



## A STUDY OF CHOICE OF DECISION- MAKING AND ITS IMPACT ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG WORKING WOMEN IN SELECT FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH KOLKATA.

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### ABSTRACT

*Women's role in the development process cannot be ruled out. However, in this society, women are commonly constrained by the norms, beliefs, customs and values of the society creating separate codes of conduct for women and men. The main purpose of the present study is to understand the pattern of decision-making choice of the working women. aims to study her cognitive orientation (i.e. her knowledge about political parties, symbols, their stay in power and their judgements about political system), evaluative orientation on how political system works including her voting behaviour and partisan preference. Women working in both the organised and the unorganised sectors play dual role looking after their children, elders in the family, husbands and also contribute to the family expenditure but have no control over their own income or expenditure. They consult their husbands, elder members of the family or the community before casting their vote and are not guided by individual preference or choice. Women do not yet exist as an effective political collectivity.*

### INTRODUCTION

Political participation is a complex phenomenon liable to be influenced by different variables. It denotes a series of activities which have a bearing on the political process. To be more specific, these activities mainly are (1) voting at the polls, (2) supporting possible pressure groups by being a member of them, (3) personally communicating directly with legislators, (4) participating in political party activity and thus acquiring a claim on legislators, (5) engaging in habitual dissemination of political opinion through face-to-face communication with other citizens. However, it is to be noted that more people discuss politics than vote, and many more vote than join parties or work in campaigns (Woodward, 1972, 133). Some other empirical studies also show that most people are just not especially politically oriented and political participation is not a "natural" concomitant of citizenship. As Eakin's (1972, 97) study, based on survey research, shows that only small percentages, probably fewer than 10 per cent in all democratic countries, belong to a political class. Milbrath (1965,25-60) suggests that "the various forms of political involvement fall into a hierarchy or continuum according to the cost in time and effort that each

demand". But other variables, such as political articulations, saliency, and interest which can only partially be reckoned into the 'costs' - also affect the frequency of the various forms of participation. Political Orientation is a complex phenomenon in the sense that its various forms vary from country to country, from era to era, from one type of people in a society to another. Researchers have shown that the generalizations derived from research in western countries may not hold equally true in India (Goel,1974, 98). It has been pointed out that to exercise political influence is a special kind of political involvement in which female citizens, no matter where they live, or what their level of education is, find it very hard to engage in. Women's roles are such in which political passivity is perceived as the norm. Women in political systems are heavily dominated by men (Christy,1984). In this society, women are commonly constrained by the norms, beliefs, customs and values of the society creating separate codes of conduct for women and men (Kabeer, 2000). Extent of this difference varies; even across time along with varying structure of the society with respect to culture, caste, ethnicity, and class. It is argued that disempowerment of women is generated from complex relations within the household and family, which makes assessing women empowerment much difficult. Professor Amartya Sen (1984) taking a much wider view of development talked of development as the process of 'expansion of entitlement' — i.e. 'giving life sustenance and self esteem — and capabilities : giving freedom'. Nirmala Banerjee (1997) says that Amartya Sen's view (1990) that wage work increases the bargaining power of women in the household and hence the overall economy and hence is empowering is highly qualified. She is of the opinion that whether or not this wage work improves her position should be assessed in terms of how far it makes it possible for her to strike out on her own on the strength of that income.

There are four important debates on the question of political participation of women both at the global level as well as in India: one debate tries to look at the women's participation as "empowering women" particularly as political categories (Parida,2009,43) Second debate tries to argue that voting rights or suffrage will remain as symbolism or "political tokenism" (Suchinmayee,2008,27) rather than actualizing participation in traditional societies such as India, Iran etc and the third debate looks at suffrage as essential component for creating egalitarian society and final debate argues that political participation especially through "quota" or reservation not necessarily leads to social emancipation of women, as women are still without property rights and that gender bias still operates at the large level (Klausen,2001). Gender equality is a phased phenomenon. It develops gradually, step wise and as a concerted effort where state intervention may assist in moving equality in high direction (Delharup,2006). Democracy to be truly representative and inclusive, all citizens must have equal opportunities to participate within democratic processes.

