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Women empowerment: Dynamic and political process

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Abstract

One of India's most pressing challenges is gender equality. Women have faced discrimination in the political process as well as in the social and economic spheres. Politically, women are side-lined. Since India's independence, women's engagement in the democratic process has consistently been minimal. The participation of women in the political process of the nation began to increase after numerous initiatives, including the constitutional amendment for women's reservation. Globalization, however, also brought about a number of other alterations and advancements, such as a strengthening of democratisation globally, which supports Indian women's political empowerment even more. In India's national politics, which have undergone significant reforms in favour of gender equality, women have been steadily increasing. This paper focuses on the Empowerment of Women and the Indian State, Women empowerment through legislative intervention at local-self-governance, Political empowerment of women: Opportunities and Challenges.

Keywords: Gender equality, constitutional amendment, empowerment, governance, opportunities

Introduction

Nearly half of the population are women. But when it comes to involvement in the business and politics, they lag well behind men. This has caused a focus on women's participation in development, also known as "women empowerment." The topic that receives the greatest attention today is women's empowerment. In order to empower women, the Prime Minister has called for "beti bachao beti padhao." In order to promote "transparent and responsible government and administration, and sustainable development," the United Nations advocated for the political, social, and economic empowerment of women in 1996 at the CEDAW Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action (Rai, 1999). The Millennium Development Goals, created to promote development, particularly in developing and underdeveloped nations, focus on empowering women through the elimination of poverty, the elimination of gender biases in primary and secondary education, the provision of access to reproductive health services, the decrease of maternal mortality rates, and other objectives. But it's crucial to comprehend what "empowerment" actually entails.

The main component of overall social development, according to the World Bank, is women's empowerment. Gender equality and women's empowerment were emphasised as key components of the Millennium Development Goal (2019) as a way to significantly enhance emerging economies. As a result, every nation needs a unique set of policies to achieve gender parity and improve the status of women in politics. Empowerment should be viewed as a component of believing that one is actively making decisions (King & Mason, 2001). Women who are empowered can take control of their lives, set their own goals, plan, and request support from the government and community during the change. as in many other cultures, as a result, it is thought that women need additional support due to their significant role in decision-making and societal development. The idea of empowerment describes the experience of gaining control and participating in decision-making (Naz, 2006; Karl, 1995). Inclusion, growth, and peace are all dependent on women's empowerment and full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of culture, including participation in decision-making and authority. This was emphasised in the Beijing Declaration (1995).

Women's empowerment was therefore designated by the UN as the fifth of its Millennium Development Goals implemented from 2000 to 2015. According to Alexander *et al.* (2016), the development of women's skills, capacities, and accomplishments to achieve equality in

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influencing and exercising political power is considered as women's social empowerment ^[1].

Political empowerment is a technique that enables women to increase their mobility, overcome isolation, develop self-confidence and self-image, and establish their presence in government by participating in decision-making in an environment where critical analysis and increasing levels of consciousness are used to track and influence growth progress. Thus, by seeking to change society's mentality and creating more venues for women to participate in political decision-making, the national government emerges as a crucial role in encouraging women's involvement in politics (World Bank, 2001; Oxaal 1997). In order to support the silent group in the cultural areas, it is crucial to promote the decentralisation of authority and power. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage the oppressed group to participate in decision-making for empowerment. Women's potential to improve is not only diminished by inequality, but it is also hampered. There is a significant lack of discussion regarding how women's inequality violates human rights, and women's underrepresentation in Scandinavian legislative bodies was particularly apparent (Randall, 1987; UN, 2019).

Empowerment of Women and the Indian State

Through the NPC report (1947), CSWI (1974), Shramshakti or National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector (1988), National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000), and National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, the Indian State has attempted to address the issue of women's status, role, and empowerment since independence (2001). The role of women in an Indian Independence was envisioned in the 1947 National Planning Committee Report on Woman's Role in Planned Economy. The research addressed the issue of where women fit into India's planned economy, taking into account factors such as their socioeconomic standing, educational attainment, civil rights, and familial status. It addressed the need to eliminate any barriers or disadvantages standing in the way of achieving equal opportunity and position for women in society. The power dynamic between men and women did not significantly change in post-independence India despite the commitment to gender equality and constitutional protections, since women's issues were primarily centred on their welfare and their maternal roles (Khullar, 2005). Inequalities that persisted in Indian society after independence were addressed by the Committee on Status of Women in India in 1974. Its conclusions showed that the planning and development processes had emphasised inequality. The Shramshakti research emphasised the issues with discrimination and inequality that the great majority of women working in the unorganised sector experienced ^[2].

