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**Women's Representation in Polity: A Need to
Enhance Their Participation**

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Abstract

There is a general impression that development means just creation of infrastructure. As a result of this, development could not become need-based and relevant to social circumstances.

Participation implies participation at all stages of the programme, viz., planning, formulation, implementation, decision-making, sharing the benefits of development, monitoring and evaluation.

The development of human resources particularly women have been neglected/denied. Educational backwardness is the major reason why women lag behind men. Moreover, women in India experience unacceptable levels of violence in the family within the community, work place, public places and at the custodial institutions.

It is the manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have lead to domination over and discrimination against women and the prevention of women's full advancement. The paper attempts to look into the progress of women's participation in polity.

Participation in polity carves out for themselves a place of significance. The attempt of the study is based on the secondary source of Inter Parliamentary Union Reports and Reports from Government of India. Based on the data it is inferred that the rate of female representation at national level stands at merely 18 per cent globally. In India, women hold only 28 of 242 seats. Women were proposed for 33 per cent reservation by the parliament but yet the society witness lungpower battles over the Women's Reservation Bill.

Gender identity is the realistic and regenerative developmental effort in the direction of progress, in terms of economic independence for women and for their educational advancement. It simply means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance. In India, the sixth five year plan (1980-85) may be taken as a landmark for the cause of women. During this plan period, the concept of 'women and development' was introduced for the first time.

Problems of Perception

Presently there is a general impression that development means just creation of infrastructure. As a result of this, development could not become need-based and be relevant to social circumstances. The development happens when there is fruitful participation of both men and women in all the stages of a programme: planning, formulation, implementation, decision-making, sharing the benefits of development, monitoring and evaluation.

But the real situation is that the development of human resources particularly women have been neglected/denied. Educational backwardness is the major reason for why women lag behind men. Moreover, women in India experience unacceptable levels of violence in the family, within the community, work place, public places and at the custodial institutions.

Male Domination and Gender Discrimination

Male domination and gender discrimination like child marriages, dowry demands, wife battering, bigamy, polygamy and discrimination in food intake, employment, education, health and nutrition facilities are some of the threatening social evils, which need an immediate attention to be eradicated. Thus it is the manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have lead to domination over and discrimination against women and the prevention of women's full advancement.

It is evidenced that more than one billion people in the world today, the great majority of who are women, live in unacceptable conditions. While women are responsible for 68 per cent of the food production and are the driving force behind 70 per cent of small

enterprises with nearly 35 per cent of the families dependent on them, yet they constitute 70 per cent of the world's poor (UNDP, 1995).

Condition of Women in India

In India, women encounter human poverty, which is manifested through deprivation in basic development caused by factors that include illiteracy, malnutrition, early deaths, poor health care and poor access to safe water (Argiropoulous et al., 2003). The poverty of women in India is increasing as a result of globalization, social policies that neglect women, inequality in employment and existing gender based social repression. It is true that women share one-third of the total workload in the world. Women are still less autonomous in the utilization of resources (Agarwal, 1992).

To Strengthen Gender Identity

Expansion of educational opportunities for women, greater recognition for their unpaid work, wider representation in electoral politics, legislative and legal mechanisms to safeguard their lives and equal opportunities for participation in their decision making process are some of the things which could strengthen the gender identity. There is a growing interest all over the world to bring women in the forefront in the process of decision-making equal to men.

The impact of new developments on women during the last two decades reveals a strikingly positive aspect i.e., through women's movements. There is more and enhanced interaction among various women organizations all over the world regarding the gender issues. This has been brought to the central stage through various international conferences on women like the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1994 and many more. The various women organizations in India too are benefiting through the interactions with their international counterparts.

Impact of Increased Exposure to All Forms of Knowledge

The explicit impact of a positive nature can be seen in the form of increased exposure to all forms of knowledge, which at least has benefited the educated youth. Today, more women can be seen in managerial and executive capacities in formal and informal sectors. This has given them the much needed economic independence and confidence. Not only the urban educated women are bringing glory in various fields, but also women from remote rural areas are making it to the top.

However, the fact remains that they constitute only a miniscule minority that also mostly belonging to the upper strata of the society. The majority of the women comprising lower caste, rural, tribal and the poor continue to remain denied from economic development.

