

SOCIO-POLITICAL RIGHTS AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract:

The empowerment concept makes clear the social, political and economic gap between men and women. It aims at a redistribution of socio-economic power and control of resources in favour of women based on a development strategy which is no longer oriented on growth, the world market and military power. The concept of human rights has become the center of attention today. The problem about human rights takes different forms in different societies. In some societies political and civil rights are not given or guaranteed to all its citizens, in other societies economic and social rights are not enforced. The importance of human rights movement is to call a society as good society until all its citizens enjoy the human rights. The basic idea behind human rights is that human beings should try to end all unjust discrimination.

Key words: human rights, socio-political power, empowerment, constitutional provisions.

Introduction:

Women empowerment is still a debatable issue in India. She is still treated as a second class citizen especially in India and the reasons are besides illiteracy, customs, traditions, poverty, ignorance, her own lack of interest and motivation. Her lack of interest in her own political empowerment leads to such Governmental policies, which lack proper insight and direction. It is important for the empowerment of women that the women actively participate in the political process of the nation. This paper tries to discuss these issues with special reference to the nation. This paper tries to discuss these issues with special reference to the political rights of the woman in India.

Politics at every level of participation is dominated by men. Political participation is not just casting vote. It include wide range of other activities – like membership of political party, electoral campaigning, attending party meeting, demonstrations, communication with leaders, holding party positions, contesting elections, membership in representatives bodies, influencing decision making and other related activities. With this understanding of political participation, the evidences shows that in most of the countries participation of women is not impressive as the number of women participating in active politics is smaller compared to men. Large mass of women are kept out of political arena due to various reasons.

The British Government granted the right to vote on the basis of wifehood, property and education. The 1935 Government of India act provided for right to vote for all women above 21 years of age who fulfilled the conditions of property and education. The Constitution of India which came into existence in the year 1950 granted universal adult franchise to all its citizens.

Concept of women empowerment in India:

In the era of globalization, women empowerment is inevitable. At this juncture, Janaki R, Krishnan quoted, “woman is the builders and moulders of a nation’s destiny, and they seek integration into the national mainstream of equal partners in progress and development”. Hence the elaborative studies on women empowerment in India aptly supported the evolvement of women empowerment as an instrument to achieve overall development of India in general, and rural political participation of women in particular.

It is not that much easy to define women empowerment. Dictionary meaning of “empower” is to authorize, hence, women empowerment concept was first brought in the lime light in international women’s conference held in Nairobi in 1985.

Global conference on women empowerment held in 1988 defined women empowerment as “the surest way of making women, partners in development.” In a broader sense, women empowerment means making women the women self-reliant, giving her the liberty to make choices in her life and providing her with information and knowledge to take decisions.

However, the empowerment of women is a global issue and it is an active multi-dimensional process that enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It encompasses social, political, cultural, educational and economic and decision-making changes in the process of development.

Political empowerment of women: since women empowerment concept denotes its multi-faceted nature, the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of women empowerment are relevant for our study:

- Equal access and increased participation in political power structure.
- Equal opportunities to associate and involve in voluntary organizations, trade unions, non-governmental organizations and training institution etc.
- Equitable representation of women in political decision-making structure at domestic, village, national and international levels.
- Social leadership in community action.

- Attaining economic security.
- Redefining gender rules and norms and their roles.
- Action for entitlement rights.
- Entrepreneurship skills development
- Equal opportunities of education and literary skills.

Political Rights of Women: In 20th century women are having various political rights

- (1) Right to Vote
- (2) Right to compete in election
- (3) Right to employment
- (4) Right to complaint against Government
- (5) Right to petition
- (6) Residential rights in Abroad
- (7) Political Reservation.

Woman political participation in India:

India is a male dominant society where woman are treated as only for family life and not for political leadership from the beginning of Vedas period and up to 1950 in India women were neglected in national politics. The government did not provide reservation in assembly or parliament seats. Their number is also very less in executive compared to men. From 1950 to 2010 woman numbers did not cross more than 11% in legislature in both national level and state level. Indira Gandhi served as PM for 15 years is a milestone in Indian women politics. Perhaps women are being treated more equally under the law, gaining more respect in society, and acquiring greater power to shape political, economic, and social change.

