



## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ISSN: 2249-894X  
IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)  
UGC APPROVED JOURNAL NO. 48514  
VOLUME - 8 | ISSUE - 8 | MAY - 2019

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### ABSTRACT:

*Political investment plans to motivate ladies with the fearlessness to break free from the chains of constraining self conviction designs and societal or religious molding that have customarily kept ladies stifled and unfit to see their actual magnificence and power. Women play one of the significant roles in economic development and its political empowerment. Here media can create an awakening inspiration to achieve their potential as prime movers of change in society. The present study focuses on the analytical perspectives of political*

*participation women in Indian democracy. The research design is based on theoretical view and it discusses that what are issues and challenges of women in 21<sup>st</sup> century in India and their challenges to get political empowerment.*

**KEYWORDS:** Women Participation, Politics, Issues and Challenges, India

### I. INTRODUCTION:

True democracy is a system which in Abraham Lincoln's words, is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. While most of the democracies have given a system which has government elected by all the sections of societies, it is debatable whether the government comprises of all the diverse sections and importantly whether the government works for all the people of the democracy. In this context, the problem of low participation of women is of special concern for democracies and without

changing that true democracy can never be achieved. Women's participation in decision-making is essential for women's interests to be incorporated into governance. It has been widely experienced that governance structures which do not provide for adequate participation of women, often suffer from state interventions which are neither inclusive nor democratic. Including women, especially in local governments are an essential step towards creating gender equal opportunities and gender sensitive policies. Since women have different needs and perspectives on social and political issues, it is important to involve women in governments to incorporate all of the societal viewpoints in policy and

decision-making processes. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Indian Constitution have filled in as an achievement towards guaranteeing equivalent access and expanded interest in political power structure for ladies. The PRIs will assume a focal job during the time spent improving ladies' support in open life. The PRIs and the nearby self-Governments will be effectively associated with the usage and execution of the State Policy for Women at the grassroots dimension, in various Departments of the Government and critically in instructive establishments where the youthful personalities are shaped and need introduction to ideas of sexual orientation equity. The capacity building initiatives

taken up at the ATI and SIRD will be periodically reviewed through a gendered lens.

Women are actively involved in household and community work and hence well aware of real issues faced by common people. This gives them insight and perspective which can be instrumental in sustainable overall development. The presence of women in local governments serves as an encouragement for other women to enter diverse professions and leads to breaking stereotypes of women's roles in society and public space. People had gained confidence in women as good public administrators and local government representatives after seeing women making a positive difference in other people's life. The society acknowledges the sincerity and commitment of women to their duties and their resistance to criminalization of politics. The measurement of women political participation is essential to identify the need of policy intervention to improve the same. India had understood the need to record gender statistics on political participation since its independence. The process of capturing women participation at the local level is an evolving area and efforts are being done to improve the present infrastructure.

## **II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIAN POLITICS:-**

The status of women in India has seen many ups and downs since ancient times - from at par status in ancient history to be in veils (Parda System) during the Medieval period. In the post independent India, the status of women regained its strength and has been on a rise ever since. Women in post independent India have been participating in almost all types of economic activities, day-to-day household chores, voting for a better governance and also in active politics. India has elected a woman prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and a woman president, Pratibha Patil. In the present central government, women comprise roughly quarter of the Indian cabinet with portfolios like external affairs, commerce and human resource development. At the ground level, India has a significant proportion of women in local level politics which has been achieved by reserving seat for women.

### **A. Indian Freedom Movement:-**

Women participated in the freedom movement with true spirit and undaunted courage and faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom. Many great Indian women like Rani Lakshmi Bai, Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakmi Pundit, Annie Besant need no introduction for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India. Indian women who joined the national movement were initially from educated and liberal families. All changed with the advent of Gandhi who converted the freedom struggle into a mass movement involving all sections of society. He understood that true freedom cannot be achieved if all the sections of the society are not truly represented.

It is most successful campaign against the imperial rule was fought on the issue of salt tax which brought Indian women to the forefront. Local issues started getting debated and women took center stage in this regard.

### **B. Women Reservation Bill:-**

Post Gandhi, India experienced centralization of planning which resulted in higher inequality in political decision making at the various levels. While Government was deeply concerned of issues of gender equality, women were not always a part of such decision making. Although, India has seen women participating in politics as the longest serving Prime minister, as chief ministers of various states, members in national parliament and state legislative assemblies in large numbers, yet the occurrence of such events has not been commensurate to their population. In order to enable better women participation in active politics, authorities had been trying to put in reservation for women but have not been successful in true terms due to non-support from some of the regional parties. Back in history, one of the prominent member of freedom struggle, Sarojini Naidu rejected reservation for women, citing that women are not weak, timid, meek. She claimed that the demand for granting

preferential treatment to women is an admission on her part of her inferiority and there has been no need for such a thing in India as the women have always been by the side of men.

