi, PratibhaDevisinghPatil, Meera Kumar, SushmaSwaraj, NazmaHeptulla, J Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati, NirupamaRao, VasundharaRajeScindia, Sheila Dixit, KiranBedi, Brinda Karat, Uma Bharti, SmritiIrani, Maneka Gandhi, MedhaPatkar are few names who have played massive role the cause of India on every possible front be it politics, administration, social work, liberation of the defeated, literature, cultural revolution, upliftment of the weak, putting India on world map, representing the country on international platforms, the list is endless. (Amitkumar et al, 2016).

Apart from that, nationwide a majority of women do not effectively participate in national and state politics due to lack of problems and factors influence on them. India has one of the most solid laws that provide women a life with full honored dignity. But the civilizations, male-controlled setups, and social norms have frequently treated them as secondary to men. They are continuously trained to be respectful. Because of inadequate distribution of resources, women do not have sufficient resources, be it economic, material or human. Women are expected to work in private province only and are generally banned from working outside their homes. Their financial dependence over men also keeps them away from strong political associations. The policies generally are made as gender blind because of male authority over policy framing. Keeping women away from the public sphere brings a lack of political will amongst themselves. Because of patriarchal setup and male dominance over political parties, women do get chances of contesting elections. The parties do not appoint and support women in their decision-making policies whereas authorizing their contestants. Women also coming from under privileged background, without any political cleavage by the feature of birth, marriage or other close relative political cleavage have to face molestation and sexual harassment like circumstances. Because of the alarm of harassment or violence, they do not appearance their full deliberation in political activities (Shah Alam, 2015, pp. 78-79).

VI. PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Numerous factors influence on Women facing several problems when they have entered politics. Illiteracy is one of the highest obstacles in creating women as politically empowered. Because of the lack of indulgent they do not know about their basic and political rights. There are many reasons which are controlling women from being politically active. Because of their low fragment in internal political party construction of India, they have failed to gather resources and support for nurturing their political constituencies. Women do not get adequate financial provision from the political parties to contest the elections. Insufficient provision of resources or lack of resources and lack of education, they do not advantage adequate political training. Poverty is also a predominant encounter in recognizing women's political participation. The female child in a poor family is the main victim and has to face many problems. The proportion of school drop outs is also found to be moderately higher in the case of women compare than men. Caste system or class structure also predominant in society is also a huge problem. The lower caste girl child could not attend the school because of the low level of income of their families. These women got themselves indulged in less paying work to take care of their families. Women are not only having lack of awareness about their rights cherished in India constitution but also the due to lack of political spirit and etc. (Shah Alam, 2015, pp.79-80).

VII. CONCLUSION

In the contemporary political set-up, political empowerment of women refers to the presence of a political system in favoring the participation in and control by the women of the political decision-making process and in governance. The supreme man of India, Swami Vivekananda, quoted that, "There is no opportunity for the well-being of the world except the condition of women is improved, It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing." Hence, the attachment of "Women Empowerment' as one of the major goals in the modern political context. Thus, in order to achieve the status of a developed country, because of the developed county protection and opportunity for women by structured law and implementing various mechanisms. India is necessitated to alter its massive women force into an effective human resource and this is possible only through the political empowerment of women. Our constitution and International Conventions, Conferences, legal enactments, constitutional provisions are highlighted the authoritative need for gender equality and women empowerment. The village poor, with the mediation of voluntary organizations, all-together for self-help to sheltered better economic growth. It has caused the formation of an enormous number of self-help groups in the country. Which mobilize savings and re-cycle the resources generated among the women members. SHG's are essential to overcome exploitation, create confidence for the economic self-reliance of the rural poor, particularly among the women who are mostly invisible in the social structure. This paper would be concluded and recommended that appropriate policy-making and essential mechanisms should be implemented for total upliftment of women empowered through the effective participation and decision-making process in the contemporary political system.

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