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Gender, Digital Democracy and Participatory Governance: Rethinking Women's Participation

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Abstract

The major focus of this paper attributes with two main questions– (a) does Digital Democracy excludes women from the ambit of participatory governance and (b) does digital democracy neutralize the value of gender? The interrogation based on descriptive analytical method with secondary data covers two major shifts in the positional status of women in participatory governance. Its portraits how do women's role as citizen gradually transform to re-image them as netizen. In this context it also highlights on how gently their positional status redirect their roles from subject to object. While digital democracy expands the scope of Government, it articulates a major shift in the pattern of governance. Thus, justifies the very role of power in its interaction with process and practices. This paper examines how does such interaction-institutionalise the role of gender in terms of skill and knowledge therefore produces a thin line between skilled and unskilled in the operation of technological power. Such gap definitely reproduces new form of social hierarchy where weak gender becomes more marginalised due to their minimum access of technology. Thus, this article concludes that, merely the expansion of the scope of participation in digital democracy does not mean that it will dismantle the power block of gender hierarchy. As long as civic consciousness could not obtain, the accountability of government will not be ensured. Thus socio- cultural restructuring of gender roles will become distant dream which is essential for sustain gender justice and equality in Participatory governance of digital democracy.

Keywords: Digital Democracy, Participatory Governance, Women's Political Participation Gender, Governance, Digital Divide

Introduction:

In the contemporary era of participatory democracy, digitalization has become a hallmark of political regimes. While technology reshapes democratic structures and rapidly transforms the dimensions of traditional political power, the strategic importance of political participation reaches new heights. In the virtual world of democracy, the citizen becomes a netizen, digitalized skills become power and e-participation becomes a signature practice that legitimizes the authority of democratic governments.

Passion of power, which drives the overall trend of digital democracy, sets norms on the basis of which uniform structural goals can be achieved. The different forms of political power are re-oriented. It creates graphical as well as digital linkages that allow free interaction among various forms of government. As a result, technical competency of governance enhances. It boosts up the coordination between national, regional and local governance. In this way, the scope of governance expands. Such expansion alters the flow of democratic participation in both rural and urban participatory governance.

Although these changes are relative, as they are closely linked to transformations at regional and national levels of governance, their impact often negatively affects the role of several genders, particularly women. Digitalisation of participatory governance exploits the bi-nary vision of political power in order to politicise gender by altering its social roles. The main objective lies behind such activity is, inclusive participation by exclusion of gender.

However, the expansion of digital democracy does not automatically ensure inclusive participation (Norris, 2003; Legard & Hovik, 2022). This study shows that how digital governance transforms participation into a skill-based activity. In such case, effective citizenship is determined by one's own access to technology, his/ her socio- cultural position and competence to use technological devices without any hassle. As women do not share same social and technological space as men do, their formal inclusion in digital platforms fails to produce genuine participation. Thus, digital democracy, while appearing gender-neutral, often reproduces existing social hierarchies within a technological framework, particularly in the sphere of participatory governance.

Objectives:

In this article, an attempt has been made to examine how the gendered nature of technology in digital democracy re-defines the concept of participation within the framework of participatory governance. The second objective of this study to analyse the tension between women gendered social roles and their equal status as citizens in relation to political participation. The third objective is to investigate how the expansion of participatory mechanisms in digital democracy reproduces new forms of hierarchy and exclusion.

Method: This paper adopts a descriptive–analytical method based on secondary sources.

Analysis and Finding:

(i) Between Inclusion and Exclusion: Women's Participation in Participatory Governance in the Digital Era:

The term "participation" in women's participation has a clear gendered dimension. It is often defined as a process, that set the rules on the basis of which inclusion of the excluded takes place. The pattern of inclusion is depended upon specific interaction between gender, space and culture. Thus, mainstreaming weak gender, specially, the excluded one, is the result of a specific structural orientation of a gendered society (Kabeer, 1999). In this process, collaboration, connection, and the continuation of socially prescribed gender role soften tend to change. Though, existing patterns of gendered orientation are not altered respectively. (Krook & Mackay, 2011). As a result, participation becomes gendered. Masculinity dominantly determines the procedural conditions under which the participation of weak gender can be regulated.

