



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

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Abstract

The notion that democracy and the empowerment of women are inextricably linked in India is a manifestation of the country's dedication to achieving gender equality and inclusive governance. This abstract investigates the path that women's empowerment has taken and the influence that it has had on the democratic framework of India. The values of equality and non-discrimination are enshrined in the democratic constitution of India, which was taken into effect in the year 1950. Women have been given the opportunity to actively participate in the political, economic, and social spheres via the implementation of substantial legal and policy initiatives that have been implemented over the course of several decades. Initiatives like as the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which mandate a 33% reservation for women in local government bodies, have helped to strengthen the participation of women in political institutions, ranging from local Panchayats to the national Parliament. This has enhanced the number of women who hold positions in political institutions. Furthermore, to the problem of gender inequality is the discrepancy in educational possibilities, healthcare, and career prospects. In spite of this, the fact that more and more women are showing up in positions of authority across a variety of fields is evidence of the progress that has been done. In addition, the empowerment of women in India has had a significant influence on the democratic process. As a result, government has become more inclusive and representational, with a wider range of opinions being considered during the decision process. When women are empowered, they are more inclined to advocate for the development of their communities and for social justice, which helps to reinforce the democratic fabric of the nation.

Introduction

Women Empowerment and Democracy in India

Since winning its independence in 1947, India, a nation that is well-known for its diverse cultural legacy and rich cultural heritage, has seen tremendous developments for the better. In this journey, the empowerment of women and the growth of democracy are two of the most noteworthy things that have occurred. The socioeconomic and political growth of the country is directly influenced by both of these factors, which are profoundly interwoven with one another. This introductory section dives into the historical setting, the development of women's roles, and the influence that women's empowerment has had on the democratic procedures that are in place in India.



Historical Context

Through their active engagement in the fight for India's independence, women battled alongside men for the liberation of their homeland. This was a defining characteristic of the conflict. It is a cause for celebration that individuals such as Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, and Rani Lakshmbai have made significant contributions. During the period after the nation's attainment of independence, a democratic constitution was drafted. This constitution served to codify the ideas of equality, liberty, and justice for all citizens, regardless of their gender. Since its adoption in 1950, the Constitution of India has been instrumental in laying the framework for a society that is founded on democratic principles and strives to provide equal opportunity for women.

Evolution of Women's Roles

The role that women play in India has seen substantial change over the course of several decades. Women have steadily expanded into numerous realms of public life, breaking free from their traditional confinement to responsibilities within the home. The legislative framework has been an important factor in the shift that has taken place. The inclusion of women in politics, their protection against violence, and their economic empowerment have all been ensured by the enactment of significant changes and legislation.

Political Empowerment: The political landscape of India has witnessed a rise in the engagement of women, particularly at the grassroots level. A significant step in this direction was taken in 1992 with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which reserved one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (local self-government organizations) and Urban Local organizations, respectively. These amendments were historic pieces of legislation. As a result of this reservation policy, millions of women have been allowed to enter the political arena, bringing their viewpoints and concerns to the forefront of administration. Women who hold positions of authority at the local level have been crucial in tackling concerns such as health, education, and sanitation, all of which have a direct influence on the quality of life in rural regions.

Economic Empowerment: Enabling women to achieve economic independence is a fundamental component of their total empowerment. For the purpose of fostering more financial autonomy among women, the government has initiated a number of different programs. Opportunities for women to start their own businesses and gain access to loans have been made available to them through initiatives like as the Self-Help Group (SHG), self-help groups (SHGs) have shown to be particularly beneficial. The economic standing of women has been enhanced as a result of these groups, which have also contributed to the development of a spirit of solidarity and collective action.



