

**DEMOCRATISATION AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN
REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the Degree of the*

Master of Philosophy

NAOREM THOINU DEVI



**CENTRE FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**

NEW DELHI 110067

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जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
CENTRE FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI- 110 067 (INDIA)

Phones : 91-11- 2670 4346
Fax : 91-11-2670 4346

29th July, 2009

DECLARATION

This is a declaration that the dissertation entitled “**DEMOCRATISATION AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN REPUBLIC OF KOREA**” in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** from Jawaharlal Nehru University is entirely my own work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree in this university or any other university.


Thoi N. Thoinu Devi
Naorem Thoinu Devi

CERTIFICATE

We recommend this dissertation to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Srikanth Kondapalli
Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli
(Chairman, CEAS)

Jitendra Uttam
Dr. Jitendra Uttam
(Supervisor)

 Prof. SRIKANTH KONDAPALLI
Chairman
Centre For East Asian Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi

Dedicated to

Ima and Baba

***For their constant efforts and encouragement to educate
me despite many odds in the journey of life***

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Abbreviations

CKWO – Council of Korean Women’s Organisation

FFI – Family Friendliness Index

KBS – Korean Broadcasting Service

KIGEPE – Korean Institute for Gender Equality Promotion and Education

KNCW – Korean National Council of women

KWAU – Korean Women’s Association United

KWDI – Korean Women’s Development Institute

WISE – Women in Science and Technology

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Chapter 1

Democracy and Women in Korea

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of democracy in relation to women has become a contested space with many feminist organisations expressing its dissatisfaction with it. Many issues concerning women began to be raised and the quest for stable democracy which give ample space to women started around the 1980s. The basic idea behind this quest was to empower women in such a way that the 'reverse condition' of women would never occurred to them again. Because when democracy takes a reverse form, the setback focuses on women and its status in society, economy and polity. This is because most of the people consider women to be a 'mirror-image' of society and that they represent the 'inner sanctum' or the emblem of the nation which guards against the onslaught of foreign culture.¹ Thus, the relationship between democracy and women becomes important as democracy is often thought to open up a society and chalks out plans for the weaker sections of the society including women.

Many scholars have identified factors that might lead to women emancipation; one is the socio-economic factor and the other is political development propelled by democracy. If the position of women is strong in areas of socio-economy and politics, democracy is said to be in full form in such countries. Thus, democracy has the potential to upgrade the

¹ Deniz Kandiyoti cited in Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury (eds) *Women and Politics Worldwide*.

status of women even in highly patriarchal societies. So, during the 1980s and 1990s, there was a popular trend of democratising from the autocratic or the military regimes such as South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, Latin America and others. This wave came to be known as the 'third wave of democratisation' and it also became associated with the feminists revolution taking during those times. Because, in most of the recently democratised nations such as Chile, Mexico, Brazil and South Korea women spearheaded the transition movement for democracy. So, this work would focus on this link between democracy and women by studying the recently democratised nation South Korea (hereafter referred as Korea) and its socio-economic and political condition of women post-democracy.

2. Transition to Democracy in Korea

During the 1970s to 1990s, there were as many as 30 countries that democratised their nation, which constitutes the so-called 'third wave of democratisation'.² The first 'wave of democratisation' began in the 1820s and continued till 1926, which gave the voting rights to male citizens. Then the triumph of the World War II initiated another wave of democratisation that reached its zenith in 1962 with 36 countries governed democratically. It came to be known as the period of 'second wave of democratisation'. The reason for the change to democracy were many but one important reason among them was the unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960s which raised living standards, increased education and greatly expanded the urban middle class in many countries. According to Huntington, there is a correlation between wealth and democracy

² S.P. Huntington, 'Democracy's Third Wave', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.2, No.2, spring 1991, pp.12-34.

and that transition to democracy should occur primarily in countries at the mid-level of economic development also known as the period of 'political transition zone'.³ In fact, transition to democracy from authoritarian regime during the third wave was heavily concentrated in this transition zone, especially at its upper reaches so the future of democracy depends on the future of economic development. Obstacles to economic development are obstacles to the expansion of democracy. Thus, the third wave of democratisation was propelled by the extraordinary global economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s.

Economic growth has played an important role in transition to democracy. According to Rustow, if the economy expands with growth in middle class and increasing export sector, pressure comes for political liberalization and change of regime⁴. He gives the example of Korea in which the booming economy under Park chung-hee and Chun Doo-Hwan gave rise to increased insistent demonstrations for democracy.

East Asia is an interesting subject for democratisation because of two reasons according to scholars like Rose J. Lee and Cal Clark. One, the emancipation of women seems to have been a 'challenging task' because of its strong patriarchal cultures; the second reason is the kind of distinctive relation shared among the traditional cultures, patterns of industrialisation and political development.⁵ Modernisation and industrialisation are interlinked because modernisation enables women to overcome many barriers as the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dankwart A. Rustow, 'Democracy: A Global Revolution'. *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 69, No.4 (Fall, 1990), P. 75-91

⁵ Rose J. Lee and Cal Clark (eds), *Democracy and Status of Women in East Asia*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

cultural change associated with modernisation undermines the patriarchal norms of society.

According to many observers, the scenario created by industrialisation brings many changes in the socio-economic condition favourable to them. Thus, it will lead to women's major participation in the labour market which would lead to better opportunities and a more urbanised society. Therefore, their economic and social condition would improved and give them the freedom to their choices. All this would in turn lead to liberalisation of women. But in contrast to the above view, Rose J. Lee and Cal Clark argued that a successful 'developmental state' due to its logic of 'hard market' takes a modern and masculine characteristic which takes the form of marginalisation of women in public realm. Thus, modernisation through industrialisation often leads to patriarchal norms in social, economic and political institutions. Thus, even in the case of Korea, the 'developmental state' model was the basis for its industrialisation

The process of democratisation in Korea was triggered by the economic boom after industrialisation took place. The military rule of Park Chung-hee from 1961 marked the period of economic liberalisation which led to Korea's rapid industrialisation. It also marked a turning point in national politics and women's movement because the foundation of that rapid economic development was laid by the young female workers.⁶ Thus, the middle class oriented feminist's movement started the pursuit of economic development and ensuring prosperity. In turn this led to the formation of pro-democracy

⁶ Mikyung Chin, 'Self Governance, Political Participation, and the Feminists Movement in South Korea', in Rose J. Lee and Cal Clark (eds), *Democracy and Status of Women in East Asia*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

movement though it was very much at its initial phase. But by the time of Chun Doo-Hwan's rule, the movement for democracy had become much more widespread. It was the middle class or the pro-working class specialists⁷ that led the pro-democracy movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

But a new element that joined the democratic movement was the blue-collar workers, a more visible, vibrant and militant labour force that was a direct product of the country's rapid industrialisation.⁸ The word for the movement was *minjung* meaning 'popular masses' and became an anti-government slogan and a word which implies for democratic transition. Finally, the famous 'Kwangju incident' of 1980 troubled the authoritarian regime and the base for the process of democratisation was laid. Thus, it is clear that in the context of Korea too, the factor behind the transition was the economic boom which started during the 1970s.

Yet, the process of democratisation undergoes at several different levels in society which includes formal political and administrative structures at the international, national-state, village/town, and local community levels; voluntary organisations; informal associations and community groups; productive work activities; educational systems; family and kin networks; and personal relationships or in short the civil society organisations.⁹ Civil society dominated in the transition to democracy and political parties were not the only 'primary vehicle' of democracy.¹⁰ A strong civil society is an indicator of greater

⁷ Chulhee Chung, 'The New Class and Democratic Social Relations in South Korea – Nascent Moves Towards Non-Hierarchical and Participatory Relations', *International Sociology*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2005.

⁸ Charles K. Armstrong, 'Democratic Movements', *Korea Policy Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Jan. 2006.

⁹ Jill M. Bystydzienski and Joti Sekhon. *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements*.

¹⁰ Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury (eds), *Women and Politics Worldwide*.

democracy at the national-state level according to J. M. Bystydzienski and J. Sekhon. They are important in ensuring that citizens and the state institutions are responsive to its citizens and perform a mediating role between the state, the local community and the family. This was also seen in Korean case in which the Korean civil society took up active role for democratisation. As per Charles K. Armstrong, the Korean democracy was developed and sustained by the emergence of voluntary associations, political pressure groups, and the non-governmental organisations that collectively constitute Korea's civil society. For example, organisations such as the Christian Academy established in 1973, the Korean Women's Development Institute and Korean Women's Associations United among others played an effective role for the empowerment of women and also for democratisation.

In democracy, three factors are of immense importance in ascertaining the extent of democracy. First is the political democratisation; second is the economic democratisation and the third is the social democratisation. According to Shim Young-hee,¹¹ political democracy leads to participatory democracy, economic democracy means that employees can participate in important decisions and the cooperative relations between employees and employers are recovered and social democratisation is defined as the realisation of a participating democracy, not only in the economic organisations, but also in social organisations in the broad sense, such as education, press, hospitals, churches, financial circles, interests groups and others. She is also of the opinion that participating democracy includes the activities of everyday life which means the freedom to have our own choice at home, informal organisation or group and voluntary social movement.

¹¹ Shim Young-hee, 'Democratization and My Role'. *The Woman*, Vol. 25, No. 2, p. 18, December 1988.

Basically, she refers to a state where relationships between people are attained by mutual understanding and consensus. But a democracy without women's participation is a non-democracy because a true democracy can only be achieved when 'discrimination of sexes' ceased to be there in everyday life.

However, after democratisation, women often find themselves excluded from politics. One example is the democracy in Latin America. During the transition period, women played an important role but once achieved, the government close their door to women since the government was led by traditional parties, women's issues faded away from national agenda's and their contribution to the process of democratisation were mostly forgotten.¹²

In case of Chile too, Marcela Rios Tobar pointed out that though the socio-economic status of women has increased due to interventions by the government after democratisation, critics pointed out that the public presence of women's movement has declined as a political force in Chile. This is because the traditional politics and their conservative ideology have retained their cultural relevance with respect to women and broader social and political liberalisation. Thus, Chile lives in 'modernisation without modernity' according to M. C. Tobar.¹³

So the level of democratisation differs according to each country and their set of dominant culture. Samuel Huntington argued that one serious impediment to

¹² Jennifer L. Troutner and Peter H. Smith, 'Empowering Women: Agency, Structure, and Comparative Perspective', in *Promises of Empowerment: Women in Asia and Latin America*.

¹³ Marcelo Rios Tobar, 'Feminism and Transition to Democracy in Chile', in *Promises of Empowerment: Women in Asia and Latin America*.

democratisation is the absence or weakness of real commitment to democratic values among political leaders. Because once the leaders win power through the electoral system, these leaders then proceeded to undermine that system as they had little commitment to democratic values and practices.

So what exactly hinders democratic process? According to many authors, the answer is culture. An evaluation of cross-national history of the correlates of democracy has shown that cultural factors appear more important than other factors¹⁴. This cultural thesis comes in two forms. According to George Kennan,¹⁵ the more restrictive version states that only Western culture provides a suitable base for the development of democratic institutions and consequently democracy is inappropriate for non-Western societies. The other argument holds that non-Western cultures are peculiarly hostile to democracy. According to Clark and Lee, the overarching culture and political economy of East Asia have many hidden biases against women. These are no small obstacles, given the importance of culture and institutional arrangements. Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury states that in most cultures, there is a complex matrix of political power composed of many social hierarchies, of which gender is only one component. Politics is thus, intertwined with other aspects of life. Thus, the relationship between culture and democracy becomes problematic because democracy ensures the liberty of each individual whereas some cultures insists on liberty of men only.

¹⁴ Seymour Martin Lipset, 'The Social Requisites of Democracy', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (feb.1994), P.1-22

¹⁵ George Kennan, cited in S. P. Huntington's, 'Democracy's Third Wave', *Journal of Democracy* Vol.2, No.2, spring 1991, pp.12-34.

In the case of Korea, Confucian culture comes under scrutiny because of its conservative ideals. L. H. M. Ling argues that patriarchal family has served as the model for government and for state-society relations and the politicians and government operate under such cultural contexts. So, the capacity of empowerment of women democracy permits is distorted and weakened. Thus, democratisation does not have much relevance in the 'hyper-masculine development' state where the market interest prevails before women's interests, limiting women to traditional family roles and suppressed to a role of cheap labour.¹⁶ Ling terms this kind of politics as 'sage man politics'¹⁷ where man can only lead the nation. Thus, democratisation does not open up many opportunities for women and the fight against patriarchal domination is diminished.

Mikyung Chin wrote that the women's movement includes the cultural movement against the patriarchal system and for more democratisation including other rights. Despite the progress, there is a discrepancy between reality and ideology of democracy because the political space allotted to women is considerably low as compared to men. The high hopes of women generated by democratisation fell into pieces when discrimination still persisted and again when the representation of women at national level did not result as expected. In addition, the top positions in the executive and the judiciary remained totally closed to women and only a few could climb up the ladder of success with support from

¹⁶ L.H.M. Ling, 'The Limits of Democratization for Women in East Asia', in *Democracy and Status of Women in East Asia*.

¹⁷ Sage man politics refers to the implicit belief of politicians and the public alike that only a wise man with the proper moral credentials can lead the nation. Here, men only are taken as the wise persons who can rule a nation, completely excluding women.

male colleagues. Women then shifted their strategic force to local politics, but progress here was limited as well.

3. Nature of Democracy in Korea

Many changes have been incorporated to the meaning of democracy since Aristotle first termed 'rule by the people' as 'democracy'.¹⁸ Democracy also means the complete protection of the fundamental rights of each individual and the freedom to choose our own elected representative. According to De Tocqueville,¹⁹ democracy involves the participation of people in voluntary associations to the development and maintenance of democracy which involves the participation of all including the formerly marginalised social groups in all aspects of public and private life and the improvement of their lives. But one needs to understand the different levels of democracy according to socio-cultural and historical context and how it is defined and the procedures for democratisation are spelled out. To evaluate the levels of democratisation, Biryukov and Sergeyev feel that there is no 'culturally neutral' concept of democracy to support the development of indices of democratisation',²⁰ so there cannot be comparisons between different democratic nations.

¹⁸Joti Sekhon and J.M. Bystydzeinski (eds) *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements*.

¹⁹ Seungsook Moon, 'Women and Democratization in the Republic of Korea', *The Good Society*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2002.

²⁰ Biryukov and Sergeyev, cited in Joti Sekhon and J. M. Bystydzeinski. *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements*.

3.1 Participatory democracy

The democracy of Korea is officially declared as a participatory democracy by the Korean government. A participatory democracy consists of a system where the rule of the people entails equal opportunities for all to take part in decision making concerning not only traditionally defined political issues but also matters relating to workplace, the community, and interpersonal relationships.²¹ Political action and participation takes place not only in the sphere of formal political institutions associated with the state, but also in other spheres of people's lives. 'A truly participatory society would need a political culture, and corresponding structures', that would allow the citizens to know the happenings and to take decisions affecting their lives.²² The participatory democratic process must be pluralistic enough to allow for multiple affiliations and identifications as well as individual self-development and self-realisation.²³ A participatory democratic society is one that enhances the ability of people to make choices. Participatory democracy thus generally recognise that it needs to continue to undergo a process of re-creation and that a more active and substantial participation can only take place as a result of experimentation with new and different ways that seek to enhance the citizen

²¹ Parry and Moran cited in Joti Sekhon and J. M. Bystydzeinski, *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements*.

²² Dryzek, Habermas, Held, Lappe and Dubois, cited in Joti Sekhon and J. M. Bystydzeinski, *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements*.

²³ Walzer, 1992; Mouffe, 1992; Eisenburg, 1992 cited in Joti Sekhon and J. M. Bystydzeinski, *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements*

involvement and discussion. In a sense, democracy can never be achieved in any final form as it has to be continually re-created and renegotiated.

Though the type of democracy Korea follows is participatory democracy, there is the tendency of women's exclusion from politics in Korea as Prof. Shim Young-hee wrote, 'Korean women are alienated from politics and the political decision-making process, from the fact that participation of women in the legislative, judiciary and administrative sectors is very low.'²⁴ In a participatory democracy, if there is a marginal participation of women then the meaning of democracy is lost. So the concept of participatory democracy comes in question.

According to Seongsook Moon, democracy in Korea is largely conservative in nature. First, democratisation in Korea has been largely conservative in the sense that it has maintained the masculinist nature of institutionalised politics. Second, although women are participating in the development of civil society, as is reflected in the revival of autonomous women's movements and associations, the change is very unstable. It is because the socio-political context of Korea continues to be characterised by its hybrid nature with elements of both Confucian governance and liberal institutions at play. Thus, the formal democratisation in Korea is not a sufficient condition for the empowerment of women. Therefore, formal democratisation has remained conservative as the patriarchal nature of institutionalised politics has remained largely intact despite many changes. By masculinist, Seongsook Moon meant in two terms- first, the cultural perception of politics as an arena meant for men only and secondly the common tendency in national and

²⁴ Shim Young Hee, 'Democratization and My Role', *The Women*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Dec.1988.

international politics to issue put up the issues concerning the military, foreign policy and economic growth first than the issues concerning everyday life and power relations in family, society at large.

