

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN POLITICS

Dr. Saroj Choudhary,
Jiwaji University, Gwalior (M.P.),India

ABSTRACT

The Constitution of India is based on the principles of equality and guarantees equality before law and equal protection to all its citizens. It not only guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, but also prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth. However, these rights have remained de jure and have not been translated into de facto rights. As such, women have been denied social, economic, civil and political rights in many spheres. An important area where women have been inadequately represented is in the political sphere. Articles 325 and 326 of the Constitution of India guarantee political equality equal right to participation in political activities and right to vote respectively. Lack of space for participation in political bodies has not only resulted in their presence in numbers in these decision making bodies but also in the neglect of their issues and experiences in policy making.

Keywords: Indian Politics, Representation and Women Education.

STRUCTURE OF GOVERNANCE:

On attaining independence in the year 1947, India became a republic country and adopted the parliamentary form of Government. The Government functions at different levels. At the Apex is the National or Central Government, followed by 29 State Governments and 7 Union Territories. Each State has its own local self-government. These three levels of Government jointly discharge the functions of administration.

At the centre there is a parliamentary form of Government consisting of two Houses, i.e., the Upper House called Rajya Sabha (Council of States) and the Lower House called Lok Sabha (House of People). The structure of the State Legislative Assembly is unicameral. The Upper House is the Legislative Council and the Lower House is the Legislative Assembly. Local Self-Governance is an effective method of governing through which the National policy is administered at the grass-root level. The local self-governments known as the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) are under the Control of the State Governments. In the rural areas a three-tier structure has been adopted. They are:



(a) Grama Panchayat consisting of a village or group of villages having a population of not less than 5000 and not more than 7000, or the geographical distance of an area within a radius of 5 km. from the centre.

(b) Taluk Panchayat for every taluk

(c) Zilla Panchayat for every district.

In the urban areas there are the Municipal bodies called the Nagara Palike i.e., Nagara Panchayats (transitional area - an area in transition from a rural area to an urban area).

There are also the Municipal Councils for smaller urban areas and Municipal Corporations for larger urban areas, based on the size of population. India has adopted a bold affirmative action in providing for one-third reservation for women in all institutions of local self-governance. It also provides for reservation of posts for Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons in the Panchayats and the Committees in the Nagara Palikes. The reservation or quota system is put in practice by identifying one third of the total constituency as reserved for women. The reserved constituencies differ for each election because of the adoption of the policy of rotations. The term of the elected persons is for a period of five years in all elections. According to the 1991 census, the scheduled tribes (ST) constitute 8.08 per cent of the total population of India. They are unevenly spread over different regions of the country. Madhya Pradesh records the highest percentage of ST population amounting to 23.27. Each State is divided into several districts, which are further divided into several taluks.

EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES:

The roots of women's participation in politics can be traced back to the nineteenth century reform movement. This movement emerged as a result of conflict between the Indian bourgeoisies, trying to wrest control from the British. This class made attempts to reform it, mainly by campaigning against caste, polytheism, idolatry, animism, purdha, child marriage, and sati etc., perceived as elements of primitive identity. Raja Ram Mohan Roy focused on two issues, namely women's education and abolition of sati. In the early 1850s, a campaign on widow remarriage was launched resulting in the passage of a Bill in 1856, which allowed widow remarriage. This Bill though helped the situation of widows, denied them the right to their husbands' or his family's properties. Several eminent women reformers participated in this



movement as well as in the religious reform movement of this period. Pandit Ramabai, Manorama Majumdar, Sarala Debi Goshal who started Bharata Stree Mahamandal for the education of women, Swarna Kumari Debi who started the women's organisation Sakhi Samiti in 1886 for widows are few examples. These activities gave momentum to women's participation in public spaces, which paved the way for their entry into the independence struggle. Swarna Kumari Debi, one of the two delegates elected from Bengal to represent the State at the 1890 Congress session is a case in point.

