



GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN INDIAN POLITICS

D. N. YADAV

Associate Professor, Department Of Political Science
Purnea College Purnea.

ABSTRACT:

Gender Inequality based on social and gender equity are interdisciplinary and cross-national in nature. India, which is included in the world's largest democratic country, where participation in politics of women and men is a positive effort. The Indian Constitution guarantees the equal opportunity, yet the representation of women at legislative bodies and political participation of women at all levels is negligible. While the world average for women in Parliament stands at 23.1%, India is at the 145th place out of 193 countries with a mere 12% representation. Within SAARC, India is at the 5th position out of 8 countries. As compared to Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the scenario of women Members for Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) across all state in India is even worse. The average number of women contestants is only 6.7% and only 7.51% of women represent around half the population of India.

KEYWORDS: education policy, gender equality, India, women's political representation, political participation.

INTRODUCTION:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion,... birth or other status. But it is the most unfortunate that women have suffered inferior position to men in almost all societies of the world. The status of women in the family and society at large was no better than those of slaves and had been treated like ordinary chattels-incapable of enjoying any rights as human beings. They were condemned to perpetual subjugation to their fathers, husbands and guardians. Under the old Christian law, the woman was not even considered a 'person'. Thus, she had no right of a human and as such she could not join a college, she could not be enrolled as a medical practitioner or a lawyer for the same reason.

The Constitution of India (Article 15) attempts to remove gender inequalities based religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and enshrining fundamental rights for all citizens. It is unfortunate that women have not substantially availed of the constitutional provisions. Women still have only *de jure* rather than *de facto* access to these rights.

Even though one forgets about the gender parity at all levels, India fails to become a nation wherein women have proportional representation in legislation. Since independence, the Parliament hasn't seen a fair percentage of women members who can represent the almost half of the population of the nation. No one can deny the fact that greater participation of women in the political process would have positive impact on economic and social emancipation of women. As compared to Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the scenario of women Members for Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) across all states in India is even worse. The average number of women contestants is only 6.7% and only 7.51% of women

represent around half the population of India. This paper tries to analyse the facts related to representation of women in politics at state and national level. The researcher also tries to find out the India's position at world the level. The author has also made an attempt to highlight key issues and challenges and have tries to give some solutions so as to increase the women participation in Indian politics based on finding.

Political participation is generally defined as being a process through which individual performs a role in political life of the social order, has the occasion to take part in deciding what the common aim of that society are and the most excellent way of achieving these goals. Political participation refers to actual participation in these voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rules and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public policy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To analyze the representation of women at both the houses of parliament since independence.
- To analyze the representation of women at state legislative assembly.
- To compare the representation of women at parliament in India with that in the World.
- To figure out key challenges and to trace out the possible suggestions to increase the representation of women in Indian Politics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present study is primarily based on the secondary data. The relevant secondary data has been collected from Election Commission of India's report, newspaper articles, and research article and from various Government websites and reports.

Women Participation in Parliament:

Political representation of women in India, though in a small number, started with the freedom movement. Mahatma Gandhi played a significant role in women emancipation and was instrumental for encouraging political consciousness in the illiterate, poor women and making them to take part in the freedom movement.

Political representation may be defined as voluntary participation in political affairs through membership, voting and taking part in the elections and activities of the political parties, legislative bodies and/or politically motivated movements. The constitution of India gives equal right to both men and women to participate in political affairs and exercise their rights. Then too, numbers of women representatives are small in number. The successive election statistics show that the number of women who exercise their rights has increased since independence. Since the last two decades almost equal numbers of men and women have gone to the polling booths to vote.

Participation of Women in the Lok Sabha:

During the first three decades after independence (from 1951 to 1977), the average number of women contestant were 62 and average elected women were around 5 only. The sixth Lok Sabha in 1977 witnessed the smallest proportion of women in Parliament at mere 3.5 per cent. The number of women MPs increased from 22 in 1956 to 62 in 2009. (See Table 1)

Participation of Women in Lok-Sabha Since Independence							
Election year	Women Contestants		Women elected over total seats (%)		Women registered Electors over total registered electors (%)	Votes polled by women over total votes polled (%)	Votes polled by women over women registered electors (%)
	No.	%	No.	%			
1951					45		
1957	45	3	22	4.5	47.2	38.3	38.8
1962	66	3.3	31	6.3	47.3	39.8	46.6
1967	68	2.9	29	5.6	48	43.4	55.5
1971	61	2.2	29	5.6	47.7	42.3	49.1
1977	70	2.9	19	3.5	48	43.6	54.9
1980	143	3.1	28	5.3	47.9	43.1	51.2
1984	171	3.1	42	8.2	48.2	44.4	58.6
1985*	9	5	1	3.7	45.7	45.4	71.7
1984-85	171	3.1	43	7.9	48.04	44.46	59.25
1989	198	3.2	29	5.5	47.5	43.9	57.3
1991-92#	330	3.8	39	7.3	47.4	42.9	50.6
1996	599	4.3	40	7.4	47.7	44	53.4
1998	274	5.8	43	7.9	47.7	44.4	57.7
1999	284	6.1	49	9	47.7	44.3	55.6
2004	355	6.5	45	8.3	48	44.4	53.6
2009	556	6.9	59	10.9	47.7	45.8	55.8

Source: Election Commission of India

(Tabel-1): Participation of Women in Lok-Sabha Since Independence

Participation of Women in the Rajya Sabha:

In comparison with Lok Sabha, the figures at the Rajya Sabha are equally dismal. Table 2 depicts an overview of participation of women in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House). The participation of women in the Rajya Sabha has, in fact, never exceeded 11.9 per cent since Independence. The proportion of women Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Rajya Sabha has increased by only from 7.3% in 1954 to 11% percentage in 2009.