The issue of women's reservation again came to limelight in 1973 with voices recommending reservation for women in at least one third of the seats and eventually statutory women's panchayats at the village level were recommended to take care of the neglect of women in rural development programs through 73rd & 74th constitutional amendments in 1993. Women's Reservation Bill or the Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, is a pending bill in India which proposes to reserve 33 per cent of all seats in the Lower house of Parliament of India, and in Measurement of Women's Political Participation at the Local Level: India Experience \_ 3 all state legislative assemblies for women. The seats to be reserved in rotation will be determined by draw of lots in such a way that a seat shall be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections. Women's Reservation Bill, was passed in Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010 But Lok Sabha could not clear the bill due to resistance of some regional parties on certain provisions of the bill.

### **C. Panchayati Raj Reforms:-**

Indian Constitution made provisions relating to the establishment, powers, and responsibilities of the panchayats through the 73rd Amendment in 1993 with three tier system, viz, panchayats (village governance bodies) at the village, intermediate and district levels in every state, except provision of skipping intermediate level in states with less than twenty lakh population.

The states have been empowered through law for the composition of panchayats. The reform provided for reservation of both seats and leadership positions for the Scheduled Castes, tribes, and women. A normal duration of five years for panchayats has been provided with the authority of preparing the electoral rolls and conducting elections in the state Election Commission. The state government is also empowered to make laws providing criteria for disqualification of candidature from panchayat elections and also to legislate with respect to maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and their audit. Apart from providing political empowerment, the Panchayati Raj reforms endow the panchayats with necessary powers and authority to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon panchayats at the appropriate level for economic development and social justice under their jurisdiction.

This has helped all the sections of the society particularly the weaker sections including women to take part and to share the responsibility of governance and development at least at the sub-district levels. As the legislation provides for reservation for women, the number of women elected representative at local level has sharply increased. India has been maintaining the record of number of women representatives at the panchayat level and statistics indicate that 30-50% of local level elected representatives are women.

### **III. ARRANGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS JUDICIAL LEGAL SYSTEMS:**

Legitimate legal framework will be made progressively responsive and sexual orientation touchy to ladies' needs, particularly in instances of abusive behavior at home and individual strike. New laws will be authorized wherever there is insufficiency of lawful structure and existing laws looked into and fortified to guarantee that equity is fast and the discipline distributed to the guilty parties is equivalent with the seriousness of the offense.

Efforts will be made for creating awareness on legal provisions and legal literacy among women in co-ordination with Legal Service authority. Government should promulgate specific legislation to set up separate court/fast track courts to try all cases of domestic violence and violence/atrocities against women. This is necessary to provide justice to women and to serve as a deterrent to the perpetrators of crime against women.

With the full investment of all partners including network and social pioneers, the Policy would intend to support mainstreaming of all Laws which has direct effect on ladies to dispense with victimization ladies. The advancement of property rights in a male centric framework has added to the

subordinate status of ladies. The Policy would expect to empower changes in laws identifying with responsibility for and legacy by developing accord so as to make them sexual orientation just.

### **A. Constitutional Provisions**

Adoption of our Constitution heralded a new era of equality for women of India. It guarantees equal political rights including the right to vote to women. Additionally, practically every one of the arrangements contained in the UN Convention on the 'Disposal of All Forms of Discrimination against Women' are there in the Indian Constitution. Not only does the Constitution guarantee equal political status to women, there is even a scope for 'positive discrimination' in their favour as is evident in Article 15(3) of the Constitution. There are many other provisions in the Constitution which lay stress on equality between men and women. Article 14 provides for equality before law. Article 39(a), states that the State will coordinate its strategy towards verifying similarly to people the privilege to a satisfactory methods for employment, and 39(d) urges the State to coordinate its arrangement towards verifying equivalent pay for equivalent work for the two people. Article 42 accommodates verifying just and others conscious states of work and for maternity help and Article 51(A) (e) alludes to the basic obligation of natives to deny rehearses critical to the pride of ladies.

### **B. Representation of Women in Parliament/State Legislatures**

Political representation was initially based on the premise that it deals primarily with individuals. It was believed that though very few women were actually joining politics at a given time; the overall improvement in terms of education and employment opportunities would necessarily percolate into the political sphere too and their representation would commensurately increase. During the first general elections, 66 women contested the elections to Parliament and 19 were elected to the House of the People. Shri Jawaharlal Nehru was quite appalled at the low representation of women in Parliament.

### **C. In Lok Sabha**

Even six decades after Independence, the representation of women in the Lok Sabha do not present an impressive picture. It has not crossed 10 per cent (Table 1). In the First Lok Sabha, there were only 22 women constituting 4.4 per cent of the House. It increased marginally over the years except in the Sixth Lok Sabha when the House had only 19 women members. In the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, there were 49 women members. However, in the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, the strength of women members is 51.

