



IS WOMEN'S VOICE REMAIN FAINT IN POLITICS?

Dr Ekta Dhariwal Director, Arihant Educational Group Kota (raj)

ABSTRACT Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concern of 21st century. Now a days the theme of gender equality and gender studies is very popular all over the globe. For the first time in the history women felt empowered enough to step forward and speak up for themselves. The MeeToo movement is the prominent proof of the fact that women finally decided not to endure the gender discrimination. This Paper attempts to analyse the status of Women in politics and highlights the issues and challenges that women face in politics. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. The study reveals that women are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society.

KEYWORDS : Women Empowerment (WE), Indian National Congress (INC), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Lower House (Lok Sabha), Cooperative Societies Act (CSA), Zila Parishad Act (ZPA), Gender inequality (GI)

1. INTRODUCTION

Citizens in each country and then all countries together must have an integrative vision of sustainable progress. More effective processes must be designed for people to participate in the shaping of policies that affect their future. The 21st century leader's role has to be to lead and facilitate the dialogue.

During the first 50 years after independence, the question of bringing women in the forefront through opportunities and capabilities has been considered from time to time. Our national plans started using the term "women's development" during the early period itself. Throughout various social and economic movements, especially, the cooperative movement, it was realized that women's participation in decision making was important.

In 1917, the first Indian women's deputation to demand women's political rights and their natural role in the contemplated reformed political set up, waited on Mr.E.S.Montagu, the then Secretary of State for India. The crux of their demand was that when franchise condition for India were being drawn up, "women be recognised as people". The deputation was composed of Sarojini Nadu as the leader, 14 women leaders drawn from all over the country. Continuous public meetings were held, and petitions and deputations were presented to prominent officials and organizations to support the vital demands of women such as for education, training skills, local self-government, social welfare etc. The Indian National Congress (INC), at its Kolkata Session in 1917, stated that women should not be disqualified on account of sex, that the same tests be applied to women as are applied to men with regards to franchise and eligibility to all elective bodies. [1]

2. POLITICAL HEADSHIPOF WOMEN

The status of women in recent years as a political actor has captured the imagination of spectators around the world. The growing number of female presidents and prime ministers as well as record proportion of women elected to national parliaments, suggested that women have made important gains in the political sphere and hold more positions and power than ever before. For example, the percentage of female British MPs has risen from 4% in the 1970s to 30% in 2017. Women have also received renewed focus from the media and political elites as voters and candidates. This is due to the increase salience of gender gap in the recent elections in many countries. [2]



Figure 1 - <https://www.google.com/search?q=women+in+politics+2019>

Although female voter turnout has been increasing across India—from 51 percent in 1980 to 66 percent in 2014—it remains low when compared with the adult population sex ratio in most states. The average representation of women MPs (12.15%) is higher than the national average of women MLAs in state assemblies, which stands at a dismal 9% while the numbers have increased over the years, the percentage of women that make up the Lok Sabha even today is not a figure to be proud of, especially when the ideal number should be a 33% at least. We still have a long way to go. [3]

The Economic Survey today called for more representation of women in decision making process in the country, saying their political participation has been low despite them accounting for 49 per cent of the population. The survey said there are developing countries like Rwanda which has more than 60 per cent women representatives in Parliament in 2017. Countries like Egypt, India, Brazil, Malaysia, Japan, Sri Lanka and Thailand have less than 15 per cent representation of women in Parliament, it added. Quoting an Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women report — Women in Politics 2017, the survey said Lok Sabha had 64 (11.8 percent of 542 MPs) and Rajya Sabha 27 (11 per cent of 245 MPs) women MPs. "As on October 2016, out of the total 4,118 MLAs across the country, only 9 per cent were women," it said. In India, between 2010 and 2017 women's share rose 1 percentage point in its Lower House (Lok Sabha). [4]

The discussion of women's empowerment cannot be complete without discussing the issue of sharing power and property. The first step towards women's empowerment was taken in the country immediately after independence when every adult women was given equal constitutional right to vote and to contest the elections. This right has been earned by the Indian women much before it was earned by the women in many other advanced countries. Immediately after independence, a large number of women were elected to assemblies and parliament.

Women Members in Lok Sabha

Loksabha	Years	Total No. Of Seats	No. Of women	Total %
First	1952-57	499	22	4.4
Second	1957-62	500	27	5.4
Third	1962-67	503	34	6.7
Fourth	1967-71	523	31	5.9
Fifth	1971-76	521	22	4.8
Sixth	1977-80	544	19	3.4
Seventh	1980-84	544	28	5.1
Eighth	1984-89	544	44	8.1
Ninth	1989-91	529	28	5.3
Tenth	1991-96	509	36	7.1
Eleventh	1996-98	537	34	6.3
Twelfth	1998-99	543		
Thirteenth	1999-04	543	42	7.8
Fourteenth	2004-09	543	59	10.87
Fifteenth	2009-14	543	69	12.45

Chart 1 : Political Status of Indian Women: Progress since independence

The Cooperative Societies Act (CSA) and the Zila Parishad Act (ZPA) of 1960 of Maharashtra can be cited as example in which it is mandatory to co-opt two lady members if there are no elected lady members. During 80's the concept of women's political participation evolved in a big way. Only towards the end of the century our planning strategies started talking about women's empowerment. Thus we find that in terms of government policies and programmes we have moved from the concept of women's development to women participation in the social and political affairs to women's empowerment. This can be considered as theoretical or attitudinal change in our perception of the role of women.