Women empowerment though legislative intervention at local-self-governance

The journey to political empowerment for Indian women was the main topic of Shrivastava's 2019 study. The empowerment of women in India on the political, social, and economic fronts has been covered in the article. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts, which placed

a strong emphasis on empowering women, are illustrated. The execution of these legislation has a number of challenges, which have been noted and addressed. Systemic problems, bureaucracy, and flaws in the infrastructure necessary to execute the stated goals are rare. The psycho-social barrier and other social revolution fronts, however, have not been covered in this study.

analysed how women's standing has changed through time as a result of new laws and regulations such the Sikkim Panchayat (Amendment) Bill, 2011, which grants women 50% of the seats in local Panchayats. The Sikkim Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 2011, was the first action taken in the northeast state to increase the percentage of women with reservations from 40 percent (2007) to 50 percent (2011) in the Panchayat Raj Institution, where proportionate reservation is intended to include women in the post of Sabhapati and Up-Sabhapati in Gram Panchayats and Adhyaksha and Up-Adhaksya in Zilla Panchayats.

Political empowerment of women: Opportunities and Challenges

Study was done on India's reputation for women's empowerment as well as the obstacles women their encounter. It was found that Indian women still have somewhat lesser status than men and are relatively less empowered. "Access to Education," "Employment," and "Change in Social Structure" were named as the variables influencing women's empowerment and are still in the early phases of implementation. However, a considerable gap has been found between policy developments and real community practise ^[3].

promoting election campaign measures and raising awareness of the importance of instilling the ideals of gender equality and gender justice in society, especially among women, in order to support and encourage the passage of the Women's Political Reservation Bill. The study largely relied on documents from the United Nations, international standards and agreements, provisions of the Indian Constitution, and other statutory enactments. However, it was found that there were capacity gaps, a significant gender difference in literacy, and legislative and policy shortcomings.

Women in the legislature in developing nations have an impact on politics by bringing up issues of gender equality and the benefits of implementing public policy. Women make significant contributions to more effectively addressing societal issues, which impacts and has led to a variety of extended welfare services pertaining to women and children. Women now have a better chance than ever to be represented in the cabinet in parliamentary democracies thanks to the rise in their political participation. A key factor in formulating various government policies pertaining to women for an equal beneficiary is the presence of women in the cabinet. For instance, only when women are represented in cabinet ministries will the state's complete weeks of maternity and parental leave be implemented (Atchison & Down 2009). This study demonstrates how the presence of women improves the way that different issues pertaining to women are taken into account during decision-making, which may not be realised in their absence. For instance,

¹ Mohd Shahwaiz, Globalization, Democracy, and Women: A Review of the Political Empowerment of Women in India, Dogo Rangsang Research Journal (2020).

² Shruthi Chandra. Empowering Women through Political Representation in India, Research Gate 2016.

³ Neeru Sewa. Dynamics of Indian Political Scenario in the Context of Political Empowerment of Women with a Case Study on Participation of Women in Politics in Sikkim, International Journal of Innovative Studies in Sociology and Humanities 2019.

choices in favour of women, such as maternity leave or other benefits, have been made by the Indian government as a result of the participation of women (The Hindu, 2017). Nevertheless, given that patriarchy relieves dads of having to share equal responsibility for the child's feeding, it might be necessary to sustain it despite the easing of restrictions on Indian women. Government-sponsored services are only available to the public sector, where they are scarce, and private businesses are not required to abide by government regulations^[4].

Women's political empowerment is a process that increases their adaptability. Women may have the chance to change their self-perception and develop confidence during this process, which supports the realisation of their existence in the nation. As women have the chance to promote participation and knowledge and guide them in continuous development, a decision-making area for them expands. Political equality includes the right to access institutionalised centres of power in addition to the equal right to "franchise" or vote (Kabeer, 2005). To ensure the equal rights of women, India has ratified a number of international agreements and human rights treaties. The most significant convention out of all of them was "All kinds of Discrimination against Women" in 1993. Women have historically been excluded from national politics for a number of socio-cultural and patriarchal norms. Very few women who were backed by their families were able to join the mainstream of politics. The political climate of the nation deters women from entering politics because they have less access to resources like money, power, and other means of influence in the public arena. Politics has a reputation among women for being a filthy game. While facing difficulties like character assassination, threat, assault, etc. are problems faced by female activists or decision-makers. There have been several rapes, bodily attacks, and murders of women who dared to participate in politics. The measure to enable and accommodate women in India's mainstream politics was first introduced in the country's parliament twenty years ago. However, the participation of women is still not dynamic^[5].

