



Women's representation in the state assemblies of India

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Abstract

Gender equality is a prerequisite for the effective participation of women in strengthening the institutional structures of any democracy. The political position of women in India is indeed ironical, when we consider the fact that India is the largest democratic system where everyone should have the right to contribute to decision making and represent their interest. Women are not well represented in the country in spite of the fact that they form almost half of the population in India. The number of women in Legislatures at the State and National level is still not commensurate with their numbers in the society. Their representation in elected bodies including the two houses of Parliament has always been negligible. Similarly, the number of women in the Legislative Assemblies of the Indian States is also very disappointing. It is undoubtedly true that political institutions are predominantly comprised of men. The other half of the Indian population is politically marginalised, socially harassed, economically deprived, culturally exploited and religiously sidelined. Unless this trend changes, the meaning of Indian democracy is nothing but a mere farce and all claims and display of political equality are simply a charade.

Keywords: gender equality, democratic system

Introduction

For healthy political system and for welfare of the people, it is necessary that Women must come forward and play an active role in political affairs. More participants in decision making process will enhance the economic and political capacity of the country. Through this they can gain more self confidence and make attempt for better share in the political system. Their participation in the political process is also crucial for strengthening the democratic traditions. They are also important to nationalism as signifiers of ethnic/national differences- as focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transmission of ethnic national categories, and finally as participants in National, Economic, political and military struggles^[1]. But women representation is not in right proportion to their population in the society.

The status of female representation in legislative bodies of all other states of Indian union has been found that none of the states have set an exceptional record of women in their Assemblies. Although some state represent higher number of women in their respective assembly as comparison to Uttar Pradesh assembly. For instance, neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh such as Bihar has a still better women's representation around 14.81% in their present Assembly. West Bengal and Assam also have higher representations as compared to U.P. West Bengal has 11.86 percent and Assam has 11.11 percent women members in their current Assembly. The representation of women in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh is also better than U.P. In Chhattisgarh female representation is 13.19%, and in Madhya Pradesh is 10.87%.

Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan have appreciable female representation as compared to U.P. Punjab has 11.97 percent, Haryana has 11.11 percent and Rajasthan has 10 percent women representation in their current Assemblies. Data of Women representation of all State legislatures is illustrated in Table.

The representation of women in two Southern States Assemblies is also a bit better than U.P. In Andhra Pradesh Assembly, female percentage was 11.81 and in Tamil Nadu it is 9.3 percent. The conditions of rest of the southern States are despicable, with Karnataka having only 5 women (2.23%) in their present Assembly, while Puducherry has no woman in its current Assembly (See Table) It is also clear from the table that literacy has no effect on representation, Kerala is the most literate State of India, but women's representation is only 5 percent in its Assembly.

Table reflects that no state has touched the record of 20%. Even most of the states in India have failed to give due representation to women in Legislatures. Delhi despite being the Capital of India has only 3 women (4.29%) in their current Assembly of 2008. The condition of Maharashtra and Gujarat, the most developed states of Indian union, is also very saddening, with only 3.82% and 6.81% women in their present Assembly of 2009.

Women's representation in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir is not better than in the other States. The percentage of women in Himachal Pradesh is also not satisfactory, being only 4.41%. Uttarakhand has a better representation than these two states, with 7.14 Percent women in the Assembly of 2012. The condition of women's representation in North Eastern states is also very miserable. As we can see in Table, the representation of women in Arunachal Pradesh is only 5% and

¹ Rai, M. Shirin. *The Gender politics of development*. New Delhi: Zubaan (an imprint of kali for women) 2008, p.11.

in Meghalaya it is 6.67% in their present Assemblies. The condition is not much better in Tripura, where Women got 8.33% of the total shares of 60 seats in 2013 election. The scenario is worst in Nagaland, Mizoram and Sikkim, where

there are no women members in their present Assemblies. As Table shows, that the representation of women in the state legislative Assembly has been very small in comparison to men.