The conservative democratisation in Korea is shaped by various historical and cultural factors as per Seongsook Moon. One most important among them is the interplay between Confucian governance and liberal institutions in interpreting the state-society relations against the backdrop of capitalist industrialisation. The familial metaphor of the state-society relation allowed the developmental state to refashion liberal politics in contemporary Korea. The developmental state of the Park Chung-hee reign 'depoliticised the feminised populace' in the context of capitalist's industrialisation, in which nation was first choice then the individuals.²⁵ This depoliticisation was achieved through the manipulation of the system in representation of women in politics and resulted in the expert management of the public sphere and of civil society. Thus, this inheritance led to the extremely low participation of Korean women in public sphere in the process of democratisation. Moreover, the hegemonic depiction of capitalist industrialisation as national family epic censored the development of individual citizens as the component of democratic politics.

Democracy and women has a special relationship as it is clear from the above discussions and democracy without looking into the socio-economy and political sphere can be an empty philosophy. Therefore, democracy touches each and everyday sphere of life regardless of gender, and if in democracy, equality in terms of all the spheres connected

²⁵ Jongwoo Han and L.H.M. Ling, 'Authoritarianism in the Hypermasculinized State: Hybridity, Patriarchy, and Capitalism in Korea', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 42, p. 53-78, 1998.

with life cannot be achieved, then it cannot be a democracy in the real sense. Rather, it could be a democracy in limited ways and can be called a 'conservative democracy' as term by Seongsook Moon in Korea's case.

Larry L. Wade holds the opinion that the failure of democracy with regard to women's participation in politics is due to women's own choices as they hardly have any scarce time left after the family chores.²⁶ But in total disagreement, Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury wrote that often authors explain the women's exclusion from politics as due to 'women's socially shaped choices' and the social norms which comprised gender-based rules about proper political activity that make up 'political socialisation'.²⁷ Most authors blame women or say that no one is at fault but these explanations according to both the authors are 'too individualistic or epiphenomenal' and the traditional explanation for women's exclusion is based only on the supply of women for formal activities and not the 'demand'. Indeed, Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury rightly said about 'demand' for women in politics because the need has to come first before supply in anything.

Professor Hahm Chai-bong says that South Korea's transition toward democracy is especially interesting because domestic political discourse has come to take on distinctly Confucian tones.²⁸ If this is the case then Korea's democracy can be called a

²⁶ Larry L. Wade and Jin Wan Seo. 'Women, Education, and Political Volitions in the South Korean Mass Public', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 29, 1996.

²⁷ Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury (eds). *Women and Politics Worldwide*.

²⁸ Prof. Hahm Chai-bong. 'Confucian Tradition and Economic Reform in Korea'. *Korea Focus*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1997.

'conservative democracy' as already echoed by Seongsook Moon.²⁹ While Choi Jang-jip wrote, 'Korean democracy is still largely procedural rather than substantial and that growing social stratification and inequality since the 1990s have actually caused democracy in Korea to deteriorate to the point of crisis.'³⁰ Samuel P. Huntington holds the view that 'the worldwide democratic revolution may create an external environment conducive to democratisation, but it cannot produce the conditions necessary for democratisation within a particular country'

However, democracy at its fullest is again hard to find even in this 21st century and it seems difficult because of many risk involved. Because of many historical and cultural contexts, democracy cannot express itself at its fullest form. This is indicated by examples from many nations so B. J. Nelson and N. Chowdhury wrote 'in no country do women have political status, access or influence equal to men's'.³¹ Moreover, it also depends on the ruling government's political ideals and the bargaining power of women's organisations and other civil societies. Thus, to judge the status of women is to judge the extent of democracy, because democracy ensures the well being of the weaker sections of society.

4. Purpose of the Study

So this work 'Democratization and the Status of Women in Korea' explores the relationship between democracy and women and the different factors related to

²⁹ Seongsook Moon, 'Women and Democratization in the Republic of Korea', *The Good Society*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2002.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury (eds). *Women and Politics Worldwide*.

democracy. To ascertain the extent of democracy in Korea, an examination of women's participation in socio-economic and politics is done in the third and second chapter. Certain parameters like education, mother and childcare facilities, marriage and divorce, average monthly wage, female unemployment rate by marital status and few others are considered to study the extent of women's participation in society and economy. The second chapter deals with the history of the women's movement of South Korea and traces the change that has been happening since its colonial times. Thus, this work compiles the history of women's empowerment since colonial times till 2008.

4.1 Hypothesis

Democratization process of South Korea has improved the status of South Korean women.

From the above hypothesis, the following assumptions are taken

- a. There is an increase participation of women in South Korean politics
- b. The implementation of various women friendly laws and decrees by the government help women in getting a fair treatment in employment sector.
- c. The notion of patriarchy in Korean society is changing towards a modern outlook in women issue

4.2 Methodology

The survey of the extent of democracy would be done through the use of primary sources which consists of official papers, government releases, government websites, newspapers

and other published and unpublished of the United Nations Report. It would also heavily rely on secondary sources like books, articles and journals published and unpublished by both the Korean and foreign authors. But the main study of the extent of democracy would be based on the yearly statistics of society, economy and politics released by the Korean government.

Chapter 2

History of Women's Movement in Korea

1. Introduction

The journey of Korean women has been an interesting one due to the fact that the Korean women's movement has continued to survive despite its cultural context and historical particularities. In spite of many obstacles in their journey, Korean women have been marching forward with enough courage and vigilance defying the traditional image of women up to some extent. This Korean women movement can be traced back to the colonial era when the people were under the Japanese colonial rule from 1910 to 1945. The national liberation movement paved the way for the Korean women's emancipation. Since then, there has been no looking back as the awareness of their rights dawned into their life with the coming of 'industrial enlightenment' together with the regime of Park Chung-hee, which liberated women economically. However, the most effective movement came along with the transition of South Korea to democracy and its effect on women is overwhelming. To do a systematic study of Korean women one needs to understand its historical and cultural contexts fully for it is culture and history that shaped up the current scenario. In addition, it needs to be understood that the Korean women's movement genesis lies within the context of nationalist movement.

The democratisation phase started in the 1980s and more so from 1987 and this period holds the clue to women's movement in Korea. Post-democracy, there have been a series

of change with many reforms and acts being passed in favour of women. These enormous changes have been neither uniform nor total as the former people of power and the social set up did change but not so much as expected.³² Chulhee Xhung wrote that the South Korean society remained embedded with authoritarianism and familial nature, a kind of 'fascism in everyday life' which manifested into informal hierarchy, sexual discrimination, patriarchy and excessive emphasis on community at the expense of individual.³³ But the pro-democracy movement of the 1980s made a major contribution to social change by playing leading roles as they made people aware of the basic contradictions existing in Korean society.³⁴

The Korean women's movement seems to be closely intertwined with politics and how the women of Korea actually bargain their needs using politics as a tool is something which needs to be praised. According to Han Myung Suk, the driving force for the democratisation movement and women's liberation movement was the struggle of impoverished women workers.³⁵ Therefore, factors behind political transition appear to be the same factors for the liberation of women. Sasha Hampson wrote that without democracy all Koreans would be oppressed and hence many separate movements placed the social movements ahead of their own struggle and women's movement is no exception. However, the 1970s and the 1980s saw a close alliance between the nationalist

³² Nancy Abelman, 'Narrating Selfhood and Personality in South Korea: Women and Social Mobility', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 786–812, Nov. 1997.

³³ Im J (2000) cited in Chulhee Chung, 'The New Class and Democratic Social Relations in South Korea-Nascent Moves towards Non-Hierarchical and Participatory Relations', *International Sociology*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2005.

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ Yayuri Matsui, 'Turning Pain into Power', in *Women in New Asia*, 2000.

and the women's movement but in the 1990s the strengthening of democracy in Korea has given the women's movement to follow its own agenda rather than other social movements.³⁶ But, there is always the feeling of anxiety over the stability of women's progress in Korea due to the fact that women were the first to be sack during the financial crisis of 1997. This crisis strengthened the course of conservative democracy according to Seongsook Moon.³⁷

So how far the women's movement has been successful and how women have benefited from it has been the main concern of various gender related organisations. However, what should be kept in mind is that the democratisation process is an ongoing process even now. Whether the transition from the authoritarian period to democracy has benefited women or not is an important question that has been lingering in the academic circle for quite a long time. So, to look into the Korean women's situation, this chapter traces the history of women's movement and how the movement for democracy took shape with the help of women's movement.

2. Korean Women's History

2.1 Korean women's movement in the colonial period

Korean women did not occupy a very respectable place in society owing to the fact that Confucianism held back women's development in various spheres due to its conservative

³⁶ Sasha Hampson, 'Rhetoric or Reality? Contesting definitions of women in Korea', in Louise Edwards and Mina Roces (eds), *Women in Asia – Tradition, Modernity and Globalization*.

³⁷ Seungsook Moon, 'Women and Democratization in the Republic of Korea', *The Good Society*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2002.

ideals. The three followings of Confucianism- to obey the father when unmarried, to obey husband when married and to obey son when widowed- did hinder the progress of women as they were made dependent to their male counterparts. Women's choices were constrained by the key axioms of Confucian thought: filial piety, family loyalty, conformity to group norms and chastity.³⁸ However, the colonisation of Korea by Japan and subsequently opening it to the outside world gave them an opportunity to resist colonial rule and emancipate women.

The first phase started from the enlightenment period till 1945 which can be summed up as the 'the quickening period of the Korean women's movement'.³⁹ It was during this period that the women's enlightenment ideas took definite shape and educative characteristics were vaguely accepted. Early women nationalist leaders like Young-hyo Park and Jae-pil Suh took the forefront in propagating that the Korean women's position is very low and that modern education would reduce the unfair treatment given to girls. During this period, schools like Yangkyueuisook Girls School and Association for Women's Education were established. Then the Jinmyung Married Women's Association launched a nationwide Campaign for Reimbursing the Debts of Korea to Japan from February 1907. Again, the 1919 Independence Movement emphasised upon women to join the national movement to enhance its effectiveness. By 1920s, many women organisations were formed that work for the upliftment of women as well for the national independence. As a result of the raising consciousness women workers formed a labour

³⁸ Sasha Hampson, 'Rhetoric or Reality? Contesting Definitions of Women in Korea', in Louise Edwards and Mina Roces (eds), *Women in Asia – Tradition, Modernity and Globalization*.

³⁹ Sohn Seong-Young, 'The Women's Movement in Korea: Transition and Prospects', *Asian women*, Vol. 9, pp. 27–44, Dec. 1999.

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union called 'Kunwoohoe' in 1923. However, due to its anti-colonial activities, the Japanese government suppressed the labour union and finally disbanded it in 1933.

The 1920s of Korea was a period when women began to challenge the doctrines of Confucianism patriarchy which was a 'source of cultural oppression' to the Korean women.⁴⁰ These educated intellectual women comprised the first feminist generation of Korea and they came to be known as 'new women' in Korea. They crafted their identity through modern education in Korea, journeys to Japan and Europe and this 'new women' became socially visible during in the 1920s.⁴¹ However, this group could not survive for long as they lacked the nationalist's feelings and a sense of societal obligation as colonised women. Haesuk La, Wonju Kim and Myungsung Kim were prominent leaders of 'new women'.

During the independence movement, women were mobilized to participate in it. The movement for independence opened their eyes and the experience of it led to the expansion of the women's movement. But the women's movement of this period remained under the independence movement as independent Korea was the main goal of that time. Thus, not much progress was made regarding the women's position as the independence of Korea remained the main priority of this period.

⁴⁰ Kwon In-sook, 'How Identities and Movement Cultures Became Deeply saturated with Militarism: Lessons from the Pro-Democracy Movement of South Korea', *Asian Journal of women's Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2005.

⁴¹ Insook Kwon, 'The New Women's Movement in 1920 in Korea: Rethinking the Relationship between Imperialism and Women', in *Feminism and Internationalism*.

2.2 The 1960s women's movement

The post-independence Korea was a scene of great transformation with industrialisation leading the way of Korean people. There was a change from the agricultural society to an industrialised society and the rapid industrialising scenario was based on export-oriented economy. Sohn Seong-Young calls this period 'the organizing period of women's movement' due to the recognition of certain basic rights of women.⁴² Mikyung chin wrote that in the 1960s, the growing women's movement among middle-class was similar to the quest of economic development and prosperity.⁴³

It was during this period that women started bargaining for policies favouring women. The government, as a result, propagated family planning in spite of strong opposition from the national assembly. Thus, in 1961 a family planning programme was adopted by the government to prevent the negative impact of population growth on national economic growth. In propagating the family planning programme, the Korean National council of women (KNCW) took extra effort to publicise it among the Korean people and the organisation acted as a primary agent of the government. The KNCW dispatched birth control specialists, distributed contraceptives and performed free sterilisation operations throughout the country. This organisation also held rallies like 'National Development by Women's Power' in 1964, 'Women's Duty in Modernization' in 1966 and 'The 1970s and the Population Problem' in 1970. Not only this, the Korean Married Women's

⁴² Sohn Seong-Young, 'The Women's Movement in Korea: Transition and Prospects', *Asian women*, Vol. 9, pp. 27-44, Dec. 1999.

⁴³ Mikyung Chin, 'Self Governance, Political Participation, and the Feminist Movement in South Korea', in *Democratization and the Status of Women in East Asia*.

Association (*Daehan Booinhoe*) and YMCA submitted a petition for the enactment of a civil law. They also launched campaigns for registering marriages which started from the 1958. By 1959, in order to strengthen the women's movement in Korean society, many separate organisations such as the Central Married Women's Association (*Joongang Booinhoe*), the Study Group for Women's Problems (*Yeosung Munje Yeonkuhoe*) and the Korean Married Women's Organizations united into a single and larger association called Association of Women's Organizations (*Yeosung Danche Hyupeuihoe: Yeohyup*). Thus, the women's movement strengthened all the more during the 1960s.

It is true that progress were made in some spheres during the regime of military government but many authors like Mikyung Chin and Sohn Seong-Young expressed the view that the women's movement of those times were conservative and pro-government. Sohn Seong-Young wrote that these organisations did not last long because of they focused on easy activities by relying on women's learning for culture and the social gathering of the members. Moreover, they were not liberal enough to carry the women movement's forward and they were anti-communists following the government ideologies in a conservative manner. Thus, to raise active consciousness and to safeguard women's rights were a distant dream for Korean women. In tune with Sohn Seong-Young, Mikyung Chin also wrote that the middle class women were reluctant to voice the fundamental feminist issues and the problems which needed immediate attention like the sexual inequality poor women faced at work place, at home and at society. It was more so because they had already lost their autonomy and they were dependent on the state. Thus, the women's organisations of this time did not last long as thought by the Korean women.

But the positive impact of the women's organisations of those times was that they did succeeded in establishing certain basic rights of women and the government was forced to rethink on the family law and other civil matters. The military government was trying to please each section of the society to legitimise its rule and broadened its support. In turn, the women's groups took the opportunity to extract certain acts and regulations which favours women.

2.3 The 1970s women's movement

The women's movement in the 1970s was a period of economic miracle and women were the backbone of this economic miracle. Most of the women workers were drawn from the countryside and they were known as *yo'kong* or factory girls. With the export-oriented economy of government in heels, the South Korean women were exploited as cheap labour and their rights were violated without the feeling of guilt by the government.⁴⁴ These women workers toiled day and nights in export-oriented industries such as textiles, garments, electronics, plastics, wig and food processing, yet they had to satisfy themselves with low wages and sexual harassment, exhaustion, and heart-breaking abuse to support parents and siblings and pay tuition for their brother's education.⁴⁵ They often lived wedged together in company dormitory quarters, called 'chicken coops', with mattresses rotated between shifts of workers.⁴⁶ It was during this time that South Korea gained international unsavory reputation for the world's longest work week and highest

⁴⁴ Yayuri Matsui, 'Turning Pain into Power: Korea', in *Women in New Asia*, 2000.

⁴⁵ Spencer (1988), cited in Miriam Ching Yoon Louie's 'Minjung Feminism – Korean Women's Movement for Gender and Class Liberation', in *Global Feminisms Since 1945 – Rewriting Histories*.

