

## **The Role of Women in Politics in India**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper presents the role of women in politics in Indian scenario. Indian Constitution gives equal rights to women. But women are not represented properly in politics today. Their representation in parliament and state assemblies is not satisfactory. Many social, economic and psychological factors refrain women from performing independently in politics. Generally they are accepted as widow, sister, or family member of any known politician. Women should contribute independently in the political spheres and utilize their potential. Women leadership is as successful as men leadership. If their given opportunity. Women can prove very efficient in politics.*

**Keywords-** *Women, politics, empowerment, education.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Women have their own ideas and values making a distinct behavioural pattern given their specific history. Their participation will further will give a new dimension to the exercise of power. Women are less individualistic and hence are able to maintain good contact with others. Lister has pointed out that policy institutions and policy processes must be representative of women, as women hold specific interests that are different from men's (Lister, 1997, 154)

Chowdhury offers five reasons why increasing women's representation and participation is necessary: (i) It is a question of democracy and equality as well as a question of civil rights making the demand for proportional representation of women in politics unavoidable, (ii) Women's insignificant presence in politics raises questions about the legitimacy of the democratic process and of decision-making authorities, (iii) Women are well informed and experienced about their basic problems and needs. But they will be deprived of equal shares if they are not properly represented in politics, (iv) Women's increased participation in politics and decision-making bodies will facilitate more changes and open up more spaces for them, (v) Finally, for the efficient and maximum utilization of human resources, women should be increasingly allowed in politics (Chowdhury, 1994, 21).

### **Status of women in politics**

Status of women in politics can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women (Thanikodi and Sugirtha, 2007, 589) Women's subordination in politics depends on various grounds like regime, culture and economic arrangement. At times the power matrix are merely a reflection of social hierarchies. There is no level playing field when it comes to access to politics between men and women. It is not conducive to the growth of women making the entire environment unfriendly for women folk.

Politics is male dominant and andocentric (Zaman Farhana, 2007, 50). The chances of integration of women's needs and voices in the mainstream politics are bleak. The entire state politics in India is in a way controlled by men except the few figureheads of the dominant parties. As women get no say in political spaces, issues of women empowerment is also not catered to. As against taking bold initiatives for the cause of women emancipation, the male folk tend to reinforce their domination over women even in the political sphere. Thus, there is a tendency to move beyond the traditional typology as determined by political science on the basis of political system and ideology, and identified the state as patriarchal. (Chowdhury N, 1994)

As the number of women present in the political circle is so less that it casts a doubt over the legitimacy of the entire democratic system. There occurs a vast disjunction between women and the democratic state due to the insufficient presence and limited participation of women in political structures and processes (Chowdhury N, 1994). As women can represent their problems better than men, the basic issue becomes that they are denied articulation so that they can safeguard their own interests. The model of political life remains a masculine one where men dominate political processes, frame rules and define evaluation standards. Women are reluctant to become a part of such double standards practiced by men in politics hence their miniscule presence. Though they might be very active in mobilizing support, they rarely find a chance to hold decision making posts. An "old boys club" atmosphere and prejudices inhibit and prohibit politically inclined women from

integrating themselves into their party's work (Thanikodi and Sugirtha, 2007, 591). These result in the underestimation and under representation of women in political circles. Quota for women has come a long way in assisting women to join politics. The older batch of women political leaders found their entry through social work but the present batches emerge out of student politics. The standard socio-economic model that explains differences in participatory behaviour in the Western democracies is also applicable in the case of men in India where higher socio-economic status does lead to greater political interest and knowledge which in turn leads to a greater sense of political efficacy and higher political participation (Verba and Nie, 1972). But the socio-economic model is only partially applicable for women with higher socio-economic status. Women's political interest and knowledge increases and they do feel a greater sense of political efficacy, but unlike men these factors do not lead women to greater participation in public rallies or membership of social and political organizations (Jahan, 1987, 858)

There are very few women who are able to make their presence felt in the national politics and they are those who come from affluent families thereby unavailable to reach out to the poor rural masses of the population. Though women do not hold many decision making posts in politics but they do make their presence felt by virtue of their participation in struggles and strikes for the purpose of social reform. These political movements provide a platform to women which also become an essential part of politics. Beall have noted that affirmative action for enhancing the participation of women in local government elections in many countries has been taken as an extra measure, rather than considering women as credible and legitimate political actors (Mukhopadhyay, 2005, 14).

