

Gendering Representative Democracy: Role of Women Legislators in Odisha Legislative Assembly

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Abstract

Like other social and ethnic groups, women also are categorized as a vulnerable group, which are socially, politically and, economically marginalized in society. In this context of human society, balanced women's participation in decision-making requires the effective redistribution of power. This essentially gears up quality intervention and provides a promising path to move forward towards achieving gender justice. Against this backdrop, this article explores the performance of the woman legislature in the Odisha Legislative Assembly and their involvement in the various assembly debates during the session. It also highlights their socio-political background and political journey. Further, this article reached the conclusion that women not necessarily stand for women, rather as a legislature works for all in their constituency. Still, women's involvement in politics can stand for the interest of their community in a better way.

Key Words: Gender, Equality, Political Representative, Capability, Decision making.

Introduction

Democracy is a form of government, which embraces the value of political equality. This implies that every adult citizen is a part of the political community, is equally capable, and has a stake in the process of collective decision making which protects their lives in all respects. So, it can be said that it is based on the idea of the equal moral worth of all individuals and against any kind of political discrimination/exclusion, to any individual. (Shrinivasan, 2013). However, the diverse composition of the state and the ever-rising population emerges as a stumbling block and prohibits every single citizen from directly participating in the decision-making process. This creates problems in adopting a kind of representative form of democracy where every group is able to represent their respective group interests. Like other social and ethnic groups, women also are categorized as a vulnerable group, which are socially, politically and, economically marginalized in society. (Singer,2007).

Furthermore, in the changing context of human society, balanced women's participation in decision-making requires the effective redistribution of power. This essentially gears up quality intervention and provides a promising path to move forward towards achieving gender justice. The World Feminist Movement arrives at the conclusion that women's participation in the political decision-making process with a firm standpoint is most necessary. Changing the worldview, seeing it through a balanced, just, and sensitive gendered point of view is a must. The main objective of the feminist standpoint is to bring the knowledge, skill, and life experiences of the marginalized, oppressed and subordinated in order to achieve an egalitarian society. This demands the need to uproot the oppressive socio-cultural norms and practices, which are deeply rooted in

patriarchal values (Pandey, 2016, p.203). Therefore, women's participation in the political process is fundamental and necessary in order to strengthen the process of social transformation and to uphold the dignity and justice of every individual. However, in recent years, feminist research on the representation of women paid considerable attention to the link between descriptive and substantive political representation. Descriptive representation of women in the Assembly as well as in the Cabinet is necessary but not sufficient to achieve women-friendly outcomes. Simply, the participation of a greater number of women within the party and house is not sufficient but it is women's political activism that supplements women's executive presence in the assembly, which would enable constructive transformation. Gendering legislatures is a desirable end in itself but is also seen to be a means by which 'women's interests can become more visibly represented. Yet, women's position within the political bodies is 'acceptable' or 'normal', but the active participation and performance of women politicians are yet not completely accepted. (Cuttrin, 2008, p. 490).

The Odisha Experience in Women Representation

The main focus of this section is to develop clarity and highlight the performance of women in the legislature of Odisha and the extent of their involvement in the various assembly debates during the session. In order to achieve this clarity, data was collected from both primary and secondary sources mainly from the Assembly archives, Television Reports, Newspapers, and one-to-one interviews with the women members, who emerged victorious in the 2009 and 2014 State Assembly elections. However, before dealing with the big debate on the participation of women in the state legislative assembly, it is very important to know their diverse socio-political backgrounds.

An Account of the Socio-Political background of the Women Members in Odisha Legislative Assembly

The following section gives an account of various women Assembly members. It highlights the distinct social and economic background from which they hail. Based on the one-on-one interviews, and secondary sources, it is a compilation that facilitates in formulating a general trend observant in the political participation of women in the state of Odisha. The general understanding of women in the field of politics is seen as an influence of familial political background. While acknowledging this trend, the following accounts highlight several additional factors and driving forces that have acted as a catalyst in allowing participation. Furthermore, the following cases are dealt with women members who elected to the Odisha Legislative Assembly in the 2009 and 2014 elections.