History of political participation of women in India:

The root to the participation of women in politics can be traced back to 19th Century social reform movement. Social reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Mahadeva Govinda Ranade, Behramji Malabari raised their voices against the prevailing practices and social Customs subjugating women. Their efforts rallied around issues affecting women's life adversely such as the practice of sati, female infanticide, plight of the widows, child marriage, polygamy etc. Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar fought against polygamy and encouraged women's education. Pandith Ramabai, Manorama Majumdar, Sarala Devi Goshal started Bharath Shree mahamandal for the education of women. Swarna Kumari Devi Started

women's Organisation called Sakthi Samiti in 1886 for widows. Behranje Malabari started campaign against child marriage and nationwide debate over age of Consent Bill so the movement was almost totally overwhelmed by Hindu revivalism by the end of the 19th Century.

Constitutional provisions:

On attaining independence in the year 1947, India became a republic. The Constitution of India adopted a Parliamentary form of government. The preamble of the constitution of India resolved to secure to all citizens justice, Social, Economic and political, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and to worship, equality of status and opportunity and to promote among them fraternity assuring the dignity of individual and the unity of nation. To attain this, the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights. Art 15 prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, place, of birth. It is a guarantee against every form of discrimination. According to article 15(3), nothing shall prevent the state from taking special provisions for the benefit women and children. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matter relating to employment or appointment to any office under state.

Article 39- a) guarantees right to an adequate means of livelihood for all citizen 39b) guarantees equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Article 42 guarantees just and humane condition o work and maternity relief. This is in accordance with article 23 and 25 of Universal Declaration of Human Right. Article 51-A Clause (e) says that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India – to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, transcending religious, linguistic and religious or sectional diversities, to renounces practice derogatory to the dignity of women. The 73rd Constitutional amendment has added the following articles to the Constriction providing reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Article 243(D) (2) states not less than 1/3 of the seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to S.C pr ad the case may be S.T. Article 325 and 326 guarantees political equality equal right to participate in political activity and right to vote respectively.

Women in India participate in voting, running for public office, and political parties at lower level political activism and voting are the strongest area of women's political participation. To combat gender inequality in politics, the Indian Government has instituted reservations for seats in local governments. In 1950 universal suffrage granted voting rights to all women. India is a parliamentary system with two houses: Lok Sabha (Lower house) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House) Rates of participation among women in 1962 were 46.63% for Lok Sabha elections and rose to a high in 1984 of 58.60% male turnout during that same period was 63.31% in 1962 and 68.18% in 1984.

Voter turnout for national elections in the past 50 years has remained stagnant with turnout raging between 50 to 60%. State elections have seen a growing trend in women's participation, and in some cases women's turnout is exceeding male turnout. Increased turnout of women was reported for the 2012 Vidhan Sabha elections (Legislative/state assemblies) with states such as Uttar Pradesh reporting 58.82% to 60.29% turnout. In the 2013 assembly elections, Women's overall turnout was reported to be 47.4%, and male turnout was 52.5%. Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Daman and Diu, and Pondicherry all reported higher turnouts among women than men in 2013.

Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 65.63% compared to 67.09% turnout for men. According to World Economic Forum's annual global gender gap index studies, India has ranked in top 20 countries world wide for many years. With 9th best in 2013 – a score reflecting more women's participation in India's Political process than Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, France, and United Kingdom, Women have held the posts of president and prime minister of India, as well as chief ministers of various states. Indian voters have elected women to numerous state legislative assemblies and national parliament for many decades. Increased participation is occurring in both rich and poor states in India. The sex ration of voters has improved from 715 females voters for every 1,000 male voters in the 1960s to 883 female voters in the 2000s.

2014 Elections:

Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% turnout for men. In 16 out of 29 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.

Woman political participation in state level:

In ancient India, the woman enjoyed equal status with men in all spheres of the life. Women of later periods spanning between the middle and modern ages have been denied their rightful place of honor and a vortex of innumerable caste and communal combinations, has paid scant regards for the education and welfare of women culminating in child marriage, sati, ban on widow marriage, and divorce, to name a few atrocities on them.

