



Empowerment of women-An overview of political participation on India

Kethapaka Prasad

Department of Political Science, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana, India

Abstract

Constitution of India has best tried to give legal equality to women in all spheres and different constitutional provision allowed the women to enter into the male dominated a political sphere. But despite this, a wide gap is found between 'de-jure' and de-facto' status of women's political participation in India. Political participation of women in India is a complex phenomenon being influenced by various factors. While taking this discourse, this article will explore the term of empowerment of women in India through political participation and its scenario at national level politics. The political empowerment of women is a social process crucial to development and progress. The status of women is measured internationally by the participation of women in politics and their empowerment. Women remain seriously underrepresented in decision-making positions.

Keywords: empowerment, women, political participation

Introduction

After independence, Indian constitution adopted the notion of democracy that is based on concepts of equality, liberty, and freedom for all men and women. But despite that, it is seen that women are excluded from different spheres, i.e., social, economic and especially in politics. The United Nation stated that women constitute "world's largest excluded category". Mahatma Gandhi also realized that the backwardness of woman was a stumbling block in the path of progress. He wrote in Young India in 1921 that the female sex is the nobler of the two, as it is the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith, and knowledge. "For all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none of me is so degrading, so shocking, or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity, the female sex, not the weaker sex.". To provide the equal treatment to women in political life, 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments implemented at the grassroots level to provide training and practice in the process of decision-making. The amendment provided reservation of seats and posts of chairperson for women in all democratic institutions at grassroots positions in the countryside known as Panchayat. This proved a historic and significant repercussion on the political process in rural India.

Political empowerment of women

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain better control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. Empowerment is multi-dimensional, social, and a process. It is multi-dimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community. Empowerment, by definition, is a social process, since it occurs in relationship to others. Empowerment is a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it. Other aspects of empowerment may vary according to the specific context and people involved, but these remain constant. In addition, one important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and community are fundamentally connected. Women's political empowerment is premised on "three fundamental and non-negotiable principles: (a) the equality between women and men; (b) Women's right to the full-fledged development of their potentials; and (c) women's right to self-representation and self-determination". In empowerment, the key indeed is 'power'.

Women and political participation

Politics is directly related to governance and management of any society. Political power is necessary to formulate policies, laws and order for a state. Women's political participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. The term of political participation generally refers to those volunteer activities of members of a society, in the selection of rulers and the formation of public policy. Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the right to participate is an important aspect of democratic government and an Inherent right in a democratic process. Political participation is a process by which people take part in political activities. Exercising voting rights during elections is one of the important political activities of the people.

Participation of women in this political activity is almost equal to men. Political participation is not merely the casting of the vote rather it includes a wide range of other activities like- membership of political party, electoral

campaigning, attending party meetings, demonstrations, communication with leaders, holding party positions, contesting elections, membership in representative bodies, influencing decision making and other associated activities. It has been stated that the personality traits and the socioeconomic and cultural environment all combined are responsible for women's marginal participation to a great extent in our politics. The culture that puts a maximum importance on the males, the unstable political environment, criminalization or absence of political ideology are the factors that decide the extent and effectively of whole political participation. The Socio-political environment has to ascertain participation and involvement of women in politics.

Governance is ever related to a set of rules, institutions, and values that have involvement in the management of both the politics and society. Governing institutions and processes include political parties, parliaments, government and their mutual interactions within the society. Although governance is a generic term that could surely mean better government or management, values of governance, better types of government, better nature of political processes, the political parties and organization's interests of those are represented and protected, and the extent of power that the masses need to exercise for challenging the state or in suggesting alternative methods of governance etc. may vary in different political systems. A number of elected women MPs in Lok Sabha have never gone above 12 percent. Table 1 gives a picture of representation of women in Lok Sabha from 1952 to 2014. The first Lok Sabha in 1951 had merely 22 women MPs. In the 15th Lok Sabha elections the number of 59 women was recorded. The present Lok Sabha has 61 female MPs. The representation of women in the Lok Sabha has basically remained much unchanged. It could be made out that the majority of women were from the Congress Party. In this general election, 556 women coverall contested. With the Congress making to the top of the list, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) held second place with 13 women candidates being elected.