Social Empowerment: The term "social empowerment" refers to the provision of education, health care, and protection from violence and prejudice. Empowerment of women would enable them to overcome the obstacles placed by socio-economic and political structure and also redeem their own weakness and deficiencies. Programmes like National Literacy Mission (NML), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) DWCRA, IRDP, TRYSEM, Mahila Samakhya Programme (MSP), Legal Literacy Camp (LLC), Adolescent Girls Scheme AGS)

Impact on Democracy

The advancement of women's rights has significant repercussions for the healthy operation of democratic institutions in India. A society that is really democratic is one in which every segment of the population is able to express their opinions and take part in the decision-making process. Increasing the number of women who participate in political processes has resulted in decision-making that is more inclusive and representative. Women in positions of authority are frequently more sensitive to the requirements of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and they are more likely to advocate for policies that advance social justice and fairness.

Inclusive Governance: Governance has grown more inclusive as a result of the increased number of women who hold positions of authority. Women bring with them a variety of viewpoints and goals, which frequently center on the welfare of the society and the advancement of humankind. It has been demonstrated via research that female leaders are more inclined to make investments in public goods such as education, sanitation, and water access. There are many sections in the nation that have been struggling with issues of inequality and underdevelopment for a long time, and this change toward inclusive government has the ability to alleviate these problems.

Social Justice and Equity: Women who have achieved empowerment are outspoken champions for social justice. In addition to working toward the creation of a more equal society, they fight behaviors that are discriminatory. The dowry system, child marriage, and gender-based violence are just some of the issues that have been brought to light in India thanks to the efforts of women's groups. Not only have these movements helped to increase awareness, but they have also impacted legislative reforms that are aimed at safeguarding the rights of women and providing opportunities for gender equality.

Strengthening Democratic Institutions: By making democratic institutions more representative and accountable, the greater participation of women has contributed to the strengthening of democratic institutions. The fact that women in positions of authority frequently place a higher priority on accountability and openness in governance contributes to the increased legitimacy and efficiency of democratic institutions. In addition, the presence of women in positions of



decision-making influence encourages subsequent generations to take part in political activities, so establishing a positive cycle of empowerment and democratic participation.

Challenges and Barriers

Although there has been great progress, there are still a number of obstacles and problems that stand in the way of women's empowerment and political engagement. The mobility and possibilities available to women are still being hampered by the persistence of patriarchal cultural practices and traditional norms. Discrimination against women continues to exist in areas such as education, healthcare, and work, which restricts the potential of women. In addition, women are frequently discouraged from engaging in politics, particularly at higher levels of government, due to the prevalence of political violence and intimidation issues.

The Way Forward

To be successful in overcoming these obstacles, it is necessary for all segments of society to collectively work together. For the purpose of altering mentalities and dismantling stereotypes, education and awareness initiatives have the potential to play a significant role. In order to defend the rights of women, it is necessary to implement legal changes and strictly enforce existing laws. Increasing the number of possibilities available to women in both the official and informal sectors should be the primary emphasis of economic policy. Additionally, political parties need to be more inclusive and supportive of female candidates in order to guarantee that women will be represented at all levels of administration.

Status of women in Indian democracy

Given the current state of affairs on a worldwide scale, women have been given a significant role in public life, and the concept of gender equality has been recognized as an essential value by a number of different civilizations. There has been a continuous discussion on the empowerment of women in India and abroad. Indian women have been fighting and overcoming cultural standards that formerly placed them in inferior positions. In order to eradicate social, political, and economic inequality, it is vital to facilitate the empowerment of women. Over the course of time, there has been a substantial advancement in the democratic status of India. During the time before independence, women's participation in politics was severely restricted, and their activities outside the house were also restricted. This was owing to the social and cultural conventions that existed at the time. A significant contribution to the liberation struggle was made by women's rights activists like as Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant, who played a particularly crucial role. Following the country's attainment of independence, the constitution of India accorded women equal rights. The individuals were granted the privilege of taking part in the voting process and also of running for a seat within the political system. Women who held prominent political roles included political figures such as Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, and a



