

Issue of Gender Disparity in terms of Political Participation. Reference to Goalpara District of Assam

Laxmirekha Nath, Hokdar Terang,
Assistant professor, Goalpara college, Goalpara, Assam

Abstract

In 21st century the issue of equal rights is considered as basic amenities in the aspect of human development. Yet the yardstick is immeasurable in every aspect that embodies our society and culture, even government initiatives. It is an open truth that gender inequality exists and will happen to exist if we as a conscious citizen ignore even minimal rights base issues. On the outset of women emancipation, why are we lacking behind in terms of women's political participation or why are we bias towards women's involvement in decision making platforms? There are numerous hurdles and we as concerned individuals must highlight and bring forward for retrospection. Society has evolved and educational system has widened its scope but the question lies with our commitment to the realization of such issues like gender equality and equal rights. From this small part of enormous India, Goalpara district of Assam has never witnessed the rise of any women representative in the mainstream decision making body. This is and will not be the only place in the world to happen where women are treated as second class citizen in India. To ponder as to why such discrimination or unwillingness persists in such matriarchy society is remarkably undesirable. This article is meant to identify and acknowledge the cause and effect of such system where women's participation in political affairs is below average and unacceptable with special reference to Goalpara district of Assam.

Keywords

[Gender Inequality]

[Democracy]

[participation]

Date of Submission: 10-06-2021

Date of Acceptance: 25-06-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a big failure if any section of the society is left behind in its practice. Democracy is all inclusive and the spirit is invisible. The making of any democratic government cannot be attributed to any particular section of the society. It is indeed the participation of everyone and to be inclusive we cannot ignore anyone not even the most marginalized section. Here, we are concentrated towards one marginalized section of our society and that too in the form of women folk. India's history like most of the democracies is not at all praise worthy because of minimal women's political participation. If we cite the examples of Cleopatra, Queen Victoria, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Margret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi, Aung San Suu Kyi and many more, it depicts a totally different picture of our society and democracies. But the hard fact is that, women are still under represented in parliament around the world. Even today they constitute less than a fourth of the world's lawmakers. In India women are treated as less capable, less thoughtful, less mobile, less intelligent, less decisive and less in every aspect to be honourable. This thinking is unconquerable perhaps the fact that our self made women like Indira Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee or Jayalalithaa had once upon a time conquered the unconquerable. The blame for gender disparity or biasness in our country is multi-dimensional be it political parties or even the voters in general. In place like Goalpara district of Assam where one has not witness any single women parliamentarian since its inception is remarkably unacceptable in this era of justice prevailing all.

Women political participation in Indian politics :historical context

Since ancient times, the status of women in India had seen many ups and downs. During the medieval period women use to face many challenges like "parda system", "sati" and patriarchy system has also deeply entrenched. Strict restrictions were placed on the bodies, movements, and legal and economic rights of women. Many of them were not able to participate in active politics. But in the post independent India, the status of women gained its strength. They had been participating in almost all types of economic activities and also voting rates increased simultaneously. India has elected a woman President Pratibha Patil and a woman prime

minister Indira Gandhi. And in the grassroot level, India has a significant proportion of women in local level politics which has been achieved after the Constitutional status of local government bodies.

Before independence women participated in the freedom movement with true spirit and courage and faced various tortures and exploitations to earn freedom. Many great Indian women like Rani Lakshmi Bai, Kasturba Gandhi and Annie Besant gave immense contribution to the freedom struggle of India. In this time Mahatma Gandhi understood that true freedom cannot be achieved if all the sections of the society are not involved. His most successful campaign against the imperial rule was fought on the issue of salt tax which brought Indian women to the forefront.

The issue of women reservation came to limelight in 1973 with voices recommending reservation of women in at least one third of the seats and eventually the constitution has recommended reservation of women in local government bodies through 73rd & 74th constitutional amendment act 1992. As the legislation provides for reservation of the women in Panchayats and municipal bodies the number of women elected representative gets increased. In India more than 50% of grassroot level representatives are women till date.

Women reservation bill (108th amendment) Bill, is a pending bill in India which proposes to reserve 33% of all seats in the lower house of parliament of India and in all state legislative assemblies for women. Women reservation bill was passed in Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010 but Lok Sabha could not pass the bill due to resistance of more regional parties on certain provisions of the bill.

Over the last two decades, there is growing recognition of the untapped capacity and talents of women and women's leadership. The rate of women's representation in national parliaments globally has increased from 11.8% in 1998 to 17.8% in 2008 to 23.5% in 2018. Accordingly the meaningful participation of women in national, local and community leadership roles has become an important focus on global development policy, women's political participation results in tangible gain for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizens need, increased co-operation across party and ethnic lines, and in a more sustainable future.

