Anasua Chatterjee*

Howrah, West-Bengal, India
Affiliated to University of Calcutta

'Empowerment in Practice and Its Impact on Political Participation': A Study Among Working Women of South Kolkata[1]

KEYWORDS

women, empowerment, decision-making power, civil society, political participation, partisan preference

ABSTRACT

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The main purpose of the present study is to understand 'empowerment' as observed in theory and in actual practice in the society where women are still regarded as second-class citizens inspite of achieving success in their chosen fields. Her freedom in choice of decision-making within the family and civil society plays an important part in influencing her participation in politics and her voting behaviour. By political activism of the respondent we primarily mean her cognitive orientation (i.e. her knowledge about political parties, symbols, their stay in power and their judgements about political system), evaluative orientation on how political system works including her voting behaviour and partisan preference. Survey was carried by the researcher on 1000 women working in both the organised and unorganised sectors of the economy mainly among street vendors and domestic workers and bank employees and teachers in Kolkata. Results: Women working in both the sectors play dual role looking after their children, elders in the family, husbands and also contribute to the family expenditure but lack effective power in decision-making. They consult their husbands, elder members of the family or the community before casting their vote and are not guided by individual preference or choice.

* ORCID: 0000-0002-5608-5694.

Introduction

Women's role in economic development, in most countries of the world, cannot be undermined. Although women constitute almost half of the total population of the world, their social, economic and political status is lower than that of men and they are subjected to the tyranny and oppression of a particular order for centuries and de facto even today. They are customarily expected to confine themselves to household environs and play a passive role as daughters, daughters-in-law, wives and mothers. They are typically considered as weaker than men. This attitude has constrained their mobility and consequently lack of opportunities for the development of their personalities. Women belonging to the underprivileged and poorer sections, irrespective of their social strata or region, are by themselves, in no position to unravel their problems. They are subject to discrimination and exploitation and occupy a lower status in domestic, political and economic scenario. Gender equality is a phased phenomenon. It develops gradually, step wise and as a concerted effort where state intervention may assist in moving equality in high direction (Delharup, 2006).Democracy to be truly representative and inclusive, all citizens must have equal opportunities to participate within democratic processes.

The 20th Century probably has experienced the most trouble in defining the role of a person as male or female. Judith Butler has completely changed the direction of women's studies through her most influential book, *Gender Trouble* (1990). Early women's studies scholars tended to think the difference between men and women as being innate and immutable. The theories of the 1990s emphasised that the concept of gender was fluid over time and over social situations. The strategy of levelling the playing fields by bringing in laws, introducing the power of rights, and finding ways to move women out of what looked like disadvantaged positions seemed all right for several decades. But it was clearly not enough. There was deep, widespread, unimaginable, and invisible discrimination. The women's movement responded to this by making inequality visible but that did not take care of the ignorance and invisibility of women's value as citizens, workers, providers who are equal if not even richer in value than men. So the movement generated new knowledge to show the role of women in development – again with the expectation that revealing truth would lead to women's equality with men. But that strategy still disabled them because they had no voice in the determination of their lives and its road map. Thus, the notion of equal participation, of equal power, of leadership was worked into the notions of ways to redress inequality. Individuals within households had highly disparate locations in power, apart from other in place of

in characteristics such as occupations, health and education status etc. This disparity amongst individuals seemed to be more enlarged the lower one went down in the asset/income scale. The new research about women as workers entered the development discourse. They looked at such practices as listing women engaged in domestic work as unemployed, unequal wages, discrimination of women in the workplace, women's double burden of work for wages and work at home, and the absence of social security for women who perform unpaid labour at home. Professor Amartya Sen (1984) taking a much wider view of development talked of development as the process of expansion of entitlement – i.e. giving life sustenance and self-esteem – and capabilities: giving freedom. Development improves quality of life through the process of expansion, ensures freedom from hunger, exploitation, discrimination and oppression and also infuses a sense of self belief and provides the strength to stand up against violence. Nirmala Banerjee (1997) says that Amartya Sen's view (1990) that wage work increases the bargaining power of women in the household and hence the overall economy and hence is empowering is highly qualified. She is of the opinion that whether or not this wage work improves her position should be assessed in terms of how far it makes it possible for her to strike out on her own on the strength of that income. Hence her entry into the labour market and her expected income is insufficient for her to live singly. Also there are societal reactions if women wants to walk out of the family. In such cases wage work increases her workload as she is not able to bargain the housework with any other else. The gender and development approach thus recognises the relation between women and men as a power relation, and sees that such power stems from social construction of gender shaped by social institutions of family, community, market and state. It does not see women as passive victims but agents who are negotiating spaces within their multiple identities for empowerment. Thus Devaki Jain (2005) is of the opinion that the very beginning of women's quest was for 'equality' or for 'overpowering', if not effacing, 'inequality'.

