

Women empowerment in politics

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Abstract

This research paper deals with the issue of empowerment of women in politics. Democratic politics is, in reality, the interplay of vested interests and PRI's great achievement has been to mandate a vested and mutual interest, between women and the political process. Thus the issue of women empowerment is raised though women participation which is in its infancy; it will have the positive effect in the long run in the whole democratic process.

Keywords: democratic, empowerment, political, governance, infancy, opportunity, representation, constitution, achievement

Introduction

“A nation would not March forward”, According to Swami Vivekanand, “If the women are left behind”.

In a society with uneven distribution of resources both the access and control of any opportunity are in the hands of the “haves” but not in the hands of ‘have-nots’. Same picture of deprivation and inequality is true between men and women. In a country like India where social orientation is based on class, caste and gender, the picture of deprivation and inequality is appalling. So long the women were not considered as a social group in their own right; rather they were either included with men or totally ignored. In British India, social reformers like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohon Roy and Swami Dayananda Saraswati etc. first raised their voices for oppressed and suppressed women. After the First World War, 1914, Indian women joined the freedom struggle. Women's organizations at all India level began to emerge in the early twentieth century with the agendas of advocacy of women's sufferings, protest against child-marriage and reforming the personal laws. The Madras Legislature first provided women the voting rights in 1920. In 1946, demands for equal rights and political representation by women were drafted in the Fundamental Rights of the Constitution of India by the Constituent Assembly (1946)^[1].

The passing of the Hindu Code Bill, 1955 and the provision of equal rights for women in the Constitution of India improved the status of women. In June, 1954, the first post war all India organization of women, the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) was formed in view of at the impending socio-political issues. In 1992, the National Women's Commission followed by the State Women's Commission was formed. Women in India raised the issue of representation in politics first in 1917. At that time it was basically a demand for universal adult franchise and political part. By 1930

women had gained the right to vote, which initially benefited women from elite families^[2]. Now, women have been adequately represented in the political sphere. Articles 325 and 326 of the Indian Constitution guarantee political equality- equal right to participation in political activities^[3]. Participation is a process in which people involve themselves in the political process. It is essential for the successful democratic setup^[4].

The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. The National Commission for Women was set-up by Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlement of women. The 73rd Amendment Act, 1993 to the Constitution of India has provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats of women laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision-making at local levels. The 11th Schedule (Devolution of Powers) of the 73rd Amendment in 1993 specifies twenty-nine areas of responsibility that states may devolve to the Panchayats, women sector has been assigned primary responsibility in the area of 33 percent seats of Panchayats have been reserved of them. The twenty- nine of responsibilities cover all key aspect of village life and the 73rd Amendment has been fulfilled in true sense. 33 percent reservation policy for women sector has been implemented at all India level since 1993 after 73rd Constitutional Amendment. In 2004, there were at least nine states where Panchayat elections were held. More than 33 percent women representatives at Andhra Pradesh 33.04 percent, Assam 50.38 percent, Chhattishgarh 33.75 percent, Kerala 57.24 percent, Karnataka 43.6 percent, Tamil Nadu 36.73 percent, Uttar Pradesh 37.87 percent and West Bengal 35.15 percent Panchayat representatives were elected from

¹ Sharma, K.L., *Panchayati Raj: An Experiment in Empowerment of the Rural People*, Kurukshetra, Vol. XLII, No. 12, September, 1994, p. 458.

² Dhamodharam, M. & B. Saraswathy, *An International Journal of Ideas*, Third Concept, Vol. 28, No. 327, May, 2014, p. 49.

³ Biswal, Subrat, *An International Journal of Ideas*, Third Concept, Vol. 28, No. 328, June, 2014, p. 11.

⁴ Siddgi, Rashida, *Political Empowerment of Women: Their share in National Development*, Third Concept, Vol. 13, No. 150, August, 1999, p. 13.

women sector^[5]. The reservations for women in Panchayat hold greater significance in all the states. Reservation for women in PRIs in India, the Union Cabinet of the Government of India, on 27th August, 2009, approved 50 percent reservation for women in PRIs. The Indian states which have already implemented 50 percent reservation for women in PRIs are Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. As of 25th November, 2011, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura also reserve 50 percent of their posts for women^[6]. In fact, 50 percent reservation in PRIs would give a good result^[7]. A proposed Amendment seeks to increase reservation for women in the number of seats to be filled by direct election for the office of chairperson, right from the Panchayat to the Panchayat Samiti and the Zila Parishad. The Indian government has raised reservations for women in all tiers of the Panchayati Raj system from 33 to at least 50 percent^[8].

