
Empowerment of Women through Political Participation in India

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Abstract: In today's time, the issues related to women's well-being and legal rights became a political concern. Many social and political groups have tried to raise the attention of the government toward the issues of women. However, regardless of these efforts, such issues seem not to be attended adequately. Such behaviors of the government have led to many social feminist movements, where women openly raised their voices to address such issues and demanded equal rights in society. In a country like India, on one hand the goddess is a woman and on the other hand she is ill-treated, oppressed, suppressed, and exploited by the males of our society. The United Nations report states that "woman constitutes half of the world population, perform nearly 2/3 of works hours, receive one tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth percent of the world's property." One of the major problem's which women are dealing today is with the political participation. Not all women are given the equal rights in the society to choose their desired candidate or stand in elections or go for election campaigns or even be associated with political parties. This paper analyzes the participation of women in politics and also analyzes whether or not women's voices and demands are articulated to the public as matters of importance.

Keywords: Empowerment, Political Participation, Representation, Position of Women, Democratic System, Reservation.

INTRODUCTION

The fundamental characteristic of democracy is the equal involvement of men and women in politics. But in the twenty-first century, women's political participation is extremely low in almost all the countries in the world. The majority of parliaments continue to have an average of 25.1% women, dominated by men and women MPs are frequently underrepresented in the decision-making bodies. If women play no meaningful role in the decision-making process, it is only a partial democracy. Full and equal political involvement for women is a fundamental human right and a sign of substantial benefits for society and democratic integrity. The quickest method seems to be quotas to ensure that men and women participate equally in politics. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of India provides 33% reservation of seats for women in local elected bodies. As a result, the proportion of women representatives has significantly increased. In recent years, this has led to more women taking part in making decisions at lower levels.

Half of the world's population is made up of women. It is believed that women's participation should be increased in political systems as they constitute half of the population, and where both men and women are legally allowed to run for office same as men. If only half of its population is actually served by democracy, the demographic is still underrepresented in politics. Absence from the political process means that half of the population's issues will go unheard and cannot be fully considered or addressed because their opinions are not given enough weight for political system integration. If women do not participate in politics,

democracy is only partially successful at all levels. Therefore, equal political participation for women is necessary.

Political Participation is a fundamental human right, a test of the democratic process, and it yields genuine benefits to the society. Participating in politics is the only way that women's interests can be represented and given a platform to speak. Given that women make up 50% of the population, women must enter politics in order to ensure a stable political system and the wellbeing of the populace. In order to move ahead, participate actively in politics. Without women's active engagement and participation, a nation cannot advance. Their inaction will actually slow down the nation. Sadly, women were not involved in politics in any of the countries and were not given the proper share of power in the structure. Males predominate in the population. only in power structures for generations, harming their interests and reducing them to total reliance on males to make all decisions. They can influence decisions by actively participating in politics.

The participation of women and their involvement in electoral process is an important marker of the maturity of democracy in any country. It can be defined as equality and freedom with which women share political power with men. Despite various provisions in the constitution, women in the Indian subcontinent continue to be under-represented in the legislatures, both at the national and the state levels. The number of female representatives in legislative bodies in the Centre and in most of the states of India is below 20%, reflecting a pan Indian gender exclusion from electoral participation and quality representation. The Indian female participants in the electoral politics are mainly less because of political party competition, as national political parties and the regional political parties in the states discriminate not only in terms of seat allotments, but also in the party rank and file and chain of command. This is a major contributor to the party competition structure in the Indian politics that is ruled by inherent male dominance and a patriarchal mindset that excludes women from the electoral process.

At the same time, even though India is considered to be a country which follows equality, the lawmakers or the people in the politics are to a certain extent influenced by the old-time rules and customs of male dominance and patriarchy especially when it comes to matters of making laws for the society and governing the people. This poses a problem when it comes to devising efficient solutions and also creates a dilemma as to what is more important; preserving something that has been practiced for long or making a change and trying methods which shall bring equality in the society. This can be addressed by going back to the origin.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, "It's a girl." – Shirley Chisholm

The roots of the present always lie in the past. So, the justification of the law relating to the political participation of the women can be appropriately scrutinized only by looking into the past history of any system. The way to shed some light on the women's right of political participation is to look at its past at national as well as global level.

If we see the international history of women's political participation, the history of equal participation of women in the political fields in a few countries, it can be observed that in ancient Greece and Republican Rome as well as in few more democracies having emerged in Europe, women were completely not given voting rights by the end of the 18th century. In the United States of America, the women in this country were the first ones to fight for their right to vote in the whole world.

