

Women's Representation Through Quotas and the Role of Political Parties in India

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Abstract:- Ghettoization of women has prevented fuller development of their potential and hence optimum advancement of any country. Equal participation of women in the decision making can influence public policy for the purpose of redressing gender bias in the society. Reservation of one-third seats for women in the local self-governing institutions by the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts tried to rectify the situation but could not subdue their demand for equal participation in decision making. The lapsing of 108th and 112th Amendment Bills in the Lok Sabha speaks volumes about women's subordination and reluctance on the part of males in our society to share power with them. Fifteen states at present have increased the reservations in local self-governing bodies to 50%, Punjab joining them in 2017. The most prominent factor which impinges on women's effective participation in decision-making is the role played by the political parties. Main motive of the party is to win the seat and hence it gives ticket to the family which has been winning the seat for it. When the constituency becomes a reserved one, a female in the family is made to contest election. This has given rise to the problem of proxies. The majority of the real female cadre in the party fails to get nominated in elections. For meaningful representation of women in decision-making bodies quota must be introduced in the political parties as well.

Keywords:- Women, Reservations, Political Parties.

I. INTRODUCTION

No country can progress without the full cooperation of its human resource. Development and optimum utilization of its human resource is a must for the advancement of any country. Women, who constitute almost half the population of any country, have a key role in its development. Circumscribing the activities of women to the household chores and discrimination against them in all the spheres of life has prevented their fuller participation in different spheres of national life, limiting in turn its fuller development. The need is to fully utilize the potential of the better half of the society and to achieve this we need to ameliorate the lot of women.

Empathy not sympathy is the key to ameliorate the status of women and who else can better empathize with them than women themselves. Representation of women, in proportion to their numbers, in the government at all levels is necessary to

enable them to utilize the available mechanisms to improve the status of women. Their under representation in decision making process causes the framed rules and regulations to ignore their needs. Equal power sharing can enable them to redefine the political agenda and enunciate their interests. Equal participation of women in the decision making can influence public policy for the purpose of redressing gender bias in the society and providing a safe environment to them. Safety of women is a sine qua non for their active participation in any field, be it social, economic or political. Violence against women, whether inside home or outside it, is a malignant feature of our society. The rise in crimes against women is a testimony to this fact. This violence can cause physical, sexual or psychological harm to women and can curtail their liberty in private or public life. Gender bias which females face from birth till death further circumscribes their freedom.

Gender bias against females manifests in many forms. It can take the form of:

1. High female mortality rate especially among the female child despite reduction in the infant mortality;
2. Less benefits of improved health services to the female child due to the suspicious interplay of social, economic and cultural factors;
3. Under nutrition and reluctance to provide medical care to the girl child leading to anemia and stunting among them;
4. Bias in allocation of food that is available in the household;
5. Lack of special diet needed during pregnancy;
6. Low literacy;
7. Lack of training and employable skills among women;
8. Underestimation of the role played by women in the development process;
9. Sexual abuse;
10. Domestic violence;
11. Dowry harassment;
12. Harassment for want of sons;
13. In old age neglect and desertion.

Hence discrimination and violence against women is a constant feature in society and prevents women from contributing to their optimum potential in every sphere of life. For genuine efforts to redress gender bias and emancipate women, their equal representation in decision-making is a must.

II. GOVERNMENT EFFORTS AT WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND QUOTAS FOR WOMEN

The 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts tried to rectify the situation. These amendments mandated reservation of one-third seats in local self-governing bodies for women. There is also one third reservation for women in position of chairpersons of these local bodies. Through these provisions a very active role for women in local governance is envisaged as compared to governance at the state and national levels. The 108th Amendment Bill or the Women Empowerment Bill (1996) did try to repeat this provision at the state and the union levels but failed to get passed in the Lok Sabha and lapsed. This explains the paucity of women in decision-making at the state and union levels. In the sixteenth Lok Sabha a meager 11% of the total members are women. It reflects their subordination and reluctance on the part of males in our society to share power with them.

The 73rd and the 74th CAAs did increase the participation of women at the local self-government level but could not subside the demand for women's equal participation in decision making. This resulted in the introduction, in the Lok Sabha, of the Constitution (One Hundred and Twelfth Amendment) Bill in 2009 by the then Minister of Urban Development. The bill sought to amend Article 243T of the Constitution to increase reservations for women from one-third to one-half of the total seats in the local self-governing bodies. Nirmala Buch¹, former secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development, critically analysed the decision of the union cabinet to increase the reservations for women from 33% to 50% at the grass root level vide the 112th Amendment Bill. She describes the decision as an effort to cover up for government's failure to extend reservation to women in state and union legislatures. The bill, however, lapsed but fourteen states took the initiative to increase the reservations in local self-governing bodies to 50%, Punjab joining them in 2017. This has, quantitatively, made women's participation in local self-governing bodies equal to that of men but, qualitatively, their effectiveness in impacting the public policy for gender justice needs proper enquiry. Numerous factors condition the role of women and impinge on their effective participation. Among these factors the role played by the political parties is of great significance.

