

A STUDY ON GENDER EQUALITY IN INDIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Balasubramanya P. S.

Associate Professor

,Department of Political Science, D.K.S.K. Government First Grade College, Bellare, Sullia Taluk, D.K.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines Gender Equality in India and the European Union with various indicators. Women in India have faced many difficulties since ancient times. They had lived as an oppressed class in society. Nevertheless, after independence, in India, the status of women regained its strength in almost all types of economic activities and in active politics. Nonetheless, women's participation in decision-making positions is the biggest challenge today. On the other hand, in the European Union, Gender equality has been practiced since the inclusion of Article 119 on equal pay in the Treaty of Rome 1957. However, has since widened to the recognition of equality between women and men as a fundamental principle of democracy for the whole European Union. In the European Union, gender equality is present in gender-specific policies and informs the basic principles and functioning of the EU institutions. In India, Panchayati Raj Institutions promote good governance. In this direction, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment to the Constitution was enacted for better governance and to provide political power to Women and the disadvantaged sections of society.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Gender Equality, India, European Union, Women Suffrage, Democratic Decentralisation

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a political system based on representative government, the people's participation in the political process, freedoms for citizens, transparency of political acts and processes. Democracy encourages people to take part in electing their representatives in the country. Political participation was another notion of true democracy. This means people have the right to choose a democratic government and have the right to express their views and attitudes towards everything happening in the public sphere. Women constitute more than half of the world population, and their contribution to the social and economic development of society is more than half that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Compared to men, women continue to be under-represented as voters, leaders, and elected members at the Political level. As a result, women do not have equal influence over the policy decisions that affect their lives.

GENDER EQUALITY IN INDIA

In India, women play a key role as decision-makers in the development process across a wide range of sectors. The Women's effective participation is increasingly on the development agenda of governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and Nongovernmental organizations, including women's rights groups. The common factors identified as barriers to women's participation include gender-based discrimination, personal obstacles such as lack of confidence, culturally prescribed domestic roles, low voter education, and lack of financial and socio-economic capital. Nevertheless, the Women's participation in political activities was a major measure of Women's empowerment. In this regard, the Liberal Political thinker

John Stuart Mill also advocated women's participation in governance, and in this regard, he advocated women's suffrage for the empowerment of Women in society. The participation of women in the political sphere is integral to the empowerment of women and to speeding up the process of national development.

A parliamentary system of government was enshrined in the Indian Constitution and guarantees its citizens the right to elect, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and form associations, and vote. The Constitution of India attempts to remove gender inequalities by banning discrimination based on sex and class, prohibiting human trafficking and forced labour, and reserving elected positions for women. The Government of India has directed state and local governments to promote equality by class and gender, including equal pay and free legal aid, humane working conditions, and maternity relief, the right to work and education, and raising the standard of living.

The concept of gender equality was included in the form of constitutional rights after Indian Independence. However, women continue to be underrepresented in legislative bodies. In this scenario, the participatory upsurge witnessed among women as voters in the 1990s reached its peak in the general election held in 2014. Their participation in the electoral process as voters has steadily increased from 46.6 per cent in 1962 to around 65.7 per cent in 2014. The difference in voter turnout among men and women, as wide as 16.7 per cent in 1962, has narrowed to 1.5 per cent in 2014. We can say that the main reason for this upward trend was that 33 per cent of seats for women in the Panchayat in the 1990s gave women a sense of sharing power with men equally. This finally resulted in the upsurge of women voters.

In the Indian constitution, the affirmative action by reservation of seats for women and disadvantaged sections of the society was enshrined through the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992. This act calls for the reservation of a minimum of one-third of seats for women in locally elected governance bodies. In 2009, the Government of India approved a 50 per cent reservation for women in Panchayats, and many states have passed similar legislation. The same amendment also calls for Panchayats to prepare and implement plans for economic development and social justice. The Affirmative action to ensure women's political representation is an important step in democratising and engendering Panchayats' governance. At the institutional level, the capacity of local structures to implement reforms, institutionalise accountability systems, decentralise functions, and facilitate women's active engagement plays a role in determining whether women can emerge as political agents and actors. The social barriers include a lack of education, a lack of respect for women in Panchayats, physical violence against women in the public and domestic spheres, as well as oppressive patriarchal and caste structures. The Traditional power hierarchies favour men and resist giving space or recognition to women's attempts to be part of the political scenario.

