



Women in Indian Politics and Governance

Prof. Sujit Kumar Paul

Professor of Rural Management and Rural Development

&

Souradeep Sarkar

Research Scholar

Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension (REC)

Visva-Bharati (A Central University)

Sriniketan-731236, Birbhum, West-Bengal

Abstract

Women empowerment is an important factor for development of a country. Women empowerment of a country can be defined by participation of women in politics. Thus, participation of a women in politics is a defining factor of the level of development of the country. The participation of women in politics in India is very less so it is the responsibility of everyone to encourage women to join in mainstream politics. Time to time there were some women politicians who rise into power for some time in politics like Indira Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj, J. Jayalalithaa, Mayawati and Mamata Banerjee etc but the overall representation of women in India is very less. After the 2019 Lok Sabha election, there were 78 women members of parliament in India that is 14.33% which is very low. If the percentage of women in the law-making bodies do not increase then the issues of women will not be discussed in the volume it should be discussed so it lacks equality which is against the basic norms of the Indian Constitution. The women's reservation bill or The Constitution (108th Amendment Bill), 9th march 2010 is one of the pending bills in the Indian Parliament which proposes to amend the Indian constitution to reserve one-third of all seats in the Lok Sabha and all the legislative assemblies. The bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha in 9th march 2010 but there was no vote in the Lok Sabha for this bill. There are reservations in panchayat system for women but in maximum cases it is seen that they are dominated by men. In maximum cases it is seen that the local leader's wife is made candidate so decisions made by her are influenced by her husband. So, in a society where men are dominant women should be given effective political reservation. The purpose of the study is to find out the actual scenario of women in Indian Politics and also to know the influence of women in decision making.

Key Words: Participation, Constitution, Empowerment, Election

Introduction

According to Abraham Lincoln true government is the situation in which government is of the people, by the people and for the people. In most of the democracies in the world the governments of the countries are elected by votes people from all sections of the society but it is debatable that the government comprises of all sections of people or not and if the government works for all the sections of people or not. On this context India has also the same situation.

Women empowerment is an important factor for development of a country. Women empowerment of a country can be defined by participation of women in politics. Thus, participation of a women in politics is a defining factor of the level of development of the country. The participation of women in politics in India is very less so it is the responsibility of everyone to encourage women to join in mainstream politics.

Before independence also there were discussions regarding participation of women in politics. In 1930-31 in the first-round table conference the two Indian women representatives supported the Simon Commission for 2.5% reservation of women. In the Karachi session of the congress in 1931 under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu all the women organisations wanted equal representation in the legislatures. At the second-round table conference in 1932 one women representative Begum Shah Nawaz was sympathetic towards reservation for women in politics through communal lines and another representative Mrs. Radha Bai Subbarayan in spite of Mahatma Gandhi's effort to convince her insisted that without reservation of seats it will be difficult for women to contest in politics in a male dominated society. Mahatma Gandhi was against reservation of women in politics, he wanted and demanded total equality for women and most of the women freedom fighters and members of the congress party supported him. Since then, till now the argument for reservation of women in Parliament and Legislative assemblies is going till now. The women's reservation bill or The Constitution (108th Amendment Bill), 9th march 2010 is one of the pending bills in the Indian Parliament which proposes to amend the Indian constitution to reserve one-third of all seats in the Lok Sabha and all the legislative assemblies. The bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha in 9th march 2010 but there was no vote in the Lok Sabha for this bill.

Review of Literature

- Varma (1997) stated that all the parties are not able to realise the main problem of gender inequality that is less participation of women in active politics and decision making.
- Chaudhuri (2003) stated that in panchayat most of female candidates are there who were unwilling to contest in election.
- Munshi (2005) stated that one-third reservation is needed for political participation for women in India.
- Roy (2015) has stated reservation in politics is not the only solution for gender equality in politics and decision making.
- Mukhia (2015) stated that participation of women in panchayat is very important for women empowerment.
- Singha (2015) stated that in India it is very hard for a woman to win in election.
- Roy (2015) stated that there were many women politicians who were in power in a period in national and state politics.
- Ghosh (2015) stated that the elections in India is mainly dominated as men.
- Alam (2015) has stated that the media has helped in movements for women empowerment.

- Dubey (2017) has stated that equal participation of women is needed in all level of politics.
- Das (2021) stated that family also plays an important role for a female politician to succeed in politics.
- Gajendra (2021) has stated that unwillingness to vote for women is a barrier for increase of women participation in politics.

Objectives

- To know the actual scenario of women in Indian Politics.
- To know the influence of women in decision making.