Table 1: Women's Representation in State Legislatures of India

States	Year of Elections	Total Seats	Elected Women	Percentage (%)
Bihar	2010	243	36	14.81
Andhra Pradesh	2009	295	35	11.86
West Bengal	2011	294	34	11.56
Uttar Pradesh	2012	403	35	08.68
Rajasthan	2008	200	29	10.00
Madhya Pradesh	2008	230	25	10.87
Tamil Nadu	2011	182	17	09.34
Gujarat	2012	235	16	06.81
Assam	2011	126	14	11.11
Punjab	2012	117	14	11.97
Chhattisgarh	2008	91	12	13.19
Maharashtra	2009	288	11	03.82
Haryana	2009	90	10	11.11
Jharkhand	2009	81	8	09.88
Kerala	2011	140	7	05.00
Odisha	2009	147	7	04.76
Karnataka	2013	224	5	02.23
Uttarakhand	2012	70	5	07.14
Tripura	2013	60	5	08.33
Meghalaya	2013	60	4	06.67
Arunachal Pradesh	2009	60	3	05.00
Manipur	2012	60	3	05.00
New Delhi	2008	70	3	04.29
Goa	2012	40	2	05.00
Mizoram	2013	40	No women	00.00
Nagaland	2013	60	No women	00.00
Sikkim	2009	32	No women	00.00
Puducherry	2012	30	No women	00.00
Jammu Kashmir	2009	89	2	02.24
Himachal Pradesh	2012	68	3	04.41

Sources: Statistical report on general elections to the Lok Sabha elections, national and state abstract and detailed results, Election Commission of India New Delhi.

Women are markedly underrepresented in all state assemblies along with parliament, although there are considerable variations in the proportion of women members. Almost all the states of the Indian union along with India's Parliament (11%) have women representation below 15 percent in their Assemblies, reflecting a pan- Indian gender exclusion from electoral participation and equality of representation.

Nowadays, women have occupied a significant position in various fields like education, occupation, employment etc. Women have been holding important position in the field of politics like Governor, Chief Minister, MPs, MLAs, etc. but they are still marginal in politics. Women are not getting adequate representation in the parliament, State legislatures, and other decision making bodies. A strong political activism is still not visible on the part of the Uttar Pradesh women's section. As a result, gender bias is very much visible in the politics of the country. The politics is dominated by men and they want to maintain their monopoly on it.

Women as voter turn out

The above study has documented a sharp gender gap almost in

all fields of political systems of the state, women are either missing or are under-represented in various political institutions like the Parliament, Assemblies, Assembly's portfolios in political parties. In contrast, a more positive phenomenon has been taking place in terms of the declining gender gap in political participation measured by voter turnout of women. The common women use their franchise like men in India. The voting is the basic activity by which the citizens get assimilated in the political process^[2].

The right to equality in voting is a basic human right in liberal democracy^[3] It is the right to vote for the correct leader and a just government. It is the means for choosing apt leaders who shall govern the state and the country judiciously. Active Participation of voters during election times shows their seriousness and strong feelings of patriotism towards the political system of the country. But in India, mostly people participate in the political process only by using their voting right. For women, voting is the only means through which

² Shrivastav, n. 3, p. 234

³ ibid

they participate in politics ^[4]. Women enjoy this right to equality in voting, and by casting a vote they make a formal expression of their individual choice of political parties, representatives or of broad policies. The fact that more women are voluntarily exercising their constitutional right across all states in India is a testimony to the rise of self empowerment of women to secure their fundamental right to freedom of expression. This is a biggest achievement in the world's largest democracy with 717 million voters of which 342 million voters are women ^[5]. It is evident from the data that women in India have proved to be good voters. In the statistics of the last five years, it is visible that the number of women voters has been increasing rapidly in contrast to the male voters ^[6].

More specifically, in the study of gender bias in political participation by analysing women voter turnout in Assembly of UP, it was found out that there is a steady and sharp decline in the gender bias in voting over time. Table indicates that the turnout of women as voters has increased very impressively and is like a silent revolution that has occurred over time. The percentage of female voters increased from 39.626% in 1962 to 57.68% in 1967. The difference between the turnout of the men and women was much higher in 1962 (21.66 percent) but it narrowed down substantially in 1967 elections to around 12.74 percent. The following table also shows that decline in gender bias of voters is solely driven by the dramatic increase in the participation of women in the elections since 1962, while men's participation has remain unchanged. A record has been broken in terms of the difference between men and women voters, as women outnumbered men in across the country in the last assembly election. During the 2012 Assembly elections in UP, 1.6 percent (60.29%) more women turned out to vote in comparison to 58.82 percent of men.

More significantly, the pattern of turnout of women voters has improved not only in UP, but also across the States including the backward ones. Further study also made sure that this phenomenon of declining gender bias in voting is across all the assembly elections held in different states between 2012 - 13, which witnessed a higher female voter turnouts as compared to men. According to the Election Commission of India there were more women voters than men across all states.