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

In Europe, after many years, Women got the right to vote and participate in political activities. The study shows that Women's participation in political activities of European parliaments, national governments, and local assemblies was low for many years. The arguments for gender equality in politics benefit not only women and female politicians but also parties themselves and the rest of society. Women form half of the world's population. Still, there are many obstacles in the way of women's participation and political representation. However, the EU was committed to achieving gender equality in political representation and participation as a matter of justice, equality, and democracy.

The European Union strongly supports gender equality and empowerment of Women, by removing the obstacles such as legislation, social restrictions, and gender-based discrimination to ensure social, economic, political, and civil life for Women. Gender equality is enshrined in the Rome treaty of 1956. Yet more than fifty years on, there remains a persistent under-representation of women in politics across Europe. In the 2009 European elections, this issue was raised, and a call was made to take suitable action to promote change. In this regard, in October 2015, the EU adopted the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the lives of Girls and Women through EU external relations. This renewed gender action plan focuses on acting and transforming the lives of Women in representative bodies like the European Parliament, the European Council, and the Council of Ministers.

In this respect, the European Commission identified equality in decision-making as one of the priority areas in its 2006 Roadmap for "equality between men and Women". Later, the European Commission set out a strategy to accelerate progress towards gender equality within the European Union, and in this respect, the European Parliament has been an important organ for Women's participation. In the European Parliament, it is certainly true that the representation of women has increased significantly from a little below 17 per cent at the time of the first direct elections in 1979. Later, in the elections of 1994, the proportion of women members of the European Parliament increased from 20 per cent to 26 per cent, and later again in the 1999 elections, this increased to 30 percent. The extent of female Members of the European Parliament is towards the end of the seventh parliamentary term, at 35.8 per cent. The percentage of women in the European Parliament increased once more in the 2016 elections. The European member countries like Malta, Finland, Ireland, and Croatia have more women members of the European Parliament than male members of the European Parliament. The number of Women members compared to men in Austria, Estonia, Latvia, and Sweden is equal. Today, in the EU member states, the percentage of women in the European Parliament is higher than in the national parliaments, with the exceptions of Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Portugal, Poland, Lithuania, and Cyprus.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it sought to present the nature and extent of Women Equality in India and the European Union with reference to Women's participation in panchayat raj institutions of rural India. It focused both on parliamentary politics and Women's empowerment through political representation. The extension of Women's political representation positions is one of the most challenging government issues of the century. Although women gained consistent political ground, a considerable variety exists regarding the development and change in society. Political participation means the correlation between the political system and the level of women's participation in political life. The Indian model of democracy is compared to the European model. It is strong but less politically participative. The European Union has given representation to women, and it has given importance to gender equality in the political participation and decision-making process.

REFERENCES

1. Towards Equality (1974), Report of the committee on the status of Women in India, Ministry of India, New Delhi.
2. Kalpana Roy, Women in Indian Politics, Rajat Publications, New Delhi, 1999.
3. S.B. Bakshi, Empowerment of Women and Politics of Reservation, Book Enclave, Jaipur, 2002.

4. Democracy and the Challenge of Change, A Guide to Increasing Women's Political Participation, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2010.
5. V. Mohini Giri, Participation of Women in Decision-making in India: Emerging Challenges and Future Agenda, the Grassroots Governance Journal, Volume VIII, 2010, Tirupati.
6. Meenakshi Sundaram, Decentralisation in Developing Countries, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1994.
7. Surinder S. Jodhka, 'Changing Face of Rural India', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XLIX, April, 2014.
8. Shiva Kumar Lal, A Study of Issues and Challenges in Empowerment of Women Through their Participation in Panchayat Raj Institution- A Case Study of Allahabad District of Uttar Pradesh.
9. K.N. Doddamani, Empowerment of Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institution in Gulbarga District in Karnataka, Journal of Research in Agriculture and Animal Science, Vol 2- Issue 3(2014) pp:09-14, www.questjournals.org.
10. Goutam Sadhu, Chandra Bhushan Sharma, Factors Influencing Participation of Women in Panchayat Raj Institution: A Study of Rajasthan, International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR), www.ijsr.net.
11. European Commission, Women in European politics – time for action, Luxembourg; European Parliament report, 2009. Access date 10-03-2018. Available from <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=2052>
12. Tayyaba Sattar. Women's Political Representation in the European Union, Council for Strategic and Contemporary Research, 2017. Access date 11-03-2018. Available from <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/politics-governance/womens-political-representation-european-union/>
13. European Parliament. Women in the European Parliament, Luxembourg; European Parliament, 2017. Access date 11-03-2018. Available from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/publications/2017/0001/P8_PUB%282017%290001_EN.pdf