

The Gendering Role and Image Building in Politics

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Abstract

Women's heroic image has been created in politics of India either by themselves or their counterparts. Whatever be the reason behind this image making or terminology used for women politicians, the matter is its effect on politics. The role of women in Indian politics can be analyzed through their participation and contribution in the development of our country. Then they are considered weaker than men because we have a patriarchal society, where women cannot get any credit. This study deals with the emergence of women in politics and proves their decision making power in favour of social welfare. Further, it explains the role of patriarchy in power dominance where respect and honour both create a boundary for women. Since the women started intervening in politics, initially they had to work within the borders because they faced challenges not from their male counterparts but also female colleagues. So the term came into existence where they can relate themselves with their female counterpart. In a patriarchal society, Amma (mother), Behen (sister) or Didi (elder sister) is the most respectful nomenclature. Therefore, these terminologies are helpful to encourage women in politics which is lagging in Bihar. This can be analyzed through the role of women in panchayat elections where men are ruling in their name.

Key words: Gender, Politics, Panchayati Raj, Bihar.

I. Introduction

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 330). Simone de Beauvoir explains that the differences between man and woman are not based on sex but gender. Gender evaluates the cultural understanding of a female body, while biologically it is not determining what makes a woman a “woman.” Beauvoir discusses how ‘self’ and ‘other’ concepts that are created by man and to define “self” they need the ‘other.’ And the woman has been defined as “other” to established man dominance and oppressed by man in the society. This is the concept of ‘others’ which a woman always has to prove herself. Throughout history, myth and mythology have created woman as the second gender. Even the story of women warriors shows how a woman fought like a hero that means as powerful and equal to man. Or, sometimes woman’s aggression has framed as motherly motivations appropriated with socially protective (Heinecken, 2003).

The construction of ‘Hero’ image making is to achieve political power that is again to prove the male dominance indirectly. Various political parties use cultural resources like folk songs, folk tales and heroes to unite those communities under the electoral fold (Narayan, 2001). The image making of Ms. Mayawati by *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh is a project of political power dominance. If it is the real motive of the dominating male politics to give equal chances to all woman candidates, then why there is no other Mayawati? There are many more women leaders who have made their image due to leadership quality. But then, the women’s representation has increased neither in the assembly nor within the political party. However, it is not true to say that women legislators in India perform less efficiently as compared with men. Many Women are trying to break the glass ceiling in politics but their voices are still unheard, and their contributions are often sidelined. In most of the sectors such as finance, economic development, foreign affairs, defence, trade, infrastructure, etc., women are seen as less capable and less responsible in

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comparison with men. They are treated as less efficient in making quick judgments or incapable of taking a decision. Politics is also not untouched by this understanding of the position of women.

Jacob has discussed how in the parliament where women have been given a portfolio of 'women' or just allowed to sit in the legislature but not engaged in the decision-making process. Due to gender norms, women are pushed into low prestige appointments rather than the high prestige appointments. That is to show the male dominance over the females in the society. Although women constitute about 50 per cent of the population of the world, in the decision making bodies their representation is less than 20 per cent. Globally there was a sudden increase in participation of women in politics after the 1990s, and yet they continue to be under-represented (Jacob, 2014).

According to Election Commission of India Report, after 2009 parliament election, women's representation in the parliament is only nine per cent (Spary, 2014). Some women emerged with a heroic image in state politics, but that also could not help their representation in politics. States such as Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, etc., which witnessed women representatives in governments proved their decision-making capabilities but failed to increase women's representation in their state legislatures. Why is it so? In these states, women's representation in the parliament and state assemblies is modest: seven per cent in Tamil Nadu, eight per cent in Uttar Pradesh and 12 per cent in West Bengal. In Bihar, the women's representation is the highest in India. What is the reason behind it? To explore this, I have focused on social structure and ideological and political variables which affect the women's representation. How has the role of patriarchy continued in politics by the women's representatives too who try to break the social norms but are not able to throw it out from within.

