



GROWING POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF WOMEN IN BIHAR AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVISM

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ABSTRACT :

In the early part of the freedom movement there was no active participation of women. Hence, Gandhi Jee tried to emancipate women from the clutches of illiteracy and age old social evils and to generate active participation of women in the freedom movement. His weapon of non-violence succeeded in awakening the national conscience among the women of our country and resulted in eminent women political personalities like Sarojini Naidu who became the second woman president of the Indian National Congress in 1925.

KEYWORDS : *freedom movement , women political personalities , Indian women.*

INTRODUCTION :

Annie Besant was the first woman president on 1917. The total success of the Quit India Movement was possible only due to the participation of women in large numbers.

It is unfortunate that in the studies of women's political profile in India is not much debated. Though stress has been given to political consciousness of women as one of the major factor affecting their political behaviour.

The changes taking place in the realm of women in the modern era are important for the understanding of the differences between the traditional and modern social structure. By virtue of education, employment, exposure to outer world, legal protections etc. a section of them are not less developed than their male counterpart. However, bulks of them are undeveloped. Both the categories needs attention of social scientists and others. The objective of this paper is limited. Through this we venture to assess the extent and levels of political participation among the Indian women in the city of Patna.

Women, especially working women, find little time for politics. Yet white collar working women, by virtue of being educated, economically relatively independent and exposed to outside world, are supposed to be more conscious of their political rights and relatively more politically motivated than the non-white collar working women and non-working women who are uneducated or illiterate and less exposed to outside world.

Broadly speaking, political participation denotes participation of an individual in the political system of a given society, The political participation of individuals in democratic countries is greater than non-democratic countries. Many scholars have tried to define political participation (Almond and Powell, 1966, Milbrath and Goel, 1977; Verba and Nie, 1972, Mc Glosky, 1968). By political participation we mean participation in political activities especially the conventional mode of union activities like campaigning, movement, dharna, gherao, attending and participating in the union meetings or meetings of political parties and awareness of the national and international political events. Keeping in view of the above, sixteen times were selected as indicators of political participation.

Political consciousness indicates the interest of the women in political matters, their knowledge and awareness of political events inside and outside the country. Seventeen items indicating interest and awareness of the respondents in political affairs were selected as indicators of political consciousness

Women in India have generally displayed a very low level of political awareness. Bound by are-old social traditions and cultural norms they have never been a potential force in domain of politics. The only exceptions have been periods of crisis and events of mass-movements. When people have participated in political struggles in a big way me example is of the national freedom struggle, when masses of Indian women entered the struggle and emerged as a very potential political force. Inducted into the movement by Mahatma Gandhi, women rapidly found their foot hold and displayed a degree of political awareness which amazed not only the imperial government, but also the leaders of freedom struggle. Their role in the non co-operation movement, the fault satyagraha and 1992 movement is a saga of bravery, sacrifice and infinite patience, as also of their political skill.

In is unfortunate that in the studies of women's political profile in India not much. Thought has been given to political consciousness of women as one of the major factor affecting their political behavior.

This problem was picked up for research by us became although much has been written about women is general and about women's political activities in particular on effort has been made to probe deeply into the socio-psychological factors which influence women's activities and performance level in politics.

Women in Bihar suffer from a very low literacy ratio and acute economic backwardness. The hold of traditions and feudal values in very strong on the lives of Bihari women. The socio-economic and political structure in the Bihar is also in the domination of these values. As a result, there is a maximum mobilization of women voters in Bihar. The fact that Bihar has been returning a sizeable number of women to the union parliament and even in the state legislature and some of these women have also found place in the union cabinet and state ministry may present a bright picture to the on looker but the reality is the domination of the male over state politics. In this study we will try to examine the political consciousness of women in

Political awareness is directly related to education and education leads to development. Political awareness is one of the major components in the empowerment of women. Political awareness includes knowledge of the political system – knowledge about the state, legislative assemblies, legislative council, Governor, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, The President, parliamentary democracy, party system, ideologies of different political parties, the process of election, the franchise as well as the knowledge of local (Urban and rural) self government.

We can assume that illiterate women are swayed by caste, community emotional appeal, money and muscle power. But educated women are capable of discerning. They can vote for the right party and person in a given situation. It is obvious that the educated woman must have a clear comprehension of issues and ideologies. This will help in transforming the society into more human, just gender sensitive and developed society. Education has always been an instrument of enlightenment. As Plato depicted that education is an attempt to cure mental malady by mental medicine.

The major contribution of women's studies in the earlier phase was making women's issues academically visible and shifting the research agenda from the concerns of women from upper castes and middle classes to the needs and problems of poor women. The overriding concern of research in he earlier phase of women's studies was on population policy and planning and the issues of poverty, unemployment, inequality, and strategies for survival.

