

Gender Inequality: An Experience from Indian States

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ABSTRACT

Women form the half of human capital and they are the greatest assets of any country who require equal treatment and earning opportunities for ending poverty in all its forms and ensuring gender equality. Different research studies show that women work double than men and contribute doubly in the economy, but still they are treated as second class citizens and are discriminated in social, economic and political spheres. It is also a fact that, in almost all the society's women's rights are suppressed and their human rights are violated. Moreover, they fail to enjoy the fruits of development. The building of India as a nation would not be realized if the fifty per cent of its population remains confined within the kitchens and mere household chores. The progress and development of a country is judged by the rate of participation and position of women in academic, economic, political and social fields. But, the rate of unemployment, social exclusion, political discrimination and high vulnerability of women has made India poorer and medium developed country in the global development indicators. Besides, out of all poor people women are the poorest throughout the globe, and India is not an exception. Though India has made astounding economic growth and tremendous progress in science, technology, infrastructure, and research and innovation; the overall status and position of women still speaks a sorry state of affairs. How far Indian growth story is real and what are the constraints standing in the way of gender equality, a research study was undertaken with the financial assistance from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) in three Indian states. On the basis of the empirical research, this paper seeks to highlight the inequality of women in social, political and economic spheres, and further intends to plug the loopholes by extending some concrete policy prescriptions.

Keyword: *human capital, economic growth, gender equality*

1. INTRODUCTION

The New Millennium started with eight specific goal-settings by the United Nations including 'Promotion of Gender Equality and Empowering Women' (Goals No. 3), which were targeted to be achieved by 2015. Almost all the heads of member states of the United Nations brought about major policy changes and took requisite measures in their respective countries to attain the goals. Resultant to the combined efforts of the world leaders, girls' enrolment ratio in schools has been increased; the gap in literacy between girls and boys has been narrowed down; women's rate of participation in work force outside the agriculture sector has been hiked and the rate of maternal mortality during delivery has been reduced. Also it was found that, "Between 1990 and 2015 income poverty in developing country regions fell by more than two-thirds. The number of extreme poor people worldwide fell from 1.9 billion to 836 million. The child mortality rate fell by more than half, and under-five deaths fell from 12.7 million to 6 million. More than 2.6 billion people gained access to an improved source of drinking water, and 2.1 billion gained access to improved

sanitation facilities even as the world's population rose from 5.3 billion to 7.3 billion."1 Political development in various countries has enabled more people including women to participate in democratic decision making bodies in their countries. Average numbers of women in Parliament has also been doubled between 1990 and 2015.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In spite of the above achievements, there remains gender disparity in social, political, economic and educational sectors. In this regard, the then Secretary General of United Nations Ban Ki Moon asserted that, "Too many women continue to die during pregnancy or from childbirth-related complications. Progress tends to bypass women and those who are lowest on the economic ladder or are disadvantaged because of their age, disability or ethnicity."2 Moreover, the Human Development Report 2015 points out that, "Globally women earn 24 percent less than men and hold only 25 percent of administrative and managerial positions in the business world – while 32 percent of businesses have no women in senior

management positions. Women still hold only 22 percent of seats in single or lower houses of national parliament.”³

Though the proportion of women has been increased many fold in their national Parliaments, still only one in five members are women. In every country women are more likely to live in poverty than their male counterparts. Besides, “In 85 per cent of the 92 countries with data on unemployment rates by level of education for the years 2012–2013, women with advanced education have higher rates of unemployment than men with similar levels of education. Despite continuous progress, the world still has far to go towards equal gender representation in private and public decision-making.”⁴

Thus it is evident that a wide hiatus exists between men and women in the post-World War- II era, which throws a major challenge to achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Despite the enactment and implementation of various international laws, conventions, charters etc., the degree of discrimination between women and men in both rural and urban areas become more visible. Since the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 more than two decades have been passed, but the status of women has not changed much. “Today, despite considerable progress, the Platform’s envisioned gender equality in all dimensions of life is still an unfinished agenda. Women earn less than men and are more likely to work in poor-quality jobs. A third suffers physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Gaps in reproductive rights and health care leave 800 women dying in childbirth each day.”⁵

Despite enactment of various gender specific laws and policies, Indian women could not achieve equality with men in social, political and economic spheres. Thus the issue of gender equality holds a major concern to the development theorists and social scientists not only in South Asian countries including India, it is an issue of discuss, debate and research in the developed nations including America and Europe. However, some available literature can be reviewed hereunder.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Of late the issue of women’s empowerment through participation in politics and economic activities has attracted attention of the scholars from both India and abroad. However, most of the Indian studies are concentrated on the participation of the renowned, educated, upper-caste and urban-born women who took leading role in the freedom movement and other social or cultural movements. Some recent studies examine

women’s participation in various social and political movements and agitations while others focus on women’s empowerment through participation in paid labour force and self-help groups (SHGs). Also there are a large number of studies related to the participation of women in different political activities and institutions in the post-Independence era. Though at present literature on women’s studies is voluminous and it has become almost a growth industry; the numbers of studies on the participation of women in local governments as well as economic activities are usually insufficient. However, a few studies highlighting the issues of women’s empowerment through political and economic participation and other related activities are examined hereunder.

