



Women's rights and their importance to the development of true democracy

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Abstract

Due to its foundation in the will of the people, democracy is the most favoured form of administration in the modern world. India was the first country in South Asia to introduce democracy. After independence, the democratic form of administration was implemented in this country.

First-group women who are illiterate or have little formal education are aware of their right to vote in elections, but not all of them have heard of democracy. None of them belong to any organisations or self-help groups, and either they have no interest in politics or their families forbid them from participating in public life.

The second category of women are involved in politics or an organisation. They are aware of the term "democracy" and the accompanying rights.

Women with a higher education and a vocational degree make up the third group. They are well aware of their democratic rights, but they also understand that women may find it difficult to exercise those rights at various junctures and circumstances in their lives. The position of women is complicated; while they have the option of participating in public life, those who pursue vocations inherently balance two roles: that of employee and that of head of household.

Keywords: Democracy, political participation, discrimination of women in politics

Introduction

In India, the women's movement is working to address and rectify two significant inconsistencies in the democratic system of the nation. These obstacles keep Indian women from participating on an equal footing with males. The first issue is the conflict between women's increasing desire for democracy and the limited chances that exist for them in the nation's democratic structure, functions, and political decision-making processes. The second issue is related to the gender gap that still exists in this new consciousness. To strengthen democratic foundations, it is necessary to demand a 33% seat reservation for women in state and federal government as well as a zero-tolerance policy for violence against women. Institutional impediments must go in order for women to have full access to political possibilities and for the gender gap in the public sphere to be closed.

Authentic democratic governance

The importance of democratic government in promoting social and economic growth and ending poverty has long been emphasised. The term "democratic governance" is derived from the Greek terms "demos," which means "people," and "kratos," which denotes power or authority.

Addressing the democratic deficit

India is quickly becoming the biggest nation fighting to bring democracy to the underprivileged. To guarantee that all women and men participate in decision-making and have a connection to governmental processes, the government and civil society are working on a number of fronts. Since the Indian Constitution provides defined concepts regarding the path of nation-building and social reconstruction to promote equality in economic, political, and social practise, there is already strong constitutional support.⁶ Since India's social and cultural traditions are hierarchical and

discriminatory and exclude women, Dalits, and other marginalised people, it is challenging to build democracy there because of this tension.

Women's status in India

Because of India's highly hierarchical and prejudiced social and cultural systems, minority groups continue to be excluded from decision-making forums and to face pervasive discrimination and disadvantage. The exclusion of women from India's political arena is a significant challenge in this situation. However, this issue is not unique to India and is shared by democracies all over the world. In the developing world, women are marginalised in both political activism and voting, in addition to being underrepresented in decision-making bodies. Additionally, women who are politically active—whether as engaged citizens or elected officials—frequently experience harassment, assault, and discrimination from political competitors, dissatisfied neighbours, and even members of their own families and political parties.⁸ Due to their exclusion from democratic governance, women's rights to political participation are infringed, which has serious ramifications for the democratic deficit. Additionally, it has resulted in policies that are less effective in addressing inequalities and advancing development because they do not sufficiently reflect the values, needs, and priorities of women.

The Constitution of India, the largest democracy in the world, guarantees women equal rights and position. The Constitution, which was adopted in 1950 after independence from the British colonial powers, embodies the spirit of the liberation movement and places a strong emphasis on individual rights as well as the elimination of caste, class, and gender discrimination. In order to combat prejudice against women in social, cultural, and political contexts, it also integrates affirmative action practices. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), and 39(c) of the Constitution all

provide equality for women.⁹ However, despite 66 years of freedom and democracy, Indian women still do not have complete and equal citizenship rights. True democratic governance continues to face significant obstacles as a result of this. Additionally, patriarchal ideals are pervasively present in many of India's social, political, and cultural institutions, which makes it common for women to experience prejudice and indifference in both their public and private lives. In addition, women have fewer access to education, and their 65% literacy rate is still 16% lower than men's.¹⁰ In addition, women had a greater morbidity rate than men, while having less access to medical care. Anaemia affects about 55% of women in India, where there are 212 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births. In India, there were 57,000 maternal fatalities in 2010. One death results from this every ten minutes.

