INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The process of nation building involves in some respects the dissemination of information about and the commitment to the national unity. Political participation is an important requirement of every political system. Although political process in some societies is monopolized by only a few incumbents of political authority, every system undertakes several measures to ensure some amount of political participation by the people. "By involving the majority of its citizens, political participation fosters stability and order through the re-enforcement of the legitimacy of political authority" (Lipset,1960,180). A society, in which a significant part of the population is denied any right to participation whatsoever, is likely to be highly explosive. The idea of this participation naturally assumes greater importance in a democratic system which, indeed, demands it. According to McClosky, "participation is the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled" (McClosky,1968,253). Explaining the importance of participation in politics, Milbrath and Goel argue that the citizens must at least participate in choosing their representatives in public offices in order to keep public action responsible to the wishes and desires of the people (1977,2), particularly in a society where certain groups are traditionally behind the others, where they are termed as 'weaker sections' or 'disadvantaged groups'(Palmer,1976,59-61**)**, wider participation and mobilization at higher and higher levels would be necessary for their upliftment and a healthier democratic system. On the whole, a more developed society is a more participant one. It has also been maintained that political participation has some role to play in nation-building, since it represents **a "**means of orienting loyalties and a new feeling of national identity" (Pye 1972,39-40)

Indicating the importance of the citizen's participation in a democracy, several theorists emphasize the presence of an active participant citizen as an essential condition of the successful working of the democracy. Almond and Verba (1965) hold that "a successful democracy requires that citizens be involved and active in politics". In their opinion, democracy is characterized by the fact that power over significant authoritative decisions in a society is distributed among the population. The ordinary man is expected to take an active part in governmental affairs, to be aware of how decisions are made, and to make his views known (Almond and Verba,1965,119). Berelson and his associates argue that "an ideal democratic citizen should be interested and ... participate in political affairs, have the capacity for and practice of (political) discussion, possess a strong motivation for participation in

political life, be well informed about political affairs, cast his vote on the basis of principles, and exercise rational judgment in coming to his voting decision''(1954,307-309).

Political participation is a complex phenomenon. It influenced by different variables. It denotes a series of activities which have tremendous influence on the working of the country's political process. These activities are (1) voting during elections, (2) supporting political parties or pressure groups by being a member of them, (3) personally communicating with leaders, (4) participating in political activities and thus gaining confidence of the legislators, (5) engaging in face-to-face communication with other citizens and thus forming public opinion. 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 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 (1972, 97). Milbrath, suggests that the various forms of political involvement fall into a hierarchy or continuum according to the cost in time and effort that each demand (www.encyclopedia.com).But other variables, such as political articulations, saliency, and interest which can only partially be reckoned into the 'costs' - also affect the frequency of the various forms of participation" (Milbrath 1965,55-60).

"Political culture" according to Almond and Powell, "is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientation towards politics among the members of a political system. Such individual orientations involve several components: a) *cognitive orientations*; knowledge of political objects and beliefs, b) *affective orientations*; feeling of attachment, involvement or rejection about political objects and c) *evaluative orientations*; judgements and opinions about political objects." (Powell.Almond,1966,50) Hence, an individual may possess a high degree of political knowledge about the working of the political system, who are the leading figures, what are the different government structures through which decisions are taken but he/she may have a sense of alienation or rejection towards the system and therefore would not respond in terms of political participation like voting, involvement in political meetings etc. These three dimensions are interrelated and may be combined in a variety of ways even within the same individual and this has significant influence on the ways in which a political system works. Some of these variations are due to the familiar determinants of political participation like education, access to information etc. However, Almond's classification is based rather on its utility and meaningfulness in comparing political systems. It shows how

the performance and working of political systems are dependent on the structural and cultural characteristics of political systems in different countries.

Political Orientation is a complex phenomenon. Its various forms vary from one country to another, in different periods of history and from one type of people in a society to another. In this context, attention must also be paid to the differing situational factors in individual countries – geographical location. its tradition, history, access of people to the government institutions, and the peculiar forms of political competition. Researches 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 political influence requires special ability to be involved in political matters which female citizens, no matter where they live, or what their level of education is, find it very difficult to engage in. Women's prescribed image are such where they are regarded as passive citizens and this norm has been very strongly rooted in society. Women in political systems are heavily dominated by men (Christy,1984,7-34). In presence of patriarchy, gender differentiation emerged from and within the system. In this society, women are usually restricted and forced to follow the norms, beliefs, customs and values of the society making separate codes of conduct for women and men (Kabeer, 2000). These constraints are fluid over time and space and therefor varies according to the structure of the society with respect to culture, caste, ethnicity, and class. We have not been able to get rid of these characteristics even in this 21st century. Being treated as a deprived section, women are still denied from power indicating that they are relatively less entitled to make strategic choice. But from development perspective, women's role was never denied, as they are also a part of the society and therefore mainstreaming of women is recommended by various scholars to entitle them the equal share of development process. As a means; 'empowerment of women' is suggested which highlights the importance of- as Mosedale puts it- as an expansion of freedom of choice and action (Mosedale,2003). It is assumed that empowerment generates self confidence among women not only for making important decisions for their life but also to carry them out. In this connection, it is pertinent to mention that empowering women is not an easy task because this particular term involves multidimensionality and is latent in nature. According to Anshu Malhotra, "though proxy variables are used to capture empowerment, but complexity arises in its measurement because women cannot be treated as one group or a category like 'poor, backward castes' etc. rather they are a separate category of individuals that encompasses within themselves members of other socially excluded groups (Malhotra,2003). It is argued that disempowerment of women is generated from complicated relationships emanating from

