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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON WOMENS' POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Political participation is an action that influences the distribution of social goods and values. As examples freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign and to hold office at all levels of government and extra. The main objective of this paper is to comparatively analyze the women political participation of South Asia. The paper is based on secondary data, obtained through articles, reports, international journals and other sources. Also the methodology that is used in this paper is content analysis. However when deeply examining it clearly express that the women political participation is in a better level in South Asia than the past.

KEY WORDS: *Political participation, Local government, Women, comparative*

INTRODUCTION

Introduction of Political Participation

Political participation is a basic concept in political science and scholars have defined the concept in different ways. It may be defined as the actions of private citizens seeking to influence or support Government and politics. Milbrath and Goel uphold that this is a relatively broad definition since it also includes ceremonial and support activities (Milbrath, L W, Goel, M L 1977: 2). However there are two ways to understand the broadness when defining the concept of political participation:

(1) In terms of the kinds of tools or actions that are included

(2) In terms of the target of the actions

Simply political participation means that a person participating for political process under her/his personnel attitude and beliefs. Also it can be define as a action taken by a citizen that effect for a outcome of a political issue. According to verba, "Political participation affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to

respond"(www.encyclopedia.com).

It express that in any democratic system citizens have the right to express their views and attitudes towards almost everything happening in the public sphere or concerning their own interests in a way that governmental officials know this and respond (www.encyclopedia.com). There are several ways that the citizens can involve for politics. Out of those , voting is the main activity that citizens can participate for politics. However bellow are the tools that the citizens can use to participate in politics.

1. Voting
2. Working in and contributing to electoral campaigns and organizations
3. Contacting government officials
4. Attending protests, marches, or demonstrations
5. Working informally with the others to solve some community problem
6. Serving without pay on local elected and appointed boards
7. Being active politically through the intermediation of voluntary associations (saylordotorg.github.io)

However there are three types of political participation as below mentioned:

1. Conventional participation

It means the ways that a citizen participate for politics in a legal framework

Example: Conventional political participation include voting, volunteering for a political campaign, making a campaign donation, belonging to activist groups, and serving in public office.

2. Unconventional participate

These kind of activities are legal, most often considered inappropriate. Most of the young people as well as students engage in unconventional participation against regimes policies. Some of the examples are:

Example: Signing petitions, supporting boycotts, and staging demonstrations and protests.

3. Illegal Participation: Activities which are done by the citizens which breaking the law of the country.

Most of the illegal participation happening when the legal participation will not be able to create significant positive impact on the political system.

Example: Political assassination, terrorism (LTTE, ISIS)and sabotaging an opponent’s campaign through theft or vandalism(www.sparknotes.com).

However the citizens participation of certain political phenomena will depend on the situation. Also when examine the history of a country there we can see all the three types of participation in certain three situation.

It is important to find whydo the citizens participate in politics and why do they not participate in politics. There are four factors which influence people to participate in politics, those are:

- Responsibility: Some of the citizens think that it is their responsibility to participate in politics.
Example: Most of the people using their vote in a election because they think that it is a social responsibility.
- Idealism: This means that some of the citizens participate in politics because they strongly believe a particular idea. Example: In Sri Lanka the citizens practice to use their vote either to United nation party or to Sri Lanka freedom party.
- Self-Interest: A person might work to promote issues and causes that personally profit that person.
Example: When examine the role of the pressure groups, those organization are influenced for the government to fulfill their neediness.

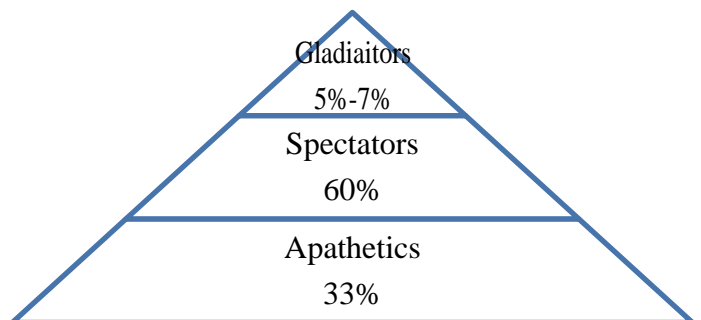
- Enjoyment: Some people enjoy their self’s by engaging for politics.
(www.sciencenewsforstudents.org)

Also there are few reasons that influenced citizens to not to participate politics. There are some countries that the large parts of the country do not participate for politics. It means at least they do not use their vote in an election. As an example in United state, half of all eligible people did not use their vote in the presidential election(www.sciencenewsforstudents.org). Because of that some governments influence the citizens to participate in politics. It means some countries such as Australia, Belgium, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, North Korea entitles with restrictions which enforce compulsory voting for citizens. However below are the reasons that citizens do not participate for politics.