Such a gender-oriented scheme of participatory governance in digital democracy raises a number of serious questions: Is digital democracy capable enough to break the stereotypes of gendered participation? Is women's political engagement a result of mainstreaming gender? How does gendered participation in political context protect the voice of different women as a social category? Does women's interaction with the process of main streaming gender helps them to build up a distinct political identity for women? If so, what role does digital democracy play in developing such distinctiveness, and how effective is it in protecting women's share in participatory governance from counter-revolutionary forces?

It is true that by optimising decentralised power participatory governance providing an equal scope for all citizens to participate in deliberative governance. But gendered role of participation undermines the character of democratic politics. In this context, participation becomes a political tool in the hand of the 'power elite' (Mills, 2019) of gender politics. Mainstreaming of gender shapes the basic orientation of structured social norms. It helps to connect politics with policy to transform gendered identity from personal to political. However, the basic structure of gender politics remains the same.

Although, this process raises a serious question of gender sustainability. As mainstreaming is not conducted strictly along gendered lines, the politicisation of gender deeply biased by the non- gendered issues (Kallay & Valkovicova, 2020). It misleads the legitimisation process of gender politics. In digital democracy multiple identical values interact with social political norms. It challenges the one-dimensional model of gender politics. So, gender alone could not become a source of legitimisation of power thus lost its control over politics significantly.

In populist politics, leader-centric forms of political power increasingly become dominant. It enables ordinary citizens to establish a direct connection with leaders (Laclau, 2005). Such connection helps leaders to portrait themselves as true representatives of the people. In this sense, participatory governance pursues self-sustained individual freedom and rights to ensure the duty of rulers. It not only makes ruler more accountable to the people, rather it acts as a trust-building mechanism (Rosanvallon, 2011) within political communities. Here, the 'self' is not opposite to community; rather, it develops within community. Community provides essential conditions to develop self in its highest form. Self- driven instincts often render visionary objectives of participatory goals but such goals never obliterate the collective value of democratic participation. In Participatory governance cognitive democratic values thus replaces authoritarian imposition, articulated through the diversity of social experiences, interests, and identities present within the democratic political sphere.

In this context, it is important to examine how cognitive democratic values can help digital democracy to deconstruct the gender-based identity in persuasion of gender justice? Does participatory governance generate collective value by dislocating androcentric goals of power in order to make women free from their stereotype gender roles? Before delve into these questions it is important to understand what digital democracy is and how it reconceptualises governance.

Digital democracy refers to a new form of governance based on information and communication technology (ICT) to operate, sustain, and survive in the modern

technological world (Fang, 2002, Akter et.al, 2019). It directs attention towards several new goals, the most important of which are:
(1) Connectivity,
(2) Competence, and
(3) Commitment.

Thus, the role of governance in the digital age has changed rapidly. Digital democracy deconstructs the boundary between government and governance by intensifying interaction between power and knowledge (Faucault, 1991). It justifies the transformation in the patterns and preoccupations of governance and develops a more concrete connection between power and authority in managing public affairs.

In a country like India, where all power is vested in the hands of the people, the people remain the sole source of authority. They delegate this authority to their representatives whom they consider fit for the task. Political power is based on the consent of the people. Accountability of people's representatives reflects within the ambit of governance. Digital democracy expands the scope of governance. It facilitates common people in taking part in governmental activities thus brings them within the purview of governance. In theory such inclusion is not explicitly gender-biased. However, an important question remains: does such inclusion truly help women to become an active participant in participatory governance? Do they enjoy their political rights uninterruptedly or does such inclusion further feminise their roles to satisfy the patriarchal expectations under the guise of mainstreaming politics?

To answer these questions, it is important to understand what role digital democracy plays to include women within the ambit of participatory governance.

First, digital democracy empowers participatory governments to design governance structures in ways that enable the maximum possible participation of people. Prior to the digital regime, involving citizens in participatory decision-making required the establishment of multiple institutional setups, particularly in marginal administrative areas. In contrast, digital governance provides a single centralised platform through which people across different administrative tiers can participate and voice their concerns regarding public affairs (Macintosh, 2004).