great number of other women. Despite the progress that was made in the legal system, gender inequities continued to exist in many sectors. Women's lives were profoundly altered as a result of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution. The Indian constitution has a clause that allows for reserved seats for women in the Panchayati Raj system and urban local authorities. This provision has considerably increased the amount of participation that women have in the political system. In his book "Women and Panchayati Raj," Nagendra Ambedkar explains that in order to create effective democratic politics in India, it is highly important for women to participate and contribute. All inhabitants of India are afforded equal opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes since India has a democratic system of government. Within the scope of his work titled "Functioning of Panchayats in India," S.K. Sharma primarily concentrates on the operation of Gramme Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zilla Parishads on the Indian subcontinent. It also provides an explanation of how self-governance functioned in India during the time of British rule. Andre Beteille explains in his book "Empowerment" how resources have been reallocated according to capabilities in the context of the decision-making process. The institution of panchayati raj, which is said to have originated in ancient India and is comprised of five senior citizens in a village, is said to have persisted to the present day. They participate in the process of making all of the decisions and also take the required actions to put these decisions into action. After India gained its independence, the system of panchayati raj began to function vigorously in rural areas. Article 21 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights places an emphasis on the rights of citizens to directly participate in the governing system of their nation by freely selecting representatives of their choosing. Since the country's independence, women have had a decrease in their representation in the political system. The implementation of affirmative action and the engagement of women in India have, however, been met with obstacles. These initiatives have primarily been limited to the realm of local administration, and there has been no significant advancement in larger settings. Gramme Panchayats, which are located at the village level, Panchayat Samitis, which are located at the sub-district level, and Zilla Parishads, which are located at the district level, are the three levels of the hierarchical framework that the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee suggested for the establishment of panchayati raj. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment bills were approved in 1992, and its primary focus was on establishing panchayati raj institutions in India. With the passage of this amendment, women will be able to hold 33 percent of the elected seats in municipal government systems. Additionally, there is a provision for women to hold one-third of the chairperson positions in administrations that are local in nature. Women in India were given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes in rural government as a result of political reservations. When they are given the ability to exercise political power, they are given the chance to participate in the process of progress. The inclusion of women into the political system carries with it a special duty for them to shape policies and have an effect on the decision-making process. This obligation is a direct result of the fact that women are empowered



via politics. In order for women to make progress in a society that strives to achieve more gender equality, it is essential that they be given more influence, particularly in the political domain. Following the implementation of decentralization, women's participation in Panchayati raj institutions has resulted in a more comprehensive investigation of the function and operation of women in Panchayati raj institutions all over the nation. Numerous studies, pieces of literature, and official papers have been produced in India ever since the establishment of local self-government. These publications have investigated various aspects of the Panchayati raj system. Research has been conducted in a great number of areas. A significant number of academics have been concentrating their efforts on women's grassroots level, women's empowerment, and the influence that this has on the development of both society and the economy. A number of studies have also conducted empirical research on the socio-economic and political backgrounds of women leaders, as well as their roles in public-private partnerships (PRIs). According to the findings of several research, the success story of PRIs may be explained by the fact that they possess a platform for decision making at the grassroots level. In a case study on village panchayats in Odisha, Snehalata Panda made the observation that the majority of women who are engaged in the political process do not have any political histories. The reservation policies that are in place within the government are largely responsible for their participation in this process. They grow their perspective on politics, as well as their zeal and maturity in their stance. In her book titled "Women and Panchayati Raj," Susheela Kaushik makes the argument that when women actively participate in the decision-making process in greater numbers, such developments have the ability to not only improve the lives of women but also reshape the functionalities of public institutions. There has not been a significant qualitative shift as a result of the numerical growth in the number of women who are represented in the official political arena up to this time. According to the findings of the review, the lower involvement rate among women can be related to unique socialization patterns, particularly those that are impacted by expectations for marriage situations. They were dependent on male family members, wives, or sons, and the majority of them were illiterate.

Review of Literature

Barkat (2008) During the course of a discussion on the current situation of women in Bangladesh, it was expressed that, despite the fact that women are accorded a high level of respect on an individual level, there was a lack of clarity regarding the concept of women's empowerment. This concept refers to the process of increasing women's awareness and capacity, which ultimately results in increased participation in decision-making and control over their own lives.

