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RESEARCH ARTICLE

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA - AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Women themselves have become keenly aware of their rights and are spearheading movements across the country against all sorts of social evils. The most significant land mark in the journey is the historic 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, 1992 by the centre and its ratification by the states. These Constitution Amendments Acts reserved 33 per cent seats for women in the Panchayati Raj and Municipal Bodies, 2013 local elections government of India reserved women 50 per cent seats. In this historical context an attempt has been made here to examine the multi-dimensional facts of the participation of women in Indian politics. The preamble to the Constitutions of Indian mentions the nations resolved to secure to all its citizens. Justice - social, economic and political, Liberty- of through, expressions, belief, faith and worship, Equality-of status and opportunity and to promote among them all fraternity, assuring dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. To attain the above said goals the constitutions of India guarantees certain fundamental Rights to its citizens. Again the directive principals of state policy enunciated in the Constitutions embody the major policy goals of a welfare state. These Directive principals together with the fundamental Rights, guarantees a new social-political order.

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Introduction

Women occupy an important place in the socio-economic fabric of the society. They constitute one half of the segment of pluralism in India. According to 2011 census, women form over 49.5 per cent against a total population of 1,210 million, half of the populations are women. But the universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has right to take part in the government of his/her Country. The United Nations Economic and social council endorsed a target of decision-making by 1995. In spite of this globally women constitute only 10 per cent of legislative bodies and less in Parliamentary positions. In India, the post-independence period has seen many positive steps to improve the socio-economic status of women.

Constitutional Recognition

According to Article 15, the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth or any of them. Article 14 says that the state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. As per article 16, there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to empowerment to any office under the state.

To ensure equality, Article 39 says that the state shall in particular, direct, its policy towards securing:

1. That the citizen, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of Livelihood.

2. That the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to sub serve the common good.
3. That the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment.
4. That the record is equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
5. That the health and strength of workers, men and women , and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength
6. Those children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

Lastly Article 51A (e) imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. Thus the fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of state Policy are important institutions for attaining the objectives of Justice, Liberty and Equality. By adopting the Principle of adult franchise, the Constitutions of India seeks to establish a democratic republic by giving the adult population direct or indirect share in the Government.

Political Structure of Deferent Levels

Parliament consists of the President, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Making the president as an integral part of the parliament is a symptom of Parliamentary form of Government. The two houses of Parliament are: Lok Sabha also called as the Lower house and Rajya Sabha, also known as the Upper house.

Lok Sabha

Lok Sabha is the house of representative. The members of this house are the representative of the people elected directly by the voters through universal adult franchise. The representative is elected from all the States and Union Territories in the country. The number of members of Lok Sabha from each state is decided on the basis of the population of the state. The membership of Lok Sabha should not exceed 550. The present strength of members of Lok Sabha is 545. Out of them 530 have been elected from 28 States and 13 have been elected from 7 Union Territories. If the Anglo-Indian community is not represented, the President nominates two Anglo- Indians to Lok Sabha. 1952 women representation in Lok Sabha 22 members 4.4 per cent and 2009 general election 59 women representation in Lok Sabha 10.8 per cent only.

Rajya Sabha

The Lok Sabha is a House of representative whereas the Rajya Sabha is a federal house. It is also known as the upper house. There are members not exceeding 250. Out of them 238 members are elected indirectly by the elected members of state Legislative assemblies through proportional representation. The members of union territories are elected through the method prescribed by the parliament. The remaining 12 members are nominated by the President from the people who are popular in the fields of literature, arts, social service. The number of members from each state is decided on the population of the state. 1952 first general election 16 women elected in Rajya Sabha 7.3 per cent it is increased 9.1 per cent by 2009, 21 women representatives.

Zilla Parishad

The Zilla Parishad stands at the apex of the three-tier structure and is the highest developmental agency in state. Through the organisation of the of the Zilla Parishad differs in different state, general in consists of representatives of the Panchayat Samiti; all the member of the state Legislature and the parliament representing a part or whole of the district; all district level officers of the Medical, Public Health, Public Work, Engineering, Agriculture, Veterinary, Education, and other Developments. There is also provision for special representation of women, members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes provided they are not adequately represented in the normal course. The Collector or the Deputy Commissioner is also a member of the Zilla Parishad. He also acts as the Chairman of the Parishad.

Mandal Parishad

Under the three-tier Panchayat Raj system, the Grama Panchayat is at the lower level, the Zilla Parishat is at the upper level while the Mandal Parishat is at the middle level. There are 20-30 Grama Panchayats in the jurisdiction of Mandal Parishat. The Mandal Parishat strives to develop the village in its jurisdiction's The Mandal

Parishat area is divided into required number of territorial constituencies for the purpose of electing members directly. The members who are directly elected and the co-opted members remain in office for five years.

Grama Panchayat

A Grama Panchayat is a village level administrative unit. One Grama Panchayat is constituted for every village. Every village has a Grama Sabha. All the villagers who get their names enrolled in the electoral roll of that village are members of the Grama Sabha. The number of elected members in all Grama Panchayats is not uniform. The number of members depends on the village population. The number of elected members of the Grama Panchayat including the sarpanch should be based on the population of the village as per the latest census. The village is divided into wards for the purpose of election of the members. The term of office of Grama Panchayat members is 5 years. The sarpanch, upa-sarpanch and the members may resign their posts on any ground at any time.

REPRESENTATION IN RAJYA SABHA:

The presence of women in Rajya Sabha has been slightly higher, probably due to indirect elections nomination of some women members. The representation of women in Rajya Sabha has reached a "high" 11.5 per cent in 1984. It increased to 15.5 per cent in 1991, then it decreased to 6.1 per cent in 1998 and it increased to 11.4 per cent in 2004 and it decreased to 9.1 per cent by 2009. (Table-I) Nonetheless, this representation does not come close to the 33 per cent mark. The number of women contesting elections has always been it is interesting to note that the percentage of win-among women has been consistently more than those men.

