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Women participation in Indian electoral system

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Abstract

India considered as world largest democratic nation and we know women are the key part of Indian Society. In democracy participation of people i.e. men and women require to work effectively. Women consist nearly fifty per cent of the Country's population but their participation in electoral process is still less than men political participation. 73rd and 74th constitution amendment gives women reservation in local bodies election while in Centre legislature and state legislature there no reservation system for women instead there are some seat reserved for only women candidates.

Keywords: Women participation, electoral system, women in Indian electoral system

Introduction

According to 2011 Census, in India Women constitute nearly half of the total population. According, to UN Women the development of a country is not possible without the development of its entire population. Government of India declared 2001 as 'year of empowerment of women' to boost the women empowerment and women participation. Indian constitution banned the gender discrimination and provides women's equal rights (political rights) to men. Nearly seven decades passed after independence, but the participation of women is remained outside the domain of political authority. Women's enhanced participation in governance structures is viewed as the key to redress gender inequalities in societies. The global debate on the promotion of women's political participation states that equal participation of women in politics from the human rights perspective. Women constitute half of the world population and therefore, it is only fair that they should have equal participation and representation in world democracies. The challenge facing all advocates of gender equality in politics today is the wide gap between shared values reflected in the national and international policies and practices.

Political participation

Political Participation can be defined as activities of people affecting politics. It is the main feature of democracy. For political development in any country, it is necessary that people participate in the political process. In the words of Layman, political participation means to play a role in the policy making process in a democracy through the exercise of political right such as universal adult franchise or being a part of a pressure group buffeting the government for change in the policy framework. According to Lester Milbrath, hierarchical framework of political participation, political participation varies with the extent to which a citizen affects or can affect the decision making of the government. Milbrath classified activities of citizens with respect to influence on decision making and political participation. He classified activities into gladiator activities, transitional activities and spectator activities. All constitutional provisions as well as social laws, which were enacted with an aim to elevate the position of women, were launched with mainly two objectives- the first one is to curb the inhuman social practices against the women and the second one is to open a new avenues for women to bargain for a better position in society. Political participation that was earlier to males of the society has been extended to women through key ingredients of democracy such as universal adult franchise and equality for all.

According to CBR guidelines, Political Participation is the sum of broad range of activities through which people express their opinion and thought in the various political process and take part in the decision making process. While according to Jan. W. Deth, Political Participation is the activities of people that affect politics.

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According to him Political Participation increased continuously over the last six to seven decades.

According to Seyedh K and Hossein A, political participation is considered as necessity of political development and for proper political development women’s participation must be improved because they constitute of nearly fifty per cent of world’s population.

Research Objective

1. To study the women participation in Electoral system
2. To study challenges faced by Women in Politics
3. To study the factors affecting Women Participation in Politics
4. How to increase the Women Political Participation

Women participation

We know women constitute nearly half of Country’s population, but their status in society not proportionately from the country economic prosperity. In 1951 women have been participating in the election as voters, as party workers and as a candidate contesting elections and as legislators and minister involved in policy making. From 1951 to 2019 general Loksabha election only few of women are able to occupy in decision making process. According to IDEA, Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance all international agreements acknowledge and stipulate the need to redress gender inequalities and eradicate all form of discrimination. This includes women participation and representation in various level of power and decision making process. According to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ICCPR contains specific provision to equality between men and women in various form of political life. UN convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women CEDAW is a comprehensive instrument to address women’s rights. Despite of various comprehensive political developments for women participation in Indian Politics, women continue to encounter significant barriers to access power of decision

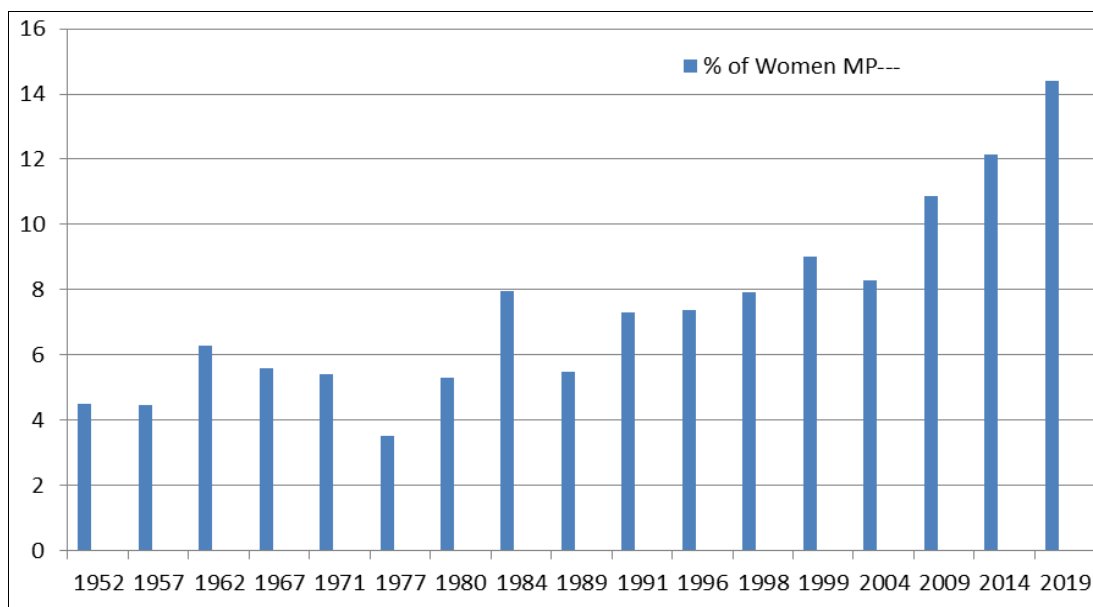
making at all level.

