



Representation of Women in Indian Politics

Nadira Nayeem^{1*}, Javeed Ahmad Bhat²

^{1*,2}Lovely Professional University-Delhi G.T Road Phagwara, 144411, India

Email: ²javeed.23652@lpu.co.in

Corresponding Email: ^{1*}nadiranayeem14@gmail.com

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Abstract: *Women political participation has been the highly contested issue since a long time. Women in the Indian Political System time and again have been underrepresented, although having a strong and enigmatic role in historical India. Very less has changed since independence concerning the representation of women in Indian political system. Indian political system has always been an affair of men and always favored men over women. The purpose of this study is to highlight the role women play in Indian political arena. Further it will talk about the women underrepresentation in Indian Parliament and what percentage they constitute in the lower house.*

Keywords: *Women, Representation, Political Participation, Underrepresentation, Gender Disparity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy, a word which defines Indian Political System as one of the largest and infamous democracies in the world. India is known for its democratic setup and political participation of people in elections. Given the numbers, the political representation of women is considerably low compared to men. Women not only outperformed men but played vital roles in constructive process of India since beginning but the role has never been acknowledged given the fact that India is a patriarchal society where women are considered subordinate to men. Even after the prominent names like Indira Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu and Vijayalakshmi Pandith, women have failed to create a niche in political spectrum. Similarly, goes with the political system of India where the political participation percentage of women is dismal compared to men. What is usually seen against the democratic laws of our country is that women from all shades and all walks of life don't get opportunity to represent their ideas, more so in that gender equality and advancement of women's rights "are at the root of achieving development goals, central to human rights achievement, and essential to successful and sustainable development outcomes. On the contrary, however, given their "proven abilities as leaders and agents of change", women's leadership and political participation are limited from local to global level. Usha Narayan (1999) claims, 'Political participation comprises the first and foremost step in that



direction'. Women representation in politics has always been a grey area which has concerned political ideologues and political expertise around the globe. Indian politics has always been a male club where women have played second fiddle to men. Women have not been regarded as the significant part of this arena which the recent elections are enough as a testimony (2014-2019). According to Census 2011, India has 48.20 females compared to 51.80 male population, which means 940 females to 1000 males. Even after the large number of female populations, almost equalent to men there are extremely low figures of women in political faction. The U.N. states that women hold "worlds" largest neglected class. In the pursuit for gender justice better political participation must be ensured and attained simultaneously. This is the duty of lawmakers to ensure the equal rights and participation for both the genders. The basic principle of democracy is to maintain peace and equality which directly refers to upliftment of masses which primarily include political participation and representation. In any Political system right from developed, developing and under developed countries, existence of women is very low. In many countries' women have undergone long battles to achieve the very basic right to vote and representation is out of the question. Women have always been a soft target from low political participation to political underrepresentation; Indian polity has always been an affair of men. Traditionally and logistically, Indian political system has favoured men over women and the impact of this dynastical tradition still exists. Psychologically, men think politics as their ancestral product which can be savoured by them alone which in any ways is an obstacle in the process and progress of democracy. Women Political representation in India as of now is a concern which needs to be addressed.

Women in contemporary Indian Politics

Contemporary Indian women's position is a historical deposit of various factors that work out their resolution to many kinds of issues unnerved by history that is dead and decaying. Women in modern India have been largely influenced by Western democratic and progressive ideology's reform and upliftment initiatives. Women played an instrumental role in politics. They not only contributed to freedom struggle but left deep imprints in the minds of people. Their voices were not only heard by persecutors but their sacrifices made them the glorified names in the history of India. Every freedom movement or conspiracy led by men against east India company equally constitute women in it. Protuberant names like Rani Lakshmi Bai, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Annie Besant, Sucheta Kriplani, Bhikaji Cama, and many other unsung female heroes who equally played their part in the freedom struggle made India a diversified nation where men and women together worked for a peaceful tomorrow. After conquering Independence, the role of women has enhanced incredibly. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit became the first ever president of United Nations General Assembly of free India and the race continued recording some noted names in the annals of Indian history. From Suchitra Kriplani, the first chief minister of an Indian state (Uttar Pradesh) to Indira Gandhi the first women Prime Minister of India. Indira Gandhi brought golden days to India, she was known to be the most fierce and strong women holding such a prestigious position with utmost grace and responsibility. She is known to be amongst the few Prime Ministers who not only shaped Indian political space but brought a revolution to the Indians subcontinent with her policy making and international tie-ups. Mother Teresa became the first Indian woman who was bestowed with a Nobel Prize for peace, the most prestigious award in the world. India saw Pratiba Patil as the first woman President and