⁴⁶ Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, 'Minjung Feminism – Korean women's Movement for Gender and Class Liberation' in *Global Feminisms Since 1945 – Rewriting Histories*.

rate of industrial accidents.⁴⁷ Thus, these women workers were the one's who spearheaded the democratic union movement throughout the 1970s when labour rights were completely on the brink of extinction under the martial law. The women workers began to take the centre stage of the women's movement from this time onwards and for the first time in 1972, a woman was elected as the chairperson of the trade union branch. This Trade Union Branch was brutally suppressed by the government authorities and was harassed by 'yellow' (pro-government) unions due to its transformation to a democratic organ which protected the rights of its women workers. When the women workers protested against the government's policies, they were beaten up, arrested or dismissed from the work. There was this infamous incident in 1978 in which women protesters were smeared with human faeces and urine by company-hired thugs.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, these women workers continued with their demand saying that they just wanted to live as human beings.

Another catalyst that influenced the Korean women's movement of the 1970s was the women liberation activities at the international level. The year 1975 was designated as the International Women's Year and declared the United Nations Decade for Women from the year 1976 to 1985. Moreover, the adoption of the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 gave impetus to the Korean women's movement. It again helped to change the approach of the Korean People regarding the gender issue. Thus, this led to increased

⁴⁷ Bello and Rosenfeld (1990) cited in Miriam Ching Yoon Louie's 'Minjung Feminism – Korean women's Movement for Gender and Class Liberation' in *Global Feminisms Since 1945 – Rewriting Histories*.

⁴⁸ Yayuri Matsui, 'Turning Pain into Power: Korea', in *Women in New Asia*, 2000.

activities of women's organisations and students' demonstrations. Most of the female students participated in the demonstrations against military regime asking for democracy once again. They also supported strikes and demonstrations by the reporters for free speech and opinions which was repressed by the military regime of Park Chung-hee. In addition, they joined hands with the labour unions who were protesting against the bad working condition, unpaid and low wages and the suppression of workers rights.

A catalyst in bridging the gap between rural women and urban educated women was the New Village Movement (*Samuel Undong*) of the early 1970s. The *Samuel undong* movement was aimed at reducing the gap between the living conditions of rural and urban areas.⁴⁹ During this movement, many rural women cooperated with working women in building up a new, more radical branch of the feminist's movement. Many radical branches came closer to other emerging social groups such as the labour movement and the democratic movement against authoritarianism according to Mikyung Chin

The society of this period is known as the 'system of restoration' because the 1970s were characterised by many internal conflicts caused due to favouritism of economic growth depending mainly on exports.⁵⁰ It is also called as the 'broadening of the base for liberal movement period' because women's labour activism was generated at this time and they

⁴⁹ Mikyung Chin, 'Self Governance, Political Participation, and the Feminist Movement in South Korea', in *Democratization and the Status of Women in East Asia*.

⁵⁰ Yang Hee Kim, 'Gender Perspective on Peace and Directions for the Korean Women's Peace Movement', *Asian Women*, Vol. 12, summer 2001.

began to be recognised.⁵¹ According to Mina Roces and Louise Edwards, the 1970s women's movement focused primarily on the issues of the women workers. The female students of South Korea were pretty conscious about the horrible situation of the women workers and they started to work together with the workers.

Han Myung Suk, a protester of the Gwangju uprising recounts her experience of women workers:⁵²

Women's working conditions were terrible at that time. Women were not treated as human beings; they were paid only 30 percent of man's wages, were not allowed to go to the toilet freely, and were constantly forced to work overtime. All women workers became ill within five years.

The Park Chung-hee government was rallying the people of the nation through the ideology of 'nation comes first before individuals'. However, when it became intolerable up to the extent that people of South Korea especially the workers started suffering from many health problems, inadequate nutrition, suppression of workers rights and horrendous working conditions, they started protesting against the ideology. Moreover, the new *yushin*⁵³ constitution was established through a rigged plebiscite. The *yushin* constitution allows the reelection of the president a number of times and transferred the election of the president to the Electoral College, the National Conference for Unification. The *yushin* constitution thus gave limitless power to President Park Chung-hee and he

⁵¹ Sohn Seong-Young, 'The Women's Movement in Korea: Transition and Prospects', *Asian women*, Vol. 9, pp. 27-44, Dec. 1999.

⁵² Yayuri Matsui, 'Turning Pain into Power' in *Women in New Asia*, 2000.

⁵³ *Yushin* is a word borrowed from Japanese word *Meiji Ishin*.

became a dictator, controlling everything ranging from economy to politics to society. This was also another reason for the extreme turmoil in South Korea.

Another achievement of the 1970s was the consciousness-raising programme of education and women issues. Thus, the Christian Academy started conscious raising education of women in 1973 and as a result the Ewha Women's University started offering the course of women's studies at general level in 1977. In short the women worker's struggle and labour union movement of this period acted as a part of the grassroots democratic movement and opened a 'revolution' towards the women's movement and democratisation of the 1980s.⁵⁴

2.4 The 1980s women's movement

The women's movement of the 1980s has been always equated with the democratic mass movement in most of the literatures of South Korea. However, before going into the details of this relation between mass movement for democracy and women's movement, there is the need to examine whether any changes in the status of women during this period was triggered only due to the force of the women's movement or all the movements went along together.

In 1983, highly educated women opened the *Yeosung Pyungwoohoe* and focused on women's roles as office worker, housewife, and community helper. This organisation was later renamed as *Yeosung Minwoohoe* and they prepared measures against unfair treatment meted out to women in terms of job placement and while being a trainee. In

⁵⁴ Sohn Seong-Young, 'The Women's Movement in Korea: Transition and Prospects', *Asian women*, Vol. 9, pp. 27-44, Dec. 1999.

addition, the motherhood protection movement was launched by them for working women. The following year, in 1984, the Korean Association of Women's Studies was formed.

The Korean Women's Development Institute was established in 1983 (KWDI) to make a comprehensive study of women's issues and link its findings with actual policies. The National Committee on Women's Policies was also established in 1983, with representatives of the concerned government ministries, and the Ministry of Political Affairs (2) in 1988 which was given the charge of formulating and implementing women's policies. However, it was dissolved and a Special Committee on Women's Affairs which is directly responsible to the government was formed in February 1998. In 1985, the National Committee on Women Policies adopted the 'Master Plan for Women's Development' and the 'Guidelines for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women' as government policies. In 1988, fifteen bureaus of Family Welfare headed by women were established in fifteen major cities and provinces. In the same year, the Equal Opportunity Law drafted in 1987 went into effect and a section for equal pay for equal pay was inserted into the law in 1989. The government also enacted the Mother-child Welfare Law in 1989 and in February 1987, the Coalition of Korean Women's Organizations (*Hankook Yeosung Danche Yeonhap Yeoyeon*) was formed. This coalition was formed by 21 member organisations which had various branches in nook and corner of the country. They organised a 'rally of women voters to end the rule of the military government', preparing a 'cooperative festival for democratic citizens' and launched a 'campaign to expel tear bombs'. In addition, they formed committees for peace and human traffic against prostitution and women rights. They also work towards getting the

prisoners of democratic movement released and participated in strikes to remove the anti-communists laws imposed by the military government. In the same year, many organisations formed an organisation called Korean Women's Association United (KWAU). The reason behind the formation of KWAU, a national coalition of the thirty-three worker, peasant, religious, research, environmental, housewife, and anti-violence organisations in 1987 was to overcome the fragmentation and discontinuity in the women worker's movement.⁵⁵

Another organisation called the Korean Women's Society for Democracy was established in 1987. By 1988, it had 150 active members and they were against women's labour rights, prostitution and sex torture. According to Yayuri Matsui, the Korean women led the workers movement in the 1980s during the heights of suppression. Miriam wrote that due to women's expanding activities in labour movement, 'the women's movement assumed distinct theoretical, political, and organisational forms by the mid-1980s'.⁵⁶ On the other hand, Sohn calls this period as 'the establishment of democratic mass movement period'.⁵⁷ Mikyung Chin wrote that following democratic transition in 1987, women groups proliferated including many social groups.

One prominent group among the women's groups at this time was the Women for Equality and Peace, which challenged the patriarchal nature of the Korean society and the government's economic growth policy by relying on women's workforce. The objectives

⁵⁵ Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, 'Minjung Feminism – Korean Women's Movement for Gender and Class Liberation' in *Global Feminisms Since 1945 – Rewriting Histories*.

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Sohn Seong-Young, 'The Women's Movement in Korea: Transition and Prospects', *Asian women*, Vol. 9, pp. 27–44, Dec. 1999.

and principles of this group were to work out a theory of women's issues in the Korean situation; to give cooperation to other social groups to enhance the Korean society which will be suitable for women to live in; to bring around a movement in the interests of the poorest, the most alienated and oppressed women; and lastly, to allow a democratic management that allows each and asked everyone to participate and act. This organisation also protested against the maternity retirement system, the amount of compensation for female traffic accidents victims as being lower than male victims and against the sexual torture of a student by the police. The organisations first publication in 1983 emphasises that:⁵⁸

Unless women are liberated, human liberation is impossible. Unless a society where women can live as human beings is realized, women's liberation will remain only an illusion. Women's liberation is an inseparable part of the society of liberated human beings.

In 1983, two government organs to deal with women's issues were established. They are the Korean Women Development Institute (KWDI) and the Council of women's Policy. The KWDI is a research institute which carries out surveys in various spheres such as politics, society and economic status of women.

A new dimension to the women's movement of the 1980s was the movement for peace headed by women groups. There were different peace movement in a more matured and

⁵⁸ Quoted from Yayuri Matsui's 'Pain into Power: Korea' in *Women in New Asia*.

contented ways around this time.⁵⁹ The year 1986 was designated as the Year of International Peace by the United Nations. Many organisations for peace came up, such as the Opposition to War and Nuclear weapons, the Celebration for Women's Peace, the Women's Peace Thrifty Market, the Movement to Exterminate War Culture and the Movement to Exterminate Tear Gas. The organisation Celebration for Women's Peace was formed to give a common platform to all women and many women in this organisation had experienced the horror of atom bomb victims. The Women's Peace Thrifty Market was a fund-raising organisation while the Movement to Exterminate Tear Gas was an organisation against the use of tear gas by the Korean government to the protestors. In short, many organisations for peace crop up during this time especially because Korean society was the threshold of change towards a more democratic government. In any society, chaos precedes any change and so was Korea at this point of time. As a result many peace movements came up to bring a more stable society and that was a positive outcome of all the movements of the 1980s.

Thus, women's movement became very strong at this point of time and most of the organisations supported each other. There was an incident in 1986, where a women employee in Korean Broadcasting Service (KBS) was mistreated. As a result, all the women's groups aligned with other social groups and boycotted the KBS subscription. This protest escalated into a democratic mass movement and it provided the people to voice their grievances towards the then government. The KBS was a government channel which the government manipulated at their fingertips for their own ends. This incident

⁵⁹ Yang Hee Kim, 'Gender Perspective on Peace and Directions for the Korean Women's Peace Movement', *Asian Women*, Vol. 12, summer 2001.

led the Korean Women's Associations United to unite all radical women's groups under its organisation.

The relation between mass democracy movement and women's movement are intertwined according to many authors. Yayuri is of the opinion that the driving force for the democratisation movement and the women's liberation movement was the struggle of impoverished workers. It is a fact that movements for democracy peak around this time though it started around 1970 when a young man called Chun Tae Il burnt himself while protesting against the horrendous conditions of workers.⁶⁰ From then onwards, protests and strikes had been occurring and finally a major mass movement called the 'Kwangju incident' or better known as 'Gwangju incident' occurred in 1980, from 18 to 27 May. It was a demonstration against the then military government of Chun Do-Hwan for democracy and mainly students and women took part in the movement for democracy in a city called Kwangju. In retaliation, the government ordered all the protesters to be shot dead and thousands of protestors were killed. Thus, it came to be known as the Kwangju massacre. According to Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, 'the Kwangju uprising catalyzed radicalized and cross-fertilized the student, labor, religious and women's *minjung* movements'.⁶¹ So the women's movement started working hand in hand with the mass movement against the then existing government. A huge rally for women was organised with the theme, 'Women's Movement in Unity with National Democratic *Minjung* Movement' in 1985. Finally, due to the intensity of protests for democracy, Chun Do-

⁶⁰ Yayuri Matsui, 'Turning Pain into Power' in *Women in New Asia*, 2000.

⁶¹ Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, 'Minjung Feminism – Korean Women's Movement for Gender and Class Liberation', in *Global Feminisms Since 1945 -- Rewriting Histories*.

Hwan finally stepped down and led General Roh Tae-woo to announce that direct presidential elections would be allowed.

2.5 The 1990s women's movement

In 1991, the Korean Women Development Institute was transferred from the Ministry of Health and Welfare to the Ministry of Political Affairs (2) which led to the rearrangements of the administrative systems way of dealing with women's issues and policies. In addition, as many as 274 Family Welfare Divisions, under the Ministry of Health and Welfare where most of the workers were women was founded to take care of the issues concerning women. Then the local government of Korea was reintroduced after long years of gap enhancing the political participation of women. The Political Development Institute for Korean Women (*Hankook Yeosung Jeongchi Yeonkuso*) and the Women's Political and Cultural Research Institute (*Yeosung Jeongchi Moonhwa Yeonkuso*) were also established during this period. They played an amazing role in enhancing women's participation in politics and also promoted political leadership of women while making efforts to reach out to educate women in Korea. In addition, they tried to increase the consciousness of women about politics and to reduce discrimination faced by women at the institutional level by revising voting laws.

An Act related to Punishment of Sexual Violence and Protection of Victims was enacted in 1993. Then the Special Committee on Women at the national assembly was established as a permanent body in 1994. It was meant to look after enactment of special laws and provisions and revision of laws related to women. Then the Prevention of Prostitution Act was revised in 1995.

When the Seventh Five Year Economic and Social Development Plan were made, it included a new women's development plan for the period 1992-1996. It laid special emphasis on education, employment, cultural and social activities, welfare and international cooperation. The Ministry of Labour prepared the basic plan to promote Working Women's Welfare, in 1994–1997, to enhance the status of working women and their welfare by implementing policies such as equal opportunity, expanding maternity protection and developing human resources through women's work capabilities.

The Comfort Women Issue: The issue of Chong Shin Dae or 'Comfort Girl Corp' stands as one of the most humiliating reminders of the forty years Korea suffered as Japan's colony.⁶² It is commonly know as the 'comfort women' issue which denotes the sexual slavery of Korean women to the Japanese war soldiers of World War II. Young women were enrolled in the military corps and later on they were forced to serve the Japanese soldiers. Around 100,000 to 200,000 women were drafted and out that 80,000 were believed to be from Korea. The others were recruited from China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand.

This issue of 'comfort women' or Chong Shin Dae came into the public eyes for the first time when two of the survivors came forward and told their story. After that, the Japanese and the Korean journalists started investigating the matter and by June 1991 Korean reporters tracked down almost 200 survivors of comfort women corps. Since then, many

⁶² Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, 'Minjung Feminism – Korean Women's Movement for Gender and Class Liberation', in *Global Feminisms Since 1945 – Rewriting Histories*.

Koreans have been protesting against Japan to acknowledge their wrong doings and compensate them. One of the survivors Shim Mi Ja told her story:⁶³

When I was 16 years old a policeman tried to rape me so I punched him in the ear. Then they beat me so hard that I passed out. When I woke up I was in Fukuoka, Japan. They made me serve as a Chong Shin Dae prostitute for six years, between 1939 and 1945. ... After I was kidnapped and sent to Japan I never saw my family again because my hometown is in North Korea.

Shim Mi Ja, personal communication, 15 July 1992

After the revelation of the stark truths of the forced prostitution, many women organisations protested against the wrong doings of the Japanese government. In November 1990, the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for the Military Sexual Slaves by Japan was founded and it urged both the Japanese and the Korean government to deal the matter clearly and bring about a fast resolution to settle the row. They even filed a suit to the United Nations regarding the matter and managed to publicise it at the international level. The Korean Council is demanding that the Japanese government should admit truly about the Comfort Women corps, their apology and full investigation, as well as compensate the surviving victims of it. However, the matter stands unresolved till now.

But at a closer look 1990s, the period appears to be of political change for women in terms of political consciousness and political participation. Many Korean women were

⁶³ ibid

politically motivated to join politics for the betterment of their future. And women organisations directed their energy into politics once South Korea turned into a democratic state. Because they knew that to become a good democratic country, women should come out of their shell and participate in the public sphere. In order to make a vibrant public sphere, women's participation was a necessity thus women intellectuals guided the way towards it. Sohn Seong-Young called this period as that of political pluralisation in everyday life because there was an increasing activity of women in politics. However, Yang-Hee Kim writes of the 1990s as the period for the movement of 'peace' by Korean women which reached up to the international level.