Reasons of low participation

The data analysis above proves the facts about two aspects of women's political participation in India- the one aspect shows that women's political participation in India is not too much appropriate for better empowerment of women in Indian politics. Second aspect presents the positive side of women's political participation that proves female contestants' number to be higher than it was in 1957 Lok Sabha elections. It is important to understand that the rising number of women is an encouraging sign to pave the way for greater political participation of women. With the rise of new political parties that don't have faith in political patronage of families, party systems and more importantly money and muscle power, believe in a greater number of women entering the political fray and that only points at encouraging signs for for a section that constitutes half the population as they will be part of the decision making group. It is assumed that there are various reasons responsible for little political participation of women in India. The first reason is violence and the threat of violence that is affecting the ability of many women to take active participation in many social and political spheres. Lack of Self confidence is the second reason accountable for low participation of Indian women, particularly in, elections. Especially, Discrimination mated with Dalit women has also led to low political participation. However, from time to time, The Government of India has made several efforts to ensure the participation of Dalit women, but still these efforts are not fully effective and sufficient. Women are still less literate as compared to men. One can easily notice how illiteracy constrains the ability of women to understand the political system and issues related to these. Gender stereotypes, psychological and traditional barriers and lack of training and resources too are becoming other dominating reasons for low political participation in India. Most of the political parties, ethnic groups and clans are controlled by strong male leaders and it leaves a little opportunity for women leaders to enter into the political process. Patriarchal society and male domination are also the main reasons behind the low participation of women.

Conclusion

Today, the world 18.4 percent female members of parliaments around the world, Recently, Rwanda went ahead of Sweden to number one in the world in women's parliamentary representation with the figures of 56.3 percent against Sweden's 47.3 percent. Rwanda is an example of the new trend to use electoral gender quotas as a fast track to gender balance in politics. Other parliaments, however, still have few women elected. India, however, ranks somewhere in hundred in terms of women's representation in the main legislature. The percentage of representation for women is around 11%, that is much below the average across the world, including parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and just about mustering enough strength to go ahead the numbers from the Arab world. Well then, one thing becomes much clearer that surely we need to speedily improve the situation. Rather something should have been done in the long gone past. Presently, the question arises whether this change is required at the parliamentary level, and is reservation an effective correcting remedy for it. Women constitute 50% of the women population, but in India the participation of women is very little and dismal. The women from the social sector are unable to identify themselves as a workforce at regional, state and national level. In fact the participation of women in the political process is the pre-requisite for the political society. To remedy the low participation of women electors, India in 1994 established quotas (reservations) vide the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments reserve to reserve 33 per cent of seats in local governments for women. The Women's Reservation Bill (108th amendment) has also been introduced in the national Parliament to reserve 33 per cent of the Lok Sabha seats for women, but the bill is yet to be passed. It is believed that increasing the number of women in national government may not guarantee a direct influence on governance and the government, but a particular mass of women in power can bring about transformation.

References

1. Baseline Report, Women and Political Participation in India, accessed from http://www.iwrawap.org/aboutus/pdf/FPwomen_and_pol_pax.pdf on dated 22.01.2014.
2. Fadia K. Women Empowerment through Political Participation in India, <http://www.iipa.org.in/New%20Folder/13--Kuldeep.pdf>.
3. Gupta M, The Imbalanced Political Participation of Women in India, International Journal of Humanities and Management Sciences (IJHMS), 2016, 4(1).
4. Kably L. Women have only 11% representation in India's Parliament, 2013. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Women-have-only-11-representation-in-IndiasParliament/articleshow/26384347.cms?referral=PM>.
5. Niroj S. Ed, Women in Indian Politics, Empowerment of Women through Political Participation, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000.