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Introduction

According to the 5th National Family Health Survey, there are 1020 females per 1000 males. At present the female constitute more than fifty percent of population. If such a huge population of India remain politically illiterate, then the democratic structure of the Indian political system would become less effective. To safeguard the essence of constitution of India and to make the democratic system of the country more effective it is important to encourage the participation of women in politics. To encourage the participation of women in politics different provisions have been made in the Indian constitution. In spite of these provisions only 14 percent of total Lok Sabha member's are women. In 17th Lok Sabha only 716 women contest elections out of which 78 have been elected. In Bangladesh, one of the neighbouring countries of India, 21 percent member of parliament are women. With comparison it can be said that India is lacking behind from Bangladesh with respect to women participation in parliamentary elections. To strengthen the democratic nature of Indian political system active participation of women in politics is compulsory.

Historical perspective

Irrespective of being a patriarchal society the politics in India has been highly influenced by women since ancient time. Being it be Razia Sultana of Delhi who ruled a major portion of Indian subcontinent directly from 1236 to 1240 or

it be Noor Jahan the wife of Mughal emperor Jahangir who indirectly rule the Mughal empire in Jahangir's region. There are numerous such examples in history which strengthen the fact that women play a major role in the political regime of the country. But it doesn't mean that majority of women were politically conscious and engaged in politics in an active manner. Even after seventy-five years of independence women didn't recognise their political rights. The number of politically conscious women is too low. Irrespective of these facts, history has plenty of women leaders who fought for the independence of the country. Rani Laxmi Bai, the queen of Jhansi fought against the British Government to protect her province. She was considered as one of the bravest freedom fighter of 1857 revolt. Another woman leader of 1857 revolt was Begum Hazrat Mahal of Awadh. After the death of her husband Begum of Awadh fought with the British Government and joined hands with Tantia Tope and Nana Saheb. Among the list of distinguished freedom fighters, Sarojini Naidu also has a special place. She presided the Kanpur session of Indian National Congress. Not only the Indian society appreciate the thoughts of women leaders who have their roots in their own country but they also gave their support to an Irish women named Annie Besant who was influenced by different Indian philosophies and became one of the prominent women leader during the freedom struggle. She was the first women president of Indian National Congress who

presided the Calcutta session of Indian National Congress in 1917. She also helped to start the Home Rule League. Aruna Asif Ali was also a prominent women leader of twentieth century. Due to her services she was recognised as the Grand Old Lady of Indian Freedom Struggle. Despite these names the prominent freedom fighters namely M.K Gandhi, J.L Nehru encouraged women to participate in freedom struggle. Even the thoughts of these freedom fighters were put forward by their wives and daughters. Kamala Nehru (wife of J.L Nehru), Kasturba Gandhi (wife of Gandhi) and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (daughter of Motilal Nehru) are some prominent names. But the above mentioned women leaders wouldn't be considered as the evidence that women had a prominent role in the political system of the country at that time. The real India lies in the common being and the active role of common women in different Gandhian and Non-Gandhian movements clearly shows that the women at that time were becoming more and more conscious about their society in slow but steady manner under the guidance of different freedom leaders. Individually they were not that much politically conscious that they would understand different ill effects of British colonialism but in common they were enough conscious to understand who was their common enemy, The British Government. During freedom struggle the Women not only held public meetings and organised rallies but they also worked as revolutionary activists namely Kalpana Dutta, Bina Das and Preetilata Waddedar. In general, revolutionary activists didn't hesitate to use un-lawful and unconstitutional means to make their demands fulfill. For instance Kalpana Dutta dressed as a men and entered the European club to gather the information about security measures but

unfortunately she was caught and tortured yet she didn't reveal the plan. There are many such examples which show that women with strong political ideologies were profoundly active in Indian freedom struggle. After independence the most prominent women leader was Indira Gandhi. Indira Gandhi has served as the Prime Minister of India for more than a decade in different tenures. She was the then Prime Minister during India-Pakistan war of 1971. India had won the war and the political domination of Miss Gandhi was reached its zenith after this encounter.

