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Gender Disparity in Indian Politics: Historical Context and Future Directions

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Abstract

Politics can be a crucial tool for emancipating and empowering women. The presence of females in Parliament is a positive effort but still due representation cannot be seen in practicality. The number of prominent women leaders in India is very less. This paper focuses on this very issue. Is the problem relates to inadequate awareness, lack of consistency, inherent patriarchy or all of them? This paper also throws a light on the role of reservation bill in women empowerment. The research findings also suggest the ways that needs to be done to achieve gender parity in political representation and what can be done to avoid women being used as proxy representatives of a male family member in politics.

Keywords: Mobilization of Women, Proxy Politics, Reservation Quota, Women Representation

Introduction

To address gender inequities in countries, women's increased engagement in governing systems is essential. Since women are more sensitive to women's issues than males, they will bring female values to politics and help society embrace women as an equal and necessary element of society. Therefore, it is crucial to create female leaders through women's reservations in politics in order to eradicate gender disparities in all spheres of life and create an egalitarian society.

Political parties, not women, dominate and reserve the political arena. As per the law, the numerical strength of women is definitely not an indication of quality; however, there is distinction in their viability and adequacy. The political upliftment of women is not the premise of women's economic status ^[1]. Social obstructions can be defeated when the foundations of women are brought and initiated up in legislative issues.

Objective of the Study

The aim of this research study is to discuss and analyse the problems faced by Indian women, the importance of reservation bill in the political involvement of women; to check the impact of mobilisation of women and feminisation of politics and to find some effective ways to achieve gender parity in women representation in Indian Politics.

Methodology

The descriptive and analytical methods have been used in this research study. Several internet sources, articles, and journals are used in order to make it more comprehensive in nature, including the primary and secondary sources.

Reservation Bill

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in India introduced a 33% reservation for ensuring the representation of women in the local bodies. This has been executed without summoning any aggression or resistance from male lawmakers or society overall. In 1995, the discussion about government policies concerning minority rights, particularly for women, resurfaced, focusing specifically on reserving seats for women in Parliament.

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¹ Many women waited since long for their representation in politics despite of their strong economic status because earlier majority of parties do not give a chance to women in politics.

Initially, many ideological groups supported this idea. However, when the Bill addressing this issue was introduced in the 11th Parliament in 1997, some political parties raised concerns, particularly about the potential exclusion of women from lower castes and the possibility of favoritism toward the elite.

Lack of significant numbers of women representative in Parliament can also be a case in point for the failure of enacting this bill. If there were enough women representative, they might have been a key factor in passing the Bill establishing a 33% female quota in state legislatures and in the Parliament. India's failure to pass the Women's Reservation Bill demonstrates a lack of genuine commitment from political parties to fully acknowledge and support the women participation in the political processes.

Its opponents argued that preferential treatment to women in India is a discrimination against them. But they have forgotten that if reservation given on caste basis is right due to their past experience of caste-based exploitation, then women are also not less exploited if compared to those backward classes. Therefore, it is necessary to implement reservation bill at all levels in order to get due recognition to women candidate; otherwise women will merely be a proxy-representatives and can never be able to hold decision making power in their hands.

Mobilisation Effects on Women Representation

The absence of women from the Parliament, as well as from other levels of party organisations and political activities, has contributed to the persistence of male superiority in these areas. Political gender gap can be reduced only through women representation. Mostly female workers are recruited in female constituencies and engaged in door-to-door campaigns leading to growing political involvement.

Additionally, women candidates have a direct impact on the hiring process to increase the representation of women which further has an impact in increasing the number of women voters at grassroots level. Such experiment can open a great path towards politics for women which as a result can lead to diversify future of female candidacy. Discriminatory gendered nature in political recruitment process can be seen which further plays a key role in sustaining gender disparity. Such experiment can open a great path towards politics for women which as a result can lead to diversify future of female candidacy.

