

Empowerment of Women: -An Overview of Political Participation and Representation in India

RAJNI BALA

Assistant Professor in Political Science
D.A.V. College Hoshiarpur, Punjab (INDIA)

Received: May 14, 2018

Accepted: June 27, 2018

ABSTRACT

Constitution of India has best tried to give legal equality to women in all spheres and different constitutional provision allowed the women to enter into the male dominated a political sphere. But despite this, a wide gap is found between 'de-jure' and de-facto' status of women's political participation in India. Political participation of women in India is a complex phenomenon being influenced by various factors. While taking this discourse, this article will explore the term of empowerment of women in India through political participation and its scenario at national level politics.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION:-

After independence, Indian constitution adopted the notion of democracy that is based on concepts of equality, liberty, and freedom for all men and women. But despite that, it is seen that women are excluded from different spheres, i.e., social, economic and especially in politics. The United Nation stated that women constitute "world's largest excluded category". Mahatma Gandhi also realized that the backwardness of woman was a stumbling block in the path of progress. He wrote in Young India in 1921 that the female sex is the nobler of the two, as it is the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith, and knowledge. "For all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none of me is so degrading, so shocking, or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity, the female sex, not the weaker sex," (CW. XXI: p. 105). He said that women have the right to participate in all the activities of life and like men have equal rights of freedom and liberty. "She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as a man is in his," (In his speech at Bhagini Samaj, Bombay, on February 1918).

To provide the equal treatment to women in political life, 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments implemented at the grassroots level to provide training and practice in the process of decision-making. The amendment provided reservation of seats and posts of chairperson for women in all democratic institutions at grassroots positions in the countryside known as Panchayat. This proved a historic and significant repercussion on the political process in rural India.

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: (a) the equality between women and men; (b) Women's right to the full-fledged development of their potentials; and (c) women's right to self representation and self-determination". In empowerment, the key indeed is 'power'

WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Politics is directly related to governance and management of any society. Political power is necessary to formulate policies, laws and order for a state. Women's political participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. The term of political

participation generally refers to those volunteer activities of members of a society, in the selection of rulers and the formation of public policy. 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.

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 effectivity 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 1952-2014

SR.NO.	YEARS	SEATS	WOMEN MPs in LOK SABHA
1	1952	499	22
2	1957	500	27
3	1962	503	34
4	1967	523	31
5	1971	521	22
6	1977	544	19
7	1980	544	28
8	1984	544	44
9	1989	517	27
10	1991	544	39
11	1996	54	39
12	1998	543	43
13	1999	543	49
14	2004	543	45
15	2009	543	59
16	2014	543	61

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: THE NUMBER OF WOMEN MPs IN THE RAJYA SABHA

Sr. No.	Years	Total Seats	No. of Women
1	1952	219	16
2	1957	237	18
3	1962	238	18
4	1967	240	20
5	1971	243	17
6	1977	244	25
7	1980	244	24
8	1985	244	28
9	1990	245	38
10	1996	223	20
11	1998	223	19
12	2004	245	27
13	2009	245	22
14	2014	245	29

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. An important point explored from the above cited table is that representation of women MPs in Rajya Sabha did not even come near the figure of thirty three percent.

Table 3 Number of Female Contestants in Lok Sabha Elections from 1957 -2014

Sr. NO	Year	Number of Male Contestants in Lok Sabha Elections	Number of female Contestants in Lok Sabha Elections
1	1957	1474	45
2	1962	1919	66
3	1967	2302	67
4	1971	2701	83
5	1977	2369	70
6	1980	4486	143
7	1984	5321	171
8	1989	5962	198
9	1991	1474	330
10	1996	1919	599
11	1998	2302	274
12	1999	2701	284
13	2004	2369	355
14	2009	4486	556
15	2014	5321	668

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

To get the political plunge, Lok Sabha seats are the jumping board for women candidates. Most of women jump into the fray not only along with but also against male candidates. The number of women contestants has risen between 1957 and 2015. So much so it has grown fifteen times. The increasing numbers of women contestants for Lok Sabha elections show the increasing interest of women for entry into the politics and they're making progress in numbers to be a dominating power in political decision-making. The highest

number of women contestants was only 668 in 2014 and the number of male contestants has always been a thousand.

Table 4 Number of Women in Union Council of Minister (1985-2014)

1985	15	1	3	0
1990	17	0	1	1
1995	12	1	4	1
1997	20	0	5	0
1998	21	0	3	0
2001	30	3	2	4
2004	28	1	6	0
2009	34	3	5	0
2014	23	6	1	0
1985	15	1	3	0
1990	17	0	1	1
1995	12	1	4	1
1997	20	0	5	0
1998	21	0	3	0
2001	30	3	2	4
2004	28	1	6	0
2009	34	3	5	0
2014	23	6	1	0

Source: - Kuldeep Fadia, Women Empowerment through Political Participation in India

The data in Table 4 shows the representation of women in the Union Council of Ministers between 1985 and 2014. The number of women has remained lower in Council of Ministers. Numbers of women cabinet ministers have been higher than past years of the NDA government.

Table 5 Number of Women who attained highly powerful portfolios in India

Portfolios (Independence to tail)	Number of Women
Chief Ministers	15
Governors	23
President	01
Vice President	0
Prime Minister	01
Chief Justice of India	0
Chief Election Commissioner	01
UPSC Chairperson	01
CAG	0

Greater participation of women in the political process is surely a pre-condition for economic and social emancipation of women. Even though a significantly greater number of women enjoy the right to vote in the country, yet only a few of them exercise real power. Though women have held the posts of President and Prime Minister and Chief Minister in the states of India, the country has only been at the 20th rank in the representation of women in Parliament and it is highlighted in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2012. Table 5 proves that, since independence, we have had 15 women chief ministers and 23 women governors in states. Only one woman has served as President of India but we never had a woman as

Vice-President or Chief Justice of India. Only one woman has got the opportunity to serve as Chief Election Commissioner and one served as a chairperson of the Union Public Service Commission. But no woman has served as a Comptroller and Auditor General in our country. All these facts are very much enlightening.

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.

Way Ahead

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.

References

1. Baseline Report, Women and Political Participation in India, accessed from http://www.iwraw-ap.org/aboutus/pdf/FPwomen_and_pol_pax.pdf on dated 22.01.2014.
2. Fadia K.: Women Empowerment through Political Participation in India, <http://www.iipa.org.in/New%20Folder/13--Kuldeep.pdf>
3. Gupta M, (2016): The Imbalanced Political Participation of Women in India, International Journal of Humanities and Management Sciences (IJHMS), Volume 4, Issue 1
4. Kably L, (2013): Women have only 11% representation in India's Parliament, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Women-have-only-11-representation-in-Indias-Parliament/articleshow/26384347.cms?referral=PM>
5. Niroj S, (Ed) (2000): Women in Indian Politics, Empowerment of Women through Political Participation, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi.
6. Pam R, "Women's Political Participation in India: An Agenda for Empowerment", in Pramila Kapur
7. Paul S and Anupama Mehta (2016): Where are the women? Political Power is still a male domain in India, <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/where-are-the-women-political-power-is-still-a-male-domain-in-india-2816568.html>
8. Rajaput Pam (Ed) (2000): Empowering the Indian Women, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broad Casting, Government of India.
9. Rath S, Role of Mahatma Gandhi in Women's Political Participation, accessed from <http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/women1.html>
10. Statistical reports of the Election Commission of India
11. United Nations (2005): Women and Elections, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/WomenAndElections.pdf>