If we see the Indian history, women have a record of suffering and exploitation. The women have remained victims of violence and also, they have suffered various types of

discrimination, exploitation and torture- both physical and mental not only in the men's society but also within their own house by their family thereby disturbing the balance in the society. Before Independence, Local Self-Governments have existed in India since. Vedas, Puranas, Smritis and books on statecrafts and religious texts have vivid description of this. In the past, the Panchayati Raj system was confined to solve social problems with the help of five senior members of village called 'Panchas'. The fact that women are capable of exhibiting extraordinary qualities of leadership is visible by the participation of many women during the national freedom movement. There were many women who fought during the freedom struggle but some of them who were the prominent women were Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Sucheta Kriplani, Aruna Asif Ali, Kasturba Gandhi and Kamala Nehru. They stand out prominently for their leadership skills.

The demand for women's voting rights was initiated by Sarojini Naidu who led a delegation of Indian Women before the British Parliament in the year 1917. Consulting the Reforms Act of 1921 women were given the right to vote, but this right came with certain restrictions like wifehood, property and education. The Government of India Act of 1935 granted voting rights to all women without any conditions as it was there in the Reforms Act of 1921. Finally, the Constitution of India in the year of 1950 gave all women equal political and legal rights.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POST INDEPENDENT PERIOD

In post-independence India, large number of women's autonomous groups has sprung up challenging patriarchy and taking up a variety of issues such as violence against women greater share for women in political decision making etc both at the activist and academic level. India has a rich and vibrant women's movement but it has still a long way to go to achieve gender equality and gender justice. Women's empowerment is still a debatable issue in India. She is still treated as a second class citizen and the reason besides are illiteracy, customs, traditions, poverty, ignorance, her own lack of interest in her own political empowerment leads to such government policies, which lack proper insight and direction. It is important for the empowerment of women that the women actively participate in the political process of nation.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain better control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. Empowerment is multi-dimensional, social, and a process. It is multi-dimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community. Empowerment, by definition, is a social process, since it occurs in relationship to others. Empowerment is a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it. Other aspects of empowerment may vary according to the specific context and people involved, but these remain constant. In addition, one important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and community are fundamentally connected. Women's political empowerment is premised on "three fundamental and non-negotiable principles:

1. The equality between women and men;
2. Women's right to the full-fledged development of their potentials; and
3. Women are right to self representation and self-determination". In empowerment, the key indeed is 'power'

WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation is a process by which people take part in political activities. Exercising voting rights during elections is one of the important political activities of the people. Participation of women in this political activity is almost equal to men. Political participation is not merely the casting of the vote rather it includes a wide range of other activities like-membership of political party, electoral campaigning, attending party meetings, demonstrations, communication with leaders, holding party positions, contesting elections, membership in representative bodies, influencing decision making and other associated activities.

It has been stated that the personality traits and the socioeconomic and cultural environment all combined are responsible for women's marginal participation to a great extent in our politics. The culture that puts a maximum importance on the males, the unstable political environment, criminalization or absence of political ideology are the factors that decide the extent and effectively of whole political participation. The Socio-political environment has to ascertain participation and involvement of women in politics. Governance is ever related to a set of rules, institutions, and values that have involvement in the management of both the politics and society. Governing institutions and processes include political parties, parliaments, government and their mutual interactions within the society. Although governance is a generic term that could surely mean better government or management, values of governance, better types of government, better nature of political processes, the political parties and organization's interests of those are represented and protected, and the extent of power that the masses need to exercise for challenging the state or in suggesting alternative methods of governance etc. may vary in different political systems.

Table 1 - Numbers of Women MPs in Lok Sabha from 1952-2019

Sr. No.	Years	Total No. of Lok Sabha Seats	Women MPs in Lok Sabha	% of Women MPs
1	1952	489	22	4.4
2	1957	494	27	5.4
3	1962	494	34	6.7
4	1967	523	31	5.9
5	1971	521	22	4.2
6	1977	544	19	3.4
7	1980	544	28	5.1
8	1984	544	42	8.1
9	1989	529	28	5.3
10	1991	509	36	7.0
11	1996	541	40	7.4
12	1998	545	44	8.0
13	1999	543	48	8.8
14	2004	543	45	8.1
15	2009	543	59	10.9
16	2014	543	61	11.2
17	2019	542	78	14.4

Source: - Data Compiled from the statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

It can be successfully analyzed for the study of above cited table that represents sufficient representation was never adequately achieved in the Lok Sabha. A number of elected women MPs in Lok Sabha have never gone above 12 percent. Table 1 gives a picture of representation of women in Lok Sabha from 1952 to 2014. The first Lok Sabha in 1951 had

merely 22 women MPs. In the 15th Lok Sabha elections the number of 59 women was recorded. The present Lok Sabha has 61 female MPs. The representation of women in the Lok Sabha has basically remained much unchanged. It could be made out that the majority of women were from the Congress Party. In this general election, 556 women coverall contested. With the Congress making to the top of the list, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) held second place with 13 women candidates being elected. The All India Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) followed by four women each found a way to the Lok Sabha. However Women have 11% representation in India's Lok Sabha and 10.6% in the Rajya Sabha, but it is not enough to stand in comparison with the figures of neighbor countries. Here, Nepal, ranked at with 24, followed by China (55) and Pakistan (66).

