Political Empowerment of Women in India after Independence : A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

Indian society is a patriarchal society and this society never encouraged its women in any field, except kitchen! Indian women are relatively disempowered and they enjoy lower status than that of men from times immemorial. There are some historical examples which proved that the condition and status of women was very good in ancient period. They were treated as very important part of the society. Women were also enjoyed the political power during those days. Downfall of socio-economic and political status of women started from later vedic period onward. Women participation in politics leads to their liberty, decision making power and capability of protecting their rights. This paper attempts to find out the extent of participation of women in politics for their empowerment. The study is based on secondary data collected from different literatures relating to politics and women. Various websites also studied for analyzing the paper.

Introduction

In India the position of women is very high during vedic period. Women during the early Vedic period enjoyed equal status with men in all aspects of life. Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Rigvedic verses suggest that women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their own husbands. Scriptures such as the Rig Veda and Upanishads mention several women sages and seers, notably Gargi and Maitreyi. The Rig Veda, oldest of these texts, composed mostly by priests, but a few women too, give us the first ancient Indian writing with decipherable information about their various gods and goddesses. There is a creation story, where the goddess Aditi gives birth to the earth, also personified as a goddess, Prthivi. Mother Earth's role was to be tender to the dead and Aditi was to be prayed to for release from sin. In the two famous epics of India, the Mahabharata, and Ramayana, women are shown as having more freedom and competency than in the religious and legal literature. In the Mahabharata, there is evidence of both polyandry and polygamy. The position and status of women in India is low despite the myth of her being considered a "Goddess" and "Shakti" personified. She may be the embodiment of power or Shakti but then there is the concept of this power having to be controlled and channelized and that controlling agent is conveniently man. So woman loses her individuality, her very right to exist for herself: she is to be protected by her father in her youth, by her husband after marriage and then by her son.

In ancient India women not only enjoyed freedom for education and marriage but also they had political rights. Women often enjoyed prominent roles in politics. Megasthenes mentioned the Pandya women running the administration. The Satavahana queen, "Nayanika ruled the kingdom on behalf of her minor son. So did Pravabati, daughter of Chandragupta II,

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on behalf of the minor Vakataka prince. A little after the Gupta period, queens used to rule in Kashmir, Odisha and Andhra. Princess Vijaybhattarika acted as the provincial ruler under the Chalukya King; Vikramaditya I. Women were provincial and village administrators in the Kannada region too.

In medieval period there are many women who were known for their political and ruling capacity. Sultana became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. The Gond queen Durgavati ruled for fifteen years before losing her life in a battle with Mughal emperor Akbar's general Asaf Khan in 1564. Chand Bibi defended Ahmednagar against the powerful Mughal forces of Akbar in the 1590s. Jehangir's wife Nur Jehan effectively wielded imperial power, and was recognised as the real power behind the Mughal throne. The Mughal princesses Jahanara and Zebunnissa were well-known poets, and also influenced the ruling powers. Shivaji's mother, Jijabai, was queen regent because of her ability as a warrior and an administrator. In South India, many women administered villages, towns, and divisions, and ushered in new social and religious institutions. Despite such outstanding instances, the position, status and condition of women in India was poor.

When the Britishers came in to contact with the Indian people in the latter half of the 18th century, the position of Indian women had deteriorated to the lowest level. But a distinct change was noticeable when Indian society bore the impact of the British rule and of new ideas. In Bengal, the Brahmo Samaj Movement made rapid progress, arousing a new desire among women for freedom. A few women overcome their social handicaps and achieved positions of distinction. The participation of women in the national struggle loosened the social bondage in which they were held. Thousands of women took part in the freedom struggle under Gandhiji's leadership fearlessly facing police lathis and guns. The concern for women's political equality in India first emerged as a political issue during the national movement in which women were active participants.

The most common and accepted political action in elections is voting. This is exercised by women equal to men and in fact the number of women voters is increasing day by day. But women until the 20th century did not have the right to vote. American women were the first to start fighting for their rights to vote. In most of the western liberal democracies, women won voting rights after their systematic fight with the system.

Table :01

Women Voting Rights Of Different Countries

S.N.	Country	Year When Women Got Voting Right
1.	America	1918
2.	Australia	1902
3.	Denmark	1915
4.	England	1928
5.	Finland	1906
6.	France	1944
7.	Italy	1945

8.	Norway	1913
9.	Soviet Russia	1917
10.	Switzerland	1971
11.	Syria	1971

As early as 1917, Indian women raised the issue of representation in politics, which at a time meant a demand for universal adult franchise. By 1929 women had the right to vote on the basis of wifehood, property and education. Under Act of the Government of India, 1935, all women over the age of 21 could cast their vote provided they fulfilled the conditions of property and education. After the enactment of this Act, the introduction of provincial autonomy came into effect, many women became ministers in congress government. In the 1937 election, eight women were elected from the general constituencies and 42 from the reserved constituencies, and became ministers when the provisional cabinet was formed. Vijayalaxmi Pandith become minister for local self government in Uttar Pradesh and later Ansuyabai Kale and J.T Sipahimalchi were appointed Deputy Speakers in Madhya Pradesh and Sindh respectively. Hansa Mehta and Begum Shah Nawoy took office as Parliamentary Secretary in Bombay and Panjab respectively. In the Constituent Assembly which met in December 1946, there were 14women members.