Obstacles in Women's Political Participation

Despite over 74 years of independence, women still do not have a fair and adequate representation in the legislative bodies. This highlights the need for affirmative action, such as reserving seats for women, to ensure their inclusion. Participation of women in parliament is limited because of several problems and challenges they face while representing them in administration. They do not get many opportunities to raise their interests or advance their participation in politics because of the lack of women in decision making bodies. Women are not seen with respect if they go against family situations and fight for their rights ^[2].

² As per UN Women Annual Report 2013, Women in governmental issues likewise face many sorts of brutality in India.

Apart from this, ideological groups do not uphold the political strengthening of women nor give them legitimate tickets. Parties have the preconceived notion that women cannot administer and lack decision making power. Questions are raised on the triumph of the female applicant. Other political impediments like absence of party support, absence of supported contact and participation with other public associations like trade unions and women groups, absence of access to well-developed education, the character of electoral framework which is unlikely to favour women candidate, the double burden of domestic work and expert commitments also obstruct women.

Active Gender Parity in Political Representation

From the very beginning a family should give equal opportunities to both male and female children ^[3]. So, in order to achieve gender parity, change needs to be brought in way of parenting by educating families at grass root level. Most of the mothers of Indian families taught their girl child to follow patriarchy norms. They themselves accepted the norms of ideal woman i.e. a woman need to be sensitive, emotional, and patient, learn to adjust. So, there is need for each and every Girl to get educated to be aware of her caliber to take step for her freedom and rights.

Moreover, gender parity can be achieved in political representation by destroying the myth regarding politics in minds of people such as 'politics as dirty game', 'corrupted politics', 'dirty politics', 'selfish politics' etc. If people's perceptions regarding politics changed and they realised the scope of making career in politics, then there might be a possibility that the family would allow their children, particularly girls, to be part of their politics. Now analysing the current scenario in the context of gender parity, no doubt that positive change has come. Many Women are now coming into politics; they are becoming part of government jobs, serving as civil servants (IAS, IPS officers) and in the army too. Increasing the number of women voters is also an example of women participation in politics. However, there is still a far journey ahead in achieving gender Parity as issues mentioned away still existed in one way or the other directly or indirectly.

Avoid Women being used as Proxy Representatives of a Male family Member in Politics

Growing proxy politics in rural local bodies is becoming one of the key factors in distorting rural democracy in India. The term "proxy women" has been used to describe elected women who hold only formal power. This often happens due to various challenges, such as opposition from their families, interference from husbands in their political duties, discrimination in political meetings, and lack of support from the local community. Additionally, these women face limited economic incentives, illiteracy, societal indifference toward women, and a dependence on men for financial and

³ Females are victim of segregation in their own family; they are relied upon to remain only at home, men belittle women to keep up with their predominance. Women can't find support from their families for participation in political arena, that's the reason they can't address their views as much they need to do in politics.

emotional support, all of which hinder their ability to exercise real power. In order to avoid the proxy representatives, the government should bring laws to curb the practice of Pradhan Pati by ensuring that women representatives are not only for name's sake.

Mere representation would not give power to women in rural areas. Furthermore, the government should start mentoring programs and in-built confidence in rural areas. Reservation not only empowers women representatives; it should also empower those who are casting votes and being active in local governance. Empowerment should not only be political but it should also be social, economic and cultural. Thus, grooming of women leaders is very much important.

Conclusion

A key strategy to bring an end to political gender gaps is to increase the representation of women. Sincere attempts have been made since 1996 to introduce the Reservation Bill into Parliament, but the many parties have consistently opposed it. Hopefully the law will be approved sooner or later. People who opposed to the bill should keep in mind that the reservation for women would increase awareness in Indian political life and assist in eradicating the criminal-politician connections which is the actual threat to Indian democracy. Women's representation in politics in India has grown significantly, and some of them have succeeded in achieving top positions. Still, much more needs to be done to strengthen their presence and to bring India at par with other developed nations. The present govt. has showed strong support for addressing women's legislative issues.

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