3. Women's Movement in Korea: A Highlight

Korean women's movement can be broadly divided into three phase: before independence, post-independence and post-democracy. The first phase was the period of women's enlightenment in the sense that the Korean society opened up to the outside world and it was influenced by Japan, Russia and United States. This helped loosened up the societal norms up to some extent though Confucian ideals still play an important role in Korean society. Again, there were many instances of women being mobilised for independence movement of Korea from Japan. In the process, women learned a lot about the outside world and started questioning their role and their rights as a human being. This was the starting point for the accumulation of many ideas regarding the emancipation of women and ultimately when it ripe and the ideas exploded, the movement began to take shape.

In the second phase post-independence after a brief period of democracy, the military government of Park Chung-hee did liberate women but the liberation was not in-depth. It was just a face value change so that he could mobilise young women to contribute to the national economy. Though they were able to break the social taboo that good women should stay at home, served the family, they did not attained the satisfaction at work place because of constant discrimination against women. This was another reason the women's movement became stronger besides other reasons. The repressive government time and again tried to suppress the women's movement when it rather became a protest against the government but it grew stronger with time. Because women and the masses knew that democracy would provide a better living condition and give them the space to live as a dignified citizen of a nation.

The third phase post-democracy was a period where many women organisations came up. Though democracy was attained, the Korean women felt that somehow they did not get what they deserved. They led the movement for democracy yet democracy seems to be giving them so little for women to grow in the entire social, economic and the political sphere. After realizing this, many organisations began to work towards the empowerment of women in all the spheres they lagged. While working towards the emancipation of women, they found out that the area which women lagged the most was the political arena. So they started raising consciousness about the benefits of being active in politics and asked all the Korean women to vote so that they could choose a candidate who understands their problem. Thus, this period post-democracy can be called a very active political phase of Korean women in order to enhance their status.

Thus, the women's movement in Korea is closely related with the mass movements of those times. For example, we see that the labour movement and the democratic movement are intertwined with each other and the women's movement was an integral part of it too. Because all the three different movement had the same goal, that is of independence and democracy. Democracy was the only way to bring change in society, economy and polity of Korea. Therefore, all the movements had the same destination of democracy though they took different routes to achieve it.

Shin wrote that the Korean women's movement is totally different from the Western movements because it was a movement of modernisation, independence, democratisation and finally a movement to reunite North and South Korea. But there are authors like Sohn and Anderson who emphasised the similarities between the Korean women's movement and Western women's movements. The first stage of movement against imperialism can be compared to the enlightenment stage; the second stage of educational and legal reform can be compared to the liberal feminists of west; the third stage of economic equality between two sexes can be seen as a connection to the ideas of Marxism feminism and finally the radical feminists perspective were expressed in 1920s and 1980s. But in any women's movement, the priority is to emancipate women at any cause and how the state or nation does that depends on the socio-historical contexts and the political situation of the existing times. Lines are drawn dividing the women's movement along liberal, radical, Marxism, post modernists and so on yet the main aim of enhancing the status of women remains the same throughout the history. The policies and programmes formulated do differ from society to society, place to place and time to time but people involved in the movement always desire the best outcome in the interests of women. Thus, even in the

case of Korea too, there were similarities and dissimilarities but the best for women is always expected for women. The time factor for change is important in the sense that the more resistant a society is to change the more time it takes to change. In Korea, changes have been occurring since the colonial times and these changes till the recent times are outstanding. Changes in each decade are traceable and the process of empowerment has been occurring non-stop and this shows that the Korean society is changing fast with time.

4. Conclusion

To trace the Korean women's movement from its imperialism stage to the democratisation till the recent stage is a difficult one. Because there were many ingredients that made the women's movement successful like those many women's organisations ranging from youth organisation to labour union. In short, the achieving of independence and democratisation would have been impossible without these civil organisations. Thus, the Korean women's movement is unique in its own sense because all the movements clubbed together in order to bring about a valuable change. The movement for independence, for democracy, for economic emancipation in Korea by women and for women is hard to find in the world. Moreover, all through out those struggling days, be it for independence or for democracy, women were at the forefront. Rather, it can be called a movement for women empowerment through democracy by the women and for women in Korea. Thus, the history of women occupies an important place in the history of Korea and the world.

Chapter 3

Politics and Women in South Korea

1. Introduction

In the political history of the world, women have always been excluded from political participation and politics have always been the domain of masculine activity. But with time, many changes took place and women have finally come to a stage where they could voice their concerns. By late 1980s and 1990s, many nations yielded to international trend of emancipating women in various spheres in the hope that the process of empowerment of women would lead to better society. This extended even to the political sphere including economy and society. But for years, entry of women into politics has been an arena where women faced so many difficulties due to many cultural, social and political factors. Nevertheless, there is a believe that the advancement of women's interests results from the redistribution of power within society in which both men and women acquire political, social and cultural consciousness and women rearrange the power system existing within a society.⁶⁴ Thus, the right to vote and to hold office to join the decision-making process became necessary to women. Yet, the dichotomy still exists between men and women participation in politics in many nations due to many reasons. Despite legal guarantees, the participation of women in politics remains marginal. In most of the nations, though women are given the suffrage, the election to the national

⁶⁴ Jennifer L. Troutner and Peter H. Smith, 'Empowering Women: Agency, Structure, and Comparative Perspective' in *Promises of Empowerment – Women in Asian and Latin America*.

assembly varies widely. In some countries, the election of women to the national or local assembly is high while in some, the elections of women to these seats are very low. Thus, the issues of 'politics and women' have always been the subject of discussion. For women, the desire to be active in politics is always confronted with female-gender role as defined by the modern society and the norms and expectations linked to political roles.⁶⁵

But democracy is the only form of government that provides equal participation of gender in politics. So after the series of transition to democracy in many nations, there arose the need to rethink over the kind of democracy prevalent in democratic countries. Thus, the participation of women in politics in relation to democracy is what this chapter intends to find out. Whether democracy has brought a stable status quo in politics for women and how far the progress has been made as promised by democracy is something which is discussed here. It is because in some countries, there is a huge gap of male-female participation in politics due to many reasons. In the case of South Korea, it was only in the nineteen nineties that the effects of democratisation reached and political parties realised the importance of female voters and of gender equality in representation.⁶⁶ So this chapter shall focus on the South Korean political status of women by looking into the results of national assembly, local assembly starting from 1988 till 2008 of South Korea. In short, it is an attempt to find out the political status of South Korean women since its democratisation from the year 1987 and see whether political participation of women has actually declined or increased.

⁶⁵ Susan J. Pharr, Chapter 1, 'Women's Search for a Place in Political Life', in *Political Women in Japan*.

⁶⁶ Haike Hermannes, 'Women in South Korean Politics: A Long Road to Equality', *Journal Portal*, Vol. 3, 2 July 2006.

2. Politics and Women

Politics as a concept of power is the current understanding of politics in the world of today. To attain citizenship of a country is to have the right to vote and hold office regardless of gender. Accordingly, Barbara J. Nelson states that politics is 'the exercise of power, through reason and language, to achieve a particular outcome within a group of people'.⁶⁷

However, despite the guarantee of voting rights to both men and women, concerns directing at the marginal representation and electoral participation of women have been rising in most of the democratic countries. Because there is a limited involvement of women in politics cum decision-making process and other bureaucratic works. According to Judith Squires, politics has been historically limited to men only and in modern politics, institutional manifestations of politics located in government have been resistant to the inclusion of women and their interests in politics.⁶⁸ In every form of political system, women have always been marginalised and excluded according to Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury.

Carol Pateman holds the view that sexual difference, subordination and exclusion of women is central to the construction of modern political theory and the assumption behind this is that the 'political is public' and the private realm lies outside the proper concern of the study of the politics.⁶⁹ Most people associate politics with public realm

⁶⁷ Barbara J. Nelson, Najma Chowdhury, Kathryn A. Carver, Nancy J. Johnson, and Paula L. O'Loughlin, Chapter 1, 'Women and Politics Worldwide'.

⁶⁸ Judith Squires, 'Gender in Political Theory'.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

and men are associated with public sphere while women are associated with private sphere. In other words, women are excluded from the public sphere so that they may plainly live within the private realm. Thus, this form of political system which excludes women has always been condemned by various women's organisations and demands attention to political inequality. Thus, Eileen McDonagh wrote that exclusion of women from the politics and related decision-making process constitutes a serious violation to the definition of democracy.⁷⁰

People often assume that political change might open up new options for women by giving them more space to realise their goals by political liberalisation and transition to democracy.⁷¹ By participating in politics, women could exert political influence which would result in many legal and political reforms. In turn, these reforms would act as a check to patriarchal norms of the society. In Democracy, according to them, women could become public officials themselves with the power to enact reforms lessening discrimination. Moreover, greater political and civic freedom could provide a circumstance for the emergence of independent women's groups approaching a government to enact desirable reforms. In either case, the end result is that government policy can be used to loosen and remove the restrictions on women erected by patriarchal cultures. Thus, the state-enforced reforms can be used to soften the restrictions and discrimination against women in patriarchal cultures, but also that woman can become fully empowered only after significant cultural change.

⁷⁰ Eileen McDonagh, 'Political Citizenship and Democratization: The Gender Paradox', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 3, September 2002.

⁷¹ Rose J. Lee and Cal Clark (eds.) *Democracy and the status of women in East Asia*.

Table 3.1 Women in the National Assembly from 1948 to 1985

National assembly	Number of women candidates	Percentage of women candidates	Number of women winners	Percentage of women winners
1 (1948)	22	2.3	1	0.5
2 (1950)	11	0.5	2	1.0
3 (1954)	10	0.8	1	0.5
4 (1958)	5	0.6	3	1.0
5 (1960)	8	0.5	1	0.4
6 (1963)	7 (4)	0.7 (0.5)	2 (1)	1.1 (0.8)
7 (1967)	8 (4)	1.0 (0.6)	3 (1)	1.7 (0.8)
8 (1971)	8 (2)	1.1 (0.3)	5 (0)	2.5 (0)
9 (1973)	10 (2)	2.4 (0.6)	10 (2)	4.6 (1.4)
10 (1978)	11 (4)	2.0 (0.8)	8 (1)	3.5 (0.6)
11 (1981)	25 (10)	2.9 (1.6)	8 (1)	2.9 (0.5)
12 (1985)	16 (7)	2.6 (1.6)	8 (2)	2.9 (1.1)
Total	141 (23)		52 (8)	

Sources: National assembly, 1997; Shin, 1990, p. 26; Song, 1986, p. 240.

In sum, Virginia Sapiro and Jane Mansbridge argue that it does matter whether women vote in a democracy.⁷² And also, it does matter in a democratic country if women ‘lack access to social and political institutions and offices’⁷³

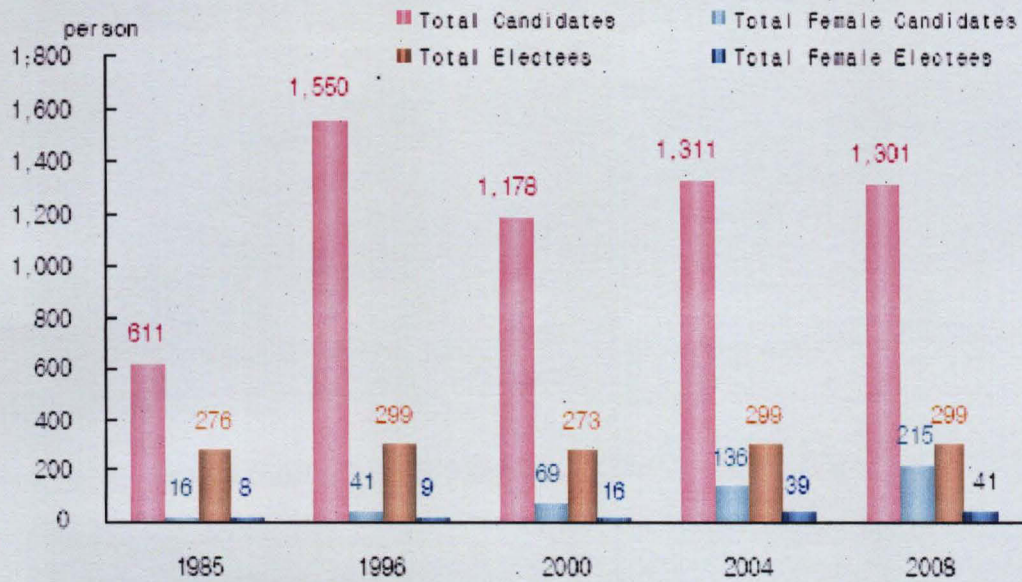
3. Election in South Korea

3.1 National assembly

South Korea held its first democratic national assembly election in 1948 and the first president of the Republic of Korea was Syngman Rhee. He held the post of president until 1960 and democratic elections went fairly well. In the first national legislative election there were twenty-two women contesting for the election out of a total of 948 candidates (2.3%). But only one woman was elected representing 0.5%. In the following elections from 1950 to 1958, the highest point of representation was only 1% showing a very minimal election of women to the parliament of South Korea. In 1961, the military coup took place and thereafter the military government permitted an elective national assembly. During this period from 1963 to 1985, seven national assembly elections were held and the representation of women increased. There was an increase from 1.1% in 1963 to 1.7% in 1967, from 1.7% to 2.5% in 1971 and then to an average of 3.5% for the 1973 to 1985 elections. However, women’s participation in politics pre-democratic scenario remains extremely low.

⁷² Virginia Sapiro (1998) and Jane Mansbridge (2001) in Eileen McDonagh (ed.), ‘Political Citizenship and Democratization: The Gender Paradox’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 3, September 2002.

⁷³ Tilly, 1997 cited in Eileen McDonagh, ‘Political Citizenship and Democratisation: The Gender Paradox’, *American Political Studies*, Vol. 96, No.3, September 2002.



Unit: Person

Classification				Candidate		Elected	
				Total	Female	Total	Female
National Assembly	12th	1985	Local constituencies	440	7	184	2
			Nationwide	171	9	92	6
	14th	1992	Local constituencies	1 052	19	237	0
			Nationwide	154	16	62	3
	16th	2000	Local constituencies	1 038	33	227	5
			Nationwide	140	36	46	11
18th	2008	Local constituencies	1 113	132	245	14	
		Nationwide	186	63	54	27	
Local Council	1991	1991	Municipal Assembly member	2 885	63	858	8
			County Council member	10 159	123	4 303	40
	1998	1998	Municipal Assembly member	1 480	91	690	41
			County Council member	7 754	140	3 489	56
	2006	2006	Municipal Assembly member	2 068	107	655	32
			County Council Member	7 995	391	2 513	110

Source: National Election Commission, Web DB(2006).

Figure 3.1 National assembly and local assembly elections.

After the democratisation of South Korea since 1987, a series of elections have been held and the last one was the election of 2008. The first national assembly after democratisation was held in 1988. The number of women contestants was 41 and out of them, only six were elected to the national assembly, constituting a mere 2.0% of women politicians. In the next election of 1992, a total of 54 women contested and three candidates were elected making up to a mere 1.0%, which was even lower than the previous election. However, the number of women candidates contesting for the national assembly election increased to 59 in the 1996 election. Nine women were elected and they constituted 3.0% of women representation to the national legislative assembly. There was an increase of just 2.0% compared to the last election. It shows a slight increase in political participation of women yet the number of women in politics was alarming for a democratic country. Some observers even wrote that 'democratisation brought a return to male-dominated party politics' after looking at election results and the miniscule representation of women in Korean politics.⁷⁴

In spite of the alarming rate of women representation in the previous three national legislative assembly election, the election of 2000 elected 16 women to the assembly, with an increase of 2.9% from the last election of just 3.0%, making to a total of 5.9%. In the following election of 2004, out of 91 women candidates, 39 were elected increasing the percentage to 13.0%. This shows a sharp increase of 7.1% from the previous election of 2000. Again in the last election of 2008, there was an increase of 0.7% as the total women elected was 13.7%, in which 41 women candidates got elected. This is the largest

⁷⁴ Rose J. Lee, 'Electoral Reform and Women's Empowerment: Taiwan and South Korea' in Rose J. Lee and Cal Clark (eds), *Democracy and the Status of Women in East Asia*.

record of women being elected to the Korean national legislative assembly. The increase in the number of elected women of 2004 and 2008 general election shows that the number is likely to be increased in the coming elections too because the data shows a steady increase starting from the year 1996. The number of women's election in politics kept increasing since 1996 till the last election of 2008. Since the transition to democracy, there has never a continuous increase of elected women for four consecutive national legislative assembly elections except this case starting from 1996 to 2008.

