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Abstract

Philosophically women are like goddess but in practice there are some misinterpretations in Nepal. Women have been designated secondary to their male counterparts, especially in the decision-making process, be it at the family level or community level or the national/ international political context. To find out the opportunities and challenges of women in politics in Nepal, the study has selected purposively 15 leading women of Nepalese political parties. The qualitative data were collected through semi structured questionnaire and interview. Equity for the females in the political arena has been discussed quite a lot, and in Nepal too this is burning issue. The legal instruments, including the Constitution, have the provision for bringing in female participation in the state-level process. But the roles and participation of women in the decision-making process is considerable.

Historical Background

Women empowerment always has been one of the top priorities and has been talked about throughout the world. The history of Nepal records that women have been getting meaningful participation in every different political movement, but their participation is presented in different ways. There has been a drastic positive change in the role and status of women in Nepal, thinning the barrier to gender inequality. While the 1990 “the Constitution of Nepal Kingdom “had guaranteed fundamental rights to all citizens without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, caste, religion, or sex, modernizing society along with reach of education to the general population itself has

played an important role to promote gender equality. Henceforth, the roles of women have been changed in various ways in Nepalese society. Nepal is also achieving targets for poverty reduction, education, child mortality, maternal health and gender equality and women's empowerment (Acharya, Bell, Simkhada, van Teijlingen, & Regmi, 2010). Nepalese women are resisting cultural traditions, becoming community leaders, environmentalists' politicians and business owners. In October 2015, Nepal elected its first female president, Bidhya Devi Bhandari. Other women likely as Anuradha Koirala, Pushpa Basnet were the CNN Hero winners, Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, first female to climb Mount Everest, Mira Rai, international award winning athletes, Sushila Karki first female chief Justice. Moti Devi Shrestha was one of the major political leaders of Nepal Communist party in the contemporary that was established in 1949. Another major figure of that committee was Sadhana Adhikari representing the Nepal Women's Association from Kathmandu Municipality in 1952. Dwarika Devi Thakurani, only the woman, was elected to the House of Representative in 2015 and later on she held the Assistant Ministerial post which was the greatest achievement of women movements (CEDAW, 2018).

Status of Women in Nepalese Politics

Women's representation in the central committees of the political parties represented in the CA/Parliament has improved to 14% from mere 8% in 2003. The three major parties UCPN (Maoists), CPN (UML) and NC have made special commitments to develop women's leadership, although they are yet to be implemented. Article 15(4) of the Political Parties Registration Act clearly states that women must represent at least one third of the membership in all committees of a political party (Dhamala, 2019). The EC granted exception on the grounds that NCP fulfil the 33 percent quota through its general convention election, to be held at a future date. The law in question, however, does not permit exceptions; therefore, parties registered under such exceptions do not have legal standing and are subject to the punitive measures outlined in the act, including monetary fines, expulsion from upcoming elections and disbandment.

Political Conceptualization

Even though the "Constitution of Nepal 2072" has paved way for the female advancement and empowerment, there are many difficulties in implementation of national and international declarations and policies made for the women's development. However, this opportunity may result differently in the system development in Nepal regarding women's representation and participation (Lindsey, 2015). But, it is required to work hard to back up and feed the concerned authorities of government of Nepal with the women's issue. Women are being involving in the

political participation and raising their voices in the different political forum for the meaningful participation and they believe that women can play significant role for the women empowerment. However, the issues of the women participation, empowerment and inclusion have been included in many political parties, state organization and Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) which have prioritized women participation, but this participation is not in the form of meaningful participation nor the total participation and upliftment of women cannot be obtained looking at them (Pathak, 2019).

Similarly, the People's Movement-II of 2006 A. D. has strongly highlighted the issues of women participation, empowerment and inclusion in politics and government mechanisms.

It is revealed that almost all the political parties have now been convinced for at least 33% women's representation in their various levels. However, the participation of 33% is not a total achievement and further advancement can be made if the leading political parties of Nepal seriously deal with the structure of their own parties including more females (Thakur, 2017).