According to UN Women, higher numbers of women in parliament generally contribute to stronger attention to women’s issues. For gender equality and strong democracy, women participation is a fundamental prerequisite. Women participation in politics increase their political accountability in decision making but also helpful for promoting gender equality in public policy and ensuring their implementation.

There are many challenges faced in first Loksabha election, thousands of women were left out, as their names were not properly registered in voter list. Many factors impact on elections, such as education, casts, religion, awareness about women’s issues, preference of women candidates and policies of various political parties. Consciousness regarding casts and class also affect and influences voting behavior and casts prejudices and class divides have strengthened during last seven decades.

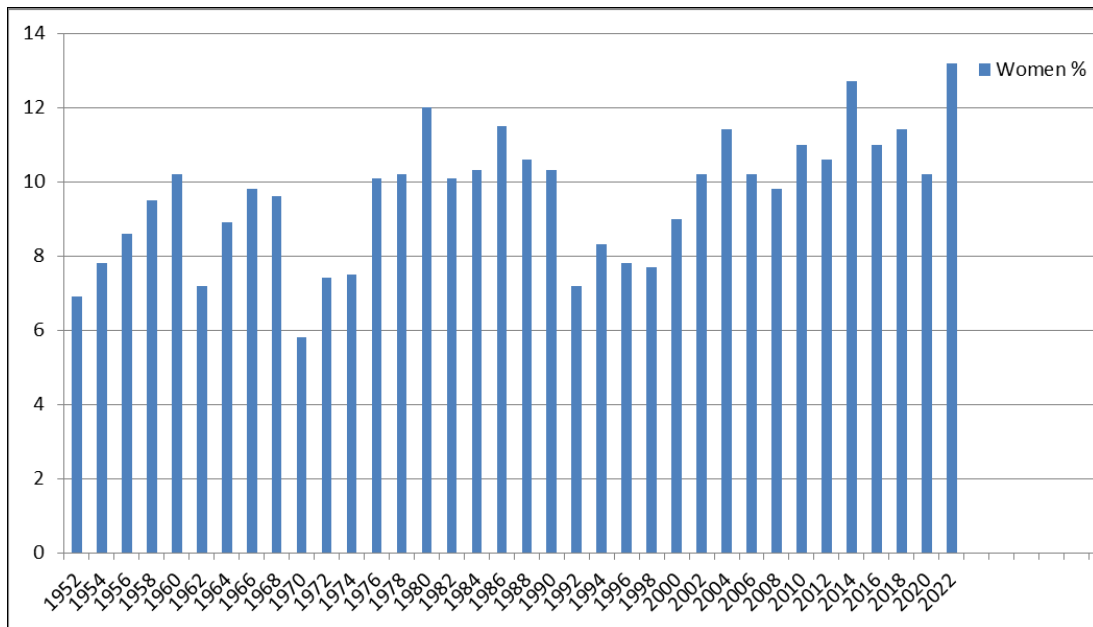
Many factors are important in the election of women candidates such as literacy, family background, financial position of family, involvements of politics, campaign strategy, and pull with party and their personality. Very few numbers of women get tickets in election and even fewer get elected among this small number. We know that getting a seat is very difficult for women for aspiring political power. There are many considerable strategies for candidates such as money, power, political background, caste affiliation etc. and party does not want to invest their energy for women candidates because they are doubtful for their success.

Table 1 show that the percentage of women MP in Loksabha, here we saw that after 75 years of Independence the women participation as a MP is still lower than 20 per cent, which lower than global participation of women in Parliaments across the globe. This table shows that there is need to increase the women participation to enhance women empowerment as well as women their presence in policy-making process.



Women MP % in Loksabha (Graph 1)

Graph 1: Show that the percentage of women MP in Loksabha



Graph 2: Shows the women MP percentage in Rajyasabha

Table 1: Shows the women MP percentage in Rajyasabha, here we see that their participation is lower than 15 per cent.