The increase in the political representation of women in the legislature during 2000 can be attributed to the transformation in the nature of Korean women due to the gender empowerment measures.⁷⁵ This improvement of women in the political sphere was due to many factors such as the rise in education, economic level and relaxation of traditional norms. Due to this generational change, many younger politicians were elected to the parliament and the outlook of the younger generation was definitely different from the older generation. For instance, the younger generations tend to give more emphasis on human rights and democratic values compared to the older generation obsession with economic growth.⁷⁶ Thus, there was a change in the ideological and political outlook. The younger generation voters did contribute a lot to this change as they made up a bulk of the voters. In addition, globalisation and financial crisis brought about an end to the conservative developmental model of government policies.⁷⁷ It also gave way to

⁷⁵ Kihl (2005) cited in Haike Hermannes, 'Women in South Korean Politics: a Long Road to Equality', *Journal Portal*, Vol. 3, 2 July 2006.

⁷⁶ Heike Hermannes 'Women in South Korean Politics: A Long Road to Equality', *Journal Portal*, Vol. 3, 2 July 2006.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

progressive ideas whereby gender equality was incorporated into the political scenario. The Korean women made up more than half of the voters and to woo women voters was to accept the proposals put forward for the empowerment of women.

Another reason for the increase in political participation of women was the passing of the Political Party Act, 2000, in which at least 30% of quota for women was made mandatory on proportional representation lists system. This also led to the increased representation of women in the political scene and by 2004 there were fourteen women legislatures as compared to eleven of the previous election.

By 2004, the political parties started taking concerns for gender issues as they wanted to project their own party as a modern party so they started recruiting women workers and women candidates for contesting election. Thus, the main three parties designated a female spokesperson and the main opposition party also elected Park Geun-hye, daughter of late Korean President Park Chung-hee, as the party president in 2004. There was a trend of incorporating women into the political parties so as to show that the parties very much welcomed the gender equality issues and proposals.⁷⁸

Besides, the electoral system of Korea plays an important role in increasing or decreasing the number of women legislatures. The inception of several electoral systems into the Korean politics is another factor that acts as a catalyst for the fluctuating change in the number of women parliamentarians. The different kind of electoral system includes the single-member districts/small district majority vote system, larger multi-member districts

⁷⁸ Heike Hermannes 'Women in South Korean Politics: A Long Road to Equality', *Journal Portal*, Vol. 3, 2 July 2006.

or mixed electoral district system, two member districts system and Yu Jung Hoi method.⁷⁹ In single-member district system, all the parties never dare to nominate any women candidate because they do not want to take any risk of losing a seat. While in multi-member districts, they do nominate one woman only when they are sure that the women candidate has enough support to win the seat. Thus, the single-member electoral system is another great disadvantage for women.

3.2 Local assembly election

Local government was instituted for the first time on April 1952 in South Korea and local elections were carried on till May 1961. After that local government election was abolished by the military government till 1987. Finally, local government election was revived in 1991 through popular demand by the civil society, opposition parties and the central government. The local self-governance was forcefully revived mainly to counter the resurgence of authoritarianism and to limit the dense power of central state.⁸⁰ The Local Assembly Election system is broadly divided into two categories: broad unit assemblies and basic unit assemblies.

The revival of local assembly election was very much welcome by the women's group during those times as they felt that women's participation in politics at the local level would enhance the awareness of politics among women. Moreover, there are fewer barriers to entry of women at the local level politics. So the women's group interested in joining local politics formed an ad hoc umbrella association called the Women's

⁷⁹ Sohn Bon Scuk. 'The Leading Role of New Age: Women's Political Participation', *The Women*, vol. 28, No.1, Dec. 1991.

⁸⁰ Mikyung Chin in Rose J. Lee and Cal Clark (eds), *Democracy and Women's Status in East Asia*.

Association for Political Participation and this association campaigned and trained many female candidates, held seminars and developed strategies to encourage women's participation in politics.⁸¹ Chin wrote of the many claims that the reason for the minimal representation of Korean women in politics was due to absence of local self-governance. But the result of the 1991 local level election stunned most of the women organisations and even the government of Roh Tae-woo. All of them had not expected that the result of the local election would be unfair to women as they secured only 48 seats out of the total of 5170 seats. Forty women got elected from the basic unit assembly out of 4304 seats and eight women from the broad unit assembly out of 866 seats available. In total women secured only 0.9% which was not even 1% and that result was an enigma to most of the gender conscious people. Despite women organisations taking active part in reviving the local government, the share of seats women got was extremely low.

In the 1995 local election, 128 women were elected constituting 2.2%. There was an increase of 1.3% from the previous election which means that there was a 100% improvement compared to the 1991 local election. Out of the total of 4541 candidate 71 got elected in the basic unit assembly while 13 women got elected in the broad assembly election out of 894 candidates. The result of the 1995 local assembly election was twice the result of 1991 local election. It is also to be noted that many women in the broad assembly unit were elected through the proportional representation system. Thus, the number of women representation increased during the 1995 local election.

⁸¹ Mikyung Chin, 'Reflections on Women Empowerment', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 2, March-April 2004.

However, in the following local assembly election of 1998, ninety seven women were elected and they constituted 2.3%. There was an increase of only 0.1% from the last local election of 1995. In the basic unit assembly, out of the total of 3489 candidates elected, 56 candidates were women. While in the broad unit assembly, 14 women candidates were elected out of 616 candidates. This was something which was taken seriously by the observers of gender equality because the then president of South Korea, Kim Dae-Jung was a propagator of liberal ideas and an upholder of gender equality notion. But the election result was proving it on the other side. Also because of the fact that two major opposition parties allocated a 30% of seats to women on their proportional lists while the ruling party nominated 50% of women.⁸² But the outcome shock most of the political observers of Korea.

Again in the 2002 local assembly election, 140 women candidates got elected constituting 3.4% of the total. Three months before the local assembly was to be held, the political party law was amended to recommend a 30% quota for women candidates in provincial legislative elections. Though the representation increased up to some extent, the result was far from satisfactory again.

In the 2006 local assembly election, the number of women elected amounted to 525 candidates constituting 14.5% of the total. There was an 11.1% increase from the result of the 2002 local assembly election. The number of women elected shot up unlike any other previous election and this was not even imagined by the people of South Korea.

⁸² Heike Hermanns article 'Women's in South Korea Politics: A Long Road to Equality'.

The sharp increase may be attributed to the requirement of at least 50% nominations of the proportional lists and 30% for direct candidates to be allocated to women.

However, the data of the local assembly election shows the trend of continuous increase in the representation of women since the revival of local politics in 1991. The result also shows the 100% increase compared to the result of the years 1995, 2002 and 2005 elections barring the 1998 local assembly election. Nevertheless, the number of women elected in the local politics kept increasing till the last election of 2005. Though the number of women elected is minimal compared to male candidates elected, there can be no denial that women's participation kept increasing with every election. Thus, the resultant may vary upon the situation of women and the political atmosphere existing in South Korea.

The merits and demerits of local assembly election are subject to discussion by many scholars and observers of South Korea. Korean feminists stress on the need for women to participate in local assembly because women understand the needs of the locality more than men. Many scholars term local level politics as 'life politics' because the issues of everyday life like waste disposal, clean air, education, childcare and consumer protection falls are dealt in local politics.⁸³ These scholars asserts that women's interests are better suited to local politics and only women can bring fair amount of justice to the above issues. But the above view is thwarted by Mikyung chin who believed that assigning local politics to women as their area of expertise assumes that men excels in national

⁸³ Local Autonomy Research Institute (LARI), Life Politics Report, 1994 cited in Mikyung Chin's 'Reflections on women Empowerment through Local Representation in South Korea', 2004.

matters of politics which deals with bigger issues of foreign policies.⁸⁴ This assumption highly sidelined women as they are taken as unsuitable to deal with national issues and lacking in intellect compared to men.

The 'spillover effect' is another group of proponents of local level politics for women. They believe that women's participation in local legislature will train them and smooth the process for entering the national legislature. Because they felt that women with experience of politics at the local level would be the obvious choice of the voters to send them to the national assembly.⁸⁵ Again this thought is contested by Mikyung Chin who says that till the year 2000 no women from local legislature had made to the national legislature. Still with time, there might be few changes in the future.

Despite all the arguments concerning the local legislature, Jung Sae-Uo felt the need to participate in local level politics as local assembly is the main decision-making body regarding the welfare of the local people.⁸⁶ Then a policy could be formulated out of the decision taken by the local assembly through public opinion. Thus, the participation of women in local politics in large numbers is very necessary to bring about an effective local assembly.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Dilys M. Hill (1974) cited in Mikyung chin's 'Reflections on Women Empowerment through Local Representation in South Korea'.

⁸⁶ Jing Sae-uo cited in Mikyung chin's 'Reflections on Women Empowerment through Local Representation in South Korea'.

4. Politics: A Catalyst for Change in South Korean Women

The emancipation of women occurs through layers of change occurring through sieve of time and politics is one layer which continues to liberate women legally. Politics can at best be identified with democracy and the identification of women's status through politics has been the norm to judge the extent of democracy and of course the emancipation of women. This is the case of South Korea too as many observers judged the empowerment of women through the extent of their representation in local and national assembly legislature.

Thus, the number of representation of women at the local and national level comes under scrutiny in South Korea. Since its democratisation twenty one years back, the percentage of women legislature is just 13.7 in the national assembly and 14.5% in the local assembly. So far, this has been the highest in the history of South Korea after democracy. Yet, many were left unsatisfied with the outcome and started questioning the legitimacy of democracy in terms of politics. Then various factors came out which acted as obstacles to women entering politics. The main factors were identified as electoral system of Korea, the male-centric political structure of Korea, lack of eligible women candidate and the failure of the political party to nominate women. Therefore, there is need to revised the electoral system of Korea and the organisation of the every party in Korea otherwise the number of women representatives could keep fluctuating with no advance in terms of empowerment of women in politics.

Another issue revolves around the capability of 'nominated women' and 'elected women'. The capability of nominated women to the national assembly with no political

background but high profile women is questioned by the Korean political observers. They wrote that though these nominated women increased the number of representatives, they had little impact on the women's issues and policies. Sohn described the nominated women legislatures as 'ornaments of the political arena'.⁸⁷ On the other hand, the elected women legislatures were constrained by many party rules in trying to carry out any reform policies of women. Since they had to obey the party rules, many capable women legislatures did remain at the background. For instance, when the family law was brought up for revision in 1980s, many women legislature were forced to sign against the bill but at private interviews, most of them said that they support the bill for revision of *hojuje* system at the personal level.⁸⁸

Thus, the political participation of women is very low in both the local assembly and the national assembly. Nevertheless, what matters at the end is the ability to carry out reformation for the empowerment of women. Many number of women legislatures at the national level can lead to passing of bills in favour of women only if they work collectively regardless of party agendas. On the other hand, if those few women at the national assembly are influential enough to convince the male legislatures to vote for the bill in favour of women, then there is no need to worry about the less number of women legislatures. But what matters in this kind of scenario is 'equality regardless of gender' mindset by the Korean male population specially. The Korean people also have to discard

⁸⁷ Sohn (1996) cited in Heike Hermann's 'Women in South Korean Politics: A Long Road to Equality', 2006.

⁸⁸ Jaelim Oh, 'Women's Political Participation and the Change of Family Law: A Case Study of the Abolition Processes of Family Head System (the *hojuje*) in Korea', *Asian Women* (quarterly journal). Vol. 23, No. 2, Summer 2007.

the notion of politics as the sphere of men only if they are willing to let the woman advance further in politics.

5. Conclusion

Women in Korea have advanced quite far as compared to their Asian counterparts. Yet seen from the wider views then they still have lots to conquer in the coming years. Politics that came with democracy has changed their status. 'Change is beginning' is what Mikyung Chin wrote. Echoing the same sentiment, Shin Nak Kyun, political party women of the Millennium Democratic Party, said, 'It's a kind of revolution' and 'Korea is changing drastically. So many women want to be the member of the assembly'.⁸⁹

The participation and representation of women in local assembly of Korea is increasing every election and is more likely to keep increasing seeing the history of the last four local assembly elections (see data). The sudden increase of women representatives from the 2002 (3.4%) election and the tremendous increase in the number of women legislatures in 2006 (14.5%) shows that the awareness of politics among women in increasing day by day. This trend was also shown when the result of the national assembly of 2004 and 2008 came out. According to Lee, the Korean women are increasingly becoming more conscious about sharing their rights in economic, social and political sphere and male monopoly in public sphere is no longer acceptable.⁹⁰ Perhaps

⁸⁹ Don Kirk, 'South Korea's Movement in Politics. 'How Big a Revolution?' International Herald Tribune, 3 April 2000.

⁹⁰ Lee (2005) cited in Heike Hermann's article 'Women in South Korean Politics: A Long Road to Equality', *Journal Portal*, Vol. 3, 2 July 2006.

change is occurring in Korea and the catalyst behind the change is democracy and its political principle.

Nevertheless, there are factors that hinder the political participation of women in Korea. The factors are many but when club in a broad category, it can be divided into two: political factors and socio-cultural factors. In the political sphere, the electoral system and the working of different political parties of Korea are the main reason for the low representation of women. Comparative studies of gender inequality in legislative representation conclude that the electoral system plays an important role in determining the seats held by female representatives.⁹¹ This seems to be true in case of Korea too. Then the political parties of Korea still seem to be based on a hierarchy system with women at the bottom. Unless the working of the party from the bottom to the top undergoes change, the nomination and subsequent representation of women would remain difficult. For this, the change in mindset is necessary among the Korean people. For instance, one female candidate narrated her experience that while she was running for the assembly seat, she found out that her male party members were campaigning for their rival male candidate.⁹² Thus, for women to advance forward in politics, the current age-long male politics should be altered to male-female politics.

Thus, the political representation of women in South Korea post-democracy is still low but women legislatures seem to be increasing with every election especially in the case of

⁹¹Norris 1987; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Lijphart 1994, cited in Heike Hermann's article 'Women in South Korean Politics: A Long Road to Equality', *Journal Portal*, Vol. 3, 2 July 2006.

⁹² Chung-Hee Sarah Soh, 'Sexual Equality, Male Superiority, and Korean Women in Politics: Changing Relations in a "Patriarchal Democracy"', *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, January 1993.

local assembly. In the case of national assembly too, for the last two consecutive elections, the number of women being elected to the national assembly is increasing. This shows that democracy is bringing a change in Korea and women are spearheading the new movement of equality in terms of socio-economy and political sphere. But this change in just twenty one years is overwhelming because even in America, it took two centuries to achieve what Korea has achieved today.⁹³ On the contrary, Korea just took two decades to achieve the representation of forty one women in the national assembly.

Many scholars have compared the number of Korean women's political representation post-democracy and pre-democracy. However, it would be unfair to compare because what the military cum authoritarian regime before democracy did was to nominate many women to appease the women section of the country. It was a bargain for the existence and longevity of its political existence. Whereas, post-democracy, the representation of women was by directly contesting the election though the political parties did nominate women to fulfill the given quota for women. Thus, the value lies in the election of women through contest for seats in the local and the national assembly.

Lastly, the status of women is often judged through their political representation by many organisations. For example, the World Economic Forum's gender gap report judges the status of women in Korea according to women's political status. Korea ranked 63rd and 99th in the low number of women in national assembly and ministerial positions. But what needs to be considered in judging the status of women is not just politics but also the socio-economic sphere too. Hermanns is also of the view that political, socio-economic

⁹³ Ibid.

and cultural factors all play a role in democracy, including changes in political procedures, the speed of attitudinal change, in particular among young women, more outspoken women's organisations, and more progressive government policies.

Overall, the political status of women in South Korea post-democracy seems to be steadily increasing over the number of elections held. A country where women are the maximum number of voters failed to send many women representatives to the local and national assembly and this is something to be worried about. But with democratic principle expressing itself in every nook and corner of Korea and the younger generations being more conscious of their rights, the future of Korea seems bright. Change indeed seems to be happening even at present but it remains upon the Korean population as to how it receives and accommodates the change.

Chapter 4

Socio-Economic Status of South Korean Women

1. Introduction

The socio-economic status of South Korean women has always been a matter of concern since democracy was adopted as the nation's principle. After democracy was officially announced in South Korea, people started questioning the socio-economic condition of women and raised many questions regarding their welfare. It is because the socio-economic condition of women determines the status of their well being in a democratic nation and thus the two are important factors for study of the extent of democracy. Therefore, this chapter deals with the socio-economic sphere of Korean women to see their status in a democratic country.

Thus, in order to determine the status of women in socio-economic conditions besides education and employment, other factors like the household head system, mother and child welfare including the perceptions of society towards women in terms of marriage, family and divorce would be discussed. Education is taken as an important parameter in deciding the status of women because it is the key indicator of women's status and financial security in society.⁹⁴ Access to education also determines the opportunities in the labour market and life. The active economic participation by women seems to have

⁹⁴ Eun-Jung Choi and Rebecca Mbuh, 'Aspects of Women's Status in Korea and Cameroon', *Asian women*, Vol. 20, Summer 2005.

been boosted by the increase in educational opportunities for women.⁹⁵ Thus, it shows that education and economic growth are related and boosts each other.