Sarojini Hembram, an important women political figure of BJD since the year 2009 born into a Schedule Tribe family but her father was actively involved in the field of politics and an influential leader in his time. She holds a Master's degree in music from Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. On 19.05.2009 she left her government job and joined politics. Later, she became the MLA of the Bangiriposi constituency, where she successfully completed her term. Hembram is associated with a number of social and cultural organizations. During her term, she had held different positions in the assembly. From 2010-11, she was a member of the Tribal Advisory Committees on women and child welfare, environment and pollution; subcommittee on ammines of members; state-level high power vigilance and monitoring committee; member of the standing

committee on health; state-level selection committee, Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Odisha; and also served as the minister of the state department of textiles handloom and handicraft (independent charge). Hembram's father Chaitanya Prasad Majhi was a strong political leader, served three times as an MLA of Odisha. She has also served as a Member of Rajya Sabha from Odisha as a Congress candidate from 1972 to 1978 and Deputy Minister for Petroleum and Chemicals in the Union from 1998 to 2000. However, one of the notable factors, in this case, is that she had the advantage of having ready access to a political platform before joining state politics. (naveenpatnaik.com,2009)

Pramila Mallick is an experienced political leader representing the Biju Janata Dal (BJD). Her educational qualification is Bachelor in Arts. Since her student days, she was involved and actively participated in several social and political activities. From the year 2000, she has been repeatedly elected as a member of the Odisha Legislative Assembly from Binjharpur constituency, Jajpur. She comes from a Schedule Caste family, with a lower middle-class economic background. During an interview with her, she mentioned that her special interest in social activities and politics brought her into politics. Still, she has been interested to learn from various political ideologies and relentlessly works for the development and upliftment of the weaker sections of the society. She has also served as the cabinet minister for Women and Child Welfare Development but, was dismissed from the ministry for her involvement in the Dal scam. Another Woman figure of Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Anjali Behera was elected as a member of the legislative assembly from Hindol constituency in the year 2009, but dismissed from the Ministry of Women and Child development as well as from the party for the involvement with Pyarimohan Mahapatra.¹ She has completed her Bachelor degree in Arts from Utkal University. In her interview, she mentioned her interest in social work and in mobilizing the downtrodden students in favor of education. She belongs to a Scheduled Caste, politically well-connected family. Her father Shri Laxmidhar Nayak was thrice elected as a member of the Odisha legislative assembly and was also the Minister of State (MoS) for Health and Family Welfare. (Times of India,2013)

Sipra Mallick is an intellectual and a prominent political figure of the Biju Janata Dal, elected in 2009 as a member of the State Legislative Assembly from the Kendrapada Constituency. She has a Master's degree in English, an L.L.B degree, M. Phil in D.C.A and Ph. D in Sanskrit. She has experience in teaching as she worked as a lecturer at Ravenshaw University, Cuttack. But her interest in politics drove her to quit teaching. She also belongs to a middle-class, Schedule Caste family. However, she had no advantage of a family political background but it was solely her personal interest in politics that inspired her to join the field. In pursuance of Section-16 of National food security Act, 2013, Rules- 3, 4 and 5 of Odisha State Food Commission Rules 2016, Government, and on the recommendation of the search committee constituted for the purpose, One Chairperson and two members were appointed, including Dr. Sipra Mallik, the former MLA of Kendrapada. (OFSC Memo,2016) V. Sugnana Kumari Deo, a prominent and the senior-most women icon of Biju Janata Dal, and has been consistent in achieving great success as she has won ten times and remains

¹ Pyarimohan Mahapatra, was a famous politician of Biju Janata Dal, also known as Chanakya of Odisha politics tried to dethrone Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in 2012 when he was in London. However, including Anjali Behera, a legislature of his party Mahapatra gathered some M.L.A and tried to become a chief minister of Odisha. Later with Pyarimohan and Anjali Behera, those who involved with this conspiracy were dismissed from the party.

the member of the Odisha Legislative Assembly born in a Royal family. She has done her M.A in Social Work, holds a Diploma in Stenography, Homeopathy and Interior decoration. She served as the Member Senate of Berhampur University from 1985 to 1986, was the President of the Regional Co-operative Marketing society, Khollikote, and the Ex-President of Ganjam District, Janata Dal. She also took oath as the Protem Speaker of the Assembly. She is the only woman from Odisha who won ten times and has served as a member of the house. She continues to remain very active in the field of Odisha politics. She is the wife of Purna Chandra Mardaraj Deo and daughter-in-law of Ramchandra Mardaraj of the famous Khallikote royal family. (The Economic Times, 2014; Patnaik, 2017)

