



The role of women legislator in the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly (1980-2009)

Dr. Samina Parween

Guest Faculty, Department of Political Science, University of Allahabad, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

The political participation of women is an indicator through which the extent of the enjoyment of their political rights is measured. It has been realised that without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality- development and peace- cannot be achieved. Therefore, here in the present work an attempt has been made to assess the level of political participation of women legislators in the Uttar Pradesh legislative Assembly from 1980 to 2009 in the light of their work, views and responses. The participation is analysed by measuring their involvement in the process of the Assembly such as through attendance, involvement in committees and involvement in different debates and issues.

Keywords: participations, representations, gender issues, decision making etc.

Introduction

The Political status of women in India, to a large extent depends upon their active political participation. The success of a democracy is not possible without a sound political participation of all classes, groups, genders and people of the country. In a democracy, power is shared by all the people and authoritative decisions regarding the welfare of the society are taken by the citizens directly or through their elected representatives. As Lord Bryce has rightly observed, an essential ingredient of a satisfactory democracy is that a considerable proportion should have the experience of active participation in the work of small self-governing groups, whether in connection with the local government, the trade Union, cooperatives or others forms of activity^[1].

From ancient times till today many theorists have laid importance on the issue of women's participation in politics. A century and a half ago, John Stuart Mill had pointed out that the participation of both the majority and minority will have to be ensured for a government to be competent and efficient. He had included women in his definition of the enormously disfranchised "minority" of that time^[2].

The European Network of experts has observed that "a balanced representation of women and men at all levels of decision making guarantees better government. Because of their history as a group, women have their own and unique perspective. They have different values and ideas and behave differently. Increased participation of women in decision making will create a new culture and shed new light on how power should be exercised. Women attach great importance to the quality of contact between people, and are less individualistic than men"^[3]. Crook and Manor define political

participation as "Citizens' active engagement with public institutions" including voting, campaigning and pressurizing, either individually or through a group^[4].

Participation in the assembly proceedings

The level of participation of women legislators in Assembly has been cursorily examined by studying the assembly proceedings. In the paper an attempt has been made to find out how many women legislators have been actively participating in the assembly proceedings and the kind of issues being raised by them. Their participation is based on many motivational factors that also need to be described here which were observed during the course of this study.

Participations in discussions

Dialogues and debates are the base of any legislative method or process. Generally members of the Assembly discuss about developmental issues, basic requirement for the betterment of their constituencies or any other problem or issue related to public importance and welfare of the people. Women members of Legislative Assembly also participate significantly in such debates and discussions. Some of the major issues targeted by Women Legislators are as follows:

Budget

Budget, a financial plan of government for a definite period, includes expected revenue and proposed expenditure. Generally, the government budget is annual i.e., it is formulated for one year^[5]. Every year it is presented in the Assembly and takes the shape of general discussion. As proceedings show, Women legislator have always actively

¹James Bryce, *Modern Democracies* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1921), p. 132.

²Pranab Kumar Panday, "Representation without Participation: Quotas for Women in Bangladesh", *International Political Science Review* (New Delhi) Vol. 29 (4), (September, 2008), p. 489-90, DOI: 101177/019251208095724.

³Ibid., p. 490.

⁴ Suzanne Ggleason, "Female Political Participation and Health in India", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Culture and development: International Perspectives*, Vol. 573, (Jan 2001), pp. 105-126), p. 106. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049017>.

⁵ Vishnu Bhagwan and Vidya Bhushan, *Public Administration* (New Delhi: S Chand & Company Ltd, 2006), pp. 586-87.

participated in budget discussions. For instance Ms. Kudsiya Begum took part in the budget debate by saying that there is too much shortage of electricity in village areas and that a sufficient budget should be passed for electricity in such areas [6]. Another strong example of women's participation in budget discussion is Smt. Syed Shadab Fatima who spoke on budget and emphasised that the expenditure of budget should be in appropriate way and more part of the budget should be spent on agriculture, education and other developmental aspects. She had also criticised the action of previous government which had spent a whopping Rs.584 Crores on making Dr. Bheem Rao scriptures, and Rs.161 Crore on statues [7].