Political Empowerment of women after independence:

After independence the Govt. of India has taken numerous measures and making honest endeavors to hoist the status of women and establish gender equality. The constitutional obligations as well as different plans, programs and policies have laid emphasis on women empowerment in order to bring them to the mainstream of development. Before independence women who were participated in politics basically they belonged to the wealthy and progressive families. After attaining Independence in the year 1947, India became a republic. The Constitution of India adopted a parliamentary form of government. The government functions at different levels. At the apex level, there is the national government and governments at states and union territories. At the centre, the parliament consists of two houses i.e. the Upper House called the Rajya Sabha or the council of states and the Lower House called the Lok Sabha (House of People). At the state level, the upper house is called the Legislative Council and the Lower House is called the Legislative Assembly. Each state has its own local self governments known as Panchayati Raj Institutions both at urban and rural areas Rural Panchayati Raj Institution has three tier structures consisting of the Zilla Panchayath at the district level, Taluk Panchayat at the Taluk level, and Gram Panchayat at the village level.

This paper is based on the participation of women in Upper House (Rajya Sabha) and Lower House (Lok Sabha).

RajyaSabha- Rajya Sabha is the Upper House of the Parliament of India. RajyaSabha is a permanent House and is not subject to dissolution. One-third members of RajyaSabha retire after every second year. Vice President of India is the ex officio Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha.

As per the Constitution of India (Article 80) maximum strength of Rajya Sabha is 250, out of which 12 members are nominated by the President and not more than 238 are representatives of the States and of the Union Territories. The present strength of Rajya Sabha is 245, out of which 233 are representatives of States and UTs and 12 are nominated by the President. The members nominated by the President are persons having special knowledge or practical experience in respect of such matters as literature, science, art and social service (Article 80). The allocation of elective seats is made on the basis of the population of each State. Consequent on the reorganization of states and formation of new states, the number of elected seats in the Rajya Sabha allotted to States and Union Territories has changed from time to time since 1952.

A person is qualified for the membership of the Rajya Sabha if he / she is a citizen of India, not less than 30 years of age (Article 84) and is not disqualified under the provisions of the Constitution (Article 102) or the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (Sections 8 to 10 A).

The election of representatives of the States and of the Union Territories in the Rajya Sabha is an indirect election. The representatives of each State and the two Union Territories with Legislature are elected by the elected members of the Legislative Assembly of that State/ Union Territory in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote. The representatives of the remaining Union Territories may be chosen in such manner as the Parliament may by law provide (Article 80).

At first the election of Rajya Sabha was conducted in the year of 1952. And in that election there were 15 women elected as the member of Upper House. After that we can see in the table given below the position of women in upper house :

Table :02

POSITION OF WOMEN IN UPPER HOUSE (RAJYA SABHA)

S.N.	Year	Women Members	
		No of members	Percentage
1	1952	15	6.9%
2	1954	16	7.3%
3	1956	20	8.6%
4	1958	22	9.5%
5	1960	24	10.2
6	1962	17	7.6%
7	1964	21	8.8%
8	1966	23	9.6%
9	1968	22	9.2%
10	1970	14	5.8%
11	1972	18	7.4%

12	1974	17	7.0%
13	1976	24	9.8%
14	1978	25	10.2%
15	1980	29	11.9%
16	1982	24	9.8%
17	1984	24	9.8%
18	1986	28	11.5%
19	1988	25	10.2%
20	1990	24	9.8%
21	1992	17	6.9%
22	1994	20	8.2%
23	1996	19	7.8%
24	1998	19	7.8%
25	1999	20	8.2%
26	2000	22	9.0%
27	2002	25	10.2%
28	2004	28	11.4%
29	2006	25	10.2%
30	2008	24	9.8%
31	2010	27	11.0%
32	2012	24	9.8%

Source: http://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/information_booklet/INFORMATION%20AT%20A%20GLANCE.pdf

On the basis of the analysis of **Table - 02** it can be observed that the political status of women in upper house is not very well. The percentage of their representation is not very satisfactory. The highest presentation of women in upper house in 1980,that was only 11.9%.

