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A STUDY ON WOMEN IN INDIAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

'If women are to have any say in the lives they lead, they must enter politics.' Fernanda Nissen (1862-1920) of Norway, one of the earliest feminist politicians, had stated thus. Such a statement is no more disputed. Women's representation in politics has its impact on every realm of the social life – leadership, administration, social status, economic empowerment, literacy and education, and health and hygiene. Whether impact is visible and substantial is the issue. However, before going into details, it is important to understand the strands of politics. Informal micro-politics that involves sectional organizations, movements and processes; formal macro-politics that is mostly party politics and representation in decision-making bodies; public administration, which is governance and partly political governance; and participation in semi-judicial administrative bodies are the four major areas of political and administrative processes prevailing in India. Political participation is still broader, involving people's participation in the selection and election processes. Participation in public administration is also political participation in a broader sense, as it is part of the political system of any nation. Public administration is governance, linked to executive, legislative and judicial wings of government, and related to quasi or semi governmental, autonomous, or non-governmental institutions. The role of women in public administration and governance is also a parameter to measure the impact of women's representation in politics. Women's equal participation in the decision-making process, policy-making, planning and administration is very significant to ensure women's equality as well as their equal participation in the developmental process. As membership in legislative (nominated or elected) bodies drastically affects power relationships, and as these members are allotted development funds (such as MLA fund or MP fund) in India, women's participation and leadership in these deliberative bodies are very significant.

INTRODUCTION

Women have always been at an inferior position. In the 19th century, the issues raised for the uplift of women revolved around sati (immolation of wife at the funeral pyre of her husband), devadasi system (so-called devoting of women in the 'service of god'), child marriage, purdah or veil even from the husband, illiteracy, polygamy, and ill treatment of widows. Now, almost after a century, the issue is overall empowerment and development of women in every field whether it is education, employment, wages, or equal share in household work, or participation in political affairs, women's health, and peace. Wife battering, sexual harassment at workplace, rape, HIV/AIDS are matters of community and governmental concern. Illiteracy is the greatest hurdle in women's development and remains to be handled

despite the efforts of Gokhale, Gandhiji, leaders of freedom movement, and later of the Constitution makers. Majority of the women in India especially in rural areas remain illiterate and according to the 1991 census, there were only 39.5 per cent female literates. This is astonishing in a country where there have been innumerable legislations since India's independence in 1947. Even now, after the launching of the Internet and websites by various women's organizations including National Commission for Women, opening of primary, elementary and secondary schools, and attainment of higher education among many rich and middle class women, the social condition of women in our country presents a bleak picture. Women continue to bear the greatest burden of human deprivation and poor healthcare in India. This is despite women's participation in freedom struggle, constitutional and legislative provisions in favour of women, and the Panchayat Raj whereby women are elected in a minimum of 33 per cent of seats in local elected bodies.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Women's participation in freedom struggle began in early 19th century in India. In 1817, Bhim Bhai Holkar fought bravely with the British Colonel Malkani and defeated him in guerrilla warfare. In 1820s, Rani Channamma of Kitur fought with the British. Rani Laxmi Bai, Rani of Ramgarh, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Rani Jindan, Rani of Tulsipur, Zinat Mahal and others fought in 1857 against the foreign rule in the first war of Indian independence, euphemistically termed the 'Sepoy Mutiny'. Therefore, part played by the women in the great outbreak of 1857-58 invited admiration even from the English. Many other women laid their lives in this battlefield, but their names remain unknown. However, there was no mass awakening among the women at this time but there was some sort of movement spreading slowly in them.[1] It was Gandhi who gave strength and inspiration to the freedom movement and drew into it women in large numbers. During the Edwin Montague reform period in 1917, women demanded franchise, for the first time. Sarojini Naidu demanded the same conditions of franchise for women as men have. Women sent petitions to the Franchise Committee urging the grant of vote for women on the same property qualifications as for men, or to at least women graduates. Other women like Hirabai Tata, Milthan Tata and Annie Besant also took up this issue. In 1918, Indian National Congress unanimously passed a resolution supporting voting rights for women. By 1926, women got the right to vote, on the same terms as men in all provinces so far as elections to the provincial legislature were concerned. Six million women got the right to vote. Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi, Hansa Mehta, Jaishri Raiji, Manibehn and others formed Desh Sevika Sanghs and link between different states of India like Bengal and Punjab. In July 1930, women participated in the campaign against Viceroy Irwin and with black flags hidden shouted 'Irwin Go Back.' They all came from Ambala, Lahore and Shimla. Among the leading women participants were Mrs. Zutshi, Kamala Nehru's mother Mrs. Kaul, Parvati Devi, Smt. Asaf Ali, Satyavati from Delhi and Manmohini Sehgal. Begum Shali Nawaz along with Sarojini Naidu also attended the Roundtable Conference during 1930-32. Not only these women were elected in the elections, but also by 1937 elections six women became cabinet members including Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit who became minister for local self-governments in United Provinces, and Begum Shali Nawaz in Punjab. Gandhiji linked the participation of women in the Independence Movement

with the social conditions of the time. He believed that women were the Satyagrahis and without them, he could not do anything. Gandhi's personality inspired confidence in them. His letters to various leaders show how he encouraged women. He believed that women could suffer more; therefore, they were fit for non-violent struggle. The writing of various women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and others show the tremendous impact of Gandhi on women.