Women constitute nearly half of the electorate in India; their representation in elected bodies including the two houses of parliament has always been negligible. Woman candidates have to struggle against great odds, no matter to which party they belong. The low representation given to them by the various political parties on their lists of candidates for the elections to the parliament and state assemblies is not merely an indicator of their inferior political status but reveals their subordinate position in a society and refusal to recognize their right and ability to participate in the nation's development activities^[9]. Women play an important role in the different sectors of the economy and political areas. Democratic and secular India endeavors to provide the necessary conditions for participation of women in all sphere of life. There has been increasing worldwide recognition and enhance the creativity, ability and contributions of women to the society; improve literacy among women; and reduce gender based inequality^[10].

The important thing for a country is that the man should be manly, the women womanly”, this comment of Chesterton, embodies fundamental principles of social order^[11]. Women participation in decision-making in sufficiently large numbers at each and every levels of decision-making is needed. Participation of women is an integral part of democratic process and strengthens the quality of civic life. As they are half the population, women must be associated in decision-making in all socio-economic and political organization. Government and non-government interventions should facilitate and promote women's participation on decision-making^[12].

Women play the role behind the scene but men run the show, in family women spend substantial portion of her life in doing household work and other activities e.g. socio- economic and political activities^[13]. Women equality in power sharing and active participation in decision-making, including decision-making in political process at all levels will ensure the achievement of the goal of women empowerment. Government of India through 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act reserved one third of seats in all elected bodies for women as a sign of political empowerment. Over a million women have actively entered political life in India through the PRIs. There are many elected women representatives at all the council levels^[14].

Women in particular and rural poor and illiterate women more specifically never get portrayed as agents of change. In almost all plans for social change this subset of disadvantaged group becomes a ‘target’ in developmental activities rather than a group to be co-opted as active participants. It is true that women empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace^[15]. In all the states, entry of women in the grass-root democratic structures has not gone unnoticed in the decade of nineties particularly because of their presence in the one-third positions of chairpersons^[16]. Empowerment has been long acknowledged a central theme of democratic in governance, where the citizens enjoy the right to participate in governance. In a political structure where freedom and equality are granted to the people, they can be engaged in political activities, at least to the extent of voting in elections and even further, they have the opinion to participate in a political party organization. Political participation in democracy has got a wider connotation, which ranges from popular participation in electing representatives to the actual participation of representatives in the process of governance^[17]. Women empowerment is a new phenomenon in modern times. Women face lot of problems of providing services effectively and efficiently in the field. With caste, class and gender intersecting and patriarchal structures still sufficiency strong, the reactions, comments, and response have a mix of disbelief, anxiety and assumption of women's innate disability in shouldering these responsibilities in the public space because of their, lack of mobility, seclusion and dependency in different parts of country. Participation of women in politics is thus itself a shifting and evolving phenomenon. Women's participation in the democratic process has been increasing considerably due to reservation and awakening among the females. The representations of women are above the Constitutional requirement of 50 percent reservation. The reservation has empowered women in the political system.

⁵ Sinha, Subodh Kumar, *Panchayati Raj Institution and Economic Development of Weaker Section*, EAI Journal, 2004, pp. 452 & 455.
www.hppanchayat.nic.in

⁷ Sinha, Subodh Kumar, op.cit., p. 456.

⁸ www.hppanchayat.nic

⁹ Shrivastava, Rashmi, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 66, No. 2, April-June, 2005, pp. 233 & 252.

¹⁰ Sinha, Ajit Kumar, *New Dimensions of Women Empowerment*, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 2008, p. 55.

¹¹ Dwivedi, Sharat, *Status of Women in Modern Society*, Cyber Tech Publications, New Delhi, 2010, p.71.

¹² Mehta, Sushila, *Revolution and Status of Women in India*, Metropolitan Book Co. Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, p. 217.

¹³ Sinha, Ajit Kumar, p. 465.

¹⁴ Sharma, Sanjeev Kumar, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. LXXII, No. 1, January-March, 2011, pp. 94-95.

¹⁵ Narasimhan, Shakuntla, *Women's Role in Gram Sabha*, Kurukshetra, Vol. 48, No. 1, October, 1999, p. 35.

¹⁶ Buch, Nirmala, *Panchayat and Women*, Kurukshetra, Vol. 49, No. 7, April, 2001, p. 13-14.

¹⁷ Patnaik, Pratyusna, *Affirmative Action and Representatives of Weaker Sections: Participation and Accountability in Orrissa's Panchayats*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XL, No. 44- 45, October, 2005, p. 2754.

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