

Status of Indian Women

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Abstract

The movements of women or feminisms raise lot of demands for women's rights so that their status and role can be changed. Feminism explains the process of male domination on women in reality and symbolically. It asserts that social and political structures of society symbolize power of men over women resulting in the latter's oppression and subjugation. Even in the contemporary literature of feminist, women became a gender. "It (gender) is seen as the process by which individuals who are born into biological categories of male or female become the social categories of men and women through the acquisition of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity." It provides deeper analysis of present inequalities. Caroline Moser has traced the evolution of practice in the field of development for women. She emphasized on five approaches from traditional to what can be called feminist.

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Introduction

From the earlier experiences of the society it was searched out that women's presence in the political process is marginal and at very low exposure, some European countries are excluded from it. From the later half of the 19th century women's movements for their rights started. In most countries women got a little bit of success but in the third world women are treated as second-class citizen in their country.

The movements of women or feminisms raise lot of demands for women's rights so that their status and role can be changed. Feminism explains the process of male domination on women in reality and symbolically. It asserts that social and political structures of society symbolize power of men over women resulting in the latter's oppression and subjugation. Even in the contemporary literature of feminist, women became a gender. "It (gender) is seen as the process by which individuals who are born into biological categories of male or female become the social categories of men and women through the acquisition of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity." It provides deeper analysis of present inequalities. Caroline Moser has traced the evolution of practice in the field of development for women. She emphasized on five approaches from traditional to what can be called feminist. She says "Women and men play different roles in the world society and, therefore, often have different needs, provides the conceptual framework and the methodological tools for incorporating gender into planning . She has formulated development for women as gender planning. She examined "the goal of gender planning is the emancipation of women from their subordination and their achievement of equality, equity and empowerment."

According to Moser, women's need can be categorized into two sets of needs one is strategic and the other is practice. Strategic needs are related to a restructured society or a changed society but the practical needs are basic needs.

But Moser takes gender into considerations. Often she indemnifies needs into five sets as welfare, equity, antipoverty, efficiency and empowerments. Feminists have thrown up gender as the most potent significant and enormously useful analytical concept. Impulsiveness is the closely associated with the feminine parlance. This is the effect on women's distance from politics.

The Independent India continued the process of enactive legislative measure to raise legal status of Indian women. The Indian constitution explicitly and

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categorically granted sex equality. What is more, the constitution declares that women would be declared as weaker section eligible for special protection, consideration and assistance as per the Directive Principles of state policy which cannot be questioned in a court of law.

Our constitution guaranteed certain fundamental rights and freedom, such as freedom of speech and protection of life and personal liberty. Indian women are beneficiaries of these rights in the same manner as Indian men.

Besides providing formal structure of equality the government as it is found in many of the third world countries, used law as a major plank to change society. The enactment of Hindu Law guaranteeing the right to divorce and remarriage to Hindu Women, the inheritance Act providing equal share to women in the property and the establishment of the principle of monogamy are often the important innovation introduced in the Indian social structure affecting women's status and role. Though several laws have been passed for the benefit of women since independence e.g. Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, Dowry prohibition Act, Equal Remuneration Act etc. These are full of loopholes and ambiguities.

Legislative and educational policies of the Government of India opened opportunities for women to assert their identity in social economic and political scenario. But the opportunities for women are not equally distributed in various parts of the country. There is a notable rural urban disparity in the status of women.

But these programmes are not sufficient for improving the status of women. First we go through the data regarding the status and condition of women in India and then we will discuss the gloomy picture of women. Yes, statistically picture can't be shown truly but an understanding can be developed by it.

Economic Status of Indian Women

The National Perspective Plan (NPP) admits that "over the years there has been little structural change in the employment pattern of women in India". Only 14% of women are in full time employment. These employed women consists of 90% from the unorganized sector and 8% are from the organized sector.