This research paper, therefore, is focused on enhancing women's political participation as an opportunity and challenges for future context in Nepal. This research paper tries to explore women's views over the propositional representative in parliament and other thematic committee as well as their struggle to address the women's issues.

Objectives

The objective of the study is to find out the opportunities and challenges of women in politics in Nepal from the perspective of women leaders in House of Representatives (HoR).

Methodology

The study has covered interactive information with renowned person of different political parties. The study is mainly based on field study, interview with keys informants. For the information, the researcher has talked to the concerned women of political parties, sister organizations of political parties; women organizations etc. have been also helpful to obtain the additional information of the related problem.

For the final discussion and analysis, 15 women from Nepal Communist Party, Nepali Congress, Madeshi Jana Adhikar Forum and Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal were interviewed from House of Representative (HoR) out of 87, who were the prime source of information for the study. For the qualitative survey, semi-structured interviews (SSI) questionnaire were developed to have the

data and information from informants.

These 15 women's informants were also the members of different political parties and representatives of local government of study area. Structured questionnaire was prepared to generate the realistic accurate data for survey of the respondent; to make favourable situation, tried to encourage them for the sharing the concern information without any hesitation and requested wilfully take part for the study process and acknowledged them for the remarkable effort. For interviewing, semi-structured questionnaires were developed to attain key information from the 15 participants from different political parties to get the information of women in politics, their challenges and opportunities in the changing scenario of political arena.

It aims benefit the society and minimize social contradiction by adopting the ethical norms. Lastly, researcher has ensured that research was conducted with respect for all groups in society, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion and culture. The researcher has taken an interview with them. In total, 15 women took part in this study. As the researcher already mentioned the participant's details, all interviews were conducted in January 2021. All interviews were conducted individually and were of different duration, from 1 hour to 2.5 hours with Representatives Women of Parliaments and other few representatives of Province and Local Government.

Discussions

Kamal Rana was got nominated in the Upper House and actively rolled as a Vice-Chairperson of the same:

The women political movement and the pace of campaign were almost null due to the unitary Panchayati system since 1960 after the direct involvement of King Mahendra. King Mahendra was known as the diplomatic leader, who dissolved the parliamentary system government of B. P. Koirala and sentenced to most of the political leaders.

It is the fact that woman's population makes up more than half national population of Nepal. Regarding this Sapana Pradhan Malla; a judge in a Supreme Court states:

The history of women's organization as a ground for formal political socialization of Nepali women is almost 92 years, that women especially those who were participating in political activities had hardly political socialization opportunities which encouraged political participation.

Women are not easily addressed and recognized in our society neither their contributions are

publicized and accepted as widely as male counterparts. Hence, Women's hopes and dreams are shattered multiple times despite their efforts (Bardach, 2000). Moreover, the legal construction, social norm and values since the origin of the society have made their life more complicated and they easily suffer from identity crisis in our male dominated society. Similarly, they are called the 'other' or 'second sex' in every section, even their socio political contributions are easily minimized in the history of Nepali women's political arena.

In this regard, Puspha Bhusal states:

The reinstated HoR has passed a proposal to ensure at least 33% women's representation in every state structure. However, the effective role of the state in the issues depends firstly on the leading political parties deal these issues within their own party system and structures.

Feminism is a general term covering a range of ideologies and theories which pay special attention to women's right and women's position in any culture and society. It is a discourse that involves various movements, theories and philosophies which are concerned with the issues of gender difference, advocate equality for women and campaign for woman's right and interest (Acharya, Bell, Simkhada, van Teijlingen, & Regmi, 2010). The term tends to be used for the women's movement which began in the late 18th century and perpetuates to campaign for complete political, social, and economic equality between man and women. In *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, Paula Treichler and Chris Kramaral defines feminism as:

A movement seeking the reorganization of the world upon a basis of sex equality in all human relations; a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of woman and man as the foundation of law and custom.

