



EMPOWERING EFFECTS OF WOMEN THROUGH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is the pivotal part in any society, state or country. It has become a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. Empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through the different problems in society. It is a necessity for the very development of a society, since it enhances both the quality and the quantity of human resources available for development. Political empowerment of women supports creating policies that would best support gender equality and agency in both the public and private spheres. Further recommendations have been to increase women's rights to vote, voice opinions, and the ability to run for office with a fair chance of being elected. Because women are typically associated with child care and domestic responsibilities in the home, they have less time dedicated to entering the labour market and running their business. 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 strongest areas of women's political participation. To combat gender inequality in politics, the Indian Government has instituted reservations for seats in local governments. Women turnout during India's parliamentary general elections was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% turnout for men. India ranks 20th from the bottom in terms of representation of women in Parliament. Women have held the posts of president and prime minister in India, as well as chief ministers of various states. Indian voters have elected women to numerous state legislative assemblies and national ministry for many decades.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Political Participation.

Introduction

“Indian women are traditionally conservative but they also have the genius of synthesis, to adapt and to absorb. That is what gives them *resilience* to face suffering and to meet upheavals with a degree of calm, to change constantly and yet remain changeless, which is the quality of India herself.” (Indira Gandhi)

Democracy implies equality for all human persons, men and women. In this context, the problem of low participation of women is of special concern; women’s participation in decision-making system is essential for effective governance. Therefore, democracy implies equality for all citizens either men or women. As against this basic notion of democracy what is normally seen is that women are excluded from different walks of life, more visibly in Politics. Women constitute half of the population. Issue of political empowerment of women has attracted global attention. The United Nations (UN) adopted Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952. UN has organized four World Conferences on Women. Fourth was held in Beijing in 1995 and it declared that women’s equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account. It also affirmed that women should have at least a 30% share of decision-making positions. ^[1]

However, participation of women, in general, in politics and public life in India has been abysmally low. There is a huge gap between men and women in political activities beyond voting. Participation of women at the higher level is lower in comparison to their participation at the lower level of governance structure. In the domestic arena leadership and managerial skills of women are silently recognized however, they are not given space in the public arena. While other marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes got reservations in the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies, no reservation for women was given in the Constitution of India in the beginning which restricted their political empowerment. To sum up, reservation for women in PRIs provided by 73rd CAA and subsequent increase in the quota by States have brought an unprecedented huge number of women in governance area in India. Women’s political empowerment of such magnitude is among the best in the world.

Objectives

- i) To know about women empowerment in the political area.
- ii) To know the need for women’s political participation.
- iii) To know about the constitution provisions for women.
- iv) To explore the constraints faced by women representative.

Research Methodology

The information for this paper has been primarily collected from secondary sources i.e., Books, Journal, Government reports and Internet.

Women Empowerment

Empowerment comes from the term “empower” which means “to give power or authority”. The concept “women empowerment” was introduced for the first time at the “International Women’s Conference” in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. When we talking about women's empowerment, it means accepting and allowing people (women) who are on the outside of the decision-making process into it. It is the most crucial point to be noted for the overall development of a country. Many people think that the days of women fighting for their rights are over but those people are wrong because one out of every three women have been public ally sexually harassed by random men they don’t know. Every day women are put down and told how to act and that they were asking for it if you wear that making woman feel that it is their fault, it is not “This puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decision-making and, in the economic sphere, on the ability to obtain an income that enables participation in economic decision-making.”^[1] Women empowerment isn’t just about offering equal rights to women. But it is also about ensuring that they are intrinsic and equitable partners in the workforce. .^[2]

Female Participation

The term political participation generally refers to those voluntary activities of members of a society, in the selection of rulers and formation of public policy. Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the right to participate is an important aspect of democratic government and an inherent right in a democratic process.

The status of women in India has seen many ups and downs since ancient times Women in post independent India have been participating in almost all types of economic activities, day-to day household chores, voting for a better governance and also in active politics. India has elected a woman prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and a woman president, Pratibha Patil. In the current scenario central government, women comprise roughly quarter of the Indian cabinet with portfolios like external affairs, commerce and human resource development. At the ground level, India has a significant proportion of women in local level politics which has been achieved by reserving seat for women. As of October 2019, the global participation rate of women in national-level parliaments is 24.5%.^[3] In 2013, women accounted for 8% of all national leaders and 2% of all presidential posts. Furthermore, 75% of all female prime ministers and presidents have taken office in the past two decades.^[4]

There are some need for political participation of women in India such as;

- Women are 50% of the population their equal representation in politics help them protecting their interests and fulfil their needs.
- Their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction is important to ensure the safety and protection of children and vulnerable sections of populations.
- Political participation of women has the potential to change the societies.
- It can have an impact on outcomes for women and children especially in the distribution of community resources.

