

Democracy and Political Participation of women in India

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Abstract:

Democracy is the most popular system of government in the contemporary world as it is based on the will of the people. Among South Asian nations, democracy for the first time was introduced in India. Democracy as a system of government was applied here after independence. There are four main foundations of democracy viz, liberty, equality, fraternity and justice wherein the most important foundation is 'equality'. The Indian constitution guarantees the equality of rights of men and women. It is evident that Indian constitution from the very beginning made provisions for the rights of men and women together.

Key words: Democracy, political participation, discrimination of women in politics, findings and suggestions.

Introduction:

In Indian democracy, Constitution has granted equal rights to women like men and several laws have been enacted by successive governments to realize the goal of equal representation in politics, but the ground reality is different in actual terms. In real life treatment to women is based on biases and discriminations. Definitely, the Indian politics does not stand for a fair status of women in practice.

Women's political rights in India, there exists a wide gap between theory and practice. Political participation identifies and accepts the equal distribution of liberty, status, dignity, opportunities and authority between men and women as its prime values. It is not enough if these values are only legally guaranteed and rest are only in the law books and the constitution, but are never actually practiced. Very often they have to face discrimination, injustice and dishonor in politics.

Objectives of the study:

1. To understand the discrimination of women in politics.
2. To analyze the Poor participation of Women in party politics.
3. To know the increasing violence and criminalization in politics.
4. To suggest measures for bring in women force in politics.

Methodology: This study is fully based on secondary data. The data was collected from books, magazines, research articles, newspapers, documents and websites.

Discrimination of Women in Political Aspects:

Participation of women in political structures implies the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of society to the role of women. In most societies men have always monopolized the political space. Until and unless marginalized sections of society which include women get into the political system of power, true democracy cannot be realized.

In the 1952 elections, many women contested and were given positions in the central and state cabinets or appointed as ambassadors and governors. However, after the initial enthusiasm, women's participation in the political process declined both as voters and contestants at no time has women's representation in Parliament and State Assemblies gone beyond 8 or 11 percent.

Table:

Women in Lok Sabha 1952-2009 :

Year	Total Seats	Women Members	Percentage to Total
1952	499	22	4.4
1957	500	27	5.4
1962	503	34	6.7
1967	523	31	5.9
1971	521	22	4.2
1977	544	19	3.4
1980	544	28	5.1
1984	544	44	8.1
1989	517	28	5.41
1991	544	36	6.61
1996	543	40	7.4
1998	543	44	8.1
1999	543	48	8.83
2004	543	45	8.28
2009	543	59	10.86

Source: Election Commission of India –The Hindu, 26th May 2009

Minimum Representation of Women in Lok Sabha

The representation of women in the Lok Sabha has been very poor since 1952 elections itself. For example, in 1952, there were 22 women Parliamentarians constituting only 4.4%, that is, out of a total of 499. In the 12th Lok Sabha, (1998) their number increased only to 44, that is out of the total strength of 543. In no previous elections, women's representation in the Parliament had exceeded this mark of [8.8%]. This means women who constitute 50% of the total population do not even get 10% of the representation in the Parliament. In the 13th and the 14th Lok Sabha Elections also representation of women is less than 10%. In the 15th Lok Sabha Elections representation of women is less than 11%. Two things are clear from the above table. (1) There is male domination in Indian politics and almost all political parties give very little participation to women in election despite their vocal support for 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in Parliament and Provincial Legislatures. (2) Women have made initiatives in political participation but they have not been accepted in politics. We can conclude from the analysis of the table above that women lag behind their male counterparts in politics even in 21st century

Poor participation of Women in party politics:

Not only in the legislative bodies but even within the framework of the political parties also the participation of women is very poor. Political parties are still male-dominated and unwilling to give sufficient representation to women. For example, in 2001 the Congress party had only 3 women in its 20-member working Committee. In the BJP working Committee, out of 75 members there were only 8 women, and in its 650 member National Council, there were only 150 women. The Communist Party [Marxists] had only 12 women in its 150 member National council, and 3 women in its 21 member National Executive. At the state and district levels also the picture of this representation is more or less the same. No political party is ready to give representation to women in proportion to their strength in the population.

Increasing Violence and criminalization in politics:

Political corruption, criminalization of politics, erosion of political values, disappearance of political decency, instability, lawlessness, terrorism and confusion have been increasing in our public life since 1980s. This state of confused political situation has discouraged women from taking active role in politics. Besides this the

cultural constructions of gender roles, in the absence of adequate support structures in the family and domestic responsibilities cannot completely be done away with, once she becomes a people's representatives.

Findings and Suggestions:

Women can be brought at par with men only after providing them in practice all social, economic and political equality and equal rights and through educational empowerment. It is necessary for the protection of women's human rights that every woman is educated, made aware of available legal rights and in practice she is provided with her due legal rights. Education is the best instrument of bringing awareness in any society and by including them in the mainstream of development. At the same time women have to come forward to struggle for their rights. In fact the struggle for women's rights is a struggle for human welfare and democracy.

Democracy could only be strengthened after women empowerment. The establishment of real democracy in India is only possible when we bring men and women at equal pedestal in social, economic and political spheres. Democracy in the family will establish social and economic democracy which can establish and empower in real terms true political democracy in the country.

Fundamentally India is a male dominant society where in all privileges were male oriented. Women were denied basic rights and discrimination is obvious in every walk of life. Indian women, by and large, educationally backward, socially and economically dependent, she was assured, the unique pride of the motherhood of man, and unparalleled influence in the shaping of the society, has had lived through suppression, exploration and ill treatment at the hands of man.

Despite governmental concern and official attention to these issues of women, a large proportion of women living in the country both, in the rural and urban areas, continue to experience and suffer from acute inequalities, deprivation, exploitation and violence.

Official and unofficial data collected and various indicators applied to assess the position of women, reveal that only a small number of women have been benefited from these measures. Majority of women will occupy a lower status than men in power, wealth and opportunity.

Therefore more efforts are made to bring in women force in policy-making and public life in the years to come. Women should also make use of the opportunities and provisions provided to them and try to come to the mainstream both in administration and public life. Moreover, it is the moral obligation of all including the Media, Educational Institutions, NGO, Governmental Machineries, Feminists, Political and Socio - Religious Leaders to fight injustice and uphold individual dignity.

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Table : Women in Lok Sabha(percent)