Though women generally rise to eminence due to the male backing, they never really try to break the gendered relations of power and the existing stereotypes regarding women. Their positions on the issue of reserved seats for women in parliament and the way they handled the National Commission for Women (NCW) underscore their unwillingness to challenge the gender dynamics in society. As upliftment of women depends a great deal on their representation in political parties, it is the prerogative of governments to give ample avenues to women. The role of NGOs has been encouraging in areas of political and social reform. These grassroots organisation struggles to wrest an autonomous space for women in politics. By its various interventions, it has been successful in bringing out various issues to public gaze. These are those issues which link the personal issues with an analysis of the subordination of women as a group. One of the most prominent issues taken up is that women's body has become a site to exploit and suppress. The condition of women have improved a great deal in the way that women can now at least defend themselves.

Women have increased interaction with service providers from various public agencies (Naved, 1994, 169). Female education is actively pursued with a number of schemes thrown open to women. The result is that elected women attended council meetings and questioned procedures helping to develop transparency. It is because of such support the women became confident about their inner potentials and became able to negotiate their terms in the public arena. Once they became organized, they could even challenge the norms of the society that sustain discrimination

### **Obstacles to political empowerment**

If we go deep inside politics, we find many lacunas which discourage the presence of women. There is a persistent confusion over the roles to play by the party members. Even if a woman is elected she is not given the work she is supposed to do in a bid to suppress her capabilities. Certain activities like making birth certificates are not assigned to women showing a predominant negative bias towards women.

Even after the long struggle for independence where figures like Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kripalni raised political consciousness of women in India, politics still remain for them a very unusual career. The major obstacles to women emancipation therefore can be discussed as domestic activities that women undertake which is highly unrecognized and therefore acts as a fetter in women's involvement in politics, women's inferior economic or educational status and the underlying social norms and values of the society.

### **Constitutional Provisions for women**

The Constitution of Republic of India recognizes basic and fundamental rights of the citizens irrespective of gender, creed, cast, religion and race. It also makes provision for promoting causes of the backward sections of the population. Related articles of the constitution regarding women's participation may be seen in the following sentences:

(i) Equality before law for women (Article 14) (ii) The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i)) (iii) The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3)) (iv) Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16) (v) The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of

livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)) (vi) To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A) (vii) The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42) (viii) The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46) (ix) The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people (Article 47) (x) To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)) (xi) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3)) (xii) Not less than one- third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women (Article 243 D (4)) (xiii) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T (3)) (xiv) Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide (Article 243 T (4)) (MOSPI:2014)

The progress of a society can always be assessed by the status of its women. The starting point of every discrimination of women lies at the heart of the political theory men propounded to keep women subdued. Mary Wollstonecraft believed that inequalities between men and women are created and sustained by male dominated society, which therefore needs to be changed. In 1792, she published her most important work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, whose content created a storm in society (Rashid, 2009, 1). She asked for equality between sexes and exposed the structural constraints a woman faces. The regulation becomes further necessary in societies where there is religious fundamentalism which constantly tries to suppress women and make them invisible in public life.

## II. CONCLUSION

Women in India suffer inferior status in terms of legal entitlements and one of the main causes is lack of a political will for justice delivery. The rights of women are infringed on a regular basis but there are no efforts taken to ameliorate the situation for women as they lack both knowledge and confidence to address their issues. The most frequent issue that women are faced with is the infringement of their identity guided by both cultural and social norms. Women as a group are treated as unequal citizens and are provided with fewer rights and resources.

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