Dijkstra (2002) Suggested a new measure called the Standardized Index of Gender Equality (SIGE), which attempts to encompass all possible dimensions of gender equality and avoids the



conceptual and methodological problems of GDI and GEM. While providing a critical review of both measures, identified the strengths and weaknesses of these measures and suggested a new measure. Additional to this, he asserted that SIGE is capable of functioning as a preliminary estimate of such an overall index. In their work, Malhotra et al. (2002) brought attention to the methodological challenges that are associated with the measurement and analysis of women's empowerment.

Klasen and Schüler (2009) extending their earlier efforts by showing illustrative findings for the suggested measures and by offering concrete solutions for the two gender-related indicators, they have extended their prior works. Calculating a male and female human development index (HDI) and a gender gap indicator (GGI) to replace the gender development index (GDI) were among the most significant recommendations. When it comes to the GEM, the most significant improvements that were suggested were alternative approaches to dealing with the earned income component, as well as the replacement of the component with a method that is simpler to compute the measure. He discovered that the rankings of nations were different when compared to those of GDI and GEM by using the methodology that he presented.

Karat (2005) The concerns of violence against women, their own survival, political engagement, and independence were all topics that she explored in her works. Panda and Agarwal (2005) focused on factor such as women's property status in the context of her risk of marital violence. They came to the conclusion that if development means the expansion of human capabilities, then freedom from domestic violence ought to be an integral part of any exercise for evaluating the progress that has been made in terms of development.

Female Empowerment Models

Model in Three Dimensions

According to Lee-Rife (2010), it is commonly believed that women's empowerment is a process that takes place over a period of time, culminating in women being agents who are able to build choices, manage resources, and make strategic decisions regarding their life. This is the case because women become empowered over time. She put a significant amount of importance on the strategic life decisions that are regarded as first-order options. These choices include the decision to marry, the decision to have children, and the choice of how to make a living. She also emphasized the influence that these choices have on second-order choices, which are less important. Some examples of these second-order choices include teaching values in children, making decisions regarding the everyday home, and managing the well-being of the family.

Figure.1 Three Dimensional Model by Kabeer



(Source: Kabeer, 2009)

According to Kabeer (2009), the researcher emphasized that having access to resources (whether they be material, human, or social in nature) is a necessary pre-condition for empowerment. This is particularly true because resources boost the ability to exercise choice. It was emphasized by Kabeer that it is not enough for women to just have access to resources; they must also be able to recognize and make use of those resources (Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender, 2002). According to Kabeer, empowerment is both an aim and a means to an end. For instance, one status is obtaining an education, another status is earning gainful job, and a further step toward it may be gaining control over decision making in relation to oneself or one's family. The final result of empowerment is control over one's relationship with oneself or one's family. In light of this, obtaining an education can serve as either an end or a means to an end; yet, the ultimate result of empowerment is the possession of the talents necessary to realize one's goals. One of the conceptual frameworks developed by the Commission on Women and Development An empowerment framework and methodology was developed by the Commission on Women and Development, which is an International Aid Agency, in collaboration with the Government of Belgium. This framework and methodology was influenced by Kabeer, Longwez, Rowlands, and Leon, as well as the DAWN women's movement. It was the opinion of the panel that empowerment took place on two different levels, namely the individual level and the communal level. The older approach, on the other hand, focused largely on the individual components of empowerment and recognized the four fundamental principles of empowerment as being assets, knowledge, will, and ability. This concept divides resources into two categories: assets, which are material resources that confer increased economic power, and knowledge, which is the provision of people with procedures, training, literacy, and the ability to analyze crucial information. Will may be defined as the psychological strength or power that exists inside an individual to make their own choices. This is followed by capacity, which is defined as the

ability to utilize resources (assets, knowledge, and will), to make decisions, and to accept responsibility for one's actions.

