

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH THEIR REPRESENTATION IN LEGISLATURES AND LOCAL BODIES

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ABSTRACT

The problem of women reservation is an age-old issue. Montague has categorically rejected for the women representation in the proposed legislature to be introduced in India through Montague Chelmsford reforms in 1919. But some of the women representatives were elected to the state legislatures and imperial assembly during British period. The Constitution of India has conferred all rights including political rights upon women. From 1960 onwards the women representation has been slowly increased but not appreciably. Efforts of the first lady Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi are not met with success. Movement has been launched by the feminist leaders for the reservations in law making bodies. The political parties have taken different stand on women reservation which became a hurdle in the passage of the women reservation bill. The women reservation in law making bodies is essential to solve their problems and to recognize their rights conferred by the constitution of India. Most of the states have passed legislations providing 33% reservation to women. Later the reservation has been increased upto 50% in the first decade of the present century. All these issues would be highlighted in present article.

INTRODUCTION

A long controversy has been erupted on the representation of women in legislatures and local bodies. Very few women found their way to the law making bodies. but after 1970 women representation has been increased and accepted the political power of women in India. A demand has been grown for the 33% reservation for women in legislatures and local bodies. This demand has been still in debate in the Parliament. Different views expressed by political parties are responsible for not safe passage of the reservation bill. But 33% reservations have been accorded to women in local bodies at the will of respective states. All these issues have been discussed in my present article.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To focus on the need of women representation in both Parliament and legislatures.
2. To lay emphasis on the reasons for not increasing the representation in law making bodies.
3. To focus on the demands made by women for their representation in law making bodies.
4. To focus on the 33% reservation accorded to women in local bodies by the respective states.

On the basis of these objectives present article has been prepared.

METHODOLOGY:

Available literature has been gone through to prepare this article. Eminent women organizations are consulted to know their opinion on the women reservation bill. Several consultations have been made with the experts of this topic to have firsthand knowledge on the political rights of women. Conclaves and women conferences are attended to collect data for this topic.

HYPOTHESIS:

Women are being considered as vulnerable sections. They have no particular rights for their all-round development. Giving political power to women is only the solution to solve their problems. Women should have more representatives in law making bodies to discuss their problems and make the laws for their all round development. On the basis of these tentative conclusions present article has been prepared.

SIGNIFICANCE:

For ages together women have been suppressed at the hands of their male counterparts. Women have been treated as pleasure dogs. After independence the Indian government has tried its best to enhance the position of women by conferring political power on them. A lady Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi had been worked as Prime Minister for nearly 17 years. The women representation has been considerably increased in the early days of 21st century. But their demand for 33% reservation in law making bodies has not been adhered. Still the bill is in pending in the Parliament due to the stands taken by political parties.

THEME OF THE PAPER:

Indian women have secured honorable position right from the ancient days. Ramayana directly indicates that Yaznas and yagas could not be completed and achieve their ends without the presence of wife or female relatives. That kind of status has been accorded to Indian women. Even in the assemblies they had assisted the kings in the deliberations. Women were consulted by the rulers in the construction of temples and sacred buildings. But with the extent of Muslim rule the position of women was deteriorated. After the emergence of British, they have introduced reforms to revitalize the position of women. After the enforcement of the constitution of India the government has taken steps for the all-round development of women under the directive principles of state policy.

According to M.K. Gandhi “Women are a great power in society, but if they misuse their power, it can shatter to bits the whole fabric of society”.¹ The emergence of Indian women into active political life since Independence is a result of their partnership in revolution that gained India her freedom in 1947. The freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru have felt that women and men should work together to avoid discrimination which would make India a prosperous country. The illiteracy, poverty among women reduced only through their representation in law making bodies. Parliament and legislatures are the real venues to discuss the problems of the vulnerable section like women. Yet no aspect of women’s capacity to rise to full

¹ Maya Majumdar, Protecting Our Women, Volume – III, Dominant Publishers and Distributors, 1st edition 2001, P. 1.

stature as a human being came out more clearly than in politics. The Indian politics have proved that the women are not so strong to take decisions to strengthen the society. The women are in general dependent upon their parents or the husbands for their survival which push them back in the development.

