



POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IMPACT ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract

Women constitute almost half of the population. Yet they lag far behind men when it comes to participation in economy and politics. This has led to focus on engagement of women in development, popularly termed as 'women empowerment'. Women Empowerment is the most talked about theme today. The Prime Minister's call for 'beti bachao beti padhao' aims to empower women. In 1996, United Nations at The CEDAW Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action called for empowerment of women in social, economic and political lives for 'transparent and accountable government and administration, and sustainable development'. Millennium Development Goals formulated to bring about development especially in the developing and the under-developing countries aim at empowering women through reduction of poverty, eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, providing access reproductive health services, reduce maternal mortality rate, etc. However, it is important to understand what 'empowerment' means.

present paper aims to understand the 'term' empowerment. It aims at highlighting political representation of women in legislature as a tool of their empowerment. The second part of the paper focuses upon the engagement of Indian State with women's empowerment and throws a light on the status of women in India. In the third and the last section,

focus is placed upon the need for reservation by highlighting the difference in women's representation in Parliament and State Assemblies where there is no reservation and Panchayati Raj Institutions where reservation for women is between 33.3% to 50%.

Women Empowerment and the Indian State

Since independence the Indian State had tried to address the question of status and role of women and their empowerment through the NPC report (1947), CSWI (1974), Shramshakti or National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector (1988), National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) and National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001). The National Planning Committee Report on Woman's Role in Planned Economy (1947) envisioned the role of women in independent India. The report dealt with the question of place of women in the planned economy of India, including consideration of their socio-economic status, education status, civil rights, position within the family, etc. It addressed the need to remove all obstacles or handicaps in the way of realizing the equal status and opportunity of women in society. Despite the commitment to gender equality and constitutional guarantees, post independent India did not see much change in the power equation between men and women, as women issues focused mainly on women welfare and their maternal role (Khullar, 2005). The Committee on Status of Women in India (1974) addressed the inequalities persistent in the society in the post independent India. Its findings revealed that the process of development and planning had accentuated inequalities. The Shramshakti report highlighted the problems of inequality and discrimination faced by the vast majority of women who were involved in the unorganized sector.

Social Indicators, Census 2011

Sex Ratio (Female 1000 Males)	943
Sex Ratio (0-6 Years) (Female Children/1000 Male Children)	919
Total Literacy Rate (%)	74
Male (%)	82.1
Female (%)	65.5
Gender Gap in Literacy (%)	16.7

India ranks low in terms of sex ratio i.e. females per thousand males at 943 females per thousand males. In the 0-6 year population the sex ratio is 916 females per thousand males. This highlights the fact that India faces an acute shortage of females. In states like Delhi, Punjab, Sikkim and Haryana sex ratio is less than 900 females per thousand males.

Enrolment Ratio (in '000)

Levels	Boys	Girls	Polytechnics
Total Primary (I-V)	70845	64824	135669
Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	31828	27593	59421
Elementary (I-VIII)	102673	92417	195090
Secondary (IX-X)	16896	13702	30598
I-X	113952	243356	119569
Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	9835	7832	17667
I-XII	129404	113952	243356
Polytechnics	1094	9835	7832
Graduate	8095	5776	13871
Post Graduate	1027	806	1833
Ph.D	55	37	92

Source : Educational Statistics at Glance, 2011

Low sex ratio impacts female participation in education as well as employment. Women lag far behind when it comes to education. Only 65.5 females are literate as compared to 82.1% males. Across the various levels, girls lag behind boys in terms of enrolment. Infact, higher the level of education lesser is the presence of female. This can be attributed to high dropout rate among girls, which is due to various factors like poverty, early marriage, taking care of household, etc.

Women in Economy (All figures in percentage)

Work Participation Rate	
Total	39.8
Male	53.3
Female	32.6
Percentage of Female Main Workers to Total Female Population	
Female main workers	25.5
Cultivator	24
Agriculture Worker	41.1
Household Industry	5.7
Others	29.2

Source : Census, 2011

A glance at women in economy shows participation of women in economy as workers to be abysmal. Work Participation Rate (Total workers/total population \times 100) for female is 32.6% as compared to male which is 53.3%. Thus only 1/3rd females are working whereas more than 50% male population is employed. Almost 2/3rd women employed are working in organized sector, where they do not accrue any benefits.

