

CALL FOR PAPERS

UGC SPONSORED NATIONAL SEMINAR

Title - Women and Politics in India: 1913 - 2013

Organised by

Lalbaba College, Howrah

in Collaboration with

Women's Study Centre, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata

26th & 27th November, 2014

Venue: Sarat Chandra Sabhagrihya, Lalbaba College

Issues relating to women have become very significant today, both from academic and practical standpoints. Women's studies have evolved as a major discourse integrating different disciplinary perspectives. No nation or society can afford to move along the path of development neglecting women, who constitute roughly half of the society. Where women constitute half the population in a political system which supports equality and where both women and men are legally eligible for political office, women's participation should be equal to that of men. The world's largest democracy, India, falls in the lowest quartile with respect to the number of women in parliament.

While the Indian democratic state is committed to the protection of individual rights within the context of citizenship, a closer look at how it operates for the women reveals that these rights are not accessible in the public and private spheres in their full potential to all the women in India. The evolution of Indian democracy through the general elections so far has reflected a low representation of women in Parliament, State legislatures, in political parties and other decision-making bodies. Representation of women leaders at the grassroots level in India is nearly 50%, especially since the passing of the 73rd amendment of 1992, which allotted one-third of all seats to women. Still, in India, the impact of women panchayat members and chiefs (*pradhans*) on the administration of local bodies did remain peripheral. The problem of Indian politics is that reservation is made for women but women are not included in these policies. Clearly, it is the male panchayat members who call the shots by carrying out most of the proposals for developmental schemes. The under representation of women in the political sphere is inextricably linked with the low and inferior status of women in society in India especially in the context of the declining sex ratio, increasing violence and crimes against women and their marginalized status in employment, education and health sectors.

Another interesting observation regarding participation of women in Indian politics is that barring striking exceptions where dynastic charisma is seen to matter more than anything else - most women politicians have found it difficult to rise within party hierarchies. They are especially relegated to the "women's wing" of the party, and made to concentrate on what are seen as specifically "women's issues" such as dowry and rape cases, and occasionally on more general concerns like price rise which are seen to affect especially "housewives". They have managed to achieve clear leadership only when they have effectively broken out and set up parties on their own. Yet once these women become established as leaders, another peculiarly Indian characteristic seems to dominate - that is the unquestioning acceptance by the (largely male) party rank and file of the leader's decisions.

Thus it seems clear that the actual political power remained something of a male domain and only few crumbs are thrown to women. Women are unjustifiably rare in the decision-making bodies. This is the real situation that exists in India in terms of political participation of women. Often they are treated as subordinates to man almost in every place. As a result, the advancement of women seems constrained at all levels including media.

Media once played an important role in strengthening the women's empowerment movement. Now media's role has changed from being a 'social institution' into a 'trader' or 'businessman' which treats 'citizens' as 'customers'. Glossy supplements of newspapers prefer to use women as commodities to increase their circulation. Reports of violence against women are covered widely for the same reason. Media projects two extreme characters of women, one being traditional (submissive) and the other modern and liberal (aggressive) which is driven by market forces and is an offshoot of the consumerist society. Many of the old stereotype roles like housewife or mother have been modified and have been replaced by new stereotypes which emerged due to the changed social economic political scenario in India, due to globalization in the 1990s and parallel developments in the media. Though the number of women journalists is increasing except the mainstream media companies, most women working in newspapers and magazines are in low paying positions. Most women in journalism are sub-editors, who have limited responsibility, and women reporters are often given 'soft' or development beats, not political or important beats.

The objectives of the seminar are as follows:

- to know the role of women in politics in both colonial and post-colonial India,
- to know the condition, position and participation of women in the political life of India during the last hundred years,
- to know the narratives of women in the various sectors of the Indian society during the last century,
- to know the story of women's empowerment,

- to know the women working in the media and the issue of women's empowerment,
- to know the aspect of commodification of women in their representation in media,
- to give a platform to the young scholars for expansion of knowledge,
- to know the young minds about their views on women in Indian politics and
- to review the Government's spirit about the matter.

The Seminar would therefore encourage discussion and papers on these and we welcome proposals in the following areas (but not strictly limited to them):

- Women & Politics in Colonial India
- Women & Politics in Post-Colonial India
- Women, Media & Empowerment

Abstracts of no more than 250 words are invited from presenters and may be sent at the following email id - lalbabacollege@yahoo.com within **1st October, 2014**. Selection of abstracts shall be made and presenters shall be duly informed by the 7th of October, 2014. **Completed papers need to be submitted by selected presenters at the above email id by the 15th of November, 2014.**