Usha Devi is an influential woman political leader, who was elected five times as a member of Odisha Legislative Assembly from Chikiti Constituency, Berhampur since the year 1990. She did her Bachelors in Journalism along with some additional courses, which include; Stenography, Diploma in Flower Arrangement, and Interior Decoration. Before joining politics, she was a homemaker. However, she has been a cabinet minister from 10/05/2011 onwards representing the B.J.D. She has held the portfolio of the Minister for Textile and Handloom, Minister for Science and Technology from 10/05/2011 to 10/02/2012; Minister for Planning and Coordination & Minister, Minister for Handlooms, Textiles, and Handicraft from 10/02/2012 to 02/08/2012; and from 02/08/2012 to 06/05/2017. She had taken the charge of the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Again on 21/05/2014, she held the position of the Minister for Planning and Coordination. She continues as the Minister for Planning and Convergence, Skill Development, and Technical Education. Further, she has been a member of various committees from 2000 to 2013, such as the member of House committee on Linguistic Minorities, House Committee on Women and Child Welfare, Library Committee, House Committee on Environment, Committee on Paper laid on the Table, Standing Committee on Energy, Revenue and Exercise (10). Her special interest to help the distressed and marginalized people motivated her to join politics. (Kalinga TV, 2017)

In 2009, Mamta Madhi was elected as a member of the Odisha Legislative Assembly from Chitrakonda Constituency, Malkangiri as a member of the Indian National Congress. She came from a non-political tribal family in Malkangiri. She has completed her B.Sc in Home Science from OUAT, Bhubaneswar. Further, she has already worked as the Sub-editor (English) Directorate of Extension Ministry of Agriculture, New Delhi from the year 1995 to 2000 and Demonstrator (Home Science) Government Women's College, Jaypore, Odisha from 1990 to 1995. However, Madhi was also a member of various committees in the Odisha Legislative Assembly during the same period. Further, though she belonged to a tribal family, she became a leading woman member of the Odisha Legislative Assembly. (Naveenpatnaik.com, 2009) Another MLA Snehagini Churia has held the portfolio as the state minister for Handlooms, Textiles, and Handicrafts from 21/05/ 2014 during the Naveen Patnaik government. Though Churia does not come from any political family, her affection towards politics motivated her to join this field. She did her Master's from Sambalpur University and B.Ed from "Parsuram Mishra Institute of Advanced Studies in Education", Sambalpur. (naveenpatnaik.com, 2014) In 2015, a farmer from the Bhadrak district has alleged that he had been kidnapped and kept confined in the residence of Handloom and Textile Minister to prevent him from taking part in the

cooperative election. He was faced threat to his life and compelled to send the petition to the district police chief through registered post. Although, Chhuria refused the allegation and ready for any inquiry the Opposition party made this issue a special figure in the Assembly and urged for a direct reply from the government.

Radharani Panda is the only woman candidate from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and became a member of the Odisha Legislative Assembly in the year 2014. Smt. Panda is a lawyer and has always remained in the limelight grabbing Media attention. From the very beginning, she has been working as a woman activist and an active political leader. She has emerged as a prominent leader, leading the interests of the labour class and the common people. Many a time she has been seen as a supporter of the strike and demands for the development of western Odisha. Sometimes she was seen standing on the bench and raising slogans inside the Assembly, whenever the government failed to listen to the demands of her party. Since her student life, she has been involved in various political activities but continued to although face many obstacles. In her interview with Kanak T.V, she mentioned that as a woman, it was very difficult to enter into the field of politics. Women are subjected to criticism and some have also become the victims of the misbehavior by some male colleagues in the Assembly. Raseswari Panigrahi, Member of Odisha Legislative Assembly was elected from Sambalpur constituency as the member representing Biju Janata Dal. Panigrahi is an Obstetrician and Gynecologist by profession. She has visited several countries as a visiting professor and has attended several medical conferences. She has involved in various social activities like organizing health camps in rural areas. Having a novel profession, she did her work for the development of the weaker section of society. (naveenpatnaik.com,2014)

Seemarani Nayak was elected as the M.L.A of the Hindol constituency, as serves as a member of Biju Janata Dal. Smt. Nayak also comes from a Scheduled Caste family. Her educational qualification is matriculation. Recently, she came under the limelight and received a lot of criticism as she was exposed in front of a camera while negotiating with a businessman and demanding 40 Crore rupees for clearing the N.O.C. in her constituency. (Kanak News,2017) After the brutal murder of her husband Abhimanyu Sahu, a leader of the Biju Janata Dal, Tukuni Sahu entered into the field of politics in the year 2013. Further, with the humble co-operation of her party members and the staunch supporters of her husband, she contested the 2014 Odisha Assembly Election and won as a member of Odisha Vidhan Sabha from Titlagarh constituency. She holds a graduate degree. Before entering into politics, she was working with a consultancy firm. During her speeches, she many times mentioned that she stands for her husband and to fulfill his vision for the district of Titllagarh. (naveenpatnaik.com,2014) Another member, Rajashree Mallick is a prominent women figure of the Biju Janata Dal from Tritol constituency, Jagatsinghpur. In 2014, she came to the assembly as a member of the house representing her constituency. After completing her medical degree, she had worked in some medical colleges and in the early 1990s, she came forward for social service. In one of her T.V interviews with Kanak News, she described that her willingness for serving society, which could only be possibly achieved through politics in an effective way, rather than her own profession. In 2014 she got an opportunity to contest the