Despite gender equality plays the pivotal role in development process; gender inequality is pervasive in most parts of the world — although at a varying degree. There is a high and persistent degree of gender inequality in India which holds a perpetual and vested problem in India’s development and the issue has been analyzed in a Discussion Paper by Katharina Raabe and others in their study on Karnataka panchayat raj. The authors point out that Karnataka was one of the earliest states to have brought a similar legislation in line with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and strengthened decentralized governance structures and service provision by promoting major institutional, administrative and fiscal change. In the Discussion Paper the authors aim “...to shed new light on the role of reservation policies for women as a determinant of rural service provision and local governance by identifying the social, economic, and institutional factors that constrain effective local governance and rural service provision beyond the women’s reservation effect.”⁶

Women’s political participation in Asia and the Pacific has been analyzed by Jacqui True and others⁷ in their Working Papers on Women in Politics. Patterns of political participation in East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia and Pacific Islands have been elaborately examined by the authors. The study reveals that, “The proportion of women in national parliaments in the region is below the global average of 20 percent, however, despite affirmative action carried out in most South Asian countries.”⁸

In a research paper Tsai-Wei Sun attempts to evaluate the status of women’s representation in politics and public administration in Taiwan and sixteen other Western as well as Asian countries which highlights the general

perception of common people in Taiwan: "It seems that people in Taiwan still do not believe that women can handle public affairs as chief leader as well as men do."⁹ Verba, Nie and Kim studied women's political participation¹⁰ in seven heterogeneous countries which are divided by rural and urban conglomerations also. The book highlights a theoretical perspective of the gender empowerment in democratic set up. The authors observed that the people with better education, wealth and language capacity enjoy greater political influence and political power. They have also found out that women's participation in political activities is lower than their male counterparts. Women are also found to play insignificant role in political decision making processes that makes them politically marginalized. Further, political participation and gender equality has been extensively studied by Nancy Burns, Sidney Verba and others.¹¹ The authors have studied the status and position of women in the USA since the days of Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1920), which conferred US women the right to franchise and opened up the most vital avenue for women's political activities. But after the enfranchisement of women, it seemed that women have attained everything they desired and hence withdrew themselves from mass movements and political struggles and merely remained confined within casting their franchise.

However, women's political participation in state legislature in West Bengal was examined by Jayasri Ghosh.¹² Though the study was conducted primarily for examining the women's participation in politics and decision-making process in the urban politics in West Bengal; it provides clues to the understanding of gender empowerment as a whole. The study shows that the male leaders of most of the political parties prefer men as candidates. The survey on the state legislators exhibits that young, unmarried or elderly married women have more scope for active participation in politics.

Sujata Patel¹³ analyzes Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) from a sociological and political perspective. She holds that, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a leap toward rural people's economic empowerment and especially for women. The scheme is unique in India because it guarantees minimum 100 days of employment to the rural people on demand. The scheme has a potentiality to create economic empowerment of rural people especially the landless and women. The author feels that, "Given the nature of

distribution of resources and power in countries like India a scheme such as EGS can sometimes turn out to be a radical instrument of social change."¹⁴ In another study Md. Rafiqul Islam throws light on rural women's income generation scheme in Bangladesh. The author points out that economic empowerment of women is indispensable for poverty reduction in the third world countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, India and others. The study¹⁵ reveals that, "Bangladesh is a country in which women have very low status. They are not encouraged to engage in economic activities." Though the women have limited mobility power and heavily loaded with domestic work, after joining in NGOs their socio-economic and familial status had been increased in Bangladesh. In an occasional paper Indrani Chakraborty and Achin Chakraborty¹⁶ studied the pattern of gender differential in the earnings through workforce participation in West Bengal. The study shows that in West Bengal the female labour force participation rate is one of the lowest in India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The principal objective of the present research is to study the nature and extent of participation of women in Local Government Bodies in three Indian states viz. West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan which constitute the representative character of India. Apart from that, the proposed investigation intends to study the following:

- (i) The major deterrents of women's participation in local governments.
- (ii) Develop a policy prescription for actualization of empowerment of women after carefully studying the present state of affairs in this regard.

UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY:

The present study was carried out in three socio-culturally diverse states viz. West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan that are comprised of eastern, southern and northern parts of India. After selecting three states, three districts one each from every State was selected. Then, two gram panchayats and two municipalities were selected from each district of three states. In this way total 6 gram panchayats, and 6 municipalities were selected from the 3 states. At the second stage, 2 gram sansads from each gram panchayat and two Wards from each municipality were selected. Thus a total of 12 gram sansads and 12 municipality wards were selected from three districts. At the third stage, 10 voters – 5 males and 5 females from each gram sansad and each Ward – were selected and interviewed. The voters' list used in the last general election (2014) was taken as the sample frame for the

purpose of selection of respondents. In this way a total of 120 (12x10) voters from gram panchayats, and another 120 (12x10) voters from Municipalities were interviewed. Thus in total 240 respondents were selected and interviewed initially. Apart from that, from the three states another 75 respondents (Females- 35 and Males - 40) comprising office bearers of three-tier panchayat bodies and municipalities; members of NGOs, civil society, government officials, teachers, members of political parties, block level officers and others also contacted and interviewed randomly on the basis of the same questionnaire to have firsthand information on the status of women in India and the problems standing in the way of their empowerment. Thus a total of 315 Indian citizens (155 men and 160 women) from the three states of the country aged 18 or above were interviewed.

4. FIELD OF THE STUDY

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Initially, three districts – one each from the states of Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and West Bengal - have been selected purposefully for the present study. Further, two municipalities and two gram panchayats from each district were selected and in this way a total of 12 local bodies comprising 6 municipalities and 6 gram panchayats have been selected. Finally, from each gram panchayat and municipality 20 respondents (10 male voters and 10 female voters) were randomly selected to have a representative character of India. Thus a total of 120 respondents from six Municipalities, and another 120 respondents from six gram panchayats were interviewed with the help of a structured questionnaire. The details of the respondents are as follows:

The below table (Table 1) shows that there are total 80 respondents from each district including 40 men and 40 women. Thus a total of 240 respondents (80 X 3 = 240) were interviewed from three districts for the present study. Municipality-wise general respondents have also been enumerated From Kancheepuram district two urban local bodies namely Tambaram and Pallavaram municipalities were selected. Further, two wards from each municipality were selected on the basis of random selection method. Next, from each ward 10 voters (Females - 5 and Males - 5) were selected and interviewed. Thus a total of 20 voters (Females -10 and Males - 10) were selected and interviewed from Kancheepuram municipality. Similarly, From Tonk district, Newai municipality and Tonk municipal council (nagar palika) were selected and from these two municipalities

also 40 voters (20 voters from each municipality) were selected and then interviewed. Similar procedure was adopted in case of Paschim Medinipur, from where Ghatal and Khirpai municipalities were selected. In this way, from 12 wards of 6 Municipalities 12 x 10 = 120 voters were selected and interviewed.

Level of education of the female respondents has been shown in Table 6.14. It shows that out of 120 female respondents, a total of 44 (36.66%) respondents have no formal education. This reflects the women's education scenario of Indian society. Further, in the area of study out of 120 respondents, 25 respondents (20.83%) have only primary education i.e. from Class I to Class V, but 30 number of women respondents (25%) have passed 10th examination and only 14 (11.66%) have passed higher secondary (10+2) level. Only 6 (5%) women respondents have completed graduation and only 1 (0.83%) woman has finished her Master's Degree.

Monthly income of the female respondents has been presented in the Table: 6.23. It shows that majority of the women respondents have no any income (54.16%), while only 28.33 per cent women respondents have monthly income in between Rs. 500 and Rs. 2000. Also it comes out that, only 10.00% women have income between Rs. 5001 to Rs. 10,000, and only 3.33% women have income between Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000 while only 1.66 per cent women have income between Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 40,000 while there is not a single woman respondent whose income crosses Rs. 40,000 in a month. It substantiates the myth that men are bread earners and women are economically dependent on their male counterpart.

Monthly income of the male respondents has been presented in the Table 4. It highlights that, only 6.66 per cent male respondents have no any income, while this rate for women respondents is 54.16%. Further, it shows that majority of the male respondents (40.00%) have income between Rs. 500 and Rs. 2000 while 19.16 per cent male respondents have income between Rs. 2001 to Rs. 5000. Also it comes to light that, only 11.66 per cent men have income between Rs. 5001 to Rs. 10,000, and interestingly 15.83 per cent men have income between Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000 while only 7.5 per cent women have income between Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 40,000 while there are only two men respondents (1.66%) who have income between Rs. 40,001 and Rs. 60,000 in a month, while only one male respondent has income between Rs. 60,001 and Rs. 1 lakh. On the other hand, not a single respondent admitted his income above Rs. 1 lakh per month.