A study of women MP's in India (Rai,1995) suggests that loyalty to class, caste and a range of other cross-cutting institutional loyalties limits the representation of women's interests. In our country even the best women parliamentarians feel side-lined and powerless within the party. The few women leaders have not been able to facilitate the entry of greater number of women in electoral and party politics and so remain an 'ineffective' minority in politics.

**Table 1:** Seats allotted to women by national parties in general elections

Source: Election Commission of India

National Parties	2004		2009		2014	
	Contested	Won	Contested	Won	Contested	Won
All India	355	45	556	59	668	61
Congress	45	12	43	23	57	4
BJP	30	10	44	13	37	28
Others	280	23	469	23	574	29

The participatory upsurge witnessed among women as voters in the 1990s reached its peak in the general election held in 2014. Their participation has steadily increased from 46.6 percent in 1962 to around 65.7 percent in 2014. The difference in voter turnout among men and women, as wide as 16.7 percent in 1962, has narrowed to 1.5 percent in 2014 (<http://www.parliamentofindia.nic.in>). After 2014 women representation has increased manifold with 40 women MLA in 2016. There were 41% women nominations in 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

West Bengal is now the third most populous state in India, with a population density of a little more than 900 persons per square km. Indicators of women's participation in political processes with reference to the last Assembly and Parliamentary elections held in West Bengal in 2011 and 2014 respectively suggest that among the five assemblies, West Bengal has the highest number of women members. People of West Bengal have elected maximum number of women parliamentarians. The state has elected 14 women MPs in 2014 and 11 women MPs in 2019 compared to only 7 MPs in the 2009 parliamentary election. Despite the land of various political, social, economic and cultural movements, the state has failed to organize a movement for development and upliftment of women as an entire class. They are practically excluded from decision making. Several government reports corroborate the fact that gender discrimination has been an important feature of economic and social processes in West Bengal, and while it has declined in some respects in the recent past, it remains significant. It is worth noting that the rankings of the Gender Development Index (GDI) broadly follow the same pattern as the Human Development Index (HDI) rankings, in that districts with low HDI also tend to have low GDI. However, some districts such as Haora, North 24 Parganas, Bardhaman and Koch Behar tend to have worse ranking in terms of GDI than HDI, suggesting especially acute gender discrimination. The very low "Income index" component of the GDI essentially reflects the low workforce participation of women in West Bengal, which in turn suggests a combination of greater restrictions on women's economic agency as well as social lack of recognition of women's unpaid work. Both of these suggest a major undercurrent of gender discrimination in society.

TABLE 2

**Gender Development Indices by district**

	Health Index	Income Index	Education Index	GDI	Rank
Darjeeling	0.731	0.356	0.714	0.600	2
Jalpaiguri	0.614	0.281	0.581	0.492	11
Koch Behar	0.497	0.287	0.628	0.471	13
Dinajpur	0.616	0.291	0.527	0.478	12
Malda	0.491	0.291	0.465	0.416	17
Murshidabad	0.566	0.176	0.527	0.423	16
Birbhum	0.533	0.178	0.595	0.435	14
Bardhaman	0.740	0.270	0.669	0.560	7
Nadia	0.649	0.215	0.653	0.506	9
North 24 Parganas	0.721	0.219	0.752	0.564	6
Hugli	0.764	0.259	0.720	0.581	3
Bankura	0.662	0.215	0.605	0.494	10
Purulia	0.606	0.161	0.506	0.424	15

Medinipur	0.683	0.323	0.728	0.578	4
Haora	0.773	0.194	0.742	0.570	5
Kolkata	0.824	0.320	0.783	0.642	1
South 24 Parganas	0.705	0.192	0.666	0.521	8
<b>West Bengal</b>	<b>0.697</b>	<b>0.270</b>	<b>0.681</b>	<b>0.549</b>	

