STRUCTURES OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN LOCAL DEMOCRACY: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Political participation of Women's is crucial—and it is important to recognize that women are not a homogeneous group. Depending on whether women are young or older, educated or uneducated, live in rural or urban areas, they have very different life experiences that lead to different priorities and needs. Moreover, not every woman elected to parliament or another legislative body will place women's issues or rights at the forefront of her own agenda. Clearly, women's representation is not the only factor, but it is a critical factor for the development of inclusive, responsive, and transparent democracies. Women's participation in politics helps advance gender equality and affects both the range of policy issues that get considered and the types of solutions that are proposed. Research indicates that whether a legislator is male or female has a distinct impact on their policy priorities. There is also strong evidence that as more women are elected to office, there is a corollary increase in policy making that emphasizes quality of life and reflects the priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities.
Keywords:- Women, Political, democracies, minorities

Introduction

To make a democracy successful woman's participation in National and local politics is very much essential. In every country women participation in politics, economy, an academic, and in the media played an important role in the world economy. A country cannot be developed if it neglects women's participation in any sphere of life, because true democracy is based on the realization of human rights and gender equality. Not only that the true democracy must be based on checks and balances and accountability of institutions that allow women to seek redress when their rights are violated. The issue like women's identity-question or the challenges of a patriarchal system, sex oppression and sexual liberation of women, heterosexuality/homosexuality, the male biases, and the phallocentric curriculum in education were not and still now not considered with gravity. The problems of women in India are more acute. There is a wide gap of communication or sisterhood between a small section of educated women and the group of women masses mainly illiterate, scattered and divided by caste/cast-like/religious groups. Most of the women's organizations act as a wing of a political party where gender exploitation is gaining less attention compared to social and economic exploitation. In the Vedic period, girls were looked after with care and they were allowed to learn. The widows were allowed to remarry. However, in the later Vedic period, daughters were considered as the source of grief. The practice of polygamy degrades the dignity of women. Women of the later civilization were not allowed to go to schools. In the middle Ages, thorough customs, dowry, and satirical practices were introduced, Sati and polygamy were glorified. It is thought that the right place for women to have their own home. In the middle Ages, thorough customs, dowry, and satirical practices were introduced, Sati and polygamy were glorified. It is thought that the right

AIJRRLSJM   **VOLUME 6, ISSUE 9 (2021, SEP)**   **(ISSN-2455-6602)ONLINE**

Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices

place for women to have their own home. In the eighteenth century, the Sati Daha pratha began, which had been going on for almost a century. Raja Ram Mohan Roy fought against this evil practice, and as a result, this evil practice of Satidah was finally demolished. According to the census of 2011, the sex ratio in India is from 940 females to 1,000 males. Dowry has become common. The more educated and well employed a groom is, the higher is the dowry demand, and therefore the birth of a daughter is considered a curse. The condition of any Indian woman's contribution to the house as a housewife is not recognized, Sexual harassment in the workplace is also common. Due to these demands, multiple social laws were enacted to improve the condition of the Indian woman. Indian women can now choose any type of education and professional training which will help them to make their careers. They can pray for the highest rank in the state on equal opportunity for all appointments, provided by the Indian constitution. There are guarantees of certain rights on part III of the Constitution that specifically affect women. Women have achieved a lot in the modern age than in the past but in reality, they still have to travel a long distance. Women can leave the secure domains of their home, but a harsh, cruel, exploitative world awaits them, where women around in the world have to prove their talents.

The political participation of women in India has neglected the events of independence. Although our country has a democratic government and 48.9% of the country's population is women, but their political participation is very low. Due to various obstacles they could not occupy the position of power and took the role of leadership. The participation of women is increasing rapidly but it is not satisfactory. They are also denied opportunities to participate in the administration, even in making decisions that affect their lives and well-being. However, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, believed that women had a positive role to play in the reconstruction of society and the recognition of their justice was a necessary step towards bringing about social justice. It added to the widespread participation of women in the independence movement and had a direct impact on the political and social elites, including women. Our Constitution has provided many channels for the development and advancement of women. The preamble of the Constitution, the chapters on Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, etc. are the specific objectives of this purpose. Many government and non-government organizations are working for the development of women but in reality, we see a wide gap between the empirical reality, symbolism, and reality in the legal framework between the stated social goals and the achievement. And this is why the participation of women is still very low even after this constitutional protection and legal framework. There are three indicators to assess the political participation of women: Participation of voters and candidates in the political process in elections.

