

STUDY ON WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN HARYANA

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Abstract:

These figures indicate that it was only in the Eighth Lok Sabha (i.e. after two decades of feminist struggle) that women's representation reached an all-time high of 44 or 8.1% out of the total strength of a 544 member House. In all the earlier and subsequent Lok Sabhas, their representation have varied from 5.9 and 4.2% in the Fourth and Fifth Lok Sabha respectively to 5.3 in the Ninth Lok Sabha and 6.6 in the Tenth and Eleventh Lok Sabha. The Sixth Lok Sabha had a dismal record of women's political participation, as there were only 3.4% women representatives in a 514 member House.

Similarly, an examination of women's voting patterns reveal the low turnout of women as voters. But the good news is that, the gender gap between the percentage of male and female voters is steadily declining (see table 2). Also the extent, nature and level of Indian women's participation in electoral processes (as voters and election campaigners) is far greater than many other third world countries. Since 1989, this increase in the turnout of women voters could be attributed to the mobilization of the lower castes. Nevertheless, many studies also point out that the majority of women are not independent voters, they vote according to the wishes of the men in the family and they are not politically informed (Kaushik 1993:9)

Key words: majority, strength, declining, mobilization.

INTRODUCTION

Nevertheless, an examination of women's political participation in India since the 1930s, when for the first time women were enfranchised, reveals contradictory trends: they have participated in various mass-based protest movements ranging from the sporadic armed struggles of peasants, tribals and workers in

West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Kerala to the non-violent Narmada Bachao Andolan and Chipko movement. Currently, there is an apparently leaderless, anti-alcohol movement spreading across Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur to Ghaziabad in western Uttar Pradesh, in which women have attacked liquors shops armed with rods, sticks and brooms (Kumar 1996:11)⁷.

A remarkable feature of Indian democracy is the participation of women. Thanks to the ethos developed during the freedom movement, in which women from all corners of India played a historic part equaling men in courage, sacrifice and spirit, there would have been no question whatsoever of denying women their democratic rights in a free India. The Suffrage Movement, aided by the work of women in the First World War gained British women the right to vote only in 1918. In the United States, women were given the vote by the 19th Amendment in 1920, and women were specifically protected from discrimination in the Civil Rights Act only as recently as in 1964. There are still nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America where women are yet to be emancipated enough to enable them to vote. The Indian woman has been more fortunate.

Review of literature

This apart, the zeal for voting among women has been as strong as among men, and in a large number of constituencies, even stronger, judging from the turn-out. Women voter turn-out increased from 38.8% in the fifties to nearly 60% in the nineties, whereas the increase in the turn-out of men in the same period was only four percent.

It is not only in the participation in the voting process that the commitment of India's women to democracy is reflected, but also in the mounting enthusiasm and interest among women to secure representation in the country's legislatures. Partly, this rising fervour is due to the benefits of education reaching the interior areas of rural India. Partly, it is due to the strengthened sense of self-confidence among women in their capacity to contribute at par with men in nation-building. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments, which reserve 33% of elective seats in Panchayati Raj and Municipal bodies to women, not only brought thousands of women into the democratic process but have also provided a major boost to their self-confidence.

In the 1984 general elections, for instance, as many as 128 seats in 23 states of India were contested by 173 women, of who 43 got elected to the Lok Sabha (House of the People). The number of women contestants has progressively risen election after election. The figure which remained under 50 in the first two general elections rose to 65 in the third, and to 599 in the eleventh. The number of women in the

outgoing Lok Sabha was 43. Legislation to ensure 33% representation for women in Parliament and legislatures figured on the agenda of the eleventh and twelfth Lok Sabhas but the measure could not be passed. Most of the political parties have committed themselves in their respective manifestos to enact the legislation in the 13th Lok Sabha.

Material and method

This is no doubt gratifying, the number of women contestants has unfortunately not corresponded to the large female population in India and there surely is the need and scope for a larger number to enter the fray. At the same time, it is sad but true that most political parties have not shown the necessary fair-mindedness in giving adequate number of „tickets“ to women candidates, though all of them subscribe to the healthy principle of reserving 33% of seats in all democratic institutions for women. While a large number of men have chosen to contest polls as “independents” (unattached to any political party), there have been very few cases where women have shown similar enterprise.

