

Rethinking Marginalisation of Women Through Political Empowerment

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ABSTRACT: *In both the developed and developing countries, race, ethnicity and gender have represented the most significant bases of exclusion and marginalisation in the modern history. Marginalisation is a social process of becoming or being made marginal or relegated to the fringe of society. Marginalised people are excluded from meaningful participation in the society. The 2010 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) focuses on the theme of Reaching and Teaching the Most Marginalised. It looks beyond the broad theme of inequality to explore what marginalisation means in a wide variety of context, drawing on evidence from developed and developing countries. It explores the factors that perpetuate marginalisation, along with success or failures. Normally when one thinks of a margin one conceives of an integral whole with the margin being the edges spilling over. However, the marginalised women, children and ethnic minorities, who have been excluded from the economic and social goods of "development", represent over 80% of the global community. There is no integral whole into which the "marginalised" can be integrated. The marginalised in fact constitute the mainstream (Wiltshire. R. 1)*

KEYWORDS: *Patriarchy, Gender stereotypes, Participation, Reservation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Social exclusion refers to – ‘A process by which individuals or households experience deprivation, either of resources such as income, or of social links to the wider community or society’ (*Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, 212). It refers to the ways in which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider community. Marginalisation refers to the social exclusion of extreme kind in which some are denied of opportunities and avenues under the pretext of educational credentials, party membership, skin colour, religious identity, proper manners style of life, social origins etc. (Rao, C.N. Shankar, 911). Women are the world’s largest excluded group. Women’s marginalisation is basically community marginalisation. Societal acceptance of women’s subordination and women as property makes women the targets of those who try to assert their control. Every human being has the right to participate in the making of decisions that affect their lives and that of their community, at all stages, from determination of objectives, means to achieve them, through their implementation and assessment results. It is global experience that in the formulation of policies and programmes for national and international goals, women banning a few, have seldom played an effective role. They have been marginal in politics and political decision making process (Prabhakar,V.,257). The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an international group that works for promoting democracy, peace and co-operation in the world held that with only 11 per cent of women representation in the Lok Shaba and 10.7 per cent I the Rajya Sabha, India ranks 98 in the world (“India Ranks 98 in World” *Assam Tribune* 9 March 2011).India’s male-dominated Lok Sabha (where the population of women has never crossed 10 per cent so far) failed to address the concerns of women-not only gender issues, but also other social issues in which women may have a strong stake. Women have limited spatial mobility and heavy work burden do not give room for participation. The low level of participation of women in politics and public policy decision-making has led to the marginalisation of female gender and increased discrimination against women. Women’s participation is constrained by gender stereotypes. Women are more vulnerable than men as a result of gender inequality. The low level of participation of women in politics and public policy decision-making processes has led to the marginalisation of female gender and increased discrimination against women.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study is theoretical, not empirical one. In order to develop this, materials have been collected from various secondary sources, e.g. books, journals, newspapers, and internet. The study has following objectives:-

- (1) To emphasis on the necessity of women's participation in the decision making process;
- (2) To highlight the role of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 and the Constitution (110th Amendment) Act, 2009 which was passed in 21st July, 2012 to end women's age-old marginalisation.

States are not gender-neutral and women have been largely excluded from defining the national and global problems and shaping the solution. Race, gender, age etc are some of the tools of differentiation and subordination which are used to build our egos nationally and internationally and to disproportionately allocate resources and opportunities for human development. A major imbalance in policy perspectives and distribution of resources has resulted with negative consequences for overall social development. The policies of social development fail when they fail to establish a harmonious relationship, both internationally and nationally, irrespective of ethnicity, race or gender. The challenge of social development and integration of the marginalised, do not merely mean the continuation of development policies, but these policies must be gender-sensitive. The marginalisation of women in the process of policy-making and governance has been both the cause and effect of the slow progress in the advancement of women (UNDP Report 2000). The neglect of elementary education, healthcare, social security and related matters in Indian planning fits into a general pattern of pervasive imbalance of political and economic power that leads to massive neglect of the interests of the underprivileged. None of this is entirely new and much of it reflects good old inequalities of class, caste and gender that have been around for a long time (Dreze, Jean and Sen, Amartya,56).