If women's empowerment does not reach the political sphere, it will either fall short or not completely avoid male dominance. The socioeconomic empowerment of women would be complemented with political empowerment (Sen, 1997). Women's political empowerment is important in many different ways. In order to engage in decision-making in an increasing framework of awareness and critical analysis to control and affect the direction of development, it enhances women's mobility, breaks down isolation, builds self-confidence and self-image, and establishes public presence. In order to achieve political equality, women must be included in the nation's political institutions in addition to having an equal right to vote. Women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is acknowledged as a step in the direction of equality.

The preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental obligations, and the guiding principles of state policy all contain references to the principle of gender equality. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution recognise the reservation policy as a tool of empowerment at the

Panchayat level. India's reservation policy has been viewed as an important step toward achieving social equality. It is concerning that so few women are represented in decision-making after sixty years of constitutional government. In order to eliminate gender-based disparities, women's political inclusion is necessary, according to Naila Kabeer (2005). However, inclusion and empowerment should take place through the electoral process, not through other channels. The elected women might take the position of their inactive presence with one that is active. Women's participation in governance would be crucial in eradicating the many forms of discrimination and obstruction to equal rights and opportunities, achieving the intended result of establishing a just social order^[6]. According to the UN Women report 2012–2013, thousands of women have been elected to serve in village councils in India. The female representatives are becoming more self-assured and have access to a platform to advocate for their objectives and rights. The inclusion of women in India's political institutions has led to a number of changes in the country's social and cultural practises. One of the key objectives of the Millennium Development Goals is the wellbeing of women (MDGs). Women are becoming more and more politically empowered (UN Women, 2012-2013; IPU, 2019). The studies also cover the representation of women at India's lowest level of governance, which is designated for them. However, India's state and national legislatures do not have nearly enough women to preserve gender equality^[7].

Within the patriarchal framework of contemporary democracies, women who enter politics are unable to play a role in fundamentally altering the politics of sexuality; instead, they mostly take on political roles that are defined by men. To truly provide political space for women within liberal democracies, the underlying premise needs to be altered.

Factors Hindering Women's Political Participation

Different nations have different levels of women's engagement and access to formal political power systems. In industrialised nations, particularly in the Nordic countries, there is a consistent rising trend in women's representation and participation in politics. Nine of the twelve nations with more than 33 percent female parliamentary representation are classified as having high levels of human development. However, the advancements in nations with middle and low levels of human development remain insignificant.

The social and political structures of a society influence the structural and functional limitations that women experience. Women frequently experience political exclusion, which can be traced to (a) social and political discourses, (b) political institutions and organizations, and (c) sociocultural and functional restrictions that limit women's personal and group agency.

Ideological Factors

The male dominance paradigm known as patriarchy impacts how women interact in politics. It changes men and women into men and women and creates a hierarchy of gender interactions in which men are given preference (Eisenstein

⁴ Das, S. Women and empowerment: Predicament or affirmative action. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 123-135 (2007).

⁵ Mohd Shahwaiz. Globalization, Democracy, and Women: A Review of the Political Empowerment of Women in India, *Dogo Rangsang Research Journal* 2020.

⁶ Atchison, A., & Down, I. (2009). Women cabinet ministers and female-friendly social policy. *Poverty & Public Policy*, 1(2), 1-23.

⁷ Acker, J. Gender, capitalism and globalization, *Critical Sociology*, 30(1), 17-41 (2004).

1984). According to Andrienne Rich, patriarchy is "a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men determine what role women shall or shall not play by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs etiquette, education, and the division of labour in which the female is everywhere incorporated under the male."

The patriarchal system places men in the public sphere as fathers and husbands and places women in the private sector of the home as mothers and spouses. This is one of the key elements that influence women's political participation around the world. This ideological gap does not, however, accurately represent reality. In the daily lives of women, the lines separating the public and private are frequently blurred. However, the home realm is still seen as the appropriate environment for women in both the North and the South, whereas the public domain is identified with men. In accordance with the material and discursive options offered in a particular culture and society, women must negotiate their entry into and claim on public space. Women continue to be characterised as private throughout nations, which has led to their exclusion from politics, despite the gender role concept being fluid and constantly changing as it intersects with a society's economic, social, and political institutions^[8].