The question, however, remains: how does such a structure helps women to participate in governance at the different level? There is no doubt that, digital system is formally free from all sort of gender bias. Irrespective of multiple divisions among people, based on class, caste, region, religion, gender and so on, it provides equal opportunities to all citizen to become a part of participatory governance. But in India, where large sections of the people have limited access to modern technology, it is often difficult for women to acquire technological skills for effective participation. This leads their exclusion from the ambit of digital democracy. It is not that such exclusion is inherent because they are women, but their limited access of technological knowledge and skills (Dijk, 2020) push them away from democratic power centre. Such conditions tend to polarise governance by dividing citizens into two categories: the technologically proficient and the technologically excluded.

Secondly, in order to expand digital access to participatory governance, governments sometimes subsidise the cost of modern technology, particularly for women. These efforts

hardly satisfy the needs of women. In most cases women are unaware of the facilities of such schemes. In patriarchal society like India, women's inclusion in digital world is highly depends on the consent of their male counterparts. Thus, such schemes will never become successful without the removal of patriarchy. Not only so, poor women hardly find any time to spend on the modern technological devices as they bound by their duty to manage household chores. In this context it is quite clear that without altering the gendered power relation of traditional society, no schemes will become successful.

Thirdly, older women are not familiar with the use of modern technological devices, thus maintain a safe distance from digitalised governance processes.

Fourthly, in many areas, poor digital infrastructure and service networks pose serious obstacles to common people— especially women— seeking to participate in participatory governance of digital democracy.

Fifthly, in most cases, operating systems are guided by foreign languages, and poor women fail to understand the instructions provided for this purpose. As a result, digitally activated governance hardly shapes women's participation in its domain. Although several initiatives have been undertaken to encourage women's participation in governance—such as the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA), Mahila e-Haat, Banking Correspondent (BC) Sakhi, and the Digital Beti Initiative— the desired level of success has not yet been achieved. A large number of women still remain beyond the purview of participatory governance.

Thus, it can be argued that participatory governance has largely failed to resolve the tension between traditional and modern gender roles within a digitalized governance framework. Moreover, it has been unable to address intra-gender divisions based on class, caste, religion, region, and language, resulting in the uneven incorporation of women into governance activities.

(ii) Participatory Governance and Gendered Inequality: Access, Literacy, and Technological Barriers in Digital democracy

The digitalisation of participatory governance, although it increases administrative capacity, has seriously affected women's participation, which was carefully planned in the earlier era to reduce gender discrimination in rural society. As the structural set-up of participatory governance changes rapidly under the influence of rampant digitalisation, it fails to accommodate all sections of society, particularly the weaker gender, within the governance process. Administrative norms that previously dominated the sphere of governance have undergone a sudden transformation. In their place, a new set of norms and belief systems now dominate the administrative domain, fundamentally altering the traditional relationship between the rulers and the ruled (Chadwick, 2006).

The nature of administrative responsibility has changed, and the direction of obligation and duty has been re-dimensioned accordingly. In this context, the new rules of governance do not conform to the principles of gender equality. Subsequent phenomena such as e-literacy, digital voting, virtual citizenship, and computerised governance have become determining factors in conceptualising and contextualising the changing domain of democracy. Consequently, participation in participatory governance is increasingly conditioned by technological supremacy, where eligibility depends upon mastery over newly developed technological tools (Mossberger et al., 2007).

With these transformations a new class has arisen in the domain of digital democracy. Their control over technology makes them able to dominate power and resources within democratic government. A new form of power relation develops in this phase. Such relations vertically connect the units of power and shift the participative values accordingly. It further marginalises the role of women in participatory governance. To manage the affairs of participatory governance a number of new projects has been undertaken which place unskilled women as receiver end, thus excludes them from the sphere of decision making. With such exclusion women lose their control over the major decisions, shape their life and livelihood. Their primary exclusion from the sphere of power circle occurs due to their limited capacity to handle new technological equipment (Halfkin & Huyer, 2007), though it has a different connotation. In the so-called democratic processes of digital democracy all orbits of power are highly controlled by the platform capitalism (Tornberg, 2023). Corporate digital network fixes up the role of women as labour, thus bring them under the control of the technological power. Their inclusion in the labour market forces them to accept the secondary position in the hierarchical power structure. Thus, their participation in the democratic sphere becomes eroded.