Current political scenario with respect to women

According to Election Commission of India there are eight recognised national political parties in India. If we only consider the fact that how many women leaders are engaged in these political parties and observed the condition of women in Indian political regime in this aspect. It can be said that the political situation of women in India is considered to be average or above average with respect to whole world. Bahujan Samaj Party is also one of the National level political party in India which is headed by Mayawati. She had served as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for four times. The re-election of a women candidate as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for four times clearly shows that Indian women are not only politically conscious but the Indian patriarchal society is liberal to consider a women as their Chief Minister. Mamata Banerjee is the head of All India Trinamool Congress which is one of the national political parties in India. Currently she is serving as the ninth Chief Minister of West Bengal. She had not only served as the Minister of Railways in the centre but also hold the office of Chief Minister of Bengal for three consecutive complete tenure. For

another instance Sonia Gandhi is the president of Indian National Congress which is one of the prominent National level party of India. Sonia Gandhi incumbent the office of Indian National Congress's president for more than twenty years and still occurred it. In other national political parties we can take the example of Bhartiya Janta party who has made Nirmala Sitaraman as the Finance Minister of India. With above facts we can not conclude that the political participation of women in India is good. But at grass root level the political participation of women is not good. Only 14 percent of total members of parliament are women. However since the first Lok Sabha election which only consisted 5 percent of women the number has increased to large extent. But in United States of America there are 32 percent of women representatives in centre which is far more than India. The literacy rate of females in India is 53.7 percent. Such a low literacy rate also shows that considerably less percent of Indian women are politically conscious. In Panchayati Raj institutions women have been given 33 percent of reservation in seats but in reality the scene is slightly different. In the seats which are reserved for women candidates, politically conscious families make their daughter or daughter-in-law fought elections and after results the women candidate only become a face behind which other people exercise the power of office hold by her. But due to such reservations the political consciousness of women has increased which has also increased their participation in politics at both grass root level and state and central legislature. Irrespective of provisions for women reservation in different constituencies the constitution of India has also provided several other provisions which are meant to increase the political participation of women in

the political system. Some of the provisions which encourage women participation in politics have been discussed below-

- The preamble of the Indian constitution says that political justice has to be given to each and every citizen of India irrespective of their gender. Though the preamble can not be enforced by the court but it shows the spirit of the constituent assembly.
- Article 15 of the Indian constitution rejected any type of discrimination on the basis of gender. According to this if any women is denied to fought election on the basis of his gender she can move to Supreme court (according to article 32) or to High court (according to article 226) to restore it's fundamental right.
- According to Article 19 Indian citizens have right to speech and expression and to form associations and unions but with certain restrictions. Such fundamental rights help the citizens to develop their political thoughts and make the more politically conscious.
- In Directive Principles of State Policy Article 39(a) (adequate means of livelihood for citizens) and 39(d) (equal pay for equal work) help to ensure social and economic equality among men and women. These provisions made a solid base which help to promote political participation of women in politics. However Directive Principles are not enforceable by court but it guides the government and shows the real spirit of constitution.
- According to 73rd and 74th amendment act of 1992 not less than 33 percent shall

be reserved for women in panchayats and municipalities respectively. These provisions promote the participation of women in politics at grass root level. Irrespective of these provisions different statutes had also been enacted by parliament.

Obstacles which led to less-participation of women in politics in India

India is an under developed country. The major political problems of the country has there roots strengthen by illiteracy, poverty and lack of infrastructure and facilities. Overall the obstacles which made the political participation of women difficult in India are also strengthened by these factors. Obstacles which hinder women participation in Indian politics are given below-

- In India only 53.7 percent women are literate. Such low literacy rate indicates that the Indian women are less politically conscious and didn't know their rights properly and if they are aware with their rights they didn't know how to use them. If we have to increase the political participation of women the government has to make suitable measures to literate women. The government has also introduced some schemes like "New India literacy programme" which encourages adult education.
- In India About 19 percent of total women are in the labour force. As only 19 percent women are engaged in labour activities and remaining mainly work as house wives the latter are mainly dependent on their families and husband economically and socially. This system to some extent also promote less participation of women in

politics. Such economic backwardness led to indirect political backwardness.

- Another reason for women's less-participation in politics is the house hold responsibilities they have through conventions. In India it is considered to be the mother's responsibility to raise the kids and to look after them. Due to these responsibilities which are given to a mother through convention resulted to less participation of women in politics.

Conclusion

The development and achievement of any country depends on empowerment of women. But the social demarcation of women's role have led to their vulnerability and deterioration. The amount of struggle a woman face in her lifetime is unmatched, only because of societal norms. It is the women who have struggled the most and are still doing so because their rights still look like an illusion. Most of the women in India suffer from illiteracy, inequality, patriarchy, poverty and conservativeness. Even if they try to escape this, they are locked again through orthodox eyes of agony and selfishness. Women are exploited not only by men but also by other women. The dream of equal status and equal opportunity and participation still seems far away. The struggle is very long, as women in India are forced to keep a low profile since earlier times. Even after providing the benefit of reservation in elections, women face obstacles. They are considered as back seat drives in the area of political participation. Several state policies are enacted for breaking this stereotype but the results are not fruitful even after years of independence. A lot of dedication is required in this field to overcome these hurdles ,by all

stakeholders including men, government , officials , society and also by women themselves.

Referances

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