Figure 2 : <https://www.google.com/search?biw=1920&bih=969&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=r2KkXO7IK6rDz7sPveOduAk&q=participate+women%27s+in+politics+indian+news+in+newspapers&oq=participate+women>

3. LACK OF WOMEN LEADERS

Women are not new to leadership; think of Indira Gandhi or Queen Elizabeth. Think of the women who led the civil rights and education reform movements. But women are still outnumbered by men in the most prestigious positions, from Capitol Hill to the board room.

The presence of more women in politics has in turn raised questions about whether or not women makes a difference in terms of introducing new policy priorities proposals and outcomes. Despite the advances towards recognition of women’s political, economic and social equality with men during the twentieth century, there is a countering lack of women leaders to determine the political, economic and social progress of humanity.

Though woman have set up thousands of vibrant visionary organisations of their own which have had considerable success in influencing the policy of governments international financial institutions and development agencies over the last 30 yrs., and this success of women has to be saluted but in contract, women are largely absent from senior positions in the natural and international institutions that governs our lives.[5]

From the local to the global level, women’s leadership and political participation are restricted. Women are underrepresented as voters, as well as in leading positions, whether in elected office, the civil service, the private sector or academia. This occurs despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of change, and their right to participate equally in democratic governance.

Women face several obstacles to participating in political life. Structural barriers through discriminatory laws and institutions still limit women’s options to run for office. Capacity gaps mean women are less likely than men to have the education, contacts and resources needed to become effective leaders. [6]

- Their status is low where they:
- Are generally poorer than men because they earn less;
 - Are less educated;
 - Are increasingly becoming heads of households, with no resources to support their dependents;
 - Do not enjoy due acknowledgment for their labour contribution, particularly in agriculture,
 - Do not have decision making power. .
 - Lack of confidence and finance were the other major deterring factors that prevented women from entering politics.

4. GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender inequality extends across various facets of society. Political participation is often perceived as a key factor to rectify this situation. However, gender bias extends to electoral politics and representative governance as well. The relative difference between male and female voters is the key to understanding gender inequality in politics. While the female voter turnout has been steadily increasing, the number of female candidates fielded by parties has not increased. In 2016, India ranked 130 out of 146 in the Gender Inequality Index released by the UNDP. Gender inequality still exist and their positions are still weak when compared with their male counterparts. This measure of gender inequality considers the gap between men and women in political decision making at the highest levels.



Figure 3 : Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership <https://www.aauw.org/research/barriers-and-bias/>

Though India has ranked in top 20 countries worldwide for many years, with 9th best in 2013 – a score reflecting less gender inequality in India's political empowerment than Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, France and United Kingdom. [7] From the prime minister to chief ministers of various states, Indian voters have elected women to its state legislative assemblies and national parliament in large numbers for many decades.

Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% turnout for men. In 16 states of India, more women voted than men. A total of 260.6 million women exercised their right to vote in April–May 2014 elections for India's parliament.[8]

India passed 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1993, which provides for 33 per cent quotas for women's representation in the local self-government institutions. These Amendments were implemented in 1993.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the numerous international laws that exist there remain large disparities between men and women. As there is no lack of qualified women to fill leadership roles but still they are not recognized and given the rights to participate in politics like their male counterparts and have fewer opportunities to move up the ladder. Women earn the majority of university degrees at every level except for professional degrees, and more women are in the workforce today than ever before. Cultural attitudes toward women still prevail, especially concerning whether they should lead. Moreover, the growing number of policies that give women their rights are not implemented in reality. Women are represented in government all over the world in increasing numbers, yet they lag behind in positions of power and decision-making because our default image of a powerful person in society remains male. There must be something inherent in the system that’s working against them. Women are still underrepresented in the political sector whether it’s a president or a professor it is always “HE”.

RECOMMANDATION

- Women have to change their mode of approach to political participation, if they aspire for substantial representation in the legislative bodies.
- More and more women should take the primary membership of the parties and involve themselves in the local activities.
- Women from all strata of society should join political parties of their choice and correct the disparity in male-female ratio in the parties at the grassroot level, as well as in the executive bodies.
- Without proper representation of women in the legislative bodies and political participation of women at all levels, issues concerning women would remain neglected.
- Political status could be achieved only through hard and persistent work.

6. Constitutional and political action has to play a positive roll to solve the problem and reservation of 33 per cent seats in the legislative bodies for women, through an Act of Parliament has to be given.
7. Training for women political candidates to help build their capacities, and offer voter and civic education and sensitization campaigns on gender equality.
8. Encourage young men and women to engage in advocacy around making gender equality measures central to public policymaking.

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Dr. Ekta Dhariwal

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