Next to education, the level of women being employed served as another indicator to the status of women. This is mainly because gender is a mechanism of power that operates in the workplace as well as in everyday labour; it also operates in a much broader context ranging from the masculinity of labour and class consciousness to the mobility of capital across national boundaries.⁹⁶ Thus, the condition of women at the workplace can tell a lot about the status of women. In case of Korea, numbers of women from rural and urban areas were rapidly absorbed into the global capitalist economic system through employment in industries. In the process, many women were left just as workers without any status accorded to them and they formed the source of cheap labour in this kind of economy.

However, the reforms introduced by the government post-democracy acts as another milestone in improving the condition of women. Thus, reforms in favour of women post-democracy would be traced and see if these reforms introduced by the Korean government has made any positive impact by looking at the findings of the data of various fields. Then from the analysis of the relevant data, a conclusion would be made regarding the Korean women's status in the socio-economic sphere.

⁹⁵ Lee Kye Woo, 'Evolution of Women's Employment and Gender Discrimination in Korea', *Korea Focus*, Vol. 13, No. 5, September–October 2005.

⁹⁶ Kim Hyun Mee, 'Gender and Sexuality as a Labor Control Mechanism: The Gender Identity of Korean Female Workers in a US Multinational Corporation'.

2. Reforms in the Social and Economic Sectors

The First Basic Plan for Women's Policies was implemented from 1998 to 2002 and under it; an office for women's policy was established in six central government ministries.⁹⁷ Since then many laws, regulations and rules that discriminated women have been identified and revised. From mid 2005 to mid 2006, 385 gender-discriminative provisions have been identified and these provisions are being revised currently.

The Second Basic Plan for Women's Policies was implemented from 2003 to 2007.⁹⁸ The Women's Policy Coordination Committee under the office of the prime minister was institutionalised as per the second plan for women's policies. Moreover, public officials at the level of deputy minister in central government organisations have been appointed as senior gender policy coordinators. An inter-ministerial system for the promotion of Women's Policies is therefore in place.

In 2001, the National Human Rights Commission, an independent body meant only for human rights was founded. This commission has made itself very clear that it is against gender discrimination based on Article 2 of its act, as a form of 'infringement of rights to quality'.⁹⁹

The Ministry of Gender Equality was launched in 2001, but this ministry came out of the 41 member Presidential Commission on Women's Affairs of 1998. It expanded into the

⁹⁷ H.E. Dr. Jang Hajin, Minister of Gender Equality and Family, 39th Session of the Convention on the 'Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women', 31 July 2007, New York.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2005. It has a budget of 1.3 Billion US Dollars (30.3 billion won) and serves as a state organisation dedicated to women policies only. The Ministry of Gender Equality encouraged joint cooperative initiatives between the private sector and the government and forms close networks by supporting the Korean Women's Conference and the National Women's Conference.¹⁰⁰

The Women's Development Act was revised in December 2002 to ensure that all the policies formulated by the government keeps into account the gender issues. Then in the year 2003, the Korean government launched the Korean Institute for Gender Equality Promotion and Education (KIGEPE). This institute conducts gender-sensitivity training for the public officials throughout the nation to contribute to the realisation of government policies of gender equality.

In 2005, the Family Head System or *Hojuje* was abolished by the government of Korea. The *hojuje*, the household registration system is a symbol of a strong patriarchal social order in the Korean society.¹⁰¹ According to this system, only a man in a family has the first priority to be the head of the family (the *hoju*) and this status can be passed down on male member of the family. Only in case of absence of male member, the female of the family can be the *hoju*. This case was first brought into limelight in the 1980s when the revision of law had a new clause stating that 'a marriage and a family life should be established and maintained on the individual's dignity and gender inequality'.¹⁰² Finally

¹⁰⁰ H.E. Dr. Jang Hajin, Minister of Gender Equality and Family, 39th Session of the Convention on the 'Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women', 31 July 2007, New York.

¹⁰¹ Jaelim Oh, 'Women's Political Participation and the Change of Family Law: A Study of the Abolition Process of Family Head System (the *Hojuje*) in Korea, *Asian women*, Vol. 23. No. 2, Summer 2007.

¹⁰² Ibid.

after much struggle by the women organisations the Family Head System was abolished in 2005.

In 2005, the Equal Employment Act was revised to prohibit indirect discrimination. Following this, the Affirmative Action Plan, which mainly focused on the Female Employment Target Policy, was introduced. It was meant to improve the employment practices of Korea. Moreover, the Act on Healthy Families and the Five-Year Family Policy Plan was established to build a universal and comprehensive family policy. The government has also developed and applied the Family Friendliness Index (FFI), an indicator to measure a company's operation of family-friendly programmes.

For the welfare of rural women, the Korean government has been pursuing welfare policies such as the workload support system for female agriculturists, the expansion of the helper support system for rural households with newborns and the expansion of women farmers' centres.¹⁰³ Moreover, the female agriculturists are being provided training to upgrade their skills in the field of agricultural management. The 'Rural Household Management Agreement' aims at the rational running of farming households.

The National Fiscal Act was enacted in 2006 and in accordance with this act the gender-sensitive budget policy will enter into effect in 2010. This shows the government commitment to gender issues and to ensure its success the Korean Institute for Gender Equality Promotion and Education is conducting training on gender budgets for public officials in central ministries and local governments.

¹⁰³ H.E. Dr. Jang Hajin, Minister of Gender Equality and Family, 39th Session of the Convention on the 'Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against women', 31 July 2007, New York.

The Women's Participation Target Initiatives for Government committees and planning to pursue the Women Managers Employment Target Initiatives by 2011 is being implemented to raise the proportion of women public officials at Rank 4, equivalent to Director-level and above in central government bodies. With this policy, the proportion of women in government committees is expected to increase to 40% and the proportion of women in public posts of Rank 4 and above is expected to reach 10%, twofold increase from 2006. The government has also taken steps to increase women directors over 30% in state-owned companies and government-affiliated institutions.

In 2000, the Korean government abandoned the Military Service Credit System so that women can enter the active service. This Military Service Credit System had been a stumbling block for women seeking careers in military service. The Korean Air Force Academy began to accept women applicants' from 1997. Following this system, the navy and air force subsequently adopted the system of accepting female officer candidates in 2001. These policies will increase the number of women in active service tremendously by 2020. From the year 1996 to 2002, the implementation of the Women's Employment Initiative led to a constant rise in the ratio of females in public services posts. Due to the success of this policy, the Gender Equality Employment Initiative was enforced from the year 2003 to 2007. All this policies were put into practice to address the gender imbalance in the public posts and it resulted in women landing to higher-ranking positions.

In case of education in Korea, the college enrollment rate of women was 81.8% while that of men was 82.9% in 2006. The difference is minimal with just 1.1% which is very

normal compared to the past. The government has been encouraging female students to join the fields of Science and Technology which has been traditionally dominated by men. Thus, the Act of Supporting Women in Science and Technology was enacted and the government also established the Basic Plan for Female Science and Technology Specialists in 2002. In addition, a science education programme called Women in Science and Technology (WISE)¹⁰⁴ was launched to encourage the participation of women in Science. Many scholarships are offered to female students who excel in science and technology and the government has implemented the recruitment target system for women scientists. Moreover, infrastructures such as the support centre for female scientists and engineers to encourage women experts in science and technology are built. With regard to education for women, the Korean government opened 430 centres for life-long learning opportunities for women nationwide.

The first five-year Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Women Resources and the Female Employment Expansion Measures were established in the year 2006. Various government organisations were involved in bringing about a greater participation of women in the workforce. The childcare support is also in the agenda by increasing the percentage borne by society for maternity protection costs. The government also adopted the Policy of Subsidies for Continued Employment after Childbirth and enhanced job security for female temporary workers.

The Childcare Budget was increased up to 500% in 2007 from that of 2002, which reached 1.16 billion U.S. dollars (1.1435 trillion won) and the childcare facilities were

¹⁰⁴ H.E. Dr. Jang Hajin, Minister of Gender and Equality, The 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 1 March 2006, New York.

provided free of charge for low income families. From 2006, the basic subsidies of children under 2 years of age are being provided and from 2007 the basic subsidies has been provided to 3 to 5 years old children.

In June 2008, the Korean government amended the existing Equal Employment Act to the Act on Equal Employment and Support for Balancing Work and Family Life and inserted new articles on paternity leave, parental leave and the approval of flexible working hours for childcare. These changes have also ensured the involving of men in childcare and household works and also raised people's awareness on childcare and family works.¹⁰⁵ Also an act on promoting a family-friendly social environment was enacted and the Family Friendly Certification System to bring on larger participation of the private sector in creating family-friendly social environment was introduced.

The Act on Promoting Economic Activities of Women with Career Interruptions was passed in June 2008 to solve the problem of women giving up job due to pregnancy, childbirth and childcare. This act will enable them to work uninterrupted and contribute to the society with their skills and ability. Also the Ministry of Gender Equality and the Minister of Labour has joined hands with regional governments to open 50 new job centres for women in order to provide wide-ranging employment support services to women. By 2012, the government has decided to increase the number of job centres to hundred. The Ministry of Gender Equality also launched the Task Force Team on Counting the Effects of Economic Crisis for Women to help the activities of the job centres for women and to provide focused support to women at risk due to the economic

¹⁰⁵ Speech by Byun, Do Yoon, the Minister of Gender Equality, 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 4 March 2009.

downturn. This may be seen as a back up after the experience of financial crisis of 1997.¹⁰⁶

Thus, a series of reforms has been introduced since democracy was adopted in favour of Korean women. Whether all these reforms have change the lives of women in a positive way will be seen from the data of the following parameters taken into examination.

3. Economic Status

Korean women have been the mainstay of Korean national economy since independence and they had played an important role in the economic structure of Korea even before independence. But their involvement in non-traditional work started long before there was a diversified division of labour in society.¹⁰⁷ Going back to the history of women being professional, mention can be made of the female medical personnel system. Then the *Kisaeng* (female entertainer) also existed and several other occupations open to the lowest of the class. By the end of the *Choson* dynasty in 1910, Korea's last kingdom, the main occupation for women was in agriculture. The first modern type of employment came with Korean Monetary Bureau in 1900 when it hired 15 women as production workers.¹⁰⁸ After that the number of women increased every year and the industrial

¹⁰⁶ Speech by Byun, Do Yoon, the Minister of Gender Equality, 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 4 March 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Hong Sawon, 'Korean Women at Work', *Korean Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January 1984.

¹⁰⁸ Lee and Kim (1975), cited in Hong Sawon, 'Korean Women at Work', *Korean Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January 1984.

revolution paved the way for women to work in industries. Thus, by 1900s women comprised one-third of the total number of factory workers.¹⁰⁹

The Christian missionaries who came to Korea introduced higher education at the end of the 19th century and teaching, nursing and midwifery became common among women. So by 1960, out of the 25.0 million people, two million women participated in economic activities. They made up about 28.8% of the workforce out of seven million. By 1975, the working women constituted up to 39.3% contributing to economic activities. Thus there was a rapid rise in the proportion of women engaged in production and manufacturing activities and in clerical jobs. This rise in women employment especially in manufacturing has been a by-product of the labour-intensive, export-oriented development strategy adopted by the Korean government.¹¹⁰

The period of Park Chung-hee was a time when women were exploited in the name of the national economic growth. Though women became the backbone of its economy by working in the export industries, they were subjected to exploitation with low wages, long working hours and inadequate facilities. President Park rallied women with the slogan of 'Let's fight and construct' (*ssaumya geonseolhaja*) and 'Export is the only way to survive' (*soochoolmani salgilida*). He also wrote a poem in the 1960s dedicated to women:¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Repetto (1978) cited in Hong Sawon's 'Korean Women at Work', *Korean Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January 1984.

¹¹¹ Jongwoo Han and L.H.M.Ling, 'Authoritarianism in the Hypermasculinized State: Hybridity, Patriarchy, and Capitalism in Korea', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 42, pp. 53–78, 1998.

Work hard and sweat!

The wheering of the machines

Reverberates like music.

Young girl

In a second-class carriage

Reading French poems

To me, your

Tender hands

Are undesirable.

We have to work.

Beautiful hands, through you

We have become poor and exploited.

Although the young girl's beautiful hands aren't ugly,

Beautiful hands are enemy.

Post-democracy starting from 1987, the economic scenes tend to change with different acts and regulations for the workers. This was a new beginning for the oppressed workers

to start a new life as democratic principles came to the scenario. For women, democracy came with a new lease of hope by allowing women to participate more in the economic and social activities.

During the period from 1980 to 2002, the number of working women increased from 43% to 50%. Thus, women workers accounted for 41.4% share of the total labour force in 2002, as compared to 37.5% in 1980.¹¹² The increase of women's participation in the labour force occurred both in the non-farming (from 37% to 48%) and farming sector (55% to 69%).

The participation in the professional, technical, administrative, and managerial positions by women stood at 4% compared to men's participation at 6%. But by 2002, the gap widened reaching up to 23% for men and women stood at 14%. Female participation in these high posts lagged far behind men workers by 2002. This seems to suggest a gender discrimination market existing in Korea's labour market.¹¹³

3.1 The 1997 financial crisis and its impact on women

The 1997 financial crisis which started due to depreciation of Bangkok's currency Bath hit most of the Asian countries and Korea was among one of them badly hit by the financial crisis. Many suicides and divorce occurred during this time and it led to societal chaos bothering much of the population of Korea. It was also a trial and test for

¹¹² Lee Kye Woo, 'Evolution of Women's Employment and Gender Discrimination in Korea', *Korea Focus*, Vol. 13, No. 5, September–October 2005.

¹¹³ *ibid*

democracy which exists in Korea since 1987. Thus, women's economic status became an important parameter to determine extend of democracy.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis, most of the women became temporary workers or daily wage workers. The Marxists theory says that in an economic crisis, female workers would be more in demand than male workers because of less wage payment compared to male workers. In turn, the employers would be able to make much profit if they employ cheap workers. This theory was found to be at fault during the Asian financial crisis. According to Lee Kye woo, most of the employers in Korea replaced female with male workers during the financial crisis. This was due to the frequent maternity leave, childcare and other leaves for women while still in work and still being paid their salary. All these amounted to greater loss to the employers so they naturally replaced women workers with male workers.

So more female than male workers were requested to leave their jobs involuntary during the Korea's 1997–1998 financial crisis. A survey conducted during this period reveals that female employees were terminated from work involuntarily and this hints towards a form of gender discrimination in the process of enterprise reorganisation and structural adjustment.¹¹⁴ The percentage of female workers terminated from work was 16% as compared to 12% of male workers.

¹¹⁴ Cho (1999) cited in Lee Kye Woo, 'Evolution of Women's Employment and Gender Discrimination in Korea', *Korea Focus*, Vol. 13, No. 5, September–October 2005.

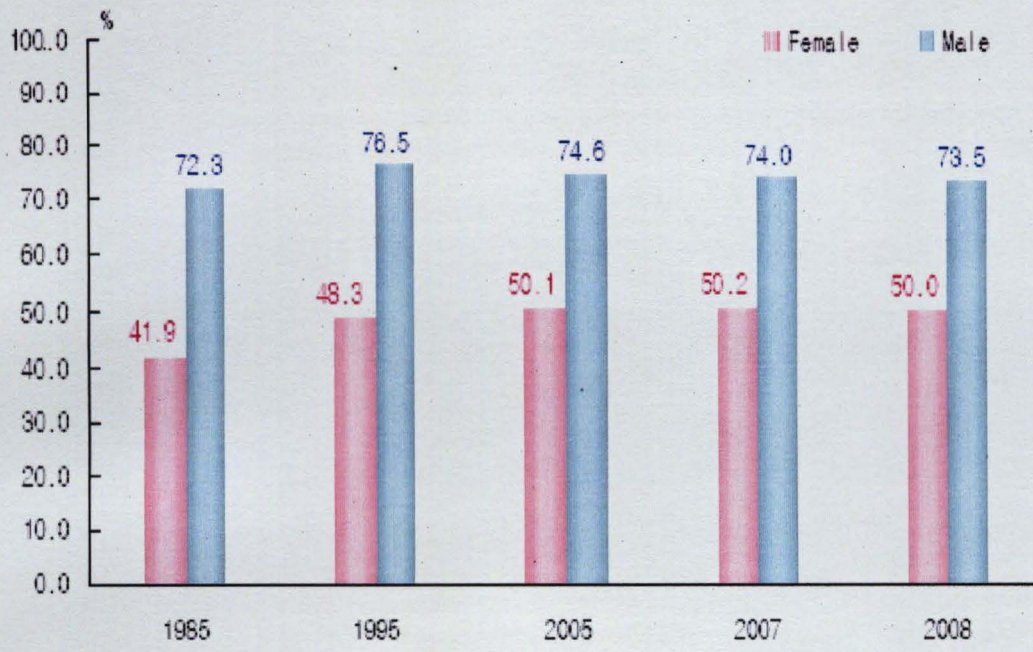
Examination of the Economic Status through Statistics

4.1 Economically active population

In the year 1985, the number of economically active women accounted for 41.9% while that of male was 72.3%. But in 2008, the percentage of economically active women reached 50.0% while that of male was 73.5%. Thus, the percentage of economically active women increased by 9.9% and for male it was just 1.2%. This shows that women economic independence have been increasing fast and the number of men being economically being active is rather slow. On the other hand, 50.0 % of female participation rate in economic activities is too low compared to OECD member countries. So the government needs to give more attention to the factor which prevents Korean women from taking up job.

