

# Feminist, Recognition and Identity: An Analysis to the Reservation Policy of Women in Case of Indian Politics.

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**Abstract**—*Liberal democratic theory began to grapple the issues of marginalized community in institutional politics that arose from group rather than individuals, claim their rights and citizenship. Some feminist scholar argues, quota for women in politics. These shift in local governance, focus on increasing the rate of women participation and used quota as one of the strategies to do so. Deliberative democracy has focus of political equality. On the other hand, value of feminism to philosophy and political theory focus on the feminist critique of contemporary social practices, institutions and belief, construct a critical perspective on existing theory of recognition. Institutional processes are embodied in structures of social power that limits the effectiveness of the outcomes of the deliberation. In contemporary approaches and debates on feminist philosophy, the concept is mainly based on the universally values of justice and freedom of women in the developing world, questions for identity, difference and diversity A critical understanding of democracy in India is exploring, how women are granted equally in public yet still subject to traditional family law in the home? The aim of this paper is to analyze the policy of women reservation in politics. Is it reflects the politics of recognition and the identity politics? Feminist interventions in democratic theory continue with the arguments, whether such recognition of women in politics leads to the politics of redistribution.*

**Keywords:** *Women identity, Politics of Recognition, Gender Politics, Culture, Representation, Social justice.*

## Introduction

In the feminist discourse, starting from the first wave of feminism up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they have long struggled with different issues of women. Feminist philosophical scholars increasingly focus on the roles and locations of women in society as well as globally. What social or political locations are they part of or excluded from? How the complexities of women situated including sex, caste, class or gender. What's their status in society? How have women's roles been value or devalued? Feminist philosopher tried to deal with such questions. Since then, different school of feminist emerged.

There are numbers of departure for the analysis of feminism. The debate is mainly focus on liberal feminism. It defines itself with self modernity and enlightenment. The political subject of this form of feminism is the individual autonomous and capable of deliberative reasoning based on freedom of equality. The first section of this paper is the concept of women recognition in politics and the second part is the role of women in local government politics through the reservation policy.

## Feminist Politics of Recognition:

The questions of identity and recognition are central to many contemporary debates for freedom and dignity. Theorist like Irish M. Young, Charles Taylor, and Alex Honneth emphasized on the concept of recognition not just for individual rights or resources but also as a members of social groups that seek recognition for their distinctness. From the classical political philosopher, the concept of justice has encompassed "the just" that is redistribution which is legitimate, fair and reasonable. By taking John Rawls famous "difference principle" asserts that social and economic inequalities means inequalities in the distribution of primary social goods wealth, authority and status are justified only when the least of people get benefit in the society<sup>1</sup>. Institutionally, it is the welfare state where the principle of redistributive justice has been given shaped.

The most recent socio-cultural concept of justice is now concerned with the recognition of collective identities, group of minorities who are oppressed and excluded such as women or homosexual are subject to discrimination, marginalization, stereotype etc. Struggle for recognition include multiculturalism, emancipation, policies and extra parliamentary activities of new social movement. Philosophers

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<sup>1</sup> John Rawls: *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, 1971.

such as Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Iris Marion Young play a major role in expanding the concept of socio economic justice in social and political theory. According to Charles Taylor recognition or misrecognition can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false distorted reduced mode of being.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand Nancy Fraser proposes to conceive recognition as a matter of justice. For this purpose she treats recognition as an issue of social justice. Fraser used two dimensional conception of justice. She argued about 'parity of participation' which is based on two conditions; 1) objective conditions: the distribution of materials resources must be such as to insure participant's independence and "voice" and 2) inter-subjectivity condition: institutionalized pattern of cultural value which ensure equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem. Both the conditions are necessary for the participation parity neither alone is sufficient. Therefore social justice via redistribution and recognition try to include the effected group or individual. Therefore social justice through redistribution and recognition tried to include the effected group or individual. It is a policy for the group of social, economic and political exclusion in the society.<sup>3</sup>

However philosopher likes Arendt diagnosis exclusion is not at least in terms of a lack of socio economic redistribution or socio cultural recognition which she called social perspective. It advocates a political rather than a social struggle for participation, political equality, empowerment and freedom. Feminist and political philosopher objects to Arendt rejection of a social approach to the political issues, she rejects social approach on political issues. It means any approach focusing on socio economic and socio-cultural justice. Benhabib critique Arendt for anti modernism because of her exclusion of social "Arendt's agonistic model is at odds with the sociological reality of modernity as well as modern political struggles for justice".<sup>4</sup>

Here Benhabib assumed that the distinction between the social and the political has become porous and meaningless because the struggle to make something public is a struggle for justice, identity, freedom and recognition. This agenda of un-recognition/ misrecognition of social and cultural, Benhabib called this as "Blind Spot". It is important to concern about the nature of socio economic and cultural status of women in society. The constitution of India gives political equality under Article 325 and 326. The arguments is whether, Indian Women get benefited from this rights. Therefore the following

is the status and role of women in the local government politics of India.

### Women in the Local Governance Politics of India

The issue of women participation in institutional politics have been increase during the 1990s. Most of the countries are in the favour of feminist participation in institutional politics. Liberal democratic theory began to grapple the issue that arises for groups rather than individual claims to right and citizenship. Due to this shift, structures of the government policies began to change in the parliaments, local governments or in bureaucrats and tried to focus on increasing participation of women in politics and used quotas as an input strategy to do so. As mentioned above Fraser argued for the politics of recognition and identity politics allows for recognition of inequalities within society, the question is such recognition leads to the politics of redistribution?