While some scholars identify the gendered nature of technological development as the primary reason for such exclusion (Wajcman, 2004; Hafkin & Huyer, 2007; Antonio & Tuffley, 2014) others argue that it results from the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women (Torenli, 2006; Agarwal, 2001; Mossberger et al. 2007, Dijk, 2005). A group of academicians opine that unequal access to power and resources is deeply rooted in socio-cultural history, where dominant cultural values determine the social position of different genders in terms of power, resources, and influence (Bourdiew, 2001; Lober, 1994; Young, 1990). Visibility in the socio-political sphere is conditioned by excellence in controlling the narrative of power, which in turn legitimises hierarchical relationships between genders.

Scholars who link such exclusion to post-colonial legacies present a different perspective. In their view, the language of dominant power often shapes the narratives of power dimension. It definitely establishes new mechanism, which exercises control over power structures (Foucault, 1991) through algorithms (Beer, 2017; Gillespie, 2014), often justified in the name of modernisation. This process re-writes the vocabulary of domination as it places technical use of tactical language to dominate over the weaker gender. Proponents of the technocratic approach justify such exclusion by promoting administrative efficiency. In their view administrative efficiency is the ultimate goal. To achieve it, primarily technological reform is inevitable (Fischer, 1990; UN, 2018**;** Hood, 1991). Feminist thinkers, although conceptualise the unequal attributes of power, but hardly provide any solution to redress it. They often fail to realise the fundamental reality that power itself is gendered. Such failure makes them bias in justifying their theoretical position.

While a large number of scholars devotes their time and labour to develop the theoretical attributes of gender, practical attention remains focused on how swiftly gendered power relations have divided the space of participatory governance (Brush, 2003). In this context androcentric biases legitimise the generalised administrative goals. Modernisation justifies the neutralisation of power, by undermining the justification of gender equality. It deviates participatory governance of digital democracy from its

proclaimed goals. In such case Participatory governance tends to becomes a showpiece in the ambit of symbolic democracy (Taubes, 1955).

Women are continuously diverted from their natural role as citizens through the imposition of femininity (Lister, 2017). In the name of defining femininity, a number of so-called universal ethos's are imposed on women, pushing them away from their real goals embodied in the vision of power. Domestic femininity further confuses women by justifying their familial roles and redirecting their aspirations accordingly. Such endeavours render women irrelevant within the sphere of power.

In participatory governance, the interaction between political power and social status is largely shaped by gendered attributes (Baviskar & Mathew, 2009). As a result, gendered norms are used to socialise the role of political power. In digital democracy such norms slightly alter their position. In this phase, social acceptance of political power largely depends on a number of social networks. Through this network political rulers legitimise their rule. Under the direction of the expertise technocrats, such networks help rulers to institutionalise a support base in favour of their rule. But in Third World country like India, it could not fully free from gender bias. For example, in India, common people believe that women are less competent to control technology based political outcomes than men. Thus, socially produce gender roles set the power goals of the political actors. Skill and knowledge are used accordingly. In this way the share of women in technological knowledge is gradually decreased. Gender norms normalise the power position in such a way that this situation appears almost natural. As technology based political outcomes are the subject to rational choice, commonly perceived as belonging to the public domain, thus women exclusion from public sphere questions the rational acceptability of political outcomes.

In many cases, women's eligibility is questioned on the grounds that they are believed to lack sufficient knowledge and merit to handle technological equipment (Wajcman, 2004) that is essential for the effective functioning of governance at the different levels. This unequal perception, embedded within the structures of participatory governance, leads to discrimination among genders based on levels of digital literacy. It creates multiple barriers that adversely affect women's participation in participatory governance of digital democracy.

The division of labour based on technological efficiency often confines women to a nominal role in participatory governance. The digital divide compels them to acknowledge the supremacy of their male colleagues (Wajcman, 1991), as women are comparatively less familiar with the use of digitalised mechanisms prevalent in the modern technological world. As democratic states are increasingly shaped by technological advancement, power exercised through technology becomes dominant. Women's subordination to this technologically mediated power structure places many of them at a marginal position thereby undermining their capacity to emerge as effective leaders.

Technology often portrays women as warriors rather than leaders. Their struggle to change their fate by breaking gender stereotypes and transform society accordingly postulates a new goal of power regime. They intend to deconstruct the and areocentric values of power relation which represent women as backward in comparison to their male counterparts, and push them outside the power circle. Such barriers not only question women's gender roles but also label them as non-profitable, effectively excluding them

from the centre of power. This significantly restricts women's effective participation in democratic governance within an increasingly digitalised administrative framework.