Table 1 General Respondents

Area	Male	Female	Transgender	Total	Percentage
Kancheepuram	40	40	00	80	33.33
Tonk	40	40	00	80	33.33
West Bengal	40	40	00	80	33.33
Total	120	120	00	240	100.00

Source: Field Study

Table 2 Educational Background of the Female Respondents

Area	No Formal Education	Primary Education (I-V)	Secondary Education (VI-X)	Higher Secondary Education (XI- XII)	Graduation	Post-Graduation	Others
Kancheepuram	11	8	9	7	4	1	
Tonk	27	5	6	2	Nil	Nil	Nil
Paschim Medinipur	6	12	15	5	2	Nil	Nil
Total	44	25	30	14	6	01	00
Percentage	36.66	20.83	25.00	11.66	05.00	0.83	00

Source: Field Study

Table 3 Monthly Income of the Female Respondents

Area	Nil	Rs. 500- Rs. 2000	Rs. 2001- Rs. 5000	Rs. 5001- Rs. 10000	Rs. 10001- Rs. 20000	Rs. 20001- Rs. 40000	Rs. 40001- Rs. 60000	Rs. 60001- Rs. 1 lakh	1 lakh above
Kancheepuram	21	3	9	3	2	2	Nil	Nil	Nil
Tonk	14	23	1	1	1	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Paschim Medinipur	30	8	2	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	65	34	12	4	3	2	Nil	Nil	Nil
Percentage	54.16	28.33	10.00	3.33	2.5	1.66	Nil	Nil	Nil

Source: Field Study

Table 4 Monthly Income of the Male Respondents

Area	Nil	Rs. 500- Rs.2000	Rs. 2001- Rs. 5000	Rs. 5001- Rs. 10000	Rs. 10001- Rs. 20000	Rs. 20001- Rs. 40000	Rs. 40001- Rs. 60000	Rs. 60001- Rs. 1 lakh	1 lakh above
Kancheepuram	6	3	3	6	16	4	2	Nil	Nil
Tonk	1	15	15	5	Nil	3	Nil	1	Nil
Paschim Medinipur	7	20	5	3	3	2	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	8	48	23	14	19	9	2	1	Nil
Percentage	6.66	40.00	19.16	11.66	15.83	7.5	1.66	0.83	0.00

Source: Field Study

Table 5 Personal Bank Account of the Respondents

Area	Females		Males	
	Yes	Not	Yes	Not
Kancheepuram	30	10	35	5
Tonk	24	16	37	3
Paschim Medinipur	15	25	24	16
Total	69	51	96	24
Percentage	57.5	42.5	80.00	20.00

Source: Field Study

Table 6 Private Property of the Female Respondents

Area	Home	Land	Pond	Gold - Jewelry	Bus/Taxi/Motor Cycle/Cycle etc.	Bank Balance	Shop	Others	Nil
Kancheepuram	36	9	1	18	8	2	1	Nil	3
Tonk	31	5	Nil	10	5	1	1	Nil	7
Paschim Medinipur	13	7	1	12	3	3	Nil	Nil	14
Total	80	21	2	30	16	6	2	Nil	24
Percentage	66.66	17.5	1.66	25.00	13.33	5.00	1.66	0.00	20.00

Source: Field Study

Table 7 Private Property of the Male Respondents

Area	Home	Land	Pond	Gold - Jewelry	Bus/Taxi/Motor Cycle/Cycle etc.	Bank Balance	Shop	Others	Nil
Kancheepuram	34	18	5	16	21	2	2	Nil	2
Tonk	25	13	Nil	2	16	1	Nil	Nil	8
Paschim Medinipur	22	12	7	4	15	8	7	Nil	9
Total	81	43	12	22	52	11	9	Nil	19
Percentage	67.50	35.83	10.00	18.33	43.33	9.16	7.5	0.00	15.83

Source: Field Study

The above table (Table 5) shows that 57.5 per cent female respondents have bank accounts while 80.00 per cent men have their own Bank Account. On the other hand, 42.5 per cent females have not yet opened any bank account in the area of study and mere 20.00 men have not opened bank accounts in the area of study.

Private property of the female respondents has been shown in Table 6. It shows that 66.66 per cent women have home and only 17.5 per cent respondents have land while only 1.66 per cent women respondents have pond

in their name. Interestingly, 25.00 per cent women have gold and jewellery and 13.33 per cent women have vehicles like motor cycles, bicycles and only a few have private cars (of their husbands). Most of the women in India have neither bank account nor any savings in their names. This study also shows that, only 5.00 per cent women have bank balance while only 1.66 per cent female respondents have their own shops.