Women in National Politics

The Article 15 of the Indian Constitution attempts to remove all inequalities based on gender, religion, race, caste or place of birth and ensuring the fundamental rights of all the citizens. Forget about gender equality India has failed to secure equal involvement of women in legislation. From the independence the direct participation of women in politics is very less. Time to time there were many women politicians who came into power and took active participation in legislation. Some of the important female politicians of past and present are as follows:

- Indira Gandhi (1917-1984)- Till date she is the only women Prime Minister of India. She was one of the main leaders of the Indian National Congress. She was daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India. She became Prime Minister after the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri. She was prime minister from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 to 1984. The most controversial state of emergency was on her tenure. She was shot dead by her bodyguards on 31st October 1984.
- Sushma Swaraj (1952-2019)- She was an Indian lawyer, politician, and diplomat who was one of the main leaders of Bharatiya Janata Party. In 1977 at the age of 25 she became youngest cabinet minister in Haryana State. She became the first women Chief Minister of Delhi. She was minister of External Affairs from 2014 to 2019.
- Sheila Dikshit (1938-2019)- She was an Indian Politician who was the longest serving Chief Minister of Delhi from 1998 to 2013. She was also the longest serving female Chief Minister of an Indian state.
- Jayaram Jayalalithaa (1948-2016)- She was an Indian politician, actress and philanthropist. In 1989 she became the general secretary of AIADMK. She became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu for more than 14 years in between 1991 and 2016.
- Pratibha Patil(1934-Present)- She is an Indian Politician and Lawyer. She served as the first and only women President of India till date from 2007-2012.
- Nirmala Sitharaman(1959-Present)- She is an Indian Economist and politician serving as the current minister of finance and corporate affairs She is the women 2nd finance minister and first women full time finance minister of India from 2019 to present. She also served as the second women defence minister of India from 2017 to 2019.
- Sonia Gandhi(1946-Present)- She is an Indian Politician. She was the President of Indian National Congress from 1998-2017 and again she took charge as president from 2019. Till now she is the president of INC.

- Mayawati(1956-Present)- She is the national president of Bahujan Samaj Party. She has served four separate terms as the Chief Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh. She was Chief minister for a short time in 1995 and 1997 and then from 2002 to 2003 and from 2007 to 2012.
- Mamata Banerjee(1955-Present)- She founded Trinamool Congress in the year 1998 and she is the supremo of All India Trinamool Congress. She was the first women railway minister. She is well known for ending 34 year Left-Front Government rule in West-Bengal. She is the first women Chief Minister of West Bengal from 2011 till now. Now she is the only women prime minister of an Indian state.
- Supriya Sule (1969-Present)- She is an Indian Politician from Maharashtra. She is the leader of National Congress Party which was founded by his father Sharad Pawar. In 2011 she launched a statewide campaign against female foeticide in Maharashtra. She is the member of Lok Sabha from Baramati constituency from 2009 till now.
- Agatha Sangma(1980-Present)- She is an Indian Politician from Meghalaya. She is the youngest MP to be sworn in as union minister in 2009 when she was sworn in as the minister of state for Rural Development. She became MP from Tura assembly from 2008 to 2010 and from 2009 to 2014 and from 2019 till now.
- K.K. Shailaja (1956-Present)- She is an Indian Politician from Kerala. She is a Central Committee member of CPIM. She was the Minister of Health and Family Welfare in the Government of Kerala from 2016 to 2021. She is now the member of Legislative assembly of Kerala from mattanur constituency.

There were many other politicians in India who rose in to power like Anandiben Patel, Rabri Devi, Smriti Irani, Mohua Moitra and Vasundhararaje Scindia.

Some important events and achievements for women in Indian Politics are-

- 1917: Annie Besant became the female president of the Indian National Congress.
- 1925: Sarojini Naidu became the first female president who was Indian born of the Indian National Congress
- 1947: Sarojini Naidu became the first women Governor of an Indian State when she took charge as the governor of Uttar Pradesh.
- 1963: Sucheta Kripalini became the first women Chief Minister of an Indian state by becoming chief minister of Uttar Pradesh.
- 1966: Indira Gandhi took oath as the first women Prime Minister of India.
- 1972: Nandini Satpathy became the first women Chief Minister of state of Odisha.
- 1973: Shashikala Kakodkar became the first women Chief Minister of state of Goa.
- 1977: Sushma Swaraj became the youngest cabinet minister of state when she sworn in as minister in the Haryana legislative assembly.
- 1980: Anwara Taimur became the first women Chief Minister of state of Assam.
- 1988: V.N. Janaki Ramachandran took oath as the first women Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.
- 1996: Rajinder Kaur Bhattal became the first women Chief Minister of Punjab.
- 1997: Rabri Devi became the first women Chief Minister of Bihar.
- 1998: Sushma Swaraj became the first women Chief Minister of National Capital Territory of Delhi.
- 2003: Uma Bharti became the first women Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.
- 2003: Vasundhara Raje became the first women Chief Minister of Rajasthan.