Political Factors

The nature of politics plays a significant role in determining whether or not women are included in politics. Vicky Randall contrasts the conventional definition of politics, which views it as an activity, a conscious, deliberate participation in the process by which resources are distributed among citizens, by defining politics as a "articulation, or working out of relationships within an already given power structure." This idea of politics considers family life to be outside of politics and limits political participation to the public realm. In the traditional definition of politics, the public-private dichotomy is utilised to keep women out of the public political arena, and even when they are included, they do so as mothers and wives. Another barrier to women's political participation is the male dominance of politics, political parties, and formal political organisations. A male perspective on problems of national importance is frequently held by political parties with a male majority, which disillusions women because their perspective is frequently overlooked and not reflected in the policies of their parties. Due to the gender bias of male leadership, women are typically not elected to positions of authority within party organisations. Council and parliamentary sessions are scheduled at unusual hours that conflict with women's home duties^[9].

Women's political engagement is influenced by both the overall democratic system and the degree of democratisation. Comparatively more space has been made for women to participate in politics in secular democracies like those in Europe and some developing nations than in those where religious orthodoxy has dominated politics and democracy^[10].

Socio-Cultural Factors

Though the kind and degree of subordination vary among nations, the inferior status of women to men is a worldwide occurrence. Because of the socially prescribed duties that women and men play in the reproductive realm, gender role theory not only creates the dualism of femininity and masculinity, but also arranges them in a hierarchical manner. The state, society, and families give little attention to the human development of women, maintaining the status quo. The social indices, which show varied degrees of gender inequality in all countries in terms of health, politics, employment, and ownership of productive resources, reflect this. Additionally, class, caste, and nationality that govern access to resources and opportunities mediate gender. One of the greatest barriers to women's political participation in the public political sphere is their sociocultural reliance.

Due to their simultaneous responsibilities in the reproductive and productive domains, women also find it challenging to participate in politics due to the limited time they have at their disposal. They have limited free time due to their major roles as moms and wives, as well as conflicting domestic and caregiving duties. Women also encounter cultural barriers to movement in several of the nations, particularly in South Asia. Their mobility is limited by the purdah and sex segregation laws. Women must be exposed to politics in order to interact with both male and female constituents and speak at public events.

Economic Factors

Politics is getting more and more commodified. It costs more and more money to get involved in politics. Women's lack of ownership and access to productive resources restricts the extent of their political activism.

Lack of Social Capital and Political Capacities

Because they are frequently not in charge of their communities, tribes, or kinship groups, women frequently lack social capital. As a result, they lack a constituency base and the means to participate in politics, such as political skills, financial resources, education, training, and information access.

Strategies for Women's Political Participation

Due to a lack of comparison data and a time crunch, this section is unable to evaluate the effective ways for promoting women's political engagement in-depth. Only two strategies-gender quotas and women's networking experiences-will be the subject of this essay.

Quotas

Gender quotas have been a popular fast track approach around the world to address the historical exclusion of women from the official political sphere. Many nations have implemented gender quotas either voluntarily or by legislation over the second part of the 20th century. Discursive disagreement taints the gender quota. This section provides an overview of some of the concerns raised in comparative studies on gender quotas without arguing the two separate opposing viewpoints^[11].

In the literature, there is unambiguous agreement that

⁸ Rai M. Shirin International Perspective on Gender and Governance, Macmillan Press, Great Britain (2007).

⁹ Randall, V. (1987) Women and Politics: An International Perspective Basingstoke: Macmillan 2nd Edition 1994.

¹⁰ Farzana Bari. Women's Political Participation: Issues and Challenges, EGM/WPD-EE/2005/EP.12 3 November 2005

¹¹ https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJSSP-12-2019-0261/full/html?casa_token=s9PvCem2LBoAAAAA:ncAJpSy4M-GHvFPxqzpuVgpZFncmUoy6yr94nay7s7Ek46LL last visited on 18 July 2022

gender quotas are a useful instrument for resolving women's exclusion and assuring their participation in formal structures of politics. However, the debate centres on the crucial question of whether or not the inclusion of women in political structures has effectively mainstreamed gender issues in politics. The limitations of gender quotas in empowering women in politics as well as their nature and modalities have been brought up by this ^[12].