(iii) Power, Technology, and Marginalisation: Reconfiguring Women's Roles in Participatory Governance of Digital Democracy

Before addressing the question- how women can assume an active role in participatory governance of digitalised democracy, it is essential to delve into the matter of what prevents women from taking on such a role? The answer is partially based on the notion that domestic femininity adopts to define and regulate the women's social behaviour. Domestic femininity in its normative sense restricts women's role to the domestic sphere. It secludes women from the domain of public responsibilities. Out of their fear of losing social recognition women hesitate to cross the boundary line imposed upon them by domestic femininity. It not only confines their roles but also challenges their individual social existence. Consequently, the reconfiguration of women's roles in participatory governance is constrained by such prerogative meanings of gender identity. It shapes and sizes the digitalisation of femininity and defines their role accordingly.

Thus, portraying women in a new role that conforms to digitalised democratic governance is a challenging task. Women's incorporation into the newly construct belief system, where knowledge dominates over socially constructed identity norms, can happen only when they transform the dimensions of their thought. This transformation requires moving beyond the thumb rules of gender-oriented identity sanctity by accepting their multipolar identity (Mohanty,2005)**.** In this process, the gendered construction of the feminine role gradually becomes obsolete.

One may argue that when women alter the subjective roles prescribed by gender-oriented norms, the goals of their sociability also change, bringing women into the public domain as objects (Bartky, 2015) rather than autonomous subjects. Such a transformation from subject to object may allow women to conform to roles imposed by the capitalist free-market economy. Consequently, through participation in several participatory institutions of governance, women often struggle to establish themselves in terms of a meaningful and self-defined identity.

Antagonists of this view have argued that participatory governance provides a number of alternatives through which women can change and challenge their traditional gender-oriented roles (Agarwal,2001; Cornwall, 2003). By providing digitalised platforms, participatory governance not only enhances women's scope of participation but also increases their capacity for self-knowledge by enabling them to map their potential power. For example, through their virtual presence in participatory governance, women can correlate their abstract (imposed) self with their concrete (achieved) self and thus transcend their identity to a higher order. This process may help them to understand their inner power, through which they can realise their connection with the power of the universe and justify the truth that they should perform as part of humankind rather than prioritising the remote identity (gender) imposed on them from outside. It also increases their confidence level to meet the needs of the present digital era.

Feminist thinkers, however, have criticised such idealistic views by pointing out that most technological innovations have a gendered dimension, as they are developed primarily by considering the needs of men in order to save their time and money (Cowan,2023; Wajcman,1991), leaving little scope for women. In the sphere of digitalised

governance, whatever technologies are used are not planned for the purpose of increasing women's participation, but rather for the smooth operation of governance. Consequently, the parameters of effective participation are fixed in such a way that suppresses women's enthusiasm to become part of effective governance. Moreover, women have limited access to these electronic gadgets and are often treated by others as non-performers because of their gendered roles. In this context, it becomes difficult for them to recognise themselves as potential actors in participatory governance. Though, feminists argued that altered gendered model of power can reverse the dimension of relationship status, they could hardly outline a viable model through which technological mediation could be aligned with equitable and meaningful participation of women in participatory governance.

(iv) Beyond Access: Rethinking Gender Equality in Digital Democratic Practices

Digitalised governance offers an alternative model to describe the relationship between power, gender, and politics. The narratives of this model are based more on creative experiences than on normative values. The major thrust of these narratives lies in the digitalisation of power within politics and the subsequent reconstruction of gender roles. Thus, mainstreaming gender in digital democracy becomes merely a facet of empowerment. Politics does not necessarily assume a judgmental role, as empowerment itself becomes subject to digitalisation.

However, gender narratives that have historically justified the central connotations of power continue to remain political. Male-centric determinism illustrates how power is digitalised, who gains access to the means of power and appropriates it, what the ultimate use of power will be, how gender issues are negotiated in the process of digitalisation, and who becomes the beneficiary of this transformation.

In this context, power—the driving force of politics—remains fundamentally gendered in nature. The articulation of male-centric values through technological devices arrests the free flow of value-neutral logical construction of power. Thus, space for open interaction between different value laden identities is gradually decreased. In course of time the traditional norms of gender division are gradually become obsolete. In its place a new set of norms develop. It technically supports multi-identical features of gender both in society as well as in workplace. In this way women's identical features as gender are gradually eroded. It weakens their movement for position and power in politics. Thus division continues to exist, though in a modernised form. In this sense, the overlapping values of power and politics retain a judgmental character.