Source: West-Bengal Human Development Report, 2004

Women in Kolkata have always participated in the vibrant political and cultural life of the city even as they do now. And they continue to make their mark in all spheres of economic activity. In Kolkata women are to be found in services and professions, as entrepreneurs and NGO activists, as industrial labour and home-based workers. If we look at the working women of Kolkata the percentage of women has declined and most of them belong to low income group. (West Bengal Human Development Report,2004). Pradeep Chhibber seems to emphasise that if women are confined in home, they are less active in politics. However, a contradictory view is observed in the empirical study of slum dwellers by Anirban Mondal and Gitanjali Hajra (IJRC, 2012) that women's autonomy depends not only on economic empowerment and education but also on social organisation, kinship and marriage. Sometimes role of individual decision making decreases and family decisions take a major role.(Mumtaz,1982).Sarit K. Bhowmik in his article on women hawkers of some big Indian cities including Kolkata find that due to lack of space, harassment by the police etc, women have become politically apathetic. Again, in some cities women hawkers being members of some secondary groups (like SEWA) get protection and hence become politically active. (NASVI, 2011).

In light of the above facts, South Kolkata has been the main focus of research. South Kolkata has been selected due to its rapid urbanisation, its geographical location and other certain characteristics such as employment status and wide spread formal retail chain and street trading among all other regions of Kolkata. From the formal sector women in the teaching profession (school and college) and women working in private and public sector banks have been selected and from the informal sector domestic workers and street vendors have been selected. The respondents were chosen on the basis of random sampling from selected wards having the desired population. To run the research the author has used an empirical method of survey (structured interviews with the respondents and sometimes also informal interviews, talks and discussions with them and members of their families). Total 1000 working women (500 in the formal and 500 in the informal sectors) have been interviewed. Government reports and various other research publications constitute her secondary material. Relevant books and articles in journals have also been consulted.

**Table 3: Total Sample Chosen from each Study Area**

Name of the places.	Total sample chosen.			
	Street Vendors	Domestic Workers	Teachers	Bank Employees
Gariahat	35	30	40	35
Jadavpur	40	30	40	30
Bhawanipur	40	35	35	30
Park Circus	35	40	30	35
Rasbehari	30	35	30	40
Tollygunge	30	40	30	40
Behala	40	40	45	40

Total: 100	250	250	250	250
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As per the 2011 census report, only 26% of India's women work as compared to 53% of men. As regards religion-wise workforce participation, among Hindus there are 27% working women while it is 31% Christians and 33% for Buddhists. Women's participation is just 15% for Muslims and Sikhs and even lower at 12% among Jains. Women work participation is highest among tribal communities though mainly in the unorganised sector characterised by low income, harassment at the workplace and absence of job security. A quick look at the sample distribution of the working women shows the reflection of the all India figure. The women belonging to the Hindu community comprise the majority **93.80%** in organised and **93%** among the unorganised sector. (Table 4) The percentage of working women among other religion is very low. Only **4.80%** of Muslim women work in the organised sector while about **7%** are unorganised workers engaged in low-paid jobs. Among women belonging to the Christian community only **1%** works in the organised sector.

TABLE-1: RELIGION

Religion	Number		Percentage	
	ORG	UNORG	ORG	UNORG
Hindu	469	465	93.80%	93.00%
Islam	24	35	4.80%	7.00%
Christian	5	0	1.00%	0.00%
Other	2	0	0.40%	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

In terms of caste (Table 5) about **88.40%** women in the organised sector and **79.60%** in the unorganised sector belong to the general caste. A total of only **11.6%** (**8.40%** of SCs, **0.20%** STs and **1.80%** OBCs and others **1.20%**) work in the salaried jobs compared to **20.4%** (**15.40%** SCs, **0.80%** STs and **3.40%** OBCs and others **0.80%**) in the unorganised sector. This figure reinstates the fact that not much has improved in terms of GDP as evident in the Human Development Report of West- Bengal 2004.