Political attitudes such as awareness, commitment, and involvement in politics and autonomy in political actions and behavior. Their influence in the political process after independence, the Indian government has made efforts to promote the welfare of women. Many important government positions are held by women and they have had a profound impact on the professional workforce for national and multinational corporations. Since women make up half of the total population of the country, they should be equal partners in decision making.

AIJRRLSJM   VOLUME 6, ISSUE 9 (2021, SEP)   (ISSN-2455-6602)ONLINE

Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices

Women's broad-based political participation is severely limited due to various traditional theoretical factors such as castes, religion, feudal attitudes, and family position. After the adoption of democratic measures, women got constitutional rights and opportunities in the political arena. Observing these dark images, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution came to allow them to redress their grievances and take an active part in the decision-making process at the local level. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution were enacted in 1992 to provide for the autonomy of the grassroots level and to reserve one-third of the seats for women in each panchayat and municipality, to the credit of the Narasimha Rao government, less than one-third of the seats shall not be reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The origins of the Panchayati Raj in India can be traced to the Community development program initiated in 1952. Based on the recommendations of the Balwant Roy Mehta Committee, the Panchayati Raj Institution was established in India with much excitement. There are three tire structures of Panchayati Raj institution in India

a) Zilla Parishad at the District level.

b) Anchalik Panchayat at the Block level.

c) Gram Panchayat at the village level.

India is expected to be the third-largest economy in the world by 2030, after the US and China. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), India's economy will grow by 6.8% compared to the US's 1.6%. Despite its economic growth, **women's participation in the country's economy, polity and society has not kept pace.**

Elections in India have witnessed a striking contrast in recent times. The female voter turnout has increased in the country as the seven out of eight states that went to the polls in 2022 saw a jump in female voter turnout.

Though this sounds promising, **the increasing proportion of women voters seen in local, state and general elections** has not translated into more women contesting elections.

So, the need of the hour is to **address the roadblocks in the representation of women** in politics. In order to achieve gender equality and ensure that women have equal opportunities to participate in politics, policymakers, civil society organizations, and the general public will have to work together.

What is the State of Women in Politics and Bureaucracy?

▪ **In Politics:**

  o As per data compiled by the **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),** in India, women make up 14.44% of the **17th Lok Sabha.**

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- o As per the latest available report of the Election Commission of India (ECI), women represent 10.5% of **all Members of Parliament as of October 2021.**

  - For all the state assemblies, female MLAs' representation stands at an average of 9%.

  - India's ranking in this regard has fallen over the last few years. It is currently behind Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

- **In Bureaucracy:**

  - o Women's participation is **low enough for several public services jobs** at the Centre and states to facilitate free applications for women candidates.

  - o Despite this, as per Indian Administrative Services (IAS) data and the central government's employment census of 2011, **less than 11% of its total employees were women,** which reached 13% in 2020.

  - o Further, only 14% of Secretaries in the IAS were women in 2022.

    - There are only three women chief secretaries across Indian states and union territories.

  - o India has never had a woman cabinet secretary. There have been no women Secretaries of Home, Finance, Defence and Personnel, either.

- **Other Sectors:**

  - o **Only 20.37% of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises(MSMEs) owners are women, 10% of start-ups** are founded by females, and 23.3% of women are in the labour force.

Why are Women Underrepresented in Politics and Bureaucracy?

- **Patriarchal Mindset:**

  - o India is a **deeply patriarchal society,** and women are often considered inferior to men.

  - o This **mindset is deeply ingrained in society and affects the way people perceive women's abilities** to lead and participate in politics.

- **Social Norms and Stereotypes:**

  - o Women in India are **often expected to conform to traditional gender roles and are discouraged from pursuing careers in politics.** Social norms and stereotypes dictate that women should prioritize their roles as wives and mothers, and politics is often considered a man's domain.