III. PRESENT STUDY

The marginalisation of women is the marginalisation of a community, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, economic background, educational level. The opportunities denied to women also deprive them of the pride of accomplishment. This in turn can lead to psychological, social and even, mental health problems. Patriarchy has not weakened, but has extended its sway and strengthened its hold on the majority of the population, in general and women, in particular. Gender legitimises a particular role to a particular sex. There is a hierarchical structure of dominance and subordination in gender relationship. Gender is hegemonic, invisible, unquestioned and unexplained. The domination of patriarchy has incapacitated women to lead a free and equal life both inside and outside of the house. All the social realities are gendered, and the social and political institutions are expressions of social realities. If these institutions have to be democratic, then gender roles have to be gender-friendly. In spite of many conventions and time bound measurable goals, world statistics speak of deplorable state of women and they are marginalised from enjoying the fruits and benefits of equality and independent status. The World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development, 2012 which was published on 18th September, 2011 held that the world is missing 6 million women every year as opposed to 1 million men. China and India still have among the highest number of 'missing' women-which makes gender inequality more prominent. Gender equality and equity principles are not yet fully integrated into democratization processes, and women continue to be under-represented in most structures of power and decision-making, including leadership positions in political parties, local government, the public and private sector and civil society organizations. Governments have recognized that passing laws and policies alone does not bring about substantial gender equality and equity or respect for women's human rights. Despite the guarantee of constitutional equality, women have not been able to get equal treatment or opportunity because they are not present in the institutions relevant for it. Women's participation is vital to bring about any positive change in the society. Participation in politics refers to different ways in which people exercise their rights over the political process. Though the process of participation is complex, but it is comprehensively inclusive. The concept of participation lies in the culture of democracy.

A truly democratic society is one that permits and encourages every person individually, or with others, to have control over the courses of his or her life. A real participatory society would need a political culture and corresponding structures that would enable the citizens to retrieve information to develop and advance positions on issues affecting their lives and to take part in debate to solve their own problems. Participation enhances the ability of the people to make choices. In the developing societies, like India, political participation is not confined to a relatively limited set of acts such as exercise of franchise, campaigning or participation through very formal institutions, but it certainly has a wider context which refers to 'any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods, intending in influencing the choice of public policies or the administration of public affairs or the choice of the political leaders' (Weiner, M., 26). Like other parts of country, in Assam too, the women are not getting adequate opportunity to exercise their rights and freedom in society. Gender discrimination and patriarchal mindset are responsible for women's plight. Attitude of men towards women thinking them as an object of pleasure who are inferior to them is also another cause. The statistics paint a very grim picture. There has been a phenomenal increase in crimes against women in the State. The State recorded 1203 rape cases in 2006 and the

figure went up to 1310 in 2007, 1419 in 2008, and 1631 in 2009. In 2010 till the month of November it was 1610. Though till recently it was unheard of, now the scourge of dowry too is rapidly spreading its tentacles in the State. The State recorded 2548 dowry cases in 2006, and the figure went up to 3000 in 2007, 3410 in 2008, 4355 in 2009 and 4811 in 2010 (*Crime Against Women Assam Tribune 16th Feb 2011*). Again the numbers of cases relating to human trafficking are increasing day by day. Crimes against women are increasing, despite financial security and greater awareness. Working women also face financial exploitation and domestic violence (Empowered but Defenceless *Telegraph 22 Dec 2010*). The aspects, happenings which were considered as alien to this part of India have silently crawled in the society and have become an inseparable part of the social reality. But all these statistics, I think, are tips on iceberg. There may be many cases which go unreported due to social stigma.

