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Women under-representation in Parliament: A Challenge for the Democracy - The System of Representatives

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ABSTRACT

Social justice is the signature tune of our Constitution which we can perceive in each and every provision of this sacred document. Despite the principles of constitutionalism enriching the goals to be achieved by the working of the Constitution, women are still seriously underrepresented in the decisions-making positions. Gender inequality in the legislative bodies challenges the path of achieving women empowerment galvanized by equality and non-discrimination proclaimed by our Constitution. The political empowerment of women is a social process crucial to development and progress. The status of women is measured internationally by the participation of women in politics and their empowerment. In India, the political participation of women isn't remarkable compared with men. Democracy, a government, that works on the elected representation by the people is working for than seven decades with awfully underrepresented women. This is often the case in most of the countries across the globe. However, women's political participation now's quite encouraging compared to past times. nowadays it remains stronger than ever. To secure women's rightful place in society and to enable them to decide their own destiny and for the growth of genuine and sustainable democracy, women's participation in politics is essential. This will not only uplift their personality but will be helpful in a way to open the route for their social and economic empowerment. Their participation in public life will be helpful in solving many problems of society. Women's participation in decision-making is essential for women's interests to be incorporated into governance. Since women have different needs and perspectives on social and political issues, it is important to involve women in governments to incorporate all of the societal viewpoints in policy and decision-making processes thereby helping in the balanced working of the democracy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Free and sovereign India recognized adult franchise for all the citizens but till today it fails to correspond the need of women political participation which has the potency to fulfill the targets of women empowerment. Women political participation is only about the rights of casting vote

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for electing the representative but it is a wide area which also includes participation in decision making process, political activism, political consciousness and many other things to have a strong part in the political life of the nation. One of the valid indicators of the effective working and growth of democracy in any country of the world today in active women's participation in electoral competitions. Equality and freedom as expressly declared in our written constitution liberty and space to women within the democratic framework of electoral politics is one of the necessary factors of women empowerment. Despite this clear-cut constitutional mandate for providing equality to women in the public domain, including electoral politics, prejudice and discrimination against women in India continue even after 75 years of independence. This opens up important debates on organising politics around difference. The representation of women in the Lower House (Lok Sabha) of India's Parliament does not at all mirror the gender demographics of the country. The presence of women after 15 Lok Sabha elections is still only a notch above the halfway mark of the world average of 22 per cent representation of women, with India ranked 141 among 193 countries. Imbalanced representation of women exists not only in legislative bodies at national and state levels but also in the government's executive wing, not to speak of the judiciary. In this research while delving in the data available on the women representation of women in Parliament, I will try to find out the factors responsible for women underrepresentation in the decision making and legislative bodies and also to suggest the possible measures to advance the one important aspect of women empowerment i.e. Gender Representation in Parliament.

II. A GLIMPSE OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN THE GOVERNMENT

One of the valid indicators of the effective working and growth of democracy in any country of the world today in active women's participation in electoral competitions. Equality and freedom as expressly declared in our written constitution liberty and space to women within the democratic framework of electoral politics is one of the necessary factors of women empowerment. Despite this clear-cut constitutional mandate for providing equality to women in the public domain, including electoral politics, prejudice and discrimination against women in India continue even after 75 years of independence. This opens up important debates on organising politics around difference. The representation of women in the Lower House (Lok Sabha) of India's Parliament does not at all mirror the gender demographics of the country. The presence of women after 15 Lok Sabha elections is still only a notch above the halfway mark of the world average of 22 per cent representation of women, with India ranked 141 among 193 countries. Imbalanced representation of women exists not only in legislative bodies at national and state levels but also in the government's executive wing, not to speak of the

judiciary.

Only 35 out of 195 countries around the world have at least 33 % female representatives in national parliaments. According to the Democracy Index of 2020, 4 out of the top 5 most democratic countries in the world have more than 33 per cent female leaders in parliament; these countries are Norway, Iceland, Sweden, and New Zealand. Having a high percentage of women assuming roles as decision-makers has gone on to strengthen the overall functioning of democracies. Rwanda and Finland, for instance, can be seen as eye-openers with regard to how a shift in gender roles has provided an equal footing to both sexes and led to improvements in the functioning of both democracies.²

III. KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

India's poor record on women's representation is starkly revealed by the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2021, where it has slipped 28 places, ranking 140 among 156 countries. India is the third-worst performer in South Asia, only ahead of Pakistan and Afghanistan, behind Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Bhutan. The biggest slump is in the political empowerment sub-index, where India ranks 51, dropping from 18 last year.³

There are number of issues and reasons which are the ground of low representation of women in political life of our country.