Table 2 - Numbers of Women MPs in Rajya Sabha from 1952-2019

Sr. No.	Years	Total No. of Rajya Sabha Seats	Women MPs in Rajya Sabha	% of Women MPs
1	1952	219	16	7.3
2	1957	237	18	7.6
3	1962	238	18	7.6
4	1967	240	20	8.3
5	1971	243	17	7.0
6	1977	244	25	10.2
7	1980	244	24	9.8
8	1985	244	28	11.4
9	1990	245	38	15.5
10	1996	223	20	8.97
11	1998	223	19	8.52
12	2004	245	27	11.02
13	2009	245	22	8.98
14	2014	245	29	11.84
15	2019	224	24	10.71

Source: - Data Compiled from the statistical reports of the Election Commission of India

Table 2 shows the slight shift in overall for women in the Upper House. It may be slightly higher because of indirect elections and nomination procedure of some women members of the upper house of Indian parliament. The highest figure was reached in the year of 1990 when 38 women MPs represented in Rajya Sabha. But, the receding trend of women's representation began from 1996 to 2014. It is important to note that Rajya Sabha had the woman Deputy Chairperson for more than 25 years, still the same competition is faced by women from male politicians for nomination.

Table 3: Number of Women Ministers in various Cabinets of the Government of India

Sr. No.	Years	No. of Women Ministers
1	1952	3
2	1957	3
3	1962	5
4	1967	5
5	1971	3
6	1977	2
7	1980	8
8	1985	5
9	1990	1

10	1996	5
11	1998	4
12	2004	10
13	2009	9
14	2014	7
15	2019	6

Source: <http://www.parliamentofindia.nic.in/>

The table 3 shows the representation of women in the council of ministers, Government of India since 1952. The representation of women has been very low in the ministries that were formed and women were given less important portfolios like health, welfare, local government etc. The case has been same in the state governments as well. The table 3 depicts the total percentage of women who have contested the lok sabha elections since 1952.

WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION

The 73rd and 74th amendment of Indian Constitution have brought about a silent revolution by the provisions related to 33% reservation for women in the institutions of local self-government. They have brought a drastic transformation in India as far as participation of women at the grass root level politics is concerned.

Women in India are much better represented in the Panchayats raj institutions as compared to the parliament. States like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan have reserved 50 per cent seats for women in Panchayats and Sikkim has reserved 40 per cent seats for women. This indeed, makes a historic beginning for the effective participation of women in the decision-making process at the grassroots level. The efforts and work of several women representatives' in Panchayats in Maharashtra, Gujarat and West Bengal have been widely acclaimed. Thus, women are making significant gains in the political sphere where increased participation is rapidly empowering women.

However, women have not found an adequate representation in the Lok Sabha. The percentage of elected women Lok Sabha members has never exceeded 12 per cent. The presence of women in the Upper House has been only slightly higher overall, probably due to indirect elections and nomination of some women members.

Most political parties agreed to introduce 33 percent reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures. When the Bill was introduced in 1997, several parties' and groups raised objections. The objections focused around two main issues: first, the issue of overlapping quotas for women in general and those for women of the lower castes; second, the issue of elitism. The Bill was first introduced by Dev Gowda led United Front Government. The demand for sub-quotas for OBCs and minorities is seen a way of stalling reservation for women; there are no instances of political parties having such quotas in their own cadres. The Bill has already been introduced several times, but is stalled each time. However, the Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010, took a 'historic step' by passing this bill and provided one-third reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies for women. The key feature of the bill is that one-third of all seats on the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will be reserved for women. The reservation will work as a quota within quota – 1/3 of the seats will be reserved for SC and ST women.

REASONS OF LOW PARTICIPATION

The data analysis above proves the facts about two aspects of women's political participation in India- the one aspect shows that women's political participation in India is not too much appropriate for better empowerment of women in Indian politics. Second aspect presents the positive side of women's political participation that proves female contestants' number to be higher than it was in 1957 Lok Sabha elections. It is important to understand that the rising

number of women is an encouraging sign to pave the way for greater political participation of women. With the rise of new political parties that don't have faith in political patronage of families, party systems and more importantly money and muscle power, believe in a greater number of women entering the political fray and that only points at encouraging signs for a section that constitutes half the population as they will be part of the decision making group. It is assumed that there are various reasons responsible for little political participation of women in India.