CONSTITUTIONAND LEGISLATIONS

Constitution of India has provisions in favour of women, especially Articles 14, 15 and 16. Not only the modernist framers of our Constitution, but also women members of the Constituent Assembly were behind these moves. Article 45 was included that makes it obligatory on the state to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. This provision, since 1993, has acquired the status of fundamental right. The Directive principles of state policy in Article 39 (e) provides that the state shall in particular, direct its policy towards securing the heath and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of the children are not abused and are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength. Two provisions were made against exploitation, in part IV of the Constitution on the fundamental rights. Many legislations were introduced including the Child Marriage Restraint Act / Sharda Act, the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986, etc. Women were brought into the purview of inheritance rights. What became significant is the political reservation of women in Panchayats. Political Reservation for Women Though the legislators could so far evade the Women's Reservation Bill, it should be said that the 73rd amendment was significant. It is worth going through the history of political reservation for women. After Independence, a token representation of women was recommended in Panchayats in the 1950s and '60s. The Central Council of Local Government in its third meeting held in Srinagar in 1957 recorded that the elected representatives, about 20 in number in each block panchayat, would co-opt two women who are interested in work among women and children. The Balwantray Mehta study team in 1957 also suggested a similar token co-option of two members interested in work among women and children by the 20 or so elected members of the block level Panchayat Samiti. It also suggested similar co-option in the village panchayat. In the early sixties, while discussing the welfare of women and weaker sections, the Study Team on the Position of Gram Sabha recommended that two women members should be co-opted in the village panchayat in case no women members were duly elected. The Team also recommended that the issues concerning the women folk of the village should be discussed in women's meeting preceding the Gram Sabha meeting, so that the women members could put forward their views. Thus, it reflected almost universal tokenism in respect of women's representation in panchayats. The State Acts in 1950s and 1960s reflected this ideology and consensus.[2] When the Ashok Mehta Committee reviewed the panchayat raj system in 1978, it also continued women's token representation but it suggested that if no women were elected, two women who would get the highest number of votes in zilla parishad elections should become members. In the event of no women coming forward for election, two women might be co-opted. Similar recommendation was made for the mandal panchayats in the two-tier panchayat

structure. In the meantime, the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) was set up in 1971 to look into all aspects of women's status in India, including women's political participation. The Committee in 1974 recommended separate women's statutory panchayats at the village level but as part of the panchayat structure, keeping in view the ineffectiveness of the token representation of women in panchayats. No state government, however, implemented the recommendation. A Committee on PRIs[3] set up by the government of Andhra Pradesh in 1979 discussed the question of reservation in favour of women. It did not recommend co-option of defeated women candidates and instead recommended reservation of 5 per cent of the posts of sarpanches in each block for women. This reservation was recommended, if needed, in panchayats where the percentage of women electors is comparatively higher. In the decade of 1980s, a number of developments particularly the movements and struggles led to more debates on women's issues and renewed activity in favour of women. The dominant discourse, however, continued to be 'women in development' and initiatives were developed to increase women's presence in decision-making structures, at least up to some level. The NPP (National Perspective Plan) in 1998 and the state sponsored national/regional conferences on panchayats, on panchayats and weaker sections and on panchayats and women advocated the strategy of including reservation for women in the panchayats.[4] However, women's representation in the formal political structures has remained marginal. In the Indian Parliament, women have never crossed eight per cent of the membership until recently. Women constituted less than three per cent of the membership in the Lok Sabha in 1952.[5] The 64th Constitutional Amendment bill as presented to Parliament in 1989 stated that 'as nearly as may be' up to 30 per cent seats be reserved in favour of women in the membership of panchayats at all the three levels, including in the seats reserved for SC/ST and in the total seats. In the former, it mandated reservation of one seat for women if this reservation was of only two seats. It did not provide for reservation among chairpersons, leaving such reservation permissible in favour of SC/ST/women if the state legislature wanted. After the 64th amendment fell through and before the 73rd amendment was finally passed, a number of states initiated changes in their panchayat laws to bring reservation for women, in a way, trying to anticipate these developments and claim to be the pacesetters. Thus, Orissa introduced 30 per cent reservation for women in the membership of the panchayats. Similarly, Maharashtra made a change in 1991 by introducing a 30 per cent reservation for women in the membership of the panchayats. Both the states also held elections on this basis to their panchayats. Kerala also introduced 30 per cent reservation for women in panchayats on the same lines. Women in Panchayats after the 73rd Amendment The 73rd Amendment by mandating a minimum one-third reservation for women in the membership as well as in the positions of chairpersons of panchayats at all the three levels, namely, the village, district and intermediate levels, gives representation to women in a 'critical mass'. All the states without exception have given only one-third reservation to women though the amendment spoke of 'not less than one-third' representation for women in membership as well as in chairpersons' positions. The Amendment stipulated one-third reservation for women in the seats reserved for weaker sections, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes as well, thus mandating reservation for women across caste. The Amendment stipulated one-third reservation for women in the seats reserved