the household and family, thus making assessment of women empowerment much difficult. Besides, empowerment of women can also be treated as a "process" on the one hand and "agency" on the other hand. It is considered as a process because most often the result of the effort to empower women is not always achieved in the same period; rather it can be gained at different periods. Commonly, empowerment of women depends on the components like 'resources' and 'agency', where resources are treated as the "enabling factors" (Kishor, 2000) and agency "as the ability to formulate strategic choices, to control resources and to take decisions that affect important life outcomes." (Kishor,2000). Agency is considered as most important component of empowerment and it works both at macro and micro levels. At the aggregate level, agency acts for 'social inclusion', whereas, at micro level, it acts to gain 'self-efficacy' that can change women's lives but agency alone cannot empower women. The reason is, in absence of chance to exercise and promote agency through intervention of state apparatus and others at aggregate level, agency failed to earn empowerment for women. In short, as a necessary condition, women should be economically, socially and politically empowered and as a sufficient condition women's individual or collective ability to recognize and utilize resources in their own interests is required. In various stages of life, one can make several choices, but all of them cannot be transformed into desired actions. Establishment of choice depends on the extent of power one possesses. Subsequently, inequality is generated among various groups in the society depending on their ability to exercise choices,

To be more specific, gender bias and gender discrimination has been one of the most discussed issues in the contemporary period in almost all the countries in the world. The concept of power must be made clear in order to deal with the issue of empowerment efficiently. Traditionally, power is considered as one person's gain which implies another's loss in power but later it was realized that this may not hold true always and lead to the development of new concept of power as power within, power to and power with. Where 'power within' refers to the personal qualities like self -esteem and self -confidence of an individual, 'power to' refers to productive or generative power which creates new possibilities and action without domination. (Rowlands,1997) 'Power with' refers to action by the whole indicating that more benefits can be achieved by a group unitedly rather than by individuals alone. (Mosedale,2003) Collins proposes a model of power which consists of four domains namely 'structural', 'disciplinary', 'hegemonic' and 'interpersonal'. By structural domain of power, Collins refers to the social organisations which are organized to reproduce women's subordination over time. In the disciplinary domain, power relations are managed in the family through hierarchies and various forms of controlling mechanisms and surveillance.

Collins holds that hegemonic domain of power deals with ideology, culture and consciousness and also involves women in supporting own subordination. The interpersonal domain of power functions through routinized day-to-day practices of how people treat one another…such practices are systematic, recurrent and so familiar that they often go unnoticed. (Collins, 2000,306-307)

Providing 'equality in opportunity' and 'equality in treatment' to both men and women in social, economic and political lives have been considered to be essential ingredients for gender equality. It has now been well recognized that gender discrimination exists "in every region, at all economic developmental levels, in all political systems, and in diverse religious, social and cultural environments." (Anker, 1998) At the same time, greater emphasis has been placed by people of different walks of life about this phenomenon. As mentioned, the problem has been widely discussed both nationally and internationally among theorists, politicians, policy-makers and, above all among social reformers who have taken up the cause for the prevention of discrimination towards women.

REFERENCES

1. Anker, Richard. 1998. *Gender and Jobs: Sex Segregation of Occupations in the World.* Geneva: International Labour Office.
2. Berelson, B. R., Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee. 1954. *Voting: A study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
3. Christy, C. A. 1984. "Economic Development and Sex Differences in Political participation". In *Women and Politics*: 4 (Spring).
4. Collins, Hill Patricia. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment.* Routledge Classics
5. Eakin, T. C. 1972. *Students and Politics: A Comparative Study.* Bombay: Popular Prakashan.
6. Goel, M. L. 1974. *Political Participation in a Developing Nation India.* New Delhi: Asia Publishing House.
7. Kabeer, N. 2000. *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labor Market Decisions in London and Dhaka.* London: Verso.
8. Kishor, S., and S. Lekha, 2000. *Household Decision-Making as Empowerment: A Methodological View.*
9. Lipset, S. M. 1960. *Political Man – The Social Bases of Politics.* London : William Heinemann.

10. Malhotra, A. (2003). *Measuring Women Empowerment* – World Bank Group.

11. McClosky, H. 1968. "Political Participation". In *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*. New York : Collier – Macmillan.

12. Milbrath, L. W, and M. L. Goel. 1977. *Political Participation How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics ?* Chicago & Rand McNally.

13. Milbrath, L. W. 1965. "Political Participation in the States". In H. Jacob and K. N. Vines (eds). *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*. Boston: Little Brown.

14. Mosedale, Sarah. 2003. *Towards a Framework for Empowerment – Women, Culture and Development.* Ch – 2 Zed Books, London / New York.

15. Palmer, N. D. 1976. *Elections and Political Development-la India*. New Delhi: Vikas.

16. Powell, G., and G. A. Almond. 1966. *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

17. Pye, L. N. 1972. *Aspects of Political Development.* New Delhi. Amerind.

18. Rowlands, Jo. 1997. *Questioning Empowerment: Working with Women in Honduras*. Oxfam Publications.

19. Verba, S., and G. A. Almond. 1965. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations.* Boston. Little Brown.

20. Woodward, J. L., *et. al.* 1972. "Political Activity of the American Citizens." In H. Eulau, S. J. Eldersvela and M. Janowitz (eds.) *Political Behavior*. New Delhi. Amerind.

21. www.encyclopedia.com
(https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-and-social-reform/sociology-general-terms-and-concepts/political-participation/)