



CHETANA

International Journal of Education

Impact Factor
SJIF 2021 - 6.169

Peer Reviewed/
Refereed Journal

ISSN-Print-2231-3613
Online-2455-8729



Prof. A.P. Sharma
Founder Editor, CIJE
(25.12.1932 - 09.01.2019)

Received on 05th Jan. 2022, Revised on 8th Feb. 2022, Accepted 12th Feb. 2022

Article

Political Empowerment of Tribal Women in Jharkhand

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Key words - Political Empowerment, Tribal Women, Jharkhand etc.

Abstract

It is believed that the real status of a country is studied by the social, cultural, economic and political status of its women. Their social status of women is not only helpful in understanding the history of that society, but it is also possible to determine what the future will be. Almost 20 years have passed since the establishment of Jharkhand. Jharkhand is a tribal dominated state, where it is very important to understand the contribution of tribal women in different areas of society, politics is the most powerful medium of social change, it is politics through which the condition and direction of a society can be conquered but as far as the level of education of women in the total population is seen, it is very less than men. Similarly, how actively the women of tribal society are participating in the decisions related to policy making and development of the state, how much place has got here in the political system and how much participation has been ensured in the decisions to solve the issues related to the state, it is a matter of important consideration.

Introduction

Women and girls represent 50 per cent of the world's population, yet are often excluded from the political arena, and shut out of decision-making that directly affects their lives. Increasing women's political participation and leadership are vital mechanisms that support women to realize their human rights. Increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making has proven to be good for economic and social development around the world.¹ In spite of Constitutional provisions of gender equality in India yet only a few women have been able to make a room for themselves in the decision making process in Legislature.² Women's increased presence in political institutions has not necessarily led to meaningful change in women's everyday lives.³ After 20 years of its establishment the state Jharkhand still characterised as Socio-economically backward and educationally deprived state. ⁴ Various national reports say the percentage of child marriage is much higher in Jharkhand compared to the national average of 47%. According to the Annual Health Survey of 2010-11, Jharkhand comes on the third position after Bihar and Rajasthan with 51.8% girls being married below 18 years. ⁵ This article mainly examines the various dimensions related to political empowerment of women of tribal society of Jharkhand state in a subtle way and its objective is to know that after the establishment of Jharkhand how far tribal women have become so politically capable and empowered. What kind of challenges and problems are being faced, as well as what would be the right way for the future that the women of Jharkhand state, especially the tribal women, can ensure their decisive participation on politics and administration.

Concept of Political Empowerment of Women

Women's empowerment (or female empowerment) may be defined in several ways, including accepting women's viewpoints or making an effort to seek them, raising the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training.⁶ Women's empowerment equips and allows women to make life-determining decisions through the different problems in society.⁷ They may have the opportunity to redefine gender roles or other such roles, which in turn may allow them more freedom to pursue desired goals.⁸

Political empowerment supports creating policies that would best support gender equality and agency for women in both the public and private spheres. Methods that have been suggested are to create affirmative action policies that have a quota for the number of

women in policy making and parliament positions.⁹ As of 2017, the global average of women who hold lower and single house parliament positions is 23.6 percent.¹⁰ Further recommendations have been to increase women's rights to vote, voice opinions, and the ability to run for office with a fair chance of being elected.¹¹ Because women are typically associated with child care and domestic responsibilities in the home, they have less time dedicated to entering the labour market and running their business. Policies that increase their bargaining power in the household would include policies that account for cases of divorce, policies for better welfare for women, and policies that give women control over resources (such as property rights).¹² However, participation is not limited to the realm of politics. It can include participation in the household, in schools, and the ability to make choices for oneself. Some theorists believe that bargaining power and agency in the household must be achieved before one can move onto broader political participation.¹³

Due to the emergence of information and communication technology and social media, the traditional structure and functioning of politics has went under big change. It has played an important role in politically empowering the youth of the present generation. Its impact can also be seen on the political side of women empowerment in tribal community. Today, due to social media technology tribal women are able to know the issues related to them and even they are coming out more vocally by the means of social media platforms.