Bills and Amendments

Women legislators are highly conscious of the bills and amendments passed by the Assembly because it majorly affects the lives of the people directly or indirectly. The ability and desire to prepare and introduce bills is also a significant parameter to assess the participation of women members. Although the percentage of women in introducing the bill is quite low, their participation regarding the discussions and debates on the bills and amendments are noteworthy. For instance, Smt. Swarup Kumari Bakhshi (as Home Minister of State) reintroduced Uttar Pradesh 'The National Anti-factor Prevention Bill 1982' (राष्ट्रीय तत्व निवारण बिल) in Assembl [8]. She also spoke loudly in favour of 3rd Amendment Bill of the Uttar Pradesh State Universities of 1980. She supported the bill because it was in favour of student and teachers and this amendment was for bringing the development of Universities of state [9].

Education

There are many countries in the world where everyone doesn't get chance to receive Education. India falls amongst such countries, where the majority of the people are illiterate. The condition of Uttar Pradesh more or less is the same, with a majority of the people living in villages where education is not given much importance. The condition of female education is much worse in major parts of India.

In Today's World education is a basic necessity and the most effective tool to improve the position of women in the society. Women legislators are much concerned with the elevation of literacy rate in their constituencies and in the respective areas as well and participate in the discussions regarding Education very strongly. For example, Smt. Swarup Kumari Bakhshi played a very effective role in the field of education and was also appointed as the State Education Minister in U.P Assembly. She gave huge emphasis on the recruitment of adequate number of teachers in Hardoi district of U.P for the development of education. She also raised her voice for implementing better education system for women. According to her, a sufficient amount of money must be granted by the

government on education policy [10].

Women's Issues

It is interesting to know that women legislators of Uttar Pradesh are much concerned with the interests of women and have always raised voice against issues regarding women. They have brought to light all types of 'women issues' such as illiteracy, domestic violence, exploitations, child marriages, female foeticide, dowry, Rape cases etc. in the Assembly. Although, amongst these, domestic violence is most common and is now considered a major violence that includes sexual coercion, physical threats and psychological abuse and controlling actions such as enforcing physical isolation.

Violence against women is not new in our society. In fact, women have been victims for long. Despite many legal provisions in favour of women and for their development like education and economic liberation, women are still victim of major violence in our society. They are kidnapped, raped, abused and burnt alive [11]. In most parts of India, both North and South, the family is mainly patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal and these regions are well known for the kinds of in-egalitarian gender relations that are in direct relation to gender violence. Women are defined as inferior; husbands are assumed to 'own women' and have the right to dominate them, including domination by force.

Domestic violence is thus deeply embedded in patriarchal norms and attitudes of gender relation in India. It also prevails in Uttar Pradesh and it is high time that it is not ignored any more [12]. Women legislators fortunately are more conscious on violence against women and they have always raised their voice in the assembly from time to time. For Example, according to rules 52, when discussion took place in the Assembly regarding burning alive of newly married women, compulsion for suicide due to dowry, and women's Strangulation etc. Smt. Swarup Kumari Bakhshi actively took part in this discussion and loudly raised women's problems, condemning harshly all types of violence in the society. She laid more emphasis on domestic violence by saying that it is the time to go into roots to eliminate and bury these types of violence. She also highlighted orthodox and regressive issues like the dowry system, which has become a curse for women, is directly related to domestic violence. She gave a few strong suggestions to remove social evils, like declaring domestic violence to be a non bail-able offence and also emphasised on providing relief to the victims.

Smt. Syed Shadab Fatima had a strong opinion in the Assembly for the all round development of women. She condemned promotion of any such activity that forced women into deplorable circumstances and conditions. For example, she requested the government to ban the newspapers which are increasing prostitution by printing advertisements that involve objectification of women. She also raised her voice against the sexual exploitation of women saying in her speech that women are not safe even in their homes and unfortunately

⁶ Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly Proceedings, LuckNow U P Vidhan Sabha Secretariat, (6 March, 1986) Vol. 376, part-2, pp. 75-77.