In continuation of the above discussion, one can say that digital democracy fixes the parameters that determine the degree of freedom, access to rights, rules of trust among different genders, conditions of justice, and so on. As the predominantly entrenched norms of structural hierarchy normalise the imbalances created by the digital divide, the goals and values of political ideology become altered. Generalisation emerges as a major trend in recapitulating the relational terms of power and politics. It side-lines substantial factors such as gender, class, caste, region, religion, and others from the ambit of political legacy.
In other words, modern technological values redefine the meaning of neutrality in terms of efficiency by discarding the ethical concerns of identity-based politics (Feenberg,2012). Consequently, gender becomes diluted, and the marginality of women in digital governance appears naturalised.

Though digital democracy provides women with equal opportunity as their male counterparts, but here equal opportunity implies equal capacity and skill in using modern technology. Since women do not occupy the same social space as men, their access to the benefits of modern technology becomes a distant dream. They receive only partial benefits offered through their male counterparts in accordance with prevailing social norms.

Thus, neutrality is not free from gender concerns (Wajcman,1991); rather, it provides an alternative model to visualise the goals of power, sustained through skill and competency. Theoretically, the non-gendered attributes of power appear to diffuse its gendered roles, as skill and competency are not dependent upon gender. Some scholars argue that as non-gendered attributes define the goals of power in digital democracy, power becomes free from forms of liability (Eubanks,2018**)** that make it answerable or responsible to the plights and distresses of weaker genders (Zuboff,2023). Such dynamic changes further delegitimise the role of gender in governance. The submissive positioning of gender is reflected across different fields of government.

Although in recent years a number of initiatives have been undertaken by the Indian government to bring weaker genders within the purview of mainstream politics, a low rate of political participation, digital illiteracy, male dependency, technological apathy, poverty, and poor accessibility have rendered these efforts ineffective. From the following table, one can examine the rate of women's participation in various governmental schemes introduced to spread digital literacy, as well as in other platforms established to promote digital governance.

Table-1

Programme/Platform	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Nature of Participation
PMGDISHA (Digital Literacy)	42.5%	37.8%	31.6%	Training/Access to ICT
Jan ShikshanSansthan (Skill+Digital Use)	76%	78%	80%	Livelihood Digital Skill
NIELIT ICT Training	45%	49%	53%	Capacity Building
MyGov Portal (Policy participation	~25%	~27%	~28%	Online Consultation
CPGRAMS Grievance Portal	~26%	~27%	~28%	Complaints to govt
RTI online Portal	~12%	~13%	~15%	Democratic accountability
e- Courts service	~20%	~22%	~24%	Legal Participation

Source: Compiled by the author from MeitY Parliamentary Questions on PMGDISHA, DARPG Annual Reports (CPGRAMS), Central Information Commission Annual Reports (RTI), and MyGov Citizen engagement statistics, Government of India

(Note: Data represent participation trends gender wise yearly statistics are not uniformly published across all platforms)

From the above table, it is clearly visible that women are less interested in participating in digital governance, while their growing interest is sustained in the development of livelihood skills and capacity-building activities. Their non-participation in digital governance indicates either a lack of awareness about these schemes or inadequate

preparedness to engage in the process of digital governance. The low participation rate cited in the table also suggests that civic consciousness among citizens in the country has not developed properly. Even though a large number of women enhance their skills and gain experience through digital modes for improving their livelihood capacities, they are hardly interested in confronting the structural constraints that obstruct their participation in forums of digital governance.

The low visibility of women participants in various government schemes also establishes that such schemes are not sufficiently gender-sensitive to their needs. The data in the table further show that while common platforms of digital governance have not been able to ensure women's participation on a large scale in exercising their rights as citizens, specific women-centric schemes have increased their level of participation in a more desirable manner. Hence, the gender-neutral form of digital democracy is effectively rejected by them.

