

Women Political Leadership in India: Status and Challenges

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Abstract— *The advancement of a nation depends on gender equality. Women's successful involvement in politics may lead to gender equality. Women's status in society is uplifted when they participate actively in politics. It is also essential to a country's growth since it is only possible for real development to occur when men and women participate equally in positions of leadership. The truth is that women still lag significantly behind men in terms of global political participation, even though they make up 50% of the global population. In India women's participation as voters and campaigners has increased gradually but women are still under-represented in legislative bodies both at the national and state level and in political parties. Greater participation of women in decision-making positions in political parties and in government is a precondition for getting full support from women and for proper utilisation of women power. So we need to address the problem of low participation of women in leadership position in politics. In this regard, it is important to examine the actual status of women in political leadership position in India and challenges that women face in the political sphere.*

Keywords— *Gender equality, political leaders, sustainable development, Political Participation, Political Empowerment*

I. INTRODUCTION

Equal participation of men and women in politics is crucial for achieving sustainable development goal of United Nation by 2030. Women represent more than half of the world's population, but their representation in the parliament, political parties and other decision making bodies is very low. The Constitution of India promulgated in 1952 promised to secure social, economic and political justice and equal status and opportunity to all its citizens. So the point is where women hold half of the population and where both women and men are legally eligible for political office, women's participation in all areas of politics must be equal to that of men. But this is not the case in India and it indicates serious flaws in the political system.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments (1992) brought about significant changes in the political scenario of India with regard to women's reservation in political representation. One third of the seats for women in panchayats and in municipalities were reserved in these amendments. Women's Reservation bill that is 108th Amendment of the Constitution is a pending bill in India which proposes to reserve 33 per cent of all seats in the Lower House of Parliament of India, and in all state legislative assemblies for women. Women's Reservation Bill was passed in Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010. But Lok Sabha could not clear the bill due to resistance of some regional parties on certain provisions of the bill.

There are various challenges that women are facing to enter in politics. Women's opportunities to hold leadership position are restricted by structural problems like discriminatory party laws and institutions. Due to our social structure, women are less likely than men to possess the training, networks, and materials required to succeed as leaders. According to the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's engagement in politics, Women remain considerably underrepresented in politics around the globe, mainly due to discriminatory laws, customs, attitudes, and gender stereotypes; other obstacles include low levels of education, inadequate access to healthcare, and the disproportionate impact of poverty on women. While many improvements have been made through women reservation in local governance, challenges persist. The participation of women in politics has actually declined since the days of the freedom movement, both in quality and quantity. Democratic India is based on the principles of equality and its constitution guarantees in article 14 equality before law and equal protection to all citizens. Article 15 restricts discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth. Article 325 guarantees political equality and equal right to participation in political activities and article 326 guarantees right to vote. Women are not getting benefit from these constitutional provisions. The political climate in India is male oriented and is favourable to male participation. Women have been denied social, economic, civil and political right in many

spheres. Thus there is huge gap between constitutional guarantees and the actual representation of women in the political system in India. Though the government has attempted to empower women politically by providing for one-third reservation for women in local bodies, they have not been able to guarantee a non-discriminative or conducive environment for women to participate. However, this legislative intervention in higher political bodies i.e., state assemblies and parliament is absent. Thus it is necessary to examine the gender inequality in political participation and the reasons for the variation need to be studied.

Status of women political leadership in India.

The initiation of women involvement in politics has started during the Indian freedom movement

But the post Independence era did not show any concrete effort to include women in politics. Involvement of women in politics after Independence was restricted by different social norms. Participation of women in the politics has started to decline after Independence. Their involvement in politics and electoral competition was confined to familial connections rather than based on own interest and motivations to sincerely participate in politics. Even now, despite different constitutional provisions ensuring equality of gender, electoral participation of women especially in leadership position is very low. The necessity of proper representation of women in politics in India was considered seriously after the recommendation of the Committee (1976) on the Status of Women in India (CSWI). The CSWI report recommended that female participation in political institutions mainly at the grass-roots level must be increased through reservation at least 33% of seats for

women. In 1988, the National Perspective Plan for Women again recommended 33% quota for women at local level government. After this the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution in 1993 took place. This Act introduced 33% reservation of seats for women at panchayats and municipalities. In 1995 the question of reservations of seats in Parliament was raised. The proposed bill is yet to be passed by the Lok Sabha although it has been passed in the Rajya Sabha.