Here the support impliedly indicates that the support given by family to the women to participate in the political process. Political process simply denotes that the women's participation in the democratic process. The democracy has relied upon the electoral process and the public opinion. The democratic process would be successful with the women's participation. First of all right to vote has been conferred upon women after the First World War by most of the countries. Conferring political rights for women which allow them to contest elections to enhance their ability to speak in Parliament or legislatures. Electoral process went through various phases in India in accordance with her history, which culminated into women's full democratic participation as citizens with the sanction of right to vote to women by the Constitution of India along with their male counterparts. The problems of the women can be solved by conferring decision making power to women.² Indian women have enjoyed political power and rose to the highest peak in compare to the women of western countries. For an instance Sucheta Kripalani has been elected as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. She was the first lady chief minister. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu has been appointed as Governor of Uttar Pradesh during the initial days of independence of India. Vijalakshmi Pandit the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru has proved her skill in United Nations by showing Indian women indulgence to the west. Similarly Indira Gandhi has proved her caliber as Prime Minister and saved India from the onslaughts of western criticism. She was responsible for the independence of Bangladesh granted by Pakistan defeated by India in 1971 war. Sucheta was always filled with compassion. Unknown even to her close associates she solved the problem of countless poor people finding them jobs and healing the sick in a clinic she started in slums and other poverty areas. Mrs. Sucheta had campaigned for her party inspite of her illness in 1974.

All Indian National Congress is established in 1885. After thirty two years of its establishment the congress has elected a woman candidate as its President. Mrs. Annie Besant was elected as President of Congress who has presided over the Annual Congress session of Calcutta in 1917.³ By that time the women should possess high qualities and qualifications for the election of President of a party or a member to the elective bodies. Mrs. Annie Besant has stressed that the same rules should be applicable for the men who are to seek elections. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu has been elected as second woman President of Indian National Congress in 1925. After the third Round Table Conference the then British Prime Minister Mr. Ramsay, M.C. Donald has announced Communal Award in which the political reservations for women have been provided. Only the congress has strived for the development of women during the days of independence. Other parties have also tried to follow the path shown by the congress.

It was not until 1926 that women got elected to Legislative Councils in the provinces of the then British India. In Madras the first woman to gain elective office was Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, who was not only the

² Batliwala, S. Empowerment of Women in South Asia: Concept and Practices, 1993, P. 43.

³ Bhogaraju Pattabhi Sitaramayya, History of the Indian National Congress.

first woman doctor to graduate from the Madras University but also the first Vice-President of the Madras Legislature. The Women's Indian Association had been very active during those early years, and had also put up two candidates. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya who became a veteran socialist leader in course of time and was responsible too for the revival of India's ancient handicrafts and Mrs. Hannen Angelo. In 1921 since the battle for women's rights had been concentrated in certain States, the Madras Legislative Council had passed a resolution calling for the registration of women on the electoral rolls, Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins two English women who identified themselves wholly with the emancipation of women in India Dhanwanthi Rama Rao, the later champion and world authority on Family planning Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, T. Sadasiva Iyer and Dorothy Jinarajadasa were actively behind these developments.

