

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN INDIA: A PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

It is important for one to know the how India acquired her independence from the British ending the colonial rule. Similarly, it is imperative to know of the contribution of women who fought equal to men during the freedom struggle out of which, the present India enjoys the fruit of independence. This essay provides the reader not only an essence of the eminent women who fought for the independence of the freedom for India, but also, in a different perspective, how women were seen in the yester-years and why with politico-psychological explanation. Politico-psychological explanations by Aristotle and Sigmund Freud are used in this essay to provide an extended view of the women's role in independence as opposed to the generically perceived household role played by the fairer sex.

KEYWORDS: Independence, India, Politics, Political Freudianism, Women

INTRODUCTION

This essay aims to define 'politics' and introduce the reader about politics in India and women's participation in politics in India. Further, the essay shall discuss the scope of both 'politics' singularly and women and 'politics' combined with a specific geographic focus on India.

Defining Politics

'Man is by nature a political animal'

'Politics is not a science but an art' Chancellor Bismarck is reputed to have told the German Reichstag.

The word 'politics' is derived from 'polis' meaning literally 'city-state'. Politics can be understood to refer to the state of affairs of the polis – 'in effect, what concerns the polis' According to the Greeks the purpose of politics is to enable men to live together in a community and also to lead a high more life. Politics aims to foster a sense of adoption and follows certain ethical goals leading to spiritual attainment of self-realization.

Politics according to the Greeks are believed to study about the humans individually, societally and also about the society as a state and how it provides to its citizens.

Aristotle about Women

Aristotle in his book talks about the subject of household rule, and takes up the question of the proper forms of rule over women and children. As with the master's rule over the slave, and humanity's rule over plants and other animals, Aristotle defines these kinds of rules in terms of natural hierarchies:-

"The male, unless constituted in some respect contrary to nature, is by nature more expert at leading than the elder and complete than the younger and incomplete". Aristotle has concluded in tune with his time, that the women are by

nature inferior to men and this view is being refuted as being faulty in biology. It is also considered that Aristotle had a wrong belief where his belief about procreation only saw men playing a vital and dominant role with their semen which forms the foetus and those women playing a more passive role in the process.

He is also said to have believed that women are less brave than men for whom he used dubious or dodgy examples of animals, squids in this case. He also believed that whilst marriages are to provide support and peaceful co-existence in society, men should be the ones who could make the decisions. Although Aristotle had his own faulty beliefs about the gender roles and the dominance that results thereof he is also said to have believed that communal or societal harmony could only exist and prevail whether there is contribution from both the men and the women.

Psychology and Politics

Aristotle discusses the sexes and their natural psychological differences in his work Politics. He begins his discussion with a problem about moral virtue in a natural slave. Does a slave have any virtue besides that of a mere instrument? Does he require temperance, or courage, or any other such habit? But he also asks about women and children. Does a woman need to be temperate or courageous? Do those who rule by nature and those whom they rule have the same virtues? More specifically, do males and females have the same natural virtues?

Aristotle resolves the problem about the virtue. He argues that both those who rule and those who are ruled have virtue, but that they have virtue that is different. Their virtue differs because those ruled differ. He explains with an analogy to the soul and its parts. His analogy implies that someone who is a natural ruler has the virtue of the rational part, and that someone who is naturally ruled has only the virtue of the irrational part. The implication is important as that a male has a deliberative faculty which is mature and has sovereignty, and that a female has a faculty which is mature but not sovereign.

Aristotle then offers his resolution for the problem about moral justice. He concludes that those who rule and those who are ruled have different moral virtues. Someone who rules especially require complete moral virtue, but someone who is ruled does not. Thus anyone who rules has both intellectual and moral virtue, but someone who is ruled has only moral virtue.

Political Freudianism

The use of the theory of the unconscious to understand politics – first appeared in late nineteenth century Europe. The context was the waning of classical liberalism and the emergence of mass society. Contrarily, Political Freudianism was very much aligned to the left. Although the common people were not directly rejected there was somehow a psychological contract that instigated them into “populist, fascist and xenophobic” directions. In politics, Freud’s theory is to be provided a closer attention. Whilst on one hand Freudian theory promoted the patriarchic system – the importance of father – the theory also provides significance to the connection that exists between each individual in society. What Aristotle also identifies is that in a mass or a crowd, individuals irrespective of their gender wants to emphasize their ego. It is further believed that such an emphasis may be only shared with a leader or a person who could gain the favouritism of that individual in the common society.