Women's Representation in Political Leadership Position

Membership in Parliament is essential for participating in the government as a minister. Although women's participation in politics as voters in elections has increased significantly, the data on women's representation in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and in state legislature says that the women representation in politics has remained low. The number of women candidates and MPs varies across states in India. The following table 1 presents the no of female MPs in Parliament in different years. Lack of position for women in these political institutions and decision making bodies has resulted in inequalities and discrimination against women. In the first general election (1952) women were only 4.41%. In the next general election it reached to 5.4%. In the sixth Lok Sabha election (1977) women's representation was very low at 3.49%. In the ninth Lok Sabha election 1989, the number of women M.Ps drastically dropped to 5.22% from 8.09% in the previous Lok Sabha. The number of women M.Ps touches 9.02 % in 1999 election, in 2009, 10.9 % and in 2014 election, 11.41 %.

Table: 1 Women Representation in Lok Sabha

Lok Sabha	Total Number of seats	No of women who won the election	% of total
First (1952)	489	22	4.4
Second (1957)	494	27	5.4
Third (1962)	494	34	6.7
Fourth (1967)	523	31	5.9
Fifth (1971)	521	22	4.2
Sixth (1977)	544	19	3.4
Seventh (1980)	544	28	5.1
Eighth (1984)	544	44	8.1
Ninth (1989)	529	28	5.3
Tenth (1991)	509	36	7
Eleventh (1996)	541	40	7.4

Twelfth (1998)	545	44	8
Thirteenth (1999)	543	48	8.8
Fourteenth (2004)	543	45	8.1
Fifteenth (2009)	543	59	10.9
Sixteenth (2014)	543	61	11.2

Source: Election Commission of India.

Women in India are still not well represented as members in Parliament that would help them to remain active in the public sphere. In 1952, they constituted 4.4% of the total

members in the lower house which has increased to around 11.2% in 2014, but it is still below the world average of 20%.

Table 2: Women's Representation in Rajya Sabha

Year	Total No of sheet	No of female who won	% of women in Rajya Sabha
First (1952)	219	16	7.3
Second (1957)	237	18	7.6
Third (1962)	238	18	7.6
Fourth (1967)	240	22	8.3
Fifth (1971)	243	22	7
Sixth (1977)	244	25	10.2
Seventh (1980)	244	24	9.8
Eighth (1984)	244	28	11.4
Ninth (1989)	245	24	9.8
Tenth(1991)	245	38	15.5
Eleventh (1996)	223	19	8.5
Twelfth (1998)	245	15	6.1
Thirteenth (1999)	245	19	7.7
Fourteenth (2005)	243	25	10.2
Fifteenth (2006)	242	24	9.9
Sixteenth (2009)	245	22	8.97
Seventeenth(2014)	241	24	9.95

Source: Election Commission of India.

Table -2 shows that, in Rajya Sabha percentage of female members was 7.3 in 1952 and rose to 15.5 percent in 1991, again decreased to 6 percent in 1998 and rose to 10.3 percent in 2005, again slightly declining to 9.9 percent in 2006, again declined to 8.97 in 2009 and slightly increased in 2014 to 9.95.

Women's political representation at the state level is presented in Table- 3. The data from the states shows that membership in the state legislatures is abnormally low.

Women members of Bihar have the highest proportion (13.99 percent) in 2010 followed by Madhya Pradesh (13.4 percent). Other states with relatively high proportions of women in the state Assemblies include Sikkim (12.50 percent), Haryana (10.00 percent) Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal (11.56 percent).