Women's studies have also contributed significantly to the ongoing critique of dominant approaches to development from the feminist perspective. Such critique has succeeded, to some extent, in generating interest in women's studies among development planners and in integrating some of the needs and concerns of women for full employment and distributive justice into development planning. In addition, women's studies has also reinterpreted women's contributions to history and highlighted their substantial role in the creation of culture. While mobilizing poor women, women's studies has brought to the forefront their perspectives and Knowledge and used this knowledge for intervention. It has reclaimed the history of

women's protest and struggles in larger movements and made women's activism a legitimate area of enquiry in social sciences. An equally important aspect of women's studies has been blending academic research with action in various forums to influence public policy and public opinion in order to improve the status and conditions of women.

Women's studies has made an important contribution to understanding how gender socialization and discriminatory practices adversely affect educational participation by women. The Towards Equality report was the first one to draw the attention of educational planners to how education has both reduced and widened the gender gap among different levels of the population. Mazumdar has identified three debates on women's education which have emerged since the publication of this landmark report. The first debate shows how education has contributed to widening gender inequality instead of eliminating women's unequal roles and position in Indian society and has created a new division between educated and uneducated women. The second debate revolves around the issue of continuation of curricular differentiation in education institutions despite the policy of non-discriminatory curricula promoting social development among women. The problems of dowry, domestic violence, and eve-teasing (verbal sexual harassment of women and girls) have not disappeared but in fact have prevailed among the educated middle class. Since the mid-1980s, the debate on women's education has shifted from gender discrimination in education to using the education system to promote new values and a new kind of social order. The challenge before women's studies is to change the institutionalized processes and organizational structures of existing system of education.

On the other hand, the influence of women's studies on mainstream educational research has remained very limited. A descriptive study of educational research during 1950-1983 shows that though gender was used as one of the independent variables in several studies, research on women's education from the feminist perspective was very limited. The International Decade for Women provided some impetus to research on women's education. However, research on women's education was dominated by conventional normative and descriptive surveys and seldom reflected feminist perspectives. Women's studies has neither taken up women's education as a priority area nor succeeded in influencing mainstream educational research. Though feminist scholarship on women's education has grown over the years, it has remained on the fringe of women's studies and mainstream educational research.

With the changing political discourse of the women's movement since the mid-1980s, the issues of gender violence, reproductive health, fundamentalism and communalism, and political participation have come to the forefront of movement politics. The challenge before women's studies in the 1990s is, however, to search for an alternative paradigm that gives expression to the plurality and diversity of women's experiences and empowers women to gain autonomy and collective strength in order to change their social reality.

INTEGRATING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Women's studies in India aims at promoting gender equality and justice by producing relevant knowledge that leads to action. It is based on the premise that knowledge is not 'value-neutral'. It is an instrument for domination as well as transformation. Hence, women's studies is aptly described 'as the intellectual arm of the women's movement' not only for changing state policies, but also for transforming women's perceptions about themselves. Transformation of the existing intellectual tradition, which has also contributed to maintaining patriarchal social relations, is emphasized equally by women activists and academics.

In India, there is a close linkage between women's studies and the women's movement. Women activists and academics have worked together to redefine knowledge. Women's groups have played a vital role in the expansion of knowledge and generation and organizations are also active participants in all public forums pertaining to women's studies. They have made a significant contribution by giving expression to the silent voices of ordinary women and integrating their concerns into the research agenda of women's studies. They also have played an important role in articulating the need for developing feminist methodology on

the basis of experiences of the women's movement in order to understand the social reality of women at the grassroots.

Women's studies has also striven to break the isolation of academia and learn from the experiences of others. This is evident from the close involvement of many academics with the activities of the women's movement. Research inputs of women's studies have also enriched the women's movement by providing conceptual and analytical tools to interpret forms and mechanisms of women's oppression. Women's groups and organisations working at various levels also look to alternative knowledge produced by women's studies to develop strategies for empowering women. Thus, women's studies in India contains the potential of bringing substantial change to the position of women by linking academic visibility of women's issues with political action.

With the growth of women's studies, however, opinions have become divided regarding its role and focus. Women activists fear that the excessive academicisation of women's studies will alienate it from the women's movement. On the other hand, women's studies scholars are apprehensive that excessive preoccupation with action can lead to the dilution of scientific endeavour. Instead of acting as a catalyst to change all disciplines and shake the foundations of existing

knowledge, it could be marginalized as a discipline in the university system. Against the twin danger of excessive academicisation and activism, the key challenge facing women's studies is how to blend research and action, theory and practice without losing its broader political goals.

In the 1990s women's studies faces the challenging task of pursuing its goals of gender equality and social justice in the context of globalization and liberalization. Until now, women's studies has survived in the university system with the financial support and patronage of the government and donor agencies. However, the further growth and sustainability of women's studies research centres and cells are constrained by the present fiscal crisis in higher education. Given the rigidities of the university system, the institutionalisation of women's studies is in danger of losing its transformative and critical role. Thus, in the changing context it remains to be seen to what extent the committed academic community can pursue knowledge that transforms policies and builds perspectives to empower women.

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