- 2007: Pratibha Patel became the first women President of India.
- 2009: Agatha Sangma became the youngest union minister of Indian government when she was sworn in as minister of state for Rural Development.
- 2011: Mamata Banerjee became the first women Chief Minister of West Bengal
- 2014: Anandiben Patel became the first women Chief Minister of Gujarat.
- 2016: Mehbooba Mufti took oath as the first women Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

After seeing at the manifestos before elections of the different national parties it is clear that apart from creating new programs the parties have not looked into the actual fundamental problem that is there is less participation of women in the decision making. The following chart showed the number of elected women candidates in all the General Elections for constituting Lok Sabha in India after Independence:

General Elections	Year	Total Seats	Women Elected
1 st	1952	499	22
2 nd	1957	500	27
3 rd	1962	503	34
4 th	1967	523	31
5 th	1971	521	22
6 th	1977	544	19
7 th	1980	544	28
8 th	1984	544	44
9 th	1989	517	27
10 th	1991	544	39
11 th	1996	544	39
12 th	1998	543	43
13 th	1999	543	49
14 th	2004	543	44
15 th	2009	543	59
16 th	2014	543	61
17 th	2019	543	78

There are many significant factors which directly influence the election of the women candidates in the Lok Sabha Elections. The Significant Factors are-

- Literacy- This is a very important factor. In general, if a person is literate, he or she is able to influence other pupils easily which is very important in winning elections so this is same for a woman.
- Liberal Family Background- A family with a conservative background will never allow woman from their family to join politics. So, it will be easy for a woman in the election if her family have a liberal background.
- Financial Position- It is very important for a woman to have strong financial position as an individual or strong financial back up from her family as in India much money is needed for contesting properly in Lok Sabha elections.
- Support of the male family members- As our society is generally men dominated so it becomes easy for a woman to get elected if the male members of the family support her directly.
- Involvement in Politics- To win in a election it is important for an women to be directly involved in politics as it helps her to become popular as a politician in the society.

- Local Conditions- If the local condition is vulnerable for women that is if the crime against women is more and there is more social restriction it is very hard for them to contest in elections. It is mainly very hard in the rural constituencies in India.
- Decision of the Political Parties- The decisions of the leadership of the political parties are very important for women contesting in elections.
- Campaign Strategy- The campaign strategies of the political parties is a decisive factor for women to win in elections
- Personality- The personality of a woman is important for her to win in elections.

The above factors are combinedly important for very few women who gets ticket to win in elections. Often women candidates are dropped for political comprises or given ticket to fight in constituencies where there is very less chance in winning elections. Women doesn't have adequate representation in the lower house of the Parliament that is the Lok Sabha. The marginalisation of the women in the politics of India is very clear. The highest representation of women in Lok Sabha is 14.33 percent which was in the Lok Sabha elections in 2021.

After the 2019 Lok Sabha election, there were 78 women members of parliament in India that is 14.33% which is very low. The number of contestants in 2019 is 716 which has increased from 2014 which was 668. In 2019 there were 78 women elected as MPs which is more than 2014 which was 62. The increase in women MPs is mainly due to 2 reasons which are-

1. BJP has won most of the seats so 73 percent of their women that is 41 out of 56 women candidates won in the election.
2. The two regional parties TMC and BJD also contributed in the increase representation in the Lok Sabha. By considering the West-Bengal Candidates only 41% of TMC women candidates that is 9 of 21 candidates won in the elections. While 6 of the 7 BJD candidates won in the election.

State-wise Odisha has the most percentage of women candidates that is 16% followed by Chhattisgarh with 13% and West-Bengal and Uttarakhand with 12% each. The parties also tend to field more women in reserved seats especially in Scheduled Tribe seats. 6 of the 7 women candidates of BJD were from reserved seats. Winnability for women candidates were higher in seats which were reserved.

In 2019 the percentage of national party discarding a women MP is 48% which is more than 37.6% of men. So, we can conclude that women are given lesser chance to re-run in election than men though the strike rate of the re-running candidates are more or less the same. State based parties tend to give chance to their women candidates to re-run in an election than the national parties. 27 out of 41 sitting women MPs including popular politicians like Sonia Gandhi, Hema Malini and Kirron Kher won retaining their seats in Lok Sabha polls but Smriti Irani and Pragya Thakur became renowned by defeating renowned rivals. Smriti Irani defeated than congress national president Rahul Gandhi on his home turf in Amethi. Pragya Thakur defeated former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Digvijay Singh.