The Swadeshi movement in Bengal (1905-8) marked the beginning of women's participation in nationalist activities. Many of the women were from families involved in nationalist politics. Middle class nationalist women contributed jewelry, money and even grain to the movement. They took active part in the boycott of foreign goods and in revolutionary activities. Sister Nivedita is reported to have become a member of the National Revolutionary Council and in that capacity, organised women for nationalist activities. Like her there were several others seen as a threat by the British including Agyavati in Delhi, Madame Cama who was described by the Government as the recognised leader of the revolutionary movement and Kumudini Mitra who started a journal called 'Suprabath' which linked nationalist politics to women's traditional power.

Women who were strong leaders in the Independence movement were Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Basanti Devi. A strong supporter of women's rights, Sarojini Naidu worked with the Congress and the Muslim League. She was instrumental in the passage of a resolution to support women's franchise and became the first Indian woman to become the elected President of the Indian National Congress. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay participated in the Satyagraha movement of the 1930s. Aruna Asaf Ali's first major political involvement was in the salt march at which she was arrested and prosecuted. She was also active in the Quit India movement, edited Inquilab magazine of the Congress and established the National Federation of Indian Women. Basanti Devi took active part in anti-British activities and was arrested for picketing foreign goods shops, and in 1922 presided over the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:



- To identify the indicators and substantiate the existence of disparity and disadvantage women face in their political participation.
- To highlight the causes and barriers that limit women's political participation and its effect on women.
- To examine the obligation of the State to ensure and facilitate the participation of women in politics and the initiatives taken by the State in terms of legislative actions, policies and programs and their effectiveness.
- To identify the lacunae in the initiatives of the State and evolve strategies to enhance the involvement of women in all activities of the political processes.
- To prioritise short and long term advocacy strategies and build coalitions and networks to monitor the State in fulfilling its obligation.

METHODOLOGY:

The definition of political participation encompasses a large arena comprising a wide range of activities, such as in trade unions, co-operatives, collectives, informal and formal political action. However, the scope of this study is limited to addressing women's participation only in electoral politics (formal politics) and women's constituencies at various levels from the grassroots to the State Legislatures and Parliament at the Centre.

At the grassroots level of local self-governance, the study has attempted to provide an analysis based on a region-wise representation of various states in India. The States included are Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan in the North, Madhya Pradesh in Central India, Gujarat and Maharashtra in the west, Kerala and Karnataka in the south, and Orissa and West Bengal in the east.

Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. Governance relates to a set of rules, institutions, and values that are involved in the management of state and society. Governance institutions and processes include political parties, parliaments, government and their interactions with society. Although governance is a generic term which could mean good government or management, the governance values, types of government, the nature of political processes, the political



parties and organizations, which/whose interests are represented and protected, and the extent of power that the masses have to challenge the state or in suggesting alternatives in methods of governance etc.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Liberal democracy is founded on reason, law, and freedom of choice but the position of different social groups in the social and political space where power is located is not always equal in practice. This is particularly so in the case of women. The nature of society or state has a decisive impact on the extent and effectiveness of women's political presence and participation. Notions of democracy, governance and the state are often not gender neutral constructs but result from both historical factors and experiences. The state and its organizational entities reflect the same social forces as other social organizations. It is thus necessary to examine the gender balance in women's participation in the political process, decision making and policy formulation. The limited nature of female participation and representation in national decision making institutions has important consequences for women and for the legitimacy of the institutions. Where women constitute half the population in a political system which supports equality and where both women and men are legally eligible for political office, women's participation should be equal to that of men. If this is not the case, it signifies deep flaws within the political system. Representation is not only a means of ensuring individual participation. It is also the responsibility of the representatives to act on behalf of the constituents, including women, who elected them and reflect their ideas and aspirations. Women's disproportionate absence from the political process would mean that the concerns of half the population cannot be sufficiently attended to or acted.

