

## Gender Equity And Political Participation

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**ABSTRACT:** The present paper on Gender equity and political participation discusses the present status of women in Indian politics. The paper further discusses the holistic assessment of electoral participation of women and issues, challenges of participation. The paper concludes with suggestions on strengthening women's role in politics.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have held high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition. As of 2011, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the parliament) were women. Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years, is the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister.

Women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. Political accountability to women begins with increasing the number of women in decision-making positions. It facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women. The equal participation of men and women in decision-making has been identified as important prerequisites for attaining equality and equity through democratic means. Political participation has been defined in various ways. Political participation means not only exercising the right to vote, but also power sharing, co-decision making, co-policy making at all levels of governance of the state.

Singh J.P., "Indian Democracy and Empowerment of Women", *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Oct-Dec, Vol. XLVI, No. 4, 2000, pp. 619.

### II. GENDER ISSUES

According to the UNDP's Human Development Report 2011, India ranks 129 out of 146 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII). Only 26.6 per cent of Indian girls complete their secondary education. In terms of health, the National Family Health Survey (2005-06) notes that 56.2 per cent of married women between the ages of 15 and 49 are anaemic and nutritional anaemia caused by iron deficiency contributes to 19 per cent of maternal deaths. These continuing gender inequalities can be partly explained by the dearth of female political participation and the resultant differences in power and decision-making authority (Dreze and Sen, 2002).

As Azza Karam (1998) puts it, democracy, by definition, cannot afford to be gender-blind, but it must strive towards the equal representation of men and women in the decision-making process. Three arguments support an expanded role for women in politics (Dahlerup, 1998): first, as full citizens constituting at least half the population, women have the right to proportional representation; second, women's views should influence politics since women's living conditions and experiences are not identical to those of men; third, men cannot reliably represent women's interests since men and women have contradictory interests on certain issues.

Studies have shown that female political representatives are more concerned with social issues such as health, poverty alleviation, community development and family welfare. They also tend to work out the details and strive for consensus on specific policies and programmes rather than debate political issues (Palanithurai, 2005).

Dahlerup, Drude (1998). 'Using Quotas to increase Women's Political Representation.' In Karam, Azza (ed). *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. Stockholm: The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen (2004). 'Gender Inequality and Women's Agency.' In Mohanty, Manoranjan (ed). *Class, Caste, Gender: Readings in Indian Government and Politics-5*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. Karam, Azza (1998). 'Introduction: Gender and Democracy—why?' In Karam, Azza (ed). *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. Stockholm: The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Palanithurai, G (2005). 'Role of Elected Women Representatives in Evolving Alternative Governance at Grassroots.' *Social Change and Development*, 3. Pp 118-139.

### III. ELECTROL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Women's participation in formal politics in India reveals that there has been a marked increase in their voting turnout and election campaigning. While there have been significant gains in these two areas, women continue to be under-represented in legislative bodies both at the national and state level and in political parties. An analysis of the factors influencing participation reveals that these differ for women in elections as voters and their involvement as campaigners

For a holistic assessment of electoral participation of women and status vis-à-vis men in India and factors that act as barriers and obstacles in efficient participation in formal politics, the following parameters will be used:

- (i) Participatory Levels in Electoral Competition: This can be estimated by analysing the turnout of women as voters and the representation of women in the lower house of Parliament over a period of time based on time series data from the Election Commission of India's archives. This would be supplemented by a comparative analysis of seats allotted to women by national political parties during the last three general elections in India.
- (ii) Electoral Behaviour and Attitudes: The level of political awareness, commitment and involvement of participation of women in electoral politics, their autonomy and independence in electoral behaviour and choices and barriers that act as impediments in participating as active campaigners during the elections
- (iii) Efficacy of Women in Electoral Process: An assessment would be made of women's roles and efficiency in the electoral process and society's attitude to new political roles of women. This is indicated by the success of women candidates in elections, the efficiency of women's movements, the nature of leadership and women elected in government and political parties and the effectiveness of campaigns for women's mobilization, particularly on issues that directly concern them.

Rangrajan, C Report of the National Statistical Commission 2001: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Election Commission of India Election Statistics Pocket Book 2014: Election Commission of India.

Arun. Rashmi Role of Women in Panchayati Raj 1996: The Administrator

Thakur, Minni Women Empowerment through Panchayati Raj 2010: Concept Publishing House.

Pai, S Women and Panchayati Raj, The Law, Programmes and Practices : Journal of Rural Development

#### Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation

Women in parliaments

- Only 22 per cent of all national parliamentarians were female as of January 2015, a slow increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995
- As of January 2015, 10 women served as Head of State and 14 served as Head of Government
- Rwanda had the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide. Women there have won 63.8 per cent of seats in the lower house
- Globally, there are 38 States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, as of January 2015, including 5 chambers with no women at all

Women's representation in local governments has made a difference. Research on panchayats (local councils) in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with female-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with male-led councils. In Norway, a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found.

Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, "Women in Politics: 2015".

Ibid.

Inter-Parliamentary Union, March 2014, "Progress for women in politics, but glass ceiling remains firm."

R. Chattopadhyay and E. Duflo, 2004, "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India," *Econometrica* 72(5), pp. 1409–1443;  
K. A. Bratton and L. P. Ray, 2002, "Descriptive Representation: Policy Outcomes and Municipal Day-Care Coverage in Norway," *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), pp. 428–437.  
Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, "Women in Politics: 2015"  
UN Women calculation based on IDEA, Stockholm University and IPU, Global Data Base of Quotas on Women, accessed February 2015, and IPU, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.  
Ibid.

On this measure, India has ranked in top 20 countries worldwide for many years, with 9th best in 2013 - a score reflecting less gender inequality in India's political empowerment than Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, France and United Kingdom. From the prime minister to chief ministers of various states, Indian voters have elected women to its state legislative assemblies and national parliament in large numbers for many decades.

Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% turnout for men. In 16 states of India, more women voted than men. A total of 260.6 million women exercised their right to vote in April-May 2014 elections for India's parliament. India passed 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993, which provides for 33 per cent quotas for women's representation in the local self-government institutions. These Amendments were implemented in 1993. This, suggest Ghani et al., has had strong effects for empowering women in India in many spheres.

The Global Gender Gap Report 2013, World Economic Forum, Switzerland, Table 3b and 5, page 13 and 19  
The Global Gender Gap Report 2012, World Economic Forum, Switzerland, page 16  
State-Wise Voter Turnout in General Elections 2014 Government of India (2014)  
Political Reservations and Women's Entrepreneurship in India Ghani et al. (2014), World Bank and Harvard University/NBER, pages 6, 29

#### IV. 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.

**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.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Strengthening women's rights and addressing barriers to political participation are critical to achieving gender equality and female empowerment. Women can be supported by providing training for female members of political parties and parliaments and supporting the development of women's causes and capacity building, leadership training for women civil society members.

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- [20] *The Global Gender Gap Report 2012*, World Economic Forum, Switzerland, page 16
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