III. QUOTAS AND THE ROLE PLAYED BY POLITICAL PARTIES

Ever since the introduction of Women's Reservation Bill in the Indian parliament, many countries have adopted women's reservations in various forms. Reservation can be in the form of quotas mandated by the state or state nominations. According to Shamika Ravi and Rohan Sandhu, "The most common forms of reservation are quotas, either in the number of seats reserved for women or the setting of a minimum share for women on the *candidate lists* for elections. While setting a quota in seats regulates the number of women getting elected

to the parliament, establishing a minimum share in the candidates list can either be a legal requirement or be written into the statutes of individual political parties."² Sheri Kunovich and Pamela Paxton also point to two types of political reservations, viz, quotas and legislative appointments. In their words: "Quotas and legislative appointments are two political mechanisms used in both democratic and non-democratic nations that may increase women's representation. There are generally two types of quotas—those put forward by the state to apply to all parties, and those established within a particular party. Quotas can either be voluntary or they can be required. When quotas are mandated by the state, they can result in dramatic increases in the proportion of women elected....When parties adopt required quotas there is an increase in elected female representatives over time."³ Whichever the form of reservation, its effectiveness in increasing the number of women participants is proved beyond doubt. Whether this quantitative increase in women participation translates into qualitative participation in the form of policy change to redress gender bias is a matter of debate. A lot depends on the role of political parties as gatekeepers to elected offices.

Reservation for women in India is in the form of quota of seats mandated by the constitution. Nomination by the state or the list system of quota in the political party has not been mandated by the state. In such scenario, an analysis of the gatekeeper role of political parties in India in terms of who gets the ticket for contesting elections and the role of women leaders in the party needs further scrutiny. "Given the absence of a pool of potential women candidates, a reservation policy would accomplish little more than tokenism. Additionally, it is likely that political parties will field women only from seats that are reserved for them, making the general seats – male only."⁴ In the reserved seats too it needs to be checked if the beneficiaries are females themselves and not the family which has been getting the party ticket, given the dynastic nature of Indian politics.

Some change is required in the policy of our political parties while distributing tickets to the female candidates. The party gives ticket to the person who actively works for the party and who it thinks can win the seat. When the constituency becomes a reserved one, the party still gives the ticket to that family and to retain the ticket a female member in that family is made to contest elections. The political parties are interested in garnering votes and trust those who have been working and garnering votes for the party. The main motive is to win the seat. In the recently concluded elections to the MCs of Amritsar, Jalandhar and Patiala it "came to notice that political parties have entertained their male leaders and workers by allocating tickets to female kin. There is also resentment among grassroots workers that parties have ignored their real female cadre and the decision is wrong."⁵ Women already active in politics, be they from some political family or else, should be given a chance to contest elections. Demand has been raised by the feminist activists that the government must enact a law that if male kin of any

female councilor take part in the sessions of the House of any MC or interfere with their work then they will have to vacate their seat. If the present arrangement continues then nothing is going to change. The objective of women’s empowerment, as espoused by the 74th CAA, will remain unfulfilled. The genuine women leaders who deserve to be represented get sidelined by the political parties making a farce of reservations for women even if they are increased from 33% or 50%. The present list of female councilors elected in Amritsar reveals that only two of them were active in politics prior to MC polls. Reservations would help women only if they are implemented in letter and spirit and women representatives act independently.

To enable women to make a carrier in politics, the provisions regarding rotation of seats must also be suitably amended. Rotation of seats is another biggest obstacle women face in the effective use of reservations and the development of their leadership. Mandatory rotation of seats circumscribes their chances of seeking re-election. Women have been

demanding reconsideration of the concept of rotation. This can also help women emerge as a constituency in itself. Their demand has been met in some states. Tamil Nadu government has agreed to implement rotation after two terms.

National and the regional political parties have failed to field even 33% of female candidates in general elections. “This collective failure of political parties to field a critical mass of female candidates is worrisome because it highlights the absence of a pipeline of women leaders. Our political apparatus has collectively failed to nurture women leaders, leaving it unprepared should quotas in Parliament be legislated. In such a context, even if the Bill were to pass, its impact would be dubious.”⁶ The table below gives details of nomination of women candidates by the national and state political parties along with independent women candidates and their success rate in terms of women elected as percentage of women fielded in general elections at the centre for the past four decades.

