



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN FORM OF PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Dr. Kamallesh Mahajan, Professor, Department of Sociology, Himalayan University, Ita Nagar (Arunachal Pradesh)

Abstract- In India there persists a striking gender gap in political participation and representation, despite several decades of targeted policy interventions. Women's political participation is important not only on normative grounds of inclusion, but because we know that when women do participate, politics changes. This article seeks to deal with the participation, function and role of elected women representation in Haryana mainly in local politics. An attempt is made to assess the women's participation and their activities in politics at the grass-root level by analyzing the voting behaviour, member of political parties, campaigning activities, attending meeting, contesting election, objective for contesting election, factors inspired to join politics, decision making involvement, independency in work, discussion and agenda, problems faced by women during convening the meeting, main hindrances in the way of women's politics, position in political parties, working hours, self-respect, political experience, accessibility of information and knowledge of political activities and Acts etc. The data relating to women participation and their activities in the political process of the selected respondents are collected in the present study.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Political Participation etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

People's participation is the essence of a successful democracy as a fruitful democracy is not only determined by its form of institutions but also includes the degree of participation from various quarters of the society. Democracy to be successful needs equal participation from both male and female population in order to be a true voice of the people. Gender equality in political participation and representation is one of the fundamental facets of modern democratic governments. The international bodies have also articulated their demands for gender equality in representation in political field such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) upheld the right of women to participate in public life, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) has called for equal participation by removing the barriers and recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) has mentioned gender equality in all spheres as one of its goal to be achieved by 2030 but still in many countries from developed to developing, the participation of women is very low as compared to men.

Indian democracy is fundamentally participatory. The cornerstone of political decisionmaking is the village assembly meeting, which institutionalizes citizen participation and input. While we often puzzle about why anyone would participate in politics at all given its high cost and low benefit, in India the benefits for citizens are direct and observable. It is therefore even more puzzling that women remain absent from these participatory institutions. Regions of India also exemplify a puzzling and yet common feature of women's political behavior: women turn out to vote at almost equal rates to men but are less present in other public spaces.

The Indian Constitution has enshrined the principle of gender equality and guarantees adult franchise and all opportunities and framework to ensure equal participation of women with men. The women constitute half of the Indian population but their political participation and representation is negligible. The Constitution of India has guaranteed equality between men and women through Article 14 and other Articles such as 15 (3) (empowers state to make special provisions for women and children), 16 (equality of opportunity in matters of public employment), 39 (d) (equal pay for equal work), 42 (just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief), 243 D (reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Women in Panchayats) and 243 T (4) (offices of Chairperson in the Municipalities reserve for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, Women) etc. has provided for adequate measures so that the women can participate equally with men in the every field. The number of women's participation as a voter has increased in the past few decades but their part in the decision making bodies such as the legislatures is poor as compared to men. The InterParliamentary Union Report mentioned that as of 2014 the

percentage of women in Indian Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha is 12.6 % and 11.5% respectively. According to the Economic Survey 2017-18 Report, out of 4118 Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) in the country, only 9 % are women. The Global Gender Gap Index 2020 Report shows that the female political representation is low in the country as women make up only 14.4% of the parliament and 23% of the cabinet and India is ranked at 112th in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 rankings.

II. POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Empowerment of women in all spheres of life is critical for their advancement particularly in the field of politics and the foundation of a gender-equal society. Women's political empowerment is premised on "three fundamental and nonnegotiable principles: (a) the equality between women and men; (b) women's right to the full development of their potentials; and (c) women's right to self-representation and self-determination".

According to Bhargava and Subha, "Political empowerment is the capacity to influence decision making process, planning, implementation and evaluation by integrating them in the political system. It implies political participation which includes right to vote, contest, campaign, party membership and representation in political office at all levels and effectively influences decisions thereby leading to political empowerment".

Siwal defined "political empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, greater decision making power and control and to informative action.

Article 21 of the Universal declaration of human rights states that "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of the country, directly or through the freely chosen representatives. A proper representation of women in political affairs will ensure their views and needs reflected in public policies that affect their lives most.

The definition of the word 'empowerment' is simply given power or authority to somebody to act without any discrimination and the meaning of women empowerment in simple way is building up women's intellect, capacity, maximum participation in decision making process and power sharing in representatives bodies, employment, security, access to property, access to information and resources, ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means, ability to learn skills for improving status, health and potential for participation in every field of life. Political empowerment of women denotes a different role for women as a voter, as a member or as a policy maker in the political process. It refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition at par with men without any discrimination and with human dignity. The term "political empowerment" refers to shaping and sharing the power at political front. Thus the political empowerment of women denotes their role in political sphere i.e. political participation, political behaviour and actions related to influencing the decision making process and participating in the process of governance. In other words political empowerment does not imply just a right to vote but covers all activities which are related to political process such as becoming curious, getting aware and participation in political process.