Status of private property of the male respondents in the area of study has been shown in Table 7. It shows that 67.50 per cent men have home and 35.83 per cent respondents have land while 10.00 per cent men respondents have ponds in their names. In rural West Bengal and Tamil Nadu many people have ponds adjacent to their house. However, like their female counterparts, 18.33 per cent male respondents have gold and jewellery while 43.33 per cent men have vehicles like motor cycles, bicycles and private cars. But only a few men respondents (9.16%) have admitted that they have bank balance and 7.5 per cent male respondents have their own shops.

The field study shows that some male respondents in West Bengal have property like home and land in the joint name with their wives. In rural areas of West Bengal, young men have bi-cycles for going to private tuition, or going to field, sometimes for learning computer or for taking children to the nearby schools etc. Now-a-days, in both rural and urban areas almost every family has either a bi-cycle or a motor bike. It comes to light that, some men respondents are maintaining their livelihood by opening small shops adjacent to their houses.

The working men respondents have bank account and gold-jewellery. They have bank balance also. Income and bank account are interlinked. In West Bengal, economy was much brightened with the spurt of financial companies like Sarada Finance, VIBGYOR Group, Appeline, Rose Valley etc. But after the revelation of multi-crore scams and the interception of Enforcement Directorate in the matters of these companies and arrests of some influential leaders, ministers, singers, and some other people created a great negative impact on Bengal

economy. However, now the following part seeks to examine the level of people's participation in local level governments.

Political participation is comprised of casting votes, campaigning, contesting as a candidate, selecting candidates, generating political awareness, organizing people, political discussions, participating in meetings and processions, local sitting, disseminating political messages, delivering lectures, collecting money for party fund etc. It was intended to know the nature of participation of the respondents. Table 8 highlights that,

Table 8 Nature of Participation in Political Activities of the Respondents

Nature	Female	%	Male	%	Total (%)
Casting votes	82	68.33%	86	71.66%	168 (70%)
Campaigning	9	7.5%	25	20.83%	34 (14.16%)
Contesting as a candidate	4	3.33%	6	5%	10 (4.16%)
Selecting candidates	2	1.66%	11	9.16%	13 (5.41%)
Generating political awareness	8	6.66%	9	7.5%	17 (7.08%)
Organizing people	6	5%	18	15%	24 (10%)
Political discussions	2	1.66%	9	7.5%	11 (4.58%)
Participation in meetings and processions	8	6.66%	19	15.83%	27 (11.25%)
Local sitting	2	1.66%	9	7.5%	11(4.58%)
Delivering lectures	2	1.66%	6	5%	8 (6.66%)
Subscribing	1	0.83%	2	1.66%	3 (1.25%)
Collecting funds	2	1.66%	2	1.66%	4 (3.33%)
Other means	0	0.00%	3	2.5%	3 (1.25%)

Source: Field Study

Table 9 Participation in Gram Sabha Meeting (Female)

Area	Yes	No	No Response
Kancheepuram	4	27	9
Tonk	6	32	2
Paschim Medinipur	8	26	6
Total	18	85	17
Percentage	15.00	70.83	14.66

Source: Field Study

Table 10 Participation in Gram Sabha Meeting (Male)

Area	Yes	No	No Response
Kancheepuram	1	30	9
Tonk	5	33	2
Paschim Medinipur	5	27	8
Total	11	90	19
Percentage	9.16	75.00	15.83

Source: Field Study

casting votes being the highest political duty of a citizen, it seems that majority of the respondents i.e. 70% comprising female 68.33% and male 71.66% cast their franchise in the last general elections held in 2014.

per cent women and 15.83% men respondents did not give any answer.

There are many of reasons behind women’s lower rate of participation in various socio-political and economic

Table 11 Factors Affect Women’s Empowerment through Participation

Reasons	Female	%	Male	%	Total (Female + Male) (%)
To bring up children	107	89.16	103	85.83	210 (87.5%)
To look after family members	94	78.33	81	67.5	175 (72.91%)
Studies and career building affects	78	65.00	64	53.33	142 (59.16%)
Non-cooperation of family members and neighbors	79	65.83	60	50.00	139 (57.91%)
Family members do not allow women and girls to stay out of home after evening	87	72.5	64	53.33	151 (62.91%)
For loss of prestige and dignity	75	62.5	53	44.16	128 (53.33%)

Source: Field Study

Note: Figures in parenthesis denote percentage to total.

Campaigning before elections is also an important political activity where the domination of male voters is clearly visible (Females -7.5% and Males – 20.83%).