Way Forward

- Political parties should come forward to increase women representatives. The absence of critical mass of women representatives has pushed women to the fringes in power sharing and has adverse impacts on their overall political status.
- Gender stereotypes which perceive women as weak representatives should be changes through awareness and education. Efforts need to be taken to enhance the participation of women in governance in large numbers.
- Women's Reservation Bill which reserves 33% of seats for Indian women at the legislatures has to be passed soon in the Parliament.
- Women's leadership and communication skills need to be enhanced by increasing female literacy especially in rural areas. They should be empowered in order to break socio-cultural barriers and improve their status in the society.
- Women panchayati members have to be trained to analyse and understand their roles and responsibilities given in the 73rd amendment act.

Constitution Provisions

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. It establishes a parliamentary system of government, and guarantees its citizens the right to be elected, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and form associations, and vote.^[5] The Constitution of India attempts to remove gender inequalities by banning discrimination based on sex and class, prohibiting human trafficking and forced labor, and reserving elected positions for women.

The Government of India directed state and local governments to promote equality by class and gender including equal pay and free legal aid, humane working conditions and maternity relief, rights to work and education, and raising the standard of living. Women were substantially involved in the Indian

independence movement in the early 20th century and advocated for independence from Britain. Independence brought gender equality in the form of constitutional rights, but historically women's political participation has remained low.^[6] Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

Challenges Faced by Women Representative

Women face numerous obstacles in achieving representation in governance. The biggest challenges a woman in government can face occur during the pursuit of her position in government office, as opposed to when she is upholding said position. Studies show that one of the big challenges is financing a campaign. While women are more than capable of matching their male opponents in fundraising totals, studies show that they have to work harder in order to achieve the same result because men tend to receive more ready support from party leaders.^[7]

According to a survey conducted on a sample of 3,640 elected municipal officeholders, women face adversities with things such as financing a campaign because they are not as heavily recruited as men by party leaders. There are two factors that contribute to this trend. Firstly, party leaders tend to recruit candidates who are similar to them. Since most party leaders are men, they usually see men as prime candidates because they share more similarities than most woman do. The same concept applies when discussing the second factor. Recruitment works through networks such as lower-level office holders or affiliated businesses. Since women are underrepresented in these networks, according to statistics, they are less likely to be recruited than men. Due to these challenges, women have to spend time and conscious effort building a financial support system, unlike men.^[8] Sivanna and Gayathridevi (2012) stated that the situation of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) at various levels - political, social, economic and personal. More particularly, it aims to understand how the EWRs use their agency to address and negotiate issues like feminization of invisibility, proxy governance and politics of exclusion.^[9] According to Sarmah (2010) "Political Empowerment of Women: A case study of Bodo Women of Assam," depicts the position of women in Assamese society. The author concludes that Bodo women have acquired a new role and without distributing their traditional family life, they have come out of their private domain to actively participate in the public domain. However, very contrasting findings are found in the study area where the women are found to be in problems in taking care of the household chores and panchayat activities. Women of the study area found to be struggling in maintaining the balance between the political and personal life. Though they are elected and should play important roles in the public domain, they are not free from shouldering up family responsibilities.^[10] Mehta (2002) in his book mentioned that, entitled, "Participation of Women in the Panchayati Raj

System” made an empirical analysis on the participation of women in PRIs in eastern and western regions of Uttar Pradesh. The two major findings of his study are: 1. Illiterates, married, but young women belonging to backward castes and Muslims dominated the village Panchayats in the study area. 2. Nearly 1 per cent of women representatives have no freedom to go alone to participate in outdoor activities. Similar situation has been observed in the study area. The women do not go alone to participate in the panchayat meetings. They take assistance from the male family members as they feel unsafe and insecure. ^[11]

Conclusion

India has a rich and vibrant women's movement but it has still a long way to go to achieve gender equality and gender justice. Women are the legal citizens of the country and have equal rights with men. Although the country's constitution says women have equal status to men, women are powerless and are mistreated inside and outside the home. Gender equality in the realm of politics continues to be elusive even today. Therefore, all the trends indicate that women's representation in politics requires special consideration, and cannot be left to the forces that presently dominate our parties and government.

Today, even the best of our female parliamentarians feels sidelined and powerless within their respective parties. The few women in leadership positions have not been able to encourage the entry of greater numbers of women in electoral and party politics, and are an ineffective minority within their own respective political groupings. Therefore, it is urgently required that we have to take special measures to enhance women's political participation in ways that help them influence decision-making at all levels of our society and polity. Our democracy seriously flawed if it fails to yield adequate space to women for their political empowerment. It is worth mentioning that the provision of reservation has truly helped women in increasing political participation throughout the state and country. It has been able to bring many positive changes in the status of rural women. It imbibed among women the qualities like the enjoyment of power, self-confidence, political awareness and affirmation of identity. However, there is still a long way to go to make women empowered and politically participative. Political parties cannot remain indifferent towards women who constitute 586.5 million population and nearly 48.46 per cent of the electorate (2011 census). Although almost all political parties have attempted to build women organisations to secure their support and make their organisations more broad based, but in practice they have fielded much less proportion of women candidates in the elections giving them proportionately much less representation in the legislative bodies than their actual population strength. It is necessary to make it mandatory for all political parties to nominate at least a-third of women candidates in their party organisations and laid the foundation of political participation of women.

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