Table- 3: Women MLAs in different States of India

Sl No	Name of the State	Year	Total no of seats	Women member	%
1	Andhra Pradesh	2009	294	34	11.56
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2009	60	2	3.33
3	Assam	2011	126	14	11.11
4	Bihar	2010	243	34	13.99
5	Delhi	2013	70	3	4.29
6	Goa	2012	40	1	2.50
7	Gujarat	2012	182	16	8.79
8	Haryana	2009	90	9	10.00
9	Himachal Pradesh	2012	68	3	4.41
10	Jammu & Kashmir	2009	87	3	3.45
11	Jharkhand	2009	81	8	9.88
12	Karnataka	2013	224	6	2.68
13	Kerala	2011	140	7	5.00
14	Madhya Pradesh	2013	230	30	13.04
15	Maharashtra	2009	288	11	3.82
16	Manipur	2012	60	3	5.00
17	Meghalaya	2013	60	4	6.67
18	Mizoram	2013	40	0	0.00
19	Nagaland	2013	60	0	0.00
20	Orissa	2009	147	7	4.76
21	Punjab	2012	117	14	11.97
22	Pondicherry	2011	30	0	0.00
23	Sikkim	2009	32	4	12.50
24	Tamil Nadu	2011	234	17	7.26
25	Tripura	2013	60	5	8.33
26	Uttarakhand	2012	70	5	7.14
27	Uttar Pradesh	2012	403	35	8.6
28	West Bengal	2011	294	34	11.56

Sources: Election Commission of India

It is clear from the data that women's participation in the parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) as well as in the state legislatures is very low. Women's participation in the state legislature is even lower than their participation in the parliament.

Women's Representation in Local Politics

In India grass root level governments are municipalities or municipal corporations in urban areas and PRIs in rural areas. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of

1992 introduced new era for local bodies. One of the most important aspects of these amendments was the reservation of one-third of the total seats of local body elections for women. Studies have shown that the policy led to a remarkable increase in the political participation of women at the local level.

Challenges faced by women leaders

Women leaders in political sphere are facing many difficulties. Women's political representation is affected

by political obstacles. Absence of party supports is one of the main causes of women under-representation in political leadership position. Lack of financial support from party for female candidates, restricted access to political connections, more stringent norms for women and lack of availability to proper education systems, training for women's leadership and the pattern of the electoral system are causing great difficulties for female to enter and stay in political sphere. Moreover women are prevented from participating in politics for a variety of reasons like the present cultural value system, patriarchal society, where women are assumed to be less suitable in politics. Social structure of India forced women to stay in home and society believe that women's only duty is to manage home and take care of children. Another most significant barrier to women is illiteracy. They are unaware of their basic and political rights due to their lack of awareness. Poverty is also a significant barrier to women's political engagement. The rate of dropping out from school for girls is much higher than that of men. Women's thinking is shaped in such a way that they are ready to accept that they are in a lower class than males since this is the viewpoint of many in the society due to social and cultural standards. The caste system, or social class structure, is also a significant barrier. Because of their poverty, women from lower castes were unable to attend school. Many women were involved in low-paying jobs. In India, the majority of women do not have any land or property. They don't even get anything from their family assets. The poor health situation of women and limited access to health-care facilities is also a barrier to their participation. Daughters are not given the same feeding services as sons. The possibility of violence is also an obstacle to women's capacity to participate in politics. Women generally spend significantly more time than males for caring their homes and children

Empowerment of Indian women to overcome challenges of discrimination and violence is necessary. Empowerment is associated first with family support which is compromised by domestic violence. Poverty and illiteracy are two factors that inhibit women from running public office properly. The inability to understand properly panchayat raj norms reduces women's confidence to act as political leader. Support from government for women in politics is important here. There should be State support to encourage women to join political parties. These organizations should host seminars and training programmes, push more female to get nominated, and provide networking opportunities for female politicians. Increased political party support for women participation in politics is also necessary.

CONCLUSION

Women's engagement in politics is critical for successful governance. Women should have access to education, job, and finance to become empowered financially. Political party members should arrange awareness training, leadership training for future female leaders. It is important to pay attention to essential issues in order to increase women's empowerment chances. These include education and training programs, the prevention of numerous types of criminal and violent activities, the elimination of discriminatory treatment against them with respect to factors like race, caste, class, religious, gender, and socioeconomic class, and encouraging them to participate in politics. In recent times women have awareness to the fact that to break gender barriers and overcome social and political bias, women participation in the political process is essential. Further laws alone cannot bring social changes. There must be a change in the mindset of women about themselves. They must realize their constitutional rights to equality, health care, economic security, and access to education, employment opportunity, pay equality and political power. Only electoral quotas are not a solution. An environment should be created where women choose to come into power on their own right, on their own terms and in a position to build and sustain their constituencies. Then only gender equality in political participation will be achieved.

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