

AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW ON THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Historical data furnished the existence of several tribal assemblies like Sabha, Samiti Vidhata and Gana which exercised “deliberative, military and religious function.”(Sharma, RS, 2005, p.111). V.D Mahajan also agreed that Sabha, Samiti and Vidhata were popular assemblies in the Vedic time with the mentioning Sabha as the council of elders or nobles, Samiti as the national assembly of whole people and Vidhata dealt with civil, military and religious functions. (Mahajan, V.D. 1990, p.105). Romila Thapar who also are of the view of the functions of the Sabha, Samiti and Vidhata and she has rightly states that Sabha be the “council of the select and exclusive and Samiti has been described as the clan assembly.” (Thapar Romila, 2002, p. 119). It is said that Sabha was a smaller assembly, Samiti seemed to be large assembly and Vidhata was a tribal assembly with various functions. (Singh Upinder, 2009, p. 188). In the early Vedic times, the king was not an autocrat as his power was checked by the two popular assemblies i.e., Sabha and Samiti. Sabha is considered as the council of elders, whereas Samiti was the assembly of whole people. (Tripathi Rama Shankar, 1992, p. 31).

The power and function of the Sabha was political, administrative and judicial functions. The Sabha was a “gathering of elect – the Brahmanas and elders but in the early period the evidences of women attendance in Sabha has been found i.e., in the early Vedic period.”(Sharma Ram Sharan, 1968, p.99). Vidhata was a very important Vedic institution in which the evidence of women’s participation in it is witnessed from various ancient literary sources. (Ibid, p. 79). Samiti also regarded as a folk assembly and all the people were attended in Samiti to transact all business of the tribal or community. (Ibid, p. 102). From the studied and analysis of the popular Vedic institutions, it is quite clear that since the ancient days right from the early Vedic period people whether elected or not, participated in the various aspect of the socio-politico economy and religion. The power of the king in the early Vedic period was curtailed by the two popular assemblies, Sabha and Samiti. Samiti had the power to dethrone the king and to elect or select the king as king could not do to the best satisfaction of the community or tribal. Therefore, the king tried to win the favour of the popular assemblies, Sabha and Samiti. No doubt, people were participated in the process of decision making for the welfare of the community and women were not excluded.

Many of the scholars are of the opinions that monarchy was the only form of the government that prevalent in ancient India. However, based on the various historical sources we have sound justification to prove the existence of the non-monarchical form of government in ancient India. K.P. Jayaswal who is pioneer in the field of the republic in ancient India remarked that “The hymns of the Rik and Atharvan, the view of the Mahabharata and the tradition which Megasthenes heard in India in the 4th Century B.C., all point to the fact that republican form of government in India came long after monarchy, and after the early Vedic age.” (Jayaswal, K.P.1924, p. 23). R.S. Sharma is also of the opinion that republics were emerged in the post-Vedic using the term post-Vedic republics. (Sharma Ram Sharan, p. 109). The term Gana is found mention 46 times in Rig Veda, 9 times in Artharveda and translated it as an assembly. Gana and Sangha are used as non-monarchical form of government. The non-monarchical form of government which is known as republic has been described as post-Vedic institutions by K.P. Jayaswal. (Jayaswal, K.P. p.23). The Greek writers have furnished the prevalence of both monarchical and non-monarchical form of governments in ancient India. Therefore, ancient India literatures have been described monarchical and non-monarchical form of governments. There is no doubt that ancient concept of republic is far difference from the well-established republics of the present days. Aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy or republics are the terms used for non-monarchical form of the state in ancient India. In the non-monarchical form of government or state the supreme power was in the hands of the group of people either elected or non-elected or whole body of the citizens whereas in the monarchical form of government power was in the hands of one individual who exercised the supreme power. It comes to know from Mahabharata that the word Gana is meant for whole body politics, whole community or large number of people of the community who have the power to administer the state. (Mahabharata, p.108, 8, 24). The Ganarajya, the state which ruled by the Gana is denoted as the government by assembly or parliament by K.P. Jayaswal. (Jayaswal, K.P. p.25). There is no denying fact that in the non-monarchical form of government or state – Gana and Sangha, people had participated to govern their communities and state. In the context of political participation, the people either elected or non-elected, jointly shared the sovereign power in the ancient days as ancient India had experienced the tradition of non-monarchical form of government or state so called the republic, ruled by more than one individual.