1. Lack of Education: One of the key challenges faced by women is lack of education which hinders their political involvement. Bridging this gap by providing quality education to women in the country is required. Awareness about their rights and privileges as mentioned in the Constitution can only be ensured once women are appropriately educated.
2. Gender Based Issues: The issue of gender-based violence (such as rapes, physical abuse, molestation, etc.) and provision of safety and security of women should also be addressed on a priority basis to promote gender equality in the social and political arenas.
3. Women Self-Empowerment: As per late Ms. Geeta Mukherjee, the chairperson of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, for the scrutiny of the Women's Reservation Bill said

² Prathana Sen, *The Time has come for Women's Reservation Bill to be passed by the Parliament*, THE LEAFLET CONSTITUTION FIRST, (05-01-2022, 12:30 PM), <https://theleaflet.in/the-time-has-come-for-the-womens-reservation-bill-to-be-passed-by-parliament/>

³ Rajesh Trichur, *India's Failure to include enough women in Politics*, THE INTERPRETER, (05-05-2022, 4:15 PM) <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-s-failure-include-enough-women-politics>

that the women put the blame on the patriarchal society. The men accept male domination to a certain extent, but place the main responsibility for this vicious situation on the women themselves. The crux of the matter is that in politics a person who is not a member of a political party is a lay person politically. Thus women self-empowerment can help the women more than the men.

4. **Low Women Membership:** Membership of women in the political parties is extremely low, which leads to low representation of women at higher level. The number of women decision-making post of the parties is very less. Due to very small representation, women issues will obtusely be neglected or will not be taken on priority basis.
5. **Male Dominancy in Politics:** The Patriarchal system of our society has also influenced the political party leadership. The male dominated political parties are interested only in the female vote-bank. They are not interested to promote female membership in the party beyond a certain limit so that men could hold maximum number of important positions.
6. **Lack of Women Support to Women Contentment:** Data reveals the fact that the highest winning percentage was 8% in 2014 at Lok Sabha election, highest ever since independence. This implies that women contestants do not get much support by women vote bank. One of the facts is that, the poor women are not much aware of the mainstream activities of their respective parties at all. On the other hand many of them decide their votes as directed by male member of the family.⁴

IV. PARAMETERS OF WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Taking a broader perspective, the participation of women in politics not only comprises interactions in elections but also involves participation in trade unions, co-operatives, women's collectives, informal and formal politics. The term 'political participation' has been defined as a citizen's active involvement with public institutions, including voting, candidacy, campaigning, occupying political office and/or lobbying individually or through membership in a group (Arora, 1999; Gleason, 2001).

The assessment and efficacy of the electoral participation of women and their status compared to men in India are based on three parameters and markers.

1. First, participation in elections as evidence of women's turnout as voters.

⁴ DURGESH KUMAR DUBEY, SOCIAL INEQUALITIES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 97-108 (2017)

2. Women's political awareness, commitment and involvement in electoral politics, their autonomy and independence in electoral behaviour, plus choices and barriers that act as impediments for participating as active campaigners during elections.
3. Women's roles and efficiency in the electoral process and society's attitude to new political roles of women. This includes the extent of women's success as election candidates, the efficiency of the women's movement, the nature of leadership in political outfits and the effectiveness of campaigns for women's mobilisation, particularly on issues that directly concern them generally and specifically as women ministers in the central government.⁵

V. SUGGESTIONS

1. A law for women representation is definitely a need of the hour to respond the world's largest democracy which has barely begun to draw on half its pool of candidates.
2. Women education and political education is a necessary tool to achieve women representation in political field of the country.
3. To curb the gender related issues like rape, outraging the modesty of women, stalking and status of women in family structures many other issues that women face because of their gender need to be curbed to make them more confident and to participate equally in the social life.
4. At the school and college level women should be made aware of the political environment of the nation.
5. The women should participate at all levels in political party, start from having voting rights to taking political membership and representing the women at different level in political system.
6. Women should be motivated and trained by the women wing of different national and state level parties.
7. There is need for capacity building of prospective women leaders by imparting leadership training to the female members of political parties.
8. Women have to change their mode of approach to political participation, if they aspire for substantial representation in the legislative bodies.
9. In a pluralistic society like India, the media is now a major communication tool for political and social outfits to reach target groups and forge strategic alliances and to spread awareness on the issue.

⁵ Praveen Rai, *Women Participation in Electoral Politics in India Silent Feminization*, 37 SAR 58, 61-64 (2017).

VI. CONCLUSION

Like any other country for India too if the female sex of the country leads a secluded life how can the spirit of nationalism ignite and flourish in our country. It is in this light that we need to analyse at this point of time on the aspect of whether shortly we would make women empowerment in our country a myth or a reality. Though the governments have taken many steps in this direction but these raw steps are nugatory, therefore, there is an urgent need for policies that can ensure better representation of women in the country such as stricter policies and implementation of girl-child education in the country; initiatives from the recognised political parties to ensure that women receive a minimum agreed-upon representation in state assembly and parliamentary elections. Passage of Women Reservation Bill; safe political space for women and debunking of the stereotyped role of women. Extrapolating these aspects, women's political participation in India still has a long way to go, particularly at greater levels of government. However, with more female political leaders and more women practising their democratic rights, we may expect policy changes that will help India improve its political performance. Therefore, in the long run, it will itself have repercussions in our spirit of nationalism. This is so because, the true spirit of "We the people" then only reverberate in the minds of we, the Indians and thereby not only reshaping our sense of nationalism but also, at the same time, make women's involvement in politics and their political representation in the true sense of the term reality.
