

**A STUDY OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN POLITICAL STRUCTURE -
WOMEN'S CHOICE OR GENDER BIASED**

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Abstract

Women constitute nearly half of the total Indian population but their representation in politics is not equal to the men. Their comparatively less representation does not mean that they are less capable than men. The historical and cultural hindrances such as their specific gender role along with women's own choices to remain away from the Indian political system are one of the two main factors responsible for lesser women representation in politics. This trend has been shown at both central as well as state level elections. In the present analysis, an effort is made to understand the reasons for lesser women representation in Indian political system. An important issue of 'Choice' is also discussed in this research article which is now coming as a major obstacle stopping women from representing in politics. Along with this issue, effort is made in the end to provide some suggestion in order to increase the ratio of women in Indian political system as representatives.

Keywords: Representation, Choice, Gender, Indian Political Structure

Introduction

After the first general elections, India had witnessed its first Lok Sabha in which 95 percent of the total strength of parliamentarians was comprised of male and rest 5 percent was female Member of Parliament. Although, the number was quite low which reflected the deeply rooted male dominated society of India, it is important to mention here that even at that time Indian society was quite ahead of other democratic or so-called champion of equality nations such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom. In the parliament of United Kingdom around 3 percent of the strength was comprised of female whereas in the United States House of Representative, 2 percent of the strength belongs to female candidates. It has been observed that the percentage of women voters no doubt increased to a significant level in recent years, the total percentage of women representation in the state as well as Union legislatures can be considered as a matter of serious concern. If the rise in women voter turnout is considered as force to influence any election then the representation of women in the law making bodies should also be declared as potential force to introduce significant change in the democratic setup of India.

The earlier situation of India, when the other western democratic nations were far behind it vis-à-vis women's representation in the law making bodies, is now reversed. Now, these western democracies are now more conscious about women's role in the legislative bodies. So, number of reasons for declining women representation in the law making bodies are analysed in various research articles. Some considered the reluctance of political parties to give party tickets to the women candidate as the main cause of women's decreasing presence in the legislatures whereas some pointed out the weak candidacy of the women candidate as the main reason for its lesser representation in the legislatures.

No doubt, the answer of the first reason is quite visible as political parties give very few chances

to the women candidates in the election and if they give then it will be according to their stature within the politics. The above mentioned two reasons are basically connected to each other. However, here emphasis is made to discuss the issue of Choice and historical and cultural factors for women representation in the legislatures at both Union and state level.

Historical and Cultural Hindrances Influencing Women Participation

These are number of reasons such as age constraints, gender norms of the tradition based societies and cultural practices which prevent women from participating in decision-making process, specifically from representing in the law making bodies at the Union and the state level.

Women as Representative: A Perspective from Historical Evidences

There are historical evidences of the Indian law making bodies where the percentage of women representative was not up to the mark level. The prime reason for this absence of women in legislatures can be attributed to the pre-conceived notion of the big leaders or in other words a narrative that women's were always a weak candidate in any party. This can be seen even in the Constituent Assembly of India which was formed after the recommendations of Cabinet Mission plan. In the Constituent Assembly of India, out of 389 candidates, only 15 members were comprised of women candidate. Some prominent women representative of the Constituent Assembly were Ammu Swaminathan, Dakshayani Velayudhan, Begum Aizaz Rasul, Durgabai Deshmukh, Hansa Jivraj Mehta, Kamla Chaudhary, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kriplani, and Vijalakshami Pandit. The ratio of women representatives depicts two important things: First, the number of women candidates were significantly low and second is connection of these women to the higher-class family. There were hardly any women in the Constituent Assembly of India that belonged to common family or low political status.

Parties Election Winning Agenda

Political parties in India have the long history that they always fight only for winning elections and it is quite obvious that the senior leaders of any party always inclined towards giving ticket to the only those candidates who have long history of political representation in the law making bodies. It has been observed in the political history of India that the law making bodies at the Union and state level have always been dominated by male candidates so the probability of giving tickets to the women candidates are quite less as compare to the male candidate. This simply highlights the winning agenda of the political parties in India.