for weaker sections, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes as well, thus mandating reservation for women across caste and class. Among the chairpersons, the Amendment spoke only of a minimum one-third reservation in the total numbers. There is no compulsion to ensure this one-third number among chairpersons' posts reserved for SCs and STs. However, almost all the states have included reservation for women chairpersons not only in the total positions but also in the positions reserved for these sections. The Amendment spoke of mandatory rotation of the reserved positions of chairpersons, but apparently not of the posts of members. (It will be evident from the words 'shall be' in the former case [Art. 243D(4)], and 'may be' in the latter case [Art. 243D(1)]). All the state legislations have however rotation of members as well as chairpersons' positions. In fact, where the states have included reservation for backward/other backward classes (only four states have not given this reservation), which is only discretionary in the Constitutional Amendment, they have stipulated onethird reservation for women among these groups also. Some of the States have given them reservation in the position of vicechairperson too. For instance, Orissa gives the Post of vice chairperson to a woman if the Chairperson's post is held by a man. Assam too has similar stipulation. In West Bengal, the vice-chairperson's post also has reservation for SC/ST and women on the same lines as for the posts of chairpersons. On the other hand, Karnataka and Maharashtra made legislative changes for rotating the chairpersons' reservations in twenty months and one year respectively. Thus, five years tenure of one panchayat will have three or five chairpersons limiting the scope of developing sufficient leadership and the possibility of showing performance. The panchayat raj system has led to positive and negative experience. Some of the women members are proxy, and in their place husbands or in-laws work. However, it is a new political exposure, and success stories do rounds in the media. Women leaders are being given leadership training by NGOs and Governmental institutes. Women's Reservation Bill Some parties have objected to the bill in the present form. When the middle-casteists and the Hindi-belt brand of socialists demanded caste quota within the reserved quota for women in legislature, the mainstream upper-casteists and leftists wanted the women's quota free of caste quota. It is interesting and strange to note that the former group fails to anticipate the continuance of caste rules in any electioneering and their parties can put up candidates they like, and the latter group fails to recognize reserved category of women as women. Standing from various points of view and adopting various tactics, the male dominant stream of political set up could so far stall the bill. In 1996, Samajwadi Party (SP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), and Janata Dal MPs tore up the copies of the Bill and stormed the Well of the House. There was an almost similar repeat of the performance in 1998, with Mamata Banerjee going unparliamentary when she overdid a bit in her support of the Bill. Bill was again introduced amidst furore in December 1999, but not taken up. Another attempt failed in March 2003 when SP and RJD did not budge at the all-party meeting. On 6 May 2003, more than a dozen of SP and RJD MPs stalled the proceedings, and the Bill was again not taken up. The facts of leadership of women in different parties show that no party is ready to sacrifice such a percentage of seats to women in state and central legislatures. The hierarchical nature of leadership gives fewer concessions at top while it may concede more at lower levels. Representation of women in leadership positions of the national parties is far from

one-third. It is important that these parties have to take interest in bringing more women in their leaderships. Then it is practically possible to develop onethird representation of women in representative electoral bodies. In the last parliament elections, some women's groups appealed to vote for parties that supported 'women's rights. However, this ended as an anti-NDA electoral fight, as the groups said that the ruling alliance, which had requisite numbers, refused to take up the Bill.[6] As Abhishek Singhvi had opined, before he became the Congress spokesman, the Bill is threatening to become the second oldest bill never to be passed by Parliament, next only to the Lokpal Bill first introduced in the sixties.[7] He has put up two propositions. One: a sort of 'creamy layer cut off' based on a composite index of backwardness; education, income, etc. should be applied to exclude some from being eligible for reservation. Two: apply a disqualifying clause disentitling wives, daughters, or mothers of sitting legislators and ministers.[8] Madhu Kishwar opposes the rotational principle of reservation, which would not allow any candidate to nurture her constituency for long and would snap the bond between the electors and the candidate even before it is fully formed. She also proposes a change in the electoral law, obliging every recognized political party to nominate women for at least one-third of the constituencies.[9] Brinda Karat is also suggesting as similar proposition. As we follow the first-past-the-post system, proposal for quotas in party lists cannot work unless and until the electoral system is changed into proportional representation system.[10] However, the fate of the Bill is even now unclear.

IMPACT ON WOMEN'S LIFE

The impact of women in politics is mixed. Though improved status can be visible in certain respects, overall their situation is not good. The status of women varies enormously from one part of India to another. Discrimination on the ground of sex is visible on the status of girl children, continuing practice of dowry and dowry killings, on the area of health, education, and political representation itself.

GIRL CHILD, DOWRY AND DOWRY

Deaths The girl child continues to confront discrimination on the ground of sex alone, because of the attitude of society. This is conspicuous in villages in some parts or States in India as Rajasthan. The girls are unwanted, in a culture that idolizes sons and dreads the birth of a daughter. To be born female comes close to being less human. Prenatal sex determination tests followed by quick abortions kill many in the womb itself before they can become daughters. Those who survive are denied equal access to healthcare, and girls suffer due to malnutrition. This inequality is grave when seen in the context of 'Health for All' by 2000 AD.[11] Besides as a girl child, she suffers more both physically and mentally after the girl is married. Usually when asked about their health problem, women from both rural and urban areas have articulated it this way: "We always feel so tired." Probe deeper, and you get the story of their punishing work burden. Their day starts long before anyone else in the family. The hard domestic chores and childcare, under-nutrition, eating at odd hours, etc take a severe toll on their bodies. The women workers, whether in the fields or in the city in offices, suffer more. Female battering and beating exist among the illiterate as well as literate, either due to influence of alcohol or otherwise. This too is on rise all over India. Battering ruins her mentally The evil of dowry remains except among the some tribes. The dowry demand increases in case the boy is more educated. This has led to