Meera Kumar as the first speaker for Lok Sabha. The current political scenario of India talks about the fierce leaders like Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee and Mehboob Mufti who not only served states like TamilNadu, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir but proved their mettle by handling the state affairs better than a man can. Moreover, Mayawati, Sheila Dikshit, Anandiben Patel like leaders served the states of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Gujarat respectively. The cabinet in the 2019 election saw the first female finance minister in the form of Nirmala Sitaraman and the late Sushma Swaraj as the first lady to look after the external affairs. Both the ladies brought wonders to their respective fields. There are other female ministers in and out cabinet who served the central and state governments. In this research study, female ministers who played an incredible part in 2014 general elections have been mentioned along with their portfolio.

Gender Disparity and Indian Politics

Gender gaps have narrowed in different areas over the past two decades, including education, health, jobs, women's legal rights, and involvement in governance which needs to be addressed. However, given the change, there are still major disparities to varying degrees across countries. India is a signatory of all the above-mentioned international commitments. In achieving gender equality, however, India is far behind, particularly in terms of women's participation in political decision-making, among others. In India, female representation in the executive as well as parliament is extremely low, both in absolute numbers and internationally. In the entire post-independence period, only a minute change is observed. After the 2014 general elections, in the cabinet there were only 5 women ministers out of total 27 ministers. India's global rank is 88 in this regard as per the 'Women in Politics Map 2017', published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women. Out of ten legislators nine are men in India. In a country like India where politicians didn't stop from praising women and are always ready eager to talk and discuss about women rights and women empowerment. Their every speech comprises women but it is completely different in the ground where women participation and representation is a sad story. Talks erupt about the noted names and political legacies of strong and fierce figures like Sushma Swaraj, Indira Gandhi or Pratibha Patil, but when it comes to see the ground report men hardly encourage women to take up politics as a major or as an area of interest. Recent 2019 election spoke volumes about women representation, as per Inter-Parliamentary report women account for only 14% of the Indian Lok Sabha and 14.4% of Indian Rajya Sabha. Among its South Asian neighbours, India stood 149th among the 193 countries ranked by the percentage of elected women representatives in parliament falling behind Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal and dropping three places since 2018. Even after the enormous debates about women political representation it remains a grey area where work is hardly being done. Men remain tight lipped about this menace. And fact remains - women are under-represented in state and national policymaking process. The report submitted by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW), the state of representation of women in the country's decision-making process continues to be dismal, with only 9% women MLAs and MPs across the country in 2019. There is a great debate that is important to ponder on women's representation and involvement on different issues of social and public policy to enhance their confidence in governing institutions. The concept of virtuous governance, based universally accepted principles such as justice, accountability, openness, performance,



engagement and responsiveness, recognizes the role of women and men in different developmental initiatives and integrates the gender dimension to it. Local governance refers to the government level that is closest to the people. The local government actions affect both men and women in ways that are central to fulfilling their basic needs and this have a direct impact on the quality community's system. According to the International Union of Local In the World Declaration on Women in Local Governance, local authorities (IULA) tend to involve women in making choices regarding their living conditions and to use their knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development (IULA,1998). Women are constantly under-represented and usually stay away from taking the position of decision making than men. The further course of the situation is the fact that women are also under-represented at national level in government institutions and processes that apprise and impact decision-making at the national level.

Women And Reservation Bill

The obstacles for female politicians is very high as they tend to face numerous other societal and personal issues. India approbated the 73rd and the 74th amendments in the year 1994, the constitution granted 1/3 reservation to women in both urban and rural autonomous frames. Subsequently, Women Reservation Bill was introduced in 1996 which states reservation of 33% of seats in the lower house and the state legislative assemblies for women on a rotatory basis. After various discussions and debates the bill was passed in the upper house of the parliament in 2010 but failed in 2014 with the suspension of the 15th Lok Sabha. The bill is still not passed and continues to fail — 22 years since the original application. There is a great necessity of an affirmative action to improve the condition of women. The Bill is promising in its attempts to acknowledge the internal complexities within the category of women by recognizing their respective deprivation points derived from caste inequalities.