Empowerment itself is an abstract multi-dimensional concept. Where, multidimensionality refers to the co-existence of various domains and layers like society, organization, family or individual, the concept of empowerment is mainly related to power, which means one is endowed with power where it is absent. Economic empowerment of women was connected with the social condition as it informs and influences the decision making process in the household. It is to note that power should be achieved in each and every domain because empowerment in one dimension does not signify empowerment in other dimensions; for example a female empowered in socio-cultural dimension (mobility freedom, lack of discrimination against daughter) does not mean that she will be empowered in

economic dimensions also (women's control over income, relative contribution to family support).

Oxaal and Baden (1997) use the empowerment indicators suggested by CIDA to measure it. CIDA classifies empowerment as *legal, political, economic* and *social empowerment*. Where *legal empowerment* refers to the legal assistance and access to information of poor/disadvantaged group (UNDP), *political empowerment* signifies the process of transferring various elements of power (resources, capabilities, and positions) to those who do not have it (UNFP). *Economic empowerment* means the capacity of a person to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognise the value of her/his contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (OECD, 2011) (Organisation de Cooperation et de Development Economiques). Finally, *social empowerment* signifies the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence, acting individually and collectively to change the social relationships and to reform the institutions and discourses which tries to exclude poor people. Social-structural realities work in a way that they do not allow the agency to actualise in certain spheres. For example, women may collectively be empowered by invoking their disapproval of public consumption of alcohol or step in to resolve issues related to pension distribution and so on, but the same woman, despite their agency, may fail miserably to stop sex-selective abortions, inter-personal bargaining or abuse.

Raka Ray (2000) in her book *Fields of Protest* has discussed the engagement of women's movement in two cities of India, Bombay and Calcutta. She argues that it is the political field in which women's movements of every city were embedded that determined the nature of women's empowerment. Political field comprises of actors such as: state, political parties and women's organization which are connected with each other in both friendly and oppositional manner. Hence the women's question was differently articulated in Bombay and Calcutta. In Bombay, women's movement has primarily focused on 'violence against women' as the cause of concern. On the other hand, women's activists in Calcutta were concerned about employment and poverty eradication which has direct linkage with the state and economy. Ray (2000) argued that women's movement in Bombay was influenced by the second wave feminism of the West; hence has been able to question the patriarchal power structure within the institutions of family. In Calcutta, feminism has challenged the state and economy by questioning the sexual division of labour within the family. This empirical study shows us the difference in perspectives between women's movements which were located in specific socio-cultural, demographic and economic climates. For instance, women's groups in Calcutta are

politically affiliated organizations therefore their presence was felt in mainstream and oppositional politics. In Bombay, women's groups are autonomous in nature, they operated in the protest field. Thus, social change is defined and demarcated in relation to the time, space and political climate in which each women's movement is embedded.

Women's political behaviour and their activities in the political arena are severely conditioned by the considerations of gender and patriarchy. A preconceived notion of the nature and attributes of men and women operate in the society. Culture affects women's political behaviour by depriving them of the self-esteem necessary for political leadership. In a culture which values male more than the female, women may never acquire the confidence and the autonomy required to seek power and wield it effectively. This observation made by Jeene J. Kirkpatrick on American women can very aptly be applied in almost all the societies. The transition from the roles of a housewife and mother to the role of of political decision-maker is not easy and not been frequently attempted. Political participation is a complex phenomenon liable to be influenced by different variables. It denotes a series of activities which have a bearing on the political process. To be more specific, these activities mainly are (1) voting at the polls, (2) supporting possible pressure groups by being a member of them, (3) personally communicating directly with legislators, (4) participating in political party activity and thus acquiring a claim on legislators, (5) engaging in habitual dissemination of political opinion through face-to-face communication with other citizens. However, it is to be noted that more people discuss politics than vote, and many more vote than join parties or work in campaigns (Woodward et. al., 1972: 133). Some other empirical studies also show that most people are just not especially politically oriented and political participation is not a "natural" concomitant of citizenship. As Eakin's (1972: 97) study, based on survey research, shows that only small percentages, probably fewer than 10 per cent in all democratic countries, belong to a political class.