In India, there is a high likelihood of violence against women. From conception to death, it affects every element of women's life. In India, 34% of women have been the victim of violence at some point. Family dynamics, broader social and economic institutions, and cultural and religious traditions all contribute to the institutionalization of this violence.

Gender-based violence begins even before a woman is born, and sex-selective abortions result in the annual disappearance of over 600,000 girls in India. The custom of dowry, which entails the bride's family sending gifts and money to the groom's family, strengthens women's subordination and their reliance on their husbands for financial support. There were 8,233 occurrences of dowry-related deaths in India in 2012, and dowry conflicts frequently result in violence against women.

The gang rape case in Delhi on December 16, 2012, attracted attention to the issue of violence against women and underlined the need to protect their safety and security. In 2012, there were documented cases of rape in 24,923 cases, molestation in 45,351 cases, and sexual harassment in 9,173 cases nationwide. The most prevalent crime in India is rape.

Domestic abuse, however, continues to be the most prevalent type of gender-based violence in India. According to official figures, 36% of married women between the ages of 15 and 49 had been victims of violence at some point in their lives.

It is very common for cases of violence against women, especially domestic abuse, to go unreported. The number of women who actually encounter violence at home is thought to be far greater.

Women's health, happiness, and dignity are severely harmed by gender inequity. Additionally, it hinders the advancement of society, the economy, and politics. The patriarchal systems that support this disparity must be dismantled for India to establish authentic participatory democracy. Ensuring women's active and direct participation in governance is one of the best methods to combat gender inequality and prejudice.

The representation of women in government body

Women now hold only 11% of lower house seats and 10.6% of upper house seats in national parliaments, although making up 48.5% of India's population and 47.5% of those who are registered to vote. In addition, there were only four women serving in the ministry in 2012. This works out to a depressing 9.8% of all cabinet positions.

The women's movement in India has been outspoken in calling attention to the marginalisation and discrimination that women experience throughout the nation and in demanding a voice in politics. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution were adopted by the Indian government in 1992 in response to demands made by women constituents as expressed by the women's movement. This required that 33% of seats in local politics be dedicated for women. Women are far more likely to participate in local governing bodies than in state and national parliaments since seats in local politics are reserved for women. Women's political involvement in local self-government has increased dramatically since the reservation system was put into place. Over 1.5 million women currently occupy roles in Panchayati Raj institutions, making up 36.8% of all elected posts. Many governments have deliberately increased the number of seats reserved for women to 50% as a result of the emergence of strong female leaders. Women made up 54% of all elected Panchayat delegates in states like Bihar, where there is a 50% reservation.

Women are now actively and vocally participating in local governance thanks to the leadership of women in Panchayati Raj institutions, which has been good for both women and larger communities. Women who are elected to office have more confidence and self-esteem. They have better decision-making abilities and feel that their family and communities respect them more. Governance at the Panchayati Raj level is now more representative of the needs, values, and viewpoints of the entire community rather than simply of its male constituents because to the inclusion of women's opinions in decision-making processes.

The battle goes on because, regrettably, the process of broadening democracy through boosting women's participation has not been repeated at the state and national levels of governance. Additionally, it is clear that not all of the obstacles to women's participation in politics have been eliminated by the Panchayati Raj institutions' allocation of seats for women. However, the democratic process over the past 60 years has resulted in a widespread mobilising of marginalised groups who are now seeking their fair share. Additionally, the practise of reserving seats for women has been helpful in raising the proportion of women serving in local governing bodies and in giving voice to women's issues and concerns. They have fought against gender inequality in political, social, and economic systems. By redefining women as political players, leaders, and decision-makers, they have also altered how society views them.

Gender imbalance in governance: Political reservations

The reservation system is a crucial tool in the fight for gender equality among women and is also essential to the wider implementation of participatory democracy. Quotas and other special measures can greatly enhance women's political representation and significantly reduce the gender gap in politics. India is just one illustration of the advantages of quotas for addressing political participation disparities. Currently, quotas for political parties, elections, or the constitution have been implemented in more than 90 nations around the globe, along with other effective measures. 25 of the 30 nations with national assemblies that include at least 30% women have statutory quotas in place.