The Women's Reservation Bill has been a political raw nerve for nearly a decade now. The proposed legislation to reserve 33.3 percent seats in Parliament and state legislatures for women was drafted first by the H D Deve Gowda-led United Front government. Reservation for women at each level of legislative decision-making, starting with the Lok Sabha, down to state and local legislatures. If the Bill is passed, one-third of the total available seats



would be reserved for women in national, state, or local governments. In continuation of the existing provisions already mandating reservations for scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, one-third of such SC and ST candidates must be women. Its proponents say it would lead to gender equality in Parliament, resulting in the empowerment of women as a whole. Historically, the Bill's supporters say, women are deprived in India. Increased political participation of women will help them fight the abuse, discrimination, and inequality they suffer from. Various political parties have staunchly opposed it because they fear many of their male leaders would not get a chance to fight elections if 33.3 percent seats are reserved for women. The Bill has also been opposed by politicians from the socially and economically backward classes. They argue that reservation would only help women of the elitist groups to gain seats, therefore causing further discrimination and under-representation to the poor and backward classes. Most members opposing say that it is better to create reservation of women in political parties than in Parliament. The provision of rotation of reserved states is also debated. It can reduce the incentive of the elected MPs to spend energy because he or she may not be able to re-seek the mandate from the same constituency.

The Bill had been referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice, and Personnel, which gave its report in December 2009. The central government cleared the Bill on February 25, 2010. For such a bill to pass, the Constitution has laid out an elaborate procedure. So, even if the Rajya Sabha passes the bill its real impact will be felt only when it passes through the Lok Sabha.

References

- Prabhat Datta, Major- Issues in the Development Debate: Lessons in Empowerment form India, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 1998, p.40.
- S.R. Bakshi, Empowerment of Women and Politics of Reservation, Book Enclave, Jaipur, 2002, p.53
- Norman D. Palmer, Elections and Political Development: The South Asian Experience, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976. pp. 50-57.
- Kalpana Roy, Women in Indian Politics, Rajat Publications, Delhi, 1999,



- Raj Kumar (Ed.), Encyclopaedia of Women and Development, Vo1.5, Anmol Publicatiotis. New Delhi, 2000, p.36.
- Barbara Smith, "Racism and Women Studies" in G.Hull et.al.,(Ed.), But Some of Us Are Brave, The Feminist Press, New York, 1982, p.49.
- Imtiaz Ahmed, "Women in Politics", in Devaki Jain(Ed.), Indian Women, Publications division, New Delhi, 1975, p.312. Zenab Banu, "Political Status of Muslim Women: An Empiried Study of Udaipur (Rajastan)", L I P . Jourrznl of Political Science, Vol. 12, No. I, Jan-June, 1990, pp.37-43.
- Marcia Manning Lee, "Why Few Women Hold Public Of f i c e : Democracy and Sexual Roles", Political Science Quarterly, Vo1.91., No.2, 1976, pp.297-3 14.
- Sushma Sood, Violence against Women, Arihant Publishers, Jaipur, 1990, p.12.
- V. Bhavani, V. Jyothi, " Women Politicians and Women Entrepreneurs: Why are they Rare? An Analysis", Paper Presented at Indian Association, for Women Studies F\$h National Conference, at Jadavpur University, Calcutta, 1977, p. I.
- S.S. Mathur, Anju Mathur, Socio-Psychological Dimensions of Women Education, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2001, p.25.
- Neera Desai, Maithreyi Krishnaraj, Women and Society in India, Vohra and Company, New Delhi, 1957, p.39.
- Hem Lata Swarup, et.al., "Women's Political Engagement in India: Some Critical Issues", in Barbara Neslon and Najma Chauwdhary (Eds.), Women and Politics World Wide, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p.366.
- The Harijan, 22 December, 1921
- Apama Basu, Role of Wornen in Indian Struggle for Freedom, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1970, p.39.
- Urmila Phadnis, Indira M ~ l a n i (E d s .) , Women of the World: Illusion a n d Reality, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978, p.20.
- J.K. Baral and Kumudini P'atnaik, Gender Politics, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990, pp 6-7.
- International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Vol.1, New York, 1968, p.225.



ThHindu, March 9, 2011

BusinessStandard, March 9, 2011

http://www.pri.net.in/statewise_reservation.php, March 2011