commitment of suicides by a few girls and some women after marriage. Three Dixit sisters of Kanpur and three Agra sisters had committed suicide, fearing dowry. Earlier such cases were never reported and, due to prevalence of polygamy, dowry was justified. Dowry harassment, wife beating, and sexual harassment at workplace are now coming up in the open and do not remain as family matters alone. Women's Health The attitude among women, even the educated ones, of not going for health checkup when suffering from a minor disease adds further to their sufferings. Further, in villages, abortion services are not available in government hospital. So, women are either forced into the hands of quacks or burdened to bear another unwanted child. This leads to disastrous consequences on their health. In rural India, women die from easily preventable diseases due to non-availability of proper treatment. It is now being realized by NGOs and women's organizations that women's 'health expectancy' is more important than her 'life expectancy'. Most of her activities, be it bear and rear of children, housework, religious or spiritual work or otherwise are all manifestations of that longing. Only a healthy woman can bear healthy children. To perform her ascribed as well as achieved role of a mother, housekeeper and an employee, it is necessary for a woman to take care of herself first. Since the development of a country is related to 'health status of its woman', today at the turn of the millennium, promotion of woman's health assumes significant place in the national agenda of different countries. It has been noticed that developing countries are still far behind in achieving health related goals. Women suffer from different kinds of diseases in developing countries like India. Besides the significance of culture in conceptualising health, there are regional changes in disease patterns due to economic disparities and environment. As a result, rural women due to illiteracy and ignorance tend to be affected most. Therefore, there is need to educate rural women on health related issues, as to labour and slum dwellers. When many deadly diseases as small pox and Guinea worm have been eradicated and leprosy is on the verge of elimination, the most common diseases from which women are now suffering such as Tuberculosis and Malaria are yet to be fought out. However, the most serious public health challenge, which is a global problem, is AIDS.[12] As to the 'Maternal Mortality' in India, still 400 to 800 deaths per lakh occur due to anaemia, sepsis and haemorrhage during pregnancy. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) in India is still 4.3 per cent, whereas in an advanced country like Japan, it is less than 1 percent.[13].

"Women Question" the term would be best understood by using the word "Feminism" which seeks to highlight women's specific oppression in relation to men, preventing this from being submerged, amid all other unequal relationship existing in society. Thus feminism is sometimes confined to women's struggle against oppressive gender relationships. In practise, however, women's action both now and in the past, often have been against inter connecting relation of inequality and have involved many aspects of resistance, a round daily life and culture that are not simply about gender.

Democracy implies equality for all human persons, men and women. As against this basic notion of democracy what is normally seen is that women are excluded from different walks of life, more visibly in Politics. The U.N. observes that women constitute "world's largest excluded category". For the attainment of true democratic spirit shall be ensured better

political participation. "In the struggle for gender justice", Usha Narayanan argues, "Political participation constitutes the first and foremost step in that direction.

In any political system, right from the developed to the developing countries, presence of women is very low compared to men. In many countries women had to wage long battles to get right to vote. Today the percentage of women as voters has increased considerably, but their political participation is not equal to men and therefore women are unable to get an equal share in organization that require decision making. Women have not been regarded as significant part of the political arena. Politics at every level of participation is dominated by men.

Feminism is a proposal for social transformation as well as a movement that strives to end the oppression of women. In this double aspect, feminism has always existed as part of the historical societies in which it has developed, it has been influenced by the specific social, economic and political traits of its society. As a movement, feminism has a long history or rebellion, more or less organised but always expressing opposition to the social institution that made possible the inferiority of women. This opposition has not been isolated from other forms of social struggle and this relationship has influenced both the ideology and the organisation of the movement. CIJ

Charles Fourier, the franch socialist argued that the degree of women's freedom decided the extent of social progress. Women's emancipation was thus linked to the idea of progressive social reform and historical change. But the development of feminist thought has not only been uneven, but it has always involved into deep theoretical disagreement, these partly reflect the varied needs and perception of women in different societies and situation. Within the feminist politics and feminism there are several differing political perspectives, the feminist approaches most commonly identified are those of Radical, Liberal, Marxist and Modem.

The word feminist and the theories came into existence because the traditional political theory excluded or marginalised women. The modern feminism involves a dynamic and existing body of thoughts that is highly controversial and that is constantly challenging its own assumptions.

Feminist theories have been divided into two specific ages; Primitive and Modem. Primitive feminism begins with Mary Astell (1666-1731), who has been known as the first English feminist.

Seventeenth century feminism had been inspired mainly by the conservative defender of monarchy at home as well as within the state. According to them, in state, the authority of the King over his people was sanctioned by 'God' and by nature in exactly the same way as that of father over his family. This theory of the century justifies social convenience and men's superior strength to justify the continuous subordination of women. It means they saw men as independent and rational individual capable of perceiving and pursuing their own self interest and saw women as wives and mothers and weak creatures.

Mary Astell, the strong and radical feminist has given a broader analysis of relationship between men and women. According to her

1. Women's duty is to obey her husband did not involve any recognition of his superiority. She said that men are not fit to educate children for precepts

contradicted by example seldom proved effective.

2. She argued that submission to male authority could not extend to single women, whether poor fatherless maids like herself or widow who have lost their Masters.
3. An educated woman should choose to reject the domestic slavery involved in marriage and she therefore advised women to avoid matrimony.

4. Women's activities need not be limited by the need to attract a husband and they could therefore concentrate on improving their minds rather than their beauty.

5. As a practical means of freeing women from marriage and dependence on men, she advocated the establishment of female communities, rather like secular nunneries, where women could live and learn together without men, knowing themselves capable of more things than the pitiful conquest of some wretched heart.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature involves the perusal of various studies conducted by different scholars and their research findings related to the present query. A huge mass of literature on status and problems of women has appeared during the International Decade for Women (1975-85) and the years following it. During this period, a number of studies were conducted at individual level, organizational level, governmental level not only in India but also abroad. These studies can be broadly placed into following categories:

1. Feminism.
2. Status of women in India and abroad.
3. Political participation.
4. Working women and their political behaviour.