- **Lack of Access to Education:**

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    o   Women in India have **historically had limited access to education,** which has hindered their ability to participate in politics. Even though there have been improvements in recent years, many women still lack the necessary education and skills to run for political office.

         o   According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020, 5.5% of children between the ag es of 6-10 were not enrolled in school, and 15.9% of children between the ages of 11-14 were not enrolled in school.

- **Limited Representation in Political Parties:**

    o   Women are **often underrepresented in political parties,** making it difficult for them to rise through the ranks and secure party nominations for elections.

    o   This lack of representation can be attributed to gender bias within political parties and the perception that women are not as electable as men.

- **Violence and Harassment:**

    o   Women in **politics are often subjected to violence and harassment, both physical and online,** which can deter them from entering politics or speaking out on issues. The lack of safe and inclusive spaces in politics is a significant barrier to women's participation.

- **Unequal Opportunities:**

    o   Women in politics often **face unequal opportunities, such as lower salaries, less access to resources**, and limited networking opportunities. This inequality can make it challenging for women to compete with male candidates and succeed in politics.

- **Structural Impediments:**

    o   **Structural impediments to women's empowerment, in general, are the primary issues** that make it difficult for them to be a part of the services.

    o   Service conditions involving postings in distant cadres, patriarchal conditioning and balancing family commitments along with the requirements of this job are some of the social factors that lead women to opt out of the civil services.

    o   Furthermore, there is a general perception that women should be preferred for "soft" ministries like Social Welfare, Culture, Women and Child Development.

How can Women be more Effectively Represented in Politics?

- **Reservation of Seats:**

    o   One of the most effective ways to increase women's representation in politics is to reserve seats for women in legislative bodies.

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- o This has been implemented in some states like Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal, where a certain percentage of seats are reserved for women in local bodies.

- ▪ **Political Parties should ensure Women Representation:**

  - o Political parties **should ensure that women are given adequate representation in candidate selection for elections.**

  - o They should make an effort to recruit women candidates and give them priority in winnable seats.

- ▪ **Education and Training:**

  - o **Education and training programs can be conducted to empower women** to participate in politics.

  - o This will help women to build their confidence and skill set, and understand the complexities of politics.

- ▪ **Encourage Participation from Local Women Leaders:**

  - o Women's representation in politics **can be increased by encouraging and supporting local women leaders.** This can be achieved through **mentorship programs** and other support initiatives.

- ▪ **Address Violence against Women in Politics:**

  - o Violence against women in politics is **a significant barrier to their effective representation.** Steps such as raising awareness, creating safe environment etc, should be taken to address this issue and ensure the safety and security of women in politics.

- ▪ **Address Social and Cultural Barriers:**

  - o Women's effective representation in politics can be **hindered by social and cultural barriers such as patriarchy and gender norms.** These issues should be addressed through campaigns, education and awareness programs, and social reform initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, Sukanya Samriddhi **Yojana.**

- ▪ **Provide Support for Work-Life Balance:**

  - o Many women face **challenges in balancing their political responsibilities with their family and personal lives.** Providing support for work-life balance, such as flexible schedules, childcare, and parental leave, can help to address this issue.

    - • Recently, Kerala government announced to grant menstrual leave for female students in all state universities under the Department of Higher Education.

- ▪ **Increase Visibility and Recognition:**

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- o Women in politics **should be given greater visibility and recognition for their accomplishments.**

- o This can help to inspire other women to get involved in politics and to create a culture of greater gender equality in politics.

Conclusion

The positive impact of women in politics is undeniable. Kofi Annan noted, "study after study has taught us, there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity or to reduce child and maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation." Further, as Madeleine Albright has stated, the world is wasting a precious resource in the dramatic underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, often resulting in the exclusion of women's talents and skills in political life. Male and female legislators must work together in order to solve the myriad of problems in their countries. In order to meet worldwide development goals and build strong, sustainable democracies, women must be encouraged, empowered and supported in becoming strong political and community leaders.

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