Historically, feminist thought can be divided into two waves. The first wave began in about 1800 and lasted until the 1930s. It was largely concerned with gaining equal rights between men and women. First wave feminism originally focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to the chattel marriage and the ownership of married woman by their husband. The second wave feminism which began in late 1960s, has continued to fight for equality but has also developed a range of theories and approaches that stresses the difference between women and men and which draw attention to the specific needs of woman. Although the term 'feminism' was not used until the end of the 19th century, the emergence of recognizably

feminist ideology can be traced to the late 19th century (Bennett, 1989).

The new constitution has become the greatest strength to women in policy making process though women representative. Most of the women started to search the economic strength through the cooperative financial saving in community level as the Ama Samuha, Sahakari Samuha, Women Awareness Group (WAG), Community Forestry Users Group (CFUG), Social Activists and so on that gave the sound platform to table their voices afterward and women voices are mainstreamed regularly. Hence, the social participation is the first steps of political participation of women. Another issue in Nepal was *Sati* system during the nineteenth century. The Shree 3 Prime Minister, Chandra Shumsher JBR had eradicated the *Sati* system from Nepal in 1971 BS (Acharya, Bell, Simkhada, van Teijlingen, & Regmi, 2010).

Though there are various challenges to women regarding to grab the constitutional opportunities. In every social and political position woman are treated as a weak character and they are not given any decision level post. The political height of women defines their strength and capacity of handling the roles and responsibilities. In general, male have occupied open competition quota and women are only getting an inclusive sector that is defined as less active roles where male have more active and social status in political parties.

International Movement on Women's Rights

The campaign of women's rights seems to have begun at the international level institutionally since the celebration of first International Women's Day on 8th March 1910 A.D. along with demands from women for equal educational, social, economic and political rights. The UN Charter states the norm that the world community should respect the equality between men and women, and human rights. The UN Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 has emphasized on the protection of human rights. In 1951, the ILO passed the Convention on Equal Wages (IOM, 2016). The Convention on the Political Rights of Women, 1952 was passed to ensure assure the political rights of women.

Similarly, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in 1994 in Cairo of Egypt has addressed the need of strengthening women in economic, social and political sectors. Talking about the same context, Dhital states:

Women's political participation at the political level is very less even in highly developed countries such as America and Europe. The participation of women in the world politics, there is only 13.7 percent. As per UNDP statistics, there is 43 percent women participation in politics in Sweden, 37 percent in Netherlands, 35.8 percent Norway and 30.4 percent in

Finland. Women's participation in politics has become an issue of serious contemplation since the UN World conferences on women and Development in 1975 to the fourth world women's conference in Beijing, China in 1995.

Although women's participation in every field for a social change is the hot topic of discussion, the condition is not satisfactory at all. It is also proven by measuring the female participation in the world politics which is miserable even in developed countries (Kabeer, 1999).

National Policy of Nepal

The Constitution of Nepal, 2072 has made the positive provisions of some fundamental rights under the women's right such as no discrimination should be there on the part of female only because females are born as females. It has given priority to the right to reproductive health which is as important to the fundamental right, equal right of both daughter and son in the paternal property etc. In addition to this, the Constitution has made provision that the acts of violence of physical, mental or other nature shall be punishable by laws. Similarly, the Constitution has made provision of right against discrimination in the name of custom, tradition or culture. The fundamental right to proportional participation has been assured (FWLD, 2016).

Women Experiences and Policy Implementation.

In Nepalese political status, Nepalese women are involved in the political movement since the fifties but several factors have prevented them from actively participating in local and national politics. These factors are the dominant ideology of patriarchy, male chauvinism, criminalization of policies, lack of equal property rights, restrictions on women's mobility, and domination of men in all the political parties. Only few women have gained higher public positions. An encouraging trend is the presence of a lot of elected women representatives in the local bodies. This is due to the provision of seat reservation at this level (Collins, 2005). However, women lack the power to contribute significantly even within these roles as most of the resources are controlled by their male colleagues. Generally, Nepalese women have already opened the door to achieve the destinations of their entire freedom and rights along with their responsibilities. There is no solution to this miserable condition of Nepalese women unless they are adequately and appropriately educated concerning their rights and responsibilities.