The world is changing fast. The modern environment is transformed at the economic, social, cultural and political level and it has given strength to thoughts by changing them. We are surrounded by complications on all sides. Women participation is registering a growth in all the fields concerned. We live in a free country and this freedom is bestowed upon us by democracy. The soul of democracy resides in its citizens. The participation of citizens constructs government. Although women constitute a large part of the population their representation and participation in politics is extremely low.

The women of India were linked to politics even in the pre-independence times. They played the role of both-volunteer and leader in it. In independent India, the article 15 confers upon them the right to equality in the eyes of law. Though equal rights have been bestowed upon all the citizens, yet the representation of women in Indian political arena is marginalized. Since women lack proper political power their participation in the centre as well as in the states is also prosaic.

Indian constitution is based upon the principle of equality. It imparts equal opportunities and rights to all the citizens without exception. Fundamental rights and freedom but also renders null and void all discrimination based upon religion, caste, sex, and birth place etc. Of course, women naturally get such rights from constitutional provisions but, defacto, they never enjoy them. Even today, women are deprived of social, economic, political and civil rights. Despite a lapse of 65 years from the implementation of the constitution, Indian women are still gasping for their rightful share. Women constitute almost half of the total population their participation in voting process ought to be equal. But they do not show their satisfactory participation in political activities. They don't contribute in decision making, whether this is the field of politics or any other field for that matter. Mere four walls were not their destiny, instead they enjoyed unrestricted freedom in all the fields of life and were considered equal to men in all respects.

Women are no doubt the enfranchised member of the political empire yet they are far away from being considered an equal to men in political participation, political will power, especially with regard to the top-posts. They are considered to be second order citizens. Article 325 and 326 imparts women the equal political right so that they may come at par with men with respect to the participation in politics, including voting. They have not fully availed the benefit of this right. Alas! there is either an absence of particular laws or plans that could empower women in politics or lethargic attitude towards implementing them.

The fact is that our society has always been primarily male dominated. In society, women have always been considered second to men. Even in earlier periods, women were helplessly dependent on others for social and familiar activities. Generally, some efforts have been made for the development of the fair sex since the independence of the nation. Yet it is the recent time that witnessed a huge rise in enthusiasm for women empowerment. These efforts have resulted into a rise in the confidence level of women, and now they are preparing themselves for every possible challenge. The government schemes as well as the private organizations are raising their voice for rights of women. The attempts are being undertaken as to awaken the latent power of women through the movement generally known as 'Women empowerment'.

III. STATUS OF WOMEN IN POLITICS IN INDIA

Women are underrepresented in positions of elected office (Fox and Lawless, 2004; Bhalotra, ClotsFigueras and Iyer, 2013), in the bureaucracy (Panizza and Qiang, 2005), women rally at lower rates (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001; Chhibber, 2002), and make fewer demands on government than men (Kruks-Wisner, 2011; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014). Today, women account for only 22% of members of parliament across the globe, up from 10% in 1995 (Inter-parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments, 2016). In India, this picture looks even bleaker. Only 12% of members of parliament are women. Figure 1 depicts this stark gender gap.¹ In this sample of men and women from rural Madhya Pradesh, on average men were 50 percentage points more likely to say that they had attended a local public assembly meeting (Gram Sabha) and 30 percentage points more likely to have contacted the local leader (Sarpanch). Even more, this gender gap in political behavior is orders of magnitude larger than the caste gap in political behavior, which has been the focus of much research. Public opinion data from all of India shows that the average attendance rates at public meetings range from 25-33% for men and 6-11% for women across five caste sub-categories (IHDS, 2005; 2015), revealing that participatory differences across caste are Yet in many countries, like the U.S., the descriptive gender gap in political participation has all but disappeared (Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014). While many models of women's political behavior have been developed (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001; Chhibber, 2002; Barnes and Burchard, 2012; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014), each focuses on a particular constraint to participation in isolation but fails to consider how these constraints interact to create a self-sustaining equilibrium where men engage in politics and women do not. As a result, we continue to see women not showing up or speaking up in politics even after particular constraints have been removed.

Women's low representation in politics matters not only from the standpoint of inclusion but because it has important policy and welfare consequences. As Leonard Wantchekon (2003) poignantly states "rural women might be systematically excluded from the most common forms of clientelist redistribution, and those groups might therefore be more responsive to a platform of public goods. This would imply that initiatives to promote women's participation in the political process at all levels of government are likely

to help improve the provision of public goods.” We know that when women are represented in politics, policy changes. In the U.S., women’s representation increased the size of the state substantially (John R. Lott and Kenny, 1999) and in India, women have been shown to shift policy towards the provision of public goods (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). In other research, I demonstrate that women’s collective engagement in local politics results in less clientelistic policies and implementation.