Women Members Elected / Nominated in Rajya Sabha								
Year	Women Members		Year	Women Members		Year	Women Members	
	No	%		No	%		No	%
1954	16	7.3	1976	24	9.8	1996	19	7.8
1956	20	8.6	1978	25	10.2	1998	19	7.8
1958	22	9.5	1980	29	11.9	1999	20	8.2
1960	24	10.2	1982	24	9.8	2000	22	9
1962	17	7.6	1984	24	9.8	2002	25	10.2
1964	21	8.8	1986	28	11.5	2004	28	11.4
1966	23	9.6	1986	28	11.5	2006	25	10.2

1968	22	9.2	1988	25	10.2	2008	24	9.8
1970	14	5.8	1990	24	9.8	2010	27	11

Source: Election Commission of India

(Tabel-2): Participation of Women in Rajya-Sabha since Independence

Why do we need more Women Representation in Parliament?

It is obvious that women politicians are more likely to concentrate on issues that matter more to women such as gender equality, safety and security, elderly care, children's welfare, women health care issues, etc... It seems pretty intuitive that there are some issues that are more important to women and affect them more. It also seems like common sense that women would be more likely to focus on these issues than men.

With continuous increase in gender-based violence against women such as rapes, physical abuse and violence, etc., it is argued that greater representation of women in Parliament may have controlling impact to it.

A lesser-known fact about female politicians is that, at the global level, they are generally less corrupt. Two studies (reference 1 and 2) have found a statistically significant correlation between a higher proportion of women in government and a lower level of corruption at both the national and local level.

KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES:

Lack of Education: One of the key challenges faced by women is lack of education which hinders their political involvement. Bridging this gap by providing quality education to women in the country is required. Awareness about their rights and privileges as mentioned in the Constitution can only be ensured once women are appropriately educated.

Gender Based Issues:The issue of gender-based violence (such as rapes, physical abuse, molestation, etc.) and provision of safety and security of women should also be addressed on a priority basis to promote gender equality in the social and political arenas.

Women Self-Empowerment: As late Ms. Geeta Mukherjee, the chairperson of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, for the scrutiny of the Women's Reservation Bill, said that the women put the blame on the patriarchal society. The men accept male domination to a certain extent but place the main responsibility for this vicious situation on the women themselves. The crux of the matter is that in politics a person who is not a member of a political party is a lay person politically. Thus, women self-empowerment can help women more than men.

Low Women Membership: Membership of women in the political parties is extremely low, which leads to the low representation of women at higher level. The number of women decision-making post of the parties is very few. Due to very small representation, women issues will obtusely be neglected or will not be taken on priority basis.

Male Dominancy in Politics: The Patriarchal system of our society has also influenced the political party leadership. The male dominated political parties are interested only in the female vote-bank. They are not interested to promote female membership in the party beyond a certain limit so that men could hold the maximum number of important positions.

Lack of Women Support to Women Contentment: Data reveals the fact that the highest winning percentage was 10.9% in 2009 at the Lok Sabha election, highest ever since independence. This implies that women contestants do not get much support by women vote bank. One of the facts is that the poor women are not much aware of the mainstream activities of their respective parties at all. On the other hand, many of them decide their votes as directed by male members of the family.

FINDINGS:

India as a welfare State is committed to the welfare and development of its people in general and of vulnerable sections in particular. Though Indian Constitution and various other legislative enactments and different Commissions established for women from time to time have made a number of efforts for the achievement of the objective of gender equality, yet in actual practice, due rights are denied to women, and they continue to be the victims of the male domination. Violations of the rights of the women continue in practice. Women are lacking in position and power and are overrepresented amongst the poor. As a result, women lack in political participation, educational achievements, thereby showing under-representation in employment spheres. It means that the planned efforts to emancipate women educationally, economically, and particularly politically did not yield the desired results over the decades after independence.

CONCLUSION:

The exclusion of women from political position affects the ability to challenge the deprivation of women in all its manifestation. Fair representation of women in politics at all level is the need of the hour. Women have to represent in politics to challenge the power which has excluded them since decades. Women who consist of almost half of the population need to be represented significantly in decision making bodies; this will be possible only when more number of women will take keen interest in representing weaker and deprived section of society. Lacking this parity and due to this exclusion, goal of social development with equity and justice cannot be achieved and as a result representation of women in Indian politics will farther be a way ahead.

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