The topic on the political participation is the area of the interest in which many of the political thinkers as well as scholars have been attempted to highlight the exact meaning, importance, etc. in the modern democratic set of government. The definitions on the political participation have been propounded by various scholars who are trying their best the accurate meaning of the political participation from different angles. It has been asserted that “Political development from tribal and feudal to advanced industrial societies is characterized by increasingly complex patterns of interest representation in the formation of policy – patterns in which organizations play a prominent although often a variable role. The particular form of participation and representation take depends on the political culture, values, ideology, and developmental experience of a society.” (Black Cyril E. and Burke John P.1983, p.394). He also further analyzed that “In the predominantly democratic societies, interest representation by organizations interacts with non-organizational forms of individual participation – especially the election of representatives to legislative bodies on the basis of universal suffrage – under conditions in which freedom of speech, press, and association are guaranteed. In predominantly authoritarian societies, by contrast, interests are represented exclusively through organizations; individuals exert influence through select organizations, and civil liberties are generally denied.”(Ibid). Many scholars has used the concept of participation and Carole Pateman quoting from McGregor stated that “Participation is one of the most misunderstood ideas that have merged from the field of human relations, goes on to say that participation consists basically in creating

opportunities under suitable conditions for people to influence decisions affecting them. That influence can vary from a little to a lot...[participation] is a special case of delegation in which the subordinate gains greater control, greater freedom of choice, with respect to his own responsibilities. The term participation is usually applied to the subordinate's greater influence over matters within the superior's responsibilities." (Pateman Carole, 1991, p.67 & McGregor Douglas, 1960, pp. 124-130). G. Tang and F.L. Lee gives the definition of political participation as "political activities, such as joining political or civic groups, volunteering, communicating with politicians, participating in campaigns, or supporting in terms of voting or petitioning online." (Tang, G. and Lee, F.L. 2013, p. 763).

When discussing what is political participation, Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie opined that "political participation refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take. The definition is rough, but it is adequate for delimiting our sphere of interest. It indicates that we are basically interested in political participation; that is, in acts that aim at influencing governmental decisions. Actually, we are interested more abstractly in attempts to influence the authoritative allocations of values for a society, which may or may not take place through governmental decisions. But, like most political scientists who start out with such an abstract concern, we shall concentrate on governmental decisions as a close approximation of this more general process." (Verba Sidney and Nie Norman H. 1972, p. 2). Max Kaase and Alan Marsh define political participation as "all voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system." (Kaase Max & Marsh Alan, 1979, p. 72).

Dealing with the concept of the political participation, Robert H. Salisbury asserted that "The concept of political participation has been heavily laden with ideological meaning, especially in recent years. The Chamber of Commerce urges more active involvement of the citizens; so does the political left. Mobilization has become a familiar political term, whether directed toward the poor, "middle America," or the student vote. Protest marches and other forms of demonstration have been recognized alongside the more customary modes of political participation. And, not least important, a considerable number of public policy issues have revolved around how and whether to increase, moderate, or otherwise control the amount, style, and impact of public participation in the political community." (Salisbury Robert H., 1975, p. 326). It involves a set of activities "(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 and (5) engaging in habitual dissemination of political opinions through word of mouth communications to other citizens." (Woodward, J.L. and Roper E., 1972, p. 133).

Gender, age, family income and regional affiliation are the main factors that affected the political participation which is described by Mohammad Soud Alelaimat in his paper Factors Affecting Political Participation (Jordanian Universities Students' Voting: Field Study 2017 – 2018). (Alelaimat Mohammad Soud, 2023, p. 54). The women in many of the societies have been found less political participation to compare to that of male counterpart which is even witnessed in the developed countries also. There has been gender gap in Britain in the political participation as witnessed of the less participation of women in the political arena which is clearly evidence that women vote less than that of the male. (Childs S. 2004, p.422). In the opinion of the Koch and Verba et.al., female have lack of political interest. The women believed that they have inability to bring change

the political as well the society. Some study drawn the conclusion that there has been a gap in terms of involvement in political participation between younger sections and older people. (Koch J.W. 1997, pp. 118-133 and Verba S., Burns N. & Schlozman K.L. 1997, pp. 1051-1072). The findings of Mohammad Soud Alelaimat stated that “the ratio of participation for young people is low, because of their different interests in political activities. Moreover, university students are reluctant to vote in elections, because of their feeling of alienation within the society, especially young female students. In addition, there are political factors which lead to marginalize students participating in the political sphere. Also, some social factors such as tribal affiliation affect students voting.” (Alelaimat Mohammad Soud, p.58). Family income is also another factor affecting the political participation. Henry E. Brady et.al., asserted that time, money and civic skills are the three main resources affecting the political participation.(Brady Henry E., Verba Sidney and Schlozman Kay Lehman, 1995, p. 271). Some studies also show that a connection between voting and conventional political activities on the one hand, and working-class people, low-income families, or individuals living in poverty on the other. Furthermore, the majority of voters and participants in political activities were those who were wealthy and affluent in society. (Alelaimat Mohammad Soud, p.58). Political participation is also affected by the differences of regions within the same country. David J. Elkins explains the regional variation in political participation as “regional variations in participation at least partly in terms of some holistic features of the regions themselves. These features, such as degree of linguistic and social diversity, differences in social hierarchy, and extent of party competition, cannot be reduced to characteristics of individuals but must be analyzed geographically.” (Elkins David J., 1972. pp.169-170).

