
Efficacy of Women's Representation in Indian Politics

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Abstract : *The Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, (commonly referred to as the Panchayati Raj Act) and the Constitution 74th Amendment Act, 1992 (the Nagarpalika Act) has made provision women reservation in politics at local level, but women's representation in local/national level is not satisfactory. The fact is that, even after getting an effective post at local level (Panchayat or Municipality), women's are not policy/ decision maker in true sense, because dominating by male family members. Women leaders are no better or worse than men. Nor have women leaders been typically anxious to give greater representation to other women within their own organizations or in the political process generally. Representation of women has not necessarily increased greatly under the leadership of women. In fact interestingly the 73rd Constitutional amendment and the policy and implementation of 33% reservation for women in Panchayats received strong support and impetus due to Rajiv Gandhi's interest and advocacy in the matter.*

Indian political system cannot be said to be non-receptive to the emergence and dominance of women leaders even though the political representation of women has not particularly registered a significant increase over the last 14 general elections. While on the one hand most women politicians have found it difficult to rise within male dominated party hierarchies, on the other hand some women have managed to become leaders when they have set up parties of their own. Once they have established themselves as leaders, there has been an unquestioning acceptance of their leadership and decisions by the party rank and file, even if it is largely male.

In the light of abovementioned theme the present paper offers a brief discussion about legal/Constitutional provisions to increase women's representation in Indian politics. The paper further examines the social dilemmas and the reformative ideas to overcome the problem faced by women to make effective representation in politics.

Key Words: *Inter-Parliamentary Union, enthusiasm, dilemmas, organizations, CPRW, CEDA, UDHR, Suffrage etc.*

Introduction

Despite of many legal instrument for the protection of women and also legal provisions for uplifting their position in India as well, the position of women in India is not satisfactory in any field, in present time. An effective representation of women is very poor in politics.

The term political participation generally refers to those voluntary activities of members of a society, in the selection of rulers and formation of public policy. Political participation may be defined as those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics. Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the right to participate is an important aspect of democratic government and an inherent right in a democratic process.

History of Women's Suffrage (Right to Vote of Women)

Women's population is approximately 50% of total population in world as well in India. There for healthy democracy effective contribution and participation of women in politics and policy making is necessary. Earlier there was no clear provision of women's suffrage (Women's right to vote) before **17th Century**. Probably, **Sweden** was first country to initiate in this regard. In **USA** women's suffrage is the right of women to vote and to stand for electoral office. Limited voting rights were gained by women in **Sweden, Finland** and some western U.S. states in the late 19th century. National and international organizations formed to coordinate efforts to gain voting rights, especially the **International Woman Suffrage Alliance (1904)**, and also worked for equal civil rights for women. The United Nations encouraged women's suffrage in the years following World War II, and the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)** identifies it as a basic right. Voting rights for women were introduced into International Law by the **United Nations'**

Human Rights Commission, whose elected chair was *Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Eleanor Roosevelt*. In 1948 the United Nations adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Article 21 of the UDHR stated: “(1) everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women*, which went into force in 1954, enshrining the equal rights of women to vote, hold office, and access public services as set out by national laws. One of the most recent jurisdictions to acknowledge women's full right to vote was **Bhutan in 2008** (in its first national elections).

In the modern World, women's right to represent effectively in parliament or to stand for Parliament was first time started in *Australia*. South Australia granted women the right to stand for Parliament in **1895**.

Indian Scenario on Women's Suffrage:

In 1947 India granted equal voting rights to all men and women at the time of independence. Women in India raised the issue of representation in politics first in 1917. At that time it was basically a demand for universal adult franchise and political participation. By 1930 women had gained the Right to vote, which initially benefited women from elite families. Women's involvement in struggles for political and civil rights in India were however sought to be linked to nationalist movements in alliance with males against the common foreign enemy. In any case women's involvement in nationalist struggles changed their lives in that even though they were denied equal opportunities to shape the new state, they gained constitutional and legal rights. But even after the right to vote became a reality for all women, their representation in the parliament, political parties and other decision making bodies remained low even after independence, and after the Indian Constitution came into force in 1950. A few women no doubt attained positions as members of parliament and state legislatures and as leaders of opposition, etc. mostly through family dynasties or through male political patronage. However, the percentage of women in legislatures and decision making positions always remained low. Women do not share the power of decision-making and are not involved in policy making in Indian democracy in proportion to their numerical strength. Thus there is a big gap between the formal idea of women's

participation and their meaningful use of power in Indian politics.

Women in India have lesser opportunities of public influence or for entering politics. Women also lack opportunities to move within the hierarchies without patronage of male leaders or mentors. The women's wings of political parties may have given visibility to women in the form of a platform for participation rather than integrating them into central power structures. Women do not have necessary resources to enter and compete in contemporary political arena. Thus improved social indicators in development graphs may not automatically ease women's access to political power or improve political participation and representation. They do not necessarily translate into collective gains nor sustained political power. Of course the scope for women's public activism varies across class, caste and region in India. The effectiveness of women's participation also depends on the local configuration of power and cultural environment apart from problems of poverty, illiteracy, lack of economic resources, negative social and legal environments, family and household pressures, male dominated bureaucracy and politicians that the women face.