### **D. In Rajya Sabha**

Similarly, in the Rajya Sabha, in 1952, the number of women members was merely 15 constituting 6.94 per cent of the membership of the House. Over the years, the percentage of women has increased and now, out of 242 members, 23 are women constituting 9.50 per cent of the House. In the Rajya Sabha, the representation of women has never crossed 12 per cent.

### **E. In State Legislatures:**

The 73rd and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments of the Indian Constitution in 1993 provided for reservation of seats for women in the Panchayats (rural areas) and Municipalities (urban areas) respectively, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision-making at the local level. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment created opportunities for political participation of women at the grass roots level. In Karnataka even political parties also doesn't take it as serious. In rural area women are leading life according to men's suggestion. Men domination is a general rule in Karnataka. Politics is also not an exception to this. According to a lady reporter, newspaper carries news on women participation in politics. These are serious type of news, and these news items find place in editorial page. Most of the women never read or look at editorial page. Even educated women also never read it. So it is far from rural women

Women representation in State legislatures has also been equally dismal. At present the average percentage of elected women in State Assemblies is 6.94 per cent, the highest being 14.44 per cent in Haryana and the lowest being 1.34 per cent in Karnataka. States like Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Union Territory of Puducherry have no representation of women in their Assemblies. It is unfortunate that in India after 58 years of the working of the Constitution, women are still fighting for their empowerment; women's representation in Parliament is merely 8 per cent. It is not surprising that the Global Gender Gap Report 2007 of UNDP had placed India at a disappointing rank of 114 out of 128 countries studied, based on indicators, among others, of political empowerment.

#### IV. RESERVATION FOR WOMEN IN LOCAL BODIES — ENCOURAGING TRENDS

Given the low representation of women in politics, there has been a consistent demand for more meaningful ways to increase their representation in decision-making bodies. In pursuance of this notion of empowerment of women, the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1993 and the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1993 reserved seats for women at the local level bodies, namely, the Panchayats and Municipalities with the hope that these measures will set the trend to provide women their legitimate place in public life. After these amendments, Articles 243 D and 243 T were added to the Constitution to provide that not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by the direct election in the local bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities) would be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the local bodies. This, indeed, makes a historic beginning for the effective participation of women in the decision-making process at the grassroots level. In the elections to these local bodies, more than one million women were elected every five years. In 2006, 9,75,116 women were elected to Gram Panchayats; 58,094 women to Panchayats at Intermediate level; and 5779 women to Panchayats at the District level.<sup>7</sup> It is but natural that a larger number of women have participated in these elections and this signifies a very encouraging trend for women's empowerment. Though it has taken time for women to translate their numerical strength into active participation in the rural and semi-urban areas, the results have been truly astounding. Before reservation, the percentage of women in this area was merely 4.5 per cent, which after reservation has gone up to 40 per cent. As per the Fifteenth Anniversary Charter on Panchayati Raj, "Today more than 26 lakh representatives stand elected to the three levels of Panchayats. Of these, over 10 lakh are women. The last fifteen years of Panchayati Raj, have thus succeeded in empowering marginalized groups who have gained political representation and valuable experience. Many of them have successfully taken on the challenge of governance and brought about enduring social change through their close links with the community."<sup>8</sup> Women have prioritized issues of health, education and access to basic services and in some cases have been able to ensure a significant change in living conditions for the entire community. The efforts and work of several women representatives in Panchayats in Maharashtra, Gujarat and West Bengal have been widely acclaimed.

- 1) **Mass Media :** Media will be utilized to depict pictures predictable with human nobility of young ladies and ladies. The Policy will explicitly endeavor to evacuate disparaging, debasing and negative customary cliché pictures of ladies and brutality against ladies. Private segment accomplices and media systems will be included at all dimensions to guarantee equivalent access for ladies especially in the region of data and correspondence advancements. The media will be upheld to pursue laws and sets of accepted rules, proficient rules and other self-administrative components to evacuate sex generalizations and undignified depiction of ladies . Special resources should be set aside to encourage and involve civil society organisations to contribute in developing appropriate messages and programmes which are gender sensitive and bring out the patriarchal values prevalent in society, which are responsible for discriminative and oppressive behaviour towards women. It would be useful to have guidelines for the media so that girls and women's portrayal is positive and there will be restraining in sensationalising news or the objectification and commodification of women.

