
Political Participation and Representation of Women in Indian Politics

Shabnam

Ph.D Research Scholar of Political Science Department in Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India

Corresponding Author: Shabnam, E-mail: shabnam74341@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Women constitute half of the world population, but they are the largest excluded category in almost all respects. Women's political participation has been recognized globally as an important measure to assess the status of women in any particular country. Their participation in political processes is important for strengthening democracy and for their struggle against marginalization, trivialization and oppression. Women's equal partnership in power structure, decision making process, and political participation in greater degree is the pre-requisite of consolidation of democracy. Political participation of women is of enormous use for planners and policy makers which help them to evolve better schemes and programs. Women participation in national level politics brings viewpoints which are essential for a holistic development of the society. The quantitative data on women participation is easy to measure and India has a long history of recording gender statistics for political participation. The challenge is to measure the actual participation of women and to filter out the problem of proxy participation which may be prevalent at the grass root level. Efforts are being undertaken to devise measures which would give a true picture of women's participation in national level politics.

KEYWORDS

Empowerment, political participation, Representation, Equality, Indian Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

"There is no chance of welfare of the world unless the condition of women improved"

(Swami Vivekanand)

Women's participation in political process is important for strengthening democracy and for their struggle against marginalization, trivialization and oppression. The women constituting half of the humanity are being marginalized all over the world. The constitution of the Republic of India ensures equality for women and men in every sphere of life and activity. The fundamental rights of the Indian Constitution specially mentions: "The state shall not discriminate against any citizens on grounds only religion, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them". Article 14 of the constitution ensures "equality before law" and Article 15 prohibits discrimination interlia of sex among other things. In spite of this, 73rd Constitutional Amendment gave constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions. It made obligatory on the part of all status to provide for the three-tier panchayati Raj Systems. The Amendments provides 33 percent seats reservation for women in all the three-tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Bihar Panchayati Raj Act 2006 provides 50 percent reservation for women and now in Odisha. Thus 73rd Amendment Act is a significant measure. It has been widely perceived a crucial step for empowering women and raised hopes for their increased participation in local level decision making structure also. Steps for decentralization of power till the grassroots level are positive steps in the changing scenario in which centralized state is replaced by the decentralized system. Thus the Seventy Third Amendment of the Indian Constitution is a remarkable step in the constitutional history of India that is taken by the Indian polity to decentralize the powers and empower the masses. Therefore, it has been widely felt that democratic decentralization is the only way out to meet the needs of the heterogeneous society like India. Political representation of women is deemed essential from the policy formulation and implementation perspective which is not possible in the normal electoral processes and therefore, reservation is suggested to enable women to contest in less competitive seats. People's participation is closely related to democracy and the theory of representation. The success of democracy depends upon the extent of participation specially at local level, In their study of six Nations Almond and Verba observe "the citizens unlike the subject is an active participant in the political input process the process by which political decision are made". The active political participation of women in India is a sin-quo-non for the success of the Indian democracy in 21st century. They are expected to play a vital role in politics from the grassroot level to the apex. So far as the global scenario, in this connection is concerned, women got their right to vote only in

this century. It was in 1920, in U.S.A.; 1928 in U.K.; 1944 in France, which was the prophet of liberty, equality and fraternity and a land of Rousseau, who advocated strongly for freedom and democracy. Even in Switzerland, women were deprived of their right to vote till 1971. The representation of women elected members in government offices displays a poor picture. In Britain, they are 6.9 percent in government offices, while in France and Singapore, they are respectively highest in U.S.A. with 33.1 percent, while in India, they are 5.8 percent, which was nearer to other developed countries. Thus, women got political liberty in this century, but, still they have to go for long to achieve their destination which is possible only by their political empowerment. Various steps have been taken to improve the status of women. The first concrete step was taken by the United Nation General Assembly in 1975, to declare this year as the International Year for Women and the subsequent ten years as the International Women Decade.

2. OBJECTIVES

This study tries:

1. To know the role of women in the political arena and their political consciousness.
2. To explore the historical status of women in Indian Politics.
3. To examine the theoretical perspective of the political participation.
4. To find out the status and representation of women in National Parliament.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ghazla Parveen, (2011) in her book "Empowerment of women in India" has highlighted the status and role of women in India and analyses the changing pattern of women in the context of socio-economic scenario. This study attempts towards women's empowerment and address the changing role of women in political process. It also covers the recommendation of various committees as regards to women's participation in panchayati raj institutions. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts giving impetus to women's development have also been analyzed.