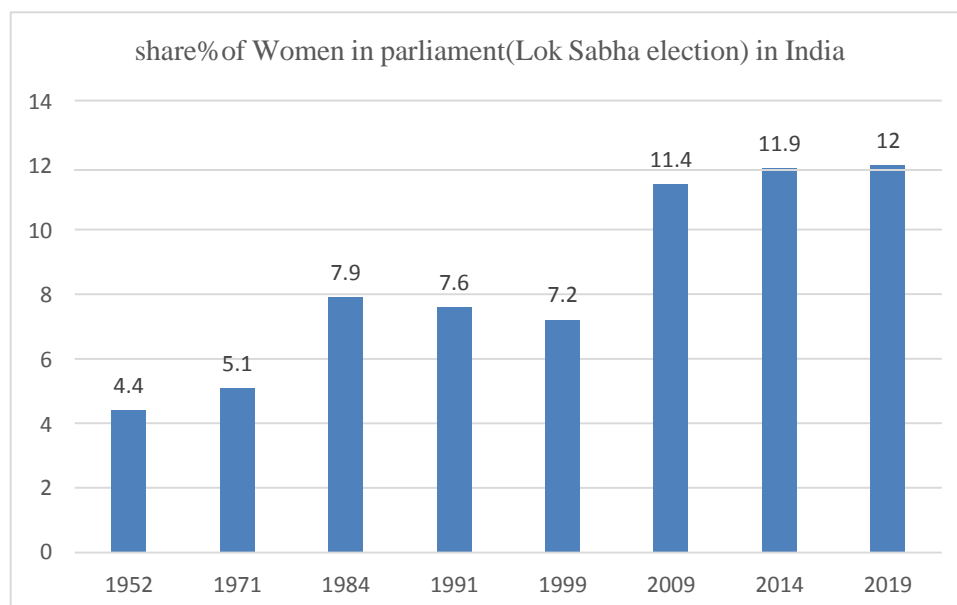
Overview of Existing Literature

Hemlata Swarup (1994) in her study says that the lives of women in India and around the world are constrained by what can be called as five Ps patriarchy, productive resources access meagreness, poverty, promotion progression, inadequacy and inability powerlessness and deficiency. It is a fact that the authentic social status and the actual level of political participation of women cannot be evaluated in seclusion. On the contrary, it is related to the socioeconomic conditions, political climate and disparities inherent in the traditional social system, its norms and values, its practices and rituals. In the case of women, their inferior status excluded them from active participation in the process of development (Singh 2014). Women in India are still not well represented in political system as members in Parliament and in legislative assemblies that would require them to be vigorous in the public sphere (Chhibber 2002). The marginalisation of Indian women from electoral process is mainly due the competition between various political parties, because the national and state parties in the country not differ only in terms of seat sharing in the electoral procedure, but also in the process of party positions, decision making but also in the several other party affairs. This could be credited to the large amount of the competition between political parties and edifice in the sub-continent of India that is overloaded by the inherent dominance of men and a patriarchal attitude that eliminates women from the electoral procedure (Rai 2011). The political participation of women in India is a multi-faceted phenomena and much-discussed