Assembly election as the candidate of Biju Janata Dal and was elected as a member of the Odisha Legislative Assembly. (naveenpatnaik.com,2014)

Nandini Devi has elected as the Member of the Odisha Legislative Assembly in 2014 from the Sanakhemundi constituency, Ganjam. She has completed her seventh from Laxmi Junior High School Octengang, Uttar Pradesh in the year 1981. Basanti Mallick from Biju Janata Dal won as a member of from Monona constituency, Gajapati in the 2014 Assembly election. She belongs to a Scheduled Tribe family. Smt. Mallick's educational qualification is under graduation. However, she has completed her +2 from Choudwar college, Choudwar, Cuttack in the science stream in 1995. Before coming to the Assembly, she was very active in local politics. She has also served as the Chairperson of the Mohana block. These political and social activities pave the way for her political career in state politics and she became the legislature of the Odisha Legislative Assembly. (naveenpatnaik.com,2014) The above profile of the women MLAs of the Odisha Legislative Assembly makes a clear picture of their socio, economic and political background. This background shows that most of the women came from a very well-known family that higher educated or wealthy or occupied powerful positions in state politics as well as in local politics. There is a very little number of women, who came to this area from their struggle.

Politics as a Profession an Ongoing Challenge for Women

There is growing recognition of the capacity and talents of women and their leadership in the world. Though there is a significantly lower political representation of women in the political offices. While the global average for women in the parliament stands at 22.4%, India is at 103rd place out of 140 countries with a mere 12% representation and within Asia, it occupied 13th position out of 18 countries. (Rao,2015) Further, there is above 1/3 reservation in Panchayati Raj institutions in India, but the women's reservation bill in the Parliament and State Assembly is still pending hence continuing the fight for recognition. (PIB,2010) However, the full and equal participation of women in public life is essential for building a sustainable, strong, and vibrant democracy. Additionally, the meaningful and constructive participation of women in local, national, global, and community leadership has an important focus on global development policy. Still, the participation of women in politics remains a problematic area and remains a pressing question to be addressed immediately. Another question which follows this is the need for more women involved in politics as well as the political offices. Why is it necessary? In what ways can it contribute to the betterment of society, and enable the strengthening of democracy?

There are many studies that prove that women's involvement in politics brings a positive sign for the nation. Kofi Annan noted, "*Study after study has taught us, there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity or to reduce child maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing chances of education for the next generation.*" (Fourth World Conference on Women and Comamoto,2006, p.2)

Madeleine Albright adds that the world is wasting a precious resource in the dramatic underrepresentation of women in a leadership position, often resulting in the exclusion of women's talents and skills in political life. To her "Development without democracy is improbable and Democracy without women is impossible. Lovenduski puts the argument of Phillips that the women's political representation, "On the surface the underrepresentation of women in legislatures, undermines the democratic legitimacy and stifles the presence of diverse interests in the legislative process. (NDI; Lovenduski,2005, p.141)

Moreover, she defends Phillips by arguing that she made her argument on the basis of sharing a common woman experience with the voters that will be helpful for the policy-making process and brings women favorable policies. Making the case for positive action to equalize the representation of Women and Men, she again quoted the argument of Phillips that "Women's experiences couldn't be addressed in a politics dominated by men". Thought the Presence theory of Anne Phillips is relevant to address the problems of all section of the society, need a little empirical test. She doesn't engage the empirical question of how many women are necessary for 'presence' to be meaningful. (Lovenduski,2005, p.141-144) There are huge appeals on what difference the women are making if they will not do any different than why they should be selected on the basis of gender. She also quoted Drude Dahlerup's research where Drude has identified a number of areas in which women legislators could make a difference and she itemized the differences they thought they had made. Her research predates the development of the presence theory, which includes how changes occur. However, the increase in the number of women in the house can bring changes in the institutional culture, the agenda (output), and the styles and procedures of the legislature. In fact, during her study of the British parliament Lovenduski assess the evidence that women politicians made a difference.