On the other hand, very few voters get the opportunity to contest in elections which has been reflected in this study also, where it is found that, only 3.33 per cent women and 5 per cent men respondents fought in elections at any time in his/her life. Selecting a candidate in local body election is done by party high command in consultation with local leaders. Only 1.66 per cent women and 9.16 per cent men voters were involved in the process of selection of candidates. Before elections and sometimes gaining political mileage, some party members or activists participate in the awareness campaigning. In this sphere also the participation of men voters are more than their women counterparts (Females – 6.66% and Males – 7.55). But the task of organizing people for political purposes is mostly done by men as it is reflected in the field data (Females – 5% and Males – 15%). Similarly, more men (7.5%) than women (1.66%) discuss on political issues either at home or outside. Again male voters (15.83%) outnumber female voters (6.66%) in terms of participation in meetings and processions.

The result revealed in the following two tables (Table 9 & 10) show that, only 15% women and 9.16 per cent men participate in the gram sabha meetings while most of the voters in the villages do not like to participate in the gram sabhas (Females - 70.83% and Males – 75%) while 14.66

activities. The reasons cited by and further substantiated by the respondents are enumerated here. The most vital problem faced by women is child bearing and child rearing. This view is supported by 87.5 per cent respondents including 89.16 per cent women and 85.83 per cent men. Besides, traditional division of labour i.e. women are the managers of home, while men are the bread winners, also affect women’s empowerment. Most of the women and girls empowerment is affected by the household chores and for looking after the family members including children, sick and older ones. Though women and girls are gradually coming out of their home and participating in social, economic and political activities, still a majority of women remain out of all these activities. In this regard, 78.33 per cent women and 67.5 per cent men consider that women’s empowerment is hindered by the household chores and looking after the family members.

Studies and career building of young girls hinder their participation in political affairs. With the government’s various women-specific policies, girls’ education is rising, and as a result, they do not get time and scope to participate in political activities. This view is substantiated by 65.00 per cent women respondents while 53.33 per cent men respondents also think the same. India is still a feudal society because the mental set-up of millions of women and men including so called educated ones are still full of superstition and bigotry. The collected data

show that 65.83 per cent women and 50 per cent men consider as non-cooperation of family members and neighbours affect women's empowerment through their participation in various socio-economic and political activities.

Further, a question was asked about whether family members allow women and girls to stay out of home after evening, the majority of the women respondents (72.5%) spoke that in most of the families, women and girls are not allowed to stay out of home after evening which cause women's lower rate of participation in education, economic and political activities. On the other hand, majority of men respondents (53.33%) also admit that women's movement is restricted after evening in most of the families. When women go out for various works and come back late at night, the family members as well as neighbours whisper about the nature of work done by the girl or woman. Besides, majority of women and men respondents (53.33%) consider that when women step out of home and engage in political, social or economic activities there remains a fear in the minds for loss of family prestige and dignity.

OBJECTIVES IN THE WAY OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Detailed analysis of survey data show that, majority of the respondents especially the women do not participate in the village assemblies and councils mainly because of their lack of time and engagement of household chores. Other reasons of non-participation of women are: their husbands and family members do not like it; sometimes women are not well-informed about the meetings; their opinions are not given due importance in the meetings; timing of the meetings do not suit them; their grievances and demands are often not recorded; after several appeals government benefits are not received by members belong to the opposition parties; poor and uneducated women are afraid to talk in front of rich and upper caste villagers etc.¹⁷

Apart from the above problems, the other challenges to women's participation in political and economic activities cannot be undermined. Moreover, age-old beliefs, socio-religious and cultural practices have restricted women's participation in socio-economic activities. Majority women have lower level of skill, lower rate of education, lower level of consciousness and lack of courage. Besides, dire poverty, negative social and legal environment, various familial and societal pressures, and other socio-economic factors have crippled women throughout the ages. "In fact, effectiveness of women's political presence and participation depends not solely on their

competence, capability and merit, but also on the local configuration of power and problems like poverty, illiteracy, health, lack of economic resources, negative social and legal environments, family and household pressures and various other socioeconomic factors."

5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

Educational rate of Indian people is dissymmetrical, while the rate of women's education is distressingly low in comparison with their counterparts in developed nations. The study reveals that, more than one third female respondents (36.66%) have no any formal education, while this rate for men is only 15.00. This shows a big gap between men and women's rate of illiteracy (21.66%). Also it comes to light that, only 47.49 per cent population have acquired up to secondary level of education and even below 10.00 per cent population are graduates in the area of study. The rate of graduation was 6.7 per cent in the census data of 2001, and in the study area it is 8.33 per cent of the total population. On the other hand, the number of women with post graduate degree and above is very negligible.

OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND

The result of the study shows that most of the women are home-makers (67.5%) and majority of men are engaged in self-employment (23.33%). A few percentages of women are engaged in agriculture, while the second and third major activities done by people in India are business and farming. Rural people are mostly engaged in agriculture, while in cities and towns thousands of people maintain their livelihood by setting up small shops, doing petty business and other activities of self-employment. There are a substantial number of both men and women who are unemployed, though they are having certain technical skills and educational qualifications.

INCOME SEGMENT

It is revealed from the study that more than half of women (54.16%) have not any monthly income while this percentage for males is only 6.66 per cent. It indicates that majority of women are economically dependent on their male guardians may be father or husband. Besides, those women who are engaged in self-help groups or other petty works earn from Rs. 500 to Rs. 2000 per month. There are only small percentages of women (17.49%) who earn between Rs. 5000.00 to Rs. 40,000 per month, though this rate for men (54.15%) is more than three times higher than women. Therefore, it is proved that

women have much lesser income than their male counterparts.

PERSONAL BANK ACCOUNT

The study shows that out of total population there are more personal bank accounts for men than their female counterparts. It shows that, 80.00 men have their personal bank accounts, while this rate for women respondents is only 54.00 per cent; hence, it comes to light that the numbers of personal bank accounts of females are lesser than that of half of the male population.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Participation is the maiden step toward gender empowerment. The result of the study shows that, majority of women and men participate in the elections. Though participation in politics consists of a variety of activities, a substantial number of the voters consider that political participation means mere casting votes in elections. Majority of the voters cast votes while a small number of voters do not cast their votes and some press the bottom button of the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) to the "None of the above" candidates. The result shows that the percentage of voting by men is more than women.

MODE OF PARTICIPATION

Apart from voting, there are other modes of participation. The study reveals that, only a small numbers of respondents (14.16%) participate in campaigning before elections. Another mode of participation is joining in meetings and processions. This study shows that only 11.25 per cent people comprising only 6.66 per cent women and 15.83 per cent men participate in meetings and processions. Only one-tenth of the sample respondents participate in organizing people for political purpose, and nearly 7.8 per cent respondents indicated that they mobilize people for generating awareness. Around five per cent respondents each only deliver lectures in support of a party; participate in local sittings and political discussions at home or locality. Further, 4-5 per cent people contested in elections and participated in selection of candidates in local body elections. On the other hand, a handful of respondents (3.33%) collect fund for elections and another small segment of respondents (1.25%) subscribe in elections.

WOMEN'S LESSER RATE OF PARTICIPATION IN VILLAGE ASSEMBLIES AND COUNCILS

It becomes evident from the field survey that, women's participation in village assemblies and councils is lesser

than that of their male counterparts. More than sixty per cent people of village do not participate in meetings of village councils and assemblies while out of the non-participants, half of the people are not aware of the meetings of gram sabha/sansad or village assemblies/councils.

It is observed that, most of the male members in the three states are concerned with the road construction and road repairing, 100 days works under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), culvert construction, crematorium set up, market renovation, water line connection, electrification, digging new ponds and renovation of old ones, tube well set up, sluice gate set up, water logging problem solution etc. In Moulivakkam gram panchayat area, Chennai open defecation problem, solar light issue, cleaning the garbage on regularly basis, parthenium tree cutting, rainwater harvesting, repair of old ones, constructing new drainage etc. are mainly discussed in the gram sabha meetings. Water and electricity are the main problems in the district of Tonk, Rajasthan. However, it is observed from the meeting resolutions that, women mostly demand for old age pension, house under Indira Awas Yojana, stopping bride beating, drinking habit of their husbands, controlling eve teasing, street lights etc.

PARTICIPATION IN WARD COMMITTEES

Women's participation in ward committee meetings in municipality area is also very low in comparison to their male counterparts. The study shows that, a little less than 10 per cent people including 9.16 per cent women and 8.33 per cent men only participate in the ward committee meetings. But the majority of respondents do not participate in such meetings.

GENDER GAP IN PARLIAMENT

Women's position in parliament is also discouraging. The study reveals that, out of 12 nominated members of Rajya Sabha, only 3 (25%) are women and out of total number of Rajya Sabha Members (244), only 27 (11.06%) are women (as of June, 9 2017). On the other hand, out of total 543 Members of Lok Sabha, 481 (88.58%) are men while only 62 (11.41%) are women Members of Parliament. The study indicates that there is a huge gap (77.17%) between women and men Members of Parliament.

