Research Reinforcement | A Peer Reviewed International Refereed Journal | ISSN 2348-3857
Vol. 11, Issue 2 | November 2023 - April 2024 | pp. 28-35

Operationalising Inclusiveness in Democracy: An Overview

Dr. Gunjeet Kaur
Professor of Sociology, Commissionerate of College Education, Jaipur (Rajasthan)

Abstract

Primitive Man lived in a state of nature and led a life guided by instinctive behaviour. With passage of time and as the size of human collectivity started to increase, societies felt the need to devise systems that could frame & implement the rules and decide for punishments to the violators. This introduced the concept of Government & Governance. Modern societies hail Democracy as a superior system of Governance as it gives a chance to its members to participate in the process of Governance. Democratic system is hailed as the most rational and inclusive way of governance. The Government formed via democratic system is supposed to be representative of the population profile of its members and thus promote inclusiveness. Social Stratification is a social fact. Social status of a person has great bearing on the being of a person. In a society great degree of diversity is observed among the members vis-à-vis family nurturing, varying abilities, family background and so on. Historically certain categories of people were denied admission to the decision-making circles. In this context it would be interesting to understand the response & status of such groups, who were marginalized in the traditional power structures. Caste, especially in the Indian context, gender and class have been the traditional markers of power status, whether at the domestic level or at various levels in the public sphere. How the ideals of democracy negotiate with the challenges offered by the inherent divisions of the society is the central query of the research article with special reference on the participation of women in governance. The research findings are based on secondary data.

Keywords: *Democracy, Inclusiveness, Marginalised*

Introduction

Earlier societies were ruled by families, over the generations, invoking the theory of Divine Right to Rule. As time progressed and modernity set in, every adult citizen was given the right to participate in government and elect a government. Societies are not homogeneous entities and are stratified. Generally speaking, societies consist of structurally unequal and maybe, antagonistic groups which are hierarchically arranged based on relationship of exploitation. Usually the so-called superior ones, irrespective of the basis of their collective superiority (caste, class, gender, political power etc) exploit the weaker ones and also work in a way that their position of dominance remains intact. An expression of exploitation is - keeping the exploited communities out of the power structures.

Modern societies are finding ways and means to address such inequalities like universalising education, providing protective instruments like reservation. The division of society on the basis of economic considerations is a universal basis of stratification. The inequality based on gender is

another commonality among the societies of this world. In the context of Indian society, the social stratification based on caste is deeply embedded and is in existence since the ancient times. Caste system is a highly hierarchical in arrangement and the castes, historically placed at lower strata suffered from many social disabilities which in turn affected their life chances and opportunities. Despite several indigenous reform movements and outside contacts and interventions, caste as an institution has remained remarkably resilient. The Constitution of India bestows equality on all citizens and has provided for protective instruments to the marginalized groups like reservation of seats for marginalised sections in politics, to make the democratic process equitable.

Feminist theory assumes the structural conflict between men and women and view women as oppressed and/or disadvantaged by various social institutions. They highlight the inequalities between men and women which emanate from differential power and status. This differential is attributed to patriarchy: a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. The concepts of feminism focus on gender, sex & sex roles.

The Indian Scene[1]

As Nathan Glazer(2010) puts it "Not every democracy will succeed in dealing with its deep divides. But democracy has institutional features which offer the hope that every part of the population will feel part of the whole—its concerns addressed, its prosperity enabled, its security protected. Thanks to free political parties, a free press, contested elections, and an accepted supreme arbiter in the courts, democracy promises to address deep divisions more successfully than any alternative."

Caste is a reality in the political field. Caste remains a consideration at all levels – for the political party to support candidature or for the voters to select their leader. As a rule the open seats (unreserved) are seen as reserved for the general categories. The participation of the deprived sections of society, namely the SC and ST in the unreserved seats, is limited. It's rare that a political party supports a reserved category candidate from the open seat. And those who join the fray at their own initiative are hardly the choice of the voters. The participation of these classes as contestants is mostly limited to their constituencies (reserved). The contestants claim to have benefitted or lost because of caste equations. The participation of the so called lower castes, as voters is better than the upper castes and women.

Gender equality is slowly getting acceptance in the democratic system. Traditionally women have remained out of the loop of governance, for varied reasons. Even now their participation is not in commensuration to their presence in population but they are making their presence felt. A clear gender divide is visible. Politics seems to be the fiefdom of the males.