Lok Sabha-Lok Sabha is composed of representatives of the people chosen by direct election on the basis of adult suffrage. It is called the House of the People (Lower House of Parliament). The maximum strength of the House envisaged by the Constitution is 552 (Article 81 & 331), which is made up by election of up to 530 members to represent the States, up to 20 members to represent the Union Territories and not more than two members of the Anglo-Indian Community to be nominated by the Honourable President, if, in his/ her opinion, that community is not adequately represented in the House. Number of seats in the House of the People as per First Schedule of Representation of People Act, 1950 is 543.

To become a member of the LokSabha, a person should be a citizen of India, not less than 25 years of age and possess such other qualifications as may be prescribed by or under any law made by Parliament. Under normal situations, unless dissolved by the President, the

LokSabha continues for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting. However, this period may be extended by Parliament by law if Emergency is proclaimed. The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker are the Presiding Officers of the LokSabha. The LokSabha (House of the People) was duly constituted for the first time on 2nd April 1952 after the first General Election held from 25 October 1951 to 21 February 1952. The Fifteenth LokSabha was constituted on 18th May 2009. Parliament, from time to time, by law makes provision with respect to all matters relating to, or in connection with, elections to the LokSabha, including the preparation of electoral rolls, the delimitation of constituencies and all other matters necessary for securing the due constitution of the LokSabha.

Table :3

S. N.	Election Year	Women Contestants		Women Elected over total Seats	
		No	Percentage	No	Percentage
1	1951	-	-	-	-
2	1957	45	3.0	22	4.5
3	1962	66	3.3	31	6.3
4	1967	68	2.9	29	5.6
5	1971	61	2.2	29	5.6
5	1977	70	2.9	19	3.5
6	1980	143	3.1	28	5.3
7	1984	162	3.0	42	8.2
8	1985*	9	5.0	1	3.7
9	1989	198	3.2	29	5.5
10	1991	326	3.8	37	7.1
11	1992#	4	4.9	2	15.4
12	1996	599	4.3	40	7.9
13	1998	274	5.8	43	7.9
14	1999	285	6.1	49	9.0
15	2004	355	6.5	45	8.3
16	2009	556	6.9	59	10.9
17	2014	640	8.0	62	11.0

Note: Data on participation of women is not available for 1951 elections *Elections were held separately for States of Assam & Punjab #Elections were held separately for State of Punjab

Source: http://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/information_booklet/INFORMATION%20AT%20A%20GLANCE.pdf

Table :3 further indicates the low participation of women in the politics. During 1957 to 2014 women contestants has increased from 3 percent to only 8.0 percent which is very surprising and discouraging. When we talked about the percentage of winning women in

LokSabha elections, there is only a satisfactory sign that the proportion of those winning contestants are increasing since 1957 upto 2014 i.e. 4.5 to 11.0 percent respectively.

Table : 4

Representation of women in the union council of minister (1985-2014)

Year	Number of minister			Number of Women Minister		
	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Deputy Minister	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Deputy Minister
1985	15	25	0	1	3	0
1990	17	17	5	0	1	1
1995	12	37	3	1	4	1
1996	18	21	0	0	1	0
1997	20	24	0	0	5	0
1998	21	21	0	0	3	0
2001	30	7	35	3	2	4
2002	31	45	0	2	5	0
2004	28	38	0	1	6	0
2009	34	45	0	3	5	0
2014*	23	23	0	6	1	0

*first phase of Narendra Modi's Council of Ministers which took oath on May 26,2014

Since independence Indian society is trying to uplift the status of women but the expected results could not be achieved. In the present scenario of Indian Politics the number of women cabinet ministers is highest i.e.6.(table :4).

The Women's Reservation Bill has been a political ball for nearly a decade and half. It has always triggered heated debates within Parliament and outside. The proposed legislation to reserve 33.3 percent seats in the Parliament and state legislatures for women was drafted first by the H D Deve Gowda-led United Front government. The Bill was introduced in the LokSabha on September 12, 1996. Although it has been introduced in Parliament several times, the Bill could not be passed because of lack of political consensus. Once the Bill is passed, one-third of the total available seats would be reserved for women in national and state legislatures, as is implemented in some of the local governments. The involvement women in politics reflects their liberty and decision making power which is very essential for raising the status of women. Biologically, in any society half of the population consists of women. If this half section is ignored the balanced development can not be achieved. Women are equally important in the society as men and their human rights should be properly protected. Low participation of women in politics is the indicator of their backward condition in the society. According to several studies, experience of women's reservation at that level has been very encouraging. More than a million women are being periodically elected to the panchayats in the country. This is the largest mobilisation of women in public life in the world, indeed!

On the basis of the findings of the paper it can be suggested that efforts should be made to promote the involvement of women in the politics through which they can protect their rights. For enhancements of women representation in politics there is urgent need to raise the over all socio-economic position of women in the society. The educational level and occupational status should be improved.

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