A few political parties have also included optional quotas for women to their candidate lists in addition to this. These voluntary commitments are more prevalent and play a crucial role in promoting women's active participation in politics in nations like Germany, Norway, and Sweden, which are among the top 25 countries favouring women's participation in politics.

In India, more needs to be done to guarantee women's citizenship rights. There is an urgent need to include state and federal legislators in the present reservation system. The Women's Reservation Bill, which was created to fulfil this need, makes it easier for women to participate in politics by allocating 33% of seats in state and federal governing bodies to women.²⁸ By guaranteeing women's active involvement at all levels of governance, this law enhances the existing political reservation for women and has the potential to radically transform India's political landscape. The amended bill was ultimately reintroduced into Parliament in March 2008 after being introduced multiple times in the late 1990s. The law faced tremendous opposition inside the Parliament, but in 2010 the upper house finally approved it. However, it has now been pending in the lower chamber for 17 long years and is still awaiting approval.

The Women's Reservation Bill will let women get beyond patriarchal barriers that keep them out of politics. Experience has also shown that when given the chance to hold leadership positions within state and national parliaments, women exhibit that they are capable and effective leaders. This is in response to persistent marginalisation and prejudice within the Parliament. Participation of women in politics raises living standards and boosts infrastructural, health, and educational indices.

However, while waiting for the bill to pass, India must be aware of international initiatives to advance women's political participation. In order to improve the representation of women in political parties and political discourse, voluntary quotas at the party level can be utilised in India.³⁰ Although precise statistics on the number of Indian women who participate in political parties are not accessible, it is clear that women are drastically underrepresented in all significant political parties. Women are frequently excluded from senior roles inside party structures and are less likely to be nominated as candidates. In India's 2009 general election, just 59 of the 556 women who ran for office were successful in taking their seats.

Empowering women leaders

One important step in resolving the gender imbalance in India's governance structure is the implementation of reservations and quotas at the constitutional or political party levels. Political reservations can successfully enhance their position in governance, as shown by the reservation of seats for women at the Panchayati Raj level. However, more work needs to be done to enable women to participate fully in politics, overcome the various obstacles they face when choosing to get involved in politics, and empower them to assume leadership positions. The Women's Reservation Bill's approval is a crucial first step in encouraging women to participate in state and federal governance. In the upcoming parliament session, which will take place in late November 2013, the Bill must be given top priority.

Training women to fulfil their tasks successfully and successfully would be another step towards empowering women. Women from all societal levels who now hold leadership positions or have a strong desire to do so must be the focus of leadership training courses. Their capacity to

participate in governance institutions should be increased, and these training programmes should teach individuals how to lead effectively and be change agents in their communities. Additionally, training modules must cover the procedure for submitting a candidature, running for office, and providing information on electioneering technology.

In addition, policies must be created at the governmental or political party levels to guarantee that women candidates receive 33% of winnable tickets from all political parties. Institutional assistance at the federal and state levels must also be given to women's organisations that promote political empowerment for women. Last but not least, initiatives should be undertaken to create a supportive climate that encourages and supports women's full and active engagement in politics.

Conclusion

India still has several difficulties in achieving inclusive and genuine democratic governance after 66 years of democracy. The underrepresentation of women in decision-making bodies, notably in state and federal legislatures where there are no reservations for women, is the main democratic deficit in the nation. Women are unable to fully and equally participate in society due to their exclusion from political life. Additionally, this limits the ability of decision-making organisations to properly address the interests and goals of all community members.

However, these obstacles can be surmounted in order for everyone, regardless of gender, to take part in the governance process. The government must take the initiative to make this happen. India has to rethink its rigidly patriarchal system of government. Women may never experience true democracy if they are kept out of political procedures. As much as it is the foundation of their right to equal citizenship, women's participation in politics is a fundamental human right. Men's dominance in politics needs to be eliminated everywhere in the nation and the planet. The key to our future lies in the hands of women in leadership.

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