The elected representatives need to be aligned to some political party, implying thereby that the support of the political party becomes crucial in the success of a contestant. The independents get poor vote share as compared to the prominent political parties of national fame.

Personal charisma plays an important role in the making of an elected representative. If people are impressed with any such person, with whom they are able to identify on the basis of any quality, which maybe acquired or achieved, the person emerges victorious despite obvious limitations of age, political background, experience, gender and sometimes caste also. States with history of kingship as governance system, the vestiges of that system are still available. Any member associated with the royal family can encash the benefits in democracy. Maybe due to historical reasons, the rich and the well established still enjoy an advantage even in the democratic set up, but this is only a matter of time when things move towards perfection and the ideal of inclusive democracy is realised.

People have great faith and hope in the democratic set up as is evident from the large number of contestants for a particular seat.

The traditional person, with large family size, moderate education, rural connectedness in

terms of occupation seems to be the one interested in politics. Maybe the unique flavour of Indian democracy, with its combination of achieved and ascribed qualities in leaders, the purely urbane and unconnected with politics gets excluded, by choice or compulsion.

A novice has less chance of success in democracy. A person has to make his presence felt amongst the people.

Reservation of seats in political arena has ensured minimum representation of the marginalized sections in the governing system. At the same time the policy of reservation of seats in politics for the marginalized sections has actually helped only the elite sections amongst them.

Women as Social Category

When a girl child was born in a family, 'Dudh pilao' (give her milk) would roar the old patriarch. Dutifully and obediently some elder female members of the family would snatch the infant from her mother and drown her in a pail of milk to the rhythmic notes of cymbal to muffle her death throes. Her quivering life would be snuffed out. It could be milk, it could be opium, it could be a pillow over her little face, it could be putting a few unhusked grains of paddy in her little mouth, it could be anything to end her cursed life. Each family had its own 'gharana' of murder and followed it faithfully. These are not horror tales from antiquity. These are incidents faithfully recorded by Census or District officers of British India in normal transaction of business in dull and drab officialese. Girl children were routinely killed till quite recently. The early Indian censuses reported villages with no girls in some parts of the north-west. Presumably such villages still exist[2]."[3] Females have an ardent biological advantage of survival over males, given equal access to health care and nutrition. Despite this biological advantage, sex ratio (the number of females per 1000 men) is generally adverse to women in India.

This is the enigma of the 'missing women' about which Amartya Sen[4] wrote. His estimate is that in China and India the number of missing women is 90 million. "The main culprit would seem to be the comparative neglect of female health and nutrition, especially – but not exclusively – during childhood. There is indeed considerable direct evidence that female children are neglected in terms of health care, hospitalisation and even feeding".

Though Indian history has evidence that rights as freedom enjoyed by women change in inverse proportion to the status of their families and especially men in their families in the social hierarchy, except a small section of India's multiple peoples – the adivasis - who neither destroy their baby daughters before or immediately after birth, nor allow them to die in infancy through neglect and lack of nourishment - whom we all regard as backward and less civilised members of our polity" Mazumdar (2000).[5]

Women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of a human life. They are less well-nourished than men, less healthy and more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have pre-professional or technical education. Should they attempt to enter the workplace, they face greater obstacles, including intimidation from family/spouse, sex discrimination in hiring and sexual harassment in the workplace – all frequently without effective legal course. All these factors take their toll on their emotional well-being - women have fewer opportunities than men to live free from fear. In all these ways, unequal social and political circumstances give women unequal human capabilities.

Martha Nussbaum(2000)[6] argues that there is an idea of basic human capabilities – what people are actually able to do and to be. Societies have denied the opportunity to women to develop their capabilities. She further says that it is not enough to make laws to protect the women's right to choice but the need is to redistribute the resources and opportunities to each person and considering each of them worthy in her own right. The assertion of choice for the marginalized, for the women in the current context, is

embedded in material preconditions of society and only a formal defence of basic liberties is not sufficient to exercise choices.