⁷ Ibid. 2009, 18 February, Vol.740, part -7, pp. 167-69.

⁸ Ibid, Vol. 354, Part 7, 11 February 1982, pp. 92.

⁹ Ibid, part-7, Vol. 346, 24 September 1980, pp.1007-1008

¹⁰ Ibid, 1983, 12 September, Vol.368, Part-8, pp.86-87.

¹¹ Uma Sharma, Indian Political Science Research Paper half yearly, (July-December, 2009), Meerut: Mudrak, p.379.

¹² Shirin J. Jejeebhoy, "Wife Beating in Rural India: A Husband Right? Evidence from Survey Data", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33 (15), (April 11-17, 1998), pp. 855-862.

many women are being sexually exploited by their family members.

Women legislators have also raised their voices against increasing rape cases in India. They have demanded Rape Preventive Measures, emphasising that rape law should be changed and highest penalty be granted, like death penalty for rapists so that it may help in protecting women and girls of India and a just and secure social environment can be created^[13]. There should be proper investigations in rape cases of minors in the state. Apart from Rape and domestic violence, prevalent issues in the society like Honour killings have also been actively criticised by the female members in Assembly. Smt. Syed Shadab Fatima raised voice in the Assembly on the empowerment of women and stated that Women and Child Welfare ministry should go to women members of the Assembly, because women members can serve women interests better than their male counterparts^[14].

Infrastructure development & constructions

The infrastructure development is considered as an important factor for judging the development of any country or region. Infrastructure assets are the physical structures, facilities, and networks that provide essential services to the public. Women legislators of Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly are quite aware of the development in the state and have focused on the infrastructure development for their own constituency as well as for the state. For instance, Ms. Vidya Chaudhary had demanded the government for the establishment of an I.T.I institute in Azamgarh district^[15]. She had also demanded for the construction of roads in the under developed areas and expansion of congested roads. She also demanded for funds for the construction of Schools for basic education within her constituency^[16]. She set into action the construction of road, which connects the highway of Baliya, Mau and Lucknow. She also reiterated that the Amazgarh-Varanasi highway be constructed without further delay.

Agriculture and Irrigations

Uttar Pradesh cultivates around 58% of its geographical area, while the figure for the whole country is 45%. UP economy is dominated by agriculture, which represents a 40% share of the state's gross domestic product (GDP) and 75% of its employment. Rapid infrastructural development like construction of roads, industries, increased residential space requirement due to easy affordability, changing life styles etc, are now competing with agriculture usage of land^[17].

To make the country self sufficient in food production it is essential that Uttar Pradesh, which has fertile land and favourable climate, should not only produce enough for its needs but should also be in a position to cater to the requirements of the deficit states as well. Food production can be increased only by intensive cultivation and use of high yielding seeds. But for this to be possible, it is necessary that

the entire state is well equipped with adequate irrigation facilities^[18].

In most of India's half a million or so villages, agriculture remains central to the local economy. Women legislators in Uttar Pradesh also have notably worked to promote agriculture. For example Smt. Vidhya Chaudhry had requested to the U.P government to install tube-wells in Jay Nagar village in Azamgarh for irrigation purposes. She put pressure on the government to construct and expand the ravaged bridge which was leading to soil erosion, mostly in the fields of Mehnagar village of Azamgrah district^[19]. She requested for information from the Agriculture Minister of Uttar Pradesh about the construction of canal in her village in Azamgarh. She asked the agriculture minister about the digging of canal in some areas for irrigation purposes^[20]. She also demanded the government to provide fertilizers to the farmers of various district for higher yields and better results^[21].

Electricity

Electricity is one of the most widely used forms of energy and is a complicated infrastructure on which the socio-economic development of a country is based. The use of electricity is very high in five major sectors domestic, agriculture, commercial, Industry and railways^[22].

