



## GENDER EQUALITY AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN POLITICS:

## Social Science

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## ABSTRACT

Gender inequality and its prevention in all its aspects is one of the key concerns addressed by Indian government since independence. However, much has been achieved on this front till date. In patriarchal societies like India, generally men are associated with the works related to the outskirts and women with household chores due to different gender roles assigned to them on the basis of different nature and traits accorded to them by birth. Hence, on the basis of such differentiation, Politics has been regarded as a male oriented activity or profession. Therefore, ever since seventy years of independence, quite a few number of women could exercise their right as a political representative of the masses. As India is one of the largest democracies of the world and believes in ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, it is really interesting to find out whether it really follows the ways it preaches. The present study tries to understand the dynamics of access of right of political representation of women in so far history of general elections of Indian subcontinent. Results of 17th Lok Sabha elections reveal that women representation in Lok Sabha was at its peak in these polls. But their number is still quite inadequate as compared to their male counterparts. Therefore, effective efforts are needed in this regard to safeguard right to representation of women.

## KEYWORDS

women, politics, representation, right

## Introduction:

Women in India constitute approximately 48% of the whole sum of the population of the country as per the census reports of 2011, yet they have still remained a marginalised group and facing tremendous injustice due to the menace of gender inequality prevalent in society. Gender equality has been among one of the major millennium development goals of the governmental authorities since independence, yet much has been achieved at ground levels to curb out this menace. Although, this trend of gender gap and injustice is been continuously followed in all dimensions of life and in all sectors of life; management, corporate, medical, engineering etc, it is even more acutely visible in the profession of politics. However, the principle of equality is itself enshrined in the preamble of the law of the land i.e. the Constitution, huge differences are evident from the available facts highlighting gap in theory and practice, especially in the political arena. Therefore, there is an urgent need of the hour to bring the issue of women's equality to the forefront and mainstreaming the cause of women's equal rights within patriarchal societies of the Indian subcontinent. Also, women folk need to develop greater consciousness among themselves for their rights and welfare. However, if one analyses the role and participation of women at local levels i.e. the Panchayati raj system, the numbers show a positive trend but one cannot deny the prevalence of proxy women candidature at the grassroots level. Even worse is the case of the representation of women at national and state levels which is quite unsatisfactory in numbers as well as in access to political decision making. Till 2009, general elections, the percentage of women parliamentarians had not crossed a double digit, yet it is now increasing but that too at a slow pace. Therefore, certain more proactive and effective measures need to be undertaken by the present government to look into this matter. Moreover, the high desires and aspirations of women are wrapped up within the 108<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill relating to 33% reservation to women within national legislative body. A clean chit to this bill is an increasing high voltage demand of young aspiring, talented ladies who wish to seek career in politics, however, its repercussions will be clearly visible in the near future. The present article seeks to explore the status of access of right to representation of women at the national level in Indian politics as compared to their male counterparts since independence and provide valuable suggestions to improve the same in the upcoming electoral decades.

## Gender Inequality in India:

Gender inequality is an all pervasive phenomenon which covers multiple dimensions. It refers to the differential treatment meted out against women on the basis of the social construct i.e. gender. Inequality comprises within itself various dimensions like social, economic, political etc. Social equality refers to providing them basic facilities like food, health, education etc at par with men. Economic equality is defined as ensuring them equal treatment at their workplace i.e. appropriate arrangement for equal pay for equal work, pension, fair recruitment, promotion, maternity benefit leaves and other safety measures etc. Political equality refers to equal access to all political