One may sum up all this by saying that all too often, women are not treated as ends in their own rights who deserve respect from laws and institutions. Instead they are treated as mere instruments as the ends of others – reproducers, caregivers, symbols of family honour. Sometimes this instrumental value is strongly positive, at times it is extremely negative. As an old Indian proverb puts it, 'A daughter born, to husband or death, she's already gone'. No wonder, the natal family rarely celebrates the birth of a girl child in the family. If the marriage is successful her instrumental value may become positive, but even then rarely is provided an environment for self-realization. An abusive or failed marriage invites no interest either from the natal family or the law.

Realty of Life from the Standpoint of Women Worldwide

Women are the primary caregivers in all societies. They are responsible for ensuring survival for families ravaged by disease or conflict, during peacetime or wartime. In spite of their potential to offer innovative solutions, especially in a time of crisis, they are rarely those to whom societies turn first.

Women are the world's largest excluded group. Even though they make up half of the adult population, and often contribute more than their share to society, inside and outside the house; at formal or informal level; they are frequently excluded from positions of power, inside as well as outside home.

An examination of gender discrimination reveals enormous gaps between men and women in all societies and the presence of many obstacles that prevent women's equal social participation.

When social development policies are drawn, women find their needs are marginalized. Around the world, women face discrimination in access to rights and opportunities.

More often than not they hold two fulltime jobs, one unpaid job inside the home, and one poorly paid job in the formal or informal labour market. They nevertheless continue to make the world's poorest people and of the world's illiterate. While women's share in the formal labour market is growing fast, they continue to see their experiences, hopes and expectations pushed aside when it comes to the larger picture of macroeconomics, globalisation, and market liberalization.

Everywhere, women continue to be under-represented -- as leaders and problem solvers, decision-makers or elected officials. Many discriminatory laws and practices still prevent women from playing a role in shaping the policies that affect their lives.

Women's equal participation in decision-making and their access to power are critical issues that have long been ignored, sometimes by societies and at times by women themselves because of historical and socio-cultural-economic factors. This political marginalization accounts for the trivialization, if not gross disregard, of concerns important to women the world over. Many women still do not have full understanding of their rights, or knowledge of how to participate in complex economic and political processes or how to hold their leaders accountable.

Reality indicates a scene where women's voice has been increasingly marginalized, the issues related to them, relegated to low priority and as a consequence they continue to exist in a system that accords them low status as members of society. This is amply corroborated by increasing crime rates against women (both in domestic and public domains), still high incidents of maternal mortality, disproportionate representation in decision making bodies, imbalanced sex ratios, still low work participation in formal sector (lack of infrastructure support both at personal and systemic level addressing their biological functions).

Women's Political Participation

A fundamental unit of social stratification in all known human societies is gender. Societies all over the world construct elaborate ideas as to what men and women should 'do' and 'not do'.[7] Throughout the history women have been rearing the future generations and acting as custodians of

norms, values and all else that makes culture and sustains the society. Their contribution to social life cannot be denied. Yet, societies have always expected women to remain out of the public domain. Their education, upbringing etc. has always been geared in a direction that prepared them for a life of domesticity and dependency. The resultant effect was their complete disappearance from the public sphere. The absence of women from the public domain patronised an approach in development, which was guided by the spirit of 'male dominance and assertion' and led to a complete marginalization of women's perception in planning and expansion.

Women have been gaining right to vote and run for office[8] ever since New Zealand became the first country to extend suffrage to women in 1893. USA extended the facility to women in 1920. Yet many European countries waited till the end of the World War II to allow them the right to vote. Most of the Asian and African countries enfranchised women when they gained Independence (India 1947).

As Jaquette[9] points that historically, women demanded the right to vote on claims of equality. Contemporary feminist movements trace their roots to these stirrings in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Influenced by such movements Friedrich Engels[10] made gender equality a central tenet of socialist doctrine. Oddly the logic of equality failed to entice women into politics. Despite the extension of universal franchise, women were nowhere to be seen in decision-making positions or as contestants – nominated or otherwise.

Women's participation in formal politics can be gauged by examining them in relation to the following indicators: women's participation in the Parliament, Legislative Assemblies, institutions of local governance and political parties and their participation in the electoral process as constituencies as well as candidates. The analysis of these indicators reveal both that historically women have been kept away from politics and political parties as well as other formal institutions have not validated their participation.

