

62 Years of Indian Women in Politics: Role & Participation

Abstract

Women's role in the Indian politics has been quite imperative through the time of movement for independence but their representation is not as impressive as it should be as compared to men. This article tries to convey how women have been part of the democracy in terms of their role in political parties and their participation in various elections across the ages. From pre-independence to post Indira Gandhi era women have struggled to make their way.

Keywords: Indian women, Indian Politics, Participation of women, Representation.

Introduction

Democracy involves human persons, men and women in equal roles. As against this basic concept of democracy what is normally seen is that women are barred from different walks of life, more visibly in Politics. The United Nations recognized that women aggregates "world's largest excluded category". For the fulfilment of true constitutional spirit shall be ensured better political participation. "In the struggle for gender justice", Usha Narayanan argues, "Political participation constitutes the first and foremost step in that direction."¹

In 1925 Mahatma Gandhi said, "Unless women of India do not take part in public life; there can be no salvation for the country". He further said, "As long as women do not come to public life and purify. We are not likely to attain Swaraj If we ever did". The recent constitutional amendment acts provided greater opportunities to women in various aspects of political life. It was Mahatma Gandhi's, plea to women to join the freedom struggle that a new era dawned He recognized the effect of women's participation in the freedom struggle. Gandhi appraised the women's potential for Satyagraha and social rehabilitation as higher than that of men. He said "In the nonviolent struggle, women have an advantage over men, for women are any day superior to men in their religious devotion. When she does a thing in the right spirit, she moves a mountain"²

A Transformation of the attitude to women was appreciated by the Gandhian view regarding women's role in the social revolution and reconstruction.

Indian women in Pre and post-independence era has participated in all kinds of political and non-political movements; their role and responsibilities in political parties have grown comprehensively from the leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur to Indira Gandhi, Najma Heptullah, Miera Kumar, Mayawati and many more who had drawn a roadmap for a lot of women to achieve a lot in this arena which is mainly male-dominated.

In this review, I propose to give a view of a various aspect of women's status and role in Indian politics. This study roughly sketches women's evolvment and retrogression during the era from 1947 to 2009. The content of this study resonates the way the women's movement or women leaders tried to express the issues and analyse extant conditions in relation to women. They could see that change was not uniform and that in all spheres women were unequal. The contents try to prove that Indian women were not willing to be passive spectators or victims of the process of transformation but intended to be active participants in directions of their own choice.

Review of Literature

Geraldine Forbes in his book "women in modern India" gives biographical sketches of women to illustrate that women did identify social work with political activity.

Vinod Tagra in her book "Jawaharlal Nehru and the status of women In India" shows an analytical study of the status of women in every field, whether it may be from home to the outside world. She also describes



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that how women are participating in every field a shoulder to shoulder along with men. The author also had illustrated on the participation of women in the political arena, where she is participating in both the skin; of a leader and as well as a voter.

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Pravin.N.Sheth born in 1932 he hails from Gujrat, Pravin Natawarlal Sheth has written many books and article over the social issues, mostly focused on the state of Gujarat, from Pokhran project to Narmada river, from Indias 50 years of independence to global terrorism. He passed away in 2011.

Pre-Independence Era

The 19th-century reform movement and the spread of education among the women had initiated the process of improving the status of women. However, this process was essentially limited to improving the position of women within the traditional family structure, prevalent social attitudes, particularly among the upper and middle classes continued to regard domestic life as women's sole occupation. Nevertheless, there were a minority of women who voluntarily participated in both social welfare and revolutionary movements. They were active in the cause of women's education, the welfare of the weaker section of society and relief of distress of persons during emergencies like floods, droughts, famines, etc.

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Post Independence Era

The dawn of independence and the framing of the new constitution, the question of political rights of women entered into a new phase. In independent India, women have taken important political and administrative position.

Constitution of India guarantees equal rights for women without any discrimination. The preamble of the constitution stipulates "we the people of do hereby adopt, enact and to give to ourselves this constitution, and resolves to secure to all citizen equality of status and opportunity and liberty of thought, expression, beside social economic and social justice and political justice" In fact, the dawn of independence marked the beginning of the Nehru era. Jawaharlal Nehru involved women in the important

task of framing the constitution of India which showed that he took a keen interest that women should be equal partners with men in this heavy responsibility and share in making provisions which would ensure an equitable treatment and an honoured place in the new emergent India. So, women like Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Renuka Ray and Durgabai Deshmukh were involved by Nehru in the most significant task of constitution-making.