- Contentment: Lack of participation indicates satisfaction of the political system—if they were upset about the political system, people would participate.
- Freedom: In a democratic country people have the freedom either to participate or not to participate for politics.
- Apathy: Some people do not have enough idea of politics and they do not care of politics.
- Alienation: People do not participate because they feel that no one in power listens to their views and that the government is, at best, indifferent to them(www.sparknotes.com).

However Milbrath and Goal (1997), explained that there are three types of groups in political participation of America. They have explained thepolitical participation follows a hierarchical structure as below mentioned.

Figure 01: Structure of Political participation in a democratic countries



(Source: Mendis&Hemantha, 2008)

“Gladiators” mean the people who are highly engaged in politics in a political system. Those are nearly 5%-7%. They are engaging in political activities such as voting in an election, engaging to conduct campaigns and running for office and extra. However there are nearly 70% of the citizens in the whole population which in the “spectators” level. The citizens who in “spectators level” use the vote in the election, other than that they don’t participate for any kind of political activity. Also there are nearly 33% of apathetic in the political system. They do not engage any activity which interact with politics (Source: Mendis & Hemantha, 2008).

ANALYSIS ON WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF SOUTH ASIA

Brief introduction of South Asia

“South Asia” or “Southern Asia” is a term which used to represent the southern region of the Asian continent. It is surrounded by (clockwise) West Asia, Central Asia, Eastern Asia, Southeastern Asia and from the Indian Ocean. South Asia spreaded nearly 5.2 million km² and the population of South Asian region is about 1.891 billion or about one fourth of the world's population. Presently South Asian region includes eight countries. Those are India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives and Afghanistan. South Asia defining as per the region which consists with various kinds of religions, races and languages. When deeply examining it clearly expresses that there are cultural, social, economic and political diversities of South Asia with on a common cultural base.

Context of women political participation of South Asia

Political participation of women and men can be considered as a main element of good governance concept. Participation can be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions. Women political participation of India seems to be not impressive when compare to men. This is the case in most of the countries across the world. Since the independent, India faced social and political issues because of the race system, cast system, language system as well as from ethnic system. However, women political participation Of India is quite encouraging when comparing it with the past. On 1993 India has adopted 73 and 74 amendment which allocate 33% of seats for the women in local authorities. Because of this act nearly million of women in India being a part of decision making process of India. Also India got several times of attempts to introduce “Women Reservation Bill”, but its not yet been success.

When consider the context of Nepal, it is considered as multi cultural, religious and social country. Nepal women face many challenges when deserving political rights in the society due to the lack of strong institutional support, lack of education, norms

and the values of the society. However Nepalin women play a vital role to make a change of their society. Women leaders associated with different political parties and engage in politics during the Rana Regime visibly since 1946. However there are many women leaders on Nepal such as Ms. Sahana Pradhan and Ms. Mangala Devi. Many women have followed them and came into the street together to get the voting right to nepali women and they have been able to fulfill that goal in a legal framework. After that Nepali women able to get property right, abortion right and citizen right because of the unity of them. However the 1991 constitution introduced gender equality, and it has made compulsory provision for the political parties to have at least 5% for women candidates in the parliament election. From that, the role of the women was identified as the participation of women in politics have grown than before. After that many women leaders who are from political parties as well as from other organization started to raise a strong voice for the women rights. However because of the interim constitution which was adopted in 2007 in Nepal, made several changes for the political system of Nepal. It means it changed the monarch to a republic system, from a unitary to federal system, and from a liberal to inclusive democratic system. Also this constitution was concerned about the political rights of women in Nepal.

Women of Bangladesh have participated for anti-British political movement in 1930 to 1940. After the independence in 1947, women played a great role in the political system. Although women played a significant role in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh in 1971, their historical contributions remain largely invisible. Women for the first time exercised their voting rights in Bangladesh when it was a part of Pakistan. Women also exercised their voting rights in the 1970 general elections of Pakistan. However, when considering according to the constitution which was adopted in 1992 by Bangladesh it clearly explained that women will deserve equal rights in public life. Addition to that the government of Bangladesh has enacted various legislations such as the “women and children repression act in 1995 (amended in 2000)” and the act which prohibited the dowry (Dowry prohibition act 1982). Undoubtedly, the most vital resource of Bangladesh is its people. Women make up nearly half of the population and work force of Bangladesh. Because of that women political participation is important to build up a Bangladesh as a democratic state. But actually the political participation of women is in a very low level in Bangladesh. According to Choudhury, “ In Bangladesh, women have remained outside the play of power politics”. This statement clearly expresses as the political participation of women is in a critical situation of Banglaesh.