TABLE 5

CASTE

Caste	Number		Percentage	
	ORG	UNORG	ORG	UNORG
Sc	42	77	8.40%	15.40%
ST	1	4	0.20%	0.80%
OBC	9	17	1.80%	3.40%
General	442	398	88.40%	79.60%
Other	6	4	1.20%	0.80%
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## POWER OF DECISION-MAKING OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY

Women today are in a much better position in terms of their opportunity to work. They control their own income and do contribute to the economic needs of the family when required. In case of organised sector about **96.04%** bank employees and **91.46%** teachers and contribute their own income to family expenditure. This is also true in the unorganised sector where **86.55%** street vendors and **94.67%** of domestic workers contribute to family income (Table 6)

<b>Table:- 6: Percentage of Relation between Occupation and the respondents contribution to family expenditure</b>			
<b>FORMAL SECTOR</b>		<b>INFORMAL SECTOR</b>	
Type of Occupation	Women contribution to Family Expenditure ( % )	Type of Occupation	Women contribution to Family Expenditure ( % )
<b>Bank Employees</b>	96.04	<b>Street Vendors</b>	86.55
<b>Teachers</b>	91.46	<b>Domestic workers</b>	94.67

In the organised sector whereas only **34.85%** are directly involved in taking decisions on their own income, investment and other areas. In the unorganised sector 44% actually have a hold on their own income. When it comes to making investments, they often leave it to their husbands to take decisions and invest on their behalf (**29%** of women in the organised sector depend on their husband as regards **36.60%** women in the unorganised sector.). It has also been observed that in matters of giving advice the women members of the family are not given due respect as chart 4 shows. Among the 1000 women interviewed only **4.80%** ( in the organised sector) and **4.20%** (in the unorganised sector) provide advice in matters of investment and it was remarked by many that they had to struggle very hard to achieve this status. Thus an elevation in the occupational paradigm does not necessarily improve her power of choice.(**Table 7**).

<b>(TABLE 7) DECISION-MAKING POWER OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY</b>			
<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>Take decision on their own investment /expenditure</b>	<b>Depend on husband or family members in investment</b>	<b>Provide advice in matters of investment</b>
<b>INFORMAL</b>	34.85%	36.60%	4.80%
<b>FORMAL</b>	44%	29%	4.20%

An interesting result was seen when the researcher interviewed the female members of the respondent’s families. Again just by being educated does not give women right to take decisions on their own. They have to struggle a lot in achieving this. They are not consulted at home regarding major or even minor decisions regarding education of their children, their private tuitions etc..**63.22%** having higher secondary education, **39.53%** graduates and **24.18%** having post graduate degree had to struggle with the male members of the family regarding decisions on family expenditure. In case of unorganised sector **34.02%** having secondary education, **50%** having higher secondary education, **10.49%** graduates (**Table 8**).

**Table:- 8:Percentage of Relation between Education to Role in Decision making in the family**

	<b>FORMAL</b>	<b>INFORMAL</b>
Educational Qualification Level	Women take Decision making in the family and to struggle with male members of the family ( %	Women take Decision making in the family and to struggle with male members of the family ( % )
<b>SECONDARY</b>	N.A	34.02
<b>HIGHER-SECONDARY</b>	63.22	50
<b>GRADUATE</b>	39.53	10.49
<b>POST-GRADUATE</b>	24.18	N.A

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND PARTISAN PREFERENCE.**

As regards their cognitive orientation, a clear difference between the organised and the unorganised sector is revealed. At the outset the respondents (both organised and unorganised) were able to identify the symbols and names of the political parties that are presently in power in both at the centre and the states They are also able to recognise and name the persons at the helm of politics earlier and present.(TABLE 9)