However, if we look at the 2009 and 2014 Assembly results, there were only 15 women who were able to win the seats and become members of the state assembly. Among them, three of them were repeatedly elected to the house. (Election Commission of India, 2009,2014) But despite the low representation of the women members in the house, it's necessary to examine their political capabilities. Capability here is synonymous with effective participation and the ability to influence policymaking in favor of women and the overall betterment of their constituencies. This however raises another question in this path of progress. Have the members received enough opportunity in the field of politics to harness their capacity? In order to resolve this puzzle, this work takes the assistance of personal and T.V interviews of few women representatives in the legislature of Odisha Legislative Assembly. While certain instances highlight their struggle from their student career, others faced many more social obstacles to get a ticket for the house. Their gender identity has been a prominent cause for facing many criticisms from society and still facing restriction within and outside the family.

During one of her interviews with the Kanak News channel, Radharani Panda, a woman member from Opposition party Bharatiya Janata Dal, reveals her struggle to sustain herself in the field of politics. She said that her boldness, strict attitude towards male politicians, and endless interest in politics give her the strength to never quit her aim. While expressing her past experiences, she became speechless and again continued her story to the interviewer. She said that being a woman it is very difficult to sustain in politics because she was

and remains subjected to various criticisms on several grounds and these emerge as common limitations in every rigid and dominant patriarchal society which expects a woman to behave according to the whims and fancies of the menfolk. Again, while describing the past experiences; she stated that the attitudes of some male politicians towards the girls were very bad and offensive. Particularly, unmarried women face so multiple problems during political meetings. The male persons treated them as a subject of entertainment. She mentioned that she has been able to confront the dominant and oppressive behavior of the male representatives for her bold and fierce attitude but several of her female colleagues have remained major victims of this. Therefore, marriage became a protective cover against the menfolk. However, according to her experience marriage is a kind of social security for every girl to protect her sexuality from the bad elements of society. Though she is a leading women political figure of her party and a straight forward speaker, she is sometimes criticized and mocked while being compared with the self-styled Goddess Radhe Maa for her behavior. In her interview, she confidently posits that woman have the ability to do what men cannot. (KanakNews,2016)

Another prominent woman leader of Biju Janata Dal, Rajeswaree Mallick has made her statement that though women have already shown their capability in every field, politics continues to remain an area witnessing low participation due to multiple subjections in the society. By giving an example from politics, she differentiates a female politician from a male. She states that a male politician can negotiate with the people everywhere and any time but a female politician can't do it because this could bring a negative impression for her. Further, by answering the question of the interviewer, she urges there are two main things that can change the negative attitude towards women. Firstly, the complete support of her family can be used as a boost to the development/upliftment of the women, and secondly, the self-confidence of women to achieve her aim. She mentioned that though being a woman, holding a medical degree, and active in the social and political area, she finds herself in a position when she is sometimes unable to raise her voice. (Kalinga TV discussion,2017)

On the other hand, three women members from Biju Janata Dal were repeatedly elected from their respective constituencies. V. Sugnana Kumara Deo, an 80-year women politician from B.J.D elected ten times as a member of the Odisha Legislative Assembly with the highest vote rank. Though she crossed eighty, is active in her field and in every election bit the opposite male politician. Pramila Mallick won four times from her constituency. She is also an experience women political figure of the B.J.D party. (Odisha Live News,2017) However, like Radharani Panda, she has also started her political carrier from student time. In her statement, she mentioned that before entering into politics one must go through the activities of social service. For the answer of the question women's public and private affair, she said that as a woman we shouldn't make our public and private life same. It should be a separate need to behave differently and maintain a balance between public and private life. She accepts some restrictions of the society that we will not just simply dismiss the rules of the family and society. Moreover, another prominent cabinet minister of the ruling party Usha Devi,

who continuously won five times make her statement that once you entered into politics, you must be free from any kind of interference and domination.²

Almost all women legislatures of the Odisha Legislative Assembly talked about their contributions to their constituency, although there is significant variation in terms of the scale of their inputs and the outputs. They employ different strategies to negotiate the constraints they face in delivering development to their constituent. Further, their different capabilities, experiences, access to resources influence their strategy. Women have the right as citizens to equal representation with men. Their life experiences are needed in political life for the making of family and child policies, particularly the policies for the upliftment of women. But there is a question that what should be the required parameter for women to enter into politics? About four women legislatures gave the opinion that primarily, the personal interest of a woman and opportunity are the two important factors, responsible for becoming a politician/ to join politics.³ An experienced woman legislature, who is also continuing as the president of the women wing of her party believes that the political system/politics should not be power-centric. To her, the centralization of power is always proved as a problem for independent thought and hence that will be a cause for difficulties for women's involvement in politics.⁴ Two her view woman should have an attraction for the social work or activity in that area, there should be women a favorable environment where the thoughts, and commented should be respected by other members and once she enters into politics should be more independent and freer to do her work according to her need and preferences. Especially, she mentioned the quota for women, which can be the easiest way to enter more women in politics.

