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# Women Empowerment and the Power Politics: A Feminist Perspective of the Contemporary Indian Scenario

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**Kiran\***

*\*Research Scholar, Lovely Professional University, Punjab India.*

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*Abstract: Gender equality, as always prevails to be a serious discussion topic in every sector of human existence. Though there has been altering definitions and intentions for feminism as an ideology and also a movement around the world, the question of whether women have been equipped with the outcomes of empowerment amidst all the challenges is still relevant. This research paper focuses on the distribution of power in the political sphere of the contemporary Indian scenario. Utilising the feminist perspective, the political and social situation regarding representation in various constitutional levels, particularly the panchayat system is analysed. Unlike in the past, there has been gradual and consistent improvement in the representation of women that helps to empower the status and living of women in the country. The findings of the paper reveal that there still prevails the irregularity in the existing freedom and rights enjoyed by women even after substantial constitutional amendments for their equal participation in policymaking. The research concludes by stating that women empowerment and equal status in politics to the female gender would help the gender to overcome the challenges raised by the patriarchal male dominance in society.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Gender, Equality, Politics, Power, Women.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world of women that was confined to the limited space within their home restricted themselves to participate in the process of nation-building. Though there have been several attempts to make themselves visible in the mainstream, the patriarchal ideology that was deeply rooted in the society hindered the process. Women empowerment in India is closely related to the constitutional rights, amendments, socio-political policies, movements and protests conducted by several groups and organizations. The post-independence era in India has witnessed several substantial changes in the social, political, economic and cultural aspects that influence women and their livelihood. As the preamble of the Indian Constitution proclaims liberty and equality, the question that whether the female gender enjoys such privileges offered by the nation's policies is relevant. Recollecting Article 15 (1), it ensures that the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or equal protection of the



laws within the territory of India. There is no provision allowing for any kind of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Same as it, Article 39 (a) supports adequate means of livelihood and Article 39 (d) ensures equal pay for work irrespective of gender difference. Gender disparity in the social, professional and personal

spaces of women is a fact in the country that makes the real essence of the word empowerment to get diminished to mere proclamations and paper works. Empowerment, as per its meaning denotes the process of gaining freedom and power to do what a person wishes or to control what happens to him/her. In the words of M Karl, Empowerment is a process and is not, therefore, something that can be given to people. The process of empowerment is both individual and collective since it is through involvement in groups that people most often begin to develop their awareness and the ability to organize to take action and to bring about change.

(Mann, 2021, p. xviii)

Many challenges are faced by the female gender in the country due to several circumstances such as lack of proper education, work opportunities, low wage situation, ideological incorrectness, exploitation and repression of identity.

Power politics refers to the distribution of power and the variations in such distribution with respect to external influences and causes. This term related to international relations has its significance in the women empowerment and contemporary scenario in India. From a feminist perspective, though there have been several attempts of protests and movements for equal rights and freedom, the complete attainment of the same is in limbo.

### **Review of Literature**

Women empowerment, feminist perspective and the Indian context has been dealt by scholars as it has the potential scope of exploration. Though such scholarly works are available, the interconnection of the three so as to analyse its significance in the contemporary scenario based on power politics is novel.

The term empowerment of women does not confine to the limits of what has been referred to as its textual meaning. It is contextual in its idea which can be altered according to situations. The development of women, when it reflects in their individual level, political activities, economical productivity and self-independent existence in society to make their own intelligent discussions (Mokta, 2017), it improves to the recognition of becoming and achieving the status of a woman having her own identity. Representation of women is a requirement of the time to increase the possibility of empowerment and also to reduce the gender gaps in society. Mobilisation of women contributes to improving women's political involvement. It encourages the entry of women to every level of politics breaking down the psychological barriers (Goyal, 2019, p. 2).

Awareness of rights and freedom in the country, its law and policies are a great requirement to access the opportunities. Ensuring education, gainful employment and empowering through self-help groups are considered to enhance the self-image and self-confidence of women by providing them autonomy in their identity and living (Tripathi, 2017). The schemes and measures of the government have been organised aiming at a gradual and systematic development of women in the different sectors of their life. Even after such initiations, society considers women as marginalised and inferior to men. Therefore, the reality of women empowerment is stated as a myth (Mirza, 2021, p. 5). Women empowerment in the political sector is traced to the movements related to the Indian independence struggle. The



involvement of women in the present scenario has a long history that also includes their massive participation, movements and protests as groups along with men and also as separate groups. It is regarded that women empowerment in politics, economy and social sector is important because of its long-lasting influence to affect the mindset of people to treat women equal to men in all sectors of life. Representation of women in politics and other relevant power positions would help in eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality, quality of education, and providing equal opportunities by reducing inequalities (Bhattacharya, 2021, p. 37).

From the perspective of J. P. Singh, India's record in favouring empowerment of women is appreciable as he believes that the strategies such as reserving seats through the political bill and economic development programmes for women has favoured boosting the empowerment of women in the country. His article favours economic empowerment of women through proper actions adhering to the gender-based reservation in the different levels like the Union, State and the Local (Singh, 2000).