Year	Women Candidates (%)				
	National Parties (%)	State Parties + Regd. (Unrecognised) Parties (%)	Independent (%)	Total (%)	Won (%)
1977	41 (3.86)	5 (3.22)	24 (1.96)	70 (2.87)	19 (27.14)
1980	77 (4.99)	5 (1.90)	61 (2.15)	143 (3.08)	28 (19.58)
1984	63 (5.06)	5 (1.80)	94 (2.20)	162 (3.04)	42 (25.92)
1989	87 (6.31)	29 (2.71)	82 (2.20)	198 (3.21)	29 (14.64)
1991	119 (6.53)	53 (3.97)	154 (2.79)	326 (2.72)	37 (11.34)
1996	125 (6.87)	50 (3.33)	424 (3.98)	599 (4.29)	40 (6.67)
1998	107 (7.16)	90 (6.70)	77 (4.02)	274 (5.76)	43 (15.69)
1999	109 (8.00)	102 (7.26)	78 (4.01)	284 (6.11)	49 (17.25)
2004	110 (8.14)	128 (7.53)	117 (4.90)	355 (6.53)	45 (12.67)
2009	134 (8.25)	215 (8.21)	207 (5.40)	556 (6.88)	59 (10.61)
2014	146 (9.17)	316 (9.22)	206 (6.36)	668 (8.09)	62 (9.28)

Source: Data sourced from Election Commission of India http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx

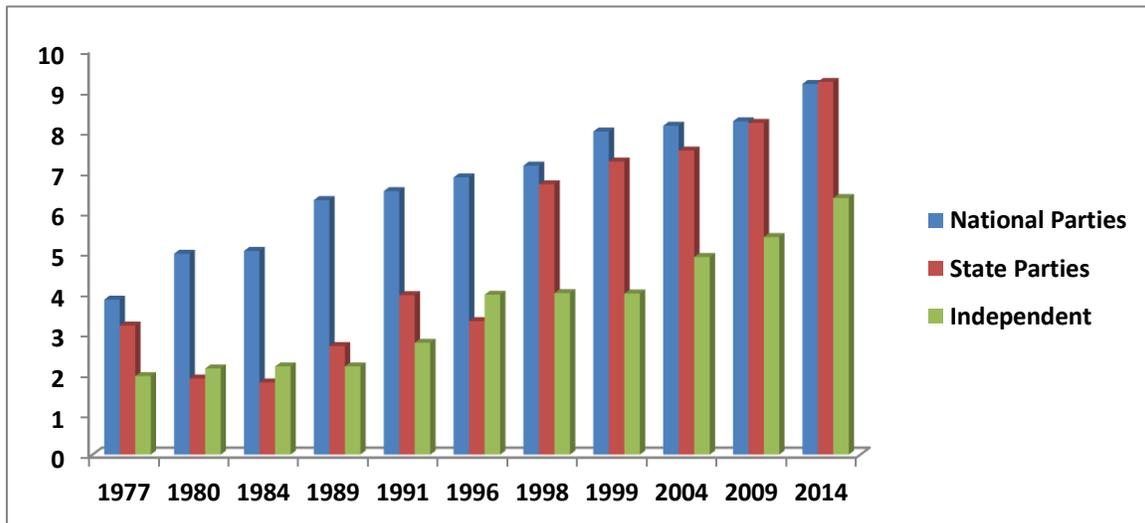


Fig 1:- Percentage of Women in General Elections



Fig 2:- Percentage of Successful Women Against their Total Numbers

As evident from Figure 1 above, the percentage of female candidates fielded by national, state or registered unrecognized parties has never reached even 10 percent. Even the number of independent female candidates as percentage of total independent candidates has never exceeded 7 percent. The success rate of female candidates in terms of seats won by them as percentage of total female candidates has also shown a declining trend. (Figure 2) This could partially be attributed to the rise in the number of independent female candidates who fail to win seat and as per data available with the Election Commission of India, more than 95% of them, even forfeit their deposit. In 2014, not a single independent female candidate could win seat (as shown in the bar diagram above) and 97% of them lost their deposit also. This highlights the significance of political parties in their role as gatekeepers of political representation for the female candidates. The failure of political parties in putting confidence in their female cadre for winning the seat and hence giving tickets to the female kin of male party workers has led to the problem of proxies. Thus, political parties are the main culprits behind the problem of proxies. They give ticket to a family which has been working for its cause. To retain the ticket, when the seat becomes a reserved one, a female member of the family is made to contest elections. Men proxy for this female who holds on to the seat till it is de-reserved.

Reservation of seats for women has quantitatively increased their participation at least at the local level but to bring about a qualitative change in political representation of women, policies of political parties need to be regulated either by some legislation by the government or the regulations of

the Election Commission of India. Reservation for women in the political parties necessitated by some legislation/regulation and made mandatory for their recognition is recommended.