**SAMPLE REPRESENTATION OF THE DATA COLLECTED**

Question no	Description	Number		Percentage	
		FORMAL	INFORMAL	FORMAL	INFORMAL
<b>Block – A-Political socialisation and cognitive orientation(giving correct answer)</b>					
1	Political Party in power of WB	475	380	95.00%	76.00%
2	Year of Political Party in power	448	335	89.60%	67.00%
3	Political Party in power of Centre	449	281	89.80%	56.20%
4	Political Party was in power just before	425	240	85.00%	48.00%
5	Present Chief-minister of WB	490	440	98.00%	88.00%
6	Chief-minister was just before	457	298	91.40%	59.60%
7	Present Prime Minister	474	304	94.80%	60.80%
8	Political Party he belong to	413	212	82.60%	42.40%
9	Prime Minister just before the present one	426	177	85.20%	35.40%
10	Province he belong to	315	133	63.00%	26.60%
11	Present President	446	191	89.20%	38.20%
12	Province he belong to	376	110	75.20%	22.00%

All the women interviewed from both the sectors said that they read the newspaper and watch television or listen to the radio programmes but most of these are entertainment programmes. Only **21.4%** women

in the unorganised sector particularly the street vendors and **56%** women from the organised sector watch political news and discussions. 208 women in the organised and 203 women in the unorganised chat regularly with their friends and neighbours but national and international politics is seldom discussed in these chats.**49.38%** women in the unorganised and among them only **94(46.30%)** discuss about political personalities. In contrast **59.13%** women in the organised sector discuss about political matters and **160(76.92%)** discuss about political personalities. They only go through political pamphlets and manifestos which are distributed by the political cadres during elections or during leisure time at night occasionally. Also they are not encouraged by their husbands and other members of the family to engage in political activities.(**TABLE 10**) Kamini B. Dashora (2013) feels that working women are in a paradoxical situation; when a family suffers economically, people think women should go out to work, yet at the same time her participation in societal practices or politics is viewed as slightly inappropriate, subtly wrong and definitely dangerous to their chastity and womanly virtues.

**TABLE 10**

Questions	FORMAL		INFORMAL	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
1.Do you read the newspaper?	180	320	440	60
a) Anandabazaar Patrika	60		100	
b) Bartaman	40		80	
c) Pratidin	25		30	
d) Aajkal	25		40	
e) Ei Samay	10		40	
f) Sanmarg	20		0	
g) The Telegraph	0		80	
h) Times of India	0		70	
2.Watch Television	310	190	440	60
3.Watch Political news and discussions	107	393	280	220
4.Listen to the radio	200	300	260	240
5.	203(Total)		208(Total)	
A. Chat with Friends and medium				
a) Directly	174		170	
b) Landphone	10		05	
c) Mobile Phone	19		33	
B. Discuss National and International Politics during chats	84	118	123	85
C.Any political personality	94	109	160	48

discussed in these chats?				
6.Read political pamphlets	103	397	210	290
a) During elections.	33		80	
b) through subscriptions	38		90	
c) Leisure	32		40	

If we consider personal or individual participation in political activities like participation in meetings or collection of subscriptions, participation in campaigns etc it was observed that occupation holds a key factor in decision. In the organised sector among bank employees the percentage is dismally low where only 1.98% engage in political meetings. The picture is not glaring in case of teachers where only 4.77% participate in meetings, 4.02% participate in political campaigns, 4.27% subscribe to political parties and 3.52% are engaged as political workers and 3.77% are engaged in other political activities. Contrary to this picture we find a considerable increase in political activities among the unorganised sectors. Among street vendors,14.20% attend political meetings,22.52% participate in political campaigns in support of their leaders, 12.52% collect subscriptions on their behalf and about 23% are seripusly engaged in other activities. This is also true in case of domestic workers where 23.37% go to political meetings, 21.78% participate in political campaigns,12.07% collect subscriptions and 26% in other activities. For women in the unorganised sectors ( like street vendors, domestic worker.), their trade is totally dependent on local party leaders right from getting trade licence, space for business and protection from local goons. Hence they cannot afford to remain silent on supporting a particular political party especially the party in power even against their own wish in order to get their job done. Hence there is a sharp increase in case of women in the unorganised sector in terms of their participation (**TABLE 11**)