Methodology

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The holistic society is possible, only when the special efforts are made to assist and encourage the women to participate in all grounds. Our constitution has stressed the urgent need for promoting educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and as women are handicapped by social customs and traditions, they need special attention to help them to play their full and proper role in a national life.

Equality of women is necessary, not merely on the grounds of social justice, but by societal reorientation through women's representation in formulation of various plans and guiding principles. The paper attempts to look into the progress of women's participation in polity. Participation in polity carves out for themselves a place of significance. The attempt of the study is based on the secondary source of Inter Parliamentary Union Reports and Reports from Government of India.

Discussion

Beijing Conference 1995 declared that "women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society including participation in the decision making process and access to power are fundamental for the advancement of equality and development of peace" (Beijing Country Report, 1995).

The declaration brings a shift towards greater gender equality during the postindustrial phase. Women are enfranchised and begin to participate in representative government. Women move in to higher status, economic roles in management and the professions, and gain greater political influence within the elected and appointed bodies. But over half of the world is not yet on this trajectory and even the most advanced industrial societies are still undergoing this process.

World Perspective

In many post industrial societies the transformation in women and men's life styles, electoral success has started to rope in women. The Inter-Parliamentary Council declared in its Resolution on Women and Political Power (April 1992) that "The concept of democracy will only assume its true and dynamic meaning when legislation and politics are determined by both men and women, equally considering the interests and abilities of both sectors of the population." However, the representation of women in democratic institutions still has not achieved parity in this hemisphere. Throughout the world, women face obstacles for their participation in politics. These barriers exist in prevailing social and economic systems, as well as in existing political structures.

Table 1: Elected Representatives of Parliament by Lower and Upper House – 2001

Members of Parliament	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses Combined
Total MPs	37177	6944	44121
Gender break down known for	37047 (100%)	6851 (100%)	43898 (100%)
Men	30219 (81.6%)	5674 (82.8%)	35893 (81.8%)
Women	6828 (18.4%)	1177 (17.2%)	8005 (18.2%)

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union. Women in National Parliaments, March 2001

Female Representation

The rate of female representation at national level stands at merely 18 per cent globally (Table 1). Although this figure has increased in recent years, minimal progress has been made, meaning that the ideal of parity between men and women in national legislatures still remains distant. The elected representatives of parliament worldwide shows that (Table 1) the total members in both the houses combined together are 44121 seats (lower house-37177; upper house - 6944).

Gender breakdown in the lower house are 37047 members out of which the women representatives are only 18.4 per cent. In the upper house too out of total gender breakdown (6851 members) the women representatives are only 17.2 per cent. Despite the lack of progress worldwide women elected representatives have moved ahead far further and faster in some regions and nations more than in others.

Table 2: Percentage of Members in the Parliament by Continents – 2001

Continents	Percentage of Members in the Parliament		
	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses Combined
Nordic Countries*	41.4	--	--
Americas	21.6	20.0	21.4
Europe – OSCE** Member Countries (including Nordic countries)	21.2	18.8	20.7
Europe - OSCE Member Countries (excluding Nordic countries)	19.3	18.8	19.2
Asia	18.4	16.6	18.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	17.2	20.8	17.6
Pacific	13.4	31.8	15.4
Arab States	9.7	7.0	9.1

Note: * Regions in Northern Europe called Nordic Regions – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden

** Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

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Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union. Women in National Parliaments, March 2001

Women Parliamentarians Do Best in Nordic Nations

It is well-known that (Table 2) women parliamentarians do best in the Nordic nations, where they are on average 41.4 per cent of MPs in the lower house.

The proportion of women members of parliament elsewhere is lower, including in the Americas (21.4%), Asia (18.2%) and Europe excluding the Nordic States (19.2%), Sub-Saharan Africa (17.6%), and the Pacific (15.4%). The worst record for women's representation is the Arab region, where women are less than 10 per cent of elected representatives, and they continue to be barred by law from standing for parliament in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

Therefore despite many official declarations of intent made by governments, NGOs and international agencies pledged to establish conditions of gender equality in the public sphere, in practice major barriers continue to restrict women's advancement in public life.

Indian Perspective

In India it was the Indian National Congress under the dynamic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, which opened the way for women to join politics, and gave the scope to participate in all its programmes. Thereby, the participation of women in the nationalist movement created a traditional involvement in politics (Agnew, 1979).