4.2 Unemployment rate for married women

The female unemployment rate post marriage in the year 1985 was 7.1% out of the scale of 8% and the unemployment rate of single women was 0.7%. In the year 1995, it dwindled to 4.6% while in 2005 it again increased to 7.0%. In 2008, the rate of unemployed married women was 5.9% which decreased and the unemployment rate of single women was 1.5%. The percentage of both married and unmarried female and their employment status keeps on fluctuating every few years. This shows the instability of both married and single women yet single women seems to be on the safer side as their chance of employment is higher than the married women. But the sudden drop in unemployment status in 2008 shows that more employment options are becoming aware for both married and single women.



Unit: 1,000 persons, %

Year	Economically Active Population		Economic Participation Rate	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
1965	5 975	9 617	41.9	72.3
1990	7 509	11 030	47.0	74.0
1995	8 397	12 456	48.3	76.5
2000	9 101	13 034	48.8	74.4
2005	9 860	13 883	50.1	74.6
2007	10 092	14 124	50.2	74.0
2008	10 139	14 208	50.0	73.5

Source: National Statistical Office, *Comprehensive Time Series Report on the Economically Active Population Survey, Annual Report on the Economically Active Population Survey*

Figure 4.1 Economically active population.

4.3 Wage difference

In a survey conducted by the KWDI, it was found out that the average monthly wage difference between male and female was 63% (won) in 2007. The data show that the difference was 53.4% in 1990 but by 2000 it increased to 62.9%. Since 2000 the wage difference between male and female workers hovers between 62% and 63.6%. The wage difference keeps on increasing every year till 2001, showing a drop of just 0.4 % in 2002. Then the difference hovers between 62.8% to 63.6% from 2002 to 2006 and it again drop to 63% in 2007. The wage difference between male and female is extremely drastic and it has kept on increasing since 1985. This shows that it is an acute problem which needs to be solved with persistent efforts by the government.

4.4 Women in professional and technical occupation

The share of women employed in professional and technical occupations was 5.4% in 1985 but it increased to 19.3% in 2007 and the difference was 8.9%. While the share of male employed in the professional and technical occupation was 6.2% in 1985 but it increased to 24.2% in 2007 and the difference was 18%. This shows a rather fast growth of male workers in the professional and technical occupation as compared to female workers. The area of professional and technical occupation has always been the place where women employment is very low. One main reason is the perception that technical and professional jobs belong to male and the less number of women students taking up science stream.



Unit: 1,000 persons, %

Year, Sex	Unemployed		Unemployment Rate	
	Married	Single	Married	Single
1985 Total	270	352	2.2	10.0
1985 Female	29	113	0.7	7.1
1985 Male	241	239	3.1	12.4
1995 Total	167	252	1.0	5.4
1995 Female	39	100	0.6	4.6
1995 Male	128	152	1.3	6.0
2005 Total	422	465	2.3	8.2
2005 Female	153	180	2.0	7.0
2005 Male	268	285	2.5	9.3
2008 Total	351	419	1.9	7.4
2008 Female	117	148	1.5	5.9
2008 Male	233	271	2.1	8.6

Source: National Statistical Office, *Annual Report on the Economically Active Population Survey*.

Figure 4.2 Unemployment rate of married women.

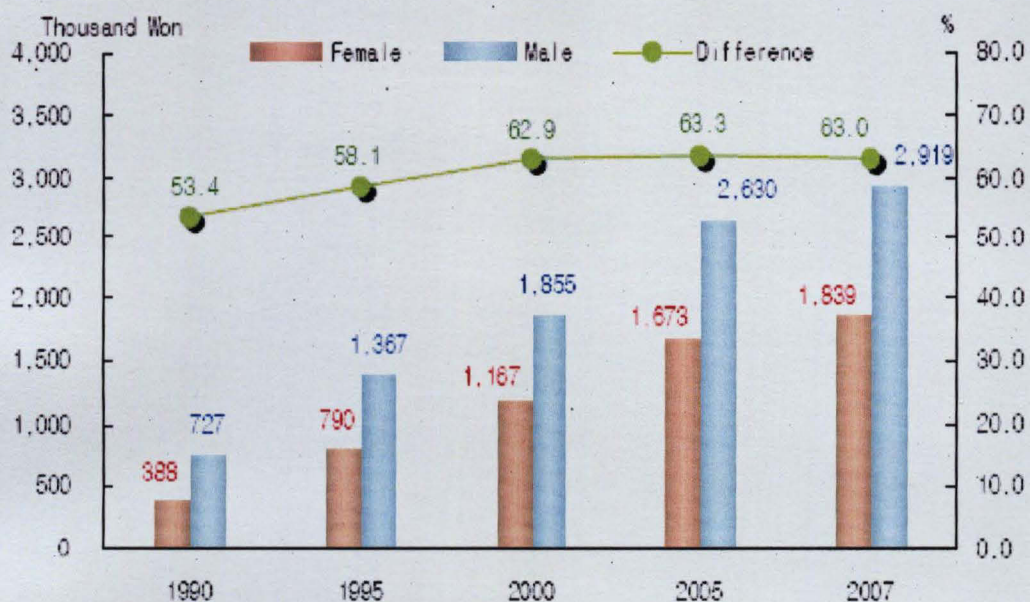
5. Social Status

'The ideology that men are the naturally superior to women in essence and in all aspects of life affects the modern organisation of societal structures'.¹¹⁵ It is this ideology which has been hindering the advancement of women in every sphere. In line with this thought, the traditional Korean society was very much influenced by Confucianism ideals and thoughts. But the history of Korea points out that the periods preceding the Yi dynasty, women enjoyed considerable degree of independence. For instance, in the Silla period, three women rulers occupied the throne and queens had enormous political influence and power. Even during the Koryo period, women interacted freely with men outside the house relatively free. But the Yi dynasty maintained a strict authoritarian system and there was no concept of equality between the sexes. Following the Yi dynasty, the contact with the outside world changes set in. Yu Eui Young named this an 'eye opening period' and it was followed by the Japanese colonial period and many women were awoken of their rights.¹¹⁶

In spite of many changes, remnants of Confucian ideology of family are visible even in modern times. This trace of Confucian ideology still influences the perception of many people in gender related issues. But in a democratic nation, the principles of Confucianism contradict the democratic principles so how far Korean society has changed post-democracy is something which needs to be studied. So, a conclusion will be derived after seeing the statistics of the following factors

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Choi, 'Status of the Family and Motherhood for Korean Women', in Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Pelley (eds.), *Women of Japan and Korea*.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.



Unit: Won, %

Year	Female	Male	Difference
1985	180 319	386 346	46.7
1990	388 171	727 444	53.4
1995	790 391	1 360 820	58.1
2000	1 166 834	1 855 076	62.9
2001	1 244 795	1 969 364	63.2
2002	1 331 164	2 119 885	62.8
2003	1 446 210	2 302 916	62.8
2004	1 550 249	2 454 737	63.2
2005	1 672 720	2 629 549	63.3
2006	1 783 280	2 790 097	63.6
2007	1 839 499	2 919 240	63.0

Note : Average Monthly Wage=Monthly salary+(Total yearly bonus÷12).

Source: Ministry of Labor, Survey Report on Wage Structure, Survey Report on Occupational Wage Survey.

Figure 4.3 Wage difference between male and female workers.

6. Examination of the Social Status through Statistics

6.1 Female heads of households

With the abolishment of the female household system, the number of women heading a household seems to be increasing as the percentage of women heading the households was 21.7% in 2002 and in 2008 it was 22.1%. Thus, the increase from 2002 to 2008 was just 0.7%. But from 1980 to 2008 women household heads has increased by around 3.2 times from 1169 to 3689. The increase rate of women household heads is larger than male householders which increased by about 1.9 times from 6801 in 1980 to 12,985 in 2008. Overall the increase in women householder from 1980 to 2008 was 14.7% to 22.1%. This shows a change in the family relationships among the members of the household.

6.2 Marriage and divorce rates in Korea

Korean marriage, according to the Confucian teaching, was of endurance by women and there is even a saying among the Koreans that if you want to get the taste of dry fish and a good wife then beat up your wife once every week. This view seems to be eroding fast because divorce was something which was considered a social taboo but now divorce rate is increasing every year. The crude divorce rate back in 1998 was 1.0% but in 2002 it increased up to 2.5%. While the marriage rate is dropping as it stood at 7.0% compared to the crude rate of 1998 which was 9.2%. This can be attributed from the recent changes in the view among the new generations of Korea. For instance, in a survey conducted by the Korean women Development Institute from April to December 2003, it was found out

that the Korean women over nineteen years (199 out of 673 unmarried females) said that they had no plans of marriage for sometime ahead. According to them, marriage would curb their freedom and the responsibility of running a household with a job will be difficult for them.¹¹⁷ This was the perspective of ordinary Koreans on marriage and divorce. Thus, it is to be noted that marriage and divorce no longer remain in the domain of Confucian values and its showing signs of change with many modern values attached in it. For example, love has become the main criteria of marriage instead of an arranged one by their respective families. Moreover, the increased number of divorce shows that both men and women want to pursue their happiness and remain independent.

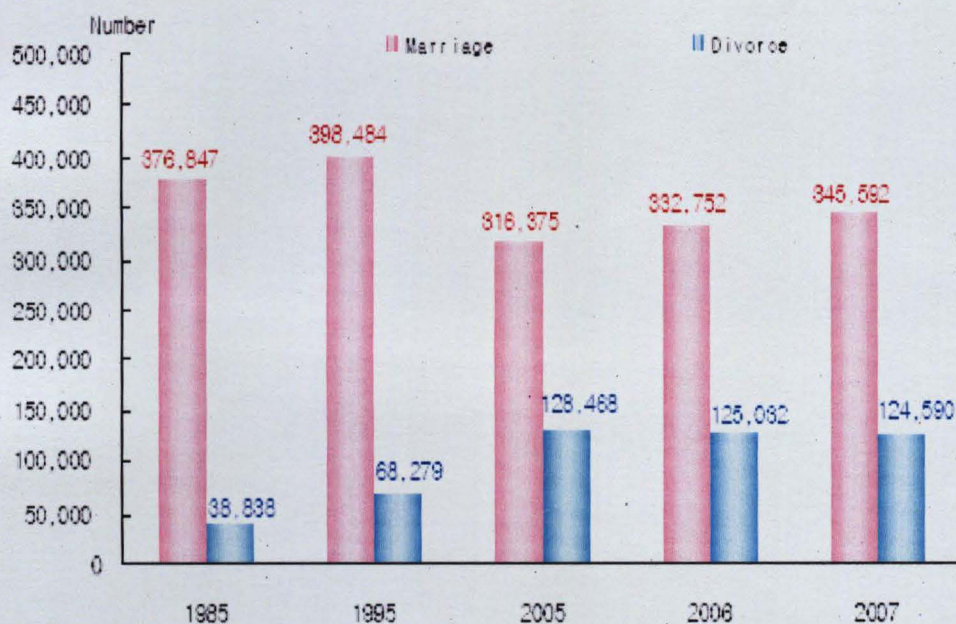
Divorce was granted in the Korean Court with the custody of the child given to the father but with the amendment of the divorce law, the custody of the child normally goes to the mother now. So, the marriage and divorce rate shows signs of change in traditional Korean society.

6.3 Childcare facilities in Korea

The number of childcare facilities provided by the government has been increasing with time. In 1990, the number of childcare facilities was 1919 and the number of children under its care was 48,000. By 2008, the number of childcare facilities rose to 32,149 while the number of children under its care was 1,091,287. Thus, there has been a drastic increase in the number of childcare facilities and number of children being cared under it. So, the Korean government indeed seems to be concerned about the working women and

¹¹⁷ O Youn-hee, *Korea Now*, p. 4, 21 February 2004.

the issue of raising children because the number of women taking a recluse to home after marriage was due to childcare and related work.

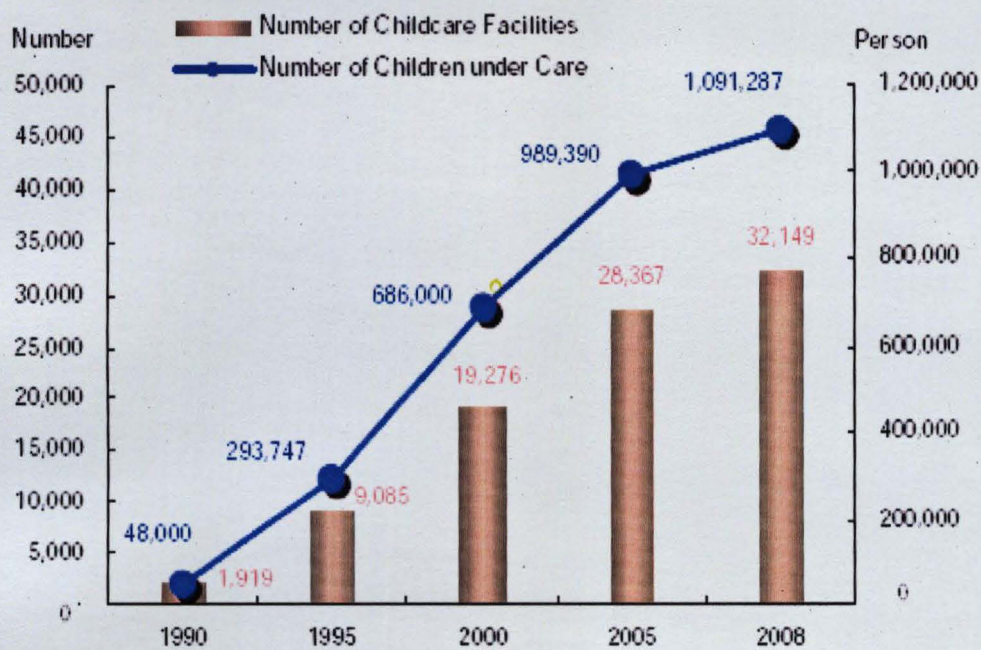


Unit: Number, per Thousand persons

Year	Marriage	Crude Marriage Rate	Divorce	Crude Divorce Rate
1985	376 847	9.2	38 838	1.0
1990	399 312	9.3	45 694	1.1
1995	398 484	8.7	68 279	1.5
2000	334 030	7.0	119 982	2.5
2005	316 375	6.5	128 468	2.6
2006	332 752	6.8	125 032	2.6
2007	345 592	7.0	124 590	2.5

Source: National Statistical Office, *Annual Report on the Vital Statistics*.

Figure 4.4 Marriage and divorce.



Unit: Number, Person

Year	Childcare Facilities	Children under Care
1990	1 919	48 000
1995	9 085	293 747
2000	19 276	686 000
2005	28 367	989 390
2006	29 233	1 040 361
2007	30 856	1 099 933
2008	32 149	1 091 287

Source: Ministry of Gender Equality, *Child-care Statistics*.