Ms. Vidya Chaudhry had raised strong voice for electricity in her constituency and pressurised the government to provide an Electricity Sub-station of 220 KW for electricity supply in her constituency. She also demanded the installation of transformers for supplying electricity in the villages of Azamgarh district^[23]. Ms. Krishna Raj also suggested the government to install extra transformers in the substation of village area of Lakhimpur District^[24].

Corruption

It is not easy to define corruption. The term corruption has been defined in various forms. In a broader sense, it is a deliberate and intentional exploitation of one's position, status or resources, directly or indirectly, for personal aggrandizement whether it be in terms of material gain or enhancement of power, prestige and influence beyond what is legitimate or sanctioned by the commonly accepted norms to the detriment of the interest of the persons or the community as a whole^[25]. The Santhanam Committee on prevention of corruption in India defines corruption as "any improper or selfish exercise of power and influence attached to a public office or to the special position one occupies in public life"^[26].

¹³ Ibid 9 February 2011, Part-4, VOL. 475, pp.12.

¹⁴ Ibid, 27 February 2008, part-10, Vol. 467, pp.175-176.

¹⁵ Ibid 17 February 2006, Part-1, Vol. 457, p.86.

¹⁶ Ibid. 27 march 2006, Part-1, VOL. 458, p.95.

¹⁷ Arun Chaturvedi, N. G. Patil and S. N. Goswami, "Reorienting Land Use Strategies for Socio-Economic Development in Uttar Pradesh", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI (26 & 27), (June 25, 2011), pp 169-173.

¹⁸ Uttar Pradesh 1947, Director of Information: Lucknow, pp.132.

¹⁹ 21 November 2005, Part-1, VOL.456, pp.65.

²⁰ Ibid. 23 November 2005, part-3, VOL.456, p.20.

²¹ 17 February 2005, Part-5, VOL.452, pp.455.

²² Sharbani Mukherjee, An Alternative Measure of Efficiency in the Use of Electricity in India: A State Wise Assessment, *Indian Economic Review, New series*, 43 (2) (July- December, 2008), p.229, pp. 229-251. <http://www.jstore.org/stable/29793915>.

²³ Ibid. 20 February 2009, Part- 9, VOL.470, pp. 10-11.

²⁴ Ibid. 19 February 2008, Part-6, VOL.467, pp.196-197.

²⁵ Jitendra Narayan, "Corruption in Administration in Ancient India", Vol. 66 (3), *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, (Meerut), (July- September, 2005), p. 559, pp. 559-574. <http://www.jstore.org/stable/41856149>.

²⁶ Subhash C. Kashyap, *The Minister and Legislators*, (New Delhi: Metropolitan, 1982), p. 16.

Corruption and corrupt practices exist in one form or the other in all societies. There is perhaps no society that can claim to have stumped out corruption completely ^[27]. However, corruption is a social evil which is both pervasive and significant all over the world. In India, the level of corruption is extremely high and is extensively spread across the country. In spite of the legal provisions against corruption in the country, it has become a way of life in India.

The level of corruption is very high in Uttar Pradesh. The women legislators of Uttar Pradesh legislative Assembly have been very cautious and have agitated against any type of corruption. For instance Ms. Krishna Raj informed the government about the scam of Rs.30 Lacs for the fellowship of Ganna Kisan degree college of Shajahanpur. It is pleasing to know that the government took a stern action against that scam ^[28]. Smt. Maya Prasad brought to the notice of the government, the running of illegal shops by some people in her constituency ^[29]. She also informed the government about the fraud in supply offices and about the illegal supply of food grains in some particular area in Lakhimpur district ^[30].