Political Orientation is a complex phenomenon in the sense that its various forms vary from country to country, from era to era, from one type of people in a society to another. Researchers have shown that the generalizations derived from research in western countries may not hold equally true in India.(Goel, 1974: 98). It has been pointed out that to exercise political influence is a special kind of political involvement in which female citizens, no matter where they live, or what their level of education is, find it very hard to engage in. Women's roles are such in which political passivity is perceived as the norm. Women in political systems are heavily dominated by men (Christy, 1984). In this society, women are commonly

constrained by the norms, beliefs, customs and values of the society creating separate codes of conduct for women and men (Kabeer, 2000).

The working women in India continue to face stiff challenges and social resistance. A recent survey conducted by World Economic Forum 2012, choosing 60 of the 100 best employers in India as a sample revealed that only 10% of senior management post is held by women in two-thirds of the surveyed companies. In a survey conducted by industry chamber ASSOCHAM in 2010 found that majority of working women often do a tight rope walk balancing a rather hostile domestic environment and professional lives as husbands and in-laws are yet to adapt modern mindsets. Dashora (2013) observes that a section of Indian women the elite and the upper middle class have gained by the exposure of global market. More women are engaged in business enterprises, in international platforms like the Inter-Parliamentary union but sharing of responsibility at workplace or taking independent decisions is still a remote possibility. It has been advocated by Amartya Sen (1990) that independent earning opportunities do reduce the economic dependence of women on men but the bargaining power depends on the nature of work she is employed in. In many families women do not have a voice in anything while in several families the women may have a dominating role. The result is that empowerment of women in India is highly unbalanced and with huge gaps. Women in Kolkata have always participated in the vibrant political and cultural life of the city even as they do now. And they continue to make their mark in all spheres of economic activity. In Kolkata women are to be found in services and professions, as entrepreneurs and NGO activists, as industrial labour and home-based workers. If we look at the working women of Kolkata the percentage of women has declined and most of them belong to low income group. (West Bengal Human Development Report, 2004). Pradeep Chhibber (Department of Political Science, University of California Berkeley) seems to emphasise that if women are confined in home, they are less active in politics. However, a contradictory view is observed in the empirical study of slum dwellers by Anirban Mondal and Gitanjali Hajra (IJRC, 2012) that women's autonomy depends not only on economic empowerment and education but also on social organisation, kinship and marriage. Sometimes role of individual decision making decreases and family decisions take a major role (Mumtaz, 1982). Sarit K. Bhowmik (NASVI, 2011) in his article on women hawkers of some big Indian cities including Kolkata find that due to lack of space, harassment by the police etc, women have become politically apathetic. Again in some cities women hawkers being members of some secondary groups (like SEWA) get protection and hence become politically active.

The cultural norms operate both as a restriction on a woman's mobility as well as an impediment for her participation in the public sphere. Though specific customs vary from region to region, there are different standards of behaviour for men and women that carry over into the work environment. Restricting women's participation in these activities and community-based organisations has denied them opportunity of developing their skills required to function as representatives in the public sphere. In different walks of life, people have to make various choices, and all of them cannot be transformed into desired action. The poor, excluded ethnic or social groups and women are relatively more disempowered than others in the society. Hence, in this context it is essential to enquire whether there has been any change in their status, and if yes, how far this achieved change in status could uplift their position in the society. Also, it is necessary to identify the factors, either social, or economic or both, that influence the level of achievement of empowerment by women. The main aim of the present study is to attempt an understanding of the quality of life enjoyed by the working women of South Kolkata in select formal and informal sectors and how far they affect her political interest and participation. A total of 1000 women were chosen. From the organised sector bank employees and teachers and from the unorganised sector domestic workers and street vendors were chosen for survey.