The notable classical studies on the subject are V.I. Lenin's On The Emancipation of Women (1967), Friedrich Engeks The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the Stale (1968), Simon D. Beauvoir's book titled The Second Sex (1974). These studies have dealt with the inferior status of women in society. The above cited authors also explained the various causes for which women in society are not treated equally with the male persons. To them, the state is also an instrument for perpetuation of the lower status of women in society.

Friederich Engels on The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the Stale (1972) argued that women's oppression has not always existed, but that it began first with the private property and class society, for it was only then that men's desire to pass property to known heirs motivated them to control women. This motive would, Engels argued, disappear with the overthrow of. capitalism, when women would no longer be economically dependent upon men.

V.I. Lenin's work titled On the Emancipation of Women (Translation) 1967, is unique in the sense that it provides a radical critique of the widely prevalent notion of women's natural inferiority. He was of the opinion that women's inferior position began with the origin of private property and patriarchal families.

Gerda Lemer, in her monumental work titled Creation of Patriarchy (1986) pointed out that women's emancipation depends upon the transformation of culture and changing of our mental processes.

Irene Tinker in his book titled Persistent Inequalities : Women and World Development (1990) has studied women in many developing societies and concluded that economic independence is not enough to emancipate women in a subsistence economy. Development causes dislocation in the traditional economic roles of women. Women's traditional jobs are challenged by new methods and technologies. The author says what is required is an adaptation of development goals to each society, only then we can assure an active role for women in society.

Jana Matson Everette in Women and Social Change in India, (1979) distinguishes between two types of feminism - corporate feminism, which claims a large role in politics for women on the ground that women have a contribution to make a woman, and the liberal feminism, which claims rights of men to be extended to women on the ground that women are equal to men.

Mary Wollstonecraft in her notable work Vindication of the Rights of Women (1982) expressed the view that the very failure to explore the issue of women's political emancipation had been detrimental not only to the equality of the lives of individual women and men, but also to the very nature of reason and morality themselves. In her view, relations between men and women were founded on largely unjustified assumptions (about natural differences between men and women) and unjust institutions (from the marriage contract to the direct absence of female representation in the state). In Wollstonecraffs words, this state of affairs was "subversive" of human endeavours to perfect nature and sustain happiness. In her view, it is not charity that is wanting in the world, it is justice. If the modern world is to be free of tyranny, not only must "the divine right of kings" be contested, but the "divine right of husbands" as well. Wollstonecraft argued that women are, like men, rational individuals and that, as such, they should have equal rights; and she established the principles underlying later campaigns for women's right to education, employment, property and the right to vote.

Half a century later, these principles find concrete expression at the first ever Women's Rights Convention held at Seneca Falls in America in 1848, and the latter part of the nineteenth century saw the growth of equal rights feminism throughout the industrializing world.

J.S. Mill in his famous book The Subject of Women expressed that the subordination of women to men - in home, in work life and in politics - is a single relic of an old world of thought and practice. The subordination of women has created fundamental hindrances to human improvement. If women had the free use of their ability along with the same prizes and encouragements as men have, there would be a doubling of their work capability which could be used for the higher service of humanity. He was of the view that only 'complete equality' between men and women in all legal, political and social arrangements can create the proper conditions for human freedom and a democratic way of life. In turning many key liberal principles against the patriarchal structure of state and society, Mill argued that the emancipation of humanity is inconceivable without the emancipation of women.

Michael Walzer in his book Spheres of Justice talks of the oppression of women in terms of the "structures of kinship" being illegitimately reiterated through other distributive spheres. Therefore, they affect

women's access to job, education and the politics as well.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Milbrath and Goel observed that it is a tradition in almost all societies that politics is mainly an affair of men and that women should fall in line with them politically. The changes brought by modern industrial societies are eroding this sex difference but the impact of tradition is still visible. Men tend to be more psychologically involved in politics than women.

Discrimination against women, says Henry Chafe, finds in the deep rooted structure of society, in the roles women play and in a sexual division of labour which restricted females primarily to the domestic sphere of life. Therefore, it is argued that only substantial social changes capable of demolishing the structural basis regarding the traditional views of male and female roles is necessary to modify the existing trends in the political participation of men and women.

The omission of women from positions of power seriously affects the ability to challenge the subordination of women in all its manifestation. Women have to be in politics and power to participate as women and to change the very nature of that power which excludes them. Women who consist of almost half of the population need to be represented significantly in decision making bodies. Otherwise the goal of development cannot be achieved. Gender equity is very essential for the progress of any society.

Political Participation – Definition

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.

Political participation is broadly defined as being a process through which individual plays a role in political life of his society, has the opportunity to take part in deciding what the common goals of that society are and the best way of achieving these goals. Political participation refers to actual participation in these voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public policy.

Political participation refers to an activity by which citizens are designed to influence the decision-making process of the government. The citizens are active participants in the political input process, the process by which the political decisions are made. As such Almond-Powel denotes participation, “The pressure from groups in the society for having a part in the decision-making of the political system”. Subsequently such involvement has to do with rapid increase in the volume and intensity of demands for a share by various groups and strata in the society. Such activity is focused on public authorities; those are generally recognized as having the final legitimate decision on the authoritative allocation of values. Participation may be individual or collective, organized or spontaneous, sustained or sporadic, peaceful or violent, legal or illegal and effective or ineffective. In fact, the processes like protests, riots, demonstrations, rallies, processions, fasting and even in an abstract sense, those forms of insurgent violence that are designed and intended to influence the public authorities are the one dimension or other dimensions of participation.