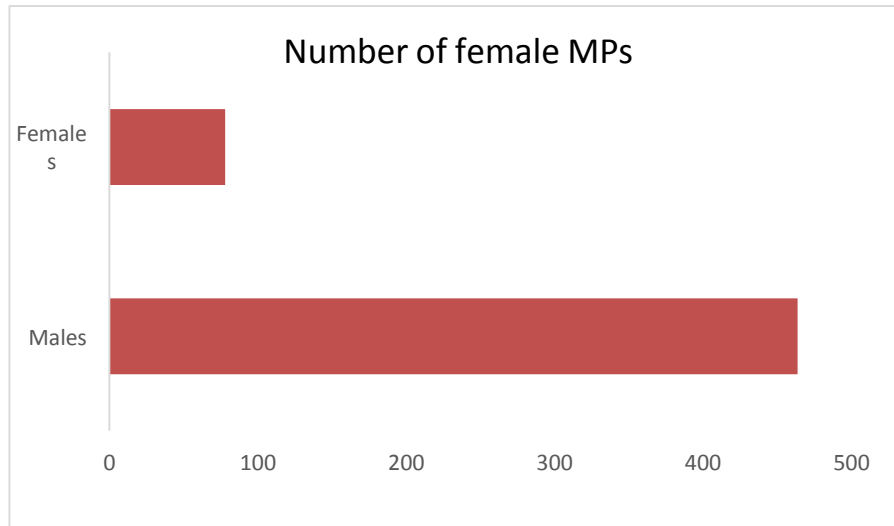
issue with a variety of views and thoughts. On one hand, some philosophers are of the view that the electoral process in India is troubled with male patriarchy and supremacy that act as obstructions to women participation. The lack of political awareness and poor representation of women in Indian Legislature is a result of segregation on gender basis (Agarwal, 1997). The Indian Constitution endowments universal suffrage to both women and men with equivalent rights to take part in electoral process, but the prevailing social structure, the societal discrimination in terms of career goals and male dominance in political organizations restrain women from exercising their democratic rights and impartial involvement in election process. These aspects also act as key blockades and obstacles in women's fair involvement in the Indian electoral system and in the larger issue of women's development as a whole. The absence of grave and eminent representation of women in key policy-making positions results in women's agenda not getting echoed and talked in public policies and programmes (Rai 2011).

Data Findings

Between the First Lok Sabha (1952) and the Sixteenth Lok Sabha (2019) women's representation has increased from 4.4 per cent to 12 per cent. Similar trend of low representation of women is also observed in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) during the entire period of post-independence era. Women's representation in Rajya Sabha has increased from 6.9 per cent in 1952 to 12 per cent in 2019. Again, these figures are substantially lower compared to the global average of 22.9 per cent and Asian average of 16.3 per cent of women representatives in Upper House. Considering the share of women (49.5%) in the total population of India, their representation in Parliament represents a skewed statistic, which does not benefit the world's largest democracy.



Source: Data compiled from the website of Parliament.
<http://164.100.47.194/Loksabha/Members/lokprev.aspx>



Data source: PRS legislative Research

- The total number of 716 women candidates contested the General Election. Out of which, 78 women MPs have been elected to the 17th Lok Sabha. In 2014, 62 women MPs were elected.
- The representation of women MPs in Lok Sabha is slowly improving from 5% in the 1st Lok Sabha to 14 % in the 17th Lok Sabha but it is not enough in consideration with the population rise of women.
- Although there is a slight increase in the percentage of women legislatures over the years, but it is still lower in comparison to some other countries. These include Rwanda (61%), South Africa (43%), UK (32%), USA (24%), Bangladesh (21%).

The Economic Survey that was held in 2017-2018 called for more representation of Women in decision and policy making process in India, stating that their political participation has been very low regardless of them accounting for 49% of the total population. The survey for 2017-2018 listed in parliament said factors such as domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural issues related to roles of women in society and lack of support from family and lack of education and awareness were among main reasons that prevented them from entering politics.

2. CONCLUSION

Female representation in Indian politics thus remains conflicted and suffers from deep structural and systematic difficulties. The many examples of female leadership in Indian politics do tell a story of female empowerment but celebrating this without looking deeper into existing disparities risks only half the story being told. To really address the gender disparity in Indian politics the focus instead needs to turn to the representation of women as decision-makers and policy makers – the keepers of real political power in the world's largest democracy. Indian democracy has always been celebrated and has been talk of the town but at



the same time pitied for less women representation. Participation in politics does not mean only right to vote, but also political awareness, the ability to take decisions and contesting elections. India cannot be empowered politically until it has a 50-50 representation of both men and women. The problem will not be solved by a minimum reservation and wide campaigning. The need of the hour is to recognize women rights and provide them opportunities to represent in any way possible. This will substantiate the political setup and simultaneously the constitution of the largest democracy in the world. The underrepresentation has taken a heavy toll on defining words like equality and secularism which are the backbones of Indian democracy. The diversification of India is what makes it different from the other countries of the world. A democracy will be brittle if its masses are subjected to political apartheid and denied political representation. Certainly, no democracy can be a real democracy when its people are discriminated on the basis of gender. So, in order to keep the spirit and gist of democracy alive the Indian state needs to look into the matter. This is the time to seriously talk about women representation in Indian political system which is surprisingly very low.

3. REFERENCES

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