Sample selection

In 1st Stage Unit, South Kolkata has been divided into seven parts (Cluster), such as, Gariahat, Jadavpur, Bhawanipur, Park Circus, Rasbehari, Tollygunge, Behala Emphasis has been placed to the permanent residents in all these areas. These clusters are selected at random by using South Kolkata Map.

Data Collection Tools:

Questionnaire:

Structured Questionnaire has been used to directly associate with the survey based on the objectives of this study.

As per the 2011 census report, only 26% of India's women work as compared to 53% of men. As regards religion-wise workforce participation, among Hindus there are 27% working women while it is 31% Christians and 33% for Buddhists. Women's participation is just 15% for Muslims and Sikhs and even lower at 12% among Jains. Women work participation is highest among tribal communities though mainly in the unorganised sector characterised by low income, harassment at the workplace and absence of job security. A quick look at the sample

distribution of the working women shows the reflection of the all India figure. The women belonging to the Hindu community comprise the majority 93.80% in organised and 93% among the unorganised sector (Table 1). The percentage of working women among other religion is very low. Only 4.80% of Muslim women work in the organised sector while about 7% are unorganised workers engaged in low-paid jobs. Among women belonging to the Christian community only 1% works in the organised sector.

Table 1

RELIGION				
Religion	Number		Percentage	
	ORG	UNORG	ORG	UNORG
Hindu	469	465	93.80%	93.00%
Islam	24	35	4.80%	7.00%
Christian	5	0	1.00%	0.00%
Other	2	0	0.40%	0.00%
Total	**500**	**500**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**

Source: surveyed data.

In terms of caste (Table 2) about 88.40% women in the organised sector and 79.60% in the unorganised sector belong to the general caste. A total of only 11.6% (8.40% of SCs, 0.20% STs and 1.80% OBCs and, others 1.20%) work in the salaried jobs compared to 20.4% (15.40% SCs, 0.80 STs and 3.40% OBCs and others 0.80%) in the unorganised sector. This figure reinstates the fact that not much has improved in terms of GDP as evident in the Human Development Report of West-Bengal 2004.

Table 2

CASTE				
Caste	Number		Percentage	
	ORG	UNORG	ORG	UNORG
Sc	42	77	8.40%	15.40%
ST	1	4	0.20%	0.80%
OBC	9	17	1.80%	3.40%
General	442	398	88.40%	79.60%
Other	6	4	1.20%	0.80%
Total	**500**	**500**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**

Source: surveyed data.

Section-II. Power of decision-making of woman in the family

Women today are in a much better position in terms of their opportunity to work. They control their own income and do contribute to the economic needs of the family when required. In case of organised sector about 96.04% bank employees and 91.46% teachers and contribute their own income to family expenditure. This is also true in the unorganised sector where 86.55% street vendors and 94.67% of domestic workers contribute to family income (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of Relation between Occupation and the respondents contribution to family expenditure

ORGANIZED SECTOR		UNORGANIZED SECTOR	
Type of Occupation	Women contribution to Family Expenditure (%)	Type of Occupation	Women contribution to Family Expenditure (%)
Bank Employees	96.04	**Street Vendors**	86.55
Teachers	91.46	**Domestic workers**	94.67

Source: surveyed data.

In the organised sector whereas only 34.85% are directly involved in taking decisions on their own income, investment and other areas. In the unorganised sector 44% actually have a hold on their own income. When it comes to making investments, they often leave it to their husbands to take decisions and invest on their behalf (29% of women in the organised sector depend on their husband as regards 36.60% women in the unorganised sector). It has also been observed that in matters of giving advice the women members of the family are not given due respect as chart 4 shows. Among the 1000 women interviewed only 4.80% (in the organised sector) and 4.20% (in the unorganised sector) provide advice in matters of investment and it was remarked by many that they had to struggle very hard to achieve this status. Thus, an elevation in the occupational paradigm does not necessarily improve her power of choice (Table 4).