LOWER RATE OF PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN STATE ASSEMBLIES

Women's participation in state legislatures also speaks a sorry state of affairs. The study indicates that, total

Members of Legislative Assembly in the three selected states are 729. Out of total MLAs, only 77 (10.56%) are women and majority of MLAs i.e. 652 (89.43%) per cent are men. Thus a clear gap of 78.87 per cent is observed in the area of study.²³ In Tamil Nadu this gap is 81.19 per cent while in Rajasthan and West Bengal the gap between women and men MLAs are 79 per cent 72.89 per cent respectively. It is also found that, there are total 518 cabinet ministers in Indian states and Union Territories comprising of 482 men (93.03%) and only 36 women (6.7%), while out of 40 state ministers there are only 6 female (15%) state ministers and rest 34 (85.00%) are men state ministers in Indian states and Union Territories.

MICROSCOPIC PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN THE HIGHEST POSTS

The study, further, substantiates that women are lowly represented in union ministry, governorship, chief ministership and other top political positions. Out of total 27 cabinet ministers in India, only 6 (22.22%) are females while rest 21 (77.22%) are males. Similarly, only 1 female (8.33%) is a state minister with independent charges and this number is 11 (91.66%) for men. In the same way, out of total 26 state ministers, only 1 (3.84) is a female, and 25 (96.15%) are men. The number of women governors are also very few. There are total 29 governors in India including 2 (6.89%) women and 27 (93.10%) men. On the other hand, total numbers of lieutenant governors/administrators in Union Territories are 7 including 6 men (85.71%) and 1 woman (14.28%). Similarly, in India there are 31 states, where only 3 (9.67%) are female chief ministers, while 28 (90.32%) are men. Therefore, it is estimated that out of total 132 cabinet and state ministers, governors, lieutenant governors/administrators, and chief ministers in India, only 14 (16.60%) are women and rest 118 (89.39%) are men. Thus, the study proves that women hold much lower position than men in the highest political decision making bodies' too.²⁵

Further, the study shows that, since independence Rastrapati Bhawan has got total 14 Presidents and the same number of Vice Presidents, and out of those 28 Presidents and Vice Presidents, so far India has attained only one woman President. Further, the study reveals that, till date India has got 20 Chief Election Commissioners (CECs), and out of them there was only one woman CEC in India. Since independence, the Supreme Court of India is represented by total 43 Chief Justices (up to June, 2016) and, unfortunately, not a single woman was appointed as Chief Justice so far in India,

which again proves India's male domination in judicial system.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above findings of the study, the present inquiry has disclosed that women are lagging behind in progress of their men counterparts in all the fields. Now, the recommendations are summarized hereunder.

There is no alternative to education because it is considered as the panacea for all evils such as ignorance, superstition, ill health, non-participation, non-development, disempowerment, violence against women, female feticide etc. The important role of education in enhancing greater social participation among respondents has been unequivocally established in this study.

This empirical study strongly substantiates the Indian government's skill development initiatives. It is an undeniable fact that, educated women can take wise and effective decisions in every institution from family to parliament. With women's greater modern education, their movement outside home and exposure to outside world would be improved.

After learning from educational institutions, next comes the matter of earning. Male domination and patriarchy can be challenged by the weapons of education and economic empowerment. Women's economic self-sufficiency would bring about gender equality in society and boost up sustainable development of India. This study strongly recommends for women's economic self-sufficiency. The economic empowerment can be achieved by formal and informal, full or part time engagement in skilled or unskilled works according to one's skill and qualification. Women's self-help group is now a great opportunity for rural women to be economically self-reliant at least to a small extent. MGNREGA is another scheme for rural women's livelihood mission. Women should be given business and entrepreneurship training for starting and managing their own business. Women should get financial assistance from government and special facilities for starting and expanding business. The government and private organizations must arrange for women's jobs according to their skills. The government jobs for women should be arranged nearby their home, so that they can look after their family and children before and after their duty hours.

To regulate domestic violence, women need to learn self-defence methods. Use of spray, chili powder etc. are very effective self-defence materials. Besides, compulsory self-

defence training arrangement for girls in every government and private school and college is very useful method for protecting women and girls. Marshall Art is also another tool for self-defence.

6. CONCLUSION

The issue of gender empowerment is a long and continuous process. History demonstrates that since long past women are bound in chains of traditional compulsions and ethos. With the advancement of modern education and Cultural Revolution in the global canvas, gradually it was perceived that unless women, the fifty per cent population, participate directly and actively in all developmental activities and decision making bodies, meaningful transformation towards gender empowerment and equitable development cannot be achieved. Indian society is still feudal and patriarchic in nature and traditional culture and beliefs are very much dominant in India especially in rural areas. However, against all oddity and obstructions, women are actively engaged almost in every domain from education to politics, and from economy to space research. Many even hold high and dignified posts. But the present study substantiates that there is not a single field where women's equal representation has been ensured.

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