This paper explores the idea of heroic image in politics and its significance. Section II discusses patriarchy and gender, and how it is constructed to overcome the power. Section III explains power domination by the males through the help of patriarchal construction and how it continues in politics too and contextualizes the heroic image of women in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh in naming politics and how much has it succeeded in comparison with Bihar where the same is lagging. In the concluding Section, the paper analyses patriarchy and power domination in Bihar where '*Panchayat Pati*' (husband of the female representatives) has an essential role in decision-making needs to break the stereotype women image and give equal opportunity in education to capacitate them in politics.

II. Gender and Patriarchy

The use of term, gender, is rooted in our existing social order. Gender means not only the sexual differences but also power and sexual hierarchy (Acker, 1990). Sex is a biological difference between male and female while gender is socially constructed. Illich (1982) argues that gender is an assigned or imposed role by a society that is internalised by individuals. These positions reflect the social commitments between both the sexes to complement each other. *Complementarity* is not a formally rigid division of some predefined tasks into repetitive responses and sequences for this is the essence of the division of labour and industrial discipline. So gender is accepted as cultural differences in behaviour which distinguishes "places, times, tools, tasks, forms of speech, gestures, and perceptions", (p. 381) but not to keep women at 'their place.' (Illich, 1982, p. 381))

This role of gender is institutionalised through the family and kinship where the part of a woman is fixed inside the house. Reproduction and child rearing become the functions of women in the family. After industrialization when the surplus value was extracted from both male and female labourers, an attempt to re-gendering the concept of workplaces was made. Capitalist societies gave equal opportunity to work without limiting the means of production in the name of gender to generate surplus mode of production. Women got the same status in the workplace, but this has qualified with '*merit.*' Illich (1982) defines merit regarding capabilities. So these

capabilities cannot associate with gender. A man can be less capable than a woman, or she can be more capable than a man. But in the male-dominated society, merit is associated with power relations and is misused to discriminate women at the workplaces. Illich discusses the economic discrimination against women that can be seen in the present economic system which is biased toward sex. "I know of no industrial society where women are the economic equals of men. Of everything that economic measures, women get less" (Illich, 1982. p.4). Economic discrimination against women appears when development sets in. It does not then go away; nothing indicates that it ever will. I concluded that the struggle to create economic equality between genderless humans of two different sexes resembles the efforts made to square the circle with the ruler and straight edge" (pp. 65-66). Efforts have been made to unmask "what men and women are" (p. 66). This difference between them is continued in everyday life from family suppression to the workplace discrimination to the state legitimacy of power through the male dominance.

Some people notice these male-female differences within the patriarchal setting through everyday experience. They even accept it as it is. Most of the time women in the family kept on trying to correct a child into a perfect female, e.g., how a girl should speak, to whom and where and how much she should speak. If you are not following the norms, then you get threatened with punishment. It's not only men who try to oppress women, but women also suppress other women in the family or outside. Since it's not men alone who want to enjoy the power of superiority but women also. So they experience their patriarchy through their sons over their wives. Manto (1981) has explained this in his story how a mother enjoys patriarchy through her son. She loves to scare her daughter-in-law or threatens her in the name of her son. Patriarchy is a political system that insists that males are intrinsically dominating, superior to everything, and everyone is deemed feeble, especially females. They are endowed with the right to govern and decree over the weak to maintain that supremacy over various forms of psychological intimidation and violence (Hooks, 2013).

Moreover, people around us don't even use the word in everyday life or are aware of the term patriarchy. In daily life, we can experience patriarchy within the family in school, temple and workplace. Some people see patriarchy regarding women's liberation and associate it with feminism and, therefore, dismiss it as irrelevant to their experiences in everyday life. Women have tried to break these norms but failed because they have grown with the concept of being weaker than man and at the end accepted it. Aristotle said that women are weaker than men and need to be protected (Clark, 1982). This concept has popularised all over the world. It can also be seen in history when women were used as a commodity and didn't have rights. The first effort was taken by feminist leaders who demanded civil rights to vote for women and achieved it. This was supported by a liberal feminist who demanded that women should have equal rights with men. Women tried to question the patriarchal system and its norms to dominate women in the society. For example, the social settings of womanhood's pride in being a mother are not at all given importance by everyone. Simon de Beauvoir has argued how women are prepared from their infancy that they are made for "childbearing." Feminists insisted that the role of childbearing is socially constructed to exclude women from productive parts. Their radical approach has been criticized all over the world by conservative patriarchy. They justified by arguing that everybody is born with some special power like what women can but man cannot, and so everybody should perform his/her duty to maintain the social cycle. The relegation of women and motherhood ostensibly to the unproductive sphere of reproduction gave men control over women's lives (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011). Their (biological and social) reproduction, their children and work allowed them to exploit women for their private, economic, demographic, political, nationalistic or other purposes (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995; Roathman, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997). So becoming mother implies obeying the system which denied women self-determined motherhood rights. That is why motherhood becomes the means of resistance against the regime. The social construction of family as an institution where the roles assigned to men and women create differences between the two, and it is legitimized by the social relationships followed by norms.