Table -1 Women's Representation in Rajya Sabha

Year	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
1984	244	23	11.5
1989	245	24	9.8
1991	245	38	15.5
1996	223	24	9.0
1998	245	15	6.1
1999	245	19	7.8
2004	245	28	11.4
2009	232	21	9.1

Source: CSDS, Data Unit.

Women's Representation in Lok Sabha

The representation of women in Lok Sabha has basically remained stagnant. It reached a 'high' of 8.1 per cent in 1984, then it increased to 9.0 per cent in 1999 and declined to 8.2 per cent in 2004 and again increased to 10.8 per cent in 2009 (Table-2). This despite the fact that all major national parties in recent years have declared through their manifestos that they would implement 33 per cent reservation for women in all legislatures. The ugly scenes and stalemate over tabling the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament seems to be entangled in the web of male-dominated politics. Political parties have no unanimous stand on the bill.

Tables -2 Women's Representation in Lok Sabha

Year	Seats	No. of Women	% of Women
1952	499	22	4.4
1957	500	27	5.4
1962	503	34	6.8
1967	523	31	5.9
1971	521	22	4.2
1977	544	19	3.5
1980	544	28	5.1
1984	544	44	8.1
1989	517	27	5.2
1991	544	39	7.2
1996	543	39	7.2
1998	543	43	7.9
1999	543	49	9.0
2004	539	44	8.2
2009	544	59	10.8

Source: CSDS, Data Unit.

Women's Representation in Panchayat Raj Institutions in India

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 ushered in a new mass awakening and upsurge in the political scene of the entire country. This Act has introduced some innovative, progressive and bold provisions in matters of enhanced statutory representation to women, SC and STs. In fact the elections to the local bodies reflected the growing participation of these sections changing the political pattern at the village level and also at the semi-urban level. For a long time the Panchayat Raj institutions remained in the clutches of the traditional conservative rural leadership and consequently these institutions failed to play a positive and constructive role in the political process of the state.

Hence in this paper an attempt is made to highlight this new awareness at the grass root level and also the involvement of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions. Participation of women in the Panchayat Raj institutions is considered essential not only for ensuring political participation in the democratic process but also for realizing the developmental goals for women.

There is unanimity across the political spectrum that Panchayat Raj is an idea whose time has finally come "If India is not governed locally, it will soon be ungovernable" says Dr. L.C. Jain, the Gandhian former Planning Commission member.

The first step for the political empowerment of women has been initiated with 33 per cent of seats being reserved for women in the Panchayat Raj institutions under the amended Panchayat Raj Act. Now local self Government reserved for women 50per cent, will be local elections in 2013. Already over a million women are now functioning as elected members on the Councils of Panchayat Raj Institutions and municipal bodies. One third of these institutions are headed by women as Sarpanchs, Chairpersons, and Mayors etc. Table -3 give the scenario of women Chairpersons at Gram Panchayat Level.

Table -3 Women Chairpersons at Gram Panchayat Level

State / Uts	Women	Total Panchayats	Gram	%
Andhra Pradesh	15065	--		--
Arunachal Pradesh	-	--		---
Assam	745	2486		29. 97
Bihar	--	--		--
Goa	--	--		--
Gujarat	4435	13316		
Haryana	1986	5958		33. 33

Himachal Pradesh	1070	2922	36.62
Karnataka	1880	5640	33.33
Kerala	331	--	--
Madhya Pradesh	11953	30922	38.66
Maharashtra	9203	27603	33.34
Manipur	--	166	33.14
Orissa	1862	5261	35.39
Punjab	158	11582	1.36
Rajasthan	3064	9185	33.36
Tamil Nadu	4323	12584	34.35
Sikkim	1	148	0.68
Tripura	775	525	33.33
Uttar Pradesh	19822	58620	33.81
West Bengal	153	3310	4.62
A & Nis.	--	--	--
Chandigarh	--	--	--
D & N Haveli	4	11	36.36
Daman & Diu	6	10	60.00
Lakshadweep	--	--	--
Pondicherry	--	--	--
Total	76297	190249	40.10

Source: Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment: Statistics for Social Editors Conference. 1999.

It is true that women by virtue of this Amendment have acquired decision making rights at the grassroots level. However studies such as Recruitment and Posting of Women Teachers in Rural Areas 1995-97 (Department of Women's Studies) had portrayed that in some villages of district Rajgarh of Madhya Pradesh women sarpanches existed only for name sake. Their husbands took decision-making in all-important matters.

Conclusion:

The idea of reserving seats for women in Parliament and State Legislatures is an extension of the reform carried out in the composition of the local self governing institutions under the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts. Women were given one-third of the seats in these bodies which too were being dominated by men till then. Though it is premature at this stage to pronounce a categorical verdict on the success or otherwise of this experiment, it cannot be denied that the active involvement of women in the working of these bodies has had a salutary effect on public life. It has brought more women into nation building activity at the local level at least. As a result of the 73rd and 74th constitution amendment acts hundreds of thousands of women have entered into public offices in the rural and urban areas. Now there is a sense of involvement as well as commitment among the women on the issues related to them.

However, the participation of women at the decision making process has been very low. They are not adequately represented in the Parliament and the in the State legislatures. Political parties have failed to give adequate number of party tickets for elections to women. Even in party organizations they are always have a lesser strength? Women political participation and all these provide that Indian Women constituting half of the population have never been equal to men in terms of their representation. The present national level indications are also not encouraging for the future of political empowerment of women unless the pending constitution amendment bill providing one-third reservation of seats in Parliament and state legislatures is passed.

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