Nepal Women's Participation in Politics of Nepal

The term women's rights refer to freedoms and entitlements of women and girls of all ages. These rights may or may not be institutionalized, ignored or suppressed by law, local custom,

and behavior in a particular society. These liberties are grouped together and differentiated from broader notions of human rights because they often differ from the freedoms inherently possessed by or recognized for men and because activists for this issue claim an inherent historical and traditional bias against the exercise of rights by women and girls (Bennett, 1989).

Women movements around the world are due to reason of lack or low level of women's participation at policy and decision levels especially in south Asian context. As Durga Ghimire, a senior social worker and a renowned human rights activist of Nepal, claims:

There are various factors that have discouraged women from taking an active part in politics. It is further cited the challenges and constraints of women in politics as women are considered stupid and ignorant when it comes to matters of any real importance. When they are constantly being told that they are not intelligent enough to participate in politics it is no wonder that they do not believe in themselves.

There have been some studies and researches on women's rights; there is lack of an extensive research on women's political participation in Nepal till date. Consequently, no political parties, organizations and individuals are ready to find out the problems of women politicians and create favourable environment for prospective women political cadres based on actual data and grassroots situations (Deutsch, 2016).

Evaluation of Challenges and Opportunities

The policies of different political parties and Constitution of Nepal are the remarkable sources of the study. Regarding this, political reviews, books, articles, election report and result published by National Election Commission (NEC), constitutional provision for the representatives, women voices in different forum for the amendment and various institution's voices were used to prove hypothesis of the research (IOM, 2016). However, many challenges remain ahead of this constitution. All the unresolved issues should be solved through political consensus and take the country ahead for developmental works. Nepalese need to develop democratic culture and develop leadership who are responsible for the welfare of the state and its entire people. This study recommends that long lasting solution of the problem of the Madhesh, efficiency in the functioning of elected bodies at all three levels of government, implementation of federalism and republic, proportionate development all around the nation and continuity of the existing social harmony are the major challenges of the government and constitution of Nepal (Kabeer, 1999).

Santa Chaudhary, HoR, claimed: Until and unless the proper implementation of constitutional

rights regarding women's opportunities, we may not assure that women have empowered and they mainstreamed in national politics" (My translation, interview, 2021). However, she agreed on the subjective opportunities that address by the constitution. Similarly, Maina Bhandari, HoR, clarified: "New Constitution 2072 has addressed women issues in certain extent through the fundamental rights and to implement them first of all it is becoming the greatest challenges to formulate the law and practically difficult aware. It is because most of the women are well educated, they are socially and financially deprived to have the access of those opportunities" (My translation, interview, 2021). It clarifies that most of the women are not well education and they are facing tremendous due to financial and social construction of our nation.

However, Dharmashila Chapagain, HoR, emphasized that "most of the new formulated laws and regulations are women friendly. It is now remaining to implement in proper manner, if so, it will definitely carry out the good result in future regarding the women empowerment" (My translation, interview, 2021).

While examining the different provisions in Nepal's new constitution, NiraJairu, HoR, said that "one can firmly and proudly say, Nepal's new constitution is progressive, and institutes several positive elements for the upliftment of women in the country" (My translation, interview 2021).

Many women remain powerless to improve their position in thematic committee and public participation. They said that, women are less represented in political parties as well. The participation of women in politics seems insufficient for decision making levels representation. However, women are not well educated, capable and experienced to handle any types of responsibility due to that they are always in second position (Lindsey, 2015)

As a result, recent Federal Parliaments, Provinces and Local Government election have ensured almost 33% women representation. This is a major achievement in the history of Nepal as well as entire South Asian region. However, Shekh Chadatara, HoR, claimed that "Nepalese women holding more than 50 percent population in the total census should not be satisfied with this result. They must strive and fight for ensuring 50% proportional and meaningful representation of women at all level" (My translation, Interview 2021). Also, these women, members all level government, have different challenges ahead, for which they need support and collaboration from all the members of civil society as well as political parties.