Patriarchy limits the right of women through their role

The family is an institution where patriarchy originates (Pateman, 2009). Henry Maine has supported this through his patriarchal theory that man is considered as the dominant authority over his wife and children (Maine, 2000). His views were supportive of Aristotle and Plato who treated man as stronger than woman that gave him the reason for being authoritative. The head of the family is always male - either husband or father-in-law. Women's work is limited to inside the household like that of a good wife or mother or sister. These relationships have created a boundary for women as well as restrictions by men on women whether they have a sexual relationship or not. Within a family, women play the role of mother, mother-in-law, sister, sister-in-law, etc. The part of the mother is to take care of children, should be emotional and caring, and will never show her pain no matter whatever the circumstances. A mother's priority should always be her children. Same as a mother, a daughter has to be taught to be a good mother, and she should not equate herself with her brother. After mother, a sister is also seen as a would-be mother in the same kind of role. Motherhood is a concept with which feminists have a problem because it makes patriarchy stronger or subordinates women as weaker than men. This experience of motherhood is different for every woman owing to caste/class/religion/ethnicity, etc. No one can justify the experience of a rape survivor, how she is experiencing the motherhood or a prostitute whose work is to sell her body. So the lesson of motherhood can be pleasant for some women but not for everyone. Motherhood is unique because it shows her loyalty towards one man and it's her responsibility towards her family and children. Nothing is more important than these relationships. Woman is a divine figure who sacrifices her life for her children and husband. This is the patriarchal construction to bound women in specific emotional connections. Women are not able to come out of this boundary or whenever they have tried are bound by these relationships.

Patriarchy limits women's accessibility to power

Gender prescriptions across historical eras suggest arbitrariness. In some cultures, women wear long, flowing garments as a matter of course, but in others the idea of a 'man in a dress' is viewed with alarm. There was a time in North America when the now familiar mantra that "pink is for girls and blue is for boys" was reversed and pink was considered a strong, "masculine" colour. All gender prescriptions are not arbitrary. Many of them help to maintain hierarchy in which men hold power over women. A man demonstrates his masculinity by exercising power, but a woman can often indicate her femininity by behaving acquiescently. So when somebody violates gender norms, she also challenges the gender hierarchy. Pratto and Walker (2004) argued that in societies that emphasize hierarchical social arrangements in which value towards men are socialized and encouraged authority enhancing values that emphasize the promotion of the interests of the dominant group. This is the social dominance theory which explains that men and women hold different values that promote perceived suitability for different kinds of occupational roles: men for positions that involve wielding power and influence, while women for positions that are supporting and empowering others (Hilary, 2015).

Political construction and patriarchy continued

Rudman and Glick (2008) argued that there are twin factors rooted in the gender stereotypes: one is the social structure that assigns to the men more power and status than the women, and second is the intimate interdependence of gender roles. Masculine stereotypes help to maintain gender hierarchy by ensuring that men are trained in and reinforced for behaviour that keeps their power and status high: leadership, decision-making, dominance and achievement-oriented behaviour, while feminine stereotypes safeguard the hierarchy by keeping the pressure on girls and women to assume traditional, supportive and nurturing roles. These two sets of status differentiating roles are interdependent; promoting a great deal of everyday role which guided social contact between women and men.