The lack of trust for the women candidates in the male dominated political parties at both Union as well as state level is also one of the main psychological traits that have been quite dominant within the political parties in India. The role of the women could not be imagined in male dominated society of India outside the four walls of a house. They even could not get the opportunity to leave their household duties and went for politics.

Cultural Influences and Women Representation

There are some cultural protocols and practices that have been imposed by the male dominated culture of India upon women so that their own interest remains secured. Some of the prescribed and imposed rules are discussed below:

1. Reproductive role of the Women

In India, women have been looked through the lenses of reproduction only and their only role is to give birth and rear the children. This has been the dominant feature of the male dominated society of India, specifically the rural part. This imposed role has limited the options for women to participate in the political activities. This is nothing but forced reproductive role for women's which

has been imposed upon them by the society.

2. Productive role of the women

Another important role that has been limiting and hindering the political representation of women in India is the productive role. Women's of India, specifically the rural women, were usually utilizing their time in the productive activities such as farming or milking the domestic animals. These traditional practices hardly give any chance to women to participate in the political activities.

3. Religious influence

In India, the picture that has been depicted within the stories and scriptures of the women is something which is very restricted and pious. The usual picture of women in many epics such as Mahabharata is presented in such a manner that she could not grab the opportunity to play a political role. The political or administrative role was usually played by the elder son of the king or the brother of the king. This picture has wide scale influences upon the women's role in the political activities of the present day world. This tradition has been followed even today in many part of India.

Women's Choice of Representation

The issue of women's own willingness or choice to stay away from representing into the law making bodies at the states and the Union level is also one of the mains psychological traits that has been halting the percentage of women MP's and MLA's within parliament and state legislatures. This choice of women to stay away from the law making bodies might be due to the number of reasons which are typical in Indian character:

- Political Apathy among women.
- General perception among women that politics is a dirty game.
- Women of India find many other options which are quite attractive in nature rather than politics which are usually considered as unsecure for everyone with no job security.
- It has been observed in the typical Indian society that women are directly or indirectly accepting the patriarchal nature of the law making bodies which is itself decreasing the chances of their active representation in the legislatures.
- Absence of significant women political personality except Indira Gandhi, and Sushma Swaraj is also one of the prime reasons that the political field has become less attractive for women which ultimately decrease their representations into the legislatures.

Suggestions for Increasing Women Representation in Indian Law Making Bodies

1. Women reservation quota should be increased in all the law making bodies of India including the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
2. History books should be reframed and reformulated in such a way that the role played by the women leaders in the Indian National Freedom Movement become the motivating force for the present generation of the women to participate in the decision making bodies more aggressively and actively.
3. More and more awareness programmes of women's representation in the legislatures should be started in the rural as well as urban parts of India.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, two important findings have been unearthed. First, being an important proportion of total Indian population, the representation of women in the law making bodies of India is very less as compared to the other developed nations. The historical and cultural hindrances in these nations have been reduced to greater extent whereas the choice of women to represent in the legislative bodies is still up to them. Second, the Indian situation is quite opposite to this as the historical and cultural hindrances are becoming even stronger that are reducing the representation in the Union and state legislative bodies. The matter of choice, however, is similar to the other developed nations but the reasons behind such choice to lessen their representation in the law making bodies are more dominant in India as compare to other western nations.