According to the Election Commission Records, approximately 61 million women turnout as voters in the recently assembly elections result of five states such as in Goa, Punjab, Manipur and Uttarakhand and UP. Contradictory, only 59 women were elected as representatives from the all five states in their respective assemblies. For instance, in Goa assembly election of 2012, women voter turnout was much higher than men, 85.97 percent women voted in comparison to 79.67 percent of men ^[7]. On the other hand only 5 percent (2) women were elected in the Goa assembly. In Uttar Pradesh 35 women, in Punjab 14 women,

in Uttarakhand 5 women, and in Manipur only 2 women have been elected, while women voter turnout were much higher in these states. (See table)

After the concluding results of these five state assembly elections, Smita Gupta (deputy editor at the Hindu news paper) who interviewed to the women of Punjab and UP, opined that "voting has become an empowering act for women. It gives women the feeling that they are independent to do what they want. They feel equal to men and other citizens" ^[8]. Women of these states have considered voting rights as a very important tool to exercise their political rights. One noteworthy point here is that this turnout is also higher for traditionally backward (BIMARU) states as well, like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc., where women voters were higher than men. Uttar Pradesh, which also comes in the category of BIMARU states (as discussed above) is a good example of the declining gender bias in women participations. Not only this, few smaller states like Sikkim, Manipur, Mizoram and Himachal Pradesh have also registered a much higher women voter turnout as compared to men ^[9].

Table 2: Difference between turnout of men and women in Assembly polls (1962-2012)

Year of Election	Overall Turnout %	Turnout of Men %	Turnout of Women %	Difference In turnout %
1962	51.44	61.28	39.62	21.66
1967	54.55	60.42	47.68	12.74
1969	54.06	61.41	45.42	15.99
1974	56.91	62.09	50.85	11.24
1977	46.14	52.09	39.10	12.99
1980	44.92	49.86	39.05	10.81
1985	45.64	51.28	38.88	12.04
1989	51.43	55.24	46.75	08.49
1991	48.51	51.85	44.32	07.53
1993	57.13	62.72	50.35	12.37
1996	55.73	60.25	50.20	10.05
2002	53.80	56.72	50.25	06.47
2007	45.96	49.35	41.92	07.43
2012	59.40	58.68	60.28	+1.6

Sources: Statistical report on general election to the legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, election commission of India New Delhi from 1952 to 2012.

The reason why this important development has taken place is not because it is an outcome of any specific top down policy intervention to raise voter turnout of women but because of the fact that it is driven over time by the voluntary act of self empowerment of women. Interestingly, this improvement did not come about because more women registered to vote as compared to men but because more women actively voted. Although, women as voters are playing a very important and decisive role in the formation of governments in these states, their representation in the states' legislatures has been very disappointing. This figure shames the largest democracy of the world despite the fact that women constitute nearly half of the citizenry and voting strength.

⁴ Jhartha, n.1, p.4.

⁵ Mudit Kapoor and Shamika Ravi, "Women Voters in Indian democracy: a Silent Revolution", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIX (12) (March 22, 2014), p.63, total 63-67

⁶ Shrivastav, n. 3, p. 235.

⁷ <http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/more-women-vote-in-india-s-state-assembly-elections/>. (Accessed on 9/11/2013)

⁸ <http://girlsglobe.org/2013/02/17/voters-of-dependency/> (Accessed on 17/6/2014)

⁹ *The Hindu*, will this election see a higher turnout, New Delhi, Thursday 10 April, 2014, p.7.

One positive aspect which has also been observed during researches is that women candidates have also had cleaner records than men. Among all the women in question none of them had any criminal records. On the other hand criminalisation of politics is increasing day by day which appears to hinder the entry of women into political process. Therefore it has been observed that increase in the number of women in the political process and decision making bodies will help in countering the criminalisation of politics. The women accessibility at grass root level politics and as the voters, will no doubt contribute to a larger number of women participating in Uttar Pradesh politics.

Despite the fact that several provisions regarding gender equality have been enshrined in the constitution, the space available to women within Indian political system is barely considerable and they are grossly under-represented in the legislatures, both at the national and state levels. Female representation in the Lok Sabha is still much less than the world average of 20%, lower than the 'critical mass' required to introduce gender parity in political decision making and legislation. Similarly female representation in legislative bodies of Indian states (as reflected in table) is also below the 20% mark which reflects gender exclusion from electoral participation and equality representation throughout India^[10].

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¹⁰ Praveen Rai, "Electoral Participation of Women in India: Key determinants and barriers", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI (3) (January 15, 2011), P. 47.