The first reason is violence and the threat of violence that is affecting the ability of many women to take active participation in many social and political spheres. Lack of Self confidence is the second reason accountable for low participation of Indian women, particularly in, elections. Especially, Discrimination meted with Dalit women has also led to low political participation. However, from time to time, The Government of India has made several efforts to ensure the participation of Dalit women, but still these efforts are not fully effective and sufficient. Women are still less literate as compared to men. One can easily notice how illiteracy constrains the ability of women to understand the political system and issues related to these.

Gender stereotypes, psychological and traditional barriers and lack of training and resources too are becoming other dominating reasons for low political participation in India. Most of the political parties, ethnic groups and clans are controlled by strong male leaders and it leaves a little opportunity for women leaders to enter into the political process. Patriarchal society and male domination are also the main reasons behind the low participation of women.

EMPOWERING WOMEN LEADERS

Reservations and quotas at the constitutional or political party level are a key step in addressing the gender imbalance in India's governance system. The reservation of seats for women at the Panchayats Raj level demonstrates the capacity of political reservations to successfully elevate their role in governance. However, additional efforts are required to empower women to take on leadership roles, to overcome the many challenges they face when they choose to be active in politics, and to facilitate their full participation in the political process. The passage of the Women's Reservation Bill is an essential first step in spurring women's participation in state and national level governance. The Bill must be prioritized in the upcoming session of parliament, to be held in late November 2013.

Another step towards empowering women would be to train them in carrying out their responsibilities effectively and successfully. Leadership training programmes must target and mobilize women from all levels of society who hold or have a strong desire to take on leadership roles. These training programmes should build their capacity to participate in governance structures and teach them how to be effective leaders and agents of change within their communities. Furthermore, training modules must include the process of filing for candidature and campaigning as well as providing information on electioneering machinery.

In addition to this, initiatives must be developed either at the government or political party level to ensure that all political parties provide 33 % of winnable tickets to women candidates. Central and state level institutional support must also be provided to women's organizations that work for the political empowerment of women. Finally, efforts should be made to develop an enabling environment that promotes and facilitates the full and active participation of women in politics.

Had topped the constitutional mandate to reserve 33% seats for women being right, we would have felt to be heading towards times of gender equality. Otherwise, it would be two steps forward and one step backward, making only fifty percent progress ahead. Today, the world 18.4 percent female members of parliaments around the world. Recently, Rwanda went ahead

of Sweden to number one in the world in women's parliamentary representation with the figures of 56.3 percent against Sweden's 47.3 percent. Rwanda is an example of the new trend to use electoral gender quotas as a fast track to gender balance in politics. Other parliaments, however, still have few women elected. India, however, ranks somewhere in hundred in terms of women's representation in the main legislature. The percentage of representation for women is around 11%, that is much below the average across the world, including parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and just about mustering enough strength to go ahead the numbers from the Arab world. Well then, one thing becomes much clearer that surely we need to speedily improve the situation. Rather something should have been done in the long gone past. Presently, the question arises whether this change is required at the parliamentary level, and is reservation an effective correcting remedy for it. Women constitute 50% of the women population, but in India the participation of women is very little and dismal. The women from the social sector are unable to identify themselves as a workforce at regional, state and national level. In fact the participation of women in the political process is the pre-requisite for the political society. To remedy the low participation of women electors, India in 1994 established quotas (reservations) vide the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments reserve to reserve 33 per cent of seats in local governments for women. The Women's Reservation Bill (108th amendment) has also been introduced in the national Parliament to reserve 33 per cent of the Lok Sabha seats for women, but the bill is yet to be passed. It is believed that increasing the number of women in national government may not guarantee a direct influence on governance and the government, but a particular mass of women in power can bring about transformation.

CONCLUSION

Women's empowerment can positively influence the lives not only of women themselves but also of men, and of course, those of children. Political parties cannot remain indifferent towards women who constitute 586.5 million population and nearly 48.46 per cent of the electorate (2011 census). Although almost all political parties have attempted to build women organizations to secure their support and make their organizations more broad based, but in practice they have fielded much less proportion of women candidates in the elections giving them proportionately much less representation in the legislative bodies than their actual population strength. It is necessary to make it mandatory for all political parties to nominate at least a-third of women candidates in their party organizations and laid the foundation of political participation of women. Women are the legal citizens of the country and have equal rights with men. Although the country's constitution says women have equal status to men, women are powerless and are mistreated inside and outside the home. Gender equality in the realm of politics continues to be elusive even today.

Therefore all the trends indicate that women's representation in politics requires special consideration, and cannot be left to the forces that presently dominate our parties and government. Today, even the best of our female parliamentarian's feel sidelined and powerless within their respective parties. The few women in leadership positions have not been able to encourage the entry of greater numbers of women in electoral and party politics, and are an ineffective minority within their own respective political groupings. Therefore, it is urgently required that we have to take special measures to enhance women's political participation in ways that help them influence decision-making at all levels of our society and polity. Our democracy seriously flawed if it fails to yield adequate space to women for their political empowerment.

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