The women need to know about their rights and more work needs to be made on it. Regarding this, Sarita Neupane, HoR, says:

The major issue of women, we have to consider is women are affected differently in war, violent conflict and any human rights violation cases. There is always the cost the women pay is very high in comparison to men in any situation. However, the contribution of women always neglected. The concept on women as weaker-sex and subordinate to the man can be changed through the involvement of women in decision making level at politics, and working in the area where there is more man involvement such as army (My translation, Interview 2021).

Socially and economically men are always considered superior to women, breadwinner, head of the family and the care taker and this is major cause for the low participation of women in politics. They are participating in the political field but it is not up to the level. In order to change the status of women in Nepal socio-cultural change is required (Badal, 2017).

The major achievement of the Constitution of Nepal, 2072, has the provision of 33% women participation must in any organization and the same thing is stated in the Article 84 (8) of the constitution stipulates that if a political party cannot ensure 33 percent women winners from first-past-the-post parliamentary election and the Upper House election, then it must select its proportional representation candidates in such a way so as to ensure 33 percent of its winning candidates are women (Zaidi, et al., 2009).

The gender bias and gender base violence are still prevalent. The educational status of women also reflects the involvement of female in national politics. Occupation is another social structure to define the political status of the women. Women are bound to give the time for political activities after doing their all works/jobs at home and only they are free. The political height of women defines their strength and capacity of handling the roles and responsibilities. In general, male have occupied open competition quota and women are only getting an inclusive sector that is defined as less active roles where male have more active and social status in political parties (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The social situation of Nepalese women is complex and cannot be explained. The differences are demarked by the geographical religion, economic situation, cultural and caste verifications. Thus the social world of the women is the picture of her position in each household (Marecek, Crawford, & Popp, 2004). Chhaupadi is a social practice that occurs in the western part of Nepal for Hindu women, which prohibits a woman from participating in normal family and social activities during menstruation. Women are considered impure during this time, and are kept out of the house and have to live in a shed. Instead of being treated as equal members in the human race, Nepalese women are shamed as less than mere slaves to their husbands. There are so many

boundaries of women which makes the women's backward. Women are bound to face many challenges during the tenure of life (Thakur, 2017).

Conclusion

It study has analysed and explored the policy provision of the Constitution of Nepal and its implementation in another. The study examines the roles and participation of women in the politics and factors affecting their participation to fill this gap. This study has attempted to document the activities of women involved in political parties, their roles and opportunities.

After the qualitative analysis, the status of women in politics; challenges and opportunities are highlighted by all those interviewed and other women political leaders:

- No control of women leaders over the state mechanism
- Inadequate opportunities and access and control over resources
- Difficulties to manage the time for political participation
- Challenges to be updated on human rights, inclusive democracy and women empowerment issues including international treaties, and provisions etc.
- Challenges to cope with the barriers of cultural values and practices that are firmly entrenched in systems and structures of society.
- Patriarchal structure of society hinders women's social, cultural, economic and political participation.
- Challenges to upgrade and raise the literacy rate of women in Nepal, which severely limits women's participation in politics.
- Unhealthy power relationship between men and women, between caste and class. (Interview 2021)

In the current situation, most of the women have positive attitude and political scenario has given tremendous social opportunities like socio-political awareness, gender empowerment, women status, cultural belief and many other more benefits. Women emphasized that special programs should be organized to grab these political opportunities like, policies orientation, training, constitutional legal rights awareness and development, skill development etc. for the empowerment of women from among the minority and marginalized communities after that they only they can realize the full potential of their status matter. Women's positions should be reserved in leadership positions of the political parties and the state at different levels. Work should be initiated from households, society and the political parties to improve women's leadership status.

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