G.S. Mehta, (2002) in his study "Participation of Women in the Panchayati Raj System" has examined various issues related to implementation pattern of reservation policy and its awareness among rural women, nature of socio-economic status of elected women, extent of participation of women pradhans and members in different activities and empowerment after elected as the representatives of PRIs.

Kiran Saxena's, in his book "Women and Politics" deals with the factors for the subordinate position of women in politics and some of the factors that imprison women to reach the top arc block. She declared lack of support by family and male counterparts, incomplete access to information, restricted access to training, fear of achievement, marriage, motherhood preordination of the family over vocation and stereotype insight etc. as the main factors. The author reveals that women all over the world are not satisfied with this position and exploring the ways to come out from this imposes.

Afsar Bono's, (2003) in the book "Women and Social Change" has attempted to make women conscious of their role and participation in politics and of the importance of their role and participation in political parties. Women's groups are continuously trying to train and mobilize them. The author further suggested that affirmative action is the need of hour in the form of quota/ reservation for women. It has briefly analyzed the role of women as voters and contestants.

P.V. Krishna, (2014) in her article "Participation and awareness of Elected Women Representatives in PRIs" focuses on the participation and awareness level of women representatives with special reference to PRIs in east Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh. The study consists of 144 elected women representatives. He found that most of women file their candidature due to pressure of their husband and political parties. It was further found that all the women representatives are aware of the objectives of PRIs. The study highlight in the study that majority of women were involved in the poverty Alleviation programmes. In the light of findings, it was suggested that the government should provide special provisions to encourage the women representatives.

Manju Rama, Chary, (2012) in her article "Women and Political Participation in India: A Historical Perspective" has discussed the theoretical and conceptual understanding of socio-economic and political problems of marginalized groups in society such as women repercussions of contemporary developments such as globalization on them.

Niroj Sinha's, (2000) book "Women in Indian politics" takes up the issues of women political participation in the context of gender and patriarchy. Participation of women in the political process has been very low and their presence in the legislatures and decision-making bodies is scarcely.

Kalpna Roy's, (2000) book "Women and Politics" depicts the story of discrimination against women at the hands of male-dominated society and wide-spread inequality in the so called new egalitarian Indian society. The author states that India's independence brought constitutional guarantees of justice, liberty, equality and dignity for women in the form of Fundamental Rights and directive Principles of State Policy. The author finds that despite their active participation in election, women have only a limited impact on political process.

Sandhya Rani Das in her article, "Empowerment of Women: A Holistic Approach" has discussed main reasons for the persistent low status of women in India. She has given parameters for their empowerment. She additionally argued that a holistic approach is needed for ensuring the social, economic, political, cultural development of women in India.

Barbara J. Nelson in her *Women and Politics World Wide* analyses the complexities of women's participation on the international national scale and from the feminist perspective surveys 43 countries chosen to represent a diversity of political system, level of economic growth and regions. The research absolutely demonstrates that no country do women have political status, assess or influence equal to that enjoyed by men.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is always carried out with assist of proper and well definite methodology. For the completion of the paper, historical and descriptive methods are used. The present study has been complete with the help of both the primary and the secondary sources. The primary sources comprise the text of census, where as the secondary data has been collected from pertinent books, journals, articles and newspaper etc.

5. WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: MEANING AND DEFINITION

Women's political participation is the genuine and equal participation of women in the governance. Women have to be in politics and power to participate as women and to modify the very nature of that power which prohibited them. Women who comprise of almost half of the population need to be represented in considerably in decision making bodies. Otherwise the goal of development cannot be attain. Gender fairness is very necessary for the development of any society.

