

Status of Women in Indian Parliament

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Abstract

The development of any nation only depends on the status of women in the society. Fifty percent of the world's population comprises of women. In this male dominated society, women have always suffered. We need to make the women of our country strong socially, economically, and politically and we need to tell the men of our country about their wrongdoings. The position of women stays the same everywhere. In a country like India, on the hand the goddess is a women and on the other hand she is ill-treated, oppressed, suppressed, and exploited by the male of our society. The United Nations report states the "women constitutes half of the world population, perform nearly 2/3 work hours, receive the tenth of the world's income and own less than one – hundredth percent of the world's property." One of the major problem's which women are dealing today is with the political participation(space). Not all women are given the equal rights in the society to choose their desired candidate or stand in elections or go for election campaigns or even be associated with political parties.

According to former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, "no nation can stand proud if it discriminates against its women folk. Certainly no society can claim to be part of the modern civilized world unless it treats its women at par with men". Prof. Amritya Sen feels that, "the parameter of the success of development in any society could be measured with the fact that it has provided due space for gender empowerment."

This paper aims to examine the current laws and legislations related to political space of women along with other laws that are in favor of the same. It also takes into consideration various aspects such as history and the global scenario to deal with the political space of women in India ;that is the contribution of great leaders and countries like Greece and United Kingdom. it also talks about the problems faced by women in getting equal political space as men. It also addresses the various contributing factors such as lack of education and awareness, poverty, the institution of marriage and the mindset of the people. The researcher has adopted primary and secondary data in this paper.

Keywords: Women Rights, Political Participation(Space), Patriarchy, Law For Political Participation, Equality, Democracy, Empowerment.

Introduction:

"Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him."

-Mahatma Gandhi

Politics involves representation, policy, power and position with Government as its area. Political participation refers to the participation of individuals in the political process. It ensures that individuals

are able to take part in deciding the common goals of the society and the best ways of achieving it. Political participation means not merely exercising the right to vote, but also power sharing, decision making, policy making at all levels of governance of the State. Political participation refers to actual participation in these voluntary activities by which the members of the society share in selection of rules and formulation of public policy directly or indirectly.

The participation of women and their involvement in electoral process is an important maker of the maturity of Democracy in any country. It can be defined as equality and freedom with which women share political power with men. Despite various provisions in the constitution, women in the Indian subcontinent continue to be underrepresented in legislatures, both at the national and the state levels.

The number of female representatives in legislative bodies in the Centre and in most of the states of India is below 20%, reflecting a pan Indian gender exclusion from electoral participation and quality representation.

The Indian female participants in the electoral politics are mainly less because of political party competition, as national political parties and the regional political parties in the states discriminate not only in terms of seat allotments, but also in the party rank and file and chain of command. This is a major contributor to the party competition structure in the Indian politics that is ruled by inherent male dominance and a patriarchal mindset that excludes women from the electoral process. At the same time, even though India is considered to be a country which follows equality, the law makers or the people in the politics are to a certain extent influenced by the old-time rules and customs of male dominance and patriarchy especially when it comes to matters of making laws for the society and governing the people. This poses a problem when it comes to devising efficient solutions and also creates a dilemma as to what is more important; preserving something that has been practiced for long or making a change and trying methods which shall bring equality in the society. This can be addressed by going back to the origin.

The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, “It’s a girl.” –Shirley Chisholm

The roots of the present always lie in the past. So, the justification of the law relating to the political participation of the women can be appropriately scrutinized only by looking into the past history of any system. The way to shed some light on the women’s right of political participation is to look at its past at national as well as global level. If we see the international history of women’s political participation, the history of equal participation of women in the political fields in a few countries, it can be observed that in ancient Greece and Republican Rome as well as in few more democracies having emerged in Europe, women were completely not given voting rights by the end of the 18th century. In the United States of America, the women in this country were the first ones to fight for their right to vote in the whole world. If we see the Indian history, women have a record of suffering and exploitation.

The women have remained victims of violence and also, they have suffered various types of discrimination, exploitation and torture- both physical and mental not only in the men’s society but also within their own house by their family thereby disturbing the balance in the society. Before Independence, Local Self-Governments have existed in India since. Vedas, Puranas, Smritis and books on statecrafts and religious texts have vivid description of this. In the past, the Panchayati Raj system was confined to solve social problems with the help of five senior members of village

called 'Panchas'. The fact that women are capable of exhibiting extraordinary qualities of leadership is visible by the participation of many women during the national freedom movement.

Political Empowerment of Women in India-

Historically the status of Indian women has been influenced by their past. There is evidence to show that women in the vedic age got most honored positions in the society. They had the right to education and were free to remain unmarried and devote their whole life to pursuit of knowledge and self realization. The urge for equality on the part of Indian women started getting momentum during the colonial times. Noted social reformers and national leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Annie Besant, Sorojini Naidu and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar made selfless efforts to create awareness among women about their status and were quite successful in removing various social evils such as sati, child marriage, and polygamy. They also encouraged widow remarriage and women education. The reformers were successful in creating a base for development of women and their strive for equality. Consequently, women became more liberal and aware of various ways of life.