Nature and dynamics of tribal politics in Jharkhand

The issue of water, forest and land is also at the center of the current tribal political consciousness. Jharkhand has been determined to protect it since historical times. And the women of the tribal society fought to save the tribal culture and heritage of the state and also sacrificed their live. India is a democratic country and since independence, there is a parliamentary tradition of governance based on representatives elected by the people. For a long time, the agenda of mainstream society has acted as the central axis in Indian politics and tribal society could not find the place in central politics that could be expected in a democratic society like other influential communities. Even when Jharkhand was a part of the state of Bihar, the tribal community was marginalized in the politics of the state.

After the formation of Jharkhand as a new state, the political consciousness of the tribal community increased and came in the central role in the politics of the state, but as far as women are concerned, even today tribal women are marginalized in the politics of the state.

In the recently held assembly election(2019), although 10 women representatives from the total assembly constituencies of the state reached the assembly, but as far as tribal women are concerned, it is very less.¹⁴ The same elected tribal women MLAs have already been from politically strong families, such as - Sita Soren, Joba Manjhi etc. are related to Shibu Soren's family. The question is not about the dominance of any political party, but the empowerment of women politically. How the maximum participation of tribal women in electoral politics can be ensured is important. The political participation of tribal women has certainly increased due to the reservation received under the existing Panchayati Raj system, but many challenges have emerged in this too.

Political Empowerment of Tribal Women in Jharkhand

Political supremacy of mainstream society, party politics, politics of appeasement, lack of coordination among tribal politicians, populism, social identity, multiculturalism and linguistic diversity, socio-economic and educational backwardness, etc., are many serious issues that poses challenges to the political empowerment of the tribal community. Although now due to the information and communication revolution, social media and increase in level of education among the youth, there is an increase in political consciousness and now tribal women are becoming more aware about politics than before.

The biggest problem of Indian politics has been the weakening of the ethics of politics. This indicates the moral degradation of Indian politics, where power uses the system and institutions of democracy to stay in power according to its agenda. This is seen in the politics of Jharkhand, which has limited the public to the right to vote only. Organizational efforts have to be made to empower tribal women politically in the state, linking education and employment with training for leadership and skill development will be an effective step.

Empowering tribal women politically will promote the preservation and promotion of tribal culture of Jharkhand, while the entry of tribal women into politics will give positive emphasis on women's rights and its use. The way in which many types of problems with women like- physical abuse, migration for employment, illiteracy, child marriage, human trafficking, sex trade, rape, child labor etc. are seen, the increase in political awareness of tribal women will strengthen to be more vocal about their rights and they will be able to keep women's subjects prominently in the decision related to the development of the state.

Conclusion

Empowerment is a broad concept, there is a lack of opinion among the intellectuals about its real meaning, but the relation of empowerment is definitely to enable a person in different dimensions in his life or to ensure an equal chance of becoming capable. Jharkhand is a state which is identified with tribal culture. Nature-friendly natural society is the beautiful identity of Jharkhand state. But since the historical period, this land of Jharkhand, which has been full of natural resources, has been the main center of exploitation of resources for all the central authorities till now, but the main concerns of the tribal society here which were mainly related to water, forest and land, still exists today. The importance of tribal culture is less visible even in the current politics of the state when it should have been a central theme. In comparison to other states, the socio-economic, cultural and political status of women in the state of Jharkhand has been relatively weak, despite this, necessary efforts have not been made to give women a proper place in the state politics. Politically empowering tribal women of the state should be the first priority of the government and for this institutional and planned efforts should be made. Tribal women can be empowered more politically through Panchayati Raj system, but for this, governments need to organize leadership training and awareness programs from time to time, apart from reservation for women under Panchayati Raj system. The leaders of the tribal community will have to come forward regarding tribal issues so that the problems related to the community can be solved and those obstacles can be removed which are in the form of challenges to the tribal women in the way of entering politics.

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