The participation of women in the National economy both as producers and consumers is very limited. Development in monetary terms tends to underestimate the contribution of women in the economy.¹

The female work participation rate increased from 19.7% in 1981 to 25.7% in 2001. Still it is much lower than the male work participation rate in both urban and rural areas. Women's share in the organized work-force has also shown an increasing trend from 2.8 million (12.2%) in 1981 to 4.8 million (17.2%) in 1999.²

Men dominate the world of Business True. But women are making rapid strides and are giving men a run for their money, Over the years, there has been significant growth in the number of women entrepreneurs all over the world and India has been no exception. "In India in 1981, only 5.2 percent of women were self employed. However, as per census 2001, this figure has risen to 11.2 percent and if this trend continues, it is likely that in another 10 years women will comprise 20 percent of the entrepreneurial force", says a study called Marketing Achievements and the Challenges faced by women Entrepreneurs Delhi and NCR, released last year by FICCI Ladies Organization in collaboration with Hanns Seidel Foundation of Germany.³

Educational Status of Indian Women

Gender disparity in terms of education is also equally serious. As per 1991 census of India, out of every five men, three or more are literate while among women are lower (two out of five). In enrolment rate, at primary educational level, the disparity is much less, but by the time, they go to middle school, there is a heavy dropout among girls, so disparity in the enrolment rate among children of age 11-13 is much wider 155% for girls and 79% boys. The number of girls per 100 boys enrolled in school declines from 75 in primary (I to V class) to 65 in middle (VI to VIII class) and further to 55 in secondary school (IX to X class) levels of education. Girls are often withdrawn from school for household work or to take care of younger siblings. Education in case of a girl is an expendable opinion especially in rural areas and poor families.⁴

Political Participation of Women in India

Being a democratic country, women gained voting rights at independence, and over the years, the number of women voter has shown a steady rise, Through the panchayati Raj institutions, over a million women have actively entered into political life in India. While the participation of women remains lower than that man.

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The concern for women's political equality in India first emerged as a political issue during the national liberation movement where women were active participants. As early as 1917, Indian women raised the issue of representation in politics, which at that time meant demand for universal adult franchise. By 1929, women got the right to cast the vote. Women's involvement in politics expanded dramatically between 1930 to 1947 particularly within congress party. But in the year following independence women's political participation witnessed a sharp decline. In 1952 with the congress having 14 women members in parliament women as a whole constituted 4.4% of the total strength in the Lok Sabha. This is at the time when there were many outstanding women in the country with long years of political activity and social work behind them. But there happened to be no room for them at the top political bodies

Indian Women in the Decision Making Bodies :The government as well as non-governmental organization have been acutely aware of women's low visibility in decision-making bodies. Their less representation at the decision making and other representative bodies means denial of ample opportunities for women to participate in political activity. Julius Nyerere, Ex-president of Tanzania is absolutely correct when he summed up the problems, "A person does not walk very far or very fast of one leg, How can we expect half the people to be able develop a nation."⁵From the late seventies, political parties started having a separate women wing.

But the presence of women in the party and the governmental decision making bodies continues to be negligible. The following tables are illustrative of it.

A glance at the data table on the representation of women from the first to fourteenth Lok Sabha indicated that their representation has all through been between 4 to 8 percent of the total strength of the house and in Rajya Sabha it is between 7 to 10%. An overview of the last fifty years of representative politics reveals a rather dismal picture in terms of women participation and representation. The evolving political system in India failed to give more than a token representation to women in the highest political decision making bodies.

The total number of women members in the First Lok Sabha with 489 seats was 22. It was only increased to 45 by 2004. (see table-1) the number of women M.Ps in the Lok Sabha touched the lowest with 19 M.Ps in 1977, the year of the

congress debacle. The highest point was reached with 49 women M.P.S. 92% in the thirteenth loksabha 1999. There has been an average 30 women M.Ps in all LokSabha till 2004. Since 1984 to 1998, a downward trend is visible in women representation in LokSabha.

An analysis of the performance of women MPs in the current LokSabha by the independent research group, PRS Legislative Research shows that their participation in House proceedings is below that of male MPs. The 15th LS has 58 women MPs at 11% of the total strength of the House. This is the highest their number has ever been. However female MPs play a smaller role in the proceedings of the house than do men. They ask fewer questions and take part in fewer debates. In both the 14th and 15th LokSabah, women MPs on an average took part in fewer debates, tabled fewer private bills and asked fewer questions than the average male MP. Since participation in House proceedings is to a large part decided in consultation with party bosses, the numbers indicate that even once elected, women MPs may not be getting fair representation. To this extent, the women's quota could create a strong enough lobby of women MPs to make equal participation in the House unavoidable. The number of women candidates fielded is of course, abysmally low, 9% of all candidates.⁶

Political parties in India are reluctant to give tickets to women for parliamentary election. The candidates fielded by the various political parties are still dominantly male. Women account for only 5 to 10 percent of all candidates across parties and regions. This is the same broad pattern that has been observed in virtually, The all previous general elections in the country. So the process of equality and empowerment must begin at the level of party organisation.