In India, feminist movement, though started late, showed a positive sign in enhancing the provisions to make women analyze their status and space in post independence era. The Non-co-operation movement of 1920, the Satyagraha Movement of 1930, the movement of 1942, all inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, helped women to establish their position of equality with men in the social and political spheres. During these movements, women suffered the same hardships as men did, whether it was in standing up to lathi charges by the police or imprisonment in jail for breaking intolerable laws. In fact these movements have emancipated women by enabling them to participate in political activities. In 1917 Annie Besant became the first female president of Indian national congress and Sorojini Naidu the first female governor of united provinces.

The most important event for constitutional rights of Indian women was the Indian women's deputation which met the Secretary for States for India in 1917 and for the first time made a clear demand regarding women's suffrage and pressed for adequate educational facilities. Since then there has been practically unanimity among all sections of public opinion in Indian political life that women should be given their due share in political life. The committee on the status of women in India recommended reservation of seats for women in municipalities and panchayats and the constitution of statutory women panchayats at the village level with autonomy and recourses of their own for the management and administration of welfare and development programmes for women and children. It also strongly recommended that political parties should adopt a policy of putting up some percentage of women candidates in the elections to parliament and state legislatures.

During the independence movement, women were visible and active as nationalists. Gandhi ji, in particular, was instrumental in creating space for women through his non-violence mode of protest, Gandhi's legendary salt march initially excluded women, but due to demands from women nationalists he later realized the power of women organizers at the local level. The period between the early 1940's and late 1970's saw an emergence of the Indian women's movement, but it was not until 1980's that the women's movement gained real momentum; India is one of the few countries in the world that has elected a women leader to head its Government. Indira Gandhi was among the very few women leaders in the world during her time in office. In 2007 India elected its first female President, Ms. Pratibha Patil, a move that was deemed a symbolic one towards a more equitable representation of women at the highest level of governance.

The principle of gender equality, enshrined in Indian Constitution, not only grants equality to women but also empowers the states to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. The government, through notable constitutional reforms like the 73rd and 74th amendments and the continued the administrative decentralization through programs like NRHM, has increased the political participation of marginalized groups, especially women. India is credited to have a women President, a women Prime Minister, a women Speaker and a women leader of opposition, who in all their capacities have proved their worth. Today, Indian women are not only represented in almost every field of national activity, but they are also making themselves felt in international affairs, occupying distinguished positions in the Government, as ministers, Governors of States and Ambassadors. But still political participation of women in Legislative Assemblies and Parliament is still quite low in India.

Women Membership in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha given below:

Year	Members in Lok Sabha			Members in Rajya Sabha		
	Total Members	Female	%	Total Members	Female	%
1952	499	22	4.41	219	16	7.31
1957	500	27	5.40	237	18	7.59
1962	503	34	6.76	238	18	7.56
1967	523	31	5.93	240	20	8.33
1971	521	22	4.22	243	17	7.00
1977	544	19	3.49	244	25	10.25
1980	544	28	5.15	244	24	9.84
1984	544	44	8.09	244	28	11.48
1989	517	27	5.22	245	24	9.80
1991	554	39	7.17	245	38	15.51
1996	543	39	7.18	223	19	8.52
1998	543	43	7.92	245	15	6.12
1999	543	44	9.00	245	19	7.80
2004	539	44	8.20	245	28	11.40
2009	543	58	10.60	245	22	8.98
2014	543	61	11.20	245	29	11.80
2019	543	78	14.36	245	32	13.06

Source :Election Commission of India website :www.eci.in

In the last two decades since the reservation for women in elected Panchayats was passed, many studies have been conducted to look at the impact of this policy. A survey conducted in 2008 yielded that women made up close to 50% of all the village councils across the India. The number of women representatives has certainly increased at the grassroots level; however, questions still remain regarding their decision-making power within the councils.

Female participation in politics, on the whole, has not only been numerically insignificant but restricted to known political families only. A few women who rose to the stature in the post-independence period

had strong political family backgrounds and connection. Moreover, women's agenda and gender oriented politics could never get encouraged due to several limitations, the most obvious being the lack of autonomous political space. While a number of other factors continue to hinder the parliamentary representation of women, the type of electrical system present in a country, the role and discipline of the political parties, the lack of previous political experience of women, the widespread perception that women are not competent leaders is probably the strongest barrier to greater participation of women in policy making. It persists in developed countries as well. Women leaders are evaluated more negatively than male leaders.

The Panchayat raj institutions, which hold the key to the election of three million peoples' representative every five years of which one million are women representative, are expected to act as important agents for local governance. But most of these women panchayat members are illiterate and ignorant. They are not in aware of their role and responsibility as punches and sarpanchs. They are not in a position to challenge patriarchy and dominance. The major decisions of their localities are taken by the male members of their families. Patriarchal structure of the society is not ready to accept women as leaders. The myth that women are not capable of governing a state or a country is still prevalent in our conservative society.

Although representation of women and members of the lower castes in Indian politics is rapidly changing, complexities of caste politics continue to govern representation. Most of local governments remain largely patriarchal and caste-based institutions, hindering inclusive governance

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