In the democratic polity, it is expected that the processes and decisions reflect the will of the people and represent the interests of all of various groups and formations in the population of the country. It rarely happens. The decision, in fact, is made by the powerful in the society for furthering their self interests. Women form the largest minority group, almost 50 per cent of any country's total population, but are hardly visible in the area of politics. They are so scarce, that their voices can hardly be heard. They are silent minority unheard and unseen. But democracy does not and cannot operate by proxy. Every citizen needs to take part in the political activities and perform political duties. Women have to take processes to ensure the democratic nature of the policy and for this they have to be present in political bodies (Prabhakar, V., 258). Reservation is the instrument which ensures political representation and empowerment. The commitment towards popular participation in governance at the local level has been reinforced through the policies of affirmative action, which have provided an opportunity to the marginalized and disadvantaged groups to express their voice and have a say in the making of decisions that affects them. Though the 8th Five Year Plan recognized the importance of people's initiatives and participation, the 9th Five Year Plan has gone further in unambiguously putting people's participation at the fore-front of the development process. It held that, 'The principal task of the 9th Five Year Plan will be to usher in a new era of people-oriented planning, in which not only the government at the centre and states, but the people at large, particularly the poor, can fully participate. A participatory planning process is an essential precondition for ensuring equity as well as accelerating the rate of growth in the economy'. Measures of affirmative action following the enactment of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 opened a new chapter in the history of democratic decentralization in India by developing power to the people and giving Constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Participation in the 1990s, with the emphasis on reservation policies at the levels of local government, has become both a right in itself and a means for ensuring effective governance, since the twin aims of decentralization, i.e. deepening democracy and good governance can be achieved with active participation of the people (Patnaik, P., 4754) Article 243G of the Constitution empowers the state legislatures to endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. The provisions of reservation for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women (Article 243D) have given them an opportunity to hold formal positions of power and in turn, participate in the decision making process. The increased importance of participation in the panchayats through policies of affirmative action has necessarily increased the number of Scheduled Castes, Schedule Tribes and women in the rural political institutions. There were some women in local government prior to the Act of 1992, but they were few and the seats were filled through nominations that were usually related to established political leaders.

Though several studies had been conducted by various scholars, various institutions regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, it had come into light that women reservation at the grassroots level could not bring the intended result. The scholars had found several loopholes in the functioning of women representatives. They held that women could not participate in a meaningful way. Women's participation was simply sitting and listening the proceedings of the house and nodding their heads. Women, especially rural women always felt that dealing with the policies, programmes, government agencies was the job of men only and it had nothing to do with women. The de-facto leaders dominated the de-jure leadership. As an impartial observer, it can be said that the charges of incapacities of women representatives are not totally wrong. At the same-time, it cannot be denied that through reservation women were forced into the arena with which they were not familiar. They were considered as 'strangers' or 'outsiders' by the society and by women themselves. The patriarchal whip and the commend of males had forced the women representatives to sign on 'dotted lines'. They could not raise their voice, as they were silent for so many years. Whatever may be, we should be optimistic regarding the new amendment. It was 1992 when the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act was passed. Now it is 2012. Long time have passed. The Constitution (110th Amendment) Act, 2009 has been passed by the Central Government on 21st July, 2011. This has enhanced the reservation for women in panchayats from 33% of seats to 50% of seats. The various state governments

would have to pass required legislations to implement the Constitution (110th Amendment) Act, 2009. Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Gujrat, Maharashtra have made required amendments to raise the reservation of women in panchayats from 33% to 50%.

IV. CONCLUSION

When the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act was implemented as early as 1994, Women had their first experience in politics and they lacked confidence, courage to lead politics. Now they have trained themselves, mustered courage and got confidence in the field of politics. They are experienced enough. The new Act regarding the reservation of women in panchayats would facilitate women, in general and women from even the most marginalised communities would become politically active. The Constitution (110th Amendment) Act, 2009 is an epoch-making step for women empowerment and their sustainable development. When half of the seats in panchayats will be reserved for women, that are bound to give a positive impact. But at the same time it is also necessary that women should realise their potentialities. Constitutional amendment can only create a congenial, gender-friendly atmosphere for women. They should be capable and confident enough to have the fruits of new Act. They will have to empower themselves, only then the goal of sustainable development at the grassroots level can be achieved.

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