To theorise this problem effectively, a number of scholars focus on the objectivity grounded in it (Wazcman, 2004; Faulkner,2001). However, the shift that contextualises subjectivity within the theoretical domain of digital democracy is hardly addressed in these theories. While some scholars devote themselves to developing a conceptual link between digital power and gender (Haraway,2013; Wazcman,2004) in order to understand the co-ordinal relationship between objectivity (sensual experience) and politics, others concentrate on crude power relations to justify politics within gender studies (MacKinnon, 1989; Walby,1998).

In this account, several scholars observe that the transition from government to governance in the age of digital democracy shifts the objectives of governance from general to particular and from particular to general in a cyclical manner (Rhodes,1996; Kooiman,2004; Osborne,2006). When the question of skill and competency in governance arises, the focus shifts from the general to the particular; thus, the subjective choice of power requires objective reliability. Similarly, when the question of governability emerges, the focus shifts from the particular (gender issues) to the general, as it attempts to free governance from subjective bias in order to appear neutral (objective). Such alterations challenge the dimensions of cohesive forces necessary to form gender sensibility and to ensure the universal applicability of governance.

The subjective framework of equality narratives in digital democracy is also questioned by another group of scholars (Young,1990; Fraser,1989). They opined that; digital democracy suggests equality as equal capacity. Thus, the provision of equal opportunity for all could not justified by the supporters of Digital democracy. They alternatively promote the idea of equity as the core concept of objectivity. In their view as equity is grounded in the need-based subjective choice thus it enhances the capacity of participative governance to provide civic amenities as per citizen's requirements. In this way, they challenge the subjective framework in which the generalisation of gendered attributes is normalised in the name of equal capacity. By questioning the internal subjective orientation of such debates, feminist thinkers criticise the process that compels women to think through a patriarchal lens. Thus, major feminist concerns are attributed with to the severe dilution of the individual self under the influence of patriarchal outlook. But their narratives hardly reveal how to play a safe game within the domain of public sphere. They equally mute about the one-sided process of the digitalisation of the women's participation

in the democratic ambit of participatory governance. Critics of feminist thinkers focus their inability to connect the subjective choice of women with the objective ideals of digital democracy (Asenbaum,2019).

Indian democracy consciously builds up an alternative model to experience subjectivity, within the framework of digital governance. Yet this alternative model does not change the basic orientation of objectivity. It also suggests that gender equality is not obtained merely with the process of democratic digitalisation. Rather, it depends on certain conditions like trust, reliability, responsibility, connectivity, commitment, consensus-building, consciousness-raising among citizens, justice, and sociability which may transform the power orientation in participatory governance of digital democracy. It should be kept in mind that gender equality is not merely an outcome of government policy; rather, it emerges from enlightened civic culture rooted in social consciousness, mutual respect, and participatory awareness among citizens.

Conclusion:

Thus, from the above discussion, one can realise that women's participation in participatory governance in the era of digital democracy is a relative phenomenon, dependent on several socio-political and economic variables aligned with different phases in the evolution of E-governance. In the process of digital interaction among various tiers of government, between government and citizens, and among citizens themselves, a space develops that connects government with governance. However, such a connection can hardly provide a gender-friendly environment, as weaker genders still remain outside the sphere of controlling power.

Digital governance redefines participation in a mechanistic way, in which participants must develop specific skills to exercise their citizenship properly. Consequently, the power vested in the people in a republican country like India gradually becomes weakened. This is followed by a shift in the process of governance that directs government towards new objectives. In this context, a new phase of accountability emerges, where participatory governance is no longer confined within traditional administrative boundaries as the scope of digitalised government expands beyond jurisdictional limits.

Digitalisation of participation in participatory governance though formalise women's participation but limit its scope within grassroots levels. In the process of governance women hardly get access of the device which may help them to control over power. Thus, institutional spaces do not ensure effective participation of women. Not only so, such institutional spaces most often produce support base for the ruler. In this process, homogenisation of socio-political culture takes space. To protect the interest of dominant culture such spaces never allow women to continue with their own cultural identity. With the expansion of digital governance, such cultural dominancy increases to a new height. Increasing use of technology justifies the norms on the basic of which cultural dominancy exercise. Digital competence set the boundary lines that further exclude women from the centre of decision-making power. Women do not possess equal access of digital resources of what government commit in its policies. Thus, a gap between policy intention and social reality, reducing participation to a procedural exercise. Unless state initiatives address these socio-cultural and digital constraints, women's participation in participatory governance will remain symbolic rather than substantive.

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