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**SARDAR PATEL INSTITUTE OF
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH**

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University Grants Commission

Approved Journal

vol. 51 No. 2 (III)

in

Anvesak A bi-annual Journal

UGC Care Group - 1

ISSN : 0378 - 4568

July-December 2021

Impact Factor: 6.20





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There is no improved or enhanced mean for a nation's progress than to empower Women from the bottom of the social fabric. Similar is the case of India and Afghanistan where, in the earlier times and even in most parts of Afghanistan at present, women empowerment can play an important role in nation's progress. For some years, the status and condition of women living in Afghanistan has been improving due to the role played by democratic forces of India and other nations. However, the early and escaped departure of America from war torn Afghanistan has left approximately 48 percent of the women population in the darkness as more fundamentalist and conservative Islamic group i.e. Taliban has again captured the entire country. In this research paper, an attempt is made to do a comparative study and then understand the past conditions and status of women in both India and Afghanistan along with the present developments that are marginalizing the status of women. In the end of this paper, some suggestions are also given to improve the status of women in both the countries so that they can contribute for the progress of the nation.

Keywords: Empowerment, Fundamentalist, Sati, Democratic, Rights

Introduction

India marked the first sign of women empowerment when in 1848 Savitribai Phule became the first women educator of the colonized India. This year has been remembered as the first step of women empowerment in India as Savitribai Phule penetrated and broke the baseless social norms that a woman could not be educated. The outcome of this step was so broad that after a century, India witnessed the first women Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Women's empowerment as a concept was introduced at the UN's Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, which defined it as a redistribution of social and economic powers and control of resources in favor of women. The saga of women empowerment in India is quite perplexed as on one side the ancient Indian women was given the right to choose her husband and on the other hand social evil like Sati Pratha destroyed the life of numerous women of Indian society. However, with the initiation of several steps to empower Indian women, their status has been improved quite significantly but one of India's most underdeveloped and war torn neighbor i.e. Afghanistan has been continuously witnessing the issue of human rights violation of women with



some ups and downs due to the inconsistency and inability of Afghanistan's government to stop Taliban. Whenever Taliban regime came in Afghanistan, women became the worst sufferer of human rights violation.

Period of Women's Emancipation in Afghanistan after 2001

Before the collapse of Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, the Afghan women had no other alternative but to live inside the four walls of house due to the strict Sharia rule and principles. The present situation is that women can now walk freely even without burqa according to their choice and without their male partners in the entire country. Before this, there was not even a single school for girls. At present there are around 250,000 girls who can go to private schools and universities and millions of girls go to public schools. This depicts how the post-2001 period has brought significant social reforms in the society of Afghanistan that played an important role in emancipating the Afghan women.

India's Participation in Empowering women's of Afghanistan

India has played an important part in empowering the women of Afghanistan by supporting women participation in the different activities of the economic development. India is supporting Afghan women in promoting their entrepreneurship and professional excellence. India even provided military training to 20 Afghan women soldiers, especially in the combat role in 2017. Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) an Indian NGO funded by USAID is supporting Afghan women in a massive manner in producing a valued and self-reliant life by giving them training in different areas such as food processing, sewing etc. The number of these women's who are getting training and improving their life are more than 3000. These Afghan women were given training skills in various fields through SEWA since 2008.

India had developed a partnership with Afghanistan even before the Indian independence in 1947 due to its cultural and ethnical linkages. India even provided a development assistance of multiple billion USD to Afghanistan since 2001 so that it could come out of its war trauma. By the 1970s Afghanistan had become India's largest development partner within India's aid program, known at that time as the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program. This doesn't stop there, the Global South-South Development Expo has given to Afghanistan a more energetic stage for focusing and exchanging number of issues such as gender problem. The dialogue on Gender Responsive Budgeting opened doors for Afghan women in the security or defense sector. The discussion led, for the first time, to the origin of the concept of building the capacity of women as entrepreneurs and workers, so that instead of outsourcing the uniforms for the Afghan Security personnel including army, they would be manufactured by Afghan women and purchased from Afghan women, paving the way for their economic empowerment.