The power and status with masculinity can be seen in the differing reactions of female and male political leaders. Participants in one study reacted negatively to female politicians portrayed as interested in seeking power, but men's power-seeking intentions did not affect participants' reactions to them (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). Not only did respondents express less desire to vote for a "power-seeking" woman politician than for a woman not perceived as seeking power, but they were also more likely to express feelings of moral outrage towards her: emotions of contempt, anger and disgust. This moral outrage was based on the woman's violation of the prescription that she should be communal in her focus. Such reactions to women perceived as ambitious or power-oriented serve to keep them out of dominant positions and maintain a status difference between women and men.

Through our constitution, an attempt was made to give equal rights to the vote to women. Some affirmative actions were also introduced for their social development. It was the first time when their participation in politics has also been considered through the 33 per cent reservation in *panchayat* elections.

III. Leadership and Gender

It is a stereotype that man has grown with leadership quality which is not true; it is the societal dominance of man over women. Men are groomed in the way of hard, terrible, decision making, etc., while woman as soft and weak. Political leadership is a domain where gender equality is lagging. Despite some development in recent decades, women's representation in parliaments in the countries of the world is less than 20 per cent (Quota Project, 2013). In India, women's representation in the parliament is low because it is projected that women candidates are placeholders for men. Sometimes it is dismissed with the idea of *Biwi Beti Bahu* (wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law), female legislators "tend to become mere figureheads with no power bargaining" (Haq, 2000). This trend in Indian politics where women tried to make the space for themselves against male dominance but forced to accept this patriarchal boundary of relationship is regrettable.

Moreover, women's position in the political sphere is contradictory at the present juncture. The political rights have been presented to women without having any facilities to exercise them. Thus, empowerment is necessary to achieve their goal. Education, health facilities, social awareness, etc., are the primary needs to give them consciousness of rights to share in economic, social and political life in the society. Political power plays an important role in the domination of women. Thus, engendering politics is the need of the hour. Women are completely excluded and incapacitated for centuries that they cannot stand without any strong support provided to them. However, this cannot be repudiated that in spite of vast differences in approaches, there is a recognition that virtually across time and place men and women are unequal in power. They have either in the society or over their own lives the corollary belief that all schools of knowledge must be re-examined and understood to reveal the extent to which they ignore or distort gender (Arneil, 1999). There is unanimity among the feminists on the issue that women are handicapped because they are bereft of power. Thus, they should be empowered or endowed with power. The universal suffrage is not a sufficient condition of granting women equal political rights. Figueira & Saari (1987) discussed the obstacles which come on the way to access political power. First, in the close relationship between economy and politics, women are a disadvantaged group. Second, as new comers in overwhelmingly male institutions, they have to compete with internal legitimacy. Thus, the core of politics is to exercise the power which is located within the large patriarchal domination, where men occupy hierarchical positions to have dominance over women.

However, the women's movement in India faced difficulties to achieve gains regarding the invisibility of women in politics. Since the 73rd Amendment of the constitution was passed, women's participation in *panchayat* institutions increased. At the same time, we observed that women's dependence on the support system of male leader has also declined. The heroic image of *Behan*, *Didi* and *Amma* in the country became the ideal leadership for women in politics. Although

the creation of this nomenclature is again patriarchal, it conveys the message that women alone are sufficient in decision-making positions not in India but all over the world.

Three political images in Indian politics describe their fighting spirit. Charisma and administrative skills left male leaders far behind when it comes to voting. Their eminent personality has emerged as *Behan*, *Didi* and *Amma*, but again it becomes the naming politics. At a time when politics of India turns into muscular-nationalistic-patriarchal, these women matriarchs are important to challenge them.

Amma

In the politics of Tamil Nadu, the image of J. Jayalalithaa as *Amma* had been created to seek the attention of women in politics. She took this turn to enter politics. She came from the film background, and there was a preconceived notion that women working in the films are not respectable. When she joined politics for the first time, she suffered from that stereotype norms of women not having a good character not only by her male counterparts but also by fellow females. She decided to break these stereotype norms about women's image. The self-proclaimed motherhood figure of *Amma* is an example of it. Therefore, her approach was to break down these patriarchal norms through the patriarchal role and create for herself as the image of a mother. We all know the concept of mother is to give everything to her children without keeping anything for herself. People were carried away with this idea, and once again patriarchy won. She introduced welfare schemes for the development of women in the society. They became empowered and their educational level improved in the state. But their participation in politics has not increased as much as it should have. Tamil Nadu has become the seventeenth state to introduce 50 per cent women's reservation in *panchayat* elections. But within the political groups, the seats for women candidates have declined.