Political participation is a process by which people take part in political activities. Political participation is not just casting vote. It includes 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 related activities.

With this understanding of political participation, the evidence 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. Women who are able to acquire decision making power are mostly from urban and elite groups. Large mass of women are kept out of political arena due to various reasons. There was no serious attempt to accommodate women in politics. In many countries women had to wage long battles to get their rights. Despite that, they were not able to get rightful position in the arena of politics.

The most common and accepted political action in elections is voting. This is exercised by women equal to men and in fact the number of women voters is increasing day by day. But women until the 20th century did not have the right to vote. American women were the first to start fighting for their rights to vote. In most of the western liberal democracies, women won voting rights after their systematic fight with the system.

Indian women, as early as 1917 raised the issue of universal adult franchise. 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.

Besides the exercising of voting rights, the representation of women in legislative bodies as policy formulators or decision makers is very low. Women have been demanding for more space in legislative bodies. Most countries in the world have failed to give due space and representation to women in their political systems, only in a handful of countries women are moving equally with men, for example, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. In these countries women are making substantial inroads into decision making process. In the advanced countries like Western Europe and North America, female presence in legislature remains small and relatively insignificant.

The statistics (2014) indicate that the world average of women representatives in legislature is 21.90%, both the houses combined. It is 22.30% in lower house and 19.80 % in upper house. The regional variations are however significant.

Table No.1 Regional Variation of Women in Parliament (2019)

	Single House or lower House	**Upper House or Senate**	**Both Houses Combined**
Nordic countries	42.10%	--	--
Americas	25.70%	26.40%	25.80%
Europe – OSCE member	24.90%	22.80%	24.40%

including Nordic countries			
Europe–OSCE member including Nordic countries	23.20%	22.80%	23.10%
Sub-Saharan Africa	22.90%	19.80%	22.50%
Asia	19.30%	14.30%	18.70%
Arab States	17.80%	7.70%	15.90%
Pacific	13.40%	38.60%	16.20%

Source: Inter Parliamentary Union, April 2019

The table 1. shows that the highest percentage of women in parliament is in the Nordic countries at 42.10% followed by America at 25.8%, Europe (including the Nordic Countries) at 24.9%, Europe (excluding the Nordic Countries) at 23.2%, Asia at 19.30%, Sub-Saharan Africa at 22.9%, and the Arab States at 17.8 % and the lowest in Pacific at 13.4% . Among the individual countries, Cuba ranks first with 48.90% of women in parliament, followed by Sweden at 45% and Finland at 42.50%.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POST INDEPENDENT PERIOD

The foundation of political participation of women was laid down during the national movement. The transfer of power from British to Indian hand gave women opportunity to participate in democratic process. Large number of legal, social and economic measures has been taken up by the Independent government to raise the status of women in India. Women too have become politically conscious, as they have started participating in national and state politics.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

On attaining Independence in the year 1947, India became a republic. The Constitution of India adopted a parliamentary form of government. The government functions at different levels. At the apex level, there is the national government and governments at states and union territories. At the centre, the parliament consists of two houses i.e. the Upper House called the Rajya Sabha or the council of states and the Lower House called the Lok Sabha (House of People). At the state level, the upper house is called the Legislative Council and the Lower House is called the Legislative Assembly. Each state has its own local self governments known as Panchayati Raj Institutions both at urban and rural areas Rural Panchayati Raj Institution has three tier structures consisting of the Zilla Panchayat at the district level, Taluk Panchayat at the taluk level, and Gram Panchayat at the village level.

The Constitution of India, one of the greatest documents ever produced came into force in the year 1950 guarantee justice, liberty and equality to all citizens. The preamble of the Constitution of India resolved to secure to all its 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. Specific articles and amendments have been enacted to ensure that women and children enjoy the Constitutional rights. The Constitution not only grants equality of treatment to women but also calls upon the state to adopt measures favoring women

neutralizing the socio- economic, educational and political disadvantages that they face. The following are the various provisions in the constitution which ensures equality between men and women.

Article 14 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of law within the territory of India. This Article stands for absence of any discrimination by law or in their administration.

Article 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 making special provisions for the benefit of women and children.

Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matter relating to employment or appointment to any office under state. Secondly no citizen shall, on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, decent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be eligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the state.

Article 39- a) guarantees right to an adequate means of livelihood for all citizen. Article 39 b) guarantees equal pay for equal work for both men and women. c) that the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizen are not forced by economic necessity to enter occupations unsuited for their age or strength.

Article 42 guarantees just and humane condition of work and maternity relief. This is in accordance with Article 23 and 25 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 51-A clause (e) says that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India- to promote harmony and sprit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, transcending religious, linguistic and religious or sectional diversities, to renounce practice derogatory to the dignity of women.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has added the following articles to the Constitution 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 or as the case may be S.T.

Article 243-(D) (3)-extends political reservation to women not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat.