rights, viz right to vote, right to representation, right to hold public office, right to criticise the government etc. Although, the architects of Indian Constitution ensured in this highest law of the land that equality must persist in Indian society in all its forms irrespective of caste, creed, colour, sex, place of birth etc, the worm of gender inequality cannot be scrapped out from the society since the later Vedic period. Women have been gradually and continuously viewed as its inevitable victims from cradle to grave due to forced life choices associated with them and static gender roles assigned to them as a result of their socialisation within families and society since birth. Women in India have been enjoying a prestigious position in society during ancient times. They had so much respectable status that even religious rituals were considered incomplete in her absence. But with the due course of time, their say in societal matters became invisible. Their status declined with the passage of time and they were confined within the four walls of homes and regarded to be eligible only for domestic work and child rearing and caring. To eliminate this menace of inequality within all its dimensions has remained among one of the top priorities of all ruling governments since independence. However, as far as implementation is concerned it still seems like a dream even after 70 yrs of Independence. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century India, women participation in all sectors like engineering, medicine, textiles, management etc has significantly improved, India still holds 95<sup>th</sup> position in Gender Inequality index (GII), although this has somewhat improved but it is still a long way ahead to accomplish its goals. It clearly indicates that India still desires a more participatory democracy for utmost progress and equitable and sustainable development of the nation and its people. Similar is the case with human development Index (H.D.I.) rank acquired by the nation. India constitutes 130<sup>th</sup> rank among 189 countries according to Human Development Reports released by United Nations Development program (UNDP) in 2018 which in itself is a matter of deep concern. The progress of the nation depends on the equitable development of its both sexes. They are like two wheels of a car, if one becomes dysfunctional, the other will collapse automatically. It will hamper balanced development of society and the nation as a whole, therefore gender equality is a significant prerequisite.

## Gender Equality in Politics:

Women inclusion is an essential prerequisite for efficacious growth of a democracy. However, the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity are enshrined in the Indian Constitution, it is rarely visible in practice. Although, there exist examples of certain very distinguished women freedom fighters like Bhikaji Cama, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Sucheta Kriplani etc who have contributed in India's freedom struggle. The country has also witnessed certain distinguished women leaders who have enjoyed highest positions within political arena such as Indira Gandhi, Pratibha Patil, Kiran Bedi, Sheela Dixit, Sushma Swaraj etc. However, these names are only few in Indian history. In modern scenario, women are struggling hard for exercising their right to representation in the lower house i.e. the Parliament especially the poor ones are almost negligible in this profession.

Moreover, Politics is generally considered a male dominated profession due to the gender roles attributed to both males and females. Therefore, women find it uneasy to make their way to politics. Moreover, this profession is regarded as a bog as whoever puts a leg into it has ended up in bafflement and destruction. Moreover besides the issue of equality, it is essential for a women to participate in the decision making process as their biological needs and concerns are highly different and urgent than their male counterparts. Also, women possess almost half of the population of the country, therefore, their contribution in formulation and implementation of policies is mandatory so that women issues can be dealt with effectively by including their concerns within political agenda to be discussed at the national level. Additionally, women tend to be more sensitive for their own well being and basic amenities viz. education, health care, human and child development, sanitation etc as compared to men who tend to focus more on technical issues and infrastructure building like construction of roads, railways, highways, airports, electricity dams etc. Since independence, very less number of women have been able to exercise their right to representation. Their numbers in percentage have not even reached a double digit before 2014. They lack adequate representation in both houses of Parliament since independence. This will become clear from the illustration below-

#### Representation of Women in Lok Sabha 1952-2019.

| Lok Sabha          | Total no. of seats | Women members who won | Total % of women who won |
|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| First (1952)       | 489                | 22                    | 4.4                      |
| Second (1957)      | 494                | 27                    | 5.4                      |
| Third (1962)       | 494                | 34                    | 6.7                      |
| Fourth (1967)      | 523                | 31                    | 5.9                      |
| Fifth (1971)       | 521                | 22                    | 4.2                      |
| Sixth (1977)       | 544                | 19                    | 3.4                      |
| Seventh (1980)     | 544                | 28                    | 5.1                      |
| Eighth (1984)      | 544                | 44                    | 8.1                      |
| Ninth (1989)       | 529                | 28                    | 5.3                      |
| Tenth (1991)       | 509                | 36                    | 7.0                      |
| Eleventh (1996)    | 541                | 40                    | 7.4                      |
| Twelfth (1998)     | 545                | 44                    | 8.0                      |
| Thirteenth (1999)  | 543                | 48                    | 8.8                      |
| Fourteenth (2004)  | 543                | 45                    | 8.1                      |
| Fifteenth (2009)   | 543                | 59                    | 10.9                     |
| Sixteenth (2014)   | 543                | 61                    | 11.2                     |
| Seventeenth (2019) | 543                | 78                    | 14.3                     |

Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

#### Representation of Women in Rajya Sabha:

| Year | Total Seats | No. of Women | % of Women |
|------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| 1952 | 219         | 16           | 7.3        |
| 1957 | 237         | 18           | 7.6        |
| 1962 | 238         | 18           | 7.6        |
| 1967 | 240         | 20           | 8.3        |
| 1971 | 243         | 17           | 7.0        |
| 1977 | 244         | 25           | 10.2       |
| 1980 | 244         | 24           | 9.8        |
| 1985 | 245         | 28           | 11.4       |
| 1990 | 223         | 38           | 15.5       |
| 1996 | 223         | 20           | 9.0        |
| 1998 | 245         | 19           | 8.6        |
| 2004 | 245         | 27           | 11.1       |
| 2009 | 245         | 22           | 8.97       |
| 2014 | 245         | 29           | 11.83      |
| 2019 | 238         | 26           | 10.92      |

Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

#### Impediments in exercising Right to Representation by Women:

- Power struggle: Political parties contest elections for the purpose of winning. They avoid taking risk if they lack confidence in any candidate. Often they believe that giving tickets to excessive women candidates may lead to defeat as they are suspicious of their winning capacity.
- Patriarchal mindset: People have patriarchal mindset due to which they do not allow women to involve in political domain.
- Domestic responsibilities: Women are so much engrossed in domestic chores that they do not even get time to involve in such

professions.

- Corruption: Politics is usually discredited for its corrupt practices which itself creates a mistrust and vacuum especially for women in this profession and presents its worse image that nobody wants to indulge in it.
- Violence: Prevalence of violence in this arena emerges as a fearful and disastrous career for women.
- Proxy candidature: Men belonging to political background tend to take political advantage of women in their homes by using quota at local level and they tend to win elections by filing the names of women in their homes who later on act as rubberstamps and all decisions are taken by their husbands or male counterparts.
- Family lineage: Since independence, Indian politics has been more prone to family lineage and red tapism which discourage many young talented women youth to enter into politics.
- Lack of financial support: Generally women belonging to elite class ponder into politics especially due to political background but the poor, destitute women lack any kind of financial help and support from parties to contest elections even if they wish to do so.
- Lack of awareness of procedure and their rights: Poor or even highly educated women often are unaware of their rights and duties towards the nation. They do not even know their contribution in this profession matters in any case.
- Mixed political culture: India, being a developing country tends to consist of men and women belonging to all the three types of cultures as advocated by Almond and Sydney Verba. Certain people are so evaluative that they go to the extent of criticising or appreciating the government for their policies. Some know that there is a government that is needed to govern the country and the third category is hardly aware about their rights and duties and hardly believe that their vote matters anyway.
- Suggestions:
- Zero tolerance policy towards corruption in recruitment to high political and administrative posts.
- Restructuring of political institutions at national level through ensuring reservation for women at the national level also and discussions and debates on the enactment of 108<sup>th</sup> Amendment bill.
- Valuing the work of women, changing mindset of people in patriarchal societies through awareness campaigns about women's worth and significance in societal development.
- Gender sensitisation missions to encourage equality should be launched periodically especially among the muslim families.
- It should be mandatory for political parties to impart a certain number of tickets to women candidates only during all the national and state elections.
- Non governmental organisations should help in creating self awareness for their rights especially among poor women and emphasis on making them self dependent.
- Certain more policy based decisions like triple talaq should be made and more emphasis should be made at their effective implementation.
- Encourage on minimum government and maximum governance to improve mass image of this profession to encourage women participation.
- Discourage proxy candidature through forming secret review committees to enable women to function fearlessly as sarpanches at Panchayat level.

#### Conclusion:

Women representation in politics is an essential prerequisite for ripening the fruits of democracy and its efficacious growth in India. Women have so far remained so subjugated and marginalised that they have lost all their self esteem and confidence to participate in public space. Over the years India has showcased its commitments towards gender equality in various international documents especially the millennium Development Goals and sustainable development goals which especially focus on women representation in Parliament and gender equality as one of its top agendas Both male and female share organic relationship while residing in this mortal world therefore the equal participation of both is necessary for equitable progress of the society and the nation as a whole. Moreover, constitutional and legal reforms are urgently required to restructure political institutions to bring women issues to the mainstream agenda and to make politics corruption free and gender friendly.

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