An interesting result was observed when the researcher interviewed the female members of the respondent's families. It has been observed that being educated does not give women right to take decisions on their own. They have to struggle a lot in achieving this. They are not consulted at home regarding major or even minor decisions regarding education of their children, their private tuitions etc. 63.22% having higher secondary education, 39.53% graduates and 24.18% having

Table 4

DECISION-MAKING POWER OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY			
OCCUPATION	Take decision on their own investment/ex-penditure	Depend on husband or family members in investment	Provide advice in matters of investment
UNORGANIZED	34.85%	36.60%	4.80%
ORGANIZED	44%	29%	4.20%

Source: surveyed data.

post graduate degree had to struggle with the male members of the family regarding decisions on family expenditure. In case of unorganised sector 34.02% having secondary education, 50% having higher secondary education, 10.49% graduates had to struggle a lot to achieve this right of bargaining or making their presence felt in the family. This has occurred even after these women have contributed a lot of their income to the family expenditure.

Table 5. Percentage of Relation between Education to Role in Decision making in the family and struggle with the male members of the family to achieve such rights

	ORGANIZED	UNORGANIZED
Educational Qualification Level	Women take Decision making in the family and to struggle with male members of the family (%)	Women take Decision making in the family and to struggle with male members of the family (%)
SECONDARY	N.A	34.02
HIGHER-SECONDARY	63.22	50
GRADUATE	39.53	10.49
POST-GRADUATE	24.18	N.A

Source: surveyed data.

Section-III. Political participation and partisan preference

As regards their cognitive orientation, a clear difference between the organised and the unorganised sector is revealed. At the outset the respondents (both organised and unorganised) were able to identify the symbols and names of the political parties that are presently in power in both at the centre and the states They are also able to recognise and name the persons at the helm of politics earlier and present. However it is seen that women working in the unorganised sectors could not identify the province from where the President was elected or even the name of earlier Prime Ministers (Table 6).

Table 6. Sample representation of the data collected

Ques-tion no	Description	Number		Percentage	
		ORG	UNORG	ORG	UNORG
Block – A-political socialisation and cognitive orientation(giving correct answer)					
1	Political Party in power of WB	475	380	95.00%	76.00%
2	Year of Political Party in power	448	335	89.60%	67.00%
3	Political Party in power of Centre	449	281	89.80%	56.20%
4	Political Party was in power just before	425	240	85.00%	48.00%
5	Present Chief-minister of WB	490	440	98.00%	88.00%
6	Name of the Chief-minister prior to the present one	457	298	91.40%	59.60%
7	Present Prime Minister	474	304	94.80%	60.80%
8	Political Party he belongs to	413	212	82.60%	42.40%
9	Prime Minister just before the present one	426	177	85.20%	35.,40%
10	Province he belongs to	315	133	63.00%	26.60%
11	Present President	446	191	89.20%	38.20%
12	Province he belongs to	376	110	75.20%	22.00%

Source: surveyed data.

All the women interviewed from both the sectors said that they read the newspaper and watch television or listen to the radio programmes but most of these are entertainment programmes. Only 21.4% women in the unorganised sector particularly the street vendors and 56% women from the organised sector watch political news and discussions. 208 women in the organised and 203 women in the unorganised chat regularly with their friends and neighbours but national and international politics is seldom discussed in these chats. 49.38% women in the unorganised and among them only 94 (46.30%) discuss about political personalities. In contrast 59,13% women in the organised sector discus about political matters and 160 (76.92%) discuss about political personalities. They only go through political pamphlets and manifestos which are distributed by the political cadres during elections or during leisure time at night occasionally. Also they are not encouraged by their husbands and other members of the family to engage in political activities (Table 7). Kamini B. Dashora (2013) feels that working women are in a paradoxical situation; when a family suffers economically, people think women should go out to work, yet at the same time her participation in societal practices or politics is viewed as slightly inappropriate, subtly wrong and definitely dangerous to their chastity and womanly virtues.