Sarojini Naidu who was considered as right hand of Mahatma Gandhi was a strong political leader who has demanded for self government in 1917 and the establishment of hospitals for poor men and women in India. She has advocated for girls education. Montagu was also asked by four members of the Senate of the Indian Women's University for an interview from the "women of India" two of whom were Margaret Cousins and Ramanbai M. Nilkantha. It is obvious that a great deal of the initial feminist movement has started in Madras and spread gradually to the other part of India. The early Home Rule league had branches in other parts of India Women's organizations started initially to bring education to girls inevitable moved on to the field of legislation and to social reform of all kinds and then to politics. But on the whole, these early movements were free of partisan elements. In the mid 30s the progress of women in the politics was rapid. A number of women have tried their luck in the elections. Awareness and enthusiasm have been mounted among the women to participate in the political process. In the 1936 elections which took place in provinces of India but not in 603 princely States. Anusuyabai Kale was elected Deputy Speaker in the Central Provinces, Siphai Malani, Deputy Speaker in the Sind Assembly, Rukmini Lakshmi pathi became a Minister in the Madras Cabinet in 1937, Jyoti Venkatachakan in Rajagopalachari's Cabinet in 1937, while the first woman to serve in any Cabinet was Vijayalakshmi Pandit in U.P. with the portfolio of local, Self-Government and Public Health. In the Central Assembly, Renuka Ray who was later Minister of Rehabilitation in Bengal. Radhabai Subbarayon, a member of one of the Round Table Conferences and Ammu Swaminathan who along with her other colleagues was elected to Parliament in the 1952 First General Elections after independence, played an active part.

The women have played a notable role in the constituent assembly after the partition of India. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and some others have been elected as members to the constituent assembly. The Constituent Assembly set up in October 1946, a body elected by the existing Legislatures, had among it members Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai, Renuka Ray and Hansa Mehta among others, to frame the Constitution for India on Independence.⁴ Barely a year later Independence came at mid-night on August 15th with wild rejoicing. After the independence of India riots have been broken in Northern parts of India killing Hindus and Muslims each other. Brother killed brother because one was a Muslim and the other a Hindu. The tragic streams of refugees

⁴ Constitution Assembly discussions, Volume – VI.

started. Gandhi was at Noakhali in East Bengal in the heart of the carnage with Sucheta Kripalani by his side. In the North, Mridula Sarabhai with singular courage went into camps to rescue abducted women, and Ramashwari, Nehru, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Kitty Shiva Rao, Achamma Mathi and many others worked for the rehabilitation of helpless people in whole hearted manner. Women from all sections including orthodox have participated in rehabilitation camps and helped millions of people who became helpless in riots. Millions of people have lost their homes. All these people are provided shelter and food by establishing refugee camps in the disturbed areas. The women have done selfless service in spite of the restrictions imposed by their men folk.

The women organizations and women leaders have initiated a long movement for their rights. Finally, the founding fathers have accepted the demand from women by conferring equal fundamental rights for both men and women in the constitution of India. Article 325 of the Constitution, also makes plain that no special electoral rolls on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex could be entertained and Article 326 emphasis that elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States were to be on the basis of adult suffrage. The election commission of India has provided equal opportunity for all the people to participate in the elections approving their political rights. The rights are enshrined in Part III of the Constitution of India. The government of India and the state governments are directed to provide equal opportunities without having any discrimination on the basis of colour, creed, caste and sex. The same principles have been enshrined in the directive principles of state policy of the Part IV of Indian Constitution. The work of Margaret Cousins, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and of the far-seeing women forty years earlier had certainly born fruit. Montague the then secretary of state for India has dismissed the demand made by women for their representation in proposed legislature. In England men of his time generally thought women's demands wholly frivolous.

But in case of India the political activities and election process are different. In the initial dates the Indian political scene has witnessed the single party domination. The congress party seems to become one member party since the days of Mrs. Indira Gandhi a strong women administrator. Speaking on, about the opposition during the rule of Congress, no strong opposition party is not found to criticize the government on it's failure. The ruling party though the dominated by Mrs. Indira Gandhi for nearly 17 years, awareness could not be created among the minds of women to take part in the Democratic process. But to return to the more innocent early years in 1952, women campaigned their huge constituencies like their male counterparts..... every member being theoretically responsible to about one million citizens. By car, jeep, train, camel, bullock cart or on foot, candidates stamped the country. Twenty-three women were elected to the House of the People, the Lok Sabha out of 489 seats. In the State Legislatures out of 3,641 elected 98 were women. There was an interesting map prepared for the Prime Minister's election tours in 1952 which shows what terrain had to be covered by the leader of the party in power and the miles he covered. This had special significance in this study; the Prime Minister since 1967 elections has been Indira Gandhi.