In 1992, India amended its Constitution to create a three tier structure of local governance. Within each State there would be governing bodies in the district (the Zilla Parishad), the block (Panchayat Samiti) and the village (Gram Panchayat). These local institutions bear the responsibility of allocating development and public works projects, establishing schools and health centers, and determining eligibility for government schemes. The Gram Panchayat is the lowest level of government in India, with each Gram Panchayat representing a population between 1,000 and 25,000. In 2013, there were 238,617 Gram Panchayats throughout India. The Gram Panchayat is governed by a body of between 7 and 17 elected representatives, called Panches. One of these representatives is selected to be the Sarpanch, which is the head of the Gram Panchayat. All Gram Panchayat officials across the state are elected at the same time and serve five year terms of office. Additionally, several times a year, each Gram Panchayat holds a Gram Sabha (local public meeting) to make decisions on issues relating to local governance. These meetings were intended to represent self-rule and direct democracy and all eligible voters are permitted to attend and participate.

I should also note some of the characteristics which may differentiate India as a case from some but not all other low and middle-income democracies. First, India remains a largely rural country, with over 60% of the population living in rural areas and over 30% of the rural population living below the poverty line (National Sample Survey of India, Planning Commission of India). The issue of state-building and political participation is of heightened importance in this setting. State capacity is often much lower in rural areas (Herbst, 2000), generating weaker political institutions (Bates, 2009), and in particular women are less likely to participate in politics (World Bank, 2011). Additionally, gender norms in much of India remain deeply patriarchal and a strong household division of labor persists (Agarwal, 1994).

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive study of case analyses of women empowerment in politics in the state of Haryana. Both primary and secondary data have been used in the present study. Primary data were obtained through personal visits to the selected respondent. A well designed questionnaire was prepared for respondents. 279 present elected women representatives at all levels of the local government institutions and 30 respondents as members or office bearers of different political parties from the three selected districts.

V. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 1: Do you attend the meeting you or your husband/son/other family member attends them on your behalf?

Response of The Respondents	Member of Municipal Corporation/Committee/Council	Member of Zilla Parishad	Member of Panchayat Samiti	Member of Village Panchayat	Political Party Member	Total/ Percent-age
Yourself	19 (63.33)	13 (54.17)	17 (37.78)	41 (22.78)	30 (100)	120 (38.83)
By husband/son/other Family member	8 (26.67)	7 (29.17)	28 (62.22)	131 (72.78)	-	174 (56.31)
Not attend	-	-	-	-	-	-

Nocomments	3 (10.00)	4 (16.66)	-	08 (4.44)		15 (4.86)
Total	30 (100%)	24 (100%)	45 (100%)	180 (100%)	30 (100%)	309 (100%)

Source: Field Survey *Figures in brackets represent percentage

To judge women's involvement in political activities, they have been quizzed whether they attend the meeting yourself or male member of the family attends them on their behalf. The question in this regard was asked and presented in the table 1. Table shows that 38.83 per cent women representatives attend the meetings themselves. But the startling fact is that 56.31 per cent women leaders do not attend the meetings personally. This work is done by the male members of their family. It indicates that women representatives work under family pressure. They are not independent to take decisions in their life. They cannot cast vote on their own choice, they cannot attend meeting themselves, they cannot sign official document, what can they do of their own. Only 4.86 women leader did not comment. They may be included in the percentage of 56.31. Here it is noteworthy that a large number of women representatives who do not attend meetings, may be uneducated, lacking motivation, uninterested in political activities, lacking confidence, burdened with household activity or may be from the families who have a conservative mindset.

Table 2: Being a woman, do you face problems in convening or attending the meetings?

Response of The Respondents	Member of Municipal Corporation /Committee/ Council	Member of ZilaParisad	Member of Panchayat Samiti	Member of Village Panchayat	Political Party Member	Total/ Percent -age
Yes	16 (84.21)	13 (100)	17 (100)	41 (100)	12 (40)	99 (82.5)
No	1 (52.63)	-	-	-	11 (36.67)	12 (10)
Occasionally	2 (10.52)	-	-	-	7 (23.33)	9 (7.5)
No comments	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	19 (100%)	13 (100%)	17 (100%)	41 (100%)	30 (100%)	120 (100%)

Source: Field Survey *Figures in brackets represent percentage

The fact is that women representatives have to face many problems during the meeting. Most of the studies made earlier have also proved that women face many problems such as lack of timely information, transportation facilities, family hurdle, safety concern, social un-acceptance, traditional set-up etc. during the meetings. Therefore, it is an urgent need to make an improvement in their working culture. Then it may be possible that the target of women empowerment can easily be achieved in the state. Table 2 shows that the Panchayati Raj women leaders have to face many problems. A large number of (82.5%) women representatives have accepted this fact. Only a small number (10%) of them have no problem during the meeting and 7.5% maintain that they occasionally have to face some problems during the meeting. On the whole it is matter of great concern for women empowerment in Haryana. That is why; we need to take necessary steps to strengthen them for the better future of political empowerment of women in the state.