Barriers to women's participation in electoral politics

While the constitution of India grants universal suffrage with equal rights to both the men and women, existing social values, the private-public divide in terms of domain identification and male preponderance in political institutions create roadblocks for women in exercising electoral rights and equal participation in elections. The lack of critical and quality representation of women in key decision making positions results in women agenda not getting reflected and addressed in public policies and programs (Baseline report, 1998). Uneven access to quality education around the world creates obstacle to the participation of women. And also the overall mindset of a society has a significant impact on gender equality in electoral matters. How society determines the differences and values of men vs. women plays a starring role in every arena whether it is employment or the political system. According to research from the World Bank, over one billion women don't have legal protection against domestic economic violence. They have become unsafe and without protection women frequently have to limit their goals like political representation. The public agenda of Indian men and women elected as people's representatives is quite different and their priority of public works undertaken is also dissimilar. While elected women representatives address issues of long term benefits, such as education, health, violence against women and basic amenities that affect the community, men concentrated on issues that needed immediate attention such as roads, community and commercial centers, tanks and bridges (National Institute of Advanced Studies, 2002-03). At the PRI (Panchayati Raj Institutions), Grassroot level too there have been strong obstacles to women's entry into politics, even a backlash of violence to keep them away from electoral politics has been noted (Baseline report, 1998). Thus, women active in politics in India relegated to the fringes in power sharing at the top level, with adverse impacts on their overall political status in the country, acting as a barrier to electoral participation (Rai, 2011)

Effects

Women's participation in decision making is essential for women's interests to be incorporated into governance. Lack of adequate participation of women representatives in electoral politics leads one section of the society deprived from equality of opportunity in all spheres. In the central level, the absence of a critical mass of female representatives reduces their bargaining and negotiating power during the allotment of key cabinet portfolios in India such as Finance, Home, Defense and Health, which are given to men and considered heavyweight ministries. Indian women are mostly allotted ministries during cabinet formation which are termed as 'Feminine' portfolios, such as women and children, information and culture and social welfare, which perceived as relatively less important with fewer resources and reach among citizens (Kishwar, 1996).

Women Representation among elected representatives

*As per the data from ECI, out of the total 4865 MPs/MLAs across the country, only 440 or 9% are women

*Among MPs, Rajya Sabha has 27 or 11% of total MPs and The Lok Sabha has 78 or 14% women MPs the highest since independence

*In terms of percentage, among state assemblies, the percentage of women MLAs in Bihar with 28 or 14% followed by Rajasthan with 25 or 14% and west Bengal with highest 40 or % and Assam with 8 or 11% women representatives.

Women in electoral politics: reference to Goalpara district of Assam

The district of Goalpara is situated on the south bank of River Brahmaputra, and it covers an area of 1,824 square kilometers and is bounded by west and East Garo Hills, Districts of Meghalaya on the south, Kamrup district on the East. Dhubri district on the west and River Brahmaputra all along the north. The geographical location of the district is between 25° 53' N to 26°30' N latitude and 90°07' E to 91°05' E longitude. It is very unfortunate pertaining to the fact that everywhere consciousness about women's participation is rising, but yet Goalpara district of Assam has not produced any single parliamentarian neither in the state nor at the centre. The data represent zero in figure. This can be attributed to indecisive society in the form of voters as well as to the political parties present in the vicinity. Societal norms have evolved but thinking pattern is yet to evolve. The main reason behind lack of confidence towards women folk is because of their bigger role in household activities and also the mindset of others that they belong in and around the family. The Nagas of Nagaland is one of the most striking examples of this societal doings. I remember an anecdote perfectly from Nagaland, which occurred in the year 2017 around mid February when the whole of Nagaland state was under lockdown. The reason for this was hard to believe but yet it actually opened the mind. Minorities in the form of women demanded free participation and representation of women in local administrative bodies which was vehemently rejected by the male dominated majority. This conflict in particular resulted unrest in the whole state. The case is similar in this part of the country too. This leads to more suppression and relegation of one section of our society which is not to be considered as a good indication for the largest democracy of the world.

II. CONCLUSION

It is not whole heartedly correct as a responsible society to create indifferences just to be superior or inferior. The question is open and conflicting because as a society we all are responsible to rectify and give each one an equal place to co-exist and uplift humanism. No stones must be left unturned, even a slightest contradiction will encourage such injustice and inequality. Great nation always look forward towards other compatriots and learn. We are not less great and our society too. Education in one hand and outlook exposure in the other is the need of the time. Not change but reformation is bigger to achieve our desired society base on equality. Gender disparity is not automatic until and unless we make it. In fact disparity of any kind is human generated. It is wrong not to unseen it. Therefore, considering our mistakes and trying to rectify it doesn't make us less human.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Ahem, P. Nutti, P. & Masterson, J.M. (2000) Equity in the Democratic Process: Women's paths to political participation and decision making. Washington, DC: International center for research on women and center for development and population activities.
- [2]. Akerkar, Supriya (1995) 'Theory and Practice of Women's Movement in India: A Discourse Analysis', Economic and Political Weekly, 30(17).
- [3]. Baseline Report (1998) 'Women and Political Participation in India', prepared by the National Institute of Advanced Studies et al. (unedited version)
- [4]. Nayak, Purusattam. & Mahanta, Bidisha (2015). Gender Disparity and Women Empowerment in Assam. Published by Munich Personal REPEC Archive (MPRA).
- [5]. eci.gov.in

LaxmirekhaNath, et. al "Issue of Gender Disparity in terms of Political Participation. Reference to Goalpara District of Assam." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 26(06), 2021, pp. 13-15.