In the first General Elections three women came into prominence as parliamentarians. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was the first Cabinet Minister with the Health Portfolio the Deputy Minister was Margatham

Chandrasekhar who was one of the Congress Party Secretaries.⁵ Not many women over the years played a role in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Secretariats or as Speakers and Deputy Speaker though they feature as alternates in the lists of the latter. Lakshmi Menon, however, was made a parliamentary secretary for the first five years of Parliament's life and subsequently remained as Deputy Minister for External Affairs under Jawaharlal Nehru who was also Foreign Minister, till 1967.

Sixteen general elections have been conducted till 2014. In the 1967 fourth General Elections political interest had gained ground even in very remote areas. The euphoria of the immediate post-Independence period forced women to play a harder more nature game, as political parties began to assess their choice of candidates less romantically and with a hardnosed insistence upon the likelihood of their nominee winning. Incredible as it may be 107 political parties and 26 unrecognised parties are listed for the different General Elections up to 1967, some of them Independents with a scant following. There have been eight major National parties as listed in the Report of the Fourth General Elections, 1967 by the Election Commission. While the State level parties have an impact upon only the local State Government of which the State of Tamilnadu is a case in point, it is mostly the action and interaction of the major national organizations that sweep the polls. The course of political events in India since Independence has led to party reverses, loss of States to the party in power, and the establishment of President's Rule in others, leading to mid-term elections in that State as in Uttar Pradesh after 1967, or in Gujarat recently.

First Five General Elections have shown that despite problems of party nomination the unwillingness of husbands, or families to allow woman to enter a field of action which may be marked by crudity and violence, with often extraordinary demands made upon their health and strength, let alone the monetary resources needed to fight an election, they have maintained a fairly even position year after year, 1962 was perhaps the best year with six women members in the Centre as Ministers of State or Deputy Ministers whose names and designations for all election years are listed. Twenty one Ministers or Deputy Ministers in State Governments, 34 elected to the Lok Sabha and 12 to the Rajya Sabha; out of the 12 nominated members, none were women instead all were returned through the voting in the State Legislative Assemblies by the normal process of returning members to the Upper House in Delhi.⁶ It was in that year also that Violet Alva served as Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. In the later part of 20th century has shown some improvement in the number of female members of the parliament. Upto 2009 forty to 50 members are elected to Lok Sabha. Mrs. Meera Kumar has served as Lok Sabha Speaker. Similarly, Mrs. Rekha, Mrs. Hemamalini are nominated as Rajya Members. Mrs. Najma Heptullah has served as Deputy Chairperson in the first decade of 21st century. Similarly, Mrs. Vasundhara Raje of Rajasthan, Mrs. Anandi Ben Patel of Gujarat, Jayalalitha of Tamilnadu and Miss Mamata Banerji are serving as Chief Ministers of their respective states. The NDA (National Democratic Alliance) Government has ordered the companies to enlist atleast one woman as director. In this way the women are finding a respectable place in politics and in the field of commerce.

⁵ A.A. Rao Politics in India from 2010, Lucknow University Press, 1978. P. 620.

⁶ S. Lal, Women in Indian Politics, Kunal Books, Deepak Offset Press, Delhi, First Published 2010. P. 108.

The women are being elevated to high positions from the last decades of 20th century. But the participation of women the democratic process at grass-root level should be strengthened. The women participation is very low in the elections of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) right from 1960 to 1990. With a view to strengthen the Panchayat Raj Institutions 73rd Amendment Act has been passed by the union parliament. The 73rd amendment has changed the composition and financial position of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs).

CONCLUSION:

The Human Rights charter has recognized the rights of women. Social economic and political rights have been conferred upon women. Only the political rights can elevate the position of women by which they are enable to solve their problems. Frequent demand has been made for the women representation in the law making bodies right from 1917. Finally, the Constitution of India has recognized the rights of women by which the women rose to the political power. The women organizations have launched movements for the 33% reservation in law making bodies. This demand has not been fulfilled due to some political reasons. But the women found 50% reservation in local bodies in the first decade of 21st century.