Table 3: Do you take free decision in your official work?

Response of The Respondents	Member of Municipal Corporation /Committee/ Council	Member of ZilaParisad	Member of Panchayat Samiti	Member of Village Panchayat	Political Party Member	Total/ Percent -age
Yes	19 (63.33)	10 (41.67)	09 (20)	13 (7.22)	26 (86.67)	77 (24.91)
No	11 (36.67)	14 (58.33)	36 (80)	167 (92.78)	04 (13.33)	232 (75.08)
Total	30 (100%)	24 (100%)	45 (100%)	180 (100%)	30 (100%)	309 (100%)

Source: Field Survey *Figures in brackets represent percentage

It is generally acknowledged by various scholars that the most of the work in PRIs is done by male members of their family. The table shows that the women representatives in local bodies are not free to take any decision of their own will. Table 3 reveals that 75.08 per cent women leaders have accepted this fact. But 24.91 per cent women leaders said the fact that they take free decisions in their official work. The women representatives who do not take free decision may be uneducated or from the families that support traditional thinking. Their families do not allow them to go outside and do any work without their permission. Some of the women respondents said that they have never seen the agenda of the meeting therefore they cannot participate in decision making. On the whole, the analysis indicates that the process of social change is very slow in India. Even after 68 years of the freedom, women are not free to take decisions whether it is inside the four walls of the house or outside it. The situation at the village and the panchayatsamiti level is worst in this regard. The family and social environment needs to be changed.

Table 4: What are the main hindrances in your political activities?

Hindrances	Member of Municipal Corporation /Committee/ Council	Member of ZilaParisad	Member of Panchayat Samiti	Member of Village Panchayat	Political Party Member	Total/ Percent -age
Lack of Education	3 (10.00)	4 (16.67)	5 (11.11)	10 (5.55)	8 (26.67)	30 (9.70)
Male dominance	21 (70.00)	15 (62.50)	33 (73.33)	167 (92.78)	22 (73.33)	258 (83.50)
Less Interest	6 (20.00)	5 (20.83)	7 (15.56)	3 (1.67)	-	21 (6.80)
Lack of information	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pardah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Any other	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	30 (100%)	24 (100%)	45 (100%)	180 (100%)	30 (100%)	309 (100%)

Source: Field Survey *Figures in brackets represent percentage

Table 4 indicates that 83.50 per cent women leaders maintain the fact that male dominance is a great hindrance in women's path of participation in the political activities and only 9.70 percent representatives think that the lack of education is the major hindrance in their political activities. Only

6.80 accept the fact that they are not interested in doing political activity. To conclude, it can be said that the male domination is a great hindrance which emerges as a great shackle in the way of women empowerment in the state. Most of the studies made earlier have also revealed this fact. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore this obstacle if we wish to achieve a better working of political institutions. Most of the scholars suggested removing this evil from local bodies to make effective the women empowerment.

VI. CONCLUSION

India is a developing country. Many problems keep confronting her. The reservation system is one of them. Though India is a democratic system based country. Indian constitution confers the status of equality on all the categories of people. But the right to equality has a special provision that the depressed classes can be given reservation for upliftment. Woman traditionally is hardly considered anything more than the children producing machines. She is treated with humiliation. But the environment is changing in modern age, and women participation is enhancing in such fields as education, media, arts, culture, sports, services sector, politics, science, technology etc.

In Haryana, although there are endless political claims relating to women empowerment, the ground reality differs sharply. The fact is that women do not enjoy freedom to speak in Panchayat; though they have been given 33% reservation. They are not allowed to attend the Panchayat meetings, not to speak of the knowledge of Panchayat meetings and the related agenda. They don't even have the opportunity to put signature on the government files. In most of the cases, her proxy signature is done by some male member of her family. It is because of the male dominated nature of society in which we live. Women, even if they are the Sarpanch, Chairman or the members of Panchayat, fail to exercise their constitutional rights and political skills.

On the basis of our study, it cannot be declared that women are politically empowered. At the same time, nobody can deny the fact that they have accessed authority and confidence to some extent. And this much of success is a direct outcome of reservation has exercised a positive influence over women. It has imparted a new direction to women empowerment. However, they are still in dire need of cooperation from society, government and women folk themselves.

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