Women are poorly represented at higher leadership levels. Even historically, it is observed that women's participation in positions of power in both houses of the Parliament has never exceeded 15 per cent of all seats. In modern societies, that profess values of individual freedom, equality of sexes and participative democracy, citizens (male and female both) are expected to engage in political activities wherein they attempt to influence the structure of the government, the selection of the government authorities, or the policies of the government.[11] Participation of women in national politics in India is between a low of 3.4% to an all time high of 9%.

Low participation of women in politics has often been rationalised by citing historical reasons [foreign rule (moguls, colonial period)], recent suffrage for women etc, socio-economic reasons – poor status of women, caste system, poverty, low awareness etc. etc. India being a developing country such reasons become understandable. M. Margaret Conway[12] reports that the women participation in USA is around 13% (2001) at National level and 22% at the State level. These figures from a country which is believed to be the most advanced on all parameters of development, how does it negotiate with such a situation? Surely the history, the recent past, the present, the socio-economic milieu of both the countries is poles apart. How is low participation of women in politics explained in societies as diverse as India and USA? Can women be treated as a monolithic category across the world in terms of their political orientation? Why is that women have displayed a similar response to political participation in the oriental as well as the occidental societies? Does that mean that lower participation of women (across cultures) in politics a natural predisposition peculiar to their sex? Is the political behaviour of women independent of history, culture, technological level etc of the society? Is construction of gender and division of gendered roles a fair process, free from the biases of societal matrix, and conforming to some genuine instinctive needs? The fact of the situation remains that on their own, women have shown limited interest in political participation.

Theoretical Approaches Explaining Gender Differences and Gender Subordination

Sociologists and anthropologists have tried to explain the gender inequalities prevalent in society. Some of the main explanations are discussed below

- George Peter Murdock(1949)[13] stressed that biological differences lead to gender differentiation in society and that explains why men and women are associated with particular roles. Advancing the argument further Talcott Parsons (1955)[14] says that sexual division of labour in family in the industrial society is devised to meet the varying needs of the family in the most efficient way taking into account the basic biological orientations of male and female.
- Ann Oakley[15] rubbishes the claims of the proponents of biological school and asserts that gender roles are culturally constructed and are not the inevitable or natural consequence of the biology of a person.
- Patriarchal arrangement of relations is seen as the main culprits for inflicting inferior status on women. Radical feminist believe that men have always exploited women and only a revolution can help alter the situation favourable for women.[1]6 Shulamith Firestone[17], Sherry B Ortner[18] and Michelle Z Rosaldo[19] all agree that male dominance is a universal phenomenon and the source of this inequality is the interpretation of sexes in terms of biology.
- Marxist and socialist feminist[20] attribute the exploitation of women to the capitalist means and forces of production. Fredrich Engels[21] tried to show that women subordination started as the concept of private property gained acceptance. Engels believed economic factors led to women's subservience to men and change in the economic structure could bring a positive change in man-woman relationship. Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson[22] agree with Engels and believe that production of goods generated gender inequality.
- Helene Cixous[23] believes that the use of language has a serious contribution towards gender inequality. Similarly Helen Haste[24] also attaches great importance to the use of language and particularly the use of metaphors in shaping the way the people see and understand the ways of the world.

Women in Leadership

Democracy as a system, theoretically, provides every person to aspire for leadership role. Let's examine the data related to women in leadership roles. As per the latest UN Data, the following facts are stated:

- There are only 26 countries where women serve as Heads of State and/or Government. At this current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years.
- As per world wide data compiled data by UN, women represent only 22.8 per cent of Cabinet members heading Ministries, leading a policy area. Over the years it has been observed that as cabinet ministers women are assigned portfolios of Women and gender equality, followed by Family and children affairs, Social inclusion and development, Social protection and social security, and Indigenous and minority affairs.
- Only 26.5 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses are women, up from 11 per cent in 1995.
- Only six countries have 50 per cent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses: Rwanda (61 per cent), Cuba (53 per cent), Nicaragua (52 per cent), Mexico (50 per cent), New Zealand (50 per cent), and the United Arab Emirates (50 per cent).
- Globally, there are 22 States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, including one lower chamber with no women at all.
- At the current rate of progress, gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063.

Analysis

What are the motivations for people to join politics? In politics, especially so in the Indian context, the first step into politics does not necessarily mean joining a party. A prior party membership or political engagement is also not considered a necessary condition for contesting in the elections. This observation appears to be particularly true for local female politicians.[25] What factors invoke individuals to participate in politics?