Table 3. Representation of Women in Premier Services

Service	1997		2000	
	Women	Total	Women	Total
IAS	512 (10.2)	4991	535 (10.4)	5159
IPS	67 (2.2)	3045	110 (3.3)	3301
TOTAL	579 (7.2)	8036	645 (7.6)	8460

Source: Department of Personnel and Training, GOI, New Delhi

Today the department of personal and training, Government of India (Table 3) observed that the women representatives in decision-making levels through premier services viz., the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) and Indian Police Services (IPS) show an increase up to 7.6 per cent in the year 2000. However the figure was very low which required an affirmative action to help raise the number of women at various decision-making levels. In the later years also the participation of women was not up to the satisfactory level.

Impact of Constitutional Amendments

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993 have brought forth a definite impact on the participation of women, in terms of absolute numbers in grass root democratic institutions viz., Panchayat Raj institutions and local bodies. These amendments have helped women not only in their effective participation but also in decision making in the grass roots democracy of the 475 Zilla Parishat in the country.

Women head Panchayats in thousands of villages in India, and chief ministers of several states are women. Yet the attempts to advance the presence of women in the chambers of Parliament have been failed time and again. Less than 10 per cent of the directly elected national representatives (45 members of the Lok Sabha's 542) are women.

Even in the Rajya Sabha, where members are appointed and therefore can be more easily chosen to represent a wide spectrum of India, women hold only 28 of 242 seats. Women were proposed for 33 per cent reservation by the parliament but yet the society witness lungpower battles over the Women's Reservation Bill.

Table 4. Women's Representation in Parliament and Panchayat Raj – 2001

Women's Representation	Females	Males	Total
Parliament	70 (8.5)	750 (91.5)	820 (100.0)
Panchayat Raj	725 (26.6)	1997 (73.4)	2722 (100.0)

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, GOI, New Delhi
Election Commission of India
National Informatics Centre, Parliament, New Delhi

The political participation of women (Table 4) in the year 2001 revealed that there were 725 women in Panchayat Raj institutions against 1997 men. Similarly in the representation of women in the parliament shows that women's participation were only 8.5 per cent against men. Although the number of women in parliament has increased their share continues to be very low. Thus women are way ahead of their counterparts elsewhere in the matter of social legislation. But the implementation of laws granting

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rights to women has been slow, lopsided and haphazard that socially, economically and politically women are kept far behind.

Conclusion

In 21st century, the psychologists and sociologists come to the conclusion that traditional sex roles are in need of change. They have come to believe that by putting people in slots labeled 'male' and 'female' and shaping them to fit the slots limits the full development of human beings. Instead they propose that each child should be treated as a total person without regard for the traditional notions of what a man or women should be.

The goals of holistic human development must not be at the expense of one another and the ascent to equality must be collective. There can never exist a true democracy unless there is a true participation of women, both in governance and developmental programmes.

Without equal participation of women and men, it is very difficult to attain what is desired. Gender and development taken together is emerging as a progressive approach. It is a part of a larger basket of creating alternative model for development.

In order to uplift women from their dependent and their unequal status, improvement of their employment opportunities and earning powers has to be given highest priority. Marriage and motherhood should not become a disability in women fulfilling their full and proper role in the task of national development. If our society is to move in the direction of the goals set by the constitution, development of women and their productive role is a special measure to transform the society.

Efforts should be made to provide economic independence in order to increase the status of women. Value must be added for the women in the informal sectors as workers and producers through redefining and reinterpretation of conventional concept of work. Education is an important component for income generation. Awareness should be created to encourage the girls being sent to school. The advancements in the political sphere are essential for the overall empowerment of women. Increasing the number of women in governmental positions must open doors for women in terms of presence and visibility. Women those who fill the seats must aware of the problems that women face and should create change within the community.

This study theorizes that the modernization process has brought systematic, predictable changes in gender roles. The impact of modernization operates in two phases: The process of industrialization has brought women into the paid work force and dramatically reduced fertility rates. During this stage women make substantial gains in literacy and educational opportunities.

Women are enfranchised and begin to participate in representative government, but they still have far less power than men. This suggests that while improvements in women's educational and professional status serve as *facilitating* conditions for women's empowerment, structural change may be insufficient by themselves to win elected office. The postindustrial phase brings a shift toward greater gender equality as women move into higher status economic roles in management and the professions, and gain greater political influence within elected and appointed bodies. Over half of the world is not yet on this trajectory and even the most advanced industrial societies are still undergoing this process.

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