Capacity Building and Empowerment of Afghan Women

Capacity building highlights the apprehensions that people of a country are given with the capacity to achieve their full capacity and growth. The process of Capacity building is not restricted to a small segment of life or sector. Capacity building is basically a foundation to guarantee the 'quality and effectiveness of South-South



Cooperation' and it can be stated as an attempt to make people capable and skilled in administration, finance, management skills and entrepreneurship.

Capacity building is a process that contributes in the empowerment of the marginalized sections of the society specifically the women. The Union Ministry of Women Affairs of Afghanistan along with Indian NGO i.e. SEWA have made several attempts to develop skills and entrepreneur qualities among the women of Afghanistan by providing training programs of economic security and poverty alleviation. The ITEC forms the flagship government body of India's development partnership for capacity development efforts under the Development Partnership Administration (DPA). Along with its sister program SCAAP, ITEC works at a regional and inter-regional level, cooperating with more than 161 countries and forty-seven empanelled associations to start around 280 courses annually.

Scholarship to the Students of Afghanistan

The women of Afghanistan were seriously prohibited to attend school as well as higher educational institutions. According to the government's 2017 Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey, the overall national literacy rate is 34.8 percent. It shows that around 9.9 million population of Afghanistan is illiterate in which 6 million are women. The Afghan women have been desperately or in dire need to improve their socio-political and economic status. Although number of effort have been made by the government of Afghanistan after 2001 to improve the literacy rate of women, lack of proper educational infrastructure within the nation have been acting as a push factor for them to move out of the country, particularly India. India is considered as the most favorable place by the students of Afghanistan specifically women due to cultural similarity and enormous availability of higher education scholarships offered by the Indian government.

At present, there are around 5,000 students from Afghanistan who are currently obtaining higher educational scholarships in pursuing different professional degrees and the numbers of women who are receiving higher education in India from Afghanistan are quite high. This depicts India's commitment to overcome the gender gap of literacy between men and women of Afghanistan. The re-establishment and re-advent of Taliban in Afghanistan again raises several question on female education and that may be the reason more and more female students will move towards India in hope of pursuing education. The Union government of India is also looking for more alternatives in enhancing the number of scholarships per year given to the students of Afghanistan, particularly women to pursue their higher education keeping in view the recent developments in Afghanistan.

What Indian Women's status Depicts?

The government of India has taken number of steps to improve the status of women such as ratification of international treaties and agreements to end discrimination against women. Although, conditions have been improved significantly in favor of the women, still there are number of sectors of their life, which are required to be improved. There are number of European and Western countries which have made efforts to reduce the gap between male and female by empowering women. However, India's condition vis-à-vis these developed



nations is different as economic and social gap, which are the deciding factors of women empowerment, is already low in these developed nations. India's journey towards women empowerment has observed several ups and downs.

Noteworthy Benefits

The women in India have been witnessing number of benefits due to various steps of empowerment taken by the Indian government and these are:

- Women in India are emerging in all the sectors of their social, political, and economic life. The entire world knows when they participated in Tokyo Olympics of 2021 and some of them even won medal for India.
- Recently, women's entry in Indian Air force as fighter pilot also depicts India's commitment of reducing the gender gap and ensuring women empowerment.
- Number of schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ujjwala Yojana, Mahila-E-Haat project are contributing significantly in empowering Indian women.
- Scholarships and constitutional provisions for improving women status have been acting as important milestone in this direction.

Comparative analysis of Constitutional Provisions for Women Empowerment in India and Afghanistan

There is a huge dissimilarity between Indian and Afghanistan Constitution due to different developments which both these nations witnessed and becomes the base of their constitution. However, in both of these constitutions some provisions highlighting women's status have been enumerated which are discussed as under:

1. **Afghanistan Constitution of 1964:** The 1964 Constitution of Afghanistan declared that the Constitution is framed to achieve Equality and Justice and to preserve the human dignity. Article 25 of the Constitution of 1964 states that the people of Afghanistan, without any discrimination or preference, have equal rights and obligations before the law.
2. **The Constitution of 1976:** The Constitution of 1976 states in Article 27 that all the people of Afghanistan including both women and men has equal rights and obligations before the law.
3. **The Constitution of 1987:** The Constitution of 1987 went further and declared in Article 28 that all the citizens of the Republic of Afghanistan, both men and women, have equal rights and duties before the law, irrespective of their national, racial, linguistic, tribal, educational and social status, religious creed, political conviction, occupation, wealth, and residence.
4. **The Constitution of 1990:** Articles 28 and 33 of the Constitution of 1987 remained the same in the Constitution of 1990. In the early 1990s, women made up 70% of the teachers, 50% of government workers, 50% of university students, and 40% of physicians.

Women status in the Constitution of India

There was a time when several questions were raised regarding women's status in Indian society, specifically before the implementation of Indian Constitution. However, soon after its implementation and inclusion of



several new provisions related to women, a clear picture has been come out which depicts that several significant attempts are made by Indian policy makers to improve the status of Indian women. These are

- Equal Remuneration Act-1976;
- Dowry Prohibition Act-1961;
- Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act-1956;
- Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act-1971;
- Maternity Benefit Act-1961;
- Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act-1987;
- Prohibition of Child Marriage Act-2006;
- Pre-Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act-1994; and
- Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Protection and) Act-2013.
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill, 2015.

Conclusion

The above discussed comparison of Indian and Afghan women simply and plainly depicts the marginalized status of Afghan women and improved status of Indian women. Although, several attempts have been made in Afghanistan by several nations including India and Civil Societies, the sudden arrival of Taliban in Afghanistan again created hindrances in the ways of women empowerment. Indian government had indulged significantly in empowering the Afghan women but interference of fundamentalist groups like Taliban and Hakkani Network and failure to maintain political continuity in Afghanistan always comes as obstacles in improving women status. However, if the situation of women in Indian is analyzed in the light of comparison with women in Afghanistan, it can be said that their status is quite better. It becomes possible due to continuous efforts of government and civil societies on one hand and political continuity in Indian government on the other.

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3. **The Constitution of 1987:** The Constitution of 1987 went further and declared in Article 28 that all the citizens of the Republic of Afghanistan, both men and women, have equal rights and duties before the law, irrespective of their national, racial, linguistic, tribal, educational and social status, religious creed, political conviction, occupation, wealth, and residence.
4. **The Constitution of 1990:** Articles 28 and 33 of the Constitution of 1987 remained the same in the Constitution of 1990. In the early 1990s, women made up 70% of the teachers, 50% of government workers, 50% of university students, and 40% of physicians.

Women status in the Constitution of India

There was a time when several questions were raised regarding women's status in Indian society, specifically before the implementation of Indian Constitution. However, soon after its implementation and inclusion of



several new provisions related to women, a clear picture has been come out which depicts that several significant attempts are made by Indian policy makers to improve the status of Indian women. These are

- Equal Remuneration Act-1976;
- Dowry Prohibition Act-1961;
- Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act-1956;
- Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act-1971;
- Maternity Benefit Act-1961;
- Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act-1987;
- Prohibition of Child Marriage Act-2006;
- Pre-Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act-1994; and
- Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Protection and) Act-2013.
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill, 2015.

Conclusion

The above discussed comparison of Indian and Afghan women simply and plainly depicts the marginalized status of Afghan women and improved status of Indian women. Although, several attempts have been made in Afghanistan by several nations including India and Civil Societies, the sudden arrival of Taliban in Afghanistan again created hindrances in the ways of women empowerment. Indian government had indulged significantly in empowering the Afghan women but interference of fundamentalist groups like Taliban and Hakkani Network and failure to maintain political continuity in Afghanistan always comes as obstacles in improving women status. However, if the situation of women in Indian is analyzed in the light of comparison with women in Afghanistan, it can be said that their status is quite better. It becomes possible due to continuous efforts of government and civil societies on one hand and political continuity in Indian government on the other.

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