However, one of them mentioned the key role of the family for the effective participation of women in the field of politics. (Kalinga TV,2017) There are several works on whether a high level of women's representation in the parliament leads to a different style of parliamentary politics. Most of them are studies in the western parliament and the result found that women add a new dimension to the policy agenda, but there is little evidence that suggests increased women's representation has influenced the policy outcomes. Lovenduski quoted Drude Dahlerup's review of Nordic parliaments where changes in the political culture did occur as a consequence of increased female culture. The recent study of Wangnerud on the attitudes and behavior of the MPs of Nordic parliaments reveals that most women considered the increased representation of women to have changed their party's position; particularly the family policy, gender equality, and social equality. (Luvenduski,2005, p.141) Different women legislature of the Odisha Legislative Assembly has different views on the question that "whether the larger participation of women in political offices can change

² I had taken personal interview of Usha Devi and Pramila Mallick at their residence, Bhubaneswar on dated 19 Oct, 2017 to know their personal experience in the area of politics but unluckily whenever I went to the residence of V. Sugnana kumara Deo, I didn't find her. However, these three women legislatures have the record of continues victory in Odisha Assembly election.

³ I had taken this source from the personal interview of Pramila Mallick on 19th Oct and three TV interviews of Rajashree Mallick (Kalinga News Discussion on March 4,2017; Radharani Panda (Kanak News on 7May, 2016) and Snehangini Chhuria (Odisha TV on 16 Dec. 2016).

⁴ This data came out from personal interview of Usha Devi on dated 19th Oct. 2017.

the nature of party politics”? One women cabinet minister and the ex-minister agreed that a greater women's participation in politics can change the Institutional hierarchy of political institutions, which can develop a women's favorable house where the women-centric policies strongly implemented.⁵ However, the Minister for Planning and Co-ordination strongly described that this atmosphere can help the women to raise their voice against the women atrocities bring social and economic reforms for women to empower them. In fact, she confidently said that not only women but also men are largely concerned about the development of girls and women in the state and make their valuable argument on the favor of women and against the violence of women.⁶

Both of them strongly agreed that they are always allowed to make their point without the interference of the male member in the house. They mentioned that they can present the ideas, make a free and fair statement and opinion, and raised questions freely inside the house. Again, Mallick said that we have to accept interference and do our work.⁷ Interestingly, it can be said, most of them are from governing party except one ex-MLA from INC. There are one women member from the Opposition party who said that sometimes they have faced interference or criticism from the opposition male legislature. However, the interviews/ interactions with the women member clearly show, the interference always comes from the opposite side, and their male colleagues saw as the supporter of the women member from their respective parties. (Kanak News,2016) Despite various factors and different backgrounds differentiate the women legislature of Odisha Legislative Assembly from each other, they all strictly stand for the interest of the women and raise their voice on women issues respectively. The interaction with the women legislature and through secondary sources makes, it can be said that the women MLAs are collectively standing with the women issues across their parties only on particular days like *Women's Day* and other special occasions or debates on issues related to women. Women also have seen together against domestic violence, rape, dowry, and other kinds of women atrocities which creates an unhealthy atmosphere for society. (Kanak News,2016)

Performance of women member in Odisha Legislative Assembly

Now examining the relevance and applicability of the above-stated arguments and theory in the case of the Odisha Legislative Assembly, we will observe the active participation and performance of women legislature in the house. How women politicians can effectively represent the problems of their respective constituencies? This would require us to ascertain that whether they have been capable of ushering any changes in the policy. One of the foremost methods of putting forward a particular cause in the house is through debating and laying down a policy. The work also takes this discursive method into account, while trying to ascertain whether women have, or have not been able to highlight and debate crucial problems through policy suggestions. According to the view of one women legislature “In the present arena, the women are free and proved their

⁵ This data was an outcome of personal discussion with both Pramila Mallick, the president of Women wing of BJD and Usha Devi, the Minister for Planning and Co-ordination on dated 19th Oct 2017.

⁶ During the discussion with Usha Devi, she strongly argued that in the Assembly not only the women but the male legislature also raised questions for the development of Women and Girls.