In India, the *Constitution 73rd Amendment Act*, (commonly referred to as the **Panchayati Raj Act**) and the *Constitution 74th Amendment Act, 1992* (the **Nagarpalika Act**) has made provision women reservation in politics at local level, but women's representation in local/national level, though it is increasing slowly, but it is not satisfactory. The fact is that, even after getting an effective post at local level (Panchayat or Municipality), women's are not policy/ decision maker in true sense, because dominating by male family members. Women leaders are no better or worse than men. Nor have women leaders been typically anxious to give greater representation to other women within their own organizations or in the political process generally. Representation of women has not necessarily increased greatly under the leadership of women.

Women in India constitute nearly half the population of the country, but they are poorly represented in the various governance and decision making bodies. The position depicted through the 15 general elections so far reflects a low representation of women in Parliament, State legislatures, in political parties and other decision-making bodies. In 16th parliament election have a record number of 61 women leaders as compared to 59 women MPs elected during the previous General Elections¹ and in Delhi election only 6

¹ “61 women make it to Lok Sabha in 2014 against 59 in 2009”; accessed on

women MLA's were elected². If one compares it as the 33% of reservation then it appears less than 12% of Parliamentary seats, less than 6% Cabinet positions, less than 4% of seats in High Courts and the Supreme Court, have been occupied by women. Less than 3% of the administrators and managers are women. The average percentage of women's representation in the Parliament, Assemblies and Council of Ministers taken together has been around 10%.

The global average of women in parliaments as of November 2013 stood at 21.3%, a slight increase over the numbers in the immediately preceding two years (20.3% and 19.5%). The IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union) is an international organization of parliaments and works for the establishment of representative democracies.

But in India, women have a poor 12.15% representation in Lok Sabha and 10.6% in the Rajya Sabha, making India 108th among 188 countries covered in the annual analysis on statistics of women members of parliament (MPs) conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). According to statistics released periodically by the Election Commission, for the 543 Lok Sabha constituencies, the number of elected women increased from 49 in 1999 to 66 in 2014, with 12.5% representation in the lower house. In 2009, the number of elected women over total seats was maximum in Punjab (30.8%), followed by Madhya Pradesh (20.7%) and Haryana (20.0%). Against this, the number of women voters in India has increased from 44.3% to 45.8%.

Women are not seen as politically important as their votes are taken for granted and political parties assume that their voting patterns are mostly influenced by the male members of the family or community. In India, where women constitute nearly half the electorate, around 364 million voters remain excluded from the decision-making process.

No mainstream party has shown enthusiasm in addressing women's problems. As of now, all they are talking about is a speedy and efficient trial for those accused in rape and sexual harassment cases. It is time for political parties to think of the impact that their policies will have on women. Promises of

more jobs, better education and tackling domestic violence are all part of election manifestos, but how will they explicitly target obstacles faced by women? Addressing gender issues in politics also depends on how many women candidates are endorsed by parties and how they choose candidates. The issue of political representation for women in India was first raised in 1917 as a demand for universal adult suffrage. Women got the right to vote in 1930, but nobody really sees them as a "vote bank". Women have held the highest offices in India. We have had a woman president, woman prime minister, speaker of the Lok Sabha and leader of the opposition. But they still do not have adequate representation or a say in the political process — note that there are 59 women MPs in a parliament that includes nearly 800 seats.

Conclusion

Gender inequality in Indian politics is very big. A United Nations report said it will take more than 50 years for countries like India to achieve gender balance in politics if women's participation in parliaments does not improve. On the brighter side, statistics show that women are voting in larger numbers. State elections in Uttar Pradesh in year 2012 saw nearly 60 percent of women coming to vote, compared to just 42 percent in 2007, in Bihar approximately 60% of women casted their votes. In Panchayat election though women's representation appears much better, but if we see the effective role of women's representative, then it appears the mostly power is used by the male member of the elected female representatives.

In 2009, activists organised a "Wada Na Todo Abhiyan" (holding the government accountable to promises), and a women's manifesto developed in consultation with people in 100 parliamentary constituencies. Education for girls enforced by law, enactment of the Women's Reservation Bill and stronger implementation of the domestic violence law were three key demands. With elections around the corner in India, several women groups have come together under the umbrella of 'Time for 33% Coalition' and are seeking passage of the women's reservation bill during the winter session which will start shortly.

The **Bill (Women Representation Bill)** proposes to reserve 33% seats for women in the Lok- Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. Various similar Bills, introduced since 1996, have lapsed. Now women's effective participation is needed very much in India as well as in World to overcome the women's problem effectively, and thus the healthy growth of the nation as well. It is the need of the time that the Government should make some

<<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/61-women-make-it-to-lok-sabha-in-2014-against-59-in-2009--44447>> on 12/04/ 2016.

² "6 Women Candidates Who Won Delhi Elections"; accessed on

< <http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/02/10/6-women-candidates-who-won-delhi-elections/>>; on 21/03/2016.

provision to increase effective participation in every important field and also in policy making. Despite of this is duty of the society to change their mentality and appreciate the effective participation in every field. Let us hope that after Bill come in to force, the effective representation of women in effective policy making will increase to shape the fate of India.

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