



WOMEN'S POLITICAL SENSITIZATION THROUGH SOCIAL CAPITAL : SOME RESEARCH ISSUES

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Prologue :

The feminist scholars have now started concentrating their attentions of women's uplift is not possible without their visibility in political arena at all levels and at grassroots level in particular. Western scholars do also advocate that unless women seek power and extend their role in politics, they cannot be empowered (Stacey, M. and Price, M., 1981). The National Commission for Women of India has also expressed its intention to take steps for their political empowerment (N.C.W: 1997). It desired women to be visible and active in political spheres.

The other significant aspect of women's political empowerment is concerned with provision of reservations for them in representative bodies. In this context it is general agreement that simply getting certain percentages of women elected cannot lead to substantial results rather they should be made to participate actively in decision making process and also in democratic activities at grassroots level as well as contribute to social domain (Mohanty, B. : 1996 : n13-15). Despite constitution and statutory provisions in favour of women's political participation, there is enough evidence to prove that they have been found less participative in politics in general and in Bihar in particular (Verma, R. K. and G. K. Yadav : 1996). Now the question is-if politico-legal provisions fail to get success in empowering women at the grassroots level, what should be done?

The Quest :

Quick yet simple answer to this question is they should be made self assertive and interested in political roles in the local sociopolitical milieu. The scholarship on social capital has been much hopeful of it being a strong weapon of sensitizing weaker sections including women for political roles at grassroots level. A few studies have marked the role of social capital in this sphere (Pai, Sudha : 2001, Jayal, N.G. : 2001). But this simple answer is most difficult to be grounded. Women are regarded as weaker section and there are weakest of the weaker like SC, ST, OBC categories of women who are much more deprived than the women of middle and upper class categories. These women are subjugated at ulmost level (HRW: 1999). Then there is a big question how to sensitize such women at the grassroots level? If they are not made active at the grassroots level, again there will be host of proxy women political leaders in the representative bodies like national and state legislatures, panchayat bodies and urban local bodies besides, lower level functionaries of political parties.

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Thus, it is suggested that motivational force with spontaneous human impulse can sensitize women to exercise the politico legal strategies or provisions and potentialities created by the policy. There is strong advocacy for creation of social capital among the women actors at the society level in order to make them more assertive. Now the question is how can women be sensitized and social capital be created among them in general?

The above situation makes an urgent imperative to look into the modes of voluntary human impulse in order to educate, sensitize and motivate the common women for their political participation and sharing power structure. The role of social capital needs also to be examined. A comprehensive study is urgently required.

It is true that an array of studies has examined the political empowerment of women at the macro level, but very few studies can be found covering the micro-level examinations. Besides, some studies are happy to present examples of certain celebrated women in political sphere like Indira Gandhi, Chandrika Kumaratunge, Srimao Bhandarnayake, Sui-Kei, Margaret Thatcher and such other women political leaders (Sidiqi, F.E. : 1999). Besides, some studies indicate towards rise and fall of percentage of women representatives in legislative houses and found women politically lesser participative than their share in population and work force (Vidhanmala : 2001) Women's Share in political power structure of united Bihar (Bihar and Jharkhand combine) has been examined many scholars. Studies by R. K. Verma and G. K. Yadav (1996), R. K. Verma and Manorama Singh (2001), Henna Tabassum (2001) and some others are worth mentioning who have taken

stock of women's share in power structure. But these do not throw much light of women's political empowerment at the grassroots level. Subhash Kasyap (2001) has hinted towards the need of sensitization of women at the lower levels. The Human Rights Watch (1999) has, in its report though discussed violence plight against women, yet it describes the political misery of Scheduled Caste women in India including Bihar. Vijay Agnew has dealt the issue of political roles taken by women in Bihar in historical perspectives. He discusses the role of women in freedom struggle.

Prabhawati (1996) has underlined the legislative roles played by women political leaders inside the legislature and their shares in power structure. But all these studies have ignored the issue of political empowerment and sensitization of common women at the grassroots level in general and women of weaker sections in particular.

The term 'social capital' has been coined by western and Indian scholars in the context of both development and participative roles (Putnam, R. : 1993, Blomkvist, H. and Swain, Ashok : 2001). A very few studies on social capital for gauging the grassroots level democracy has been done very recently in India but none in context of Bihar political system (Pai; Jayal; and Mahapatra op cit). The role of voluntarism in enhancing political participation of women, sensitization of women towards political roles and motivating them for sharing power sounds unique, but it is real. Such studies have found in a few numbers, one is worth reference (Verma, R. K. and Singh M. : 2001a, 2001b). The study has raised a significant issue in this context. In short, the above review of literature suggest that it is high time to examine the issues of social capital and women's sensitization for political roles at the grassroots level.

Potential Areas of Research:

In the backdrop of the above situation and gap in literature, social capital becomes a striking issue to be examined in the context of making women politically sensitized. In this context the following are the potential areas of urgent attention —

1. Position of women in social and political spheres in the Bihar milieu.
2. Conceptual considerations on the concepts of 'social capital', 'political leadership', 'women empowerment' and 'voluntarism in political arena'.
3. The role of voluntarism in creation of social capital among women in order to sensitize them for political roles.
4. Modes of voluntary actions in this arena and making adolescents as vehicle of communication.
5. Strengthening of grassroots democracy by enhanced women political participation.

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