**Table:- 11:Percentage of Relation between Occupation and Political Participation**

<b>FORMAL SECTOR</b>					
<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>Political Meetings</b>	<b>Political Campaigns</b>	<b>Subscribing to any Political party</b>	<b>Collection of Subscription</b>	<b>Any other activity</b>
<b>Bank Employees</b>	1.98	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
<b>Teachers</b>	4.77	4.02	4.27	3.52	3.77
<b>INFORMAL SECTOR</b>					
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Political Meetings</b>	<b>Political Campaigns</b>	<b>Subscribing to any Political party</b>	<b>Collection of Subscription</b>	<b>Any other activity</b>
<b>Street vendors</b>	14.20	22.52	12.52	2.52	23
<b>Domestic workers</b>	23.37	21.78	12.07	1.78	26

For women in the informal sectors (like street vendors, domestic worker.), their trade is totally dependent on local party leaders right from getting trade licence, space for business and protection from local goons. Hence they cannot afford to remain silent on supporting a particular political party especially the party in power even against their own wish in order to get their job done. Hence there is a sharp increase in case of self- employed women in the unorganised sector in terms of their participation.

### PARTISAN PREFERENCE :

In general it is observed that women in both the organised and in the unorganised sector have changed their partisan preference at least once or more than once in voting and most of them changed in 2011 after the change of left rule in the city of Kolkata (41.20% women in the organised and 43.40% in the unorganised sector). The interesting factor noted here is that here also the women lack the decision making power themselves and are forced to vote either after consultation with their husbands, family members and even influential persons in the locality. 47.80% women in the organised sector consult their husbands and family members before voting to that of 63.80% in the unorganised sector. 16.40% women in the organised sector changed their partisan preference after this consultation to that of 30.40% in case of unorganised class. This shows that women rarely have a voice of their own in terms of voting behaviour. (TABLE 12)

TABLE 12

(Political Activism and Partisan Preference)		FORMA L	INFORMA L	FORMAL	INFORMA L
1	Cast Vote to same political party since last 25years	180	184	36.00%	36.80%
2	Changed partisan preference after end left rule	206	217	41.20%	43.40%
3	Loyal to party solved problem before 2011	165	168	33.00%	33.60%
4	Consult with family to cast vote	239	319	47.80%	63.80%
5	Change voting behaviour after discussion	82	152	16.40%	30.40%

It seems that education and occupation play an important role in every area of participation be it family, workplace and politics. Women having secondary qualification over 54.24% in the organised sector and 35.06% in the unorganised vote as per individual decision but 9.37% women in the organised sector and 13.37% in the unorganised sector change their decision after consultation with their family while 15.62% in the organised and 13.33% in the unorganised do not change even after consultation with their family members. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> level i.e. women having higher- secondary qualification over 46.83% in the organised sector and 15.91% in the unorganised vote as per individual decision but only 6.78% women in the organised sector change their decision after consultation with their family. No one in the unorganised class change their decision. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> level, i.e. women having graduate degree over 42.79% in the organised sector and 22.45% in the unorganised vote as per individual decision but 6.52% women in the organised sector change their decision and 18.48% do not change. 10.36% in the unorganised do not change their decision in voting even after consultation with their family members. In the last category i.e. women possessing post graduate degree 39.56% in the organised sector vote as per individual decision but 5.56% change their voting preference and 13.89% did not. Thus it is clearly proved that inspite of education familial decision sometimes usurps individual decision making even in the voting process. (Table 13).