Political participation is a method by which people acquire part in political activities. Implement voting rights during elections is one of the significant political activities of the people. So that women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but a necessary pre-condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making, the goal of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. Participation is an ingredient of every political system whether traditional or modern, democratic or totalitarian, large or small. Broadly speaking, there are three types of participation: Conventional participation, Unconventional participation and illegal participation. Earlier studies in political participation included only the electoral processes and the citizen's voting and campaigning as politically participatory activities. The ancient Greek democracies operated on the principles of direct participation and the modern democracies are operating on the principles of indirect participation through representative institutions. Direct and indirect participation of citizens in public affairs is the life of a participatory democracy. People's participation is closely related to democracy and the theory of representation. The success of democracy depends upon the extent of participation specially at local level, In their study of six Nations Almond and Verba observe "the citizen unlike the subject is an active participant in the political input process by which political decisions are made."

6. DEFINITIONS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation has been defined in many ways. Political participation has narrow as well as broader sense. For understand the meaning of political participation some definition has given by scholars under as follow:

- According to David Easton, "when the set of people living in exacting area get group decisions, then the participation of people in that decision making is called as political participation."
- According to Robert Daul, "the mentally participation in the governmental conclusion means political participation."
- According to H. McClosky, "Participation is the principle means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled."

- According to J.L. Woodward and F. Robert, political participation involves, “(i) Voting at the polls, (ii) Supporting possible pressure groups by being a member of them, (iii) Personally Communicating directly by legislators,, (iv) Participating in Political Party activity and thus acquiring a claim on legislators and (v) Engaging in habitual dissemination of Political opinions through word-of-mouth communications to other citizens.”
- J.W. Prothro defines political participation as “all behavior through which people directly express their political opinions.”
- Nie and Verba define political participation as “those legal activities by private citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of Government personnel and/or the actions they take.”
- Huntington and Nelson define political participation “simply as activity by private citizens designed to influence Government decision-making.”

7. EVOLUTION OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES:

Women in the Indian society were most degraded before the British rule. The first cultural contact of Indian society with Western World began in A.D. 1498 when Vasco De Gama anchored his ship at Kappad, near Calicut on Indian shore. But a more lasting impact came after 1820 with the British rule. The emancipation of Indian women starts from the British rule in India. It influenced Indian people much. The British organized the administrative machinery which required educated young men to support it. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first person to see the true potentialities of the English language. He saw that it could be used not only for the participation of the people in the administration and political life of the country but also to transform the social system which was so much responsible for the unhealthy conditions.” This in fact enhanced the hope of women’s education and their emancipation. “During this period, there were two major movements which affected the position of women. These were the social reform movement of the 20th century. Both these movements raised the question of equal status of women. The social reformers felt that the social evil could be eradicated by raising consciousness and making people sensitive to the injustice perpetuated on women.” The cause of female was first forcibly raised by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The other social reformers like R.N. Tagore, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and so on, supported him launched movements for the betterment of women.

In pre-independence India, women had come forward with their demand for voting rights as early as 1917, much before women in other parts of the world secured this right. Women bravely fought against colonialism as well as the patriarchal, traditional society. Margaret E. Cousins had advocated, with much enthusiasm, the granting of the same suffrage rights women as would be granted to the males. The cause was furthered by Saraladevi Chaudharani in her proposals before the Montague-Chelmsford team in December 1918.

The British Rule in the 18th Century brought in some degree of political orderliness, but the social structure, customs and practices remained unchanged. During 19th Century that the reform movement undertaken by enlightened thinkers and leaders of Indian society understood the importance of women’s participation that the status of Indian women started changing for better. Women gradually came into scene and played their role not only in changing history but also the society as a whole, through their efforts in different areas of work such as education, politics and freedom movement, women’s movement and social welfare. There are several women such as Mrs. Annie Besant, Dr. Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay were actively participated in the freedom movement. Therefore, Indian women have played an important role from the very beginning of Independence in different walks of life.

Women’s participation in the freedom struggle dates back to 1905. The Swadeshi movement, which was triggered by the British decision to partition Bengal in 1905, saw women’s entry into the movement. The Swadeshi movement also marked the formation of several women’s organizations. Mahila Shilpa Samiti (1906-1908) was clearly inspired by the Swadeshi movement. The National Council of women in India (NCWI) was formed in 1925, All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) in 1927. Although women’s associations could never decide their stand on the involvement of women in politics, the women in general were ultimately drawn into the vortex of the Freedom Struggle by Mahatma Gandhi. In the Bardoli satyagrah of 1928, the women gradually outnumbered men in political gatherings. Sardar Patel commented that in Stead-fastness of purpose, simplicity and purity, they were better than their men. Women who were strong leaders in the Independence movement were Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Basanti Devi, Sucheta Kriplani. The Salt Satyagraha launched by Gandhiji in March 1930, was extended to a mass campaign at the beginning of April 1930. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya met Gandhi and expressed her desired to be involved in the Satyagraha. Durgabai Deshmukh met the local leaders of Madras and suggested that they be included in the movement. After Gandhi was arrested, and however, Sarojini Naidu directed the Salt Satyagraha until her own arrested. The Women’s Indian Association, Periodical, ‘Stri Dharma,’ protested against women’s exclusion,