Afghanistan is the new member of South Asian region. It is the country which allocate highest

number of seats for women after the Nepal. According to the new constitution of Afghanistan in 2004, under the article 84 clearly explained that the state shall allocate 27% of parliamentary berths in the lower house are held by women, along with 50 percent of seats in the House of Elders.

2008 constitution of Bhutan, simply provide 25 members for National Council under the article 11, while article 12 says there shall be 55 member of National Assembly, with no special quota for any section of the society. Also Bhutan thinks that quota system for women or for the direct society is not important. Maldives and Sri Lanka stands on similar footing with Bhutan in rejecting a quota system. These countries believe such quotas would go against constitutional provisions against discrimination on the basis of gender. But after that Sri Lanka has adopted quota system for the women in 2017.

The present political system of Pakistan have elements of both presidential and parliamentary system. Women political participation of Pakistan changed several times because of the political and constitutional changes. As an example during the period of August 10, 1947 to October 24, 1954 there were only 3% of seats for women. Also during the period of 1947 to 1956 there were no any seats allocated for women. However 1978 to 1988, another political changes were happened in Pakistan. Also at that period again the women got more opportunities of political participation by introducing 3% Quota for women. However for the first time under the military rule the woman political participation increased to 33% at the local government level. This quota were effective in the three levels in local government. However when consider the present situation of women political participation of Pakistan with the past situation it clearly express that there are positive aspects (www.ffgi.net).

Anyhow in Sri Lanka, women obtained right to collaborate with political activities since 1931. However Sri Lanka is a country which is in the lowest level of women political participation in the world. To increase women political participation as political

representatives, the Sri Lankan parliament passed “The Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 2017”. In this Act the government towards a step to increase 25% Quota for women in Local Authorities. From that total number of members in local government has been increased from 4486 to around 8356 members. In terms of Section 27F of the above Amendment, 25% of the total number of members in each local authority shall be women members.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF SOUTH ASIA

There are some turning points of politics in South Asia as in 1947 India became independent from British rule, at the same period Pakistan and Bangladesh were established as national states and the period prior to 1950 the rule of Rana family ended in Nepal. After these political phenomena the post colonial states of South Asia faced many challenges under the new political system. The new political system was based on three main elements. Those are:

- Sovereignty
- Popular participation
- Social justice

In the view of “popular participation” it can be defined as both male and female participation for political activities. But actually there are many more limitation for women to participate on politics because of the race system, religion system which has undergrown in South Asia. And also there are some attitudes of South Asian region that the wisdom of the women is compared to that of a kitchen spoon’s handle. This is a very popular statement in Sri Lanka. It is a classic evaluation (or devaluation) of her expertise in the domain demarcated for her, i.e. the kitchen. Specific South Asian concepts such as ‘stop-gap’ syndrome, widow politics, and emancipation of women have to be analyzed in this reality. Below chart describe the shape of women political participation of South Asia (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2008).

Table 01: Women Political Participation

Country	Year first women elected (e) or appointed (a) to parliament	women in government at ministerial level (as % of total) 2001	Year women received to vote	Year women received to stand for election	Seats Received by women in Parliament (as % of total)		
					Lower House 1994	Lower House 2004	Upper House 2004
Maldives	1979	-	1932	1932	6	6	-
S' Lanka	1947	-	1931	1931	5	4.4	-
India	1952	10.1	1950	1950	5	8.8	10.3
Bhutan	1975	-	1953	1953	2	9.3	-
Bangladesh	1973	9.5	1972	1972	10	2.0	-
Nepal	1952	14.8	1951	1951	6	5.0	-
Pakistan	1972	-	1972	1972	10	21.5	18

(Source: human development reports 2004)