⁷ Both the strong leader of the party Pamila Mallick and Usha Devi strongly said that they didn't faced any interference in the Assembly, 19th Oct. 2017. But on the other hand Mallick gave an ambiguous statement that in the field of politics we shouldn't expect non-interference.

capability in every field and She also mentioned about their actions, to improve conditions or services for other women to make themselves more empowered. The Minister for Textiles and Handlooms spoke about the specific actions that her ministry has been taken, such as skills development, establishing saving groups, and business initiatives for women of Odisha. She has also seen as a role model for women and girls and encouraging them to participate in community governance. (Odisha TV, 2016) The present minister for women and child welfare spoke at large about government initiatives to empower women and girls, including legal reforms, economic empowerment, and awareness campaigns in general, however, she appeared more comfortable talking about women's concerns and empowerment but all agreed on gender equality and emphasis that there must be needed specific steps to promote gender equality in politics. The minister for women and child welfare described that there are so many policies of government to educate women and girls and to empower them from the ground level, so now women are progressing which can bring equality in the future.⁸

In fact, women have been very much concentrating on their constitutional issues and during the session, their questions are mainly related to the problems of their respective constituency. However, a women member from the Sambalpur constituency has raised numerous questions in the assembly from the last four years.⁹ She raised different kinds of questions in the house such as-Water pipeline facility for the village(SAQ-93,2017)Biju Gadi Yojana(SAQ-92,2017) (a scheme of the Odisha government to give a better communication facility to the villages), Protection of birds and other animals,(Ibid) Supply of electricity to the villages,(UDAQ-374,2017) establishing Information and Broadcasting Center,(UDAQ-376,2017) Fill up the vacancies in various department of the government of Odisha, particularly in the field of education, health and administration.(UDAQ-378,2017) She has also spoken for the social security and empowerment of the differently able person and demand pension for them.(UDAQ-1295,2017) Moreover, the women MLAs from the governing party always claim that their government is efficiently working for the betterment of farmers, women, day basis workers, and other weaker sections of the state. Further, some eminent leaders of the ruling party always allowed their women counterparts to present the performance or the achievements of the government inside the house. One woman legislature of Biju Janata Dal presented her statement on behalf of the ruling party that the government is very much sensitive to the issue of farmers and also gave special attention to them because 80% of people in the state depend on agriculture, which is the basic need for everyone to live. (T-17, P.4,2016) Again she mentioned about the health insurance facilitated by the government to the farmers and day basis labour with their family members. (T-19, p.1, 2016)

However, she has not only presented a clear picture of the government but also raised her voice for the issues of her constituency. Such as – Steps for repairing the lift irrigation system at Binjaharpur, Rajkanika, Jajpur area,(UD-1411,2016) Establishment of Food processing Unit in every district of Odisha, Protection of girls

⁸ During the personal discussion with the cabinet minister Usha Devi and the answer of the UDAQ-186:17.03.2016., where she described the policies of the government or her ministry for women and child.

⁹ I had got the source from the Archive of Odisha Legislative Assembly. After observing the data, I found that Raseswari Panigrahi, M.L.A of Sambalpur Constituency from 2014 has raised highest 378 questions in the Assembly up to 2017.

from sexual harassment by appointing women teacher in the girl's hostels,(UD-610,2016) whether the government has made any effort to check the cases of dropping out of SC/ST children from the school (UD-4051,2016) to protect the river from polluted water (UD-1656,2016) salary for the Anganwadi worker according to their work,(UD-1842,2016) Many times she has seen as the protector of government from the opposition party in the house. However, she has strongly rejected the allegation made by the Congress party on the government that it uses the policy of one rupee kg. rice as vote bank rather saves the poor from extreme poverty. (T-18, P.1, 2015) The only woman of Bharatiya Janata Party has seen as an attacker of government in the house. She has made many critical analyses on government policies and budgets during the session. However, she has made her statement on the 2017-2018 financial and general budget presented by the government that it will not be beneficial for the people. It is not sufficient to overcome the unemployment problem in the state and not mentioned to repair the old mines and factory, which is a source of livelihood. (T-22, P.7; T-23, P-1-2,2017) She put forth:

The present financial budget has not been satisfactory and has lost its aim. I have rejected this budget because it will decrease the revenue of the state and increase the credit percentage of the government like the previous years. Since I have been elected as the member of this assembly, I repeatedly demand for opening up the OTM in my constituency, but the government is neither listening to me nor taking initiative for it. (Ibid)