This being a point of departure, Political Freudianism took off to merge with many new arenas. For example, Jacques Lacan reads Freud’s theory as a combination of ideology and the discourses of the ideology described. Lacan also notes that the feminist and gay liberation movements were also included in his interpretation of Freud’s theory. He says that whilst women were made to exclusively bond just between each other, his interpretation of Freud’s theory helped him

to understand that feminists paved way for a breaking-away of the traditional merging between women.

Politics in India

The women elites of Orissa changed their strategy of leadership after India achieved its Independence. Most of the women elites (old elites) chose to abstain from direct participation in electoral politics and gave way to the 'new elite' to take up this new role. The pattern of poor representation of women of India in the Lok Sabha has been repeated in Orissa. In 1952, Orissa sent 16 members to the Lok Sabha, in 1962, this number increased to 20, and since 1977, Orissa has been sending 21 members to the Lok Sabha.

Till 1962 (Third General Election), no woman from Orissa contested in the Lok Sabha elections. For the first time in 1967 Lok Sabha election, there was one woman candidate, Ms. Sailabala Patnaik who contested independently, though she lost the election. Women pioneers in all the main professions, were led by the noble motivating factors, and the idea has been "service for women by women". An interesting thing about the emergence of these pioneering professionals is that they had to create a language professionalism, till it became an acceptable channel of development of thousands of women. Witness the transformation of Florence Nightingale from the poetic image of the 'Lady of the Lamp', in the Crème an War into the driving fury of her middle-years and to the spearhead of a professional nursing movement in peace, that has made a profession of world-standing.

Taking examples from among Indian pioneers the impetus to the emancipation of women in Maharashtra was given by Maharishi D. Karve, probably the first Hindu to marry a child widow. With his wife he opened a home to encourage child-widows to be educated and remarried. Dr. Ida Scudder of Vellore fame, was inspired early to go in for medicine when she saw two young women dying within 24 hours of each other, merely because the family would not permit a qualified medical man to attend on them. Bombay, Calcutta and Madras Universities opened their doors to women for medical education. In law, Corenelia Sorabji turned-up virgin-soil as the first Indian woman barrister.

The participation of women in Indian politics can be traced in many ways. The freedom struggle in India is one of the few liberation movements in the world, which witnessed a vast participation by women. The extent, nature and method of this participation broadly followed the pattern of the evolution and growth of the Indian national movement as a whole. Sixty years of the movement witnessed the beginning and gradual growth of women's participation. There was formal, direct and visible participation of women in various activities like singing, writing, partaking in protests, processions, going to jail, etc., and in the more peaceful forms Satyagraha and non-violent non-cooperation. Married women even took-up training in gun carrying. And there was an informal process of participation such as lending support and backing up with various activities, which have not always been singled-out.

The presence and contribution of the women, however, were recognized by the leaders, particularly during the era of Gandhi's leadership. At the same time, the absence of a separate women's selection in the movement meant that the various organizations pursuing the interests of women had to act on their own; they also served as pressure groups both on the British rule and on Indian National Movement. Many women served in both, establishing a link between the two. By the beginning of the twentieth century, many women's organizations working specifically on women's organizations working specifically on women's issues were born. Women's education, health, training colleges for women, construction of homes for widows, scholarships medical colleges and short maternity courses for women, etc., were some of the issues women's organizations were concerned about They also recognized quickly that the emancipation was inextricably linked

to the political freedom of the nation. The various organizations, dealing with the multifarious problems and activities of women, had to be brought together and amalgamated, if women's questions had to be highlighted and their emancipation achieved. It was with this in view that the All India's Women's Conference was created in October 1926. Many women believed that their rights and issues could not be secured in isolation from nationalist struggle.

CONCLUSIONS

Women political aspirants are still captives under the veil of patriarchy even in the domain of reservation. Most of the time the male members dominate the election campaign, etc., because of some restrictions being traditionally imposed on women to go outside home during night and for other reasons. On the contrary, the elected representatives of Assam – the women – are active participants in the election. This is new to the patriarchic world exhibiting women empowerment. However, it is depressive that a large majority participates without any homework and as a result they mostly become backbenchers, without meaningful participation.

By examining the role performance, political participation, nature of emerging women leadership, socio-economic background features of women and their family members, perceptions of male representatives and the civil society on women leadership we find that though women are not fully successful in playing their role as development participants, their participation.

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