India introduced quota system in 1993; the policy insured that 33 percent of Indian women can be a member in the local governments, both in rural and urban area. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment introduced direct election and given five years term for all the seats at the level of Panchayat/ Municipality. Through this amendment the constitution address nationwide to strengthened the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) of India. Quotas can be seen as part of the deliberative democracy framework by recognizing that equality of opportunity access to resources requires the individual/groups be treated unequally where they are disadvantage due to circumstances beyond their control.

According to 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment women's representation through quota in politics, seems there is an expectation of good governance and delivered the quality of work in grassroots level and empowered women. In PRIs the presence of women has increased in the politics of local governance. However increase in number does not reflect women's political identity and received adequate attention in local governance. There are several cases around the states of India for physical violence or sexual assault to the member of women representative, mainly the lower caste women and tribal in panchayat.<sup>5</sup> There are two aspect of political participation- the qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative participation has increased through the constitutional provisions and need to follow up through enhancing qualitative participation. In a country like India, both aspects are necessary for the women empowerment.

In this male dominated society, women representatives faced challenges in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The society cannot accept them as a politically leading member in Panchayat institutions. The gendered stratification context can be seen both in within and outside the home that makes complex in the decision making process. The upper caste women mainly

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Fraser and Alex Honneth, *Redistribution and Recognition: A Political Philosophical Exchange*, Verso New York, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Fraser and Alex Honneth, *Redistribution and recognition? A political Philosophical Exchange*, Verso, New York, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Seyla Benhabib, Model of Public space: Hannah Arendt the. In *Hebermass and Public sphere* ed., Calhoun, Cambridge, Mass liberal traditions and Jurgen Habermass, MIT Press, 1992

<sup>5</sup> Shirin M. Rai, *Deliberative Democracy and the Politics of Redistribution: The case of the Indian Panchayat*, Wiley on behalf of Hypatia. Inc., 2007.

occupied the position of high rank in local politics. The issues of payment, some women pointed out that without a salary the panchayat is more open to corrupt practices and being dominated by the upper class who can afford to be paid. According to the study of Nirmala Buch's shows that 14% of the women represented came from landless families, 19.5% from families with marginal holdings and 20.6% from families with small holding. Overall 32% used higher laboured and 22 percent worked as hired labour. It shows the presence of poor farmers and agricultural labour. Buch points out that surpunch of panchayat are of higher class position. This shows that women involved in panchayat politics are aware of the privilege of class<sup>6</sup>. Upper caste people referred the lower caste women/ poor women cannot participate in politics. They are not capable due to socially and economically backwardness. Therefore caste system strongly enforce with class privilege in the PRIs of India. This shows that women through quota representation, there is discrimination among women regarding their caste, class and status. Women from lower caste are often treated with contempt by upper caste panchayat members. Their particular identities are subsumed under this caste division.

There are also several constraints to the women in politics. In village most of the time is consumed in domestic works, so there is lack of time to attend the PRIs meeting, women have to work long distance to reach the venue of meetings. There is a lack of training and low level of awareness, their husband managed the affairs and decision making, women acted as proxies signing. Women are ignorance regarding rights and responsibilities, misguidance by bureaucrats and gender stratification in political parties. Due to the backwardness in socio economic condition with which women have come into the system and their poor capacity building leads to low confidence level, hesitate to speak in front of large male dominant society. These are some problems which hinders women effective participation in local bodies.<sup>7</sup>

There are also some positive results flows from the reservation. This policy transforms the state from within. Presence of women in politics starts to change the structures of the governance so that they reflect more closely to the concerns of women. They are making the state sensitive to the issues of poverty, inequality and gender justice. It promotes women's empowerment and identity. Women elected representatives realising that increasing number of women is not the only means for empowerment; their outcomes should measures in the quality of work<sup>8</sup>. In order to improve their capacity, ability and to gain more confidence, need training programmes to understand their role in PRI.

<sup>6</sup> Nirmala Buch, Women experience in New Panchayat: The emerging leadership of rural women occasional, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Latha A. Pandit, Political Leadership of women: Constraints and Challenges, Indian Journal of Political Science, 2010

<sup>8</sup> Satyanarayana Sangita, Decentralization for good governance and service delivery in India, The Indian Journal of Political Science, 2007.

## Conclusion

Reservation of seats in local politics aims to empower the disadvantage group mainly the women community. From the above analysis; it is concerned with some related issues- women's representation in politics through reservation is rational; women constitute a political identity/ identity from external force, problem of "proxy" women in politics, discrimination of Dalit or poor and tribal women in politics. While analysing the decentralised government, the notion of autonomy, capacity, empowerment, and political, administrative and financial structures can transform into good governance through participation, transparency in the system, work should be accountability. No doubt, the outcomes will be efficiency, equitable and associability. Women participate by the quota base representation, the arguments is weather the women enjoy a greater share in power? Is this amendment proof to be more inclusive? Are they recognised their identity as political leader/representative? There is a great deal of confusion about the precise meaning of this policy. Yet it has opened the door for participation and share in powers at the local level for the marginalised and excluded communities such as women, STs, SCs. The full implication of this major change are not yet clear either to the people directly affected by this change or to social analyst.

In some states, through reservation, there is a change in the society and work for the development. It improves the awareness and perceptions level of women which create and urge to participate in the governance. However, some are not accepted this study. They pointed out that their articulation capacity is poor and play no effective roles in council meetings and remained silent and participated as directed by others. Gender and social differences hindered in exercising their power effectively as political representatives.

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