- 2) Policy Prescriptions Judicial Legal Systems:** Lawful legal framework will be made progressively responsive and sexual orientation delicate to ladies' needs, particularly in instances of aggressive behavior at home and individual attack. New laws will be ordered wherever there is deficiency of legitimate structure and existing laws looked into and fortified to guarantee that equity is fast and the discipline dispensed to the guilty parties is equivalent with the seriousness of the offense. Efforts will be made for creating awareness on legal provisions and legal literacy among women in co-ordination with Legal Service authority. Government should promulgate specific legislation to set up separate court/fast track courts to try all cases of domestic violence and violence/atrocities against women. This is necessary to provide justice to women and to serve as a deterrent to the perpetrators of crime against women. With the full investment of all partners including network and social pioneers, the Policy would plan to empower mainstreaming of all Laws which has direct effect on ladies to dispose of oppression ladies. 3.3 The advancement of property rights in a man centric framework has added to the subordinate status of ladies. The Policy would intend to energize changes in laws identifying with responsibility for and legacy by developing agreement so as to make them sex just.
- 3) Decision Making:-** Ladies' equity in power sharing and dynamic investment in basic leadership, incorporating basic leadership in political procedure at all dimensions will be guaranteed for the accomplishment of the objectives of strengthening. All estimates will be taken to ensure ladies equivalent access to and full investment in basic leadership bodies at each dimension, including the authoritative, official, legal, corporate, statutory bodies, as likewise the warning Commissions, Committees, Boards and Trusts and so on. Governmental policy regarding minorities in society, for example, reservations/amounts, incorporating into higher administrative bodies, will be considered at whatever point vital on a period bound premise. Ladies agreeable faculty strategies will likewise be attracted up to urge ladies to take an interest adequately in the formative procedure.

#### V. CHALLENGES IN MEASURING WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

The measurement of women participation in politics based on voting percentage and election to legislature is relatively easy. The challenge is to estimate the actual participation of women in the decision making process.

- **Participation as a Proxy Candidate:-** There have been evidences that due to reservation policy, certain women got elected into the setup, but they acted merely as the mouth-piece of the their male family members. This indicates that there is a possibility of on-roll women participation to be higher than what it actually exists on ground. Awareness programs and increase in female education is now taking care of such happenings and women active participation is on an increase. Still there is a need to record data at a more micro level so that women who only act as a proxy can be identified.
- **Measurement of Decision Making Initiatives:-** The quantitative data of political participation of women at local level is available but the qualitative data on the aspects of their active participation including the utilization of the decision-making functionality provided to them is not being quantified properly. Although, the legislature has enabled their huge presence into the state of affairs, but their valuable essence into the system is yet to be established at most of the places. The data on their sensitization about their rights and its usage is still missing. Efforts can be made to capture the performance of women in debates, initiative in brining legislation and participation in other aspects of the democratic process.

#### VI. POSSIBLE APPROACHES FOR A ROBUST MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

- 1. Application of Technology:** The new government in India has a penchant for using technology for taking government schemes to the remote areas. The mobile penetration in India is even more than the penetration of electricity connections. The digital communication advancements may be introduced to capture the actual participation of women in Panchayat activities by counting their

attendance and their vote share in passing a decision in the Panchayat. Portals and mobile applications may be developed to voice the women issues by calling response from general women.

2. **Application of Analytics:** Advanced analytics can be used to validate, cluster and segment data regarding women participation in local level politics. Big Data techniques have allowed policy planners to work with huge chunk of data which can be both quantitative as well as qualitative. Techniques like text mining and video mining can be utilized to extract meaningful information out of the huge data which can be in the form of recordings, documents and other information. Work has been started by the new government to use social media analytics for grass root development and gender issues can be incorporated into this framework.
3. **Development of Women Political Participation Score:** The collection of data on women participation in politics is essential for policymakers. With lot of related and unrelated data, it becomes imperative to convert that information into an indicator which can be utilized for policy intervention. Data required for this task may include all the three aspects of political participation which are: women as electorate, women as elected representatives and women as policy makers. Other aspects of gender statistics can also be included as an input to give a holistic measure of women participation in that area. A single score which can be weighted average of normalized version of different dimensions can be used for both budgeting and policy intervention purposes.

### VII. NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN-2001:

The guideline of sexual orientation equity is cherished in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policy. The Constitution ensures correspondence to ladies, yet in addition enables the State to embrace proportions of positive segregation for ladies. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution in 1993 have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decisionmaking at the local levels. India has additionally confirmed different worldwide shows and human rights instruments resolving to verify equivalent privileges of ladies. Key among them is the approval of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. [www.wcd.nic.in]

### VIII. CONCLUSION

India has a rich history of measuring political participation of women since its independence. The decentralization of governance which is taking place for last two decades has increased the importance of measuring participation of women in decision making. Proper gender budgeting has already been worked out for inclusive growth of women & girls by ear-marking one third budget for the women in all the schemes. The Indian Government has a lot of emphasis on utilizing real time data for measuring different social indicators and using them for policy intervention. With more responsive data on women participation, better gender budget initiatives aim to move the country towards a gender.

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