This is possibly because they feel that they would need considerable infrastructural and organizational backing, which only a political party can provide. Interestingly, of the 43 women who were elected to the 12th Lok Sabha, as many as 20 were returned from the relatively backward state i.e. Uttar Pradesh (9), Bihar (4), Madhya Pradesh (4) and Rajasthan (3), whereas the more urbanized and developed states like Maharashtra in the west and all the four states in the south made only a token contribution of one or two each.

Women participation in electoral politics have been marginal – a trend which negates the Constitutional promise of gender equality. (See table 1).

TABLE 1

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN MEMBERS FROM THE FIRST TO THE ELEVENTH LOK SABHA

<i>Percentage to</i>	Total No. of Seats	No. of women Members	The Total %age of elected women
First Lok Sabha	499	22	4.4
Second Lok Sabha	500	27	5.4
Third Lok Sabha	503	34	6.7
Fourth Lok Sabha	523	31	5.9
Fifth Lok Sabha	521	22	4.2
Sixth Lok Sabha	514	19	3.4
Seventh Lok Sabha	544	42	7.74
Eighth Lok Sabha	544	44	8.1
Ninth Lok Sabha	525	27	5.14
Tenth Lok Sabha	503	33	6.6
Eleventh Lok Sabha	545	36	6.6

Source: Election Commission India.

These figures indicate that it was only in the Eighth Lok Sabha (i.e. after two decades of feminist struggle) that women's representation reached an all-time high of 44 or 8.1% out of the total strength of a 544 member House. In all the earlier and subsequent Lok Sabhas, their representation have varied from 5.9 and 4.2% in the Fourth and Fifth Lok Sabha respectively to 5.3 in the Ninth Lok Sabha and 6.6 in the

Tenth and Eleventh Lok Sabha. The Sixth Lok Sabha had a dismal record of women's political participation, as there were only 3.4% women representatives in a 514 member House.

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TABLE 2
VOTING PERCENTAGE OF MEN & WOMEN
IN LOK SABHA ELECTION

<i>Election Year</i>	Voting %age of men	Voting %age of Women
1952	53	37.1
1957	56	38.77
1962	62.1	46.63
1967	66.7	55.48
1971	69.7	49.15
1977	65.62	54.96
1980	57.69	51.22
1984	63.61	68.17
1989	70.9	43.9
1991	52.56	47.42

Source: Election Commission India

Seats for women in the Panchayati raj

A measure with tremendous potential for social transformation is the Panchayati Raj Act introduced in April 1993 through the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution and ratified by all the states the following years. As the organization of the local self-government is a state subject, the Central Act required the amendment of their respective Panchayati Raj institutions. The Act provides for a 3-tier structure of local self-governments in states with a population of not less than 2,000,000 and for an option of a 2-tier system in states, which do not have the requisite population.

The most radical feature of the Act is that it has reserved 33 percent of the seats (as per the population) for scheduled castes, another 33 percent (as per the population) for scheduled tribes and 33 percent (irrespective of population size) for women. These representations are ensured through the reservation of territorial constituencies for the concerned groups. The reserved constituencies are not fixed but are rotated to either different constituencies of a Panchayat or different Panchayats of the Samitis. The reservation of seats for SC/STs is time bound and likely to cease at the end of the period specified in Article 334 of the Constitution. But as not such provisions made regarding women, it may be presumed that this reservation will continue indefinitely. In addition, the policy does not prevent women from seeking elections to the unreserved seats (Mukarji 1993:856-59)⁹.

Conclusion

It is an attempt to introduce progressive decentralization, the Act legitimizes the role of a total of 2,25,000 village councils in the country. This in effect means that it provides for the exercise of decision-making power by an average of 2,250,000 people at the village level, 51,000 at the intermediary level, and 4,750 at the district level. As one-third of these seats are reserved for women, there are about 750,000 seats at the village level (gram Panchayat), 17,000 seats at the intermediary level (Panchayat Samiti), and 1,583 seats at the district level (Zila Parishad) reserved for women. Further, as the Act also ensures that one-third of the positions available, as chairpersons in all the three tiers are reserved for women, it means those women head 75,000 village councils, 1,700 intermediary councils and 158 district councils (GOI 1996:71)¹⁰. The table No. 1.4 will give more comprehensive information about Panchayati Raj of India.

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