There are some general theories that provide the explanations as to why people participate in political institutions.[26] Three main cluster approaches, operating at the individual level can be identified in this regard.

The first cluster emphasises the individual motives and political or personal goals as important variables. This approach is based on the theories of rational choice, assuming that political participation is a result of rational choices of autonomous individuals, whereby people become politically involved only after weighing the costs and benefits of participation. If they find that this kind of activity provides the best opportunity to achieve their interests or ambitions, they go ahead. These political interests and ambitions are assumed to have developed in the pre-political arena, maybe at school, college or community level etc. and are therefore are described as political predispositions.

The second approach focuses on socio-economic factors, such as resources and skills. Family background – social, political, economic – education, occupational status, etc. which affects the political orientation of an individual. From this perspective, participation can mainly be explained in terms of resources that facilitate political action.

The third approach stresses the structural aspects, such as the recruiting strategies of political parties. This strand of research can explain the low representation of women in politics.

Conclusion

Voter awareness needs to be spruced up. Educating the voters is an important step to make the democracy inclusive. The participation of the voters is an important component of democratic functioning. People who opt not to vote lose an important opportunity to participate in the functioning of the government. It is important that people are educated to exercise their right to vote. Universalisation of education is the most important and crucial step towards realising the objective of inclusive democracy. The principles of equality can be installed in the minds of the people through education only. The law guarantees equality to all, but inequality is sustained by age old prejudices and images about particular social categories. Only education can help in dismantling such world views.

References

1. Extrapolation based on key findings from the Field study conducted by the author in Bikaner district of Rajasthan in the year 2010-11.
2. Krishnaji, N.E. (2000). *Economic and Political Weekly,* April 1, 2000
3. Bandyopadhyay, D. (2000). Gender and Governance in India. *Economic and Political Weekly* Commentary, July 29-August 4, 2000.
4. Sen, A. 1999. *Development as Freedom,* Oxford University Press, pp. 106.
5. Mazumdar, V. 2000. *A Background Note: Workshop on Gender and Governance*, June 22, 2000, India International Centre, New Delhi, mimeo.
6. Nussbaum, M. (2000). Women's Capabilities and Social Justice, *Journal of Human Development*, Vol. 1, No. 2.
7. Nussbaum, M. (2003 Ch). Essays on Gender and Governance; An Introduction, *Essays on Gender and Governance*, Nussbaum, Martha; Basu, Amrita; Tambiah, Yasmin; Jayal, Niraja Gopal, Human Development Resource Centre, United Nations Development Programme, India.
8. Jaquette, J.S. (1997). Women in Power: From Tokenism to Critical Mass. *Foreign Policy* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), No. 108 (Autumn 1997), pp. 22-37.
9. Ibid.
10. Engels, F. (1972). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Lawrence & Wishart, London.
11. Conway, M.M. (2001). University of Florida, Women and Political Participation, *PS: Political Science*

*and Politics (*American Political Science Association), Vol. 34, No.2, June 2001, pp. 231-233.

12. Ibid.
13. Murdock, G.P. (1949). *Social Structure*, Macmillan, New York.
14. Parsons, T. (1955), *The American Family: its relations to personality and role structure* in Parsons and Bales (ed)
15. Oakley, A. (1974). *Housewife*, Allen Lane, London.
16. Haralambos, M. and Holborn, M. (2000). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. Collins.
17. Firestone, S. (1972). *The Dialectics of Sex*, Paladin, London.
18. Ortner, B.S. (1974). Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture? in M.Z. Rosaldo and L Lamphere (eds) *Woman, Culture and Society,* Stanford University Press, Stanford.
19. Rosaldo, M.Z. (1974). Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoratical Overview in M.Z. Rosaldo and L Lamphere (eds) *Woman, Culture and Society,* Stanford University Press, Stanford
20. Ibid.
21. Engels, F. (1972). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Lawrence & Wishart, London.
22. Coontz, S. and Henderson, P. (1986). *Women's Work, Men's Property*, Verso, London.
23. Cixous, H. (1981a). *The Laugh of the Medusa* in Marks and de Courtivron (ed)
24. Haste, H. (1993). *The Sexual Metaphor*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel, Hempstead.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.