

GENDER GAPS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION – A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDIA AND BANGLADESH

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The present study on Gender Gaps and Political Participation: A Comparative Study of India and Bangladesh was undertaken to examine the dimensions of prevailing gender gaps and also to explore the differences in the status of women across these countries. Multifarious factors including socio-cultural, educational economic and political ones are said to be responsible for the continued gender gaps in India and Bangladesh.

Another important objective of the study has been to make cross country analysis of the women's political empowerment in the 1990s with special reference to these two countries and also to evaluate the programmes initiated by both government institutions and the NGOs for empowering the women in India and Bangladesh.

In the course of the study few hypotheses have been tested. The main one has been that political participation of women is conspicuously meager in India and Bangladesh mainly due to their economic dependence on males and their low level of education and socio-economic and their cultural shackles. Further empowerment of women educationally, socially and economically would directly contribute to their effective and wider participation in the political processes and systems in the two countries. Through concerted efforts and initiatives by the government, various women's organizations and NGOs, the process of educational, social, cultural and economic advancement of women could be accelerated.

The detailed analysis of the dimensions of gender gaps in the decision making and political process in India and Bangladesh has evinced that the essence of good governance lies, on one hand, in the inclusion of local level planning in the national government and on the other hand, the success of a local government depends on people's participation. It is the grassroot level people who could contribute significantly to the governance of their communities. However, unequal participation of women and men in the government planning works as a barrier to ensure good governance in both Bangladesh and India. After few decades of research focused on gender equality, it is clear that there is a crucial need for a gender specific development paradigm into all areas of policy making and development planning so that women's needs and aspirations can be met and their fullest participation in the political process ensured accordingly. Decentralization has been identified as one of the important prerequisite to ensure gender balance into development process.

Increasingly, women have stood for elections both at the national and local level and got elected. Moreover, the number of women representatives has been increasing in both

the countries, but as mentioned earlier, they have still not fully represented the female population.

Reducing the very wide gender gaps in political participation that exist in India and Bangladesh should be foremost priorities of these two countries. Their initiatives should be in the areas which have been recognized as the core elements in improving the status of women viz. health, education and socio-economic and political empowerment of women. Besides, the thrust of the educational system should be on knowledge and skills through vocational and technical training for opportunities in the employment sector. It is also imperative to identify opportunities that would provide women more avenues for self-employment and the development of entrepreneurship in women.

Both the countries need to work harder towards their lacked approach in the areas such as literacy, health and socio-economic and political empowerment, if taken care of, it can set to embark upon a new era of gender balance into development process. Although, given the variety of constraints and discrimination that the women are facing in India and Bangladesh, the initiatives that have been launched for the socio-economic and political empowerment of women are noteworthy. However, these initiatives need consolidation of various institutional efforts and intensification of the process through more innovative instrumentalities. There is an urgent need to involve women in the functioning of the state, which would help to preserve and promote equality and justice, monitor and reverse the existing situations and bring about the necessary policy changes and social restructuring of the society.