Environment Protection

The budding literature on eco-feminism in the west, especially in the United States, conceptualizes the link between gender and environment, primarily in ideological terms. An intensifying struggle for survival in the developing world, however, highlights the material basis for this link and sets the background for an alternative formulation to eco feminism, which can be termed 'feminist environmentalism'. Today women are actively engaging in the movements of environmental protection and regeneration. They have been highly forthcoming about the environmental issues and have been successful in protecting the trees from being chopped down, stopping tree auctions and illegal felling of trees. Majority of the Women Legislators are of the opinion that, twigs can be collected freely, but any harm to the trees is liable to punishment.³¹ Women legislators have been quite aware of the environment problems and have frequently raised their voices to protect environment. For example, Smt. Vidhya Chaudhri had requested to the government for plantation of trees in her constituency of Azamgarh District ^[32]. Smt. Krishna Raj also raised her voice against the chopping of green trees illegally by the police and selling it to the contractors ^[33].

Conclusion

In the end, on the basis of above discussion it can be said that the women legislators of Uttar Pradesh have played a very important role in the legislative assembly, equivalent to their male counterparts. They have focused on each and every

aspect that is essential for the development of lifestyle and progress of the common man and have touched base on every little facet in order to fulfil their responsibility. It can be easily observed that they are and have been quite serious about their responsibilities and duties. They speak out their minds, discuss their thoughts and also highlight the issues which have affected the people of their constituency directly or indirectly.

References

1. James Bryce, *Modern Democracies* New York: Macmillan Company, 1921, 132.
2. Pranab Kumar Panday, *Representation without Participation: Quotas for Women in Bangladesh*. *International Political Science Review* (New Delhi). 2008; 29 (4):489-90, DOI: 10.1177/019251208095724,
3. Suzanne Ggleason, *Female Political Participation and Health in India*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Culture and development: *International Perspectives*, 2001; 573:105-126-106. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049017>.
4. Vishnu Bhagwan, Vidya Bhushan. *Public Administration* (New Delhi: S Chand & Company Ltd, 2006, 586-87.
5. Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly Proceedings, Luck Now UP Vidhan Sabha Secretariat. 1986; 376(2):75-77.
6. Uma Sharma. *Indian Political Science Research Paper* half yearly, Meerut: Mudrak, 2009, 379.
7. Shirin Jejeebhoy J. *Wife Beating in Rural India: A Husband Right? Evidence from Survey Data*, *Economic and Political Weekly*. 1998; 33(15):11-17-855-862.
8. Arun Chaturvedi NG, Patil SN Goswami. *Reorienting Land Use Strategies for Socio-Economic Development in Uttar Pradesh*, *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2011; 46(26/27):169-173.
9. Uttar Pradesh. *Direcector of Information: Lucknow*, 1997, 132.
10. Sharbani Mukherjee. *An Alternative Measure of Efficiency in the Use of Electricity in India: A State Wise Assessment*, *Indian Economic Review*, New series, 2008; 43(2):229-251. <http://www.jstore.org/stable/29793915>.
11. Jitendra Narayan. *Corruption in Administration in Ancient India*. 2005; 66(3)-559-574. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, (Meerut), <http://www.jstore.org/stable/41856149>.
12. Subhash Kashyap C. *The Minister and Legislators*, (New Delhi: Metropolitan, 1982, 16.
13. Samuel Paul, *Corruption: Who Will Bell the Cat?*, *Economic and Political Weekly*,
14. Bina Agrwal, *The Gender and Environment Debates: Lessons from India Feminist*
15. *Studies*, 1992, 18(1).

²⁷ Samuel Paul, "Corruption: Who Will Bell the Cat?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.32 (23), (June 7-13, 1997), p. 1350, pp.1350-1355.

²⁸ Proceedings. 2 February 2010, VOL.472, Part-6, pp.203-205

²⁹ Ibid.16 February 2005, Part-4, VOL.452, pp.35.

³⁰ Ibid 10 April 2000, part-9, VOL.433, pp.80.

³¹ Bina Agrwal, "The Gender and Environment Debates: Lessons from India", *Feminist Studies*, Vol.18 (1), (spring, 1992), pp.119-158. <http://www.jstore.org/stable/3178217>

³² Ibid, Vol. 452,Part -6,(2005),18 February, P.55.

³³ Ibid 9 August 2011, Part-3, VOL.476, pp.44.