Year	Total Voting %	Men Voting%	Women Voting %	Diff. In Voting %
1952	61.2	--	--	--
1957	62.2	--	--	--
1962	55.4	63.3	46.6	16.7
1967	61.3	66.7	55.5	11.2
1971	55.3	60.9	49.1	11.8
1977	60.5	66	54.9	11.1
1980	56.9	62.2	51.2	11
1984	64	68.4	59.2	9.2
1989	62	66.1	57.3	8.8
1991	57	61.6	51.4	10.2
1996	58	62.1	53.4	8.7
1998	62	66	58	8
1999	60	64	55.7	8.3
2004	58.8	61.7	53.3	8.4
2009	58.2	60.2	55.8	4.4
2014	66.4	67.1	65.6	1.5
2019	67.10	67.01	67.18	-0.17

Source- ECI, Table 1

Obstacles faced by Women

There are many obstacles to assimilation of women in the process of decision-making. Many thinkers says that non-participation of women is low this is because women themselves are responsible for their political isolation. Mainly there are two types of standard judged by women, one is she is regarded as nurturer, passive, emotional, and subordinate to man and the other is that of her modern role-active, achievement oriented, ambitious and competitive. This private-public split has a marginalising effect of women. There are some challenges faced by women in Politics:

Political obstacles

- The male-dominated model of politics that tends to undermine the value of women’s contribution and their participation.
- Lack of party support and women exclusion from decision making structures.

- Unfavorable electoral system.
- Low interest of women in politics
- Politics considered as a dirty platform, so women’s are try to stay away from politics.
- Women have lack of political experience
- Number of less seats given to women as a candidate
- Lack of effective procedure to ensure political activity
- Long distance of position of polling booth from their house
- Lack of campaign funds for women candidates
- Violence in the election, as we know women’s considered as soft-hearted.
- Pressure from family for voting as family pressurized the women to vote to their choice not her choice.

Social Obstacles

- Gender based stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes
- Women also find hard to participate in election because they already have family and social responsibilities.
- Caste system – political party don’t want to gives seats to women candidates, as they have fear to lose their traditional voters.
- Religions also restrain women from politics as some religions restrain women to take part in outside activities.
- Women face cultured constraints on their mobility. Nearly 40 per cent women are illiterate so it’s difficult for them to access information, knowledge, strategies and model for political participation.

Economical Obstacles

- Nearly two- third populations of women are housewives or they work in agricultural activities, so they have no financial support to elect in election as candidates.
- We know, a large amount of money requires for campaigning and other political activities, so its economical barrier which restrain them for take active participation in politics.
- Women have less financial assets than men, as men earn more than women and women are generally

engaged in low paid and unprotected jobs.

- In society, money is an important indicator to determine the financial and social status and an individual in order to be chosen as a candidate.

How to overcome these challenges

1. Quotas/ Reservation
2. We know many countries around the world fixed quotas in electoral system for women, and it is integral part of electoral system. As per 2015 report, nearly 129 countries have fixed the quotas to increase the percentage of women candidates in politics. According to McCann, (2013) [3] Quotas are a form of affirmative action strategy intended to address the insignificant participation of women and other minority groups in all areas of society including job, education and politics. Dahrelup (2005) describes quotas (gender quotas) as a strategy to ensure the women participation in electoral system in a certain proportion. The main intention of gender quotas is to increase the representation of women in elected or appointed organizations like governments, parliaments and local councils.
3. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment act mandate that it is compulsory to reserve one third seats for women in local bodies' election has a step to move towards power. The reservation of seats for women in local bodies and legislative assemblies has been a successful way to increase women's representation in politics. More such reservation policies could be implemented to provide women with more opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.
4. The Women's Reservation Bill proposes to reserve 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women. It was first introduced in the Lok Sabha as the 81st later 108th Amendment Bill, however Rajya Sabha passed the Women's Reservation Bill on 9 March 2010. However, the Lok Sabha never voted on the bill. The bill lapsed since it was still pending in Lok Sabha. So its need to pass the bill in the both houses and gives reservation to women in Lok Sabha and in all state legislative assemblies.
5. Increasing Awareness and Education: Creating awareness among women about their rights and the importance of their participation in politics is essential. Educational programs and awareness campaigns can help to increase women's political participation.
6. Addressing Gender-based Violence and Harassment: Gender-based violence and harassment are major obstacles to women's participation in politics. Addressing these issues through policy and legal measures can create a safer and more supportive environment for women in politics.
7. Reforms in the Electoral Process: Reforms such as introducing proportional representation and preferential voting systems can help to increase women's representation in politics by ensuring that more women get elected.
8. Women's candidates must be supported through finance as well as socially by society to encourage them to take part in electoral process.

Conclusion

With the provision of 73rd and 74th Amendment women representatives have ample scope for involvement in the process of local government. The involvement of women representative in the decision making process is not effective and local elites minimize women representative role in the local bodies Institutions by exerting control over them. There is need for Amendment to fix the reservation for women in Lok Sabha as well as in State Legislative Assembly to increase the women participation in electoral system and make a system in which women can take more in politics and they encourage towards political system to make the democracy strong. Make some provision so that women participation as a voter increases and they can part in political activities.

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