Gender inequities, which are structural and systemic, are the framework in which gender quotas are implemented. Women's participation through gender quotas cannot result in effective representation unless structural barriers to their political exclusion are addressed. The same point was made by Rai (2005), who claimed that "quotas are important in addressing the exclusion of women from the public political sphere, but they can only form one part of a multi-faceted strategy for empowering women, which must in addition to increased political participation also involve a redistribution of socio-economic resources within societies." Women who don't have enough civic, economic, and political rights are unable to properly exercise their rights. As a result, there needs to be a connection between gender quotas and social and economic justice in society ^[13].

Additionally, essentialist presumptions about women as a unique group with a unique perspective and the universalization of women as a category are pervasive in gender quotas. There are diverse groupings of women. They are separated by class, ethnicity, religion, and rural versus urban upbringing. In order to secure women's political empowerment, it is necessary to situate the gender quota within the context of variety and difference due to the dominance of elite women in political structures caused by state quotas.

Adding more women to the political system won't be enough to close the gender imbalance in that field. It is also a problem with policies and results that cannot be solved until supportive mechanisms are put in place and given the right conditions to function. As a result, the structure and operation of quota systems become crucial to affirmative action policies. Experience has shown that quota mechanisms must be straightforward, empowering, and give women the opportunity to grow their constituency.

Lastly, the success of gender quotas depends on the broader context of politics and democracy. Quota discussions take place across the globe within the context of liberal democracy and citizenship. The foundation of contemporary liberal democracies is the extending of citizenship to everyone, regardless of their race, faith, or gender. The electorates are not free to exercise their right to vote in the elite version of representational democracy that is used in many nations. The vast majority of voters' voting habits are still influenced by patriarchal relationships and primal allegiances.

When gender quotas are implemented in this political setting, they may not always result in gender equality because some of these regimes utilise this strategy to negotiate with modernity and pluralism by integrating the outcasts on the terms of the male patriarchal elite. Women

who enter politics through quotas on these terms are unable to bridge the public-private gap and are constrained to exclusively engage in politics in public. Despite the fact that they continue to be private individuals when they enter the public arena of politics, women in politics have failed to bring their families into it. My argument is that women who enter politics through gender quotas in the patriarchal environment of contemporary democracies are unable to change the sexual politics in governmental institutions. Instead, they are made to compete on the terms of men. Therefore, it is determined that gender quotas cannot result in women's political empowerment without a change in larger politics ^[14].

Conclusion

Therefore, it is supported by the research that women's political empowerment is essential for the advancement and development of the country. By presenting a case study of the dimensions of political empowerment among Indian women, the present study has provided new insight into the area of women and politics. The study employed empirical surveys of urban middle class working women in India to pinpoint five key factors that have an impact on women's political empowerment in the nation. These five factors-accessibility to information and political awareness, political and legal environments, family support and individual ambition, and internal female motivation-were discovered. According to the study, the political climate of a country, individual goals, one's level of self-awareness, and the generational divide were all found to be important predictors of women's political empowerment. The generation gap has been discovered to have a considerable impact on empowering women to be politically engaged, hence efforts made to increase the scope of political empowerment among Indian women may also be influenced by this factor. The study discredits the idea that marital status can have any bearing on women's political empowerment. If the pilot model created for this study is effective, it can be launched and copied all throughout the country.

Women must be made aware of the urgent need by giving them the opportunity and venues they need to demonstrate their worth. When formulating plans, strategies, and actions for their protection and well-being, the government authorities should involve the common people, especially women. To make good changes at regular intervals and empower women, decision-makers must reevaluate current policies and socialistic tendencies. In addition, the government must launch a number of initiatives to support women in collaboration with non-governmental organisations and multinational corporations. To be able to deal with the complicated requirements of preserving the survival of women, political leaders should adopt a flexible approach to facilitating the formulation of pro-women legislation. Family members, particularly the males, need to be made aware of their responsibility for creating a network of encouragement for their female family members so they can support them in pursuing their goals and making significant contributions to the growth and development of other stakeholders as well as the country as a whole.

¹² Shah Alam. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN POLITICS AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA, International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences 2015.

¹³ D. Syamala Devi and G. Lakshmi. POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIAN LEGISLATURE: A STUDY, The Indian Journal of Political Science Vol. 66, No. 1 (Jan.-March, 2005), pp. 75-92

¹⁴ Eisenstein, Z (1984) Contemporary Feminist Thought, Unwin, London Phillips Ann (1998), Feminisms and Politics, Oxford University Press.

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