Table 7

Questions	UNORGANISED		ORGANIZED	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
1. Do you read the newspaper?	180	320	440	60
a) Anandabazaar Patrika	60		100	
b) Bartaman	40		80	
c) Pratidin	25		30	
d) Aajkal	25		40	
e) Ei Samay	10		40	
f) Sanmarg	20		0	
g) The Telegraph	0		80	
h) Times of India	0		70	
2. Watch Television	310	190	440	60
3. Watch Political news and discussions	107	393	280	220
4. Listen to the radio	200	300	260	240
5. A. Chat with Friends and medium	203 (Total)		208 (Total)	
a) Directly	174		170	
b) Landphone	10		05	
c) Mobile Phone	19		33	
B. Discuss National and International Politics during chats	84	118	123	85
C. Any political personality discussed in these chats?	94	109	160	48
6. Read political pamphlets	103	397	210	290
a) During elections.	33		80	
b) Through subscriptions	38		90	
c) Leisure	32		40	

Source: surveyed data.

If we consider personal or individual participation in political activities like participation in meetings or collection of subscriptions, participation in campaigns etc. it was observed that occupation holds a key factor in decision. In the organised sector among bank employees the percentage is dismally low where only 1.98% engage in political meetings. The picture is not glaring in case of teachers where only 4.77% participate in meetings, 4.02% participate in political campaigns, 4.27% subscribe to political parties and 3.52% are engaged as political workers

and 3.77% are engaged in other political activities. Contrary to this picture we find a considerable increase in political activities among the unorganised sectors. Among street vendors,14.20% attend political meetings, 22.52% participate in political campaigns in support of their leaders, 12.52% collect subscriptions on their behalf and about 23% are seripusly engaged in other activities. This is also true in case of domestic workers where 23.37% go to political meetings, 21.78% participate in political campaigns, 12.07% collect subscriptions and 26% in other activities. For women in the unorganised sectors (ike street vendors, domestic worker), their trade is totally dependent on local party leaders right from getting trade licence, space for business and protection from local goons. Hence they cannot afford to remain silent on supporting a particular political party especially the party in power even against their own wish in order to get their job done. Hence there is a sharp increase in case of women in the unorganised sector in terms of their participation (Table 8).

Table 8. Percentage of Relation between Occupation and Political Participation

ORGANIZED SECTOR					
OCCUPATION	Political Meetings	Political Campaigns	Subscribing to any Political party	Collection of Subscription	Any other activity
Bank Employees	1.98	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
Teachers	4.77	4.02	4.27	3.52	3.77
UNORGANIZED SECTOR					
UN-ORGANIZED SECTOR					
Occupation	Political Meetings	Political Campaigns	Subscribing to any Political party	Collection of Subscription	Any other activity
Street vendors	14.20	22.52	12.52	2.52	23
Domestic workers	23.37	21.78	12.07	1.78	26

Source: surveyed data.

For women in the unorganised sectors (like street vendors, domestic worker), their trade is totally dependent on local party leaders right from getting trade licence, space for business and protection from local goons. Hence, they cannot afford to remain silent on supporting a particular political party especially the party in power even against their own wish in order to get their job done. Hence there is a sharp increase in case of self-employed women in the unorganised sector in terms of their participation.

Participation in Civic Society

Civic society forms an important part in a democratic country as it voices the opinion of the people at large and also helps in political socialization. Participation in citizens' forum or local association and unions therefore are also regarded as yardstick for political participation. In the survey conducted it was observed that women participation as individual members is quite considerable. Her family members especially the men are also active members of these associations and spend at least 1 hr on an average weekly in these organisations. Also it was observed that women membership in political party organisations and local club is very much present. However, the number and the time devoted in these organisations is much less than those spent by their family members especially their Husbands or father or father-in-law. At the outset if we look at the following table it is observed that women in the informal sector are members of non-political organisations but they do not hold any administrative position like and are engaged as ordinary members and the number is also not significant except in local political party offices where among the street vendors 28 women are seen to play an active role in the local party offices. They are also found to be a little involved in their respective trade unions though the number is meagre. 71 (26.80%) street vendors and only 35 (13.46%) domestic workers were seen to participate in these organisations which imply that women are still not regarded as potential contributors. The most important area where women actively participate are the local puja and fair committees which are totally depend on women labour. At least 41.13% street vendors and 25.8% domestic workers take this opportunity to sell their products in these local fairs or to earn extra income for their family (Table 9).