Thus socio-economic profile of women in India show that women do not enjoy a high status. This is replicated in their political representation, which is poor where there is no reservation for women.

Political Representation of Women in India

Political representation has been a contentious issue both in India as well as in women's movement across the world. Political representation is a key to Political participation. Women representation in legislature has been a point of concern worldwide. The under representation of women not only effects their role in policy making but also impacts their capacity to negotiate and access to resources. The representation of women in political system is a good ten of i claim for democracy (Lovenduski, 2005).

The demand for political representation of women in India began much before independence. The first demands for political representation and suffrage in India were raised in

1917 by a delegation led by Snrojini Naidu and Margaret Cousins. Government of India Act.1935 provided for reservation of 41 seats for women at provincial level and limited reservation at central Level. While the National Planning Committee Report on Woman's Role in Planned Economy (1947) stated the need for civil rights like the right to franchise, freedom of association, work property, health and leisure. It noted that number of female was high; the number of representatives was very few. This was true for every political party. This not only represented a lack of political aspiration among women, but also indifference on part of the parties themselves. Thus, women were mobilized neither by political parties and organisations nor by women's organisations and women leaders. Meager attention was given to women's issues as a result, and the plight of rural women remained neglected in terms of political participation, the Committee noted that there was no correlation the level of women's participation and selection of women candidates (NPC, 1947). However, the Report was against providing reservation for women, stating that women could fight on equal terms with men, despite severe inequalities (NPC, 1947). The Committee on Status of Women in India Report (1974) came in the background of the World Conference in Beijing, which reiterated its faith to fairer representation to women in its political bodies. It recommended statutory women panchayats to ensure equal representation of women in villages. The CSWI report however maintained a stand against reservation despite dissents within the Committee The National Perspective Plan for Women (NPP), 1988-2000 suggested the 30 percent reservation for women's representation in government committees/commissions and local bodies.

Women in Lok Sabha, 1951-2014

Lok Sabha	Year	Total No. of seats	No. of Women Members elected	Percentage of women
1	1952	489	22	4.50
2	1957	494	27	5.47
3	1962	494	34	6.88

4	1967	523	31	5.93
5	1971	521	22	4.22
6	1977	544	19	3.49
7	1980	544	28	5.15
8	1984	544	44	8.09
9	1989	529	28	5.29
10	1991	509	36	7.07
11	1996	541	40	7.39
12	1998	545	44	8.07
13	1999	543	48	8.84
14	2004	543	45	8.29
15	2009	543	59	10.87
16	2014	543	62	11.42

Source: Election Commission of India

The reservation of seats and political participation of women has had an enormous impact on the lives of women, who were not allowed previously, in an arena, which was considered exclusively for men. While this has resulted in democratization of politics, it has led to greater access of women to power, mobility and resources.

Conclusion

Impact of women reservation on their representation is largely limited to panchayats, as can be observed from the gender difference in Parliament, where women representation has increased from 4.5 % to 11.4% in last 64 years and State Assemblies, where women representation is around 8%. Thus, political representation is conspicuously absent from political institutions where there is no reservation for women. Thus, comparison of women representation in political institutions with respect to reservation show that while reservation has led to increase in representation of women at grassroot level, its effect has not spilled to the state assembly and

Parliament where there is no such provision. This has also renewed the demand for women reservation in Parliament. However, the fact that it has taken years for the Women Reservation Bill to see the light of the day despite most of the political parties being committed to it challenges the patriarchal and hegemonic nature of the Indian State.

The contrasting study of women representation in absence of reservation also poses a challenge to the way empowerment is being defined. Instead of challenging the State, empowerment has become a tool to pay lip service by the State to issues of women rights. This has corroded the 'power' element of empowerment, and made it an empty rhetoric.

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