Women in India, now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. The constitution of India guarantees to All Indian Women Equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the state (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), and equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the state in favor of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A)(e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the state for securing just and human conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 41).³

At a time when women hadn't officially strayed into the arena of active politics, Indira Gandhi managed to battle her way to the very top. The first and only female Prime Minister of our diverse and largely patriarchal society, Gandhi was on the receiving end of some of the most derogatory, misogynist comments from the old-scholars and even the public at large.⁴

The most important political women in India were Mrs Indira Gandhi (1917-1984) India's only women prime minister and the second women to head a state in the twentieth century.⁵ During Indira's tenure, India launched its nuclear program and the country's first "Peaceful" explosion in Pokhran happened in 1974. Other major decisions during her tenure include the nationalization of banks and the abolition of privy purses to the princes.⁶

Mrs Gandhi long tenure in office from 1966 to 1977 and 1980 to 1984, ended with her assassination on October 31, 1984. Her, one political defeat was in 1977 following her deceleration of an "Emergency" in India.

Participation of Women in the Electoral Process

Dr Ambedkar argues that for any popular democracy there are two pre-requisites, first the 'The Representation of Opinion' and second 'The Representation of Persons'. According to him, the government is one of the important fields for the exercise of individual capacities; therefore, it is in the interest of the people that no person as such should be denied the opportunity of actively participating in the process of government. Since independence women across social groups, religious communities and adivasi identity have been denied the opportunity to represent themselves in the Lok Sabha.

Throughout the ages of India's independence, women had participated in all movements conducted by political & non-political organizations. The Indian national congress had successfully showcased the women leaders who had

been the part of the leaders of the movement like Sarojini Naidu, sucheta kiplani and many of them.

The Indian National Congress, whose recent manifestoes have emphasized the development of education and employment opportunities for women has been sponsoring the largest number of women candidates at all elections but has still failed to reach its repeatedly stipulated target of 15 %. In spite of women being the undisputed leader of this party, women's position in the party hierarchy is not particularly impressive. Though the working committee contains three women out of a total of twenty-one and two out of four General Secretaries are women. It is evident that without pressure from the working committee, party committees in many states would exclude women. Women workers in the party complain of the denial of opportunities to develop or demonstrate their organizing ability and of neglect of women's demands by the leadership.⁷

Women's participation in politics has not been reflected in their record of success at elections. The number and percentage of successful women candidates for the Lok Sabha have been declining steadily from 33 (50.6%) in 1962 to 21(25.9%) in 1971. The sharp decline in 1971 is due to the number of independent women candidates most of whom were defeated. The increase in independent candidates was mainly due to the failure of the parties to sponsor an adequate number of women. It has generally been found that the success of women candidates depends upon party backing, the campaign strategy adopted and the personality including the family background of candidates. Since 1952, 212 women have served in the Lok Sabha, and 83 in the Rajya Sabha.

Post-1984

After Indira Gandhi, there were no such big women leaders in Indian politics that could make an impact on the peoples. However, with the emergence of local regional parties into the centre stage of the politics. There were many women leaders from Sushma Swaraj, Najma Heptullah, to Mayawati, Jayalalitha, Mamta Banerjee, Menaka Gandhi, Uma Bharti, Shiela Dixit, and many. These women's had marked their special impact amongst the society they come from. Many of them played their roles in different governments in a cabinet at different times. Mamta Banerjee, Menaka Gandhi, Uma Bharti were given the privilege to serve in the union cabinet. Whereas the leaders like J.Jayalalitha, Mayawati were

focused on the regional politics but their impact has been much deeper into the central government too. A lot of political parties started to believe that women's participation in the political activities is also as important as men.

To improve the role of women in the legislative cycle women were given reservation in the local version of the legislation the gram panchayat and Nagar Palika, it was proposed that women should be given a reservation of one-third of the total positions. However, this leads to the women's reservation bill what demands the reservation quota for women in the lower house of parliament to 33 percent; from the introduction of the bill in 1996 the bill has been through various discussions and amendments but is still pending for the approval.