Table 9

Organisations	Street vendor		Domestic workers	
	Head	Member	Head	Member
Peace-keeping	1	6	0	39
Local Club	0	135	0	161
Professional	0	0	0	0
Harisabha	0	14	0	1
Political party	28	68	0	53
Trade Union	0	71	0	35
Youth Org	0	3	0	1
Women Org	0	23	0	18
Extension of education	0	18	0	3
Puja Committee	0	109	0	67
Local fair	0	102	0	67

Source: surveyed data.

In the formal sector it is observed that 11% women said they were members of peace keeping organisation, 18% members of local club spending an average of 30 minutes weekly. Only 4% women were members of 'Harisabha' (religious meet), 18.8% attend local party office. Only 14.6% women interviewed were members of youth organisations. Only 16% were members of organisations related to extension of education. Only 123 (24.6%) women out of 500 are members of women's organisation. On the contrary it has been observed that these respondents are active members of their occupational groups and a considerable number of them are also in administrative positions of these associations. 42% are members of professional bodies like WBCUTA, WBCUPA, Senate and Syndicate or Board of Studies or different Chamber of Commerce and Industries etc. 36.6% members of the college/school and other Office committees. Besides this they are also members of the local puja committee and local fair committee which is seasonal in nature. Other than these two associations most women were member of the local Mahila Samity and some NGO's that operate in the locality and they are actively involved in these associations to solve their local problems. Thus it can be concluded that the women interviewed by virtue of their education and income are in a better position and are willing to be active members of other civic society organisations other than their own occupational groups (Table 10).

Table 10

Organisations	Bank Employees		Teachers	
	Head	Member	Head	Member
Peace-keeping	0	20	0	35
Local Club	0	60	0	30
Professional	40	60	50	60
Harisabha	0	14	0	6
Political party	0	40	4	50
Institutional Committees	25	60	30	68
Youth Org	0	40	0	33
Extension of Education	23	30	0	27
Womens'organisation	0	72	0	51
Puja Committee	0	70	0	55
Local fair	0	67	0	30

Source: surveyed data.

Partisan Preference

In general it is observed that women in both the organised and in the unorganised sector have changed their partisan preference at least once or more than once in voting and most of them changed in 2011 after the change of left rule in the city of Kolkata (41.20% women in the organised and 43.40% in the unorganised sector). The interesting factor noted here is that here also the women lack the decision making power themselves and are forced to vote either after consultation with their husbands, family members and even influential persons in the locality. 47.80% women in the organised sector consult their husbands and family members before voting to that of 63.80% in the unorganised sector. 16.40% women in the organised sector changed their partisan preference after this consultation to that of 30.40% in case of unorganised class. This shows that women rarely have a voice of their own in terms of voting behaviour (Table 11).

Table 11

	(Political Activism and Partisan Preference)	ORG	UNORG	ORG	UNORG
1	Cast Vote to same political party since last 25 years	180	184	36.00%	36.80%
2	Changed partisan preference after end left rule	206	217	41.20%	43.40%
3	Loyal to party solved problem before 2011	165	168	33.00%	33.60%
4	Consult with family to cast vote	239	319	47.80%	63.80%
5	Change voting behaviour after discussion	82	152	16.40%	30.40%

Source: surveyed data.

It seems that education and occupation play an important role in every area of participation be it family, workplace and politics. Women having secondary qualification over 54.24% in the organised sector and 35.06% in the unorganised vote as per individual decision but 9.37% women in the organised sector and 13.37% in the unorganised sector change their decision after consultation with their family while 15.62% in the organised and 13.33% in the unorganised do not change even after consultation with their family members. In the 2nd level i.e. women having higher-secondary qualification over 46.83% in the organised sector and 15.91% in the unorganised vote as per individual decision but only 6.78% women in the organised sector change their decision after consultation with their family. No one in the unorganised class change their decision. In the 3rd level, i.e. women having graduate degree over 42.79% in the organised sector and 22.45% in the unorganised vote as per individual decision but 6.52% women in the organised sector change their decision and 18.48% do not change. 10.36% in the unorganised do

not change their decision in voting even after consultation with their family members. In the last category i.e. women possessing post graduate degree 39.56% in the organised sector voted as per individual decision but 5.565 change their voting preference and 13.89% did not. Thus it is clearly proved that inspite of education familial decision sometimes usurps individual decision making even in the voting process (Table 12).