With regard to women holding minister ship in India since 1952 till date, only 62 women have been able to reach the level of minister ship. Only Nine women have held cabinet rank Minister ship other women have been ministers of state and deputy ministers. Only one woman, Indira Gandhi was at the helm of affairs as Prime Minister for many years.

The representation of women in the decision making service (IAS) and India Police service (IPS) which stood at only 5.4 percent in 1987 increased marginally to 7.6% in 2000⁷.

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A study undertaken by Sarojini Ganju Thakur, Joint Secretary in the department of women and child development observes that even 50 years after independence, “The proportion of women in the higher civil services has remained abysmally low, a situation that can be labeled more as tokenism than representation.” The success rate of women sitting for the civil service examination has definitely gone up, the annual intake fluctuates and there has been no quantum jump in the number of women joining the service.⁸

The women constituted 8.8 percent of the I.A.S. in 1974, this figure has just gone up only at 10-11 percent in 2000. This is best illustrated by the fact that in Delhi, the capital of India : Of the 99 secretary level posts, only eight are held by women. Of the 65 additional secretary level posts, only four are women, Of the 283 joint secretary level posts, there are just 37 women.

These figures dip substantially when it comes to the police and forest services. In the Foreign Service, there are no women secretaries or additional secretaries in Delhi. Sarla Gopalan, who retired as secretary Department of Women and Child Development says personally that she faced no problems in her career and was given the postings and promotions due to her. “Yet, there is a certain reluctance when it comes to women. People are not sure about their capabilities. To that extent, women have to work much harder to establish themselves.”⁹

In fact, the gender stereotyping for women is fearless in the IAS as compared to other services. In Income Tax, for instance, the field of investigation was categorised as a ‘male domain’ which included posts in the Directorate of revenue intelligence and Directorate of tax evasion and customs. Similarly in the Indian forest service, too women are given “less challenging postings at head quarters or posts concerned with planning, publicity and social forestry.”¹⁰

The example of Mrs. Muthamma, a senior member of Indian Foreign Service who had to approach to Supreme Court in 1979 against hostile discriminatory treatment is not the sole example in the oppressed female history. Vinodini, the first pilot from Mizoram (on Doordarshan) also told that whenever she took off flight, checking was done twice/thrice (rarely done with male) because of sex discrimination. Likewise, Geeta Luthra, a Supreme Court Lawyer also placed the facts about sexual harassment, a serious problem which women faces at work-place. Even the woman lawyer is

not an exception to it only because she is a woman. It is why the Supreme Court in Vishaka Case stressed that all establishments should have separate cells for women in all cases of harassment. Even women DCP is harassed by her own husband in her own house. Courts are playing crucial role to bring equality to the women by giving their nondiscriminatory verdict as Delhi High court on March 12, 2010 directed the Central Government to grant permanent commissions to women in the armed forces.

In its verdict on a batch of petitions, a Division bench headed by Justice Mr. Sanjay Kishan Kaul ordered the grant of Permanent Commission the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force (IAF) to over 50 women officers who had accused the government of discrimination vis-a-vis their male counterparts. The Division Bench also ordered the reinstatement of six retired Short Service Commission women officers who approached the court seeking Permanent Commission in the forces. The court also directed the government to reinstate those officers who retired while the case was being heard.

On 9th March 2010, Women reservation Bill was passed in Rajya Sabha. In a Country that ranks 114th among 134 in Gender disparities, there was a need to create a level playing field. At present, there is only about 10% of women in Parliament. We would like to sound a note of caution about expectations that the Bill will automatically ensure the empowerment of women, we have seen that in states with women Chief ministers, the status of women has not improved dramatically. This has been the story of South Asia that has produced more women Prime Ministers and Presidents than any other region in the world. However, the passage of the Bill is a huge rhetorical push for the concept of aspiration among women to opt for politics as a career. But the Bill should be seen as a catalyst to let more women get a foothold in politics and not considered a right in perpetuity.¹²

Finally, we must realize that it is too necessary to understand that a real empowerment is form with in and without. So, for a woman, her real empowerment begins when she is able to raise her consciousness of herself, shape her own world view, and form an association with other people whose consciousness is also being awakened. The Latest Picture is very hopeful as Women in Lok Sabha are 9.6%, In Legislative Assemblies 5.6%, In Judiciary 3.33%, Indian Police Service 4.4%, Administrative Service and In Indian Foreign Service, Their Percentage is 13.5%.¹³

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