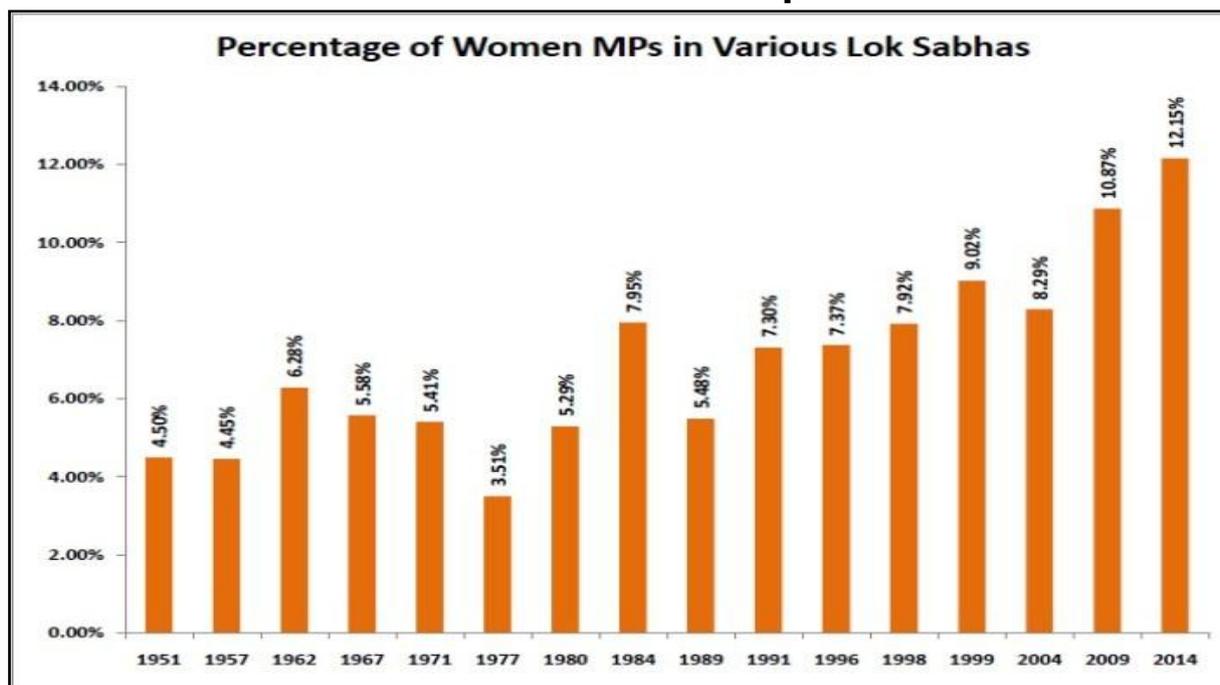
Though the women reservation bill is still pending in the parliament, these political parties are giving women leaders their quota for representation in the election to represent in the parliament and state elections.

Women as Representatives

Political participation may be defined as voluntary participation in political affairs through membership, voting and participating in the activities of the political parties, legislative bodies and/or politically motivated movements. The Constitution of India guarantees adult franchise and provides the framework for women to participate actively in politics. Article 15 of the constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth. It is a pity that women have not substantially availed of the constitutional provisions. The successive election statistics show that the number of women who exercise their franchise has increased from election to election. For the last two decades, almost equal numbers of men and women have gone to the polling booths to vote.

The number of women filing their nomination papers in any election, national or state, is only a fraction of the corresponding number of men. Some the withdraw at last moment and the contesting candidates become fewer in number. Ultimately the number of women winning elections will be so small that their percentage on the legislative body will be nominal.⁸

In the following table, we can see how women had represented in the Lok Sabha since independence till 2014.



Source: Data compiled by from the statistical reports of the Election Commission of India.

Conclusion

To conclude, we have seen women's participation in various movements in pre-independence era and since then it was no looking back for women. Many leaders like Indira Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, and many more of them have shown many ways to women across the nation. However, there has been a gradual increase in the number of representation of women in the Lok Sabha, many women representatives have played their parts at the different ages of their tenure but still there is a long way to go as far through the numbers are increasing when it comes to a cumulative to men it seems to be a small number. To overcome this situation of participation of women in low numbers women reservation bill will play a vital role to overcome these numbers and maintain a great democratic equilibrium the legislative bodies.

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Footnotes

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