

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT UNDER THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract: While the world has achieved progress towards Gender Equality and women's empowerment under the millennium Development Goals (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys). Women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and Violence in every part of the world. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful prosperous and sustainable World. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work and representation in Political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economics and benefit societies and humanity at large. Women in India are provided with 33% reservation in the three tier of the local governance by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1993) as part of the inclusive policy of the government of India. Despite this constitutional provision, women face numerous obstacles to ascertain their right and execute their mandatory powers as Panchayat President. Facts indicate that legislative provision alone can't bring success to the policy of empowering women through their inclusion in Governance. In practice caste, class and gender disparity play a crucial role in hindering the functioning of the elected women representatives. Now a days women representation in parliament is also declining. In India, the participation of women at the decision making Process has been very low. The present national level indications are also not encouraging for the future of political empowerment of women unless the pending 81st constitution Amendment Bill providing one-third reservation of seats in parliament and state legislatures is passed.

Key Words: Gender, women Empowerment, Political Representation, rights

Introduction: The 21st Century has inherited the unfinished agenda of globalising democracy in a more vibrant form. In many instances there is feeling of unease about the ultimate meaning of representative democracy because of the recurring tendency of either excluding or marginalizing a large section of the citizens. Particularly women, from the system of representation and decision making. How can we have meaningful democracy if a large section of the 'demos' is kept at the margins?

Making our democracies more and more inclusive and genuinely representative is the basic task for the new century. Only after bringing back the people, particularly the women, we will succeed in saving democracy from the force of terror and authoritarianism.

Absence of women representation in Indian Politics: The startling absence of women in Politics is a globally recognised phenomenon. One which has in recent years, led to increased national and international efforts to raise awareness and promote change in order to attain greater female participation within decision-making processes. Women across the world have started to question the predominance of men in political forums, why it is that men dominate and why it is that women do not, or cannot, participate in the same manner.

It is unfortunate that the political elite of our times has developed an attitude of benign neglect about the perpetual marginalisation of the women in the systems of decision-making. In the oldest democracy that is U.K. where women got right to vote in 1918

and today they represent only 17.12 percent. The strongest Democracy, the United States of America, women achieved the right vote in 1920. Only after long sustained struggle, today they have reached only 13.6 percent. So is the story of the largest democracy. India even after 67 years of Independence women represent 8.8 percent.

India is a very famous country known for its cultural heritage, traditions, civilisation religion and geographical features from the ancient time. On the other hand, it is also popular as a male chauvinistic nation. Women are given first priority in India however on the other hand they were badly treated in the family and society. They were limited only for the household chores or understand the responsibility of home and family members. They were kept totally unaware of their rights and own development.

Women constitute half power of the country so in order to make this country a fully powerful country women empowerment is necessary. With the slogan of women empowerment the question arise that "are women become really strong" and "is long term struggle has ended." Many programme have been implemented and run by the government such as international women's day, Mother's day, etc. in order to bring awareness in the society about the true rights and value of the women in the development of the nation. Women need to be progressed in the number of spheres. There is a high level of gender inequality in India where women are ill treated by their members and outsiders. Gender inequality remains a major barrier to human development.

Girls and women have made major stride since 1990 but they have not yet gained gender equity. The disadvantages facing women and girls are a major source of inequality. All too often women and girls are discriminated against in health education, political representation, labour market etc, with negative repercussions for development of their capabilities and their freedom of choice.

The root cause of gender inequality in Indian society lies in its patriarchy system. According to the famous sociologists Sylvia Walby, Patriarchy is "a system of social structure and practice in which men dominates, oppress and exploit women."

The Unfortunate Part of gender inequality in our society is that the women too, through, continued socio-cultural conditioning, have accepted their subordinate position to men.

Extreme poverty and lack of education are also some of the reason for women's low status in society. Poverty and lack of education derives countless women to work in low paying domestic service, organized prostitution or as migrant laborers. Women are not only getting unequal pay for equal or more work but also they are being offered only low skill jobs for which lower wages are paid. This has become a major form of inequality on the basis of gender.

The Gender Problem: Another aspect of Indian Society has been the backward status of women. According to census 2011, women account for 495.7 million representing 48.3 percent of India's total population. Although there have been a number of women freedom fighters and atleast one occupied the pivotal office of Prime Minister of India for a fairly considerable time, the women in India, by and large, remain within the four walls of the house taking care of its inhabitants.

They are the victims of many discriminations. The 2011 census of India Pointed out that for every 1000 Indian males, India has only 940 females. This is alarming especially in Punjab (874) and Haryana (861) where marriageable boys are not getting brides. Like the male-female gap in literacy rate here also the situation has changed marginally, but ofcourse to the negative side from 946 in 1951 to 940 in 2011.

Sex Ratio 1951-2011

Census Year	Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 males)
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	934
1991	927
2001	933
2011	940

* Source : census of India 2011

Gender Equality and Women Reservation Bill: While the world has achieved progress towards Gender Equality and women's empowerment under the millennium Development Goals (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys). Women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and Violence in every part of the world .Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful prosperous and sustainable World. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work and representation in Political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economics and benefit societies and humanity at large. Women in India are provided with 33% reservation in the three tier of the local governance by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1993) as part of the inclusive policy of the government of India. Despite this constitutional provision, women face numerous obstacles to ascertain their right and execute their mandatory powers as Panchayat President. Facts indicate that legislative provision alone can't bring success to the policy of empowering women through their inclusion in Governance. In practice caste, class and gender disparity play a crucial role in hindering the functioning of the elected women representatives.