According to above chart it clearly express that the women participation for politics is in a lower level in South Asia. But when it comparing, Sri Lanka is the country which got the very first opportunity for women to use the vote in a election. In the same year its means in 1931, women got chance to stand for election in Sri Lanka. However after that government of Maldives gave opportunity for the women to use the vote as well as stand for election on 1932. Although India is the largest democratic country in South Asian region, Indian government gave right of voting as well as right to stand in an election for women in 1950. This is kind of a negative political situation of women political participation of India. When consider on Afghanistan the right of participation for political activities for women has changed according to the government. Women in Afghanistan earned the right to vote after the country won independent from Great Britain in 1919 under reign of King Amanullah Khan. One year before the United States women were allowed at the polls. It can make a discussion that women of Afghanistan won rights on participating for political activities so quickly than the other countries of South Asia. But actually right on participating for political activities for women were violent by some of the governance system of Afghanistan. As a example in 1929 tribal leaders, forced Khan and the reforms which introduced by Khan were quickly overturned and Afghanistan returned to sharia law with a monarchy and no voting rights for anyone for nearly 40 years. However, again women got voting rights in 1964 after the adoption of new constitution. In 1996 the Taliban seized power and enforced an incredibly strict form of Sharia law, which required men to grow beards and women to be fully veiled. However in 2004 the most recent constitution was created and women were once again given the right to vote. But in the first election which was conducted under the new constitution, voting right of most of the women were blocked by their families and communities. However in 2014 most of the women used their vote and number of seats were won by women under the new constitution (centralasianinstitute.org).

Another aspect is seats received by women in Bhutan on 1994 nearly 2%, but when it come to 2004 it has increased to 9%. Also we can see the same situation in India as well as in Pakistan too. But in Sri Lanka, seats received by women in parliament in 1994 is about 5%, but when it come to 2004 it has decreased to 4.4%. Also in Bangladesh nearly 10% seats won by women in parliament but in 2004 it has critically decreased to 2%. In Nepal women won nearly 6% of seats in parliament. But in 2004 it has decreased to 5%. However according to the new constitution which was adopted by Afghanistan there the women got more opportunities to participate in politics as voters as well

as candidates. But there were many issues of the first election which conducted under this constitution on 2004. But according to election which which conducted 2014 there were 308 women ran for provincial council seats and 97 won in this election. So it can be described as positive point of women political participation of Afghanistan as new recognized South Asian country (centralasianinstitute.org). Also when examining the above chart it ensure that there is no difference of women political participation in 1994 to 2004 in Maldives. However the government of Maldives ensures women the right to vote in all elections. Women are eligible for candidature to all elected and public bodies except for the Head of State. Women are not represented in the Maldives Chamber of Commerce or the Maldives Traders Association for Tourism Industries. In 1990 as well as in 2004, women held 6% of the seats in the majlis.

Also in the present era the role of the women on political participation have been spreaded in a wide area. It's mean political participation of women is much more than just voting and being a candidate in a election. As an example in 1964 women collaborated to draft Afghanistans' third constitution which gave women the right to vote and opened the doors to be elected. As result of that there were two women cabinet ministers in 1965 in the cabinet of Afghanistan. They are Kubra Nurzai and Shafiqah Ziayi. Not only that there were some organizations such as "democratic organizations of Afghan" which fought to eliminate illiteracy among women, ban force marriages and do away with the bride price. However during the period of 2016 there were only two women cabinet ministers of Pakistan. One is Anusha Rehman Ahmed Khan, who leads the Ministry of Information and Technology, while, Saira Afzal Tarar is State Minister for National Health Services. But, contribution of both of them in the decisionmaking process is not in a satisfactory level like as the male ministers of the cabinet (Muhammad Ali Awan, 2016). However it is not clear that how many women are collaborating for the decision making process in South Asian region. The participation of women in politics and decision making process is influenced by the activities of political parties and the extent to which parties are committed to the promotion of women's involvement in politics. Also in Bhutan one of the six Advisory Councilor was a woman.

Moreover from 1996 the maoist conflict started in Nepal. There more of 40% of combatants were women. Also there were number of women members of LTTE of Sri Lanka. This can be described as illegal political participation of women in South Asian scenario. Although finally according to above explanation it reveals that there are many negative and positive characteristic of women political participation of South Asia.

CONCLUSION

Finally above analysis reveals that the women political participation of South Asian region have been increased in the present situation than the past. However to increase women political participation most of the South Regional countries have introduced quota systems for their political system. Also the area of women political participation have been spreaded in a wide area than the past. Finally I recommend that the political parties and civil society activists should be engaged in the discussion to increase the women political participation in quality level. Also I recommend that the political culture of South Asia has to rebuilt to give more opportunities for women in political participation. Media has the main responsibility to rebuild the political culture of South Asia.

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