Article 243-(D) (4) extends reservation to elected offices as well. The office of the chairpersons in the panchayats or any other level shall be reserved S.C and the S.Ts and women in such a manner as legislature of a state may, by law provide.[14]

The legal Constitutional framework in India would appear a combination of Communitarian perspective on one hand and that of liberal democracy on the other hand. In spite of such provisions in the Constitution, the decades following independence witnessed a decline in the women's participation in politics. These rights appeared illusionary as there was a shift from the aims of the Constitution. Gap started widening in all political spheres. Article 325 and 326 guarantees political

equality, equal right to participate in political activity and right to vote, respectively. While the latter has been accessed and enjoyed by large number of women, the right to equal participation is still a distant dream. The lack of space for participation in political bodies has resulted in their presence in meager numbers in this decision making bodies.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN LOK SABHA OF INDIA

Post independent women continued to play a significant role in less conventional activities such as environmental movements, anti-alcohol agitations, peace movements and even revolutionary activities which equally effect power relationships as they have the capacity to influence the state. Yet politics proved to be a very inhospitable terrain for women and continues to be the male domain where entry to women is severely restricted. Representation of women in parliament and state assemblies remain at a very low level. Their representation is 10.8% in parliament. No doubt a few seats have been given to women but it has not been in proportion to women's strength in population. Table 3.3 and 3.4 presents the participation of women in the two houses of parliament.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE

In India, with advancements taking place and with the advent of globalization, there has been an increase in the participation of women within the political sphere. The participation of women within the political sphere enables them to acquire an efficient understanding of the problems and challenges, which need to be overcome for leading to progression of the country. When women render a significant contribution in political participation, then it is vital for them to possess the essential skills and abilities. The most important aspect is, they need to be aware of the strategies and approaches to promote well-being of the community and nation as a whole. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper include, meaning and significance of political participation, the participation of women in politics: historical framework, modes of political participation, variables of political participation, measurement framework, empowerment of women through political participation and recommendations. Democracy applies to all individuals on an equal basis. In India, all citizens, irrespective of their backgrounds and categories are given certain rights, which enable them to render an effective contribution towards development of the nation. Women have been excluded from different walks of life and they are discriminated against in every society.[15] The discriminatory treatment against women is high among the economically weaker sections of the society, as compared to wealthy upper caste families. Women are excluded from political participation as well. The United Nations, observes that for the attainment of true democratic spirit, political participation of women is regarded to be of utmost significance. Making provision of equal treatment to women in political participation is considered to be meaningful and effective and should begin from the grassroots level. To perform their role effectively in the political sphere, it is vital for women to generate awareness and be informative in terms of various aspects. This includes, good decision making, conducting an analysis of the areas that need to be improved within the regions, and working to their best abilities towards promoting well-being of the communities and nation. One of the aims of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act is to accomplish this purpose. Because of the 73rd Constitutional

Amendment Act, the question of political empowerment of women in rural India has assumed considerable significance. The amendment provides the reservation of seats and posts for the chairpersons of women at the grassroots level democratic institutions in the countryside, which are known as panchayats. This is regarded as the historic step in terms of the far reaching insinuations and significant consequences on the political process in rural India. For the operative development of the communities and nation as a whole, it is essential for women to augment their political participation.

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN INDIA

The Indian society is full of paradoxes. On the one hand, foreigners come in hordes to our country in search of spiritual solace but on the other hand, Indians rank among the most corrupt people in the world. Again, on the one hand, India is spending millions, nay, billions to send satellites to space to prove its scientific prowess but on the other the state cannot provide almost half the population with the basic necessities of food, education, health and shelter. The same paradox exists in the case of women too. On the one hand, the scriptures put them on a high pedestal. An old Sanskrit proverb is that, where the women are held in reverence there do the gods reside. The traditional belief in the Indian society is that, a society grows if the women grow, if they partake of the spirit of progress, for they are proverbial domestic legislators, they are the matrix of social life.j4 In the Indian mythology, even God is regarded as half man, half woman-'ardh-narishwara'. On the other hand, according to the UNICEF's recent international report, "The Progress of Nations 1997", more than 5000 dowry deaths occur every year in India.

"Women's lives in India and the world over are circumscribed by what can be termed as five 'Ps' Patriarchy, Productive resources access inadequacy, Poverty, Promotion advancement insufficiency and powerlessness" . It is estimated that women do two-thirds of the world's work. In exchange they receive only 10 percent of all the income and own a mere one percent of the entire world's means of production.

It is a fact that the real social status and the real level of political participation of women cannot be analyzed in isolation. On the contrary it is inter-linked with the socio-economic conditions, political climate and inequalities inherent in the traditional social structure, its norms and values, customs and rituals. All these factors together determine the actual social status of women. Not only that, women's status differs according to region, caste, class and religion and also on considerations of tribal, rural and urban areas." The status of a person is a great force in participating wholeheartedly in the developmental process. In the case of women, their inferior status relegated to them due to fundamentalism of tradition and religious beliefs blocked them from active participation in developmental process. Historically women are supposed to carry forward the traditions, norms and the values of society. The process of socialisation that they undergo in their families does not prepare them for non-traditional roles.59 Now, it is reasonable to enquire about what the mainstream Indian culture expects a woman to be. In order to get a satisfactory answer to such a question, one will have to go through the corridors of the history of India.[16]

ANCIENT INDIA

In ancient India, reverence was given to women as mother's image, a symbol of life, strength and purity), with immense capacity for patience, sacrifice and sufferings. In the Vedic and Upanishad

periods women enjoyed considerable freedom so far as political, social and educational activities were concerned and thus enjoyed a status and prestige in society. In homes, women were given superior position to that of men. as they were treated as the embodiment of goddess of wealth, strength and wisdom . Woman was depicted as 'shakti', and it was an accepted belief that where woman is respected, there is divine presence.6' According to Manu, where women are neglected, all rites and ceremonies are fruitless and that family quickly perishes, but where women do not grieve that family always prospers.