During the British rule in India, in the second half of the 19th century, flowering of national political consciousness and the growth of an organized national movement had been witnessed. Various factors were responsible for the rise of political consciousness among the Indians. The factors were socio-religious reform movements, racial discrimination by the British, economic exploitation of India by the British, political and economic unification of India brought by the British, growth of press, repressive policies of the British authorities, etc. Even before the establishment of Indian National Congress, numbers of political associations were sprung up for the political education for the Indians. It is well known fact that in December 1885 Indian National Congress was founded with 72 delegates. The credit for the birth of Indian National Congress was given to A.O. Hume who was a retired British officer, and a person who played a key role for the formation of Indian National Congress. Bipan Chandra who stated regarding the aims of Indian National Congress in his work *Modern India* as “the promotion of friendly relations between nationalist political workers from different parts of the country, development and consolidation of the feeling of national unity irrespective of caste, religion, or province, formulation of popular demands and their presentation before the Government, and, most important of all, the training and organization of public opinion in the country” (Chandra Bipan, 1904 p. 200) are the main aims of Indian National Congress. It clearly evidences that the main objective of the Indian National Congress was to bring together all the nationalist political workers in the nook and corner of India for fostering national unity of the Indians and demand and presentation before the government.

The Queen Victoria’s Proclamation of 1858 included the assurance to the native rulers that the British government in no case would not be annexed their territory to the British empire and also allowed them the right of adoption of sons. The Proclamation also included non-interference to the religions of Indian and to allow them enjoy full religious liberty. It also allowed the Indians to hold a post under the government if they had necessary qualification. In this proclamation it is also stated that “the Governor-General would have an Executive Council

whose members were to act as heads of different departments and as his official advisers. The position of the members of the Council was similar to that of Cabinet ministers. Originally there were five members of this Council but by 1918 there were six ordinary members, apart from the Commander-in-Chief who headed the Army Department, The Council discussed all important matters and decided them by a majority vote; but the Governor General had the power to override any important decision of the Council. In fact, gradually all power was concentrated in the Governor-General's hands." (Ibid, p.152). This proclamation had given a little room for the Indians to participate in the administration of the government but the room of political participation is questionable. The British government wanted to follow a policy of association with Indian in the administration has promised to the Indians in the Proclamation of 1858 and suggestion made by Lord Canning to home government to restore the power of making laws in the Presidencies taken by the Charter Act of 1833. This led to the passing of Indian Council Act of 1861. The provisions of the Act added a 5th member to the Viceroy's Executive Council and expanded it by adding a minimum of 6 members and a maximum of 12 members. (Grover B.L. and Mehta Alka, 2018, p. 337). In connection with the Indian Council Act of 1861, D.D. Basu commented that was "neither representative nor deliberative in any sense." (Basu D.D. 1981, p. 4). However, the Indian Council Act of 1861 appeared to be an important landmark for the beginning of representative institutions by associating Indians in the law-making process. Indian National Congress under the leadership of Moderates passes a resolution demanding the increase of Legislative members by introducing a system of elections. On the recommendation of Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, Indian Council Act of 1892 was passed. According to Bipinchandra, this Act provided to increase the elected members indirectly by Indians both at the Imperial Legislative Council and provincial councils with the right to discuss the annual budgets but the members had no voting rights. (Chandra Bipan, p.208.). As a result, it did not make any significant changes in the then existing set up. It had only increased the number of additional members in the Imperial Legislative Council and the Provincial Legislative Councils. We may agree with the observation given by B.L. Grover and Alka Mehta in respect to the Indian Council Act of 1892 that "despite the fact that the Act of 1892 fell far short of the demands made by the Congress it was undoubtedly a great advance on the existing state of things. By conceding the principle of election of representatives and giving the Legislature some control over the Executive, the Act did pave the way for the introduction of parliamentary responsible government in India." (Grover B.L. and Mehta Alka, p. 381). With the coming of Liberal Party into power in England, Lord Morley and Lord Minto became the Secretary of State and the Viceroy of India respectively. They felt the need for constitutional reforms and passed the Indian Council Act of 1909 also known as Morley-Minto Reforms. The Act attempted in introducing a popular and representative element by increasing the number of elected members in the Imperial Legislative Council and the provincial councils. It also provided the association of Indians with the executive Councils of the Viceroy and Governors for the first time. Further, the Act introduced a system of communal representation for Muslims by accepting the concept of 'separate electorate'. (Basu D.D. p. 5).