Table 12. Relation between Education and Voting Behaviour

ORGANIZED SECTOR			
Educational Qualification Level	Women take the self decision	She changes her decision	She does not change her decision
Secondary	54.24	9.37	15.62
Higher secondary	46.83	6.78	13.56
Graduate	42.79	6.52	18.48
Post-graduate	39.56	5.56	13.89
Relation between Education and voting behaviour. Corrected statement is done in Table 12.			
UNORGANIZED SECTOR			
Educational Qualification Level	Women take the self decision	She changes her decision	She does not change her decision
Secondary	35.06	10.37	13.33
Higher secondary	15.91	NIL	14.29
Graduate	22.45	NIL	10.36
Post-graduate	NIL	NIL	NIL

Source: surveyed data.

As regards occupational level we observe the following data (Table 13).

Table 13

	No of Women			
	Organized		Unorganized	
Voting Pattern	Bank employees	Teachers	Street vendors	Domestic workers
Consult with family members	200	140	260	355
Consult with outside members	230	120	230	300
Changed their preference after consultation	Influenced	Influenced	Influenced	Influenced
	160	100	200	280

Source: surveyed data.

Hence just education and employment opportunities cannot change the outlook of the society and pave the way for women empowerment. One needs a total transformation of the mindset of the people particularly the male members of the family. This has resulted in the political apathy even among the educated working women. Women are valuable constituents in the voting process. Consequently, a renewed vigour to monopolize the votes of women has been made by front-running candidates. While they have brought the women's question onto the national political landscape, they have not addressed the vast array of political and social interests that concern Indian women. Instead, they have defined women's empowerment through a narrow baseline of safety, security, and education while dismissing other salient and more politically controversial areas of much needed reform. For instance, in India family laws are called personal laws. They relate to the sphere of personal relations but they are also person-specific. As a result, family laws are codified separately for four communities. As a secular state, India maintains these laws alongside secular laws, civil and criminal all of which are administered by the same judicial apparatus. This has led to the 'politicization of the personal laws' (Sen Samita, 2000). Political parties have been unwilling to admit women, allow them a voice in policy formation or give them opportunities for leadership positions. Ironically, Leftist and self-styled progressive parties are also not free from this dilemma.

Studies show that women newly entering the political arena benefit from capacity building and support. This has been the case in South Africa, where civic groups and women organisations have been able to repel laws regarding sanitation and water transport system, war stricken Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2006 where women came together and worked collectively and became leaders in their own right developing, coordinating and launching advocacy initiatives at the local level including a successful effort to amend municipal laws to better female workers. Therefore, 'Partnership Building' can help in good governance. In India for example, in June 2000, an agreement was signed for the rehabilitation of 3000 pavement dwellers in Mumbai between a landowner construction company, the slum rehabilitation authority (SRA), the Mumbai municipal compile a list of households and help them to relocate and register their societies and cooperatives. This World Bank survey demonstrates that the greater women participate in public life, the less is public sector corruption (Advancing Gender Equality: World Bank since Beijing, 2000). The research project undertaken by Chattopadhyay and Duflo in 2004 over 495 villages in Birbhum district show that women elected as leaders under the reservation policy invest more in the public goods closely linked to women's concerns. The role of self-dependent group may be important in the

Gram Unnayan Samiti in West Bengal. At present, there are about 3 lakh groups in the state. 36 lakh families are involved with it. 1 crore 80 lakh people are attached with these activities. Besides NGOs, the State Government has extended its hands for the development of rural women.

Conclusion

It is patriarchal and regressive practices – not women's lack of effort – that prevents Indian women from being equal counterparts to men. Moreover, by focusing on the concept of strength, there is a rhetorical shift in the political agenda for reform in which women are asked to be stronger and bear the burden of their empowerment. This rhetoric hinders the development of women and promotes an ethos of perseverance and resilience rather than equity. In the end it would only be apt to conclude with the words of Annie Marie Goetz UNIFEM adviser on Governance, Peace and Security "Women's effectiveness at promoting women's rights once in public office, however, is dependent upon many other factors besides their numbers. Institutional changes are needed in civil society, the media, political parties, legislatures and the judicial system in order to support women's policy agendas and to make the transition from policy to practice".

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