The Level of political participation of woman in 29 states of India is also not good numbers. Some states may have woman leader like Jayalalitha in Tamilnadu, Mayavathi in UP and Mamatha Banarji in West Bengal, Sonia Gandhi, Pratibha Patil, Sheela Deekshith, Smrithi Irani are best example. There are 224 women MLAs are there in out of 1331. From 1952 to 2000 in assembly elections women elected as MLA is only 4.1% in total seats.

Woman political participation in Local Bodies:

Challenges to increased participation of woman in politics in India, particularly at the local level are manifold. After 33% reservation provided to women in local bodies from the 1993 Panchayatraj act there are 13, 64,154 (March 2013) lakhs women members are witnessed in local bodies throughout India and now reservation quota extended to 50% by UPA Government in 2010.

Sate-wise elected women representatives in Panchayats

State-wise Elected Women Representatives in Panchayats (as on 1 March 2013)	
States	Women
Andhra Pradesh	85,154
Arunachal Pradesh	3,889
Assam	9,903
Bihar	68,065
Chhattisgarh	86,538
Goa	504
Gujarat	39,206
Haryana	24,876
Himachal Pradesh	13,947
Jammu & Kashmir	NA
Jharkhand	31,157
Karnataka	41,577
Kerala	9,907
Madhya Pradesh	198,459
Maharashtra	101,466
Manipur	836
Odisha	NA
Punjab	29,389
Rajasthan	54,673
Sikkim	NA
Tamil Nadu	41,790
Tripura	2,044
Uttar Pradesh	309,511
Uttarkhand	34,494
West Bengal	19,762
All- India	1,364,154

The 73rd and 74th amendments (1993) : five year plan (1974-78) has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. 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 (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local level.

Women are being treated more equally under the law, gaining more respect in society, and acquiring greater power to shape political, economic, and social change. To be direct, we have a long way to go in addressing one of this generation's foremost challenges: strengthening women's rights and equality.

Problems for women to participate in politics:

There are many problems to women who does not participate in all kind of politics

- Male Domination
- Lack of Opportunities
- Lack of Family Support
- Influence of religion factor
- Political apathy of women
- Inferiority complex
- Dominance of women who had political background
- Lack of self perception in women
- Increasing the violence against the women
- Deep rooted cultural beliefs
- Casteism and Classism

Social Rights of Women: equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender –sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of education, occupation, vocation, technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area. Sectoral time targets in existing policies will be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes,

minorities, gender sensitive curricula would be developed at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the cases of gender discrimination.

Recommendations: To come out of above problems a woman can get opportunities in politics through these observations

- Supporting them to take higher education
- Reservation should be extent state and central legislature & executive
- Woman themselves come over from their prejudice mind participation in politics.
- Men should support woman to take participation in political activities.
- Family & Government Support inevitable to participate in politics.
- Creation of a feminist consciousness which make the women identify with themselves and the characteristics so specific to them.
- Economic empowerment of woman can help them participation in local politics to SHCs
- Creation of good environment to take participation in policies.

Conclusion:

The empowerment concept makes clear the social, political and economic gap between men and women. It aims at a redistribution of socio-economic power and control of resources in favour of women based on a development strategy which is no longer oriented on growth, the world market and military power. The concept of human rights has become the center of attention today. The problem about human rights takes different forms in different societies. In some societies political and civil rights are not given or guaranteed to all its citizens, in other societies economic and social rights are not enforced. The importance of human rights movement is to call a society as good society until all its citizens enjoy the human rights. The basic idea behind human rights is that human beings should try to end all unjust discrimination. The increase in the number of women in legislature definitely will not bring overnight changes in the status of women. It is foolishness to think that it will solve the entire problems faced by women and bring equality immediately. The 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India with 33% reservation for women has given opportunity for the entry of large number of socially marginalized category such as women to enter into the domain of local institution and their performance is very encouraging. In the year 2006, 10, 41,460 women were elected to the local institutions. Education, sexual violence, discrimination, gender inequality should be eradicated and a success story of women in local governments indicates the qualitative changes in the performance of women in politics and governance. It would provide a way to bring a sense of equality in gender and enhance of women in politics.

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