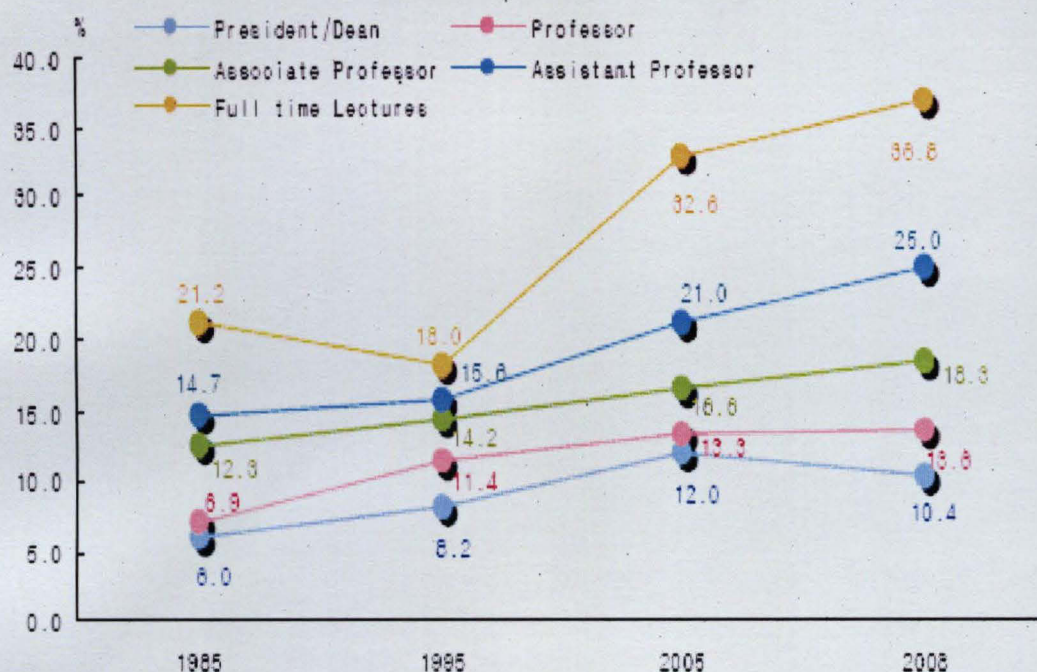
Figure 4.5 Childcare facilities and child under care.

6.4 Education sector

In education, the percentage of women employed in 1985 in elementary school was 43.0%, in middle school was 38.5% and in high school was 20.4%. The latest of the year 2008 in elementary school was 74.0%, in middle school was 64.5% and in high school was 42.1%. The increase in terms of percentage in the last 23 years in elementary school is 31%, in middle school is 26.0% and in high school is 21.7%. This shows that there is steady increase of women workers in the education sector and the data in Fig. 4.5 suggest that the number of educated women workers is growing every year.

A survey of 2008 shows the percentage of population proceeding to higher studies was 5.5% for women while that of male was 7.3%. The difference was just 1.8% which is quite low compared to the difference of 5.4% back in 1985.

In the year 2005, the percentage of female attending the elementary school was 25.5 while that of male was 12.2%. It was 12.1% for middle school for female students while male students accounted for 10.2%. In high school female students were 37.0% while it was 39.7 for male students. Lastly, the percentage of female students in college and higher studies were 25.4% while that of male was 37.8%.



Position	Unit: %					
	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2008
Dean/President	6.0	8.1	8.2	8.5	12.0	10.4
Professor	6.9	8.9	11.4	12.6	13.3	13.6
Associate Professor	12.3	13.9	14.2	14.7	16.6	18.3
Assistant Professor	14.7	16.0	15.6	16.5	21.0	25.0
Lecturer	21.2	20.1	18.0	24.6	32.6	36.8

Note : In year 1980 and 1985, number of higher education institutions was 375 and 456, respectively.

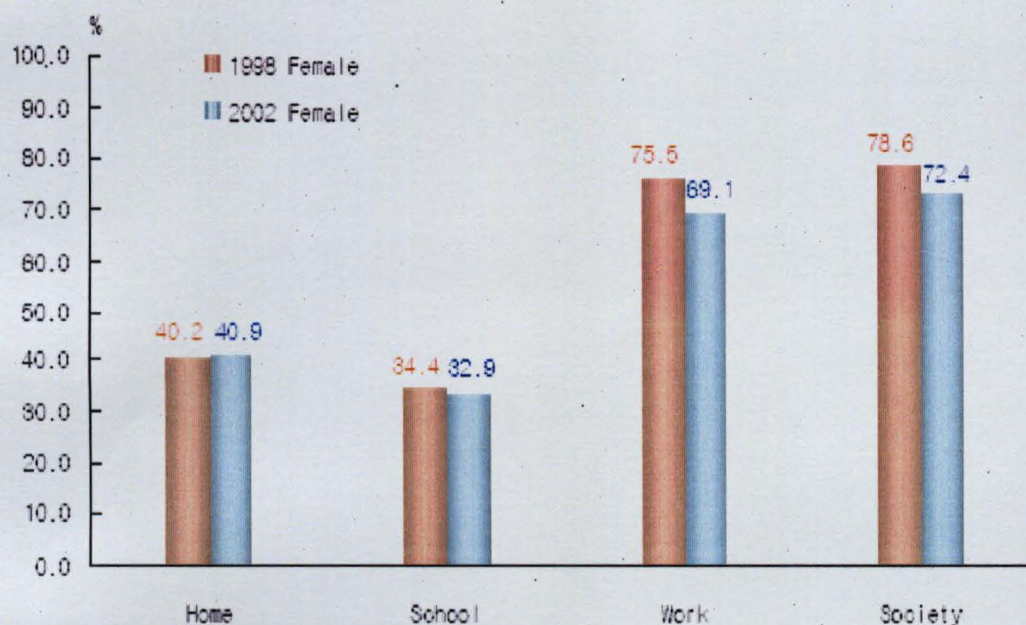
Source: Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, *Statistical Yearbook of Education*.

Figure 4.6 Women employed in higher education sector.

In higher educational institutions, women dean or president in the year 1985 was 6% and it increased up to 10.4% in 2008. This shows that the number of women holding the posts of dean or president is still low and there has been a slow improvement in the past 23 years. Women professors in the year 1985 were 6.9% while it was 13.6% in 2008. The percentage of women associate professors were 12.3% in 1985 while it was 18.3% in 2008. The percentage of women assistant professors were 14.7% in 1985 while it was 36.8% in 2008. While the percentage of women lecturers in 1985 were 21.2% and 36.8% in 2008. Out of all these posts, the posts of dean and president show the slowest growth with only 4.4% in the last 23 years. While the fastest growth is in the full time lecturer posts which increased from 21.2% to 36.8% in 2008, and the total percentage of growth in the last 23 years is 15.6% which is quite a lot compared to the other posts. But the number of women in the posts of dean/professor/associate professor seems to be increasing slowly as the data of the 23 years has not shown any negative growth. This is one achievement to be noted as it shows a promising future.

6.5 The perception of sexual discrimination in Korea

The general views of Korean men and women about the issue of sexual discrimination are important in measuring the extent of change. The survey taken at home, school, work and society show that the case of sexual discrimination is highest in society with workplace running at second. Home ranks third in sexual discrimination and the last among them being the School. In 1998, the percentage of sexual discrimination was 78.6% while in 2002 it was 72.4% in society. Throughout the long period of 1998 to 2002, the sexual discrimination at all the four described places decreased and this shows



Note: Female respondents who said "Yes"

Unit: %

Classification	Yes		Some		No		
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
1998	Home	40.2	34.8	25.1	26.6	34.7	38.6
	School	34.4	31.9	36.2	35.6	29.4	32.5
	Work	75.5	72.7	17.6	18.4	6.8	9.0
	Society	78.6	75.4	16.3	17.4	5.1	7.1
2002	Home	40.9	35.0	25.7	28.0	33.4	36.9
	School	32.9	29.5	38.6	38.8	28.5	31.6
	Work	69.1	65.2	22.0	23.6	8.9	11.1
	Society	72.4	66.8	20.7	23.8	6.9	9.4

Note: Population of age 15 and over.

Source: National Statistical Office, *Social Statistics Survey*.

Figure 4.7 Perception of sexual discrimination.

that the perception of Korean people on the issue of sexual discrimination is changing. Since 2000, there have been signs of changes among the Korean new generations regarding the society¹¹⁸. Similar to political change, Korean society is undergoing change because a bulk of youngsters makes up the Korean population.

7. Conclusion

In the economic sphere, difference is still visible in the wage payment and the instability of job after marriage still exists in Korea. But the economically active female population is increasing day by day. In the areas of professional and technical work too, women is still lagging behind compared to male population. Yet, the statistics suggests that the status of women in economy is better post democracy.

The factors which obstruct women's participation in labour market are identified as lack of ability, prejudice and lack of responsibility, working conditions, infant rearing and housework. Out of all these factors, infant rearing turns out to be the greatest factor which prevents women from participating in the labour market. In 2006, the percentage of women withheld from work due to infant rearing was 47.9%. The second major factor that obstructs women from participating in the labour market was found to be discrimination against them. The third factor was the working conditions at the workplace which was unsuitable especially for the married women. So flexibility of working hours to married women as an option needs to be adopted to tap the potential of women with intellect and skills.

¹¹⁸ Heike Hermanns, 'Women in South Korean Politics: A Long Road to Equality', *Portal Journal*, Vol. 3, July 2006.

In the social sphere, the position of women seems to be better as the government has started the responsibility of child rearing and various childcare institutes are opened for working mothers. For working mothers, this helps them ease their burden of work and childcare and helps mother to pursue their career interests without interruptions. Marriage has just become an option among singles for various reasons and the percentage of female thinking marriage as an option is higher than the male population who said they will be settling down in the near future.¹¹⁹ In opposite to marriage, divorce rate has increased in past years with divorce laws being amended. Thus, the result of the statistics points towards the assumption that the position of women has actually increased in the social sphere post-democracy.

In education sector, the number of educated women is increasing though the number of women in the technical area is lacking. The number of women taking up jobs in the higher educational institutions as a lecturer is the highest which stood at 36.8% in 2008. Not only this, the number of female students in the elementary, middle and high school is increasing with time.

However, the comparison of women in the economic and the social sphere shows that women position in society is changing fast compared to the economic sector. Though consciousness among the Korean population regarding gender discrimination is rising, there seems to be a lack in practice in the economic sphere. But, the overall condition of women in the socio-economic sphere post-democracy is getting better though some discrepancies still exist.

¹¹⁹ O Youn-hee, *Korea Now*, p. 4, 21 February 2004.

Chapter 5

Conclusions: Democracy and Its Impact on Women

1. Introduction

Democracy gives greater freedom to women is the general belief among different people of different nations. It is the assertion of this belief that led many scholars to test its validity in recently democratised nations after the World War II. South Korea, being one such recently democratised nation, is also subjected to the test of its existing democracy whether it is a procedural or subjective democracy. But to examine the extent of democracy is to look into Korea's socio-economic, political sphere and women's participation in it. Thus, this chapter provides the result of the examination of South Korea's democracy in the previous four chapters.

2. Assessment of Korean Democracy

According to Barbara J. Nelson, the transitions toward democratic politics during the 1980s and 1990s are far from complete or secure in a number of countries so the question of sustainable democratic transformation may hold crucial significance for the future in some countries.¹²⁰ But there is the need to understand the several forms of democracy according to the prevailing socio-cultural and historical context in which democratic ideals are defined and procedures are spelled out to suit the condition of the existing

¹²⁰Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury (eds) *Women and Politics Worldwide*

society and the people.¹²¹ Because in terms of women's roles in society, economy and political participation in East Asia, one needs to pay special attention to social relations, in particular the varied role women play at the kinship and family level.¹²² So, the social norms and relations still play an important role in making democracy a sustainable one. In case of Korea too, the Confucian tradition and the norms still lingers on and the type of democracy induced by it is something which is different from the western democracies.

According to Gandhi and Shah, the women's movements in the late twentieth century have been 'fluid and amorphous, diverse and fragmented, sporadic, issue-oriented, and autonomous with several streams of ideological thought and varying strategies'.¹²³ Post-democracy, the Korean women's movement organisations spurred and issues taken up by them were varied ranging from domestic matters to public matters. Also many organisations came to be divided along the radical and reformists lines. The reformists' organisations like the Young Women's Christian Association established in 1922, the Korean Center for Family Law established in 1954, Business and Professional Women, the Korean Association of University Women including the Korean National Mother's Association and Korean Federation of Housewives Clubs united under the Council of Korean Women's Organizations (CKWO). While the Korean Women's Society for Democracy, Women's Society for Justice and Equality, Women's Committee were among the others which united under the radical organisation Korean women's

¹²¹ Macpherson (1996) cited in *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movement*.

¹²² Cal Clark and Rose J. Lee, Chapter 9, 'Democracy and the Softening Society', in *Democratization and the Status of Women in East Asia*.

¹²³ Cited in Jill M. Bystydzienski and Joti Sekhon's *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements*.

Association United (KWAU). Thus, women organisations kept a check against government's plans and policies which were anti-women.

Political Status

Korean women's political status is still low compared to other countries because of various factors. The number of women elected to the political sphere is very low, though part of the requirement for women's participation in politics is filled through proportional representation and quota system. The 30% reservation of seats for women is hardly filled due to manipulations within the party system and the reluctance of the various members in filling women as its candidate. And those women who contested failed to get elected though the highest numbers of voters are women. In short, the concealed bias against women still exists in politics as there still remains the defined boundary between women's sphere and men's sphere. But one improvement as shown by the statistics of Korean general and local assembly is the increase number of women's representation in the last two elections. This shows that participation of women in political sphere is increasing with each election and showing signs of improvement.

Economic Status

In the economic sphere, women have been the mainstay of the national economic growth and its history is the biggest evidence of women's participation in it. Yet, the discrimination between men and women workers still exists in the economic industry. The wage difference between male and female (63%) shows the existence of gender discrimination in the economic industry of Korea. Moreover, most of the high posts are

occupied by the Korean male population though few women did manage to get it. Despite the low wages and few women holding high ranking posts, the number of economically active women is higher than men. This shows that women are still accommodated in the economic sphere but the stability of their jobs is still a question which bothers many women. But a saving grace is the passing of laws and regulations by the Korean government to ensure their stability through taking care of childcare, maternity leave, insurance from any financial crisis and others. The benefits provided by the Korean government acts as an insulation seal for their good future.

Social status

In the social sphere, women have somehow managed to advanced forward and have succeeded in voicing their opinions about marriage and divorce. The case of marriage and divorce by weighing the pros and cons and by consent has become the norm in Korea. Moreover, due to the active assistance of Korean government in the childcare matters, Korean women are free to pursue their area of interests without break. In the educational sphere too, the number of educated women is increasing over the years and this in turn leads to increased gender consciousness among the Korean women. In fact, education is playing an important role to make more people gender neutral by teaching the concept of equality through the concepts of democracy.

In spite of the above progress, though minimal, the women's position in society is not dynamic as it has been influenced by historical, cultural, social, political ad economic

forces within the society.¹²⁴ In case of Korea too, the remnants of old ideologies still linger among the people. Hwa Soo chung wrote that despite nearly four decades of rapid economic growth and change, Korea still retains much of its Confucian traditions and norms specially those related to women.¹²⁵ Though the legal reform and social changes have raised women's status, many women still believe that the remnants of Confucian ideology circulates in Korean society, though not a greater scale as it used to be in the past. According to Elizabeth Choi Korea is changing from a traditional into a modern culture but the social structure and cultural norms have not changed sufficiently creating a state of flux and uncertainty. For women, this cause a conflict rooted in disparities between motherhood and family roles and the opportunities of a modern society. But post 2000, due to generation change; a lot of change is visible in Korean society. This claim is supported by the findings of the statistics in which there is a sharp increase or drop post 2000 in all the related matters.

However, the advancement of women's interests results from dissemination of power within society in which women have the same power as that of men in all spheres of society, polity, economy and cultural consciousness. Thus, the awareness of one's own culture and its pros and cons may lead to many changes for the welfare of women. Because in some societies, culture and its norms acts as an agent of repression towards women's emancipation process.

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Choi, Chapter 8, 'Status of the Family and Motherhood for Korean Women', in *Women of Japan and Korea*.

¹²⁵ Hwa Soo Chung, Chapter 9, 'Social Codes and Gender Roles-Schoolbooks in Korea and Mexico' in *Promises of Empowerment-Women in Asia and Latin America*.

Conclusion

In all the spheres of socio-economy and politics, democratization has had substantial impact in Korea. Women have fared better in democracy compared to the military regime where women lagged behind in politics and status of women was low in society. In the economic sector, there has been an increase in the percentage of working women and in the social sector; the government has undertaken a host of reforms for the welfare of women. The same applies to society and polity also. This shows that the Korean government is committed to wipe off the gender discrimination in economic, social and the political sector. But the most lagging area is the political sphere where women's participation is still low.

Korean women's status has increased post-democracy (1987 onwards) and the assumption that democracy enhances women's status in society seems to be true. Yet, Korean women still have a milestone to go because they seem to be lagging far behind compared to other economically developed countries. Also, their outlook towards women's emancipation needs change because despite many legal and economic reforms, the change is slower than expected. But one needs to understand that democratisation is an ongoing process in Korea and changes keeps happening at various levels. But in all these changes if women's welfare is neglected then Korea's democracy can be called a conservative democracy. But the new democracy in Korea seems to be concerned about women's issues (change in the status of women tracked in the second chapter). Moreover, to bring about a change in Korean society depends on how the Korean people take and perceive all the reforms passed by the government and how they utilise it for their

benefits. But there can be no denial that Korea's democracy is unique in its own sense because democracy took birth during the unprecedented economic growth and by squeezing its place from the hotbed of Confucian ideals and norms of Korean society.

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