and women participated actively in mass demonstration through they did concentrated their efforts on picketing. In the North, Punjab, a massive procession of approximately five thousand like-minded women inaugurated the Civil Disobedience. During the Quit India Movement, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur played a leading role in organization processions and protest meetings. Rajkumari came from the royal family of Kapurthala state. Amrit Kaur was most active, during the Quit India Movement in 1942, she led processions day after day.

The Mountbatten Plan, which amongst other things provided for the partition of India, was accepted by the Muslim League on 9th June, 1947. The Indian Independence Act was passed by British Parliament on 8th July, 1947. This Act marked the end of British rule in India. Many prominent women served on this important work among who were Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Durgabai Deshmukh, Renuka Ray and Malati Chowdhury, Bareilly, a year later independence came at midnight on 14th August, 1947 with wild rejoicing. On 15th August, 1947 our country became independent.

Constitution of India was implemented on 26 January 1950, guarantees equal right to women, without any discrimination based on sex. Therefore, in this context our Constitution makers have taken considerably efforts to examine their position in society of the past and present exhaustively and then determined certain ways and means to equalize them in future to male and laid down certain special provisions in the Constitution. These provisions are following:

- (1) Equality before Law. (Art. 14)
- (2) Prohibition of discrimination on ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. (Art. 15)
- (3) Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. (Art. 16)
- (4) Protection of certain right regarding freedom of speech, movement, religion etc. (Art. 19)
- (5) Protection of life and personal liberty. (Art. 21)
- (6) Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases. (Art. 41)
- (7) Provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. (Art. 42.)

The Constitutional experts have constructed the Article with guiding principles that, all person and things similarly conditioned shall be treated alike both in privileged and liabilities imposed. The above principles guide us to conclude in the context of women's position before law equal to that of men. To bring change in the status of women in modern age our democrats have consider the system of law in the administration of justice giving equal rights, to be treated alike with men, so that the population of the country become self conscience and developed. Therefore, now-a-days the position of women even without any special privilege in politics is far better than of past, when there was no such law on Indian land. Therefore, Independent India has seen various reforms and programmes for the uplift of women of all communities.

8. WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION

In 1992, when the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments introduced local self-governance, it was an unparalleled step to consciously empower women as decision makers with 1/3rd of the seats reserved for women. In Indian constitution Article 243D (3) mentioned that not less than one third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and that such seats may be allotted by rotation of different constituencies in a Panchayat. The Constitutional amendment further lays down in Article 243-D (1) that seats shall be reserved for schedule caste and schedule tribes. Therefore, there has been substantial representation of women at local government levels but that varied from state to state. "There are 13.72 lakh elected women representatives (EWRs) in PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions) which constitute 44.2 per cent of total elected representatives (ERs) as on December, 2017". A further amendment to the Article was proposed in 2009, increasing to 50% but was not passed. Recently Constitutional Amendment, UPA government provides 50% reservation to women in Panchayats, ensure that it is implemented in the whole country. Some states that already follow 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj (PRIs) are Bihar, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

9. WOMEN IN 17TH LOK SABHA ELECTION

The 17th Lok Sabha has seen the highest ever numbers of women in parliament, 78 women have been elected from across the country. Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have elected the most number of women parliamentarians, 11 each. The lowest success rate for women candidates was in the 11th Lok Sabha in 1996, when 6.7%, or 40 of 599,

women contestants got elected. Now India stood 149 in a 2019 list of 193 countries ranked by percentage of elected women representatives in their national parliaments, trailing Pakistan, Bangladesh & Afghanistan. Therefore representation of women MPs in the 17th Lok Sabha-in terms of the total strength of the house has seen an improvement from 11% in 2014 to 14% in 2019. In 17th Lok Sabha election, there are 78 women members of parliament, has been elected, the highest since independence.

10. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENT SINCE 1952

LOK SABHA

Year	No. of Seats	No. of Women Members	Percentage of Women Members
1952	489	23	4.70
1957	494	27	5.46
1962	494	34	6.88
1967	515	31	6.01
1971	518	21	4.05
1977	542	19	3.50
1980	542	28	5.16
1984	508	42	8.26
1989	529	27	5.10
1991	521	39	7.4
1996	540	40	7.36
1998	543	43	7.91
1999	543	49	9.02
2004	542	45	8.29
2009	543	59	10.86
2014	543	65	11.98
2017	542	78	14.39

Source: Election Commission of India

The above table evidently reveals the share of women in the highest legislative body of the country from the 1952 to 2017. This table clearly shows that women's representation failed to reach even ten percent of the total seats till the fourteenth general election to Lok Sabha that the number of women crossed ten percent. Even in the 5th and the 16th Lok Sabhas the percentage is slightly above 10 percent. But recently 17th Lok Sabha election the percentage of women representation is highest ever before.

RAJYA SABHA

Year	No. of Women members	% of Women members	Year	No. of Women members	% of Women members
1952	15	6.94	1984	24	10.24
1954	17	7.79	1986	28	11.98
1956	20	8.62	1988	25	10.59
1958	22	9.52	1990	24	10.34
1960	24	10.52	1992	17	7.29
1962	18	7.62	1994	20	8.36
1964	21	8.97	1996	19	7.81
1966	23	9.82	1998	19	7.75
1968	22	9.64	2000	22	9.01
1970	14	5.85	2002	25	10.20
1972	18	7.40	2004	28	11.43
1974	18	7.53	2006	25	10.41
1976	24	10.16	2008	23	9.50
1978	25	10.24	2012	26	10.27
1980	29	11.98	2014	31	11.86
1982	24	10.16			

Source: Election Commission of India

The above table establishes that the scenario in Rajya Sabha is not different to Lok Sabha. The membership of women is consistently low and far from acceptable. In general picture, however, appears to be improved than the lower house.

11. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Liberal democracy is founded on reason, law and freedom of choice but the position of different social groups in the social and political space where power is located is not always equal in practice. This is particularly so in the case of women. The nature of society or state has a decisive impact on the extent and effectiveness of women's political presence and participation. The limited nature of female participation and representation in national decision making institutions has important consequences for women and for the legitimacy of the institutions. Where women constitute half the population in a political system which supports equality and where both women and men are legally eligible for political office, women participation should be equal to that of men. If this is not the case, it signifies deep flaws within the political system. As the time passed the position of women underwent changes in all sphere of life. The position of women in modern India has changed considerably. Several factors like women's education, reform movements, women participation in politics and many social legislations are responsible for the change in the day-today life of women in today's India.

All the trends indicate that women's representation in politics requires special consideration, and cannot be left to the forces that presently dominate our parties and government. Today, even the best of our female representations feel sidelined and powerless within their respective parties. Lack of confidence and finance were the other major deterring factors that prevented women from entering politics. The women who are elected are not always treated with due respect. Many elected women complained that their suggestions were not considered seriously nor were they consulted while decisions were being made. Some felt that their views were ignored only because they are women. Therefore, it is urgently required that we have take special measure measures to enhance women's political participation in ways that help them influence decision-making at all levels of our society and polity. Our democracy seriously flawed if it fails to yield adequate space to women.

12. CONCLUSION

In the end it can be said that although the political participation of women was an integral to Indian National movement; through a strange reversal and rapture independent India failed to ensure open and large participation of women in politics. Though, the Constitution of India provides many laws to ensure the better status of women in India. However, inequality and discrimination continue to persist in all sphere of public and private life. The most important manifestation of this imbalance is the insignificant participation of women in representative and decision making bodies. It becomes important that the Indian state ensures the social and political disparity come to an end. This can be made possible, most of all, through creating social awakening and consciousness in all sections of society in order to sensitize people about the importance of gender equality. It is the foremost duty of women legislators and women organization to contribute the uplift of women and make inclusive efforts of women in democratic progress.

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