Moreover, besides that, she has also concentrated her questions on the problems/issues of her constituency and demands for better policy and programme for her area. However, she raised different kinds of questions such as reopening the old "Orient Paper Mill Ltd." at Brajaraj Nagar Municipality, (UD 378,2017) fund for the establishment of a Cancer Hospital from District Mineral Fund at Brajarajnagar, (UD 379, 2017) crop insurance for the Farmers, (UDAQ-1007,2017) distribution of land ownership, Contractual appointment in the office of District Collector, (UDAQ-577, 2017) Steps for the reservation of ST, SC and the Minorities in the Schools. (UQ-498,2016) Expenditure for the Child and Mother Health care Center at Brajarajnagar, (UDAQ-490,2016) Recruitment for the post of medical officer and staff, (UDAQ-492) Another M.L.A from Kendrapada constituency has raised different types of questions and participated in the valuable debates for the development of her constituency. She mainly focused on the questions on the issue of education, Environment, Tourism, women, such as appointment of teachers in the schools, (UD-1405, 2013) development of Tourist place at Kendrapada, (UD-2592,2013) for opening up a family judge court in her constituency, SQ-62,2012) Protection of the interest of Kendupatra¹⁰ workers, (T-38, P-2, 2013) Mamata Yojana (scheme for mother and child). (T-27, P.4, 2013) She has also given a proposal for a Language University in Odisha that can be helpful for the development of the Odia literature.

In fact, some male members of the Assembly have supported her idea on the basis of Odia identity (T-10, P.1,2012) Further, some of them have criticized her performance in the Assembly. Anjali Behera, who had won the 2009 assembly election from Biju Janata Dal and held the ministry of Women and Child Development, criticized the opposition for misleading the house by placing wrong information. She found herself in an embarrassing situation in the house when replying to the question regarding the quantum of loan provided to self-help groups (SHGs), that no credit linkage was being provided to self-help groups under Mission Shakti in the state. Although later, she attempted to rectify herself, her clarification evoked resentment and anger among the opposition members, who got off from their

¹⁰ Kendupatra or Kenduleaf is used to make Bidi (Mini Cigar filled with Tobacco flake and wrapped with this leaf). Particularly, the tribal community has been working in the tribal dominated areas.

seats and shouted slogans against her. (Odisha360,2012) Furthermore, some women legislatures like Tukuni Sahu, Basanti Mallick, Nandini Devi have less participation in the debates and discussions in the house. They have raised few questions in the Assembly. But although their lower participation in the house, they have raised some valuable issues on drinking water, different kind of facilities for the ST and SC people, protection of environment and forest, asked the government for creating more employment opportunity in their respective constituency, ask for the action for appointment of teachers in educational institutions, etc.¹¹

Conclusion

The whole discussion made a clear picture of the Women legislature of Odisha Legislative Assembly that Women not necessarily acts for women, even men also act to empower them. Here, it has seen that Women's non-material resources and backgrounds, and experiences influence their current capabilities and the success of their campaign and on the other hand education does appear to matter for women's self-confidence and their credibility in the field of politics. In the case of Odisha, it has seen that those women having a good education that determines their communication skills have been able to act as effective politicians. However, this observation some of the MLAs who belong from the very well-known Royal family and Political family have got an easy way to get into the field of Politics. Having a good education and their family identity acted and made a favorable atmosphere for them to sustain in politics. Secondly, some women MLAs have seen as an activist and struggle from their student career to get into politics. Their struggle for a political career takes some time but finally, they became a legislature. However, their interest and aim to achieve the political goal and wish to help the people made them successful political leaders in their constituency or areas. They have seen as an effective leader in the Odisha Legislative Assembly and raised questions for the development of their constituency as well as the state. They have also seen as a supporter of different kinds of people's movement, whether it is the movement of pleasant, labour or for a separate high court bench. Thirdly, though some of them came from political backgrounds have not able to influence the Assembly or state politics as well. They limited themselves in their constituency.

This study has also described that how the different past experiences of women MPs also provide the opportunity to build relationships with different types of people and organizations that act for them. Another important area that all women politicians were not acting together on the basis of their separate women identity rather they act for and in accordance with their party ideology. They believe in their respective political party and their leader. The study has revealed some women member has alleged for kidnapping, demanding money from the corporate sector and involvement in different kind of scams. Therefore, it can be said that not necessarily all women are sensitive in nature, and being a mother act for all as a mother acts for her child. The study has proved that men also raised their voices for the women and act for them. It depends upon the personality and capability to do for others or for their voters. Furthermore, coming to the sharing experience has not denied the idea of Phillips that Women's political representation is necessary for bringing women favorable or welfare policies. In the case of Odisha Legislative Assembly, it has seen that especially some women legislature asked for the ban of the alcohol and smoke because to them it is not the men, it

¹¹ This data has taken from the Assembly archive of Odisha Legislative Assembly that I have studied/observed from 2009 to July 2017.

directly affects the women and their children. However, the discussion reveals how women legislature collectively raised their voices when it comes to the protection of Women from domestic violence, rape, murder and any kind of harassment.

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