Prominent women candidates who were elected as member of parliament in the 2019 were DMK candidate from Thoodthukkudi constituency Kanimozhi Karunanidhi who is the daughter of M. Karunanidhi. Bjp's Rita Bahuguna and Bengali actress turned politician Lockett Chatterjee were two prominent candidates who from Allahabad and Hooghly constituency respectively.

Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions

The makers of the constitution stated in the Directive Principles of State Policy that steps should be taken by the state to organise panchayat in the village and give them power and authority as much as needed to enable them to function as units of self-government. In the Balwant Rao Mehta Committee (1957) Recommendation it was stated that women were viewed as only targets or beneficiaries of development not as active agents of development. After the Ashok Mehta Committee (1977) submitted its report in 1978 legislation were brought in the state assemblies of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab and West-Bengal for some reservation of seats for the women in the Panchayats. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act not only helped in establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions but also ensures women empowerment by reserving not less than one third of total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and also the general category sit should be reserved for women. So, the amendment made the reservation of seats for women a mandatory provision in Panchayati Raj Institutions. This policy tried to increase equalities in socio-economic development. This policy also secured participation in different activities and it helped in mutual understanding. This policy gave women a role and status in the family which helped the women to take important part in decision making in the family contributing equally as the male members in the family. The 73rd constitutional amendment has undoubtedly women got more political space comparatively from before which is followed by a steady rise of women in the panchayat level of politics and decision making. A nation-wide study was done by AC Nielsen ORG-MARG on the empowerment of women through reservations in Panchayati Raj Institutions for the union ministry of Panchayati Raj in the year 2008. This study has shown some interesting features in favour of advantage of reservation. Among the 1,039,058 women members four-fifth were elected from the seats that are reserved. However, in most of the areas like for the women in the panchayat in Rajasthan the women are only for name's sake and it is seen that their husband or in-laws are real people who are enjoying the power and making decisions in the Panchayat. It is same in the Uttar Pradesh where unfortunately the husband of the pradhans who are popularly known as pradhanpatis take the power from their wives who are the actual Pradhan and enjoy the power and make decisions in the panchayat. Though in West-Bengal many women have come forward to take their responsibilities but they often face financial problems while going to meeting and at last their husband or any relatives accompany them to their meeting places. There is increase in politically motivated violence like beating, rape and even murder towards women. The condition is worse for women from disadvantaged sections. For eg: a tribal female sarpanch was stripped during unfurling the national flag on the Independence Day that is 15th august in 1988 in the state of Rajasthan. It is very often seen in that the panchayat the Dalit women sarpanch is sitting in the floor while some upper caste men sit on their chairs. The women barriers in the politics in the panchayat level due to narrow mindset of the society. Acceptability of women is a problem because for their illiteracy an ignorance and illiteracy often the male tries to be dominant in the panchayat. In most panchayat bodies headed by male members the women members feel ignored and often they face sexual harassment. In villages most of the women are illiterate so they face social restriction and they feel shy to come out in the world and take active participation in politics. Some important features of participation of women in politics in the panchayat level are-

- Illiteracy and low educational level- Generally in the rural areas of India most of the women are illiterate or have very less education to men so they are dominated by men in politics.
- Compliance with social restrictions- In the village the women are socially restricted so they are afraid of coming out and join in active politics.
- Shyness and submissiveness- Women in the village are very shy and submissive towards men so they are not dominate in the village.

- Lack of comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities- The women members of panchayat are not able to understand their roles and responsibilities properly.
- Weak articulation skills- In the village the women are not able to speak out their decision in a firm way which is a problem for them.

Factors for non-participation of women in decision-making in panchayat level are-

- Husband and other male family members take up the power and unofficially performs the role of sarpanch.
- The support of the panchayat members is decided on the basis of caste and gender consideration.
- Often the Panchayat secretary misguide the female members in conducting Panchayat Activities.

Some measures which can be taken to increase participation of women in politics in village are-

- The Government should campaign to increase knowledge among the women in village specially in the seats where there is reservation.
- Awards should be given for good performance to the women members. This will encourage other women to join in politics.
- The Political parties should also come forward and encourage participation of women in the village by giving them party posts like Block Sabha Pati.

Main findings of the study

- Participation of women is very less in politics in India.
- Women are dominated by men in all stages of politics.
- Reservation is not the only factor that can secure women participation in politics.
- Education and Awareness is important for securing participation of women in politics.
- Due to lack of participation influence of women in decision making is very less.

Conclusion- So we can conclude that reservation of women is not the only factor which is important for securing of participation of women in politics. In panchayat there is reservation for women but they are not influential in decision making in consensus with reserved seat. After the 73rd amendment also there are less participation of women with compared to men. So overall awareness and education is needed more than just reservation for women to join in politics. All the political parties should come together to ensure enough participation of women in politics and decision making.

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