**Indian Democracy and Political Participation of Women**

Dr.Sadhana Bhandari
Lecturer, Public AdministrationGovt. Dungar College, Bikaner

**Abstract-**India has a rich history of measuring political participation of women since its independence. The decentralization of governance which is taking place for last decades has increased the importance of measuring participation of women in decision making at all levels of democratic ladder . Proper gender budgeting has already been worked out for inclusive growth of women & girls by ear-marking one third budget for the women in all the schemes for better realization of goals in the direction of political empowerment of women. The Indian Government has a lot of emphasis on utilizing real time data for measuring different social indicators and using them for policy intervention in all possible spheres . With more responsive data on women’s political participation, better gender budget initiatives aim to move the country towards a gender equal society in the times to come.

**Key words**- Empowerment, Gender, Political, Responsive, women

 “It is difficult for women to make up her mind to enter politics. Once she makes up her mind, she has to prepare her husband, her children and her family. Once she has overcome all these obstacles and applies for the ticket then the male aspirants against whom she is applying makeup all sort of stories about her. And after all this when her name goes to party bosses, they do not select the name, they fear losing the seat”

*-Sushma Swaraj , Politician*

As the title suggests the focus of the paper is on the movement of Indian democracy towards political empowerment of women. Comprising over 50% of world’s population, democracy cannot deliver for all its citizens if underrepresented in the political arena. We all recognize that women must be equal partners in the process of democratic development. As, activists, elected officials and constituents, their contributions are crucial to building a strong and vibrant society.

“Every country deserves to have the best possible leader and that means that the women have to be given the chance to compete. If they are never given a chance to compete in electoral process, then the countries are really robbing themselves of a great deal of talent”

*-Madeliene K. Albright (NDI Chairperson)*

One of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals is to promote gender equality and empowering women. My emphasis here is on why women should participate and what role different agencies can play to enhance the role of women in making Indian democracy more gender responsive.

**Reasons why women should participate-**

-Women are dedicated to the enhancement of federal and local interests that addresses to socio-economic and political challenges facing the females

- Women are strongly committed to peace building. Reconstructing and reconciliation efforts take root more quickly and are more sustainable when females are involved.

- Women are strongly linked to positive developments in education, infrastructure and health standards at local level.

- Women are particularly effective in promoting honest governments. Countries where women are supported as leaders and at ballot box have a correspondingly lower level of corruption.

India has created a salutary landmark by introducing amendments in the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act and by passing Women’s Reservation Bill. This effect has enabled women as equal and fair participants and decision maker at local, state and national level. Despite these efforts unequal representation in legislative bodies from practical perspective signifies that women’s representation rather than being a consequence of democratization is more a reflection of a status quo.

Masculine model of political life and elected bodies, lack of access and support to party network, lack of access to well-developed education and training system to women’s orientation towards political life are the challenges to women candidates.

**Now the question is how to overcome these obstacles-**

* Political parties are stepping stone to national politics. These are opened to women candidates at local level but are hesitant to participate at national level. Political parties should encourage internal democratic configuration by preparing a zippered list where every other candidate is women, it can provide best prospects for women seeking elections. This approach requires a serious commitment otherwise insincere and half-hearted action may lead to “TOKENISM” that undermines prospects for women’s participation. Political parties should extend support and resource to women candidates.
* Media especially electronic media can play a strong role in shaping voters interest in and attitude towards women candidate. The way media portrays a woman, how they deal with issues of special concern to women and whether they convey effectual voter education messages can have a major impact on women participation in an election.

Providing gender sensitive coverage of election, avoiding negative stereo type and presenting positive image of women as leader. Additional Advertising Time or Air Time can be given and print media can devote a print space as “Women’s Page” to women candidates.

* Today role of civil society is greatly increasing , these can play a leading role in encouraging women’s participation in politics so that our govt. become more and more gender responsive by-
* 1 Identifying the female willing to contest elections.
* 2 Develop and disseminate gender sensitive message to voters.
* 3 Provide training and other type of support to women candidates.
* 4 Advocate increased media coverage of women’s issues and women candidates.
* Women candidates should themselves try to find a good platform to address the issues like family reunification, violence against women, female employment, housing, education, health, social issues to put forth their view before voters.
* United Nations has designed many programmes to provide training in sill development to enable women candidates to function more effectively. NGOs can get and work in this field and can persuade international donors to support projects aimed advancing women’s political participation.
* Political space appears to be opened to those with strong political connections and political mind set of male politician is basically gender blind or is not gender friendly as it is clear from the quote of Sushma Swaraj, women candidates will have to prove themselves when they win election through their working pattern and commitment to the cause and create an example for other female aspirants to enter in the political arena.
* Like other institutions, establishment of Women’s Political Institute can be a revolutionary step in making democracy more gender responsive where female aspirants study the syllabus framed for this purpose only and can also get trainingunder a leading female politician to complete the course. Various political parties will definitely select such candidates through interviews.

This is my vision of political empowerment of women. Strategies to enhance women’s participation should be tailored such that more women become politically involved.

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