IV. SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Available literature on the subject of women’s effective political participation unanimously highlights the need for increasing their participation in politics. Their suggestions, however, vary according to the varied socio, economic and political environment in which women participate. There cannot be a single prototype for enhancing women’s political participation. Our society needs to understand the need to utilize the unused potential of the better half of our society. Concerted efforts on the part of government, political parties, media, educational institutions, NGOs and the society are needed to tap this potential. Reservation as a tool of enhancing women’s political participation has great utility as it provides opportunity to many women to share power along with men and serves the purposes of encouraging other women and fostering acceptability among the masses that women are capable of adopting leadership roles. But reservations are not without their limitations. Firstly, in most cases it is not in proportion to the size of female population; and secondly, it sets the limit to the number of women who can actually take part in power as minimum reservation in the course of time becomes the maximum reservation. More efforts need be made to enhance their quantitative as well as qualitative participation. These efforts could be in the nature of.

- Formation of all women's political parties such as the one formed in Uttar Pradesh. "The most common route to elected office is through political parties. Most candidates depend on parties for their nomination, their base of electoral support, help during the election campaign, financial resources, and continued assistance after their election. While some candidates run for office independently of political parties, it is far more difficult to win election without the backing of a political organization."⁷ Forming an all-women's political party can go a long way in redressing their participation hardships.
- Political parties should be encouraged by the government, through suitable regulations, to sponsor a certain percentage of women candidates for election to parliament and state legislative assemblies. Laws regulating the operations of political parties must bind them to practice internal democracy and promote women candidates at all levels of party hierarchy. Such laws could bind recognition of parties to reserving some quota for women in the party.
- Women's wings in political parties can solve their participation problems. "This mechanism can provide an avenue for women to become active, learn political skills, and develop networks within the party. Women's wings can often influence party positions, especially on issues of special concern to women. They are most effective when linked directly to party leadership and decision-making bodies."⁸
- In the party organization greater role for women and placing them in formal party positions can go a long way in encouraging their political participation. Political parties need to pose more confidence in their female workers.
- Like men, women need to find mentors in political parties or government institutions, who can encourage and support their candidature in their parties.
- Women's stake groups should be formed throughout the country to campaign for women willing to enter politics.
- An all-women's lobby representing women's groups should be organised to influence the decision making process for the cause of women's greater and meaningful representation at different levels of government.
- Sharing their personal experiences with other women in small women's groups and confidence building with them can reduce the sense of isolation among women. This can help prepare them for more active participation in political activities.
- Strengthening legal mechanism to safeguard their rights and opportunities available to them for participation in the decision-making process.
- Sensitization of the general public to create opinion among them about the usefulness of a balanced participation by women and men in the decision-making process.
- Determining the social biases and the disabilities faced by women in India which hinder their active participation in politics and making efforts to weed them out.
- If women are to play an effective role in decision-making in India then their human rights should be properly recognized and protected.
- Expansion of educational and training opportunities for women is must as illiteracy and lack of knowledge are the biggest obstacles to women's active political participation. Better educational and job opportunities can build confidence among women necessary for greater participation in the political field
- The stereotypical representation of women in the media and text books needs to be improved. The cable and television networks need to be pressured to rectify media representation of women and promote media content by women writers. They should be encouraged to invite women experts on news and talk shows. Improving the media image of women can help leverage the chances of women's greater participation in public affairs. "The portrayal of women in the media as active political participants and leaders can greatly boost their political participation. In countries with high illiteracy rates, radio and television can play an especially important role in promoting women's political confidence and participation."⁹

V. CONCLUSION

In the end it can be concluded that our society is prejudiced towards women. The narrow-minded attitude of our society in circumscribing their activities to the household and preventing their optimum participation in the national life has obstructed fuller development of our country. Equal participation by women in decision-making can affect public policy to redress gender bias and alleviate the status of women. Government efforts at increasing the participation of women in decision making fructified in the forms of seventy-third and seventy-fourth amendment acts. The sincerity of males in our society to share power with women is still under scanner as the efforts of the government to replicate 33% quota for women at the central and state levels failed with the lapsing of Women's Empowerment Bill or the 108th amendment bill. Even the 112th amendment bill purporting to increase women's quota from 33% to 50% at the grass-root level could not get the nod of Lok-Sabha. This sexism is further reflected in the actions of political parties while distributing tickets to women aspirants in elections. The percentage of women candidates as part of the total candidates fielded by the national and the state parties has never reached two digit figure. At the grass-root level also the political parties are interested in entertaining the male party workers as tickets are given in reserved seats to the kin of these workers. The majority of the real female cadre in the party fails to get nominated in elections. Quota of seats in legislative bodies can increase political participation of women but for meaningful representation of women in decision-making

bodies quota must be introduced in the political parties as well.

ENDNOTES

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