Rig-Vedic women played a key role in the family, in the society and even in the political life. They enjoyed **:I** position of equality and were respected both in the family and society as well. They were not ornamental objects but co-partners in life, in its pleasures and hurdles, in its joys and sorrows. They were imparted education like men and enjoyed considerable freedom in their personal matters. These are evidences of women actively participating in the political activities. They participated in the deliberations of Vidhatha (the earliest folk assembly of Indo-Aryans) and Sabha along with men.

In short, it may be said that women enjoyed a fairly satisfactory position during ancient times. The communities as a whole showed proper concern and respect for women, allowing them considerable freedom in different activities of social and political life.

The Medieval period witnessed a gradual decline in the position and status of women in India. Women were considered weak and it was the responsibility of mall to protect them. Since they were sensitive in temperament, they should be treated with love and care. They were considered dependent on men throughout their lives. In childhood the father looks after her, in youth the husband and in the old age her sons supported her. Therefore, all her life she had to depend on someone or the other and never employed unrestrained freedom.

During this period, there emerged social evils like female infanticide, child marriage and the practice of sati in the Hindu Society. Such atrocious practices were responsible for the deterioration of the status and role of women to a great extent both in the family and in tl-e society. At the same time the spread of Islam and the beginning of Sikhism provided a healing touch to the degradation of women. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, wanted women to be treated by men as equals. He said, "Within a woman is a man conceived, from a woman he is born, he is married to a woman an3 with her goes through life.. . Why call her bad. She gives birth to Kings. None may exist without a woman. Only the one true God is exterior to woman".. However, it was a fact that the position of common womenfolk i n the country remained miserable. Their only function was bearing and rearing of children. They were confined to the four walls of their homes, leading an ignorant and illiterate life.

THE REFORM MOVEMETS

The disintegration of the Mughal Empire in the 181h century and the consequent political anarchy added to the miseries of Indian women. When the British rule started their position was the worst in the history of the country.69 From the ideological point of view women were considered an inferior species. She was inferior to male having n3 personality and significance. From the social point of view she was kept in a state of utter subjection, denied any right, totally suppressed and

oppressed. "The customs of polygamy, the purdha, the denial of women's rights over property, child marriage, sati and ban on remarriage to widows - all these practices in this period resulted in the development of a very weak personality of women."

The British influence was positive in the direction of women's upliftment. The close contacts with western cultural traditional literature and education affected very deeply the minds of the Indian leaders. The natural result was the social movements for reforms of those evils, which were prevalent in the society. Consequently a number of reform movements emerged. The leaders and the social reformers of significance who were in the forefront of the struggle for women's emancipation were Raja RamMonanRoy, Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vibekanand, Mahatma Gandhi, JawaharLal Nehru and such others These social reformers felt that the social evils can be eradicated by raising consciousness:;s and making people sensitive to the.injustice perpetrated on women. One of the important offshoots of the social reform movement was the establishment of the National Social Conference in 1887, which provided a forum for the reformers to discuss various practices and institutions which needed to be reformed. At this juncture there emerged a number of institutions organised by great social reformers led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy who is rightly called the father of Indian Renaissance. The 19th century reform movements and social renaissance initiated the process of improving the status of women. While spreading consciousness and pride in indigenous cultural tradition, institutions like the Arya Samaj, Rama Krishna Mission, the Prarthana Samaj etc. encouraged social service, educational and reform activities to bring about social change favouring women's uplift.

The struggle for the emancipation of women took place mainly in three directions (1) to make necessary laws for social reforms; (2) to provide maximum opportunities for their education; and (3) provide them with the fundamental political rights.74 Attention was concentrated on the first two in the 19th and early 20th centuries whereas political rights of women got attention only during the last phase of the independence movement.

With the beginning: of the twentieth century a number of organisations exclusively for women appeared among high - caste or elite women. The All India Women's Conference, The National Council for Women, Women's lndian Association of Madras etc. came into existence.[17]

WOMEN IN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The Indian National Government under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi inspired Indian women to enter the open field of politics. He recognized the importance of women's participation in the freedom struggle. He said, " In the non-violent struggle, women have an advantage over men, for women are in any way superior to men in their religious devotion. Silent and dignified service is the badge of her sex. Woman is sacrifice personified. When she does a thing in the right spirit, she moves mountains".

CONCLUSION

In India, there has been a radical change in the movement that is initiated to promote empowerment of women. It has been recognized that women are turning into a political force, both nationally and internationally. Political parties cannot remain unconcerned to the needs and requirements of women, who constitute 586.5 million of the population and

approximately 48.46 percent of the electorate. The political participation of women require reinforcement measures. When the women are involved in political sphere, then the positive aspects are, they are not only able to bring about enhancements in their own lives, but also in promoting welfare of their families and communities. The variables of political environment are, psychological environment, socio-economic environment and political environment. In conducting an analysis of the measurement framework, the main aspects that are included are, introduction to Indian electoral framework, electoral statistics in India, political participation of women and development of women's groups.

In order to promote empowerment opportunities among women, it is vital to pay attention towards important aspects. These are, education and training programs, alleviation of various forms of criminal and violent acts, making provision of equal rights and opportunities to them, alleviating discriminatory treatment against them on the basis of factors, such as, caste, creed, race, religion, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background, they should be encouraged to participate in various types of employment opportunities. PRIs at all the three tiers have not turned into the spaces to discuss and deliberate on critical strategic and gender issues. Through the availability of support from the PRI representatives, women are able to cope up with these problems in an appropriate manner. When individuals, and communities have the main objective of leading to progression of the country, then promoting empowerment opportunities among women is regarded crucial. Political participation is regarded as one of the fundamental measures that promotes women empowerment.

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