



Issues of Women Representation and Women in Indian Parliament

Shreedhar Barki

Lecturer, Department of studies in Political Science, Shivagangotri, Davangere University, Davangere-577 002.

ABSTRACT

The framers of the Indian Constitution had assumed that the number of women would increase on its own, as the country developed. But the number of women members of Parliament has remained low in the more than six decades since Indian independence. While Indian women in politics have many global records to their credit, the country lags far behind the rest of the world when it comes to the participation of women in politics. Women are held back from entering politics because of social norms and deeply entrenched patriarchal mindsets. So women need a safe political environment which provides a level playing field for their participation.

KEYWORDS : Women representation in Indian Political System

Introduction: Less than one-in-five parliamentarians in the world today are women. It is a worrying statistic at this point of human development and impossible to justify. The political will to change this is simply lacking in most cases. In India there is huge gap between men and women in politics and low level of women's representation in Parliament because of social norms and deeply entrenched patriarchal mindsets and lack of safe political environment which provides a level playing field for their political participation. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the worldwide average of female representatives in national parliaments is 19.3 percent, which places India at the lower end of the scale. India is ranked 98 worldwide when it comes to participation of women in politics in recent time. The country's rank puts it far behind its neighbor, Pakistan, in the rankings developed by the IPU.

Constitutional and Governmental Provisions for Women

According to studies, women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. However in approximately 500 B.C., the status of women began to decline with the Smritis (esp. Manusmriti), and with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal Empire and Christianity later curtailing women's freedom and rights. In the Post Independent period the Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), and equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favor of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42).

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women came was passed in 2001. In 2010 March 9, one day after International Women's day, Rajya Sabha passed the Women's Reservation Bill requiring that 33% of seats in India's Parliament and state legislative bodies be reserved for women. Through the Panchayat Raj institutions, over a million women have actively entered political life in India. As per the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, all local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women. Also some states reserved 50% seats for women.

Through these constitutional provisions women played a dual role in Indian politics as voters and political representatives in the all elections held since Independence. Women are still under-represented in governance and decision-making positions. Even these constitutional provisions in India, participation and representation of women in politics is less than that of men because of social norms and deeply entrenched patriarchal mindsets and lack of safe political environment which provides a level playing field for their political participation.

Women's Movement and the Issue of Women Representation

The demand for greater representation of women in political institutions in India was not taken up in a systematic way until the setting up

of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) which published its report in 1976. Before this the focus of the growing women's movement had been on improving women's socio-economic position. The CSWI report suggested that women's representation in political institutions, especially at the grass-roots level, needed to be increased through a policy of reservation of seats for women.

Women in Indian Parliament

I think Indian women need to wait a long for equality in Parliament. While worldwide more women are calling the shots in parliaments and shaping laws, in India the growth in the number of women legislators has virtually been flat. There are only about 10 most popular women leaders today as examples to 600 million women in India at the national level. Majority of these are there because of their father, husband or another relative. So women are considered marginalized section in India. India's first Parliament had roughly 4.4 percent women in the lower house. Despite 15 general elections, the number in India is much lower. Even 66 years after India's independence from British colonialists, India the world's largest democracy ranks 105th in the world for women representation in politics, with only 61 women lawmakers in the 544-member Lok Sabha (as on September 09, 2013) and 28 women MPs out of a total of 243 (as on September 09, 2013) members in Rajya Sabha. India lags behind other nations, including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, in terms of women's political participation, data released by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) shows. Female representation in the Indian parliament ranks 105th in the world in comparison, China ranks 60th in the world and Bangladesh took the 65th spot. Nepal came in 20th and Pakistan 52nd of India's neighboring nations, only Sri Lanka and Myanmar rank lower on the list, at 129th and 134th respectively. India has much to celebrate with over one million elected women representatives in local self-governments, but the number of women in parliament is lower than the global average. The table below shows the representation of women in Parliament.

Table: 1: Women's Representation in Parliament

Year	Total Seats of Lok Sabha	Women in Lok Sabha	% of women in Lok Sabha	Total Seats of Rajya Sabha	Women in Rajya Sabha	% of women in Rajya Sabha
1952	499	22	4.4	219	16	7.3
1957	500	27	5.4	237	18	7.5
1962	503	34	6.8	238	18	7.6
1967	523	31	5.9	240	20	8.3
1971	521	22	4.2	243	17	7.0
1977	544	19	3.4	244	25	10.2
1980	544	28	7.9	244	24	9.8
1984	544	44	8.1	244	28	11.4
1989	517	27	5.3	245	24	9.7

1991	544	39	7.2	245	38	15.5
1996	543	39	7.2	223	20	9.0
1998	543	43	7.9	245	15	6.1
1999	543	49	9.0	245	19	7.8
2004	539	44	8.2	245	28	11.4
2009	544	61	11.21	243	28	11.52

Source: <http://www.indiastat.com>

Above table-1 shows that the percentage of women in Lok Sabha was the highest in 2009 when it touched the 11.21 percent mark. In Rajya Sabha of the parliament, it never exceeded more than 11.52 percent.

Women Representation in Governance

Representation of women at the top of the governing structures is low with 10 percent of seats compared with 90 percent representation made by men. There are 3 Governors/Lt.Governors/Administrators of 35 states and territories, and 2 Chief Ministers of 29 states and territories. Overall women occupy about 10 percent of all top political positions in India. Women's representation at the top of the governing structures is low with 10 percent of seats compared with 90 percent representation made by men. So women need a long march towards 50 percent. Institutions and programs are needed but men leaders like the Prime Minister (PM) also have to give a chance to women and put them on top 10 percent is too low. It will take much longer to have up stream flow of women leaders from grassroots to the top. Even many of the present district level women leaders, MLAs and MPs are relatives of men leaders. It is much easier and faster to put shining examples in the cabinet, ministers, commission members, Vice Chancellors, some professors, civil leaders at district levels, etc.

Conclusion

Representation of Women in the Indian parliament, while important on the grounds of social justice and legitimacy of the political system, does not easily translate into improved representation of women's various interests. And more important, we could explore the strategies that women employ to access the public sphere in the context of a patriarchal socio-political system. These women have been successful in subverting the boundaries of gender and in operating in a very aggressive male-dominated sphere. The problem here is, of course, precisely that these women are elite. The class from which most of these women come is perhaps the most important factor in their successful inclusion into the political system. We can, however, examine whether socio-political movements provide opportunities for women to use certain strategies that might be able to subvert the gender hierarchy in politics. And also affirmative action to happen-be it quotas in parliament or in political parties-mobilization of women around an integrated development agenda is critical.The formation of a caucus of women political leaders across party lines to enhance women's participation within political parties and to advocate for the Women's Reservation Bill as a collective voice.Urgent action is needed on the long pending Women's Reservation Bill.We need to give up the social norms and deeply entrenched patriarchal mindsets which are backing women from entering politics. More diverse participation in politics is not only good for women but is key for society and a strong democracy.Institutions and programs are needed but men leaders have to give a chance to women and put them on top it will take much longer to have up stream flow of women leaders from grassroots to the top.

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