## **2. DISCUSSION: WOMEN, REPRESENTATION AND INDIA**

When the world celebrates the participation of women in policy-making through powerful personalities such as U.S Vice President Kamla Harris, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden, the representation of women in politics in India has also improved, though not satisfactory. The statistical reports of women representation in Panchayat institutions give the information that 46% are women. Twenty states in India have allocated 50% of seats in the panchayat institutions to women which is a positive move (Jadav, 2020). Unfortunately, this representation does not reflect in higher bodies such as Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. There is only 14% women representation at present in Lok Sabha. While in Rajya Sabha, the representation of women was just 12.76% in 2011, 11.07% in 2014, 11.48% in 2018 and the very lowest 10.33% in 2020 (Statista, 2020). There has been a provision in the Constitution for women and marginalised sections in society including the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to have representation, especially for women to have at least 33.33%.

From this position of women representation in the higher political institutions and lower political institutions, the question of where does the impropriety in power politics takes its root get raised. While referring to the statistical records, it can be understood that women receive their reservation in representing the community and gender at the lower institutional bodies. Whereas, the representation in the higher institutional bodies such as Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha is still a problematic situation as there is no adequate number of representations for women. It is interesting to note the paradox and hypocrisy followed by the higher bodies that amend and approve the policy of representation of women. Though they have passed the bills that support the representation and empowerment of women through proper representation, they themselves have failed to showcase a better percentage of women representation in their houses. It is opined that the lower bodies are the root bases where women can provide their participation in policymaking that would be helpful for understanding, finding solutions and creating empowerment measures for the women in the area. Thus, the representation in the local bodies is substantiated and are taken seriously by the respective governments. These changes at the grassroots level indicate a substantial shift from the politics that had been a dominant prerogative of men. Though there is space for women in the panchayat institutions, there exist situations where men rulemaking women as their puppets. It is found that "lack of adequate information and managerial experience among newly elected women



representatives is challenging, as they struggle to understand what is expected of them as elected members, leading to a situation where male representatives often seize powers (Joshi and Singh, 2021).

It is often considered that the power dynamics of gender is intertwined with the cultural identity of an individual with respect to their position in the class hierarchy (Jackson, 2010, p. 15). The recent studies regarding the strength of women to react against the patriarchal system, it was found that only 38% of women in India had a definite idea about their identities (Dhar). To overcome the situation of the fear to break the stereotypes can only be conducted through providing appropriate representation and power to the female gender. The liberation of women and their political empowerment can lead to a substantial improvement in the social situations and status of the gender.

Despite all the attempts to empower women, there is increasing violence against the female gender. As per the records of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2015-16, there are 29.5% of women who have experienced physical violence from the age of 15 (Agarwalla, 2021) and more disturbingly the study conducted in 2019 reports that at least 87 rape cases happen in India on a daily basis (*Crime in India 2019*, 2019). Also, a recent study during the pandemic lockdown period shows that there had been a sudden rise of 131% in domestic violence complaints (Ravindran and Shah, 2020). This can be taken in two perspectives: (1) that there has been an increase in the violence against women even after such a high rate of programmes and initiatives from the government, and (2) women empowerment plans have effectively worked out in creating strength and confidence in women to report such cases to the authority. If we consider the case from the second perspective, women empowerment by providing proper training, education and awareness has come out in its fruitful way.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

This research paper focused on the representation of women in the political sphere and institutions in India, especially on the panchayat system. In the analysis of the statistical data, it was observed that there has been less representation in the upper and lower houses whereas the panchayat bodies have a good number of representations. The significance of the constitutional amendment and bills related to women representation in assemblies has helped to improve the count of women representatives in the panchayat institutions. Even then, the increasing number of atrocities against the female gender as violence, exploitation, tortures, domestic and marital rapes points to the ineffectiveness of the system. These activities of empowerment would help to overcome the situation of enforced identity (Mathew and Pandya, 2020) over the women that are exerted by the patriarchal male dominance having its hegemonic rule in the mindsets of people in power and society. Though there have been several meetings, schemes, empowerment plans, law supports etc. that is provided from the side of different level of governments, the fear to oppose the patriarchal domination and mentality of the society exist as a hindrance to the achievement of freedom and rights ensured by the constitution.

Therefore, the results of the study from the analysis of the statistics give a conclusive idea about the situation of women in the country that there have been both positive and ineffective outcomes as part of the empowerment programmes that has also led to the participation and representation in the constitutional bodies. It informs that opportunity and representation of women has to be there at all sectors and levels of governmental and non-governmental institutions so as to ensure that women have the chance to present their struggling situations



rather than hiding them due to the fear to oppose the patriarchal societal existence. The realisation that there is enough space and opportunity to raise a voice would bring more women to come forward to get out of the suffocating social, familial and political settings.

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