The women movement in all over the world including India has developed out of the feminist philosophy which speaks of man's domination of women as a curse inflicted on her by a socially-structured male society. The female, feminism believes, is regarded inferior to male in all qualities. Physically she is dubbed as dull and dud; intellectually, as a being with less or no wisdom; socially, She has a place lower than man. She is considered ineligible for all public life; her life is confined to the private life of the family-mothering the babies. Even in the family, she is not only second, but is always secondary.

Over the years, the women movement has developed a theory of power of society which sees the relationship between the sexes as one of in equality, subordination and oppression and which sees this as a problem of political power than a fact of nature.

Women empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society including participation in the decision making process and access to power are fundamental for the advancement of equality, development and peace.

In India, the post-independence period has seen many positive steps to improve the socio-economic status of women. Women themselves have become keenly aware of their rights and spearheading movements across the country against all sorts of social evils. In a contemporary globalisation period if we want to build a society based on justice peace and equality. In order to achieve these three cardinal

principles it is very essential to grant equality to the two builders of the society, men and women.

Mahatma Gandhi played a crucial role in creating a favourable atmosphere for women's participation in the freedom struggle by insisting that the struggle for women's equality was an integral part of the movement for Swaraj. His choice of non-violent Satyagraha as the mode of struggle also allowed women to play a far more active and creative role than is possible in more masculine oriented movements based on violence. This galvanised huge numbers of women into action. He worked consciously to feminise the freedom movement, by picking on salt as a symbol of a countrywide satyagraha he brought the movement into every home and kitchen.

Gandhi addressed women in glorifying terms, "Women are the noblest of God's creation".

Annie Basent became the President of the Congress as early as 1917. Sarojini Naidu was Gandhi's choice for President of the Congress in 1925.

Starting with that kind of high profile role, women's participation in politics enhanced dramatically in the 1930's and 1940. However, the decades following independence witnessed a remarkable decline in women's involvement in politics. Even within the Congress Party women found very little room in decision-making. During the 1930s and 1940s that were more women leaders at all levels in the Congress Party alone than are found today in all parties put together.

The Indian women were given their political right along with independence, in comparison with western countries it was too early that Indian women got adult franchise equally with man. The most significant landmark in the journey is the historic 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments Act, 1993, 1994, by the Centre and its ratification by the states. These Constitution Amendment Acts reserved one-third seats for women in the Panchayati Raj and Municipal bodies. This itself is a milestone as far as the association of women in politics is concerned. But the participation of often illiterate rural women in the process of grassroots democracy has attracted both positive and negative views. The allegations are that these institutions are being misused by the predominantly male political structure which keeps the women away from meetings. Even sometimes in villages husbands of Panchayat members takes their signature at their residence well before the meetings and operate through dummy candidates.

Now-a-days women representation in parliament is also declining. The total number of women members which was 22 in the First Lok Sabha. It has increased to 27 in the Second Lok Sabha. It is unfortunate here to note that it has further increased only to 39 in the year 1999. Moreover, the number of MPs has ranged

between 19 in the Sixth Lok Sabha and 44 in the Eleventh Lok Sabha which constitute 3.4 percent and 8.1 percent respectively of the total number of seats in the house. Similarly, the representation of women in the Rajya Sabha has ranged from 14 to 29 which is 5.8 percent to 11.8 percent of the total strength of the house.

The representation of women in parliament which has never touched the figure of 45 in the Lok Sabha and 30 in the Rajya Sabha is far from satisfactory, especially when we compare it with other countries of the world.

Moreover, there is also very little women representation in the party organisation which to a great extent contribute to the lack of their participation in the process of policy making. Thus, there is a need for gender equality at the level of the party organisation also.

Now-a-days in parliament discussion going on Women Reservation Bill (WRB). But after a long time debate nothing came out.

When the 81st Constitutional Amendment was tabled for discussion in the Parliament in 1996. Providing for reservation of 33 percent for women in the parliament and the legislature, the caste and minority issues reflected the traditional controversies reverting to the early years of the twentieth century where women were mired in the question of caste and community differences.

No other amendment to the constitution has ever passed through an or deal as the WRB reflecting the apogee of patriarchal mindset and feeling insecurity inherent in the displacement from political power of the traditional power holders.

One important outcome of the opposition to the bill was the determination of women members of the parliament to unite against such opposition and speak in one voice in favour of reservation who perhaps realized that their electoral achievement have in no way impacted in overcoming the patriarchal notions surrounding the marginalisation of women in higher level decision making structures. The idea of reserving seats for women in Parliament and state legislature is an extension of the reform carried out in the composition of the local self-governing institutions under the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments Acts.

In India, the participation of women at the decision making process has been very low. They are not adequately represented in the parliament and in the state legislatures. Political parties have failed to give adequate number of party tickets for election to women. Even in party organisations they are always have a lesser strength. All these provide that Indian women constituting half of the population have never been equal to men in term of their representation. The present national level indications are also not

encouraging for the future of political empowerment of women unless the pending Constitution Amendment Bill providing one-third reservation of seats in Parliament and state legislatures is passed. The emancipation of women is not a simple matter. The so-called empowerment of women can take place

only when the desire comes from within, which means the women should feel the need of their empowerment. The democratic process can only create awareness and at the most provide facilities which in case of India has been done to a remarkable extent.

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