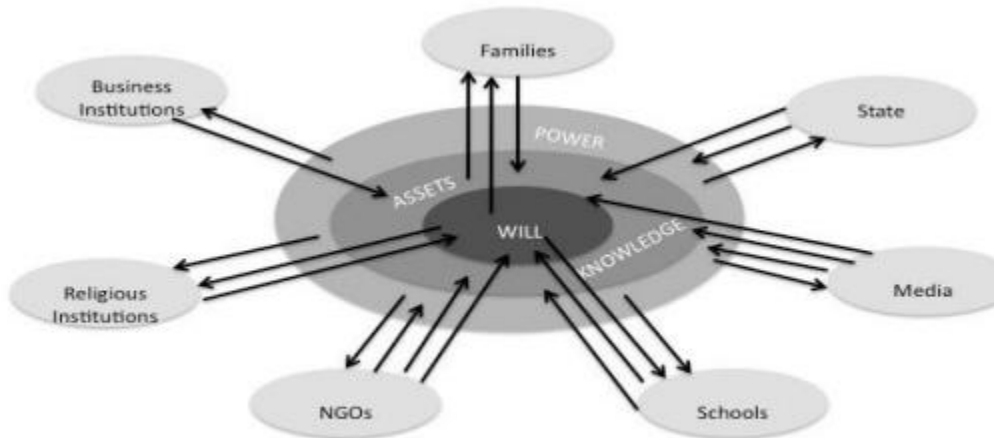


Figure 2. Commission on Women and Development's Conceptual Framework for the Field of Development

(Source: Commission of Women and Development, 2007)

For the purpose of illustrating the empowerment process as a catalyst for social change, the figure depicts will, assets, and knowledge as concentric rings that are encircled by power (power with others and power inside). The institutional framework, which includes the family, the government, the media, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious institutions, and corporate institutions, is also taken into consideration. An illustration of the ability to alter the components is provided by the arrows that point inside and outward, and not all of the arrows have the same weight. The Agency and Opportunity Structure Model developed by the World Bank, authored by Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinsohn It is based on two primary variables that contribute to empowerment, and those components are agency and opportunity structure. The capacity to make successful decisions is contingent on these opportunities. According to this paradigm, assets are the markers of agency, and they may be classified as being of a psychological, informational, organizational, material, social, financial, or human nature. As the other pre-condition for this model, the opportunity structure is defined as the informal and formal institutions in which individuals and groups take into consideration and include laws, regulatory frameworks, and norms that govern behavior. It is argued that the opportunity structure is what determines who has access to assets and whether or not they are able to use their assets. An person or group's level of empowerment may be assessed by the existence of choice, the use of choice, and the achievement of choice. The author hypothesizes



that agency and opportunity structure are connected with the degrees of empowerment of people and groups.

Dimensions of Women Empowerment

In the year 1990, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) was the first organization to create the Human Development Index as a means of evaluating the socioeconomic development of a country. The study from 1995 placed a strong focus on the empowerment of women since it was necessary for the broader growth of humanity. Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) are two indices that were introduced in order to study the statistics related to human development and the share of women. The Gender Development Index (GDI) takes into account the inequality in the achievements between women and men, and the GEM measures the extent to which a woman has influence in decision-making in politics, in professional life, and in organizations. Both of these indices were introduced in order to study the statistics. The Women Empowerment Matrix, which was developed by Wieringa in 1994, was designed to map out the basic gender issues that are prevalent at the national level, to describe the contours of the many aspects of empowerment, and to highlight the interlinkages of gender issues that are connected to particular topics such as education, health, and women's labor. The women empowerment matrix is a technique that can assist the researcher in gaining an overview of the numerous degrees of women subordination that are presented, as well as the various sectors in which women subordination is played out. It is possible to utilize the matrix for a variety of purposes, including planning, policy analysis, and awareness raising.

Conclusion

In India, the empowerment of women and democracy are intrinsically related to one another. As a result of the advancements that have been made in the field of women's empowerment, the democratic fabric of the nation has been strengthened, becoming more inclusive, just, and equal. On the other hand, the voyage is not even close to being finished. In order to ensure that women are able to fully fulfill their potential and contribute to the growth of the nation, it is necessary to make ongoing efforts to remove the persisting impediments and problems. Only when women are granted equal rights and opportunities will India be able to fulfill its goal of being a truly democratic nation. This will pave the way for a society that is wealthier and more harmonious.



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