Sumit Sarkar asserted that "the Indian Councils Act of 1909 proved to be the most short-lived of all of Britain 'constitutional' experiments in India, being totally revised within nine years by the Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918." (Sarkar Sumit, 1983, p.137). In 1917, Montagu, the Secretary of State came to India and discussed with Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, some eminent British officers and Indian politicians for political reforms in India. Thus, a committee was formed with Sir William Duke, Earl of Donoughmore, B.N. Basu and Charles Robert which together helped the Secretary of State to prepare the draft of a reform scheme known as Montagu-Chelmsford Report which was published in July 1918 and on the basis of the report the Government of

India Act 1919 was drafted. By the Act “The Provincial Legislative Councils were enlarged and the majority of their members were to be elected. The provincial governments were given more powers under the system of Dyarchy. Under this system some subjects, such as finance and law and order, were called ‘reserved’ subjects and remained under the direct control of the Governor; others such as education, public health, and local self-government, were called ‘transferred’ subjects and were to be controlled by ministers responsible to the legislatures. This also meant that while some of the spending departments were transferred, the Governor retained complete control over the finances. The Governor could, moreover, overrule the ministers on any grounds that he considered special. At the center, there were to be two houses of legislature, the lower house, the Legislative Assembly, were to have 41 nominated members in a total strength of 144. The upper house, the Council of State, was to have 26 nominated and 34 elected members. The legislature had virtually no control over the Governor-General and his Executive Council. On the other hand, the Central Government had unrestricted control over the provincial governments. Moreover, the right to vote was severely restricted. In 1920, the total number of voters was 909,874 for the lower house and 17,364 for the upper house.” (Chandra Bipan, p.263). (Bipinchandra) The Government of India Act 1919 was considered as a landmark in the constitutional history of India. It was a step towards the self-government. B.L. Grover and Alka Mehta observed that “For the first time in the history of British rule it provided for transfer of power, even though the transfer was halting and the power extremely limited.” (Grover B.L. and Mehta Alka, p. 397).

Sumit Sarkar asserted that ‘From 1932 onwards, real participation in the making of constitution had become negligible.’(Sarkar Sumit, p.336). The British parliament passed the Government of India Act 1935 and it marked a great landmark towards a complete responsible government in India. The provisions of the Act as reproduced by Bipin Chandra as “provided for the establishment of an All-India Federation and a new system of government for the provinces on the basis of provincial autonomy. The federation was to be based on a union, of the provinces of British India and the Princely States. There was to be a bicameral federal legislature in which the States were given disproportionate weightage. Moreover, the representatives of the States were not to be elected by the people, but appointed directly by the rulers. Only 14 per cent of the total population in British India was given the right to vote. Even this legislature, in which the princes were once again to be used to check and counter the nationalist elements, was denied any real power. Defense and foreign affairs remained outside its control, while the Governor-General retained special control over the other subjects. The Governor-General and the Governors were to be appointed by the British Government and were to be responsible to it. In the provinces, local power was increased. Ministers responsible to the provincial assemblies were to control all departments of provincial administration. But the Governors were given special powers. They could veto legislative action and legislate on their own. Moreover, they retained full control over the civil service and the police.”(Chandra Bipan, pp. 290-291).

With the announcement made by Clement Attlee, British Prime Minister on 20th February, 1947 that the British Government would leave India by June 1948 even if the Indian political parties could not come to an understanding on the future set up of the independent government. (Ibid, p.3030). This declaration was followed by the protest by the Muslim League demanding partition of the country. Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy proposed a plan known as June 3rd Plan for the solution of political problems of India in 1947. B.L. Grover and Alka Mehta reproduced important portions of the Plan as “It is not the intention of His Majesty’s government to interrupt the work of the exiting Constituent Assembly... it is clear that any constitution framed by this Assembly

cannot apply to those parts of the country which are unwilling to accept it. His Majesty's Government are satisfied that the procedure outlined below embodies the best practical method of ascertaining the wishes of the people of such areas on the issue whether their constitution is to be framed – (a) in the existing Constituent Assembly; or (b) in a new and separate Constituent Assembly consisting of the representatives of those areas which decide not to participate in the existing Constituent Assembly. When this is done it will be possible to determine the authority or authorities to whom power should be transferred.” (Grover B.L. and Mehta Alka, p.424). On 18th July, 1947, the British parliament ratified the June 3rd Plan of Mountbatten as the Indian Independence Act 1947. The Act provided for the establishment of two independent dominions of India and Pakistan w.e.f. 15th August, 1947. (Chandra Bipin, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan & K.N. Panikkar, 1989, pp. 496-501). Thus, 15th August, 1947 marked the end of British colonial rule and the beginning of a new era in India. The Constituent Assembly of India formed in 1946 became the Parliament of the Indian Dominion and Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn as the first Prime Minister of free India.

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