Didi

In West Bengal, Mamta Banerjee joined politics in the 1970s and later in 1997 left the Congress and established All-India Trinamool Congress to become its chair person. She became minister for railways, human resources, youth and sports affairs, and women and child development. Once in parliament, she dragged an opposition leader to prevent him from protesting against women's reservation bill. After a long battle, she finally became the chief minister. Through her journey, we know that one positive aspect is her being of an upper caste, she chanced to get into education, and the same caste helped her to join politics. It also helps her in image making of good characters and especially when she didn't marry. The elder sister or *Didi* makes her image clearer and robust.

Behen

In Uttar Pradesh Mayawati has a heroic image created by Kanshi Ram in politics. There are debates going on about her image building as a *Dalit* woman leader. But why no other woman came to the forefront of the party? Somehow it seems to be a failure of the Bahujan Samaj Party which could not produce another Mayawati. Her role in state politics brought changes in everyday life of *Dalit* women but not in politics. The registered number of cases against Preventions of Atrocities Act (POA), 1989 has increased which shows the positive effect in the social sphere.

But after studying the political image in all these states, we feel that it's not that they got the space in politics easily. To achieve these positions, they went through a long battle of stereotype norms, role, patriarchy and caste. These terminologies have given them a chance to glorify their image and categorise themselves as "good women" and to established patriarchy in politics. Although, all these three women have an important role in Indian politics, but at the same time naming them is to define their relationship with their people. While there is another important thing behind this naming is the vote-bank politics of caste. We cannot deny the role of caste in Indian

politics. Thus, *Dalit* women, in particular, have to fight against caste oppression and patriarchal social structure in general.

When we compare these three states having heroic women leaders, in Bihar State Assembly we find that women's representation is higher. The recent NHFS-4 data shows that 49.6 per cent women in Bihar own land either alone or jointly which is higher than all India average of 28.3 per cent (IIPS & ICF, 2017). Land is the main source of income in agrarian society and sign of power. But that doesn't increase their decision making power in Bihar. Women justify their role with mythological character of Sita for whom husband is everything in life after marriage. There are no images like those of *Amma*, *Didi*, and *Behen* in Bihar which can fascinate rural women to show their power dominance over men. It can be justified in the panchayat elections where panchayat pati (husband of the woman representative) plays an important role. In the recent study of panchayat elections of Uttar Pradesh, Sudha Pai found that the elected women panchayat members hardly use their institutions to fight for improvement either in their conditions or in those of other women (Pai, 1998). Therefore, those who show no interest in power get more preferences which again indicates the male dominance. Hence, the more we try to break the male dominance, the more we incline towards patriarchy. However, in panchayat election women having no prior history of activism become token or mere figureheads who are silenced and marginalized, and in extreme situations subject to violence and harassment.

IV. Conclusion

To raise women's position it is necessary to protect them from patriarchal subordination (Sultana, 2012). It is a patriarchal ideology which differentiates between men and women and assigns different roles, rights, and responsibilities to them. The stereotype norms of women as weaker than men and not capable of decision-making leads to their less representation in politics. Only after breaking the gender-based decision-making norms, can we increase women's legislative representation. It can give space to their appointment in prestigious positions vis-a-vis other appointments (Jacob, 2014). We have a recent example of Irom Sharmila who was on the fast for several years against the government. Her image is of a heroic woman martyr as she dared to fight against the government. But the moment she decided to fight against the government after entering into the politics, it's not welcoming for her regarding vote share. Again, we can go with Okimoto's argument that the more preference to seeking power, less the respondents giving voting preferences (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). Thus, we have to break all the stereotype expectations from women and assert an individual power which is neither male nor female. Hence, the study concludes that to develop participatory mechanisms of empowerment, it is not the only solutions but also to overcome the structural inequalities of social power is essential. The reservations brought them stand in front of the male-dominated society. This made a difference in the lives of women. It has also made them realize that illiteracy prevents them from active role in panchayat affairs. Therefore, reservation along with education will transform the lives of women and politics.

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