Table:- 13: Percentage of Relation between Education and individual decision in case of voting			
FORMAL SECTOR			
Educational Qualification Level	Women take the self decision	She changes her decision	She does not change her decision
Secondary	54.24	9.37	15.62
Higher secondary	46.83	6.78	13.56

<b>Graduate</b>	42.79	6.52	18.48
<b>Post-graduate</b>	39.56	5.56	13.89

**Table:- 13: Percentage of Realation between Education and individual decision in case of voting**

### INFORMAL SECTOR

Educational Qualification Level	Women take the self decision	She changes her decision	She does not change her decision
<b>Secondary</b>	35.06	10.37	13.33
<b>Higher secondary</b>	15.91	NIL	14.29
<b>Graduate</b>	22.45	NIL	10.36
<b>Post-graduate</b>	NIL	NIL	NIL

As regards **occupational level** we observe the following data (**TABLE 14**)

Voting Pattern	No of Women			
	FORMAL		INFORMAL	
	Bank employees	Teachers	Street vendors	Domestic workers
Consult with family members	200	140	260	355
Consult with outside members	230	120	230	300
Changed their preference after consultation	Influenced	Influenced	Influenced	Influenced
	160	100	200	280

Hence education and employment opportunities cannot change the outlook of the society and pave the way for women empowerment. One needs a total transformation of the mindset of the people particularly the male members of the family. This has resulted in the political apathy even among the educated working women. Women are valuable constituents in the voting process. Consequently, a renewed vigour to monopolize the votes of women has been made by front-running candidates. While they have brought the women's question onto the national political landscape, they have not addressed the vast array of political and social interests that concern Indian women. Instead, they have defined women's empowerment through a narrow baseline of safety, security, and education while dismissing other salient and more politically controversial areas of much needed reform. For instance, in India family laws are called personal laws. They relate to the sphere of personal relations but they are also person-specific. As a result family laws are codified separately for four communities. As a secular state, India maintains these laws alongside secular laws, civil and criminal all of which are administered by the same judicial apparatus. This has led to the 'politicization of the personal laws' (Sen Samita).. Political parties have been unwilling to admit women, allow them a voice in policy formation or give them opportunities for leadership positions. Ironically, Leftist and self-styled progressive parties are also not free from this dilemma.

Studies show that women newly entering the political arena benefit from capacity building and support. This has been the case in South Africa, where civic groups and women organisations have been able to repel laws regarding sanitation and water transport system, war stricken Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2006 where women came together and worked collectively and became leaders in their own right developing,

coordinating and launching advocacy initiatives at the local level including a successful effort to amend municipal laws to better female workers. Therefore, 'Partnership Building' can help in good governance. In India for example, in June 2000, an agreement was signed for the rehabilitation of 3000 pavement dwellers in Mumbai between a landowner construction company, the slum rehabilitation authority (SRA), the Mumbai municipal compile a list of households and help them to relocate and register their societies and cooperatives. This World Bank survey demonstrates that the greater women participate in public life, the less is public sector corruption. (Advancing Gender Equality: World Bank since Beijing, 2000).The research project undertaken by Chattopadhyay and Duflo in 2004 over 495 villages in Birbhum district show that women elected as leaders under the reservation policy invest more in the public goods closely linked to women's concerns. The role of self dependent group may be important in the Gram Unnayan Samiti in West Bengal. At present, there are about 3 lakh groups in the state. 36 lakh families are involved with it. 1 crore 80 lakh people are attached with this activities. Besides NGOs, the State Government has extended its hands for the development of rural women.

**CONCLUSION:** It is patriarchal and regressive practices -- not women's lack of effort -- that prevents Indian women from being equal counterparts to men. Moreover, by focusing on the concept of strength, there is a rhetorical shift in the political agenda for reform in which women are asked to be stronger and bear the burden of their empowerment. This rhetoric hinders the development of women and promotes an ethos of perseverance and resilience rather than equity. In the end it would only be apt to conclude with the words of Annie Marie Goetz UNIFEM adviser on Governance, Peace and Security, "Women's effectiveness at promoting women's rights once in public office, however, is dependent upon many other factors besides their numbers. Institutional changes are needed in civil society, the media, political parties, legislatures and the judicial system in order to support women's policy agendas and to make the transition from policy to practice".

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