

9. Role of Women in Political Process

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Paper-II

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Historical Background

- Historically many women have been active in Indian Politics in its informal set up, such as, to mobilize people or participating in *dharna* and strike.
- The participation of women in Indian Nationalist movement has been impressive.
- They were actively mobilized by Mahatma Gandhi in fight against colonialism and their large presence could be seen in Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience and salt movement.
- After independence women got marginalized except the symbolic representation by Indira Gandhi in Indian Political Process.

Facts and perceptions

- India falls in the lowest quartile with respect to the number of women in parliament (9.1%). Even the UAE, with 22.5%, has more women representatives, according to the UN's 2008 survey of women in politics.
- 15th Lok Sabha elections have delivered a record 59 women as members of Parliament, the highest since independence, raising their parliamentary participation to 10.9%. Seventeen of these women are under 40.
- In current parliament, 78 women got elected and within that TMC has almost 40 percent women elected for the Lok Sabha. It is a slight increase from the previous strength of 62. In terms of political parties, the BJP has the maximum number of winning women MPs — 41 among all political parties.
- According to the United Nations, the percentage of women in Parliament has doubled globally in the last 20 years, but this only translates into 23 per cent of women in Parliament today.

Issues and context

- Various reform movements pushed for blanket 33% reservation to women in the Parliament and State Legislatures.
- Many attempts have been made to incorporate 33% reservation but it fell through due to several factors, most prominently the provision of reservation, especially OBC reservation.
- The BJP recently announced to have 33 percents seats earmarked for women in organization.
- The issue whether women is a monolithic group and constitute an undifferentiated category has become a major bone of contention among leaders.
- Further, the collective identification and mobilization of women as a 'disadvantaged' group as gender is an appropriate way to address the issue.

Issues and Factors

- It has also been pointed out that mere increased presence of women in *Lok Sabha* and *Vidhan Sabha* will not usher in changes unless they represent the true concern of women.
- In the debates on reservation for the women in Parliament, the issue that an undifferentiated reservation for women will further reinforce the existing inequalities in women's access to position of power.
- The trend of entry of women into Indian Politics can be factorized as :Family background(daughter/in-laws of prominent politicians);political influence; Family's financial position;literacy;local conditions;personality traits etc.

Critical Factors Examined

- The real purpose in highlighting these facts and figure are to point out the skewed representation of women in politics despite the growing trend of education and empowerments.
- How one could interpret it in the context of India where we have a robust architecture of facilitating women in all position by giving them the pious position in cultural and religious set up.
- The real issues behind these low representation is perhaps the structural bottleneck in facilitating the participation of women as the continuing presence and dominance of old culture of politics which subordinated women to men in all important decision-making process.

Feminism in India

- Gender as a concept, has not only dominated the academic discourses in the recent times but has also evolved ever since its inception.
- The feminist movement in India is largely symbolized by two major events that transformed the Indian politics and society during the late 90s. Firstly, there was a demand raised for a 33 percent reservation for the lower caste women in the Parliament.
- This was arguably in line with the provisions for reservations in the Indian Constitution for certain sections of the population owing to their disadvantageous identity-based positionality within the society, such as caste.

Women in Panchayat

- The *panchayati* raj, that bedrock of rural government, has fostered more and more women participants and leaders, especially since the passing of the 73rd amendment in 1992.
- Several states including Bihar has amended the law to increase the women participation up to 50 percent at Grass-root level.
- when women can change the grammar of grass root politics through their increased presence, what hampers in not having due representation of women in Parliament for ushering in transformative politics.

Position in UK and USA

- The situation of subordination of women into political process has almost been similar except with a slight degree of variation.
- In USA the women has continuously been striving to attain increased presence and equality but still they are far off from equal representation partly because of the impact of feminist movement was more on Emancipation than empowerment. As of now they have 23% women participating in political process.
- The conservatism in allowing women to appropriate similar role to men is dominantly present in British Political system. Though Margaret Thatcher has ruled for over a decade and crafted a very powerful role for women in British Society, yet, overall women are not having the same engaging position as could be seen, somewhat, in Scandinavian nations like Finland or Newzeeland.
- However, in contrast to India the women face different hurdles than what they face abruptly in India.

Key areas of concern

- India being a poor nation has hardly afforded the minimum universal guarantee of basic health care to all.
- Even among those slew of reforms borne out of Universalization of Primary Education and Ayushman Yojna, the women are still at margin in availing those benefits and reasons stretch from cultural to political backwardness.
- healthcare, education, and the funds to make these two things happen.
- Women's role in decision-making especially in policy making is highly absymmal.

Possible solutions

- Bringing safe and accessible financial services could have potential to break the chain and women participation in economic and social can have a cascading impact on their position in polity and society.
- UNDP's study *Poverty in Focus*, strongly demonstrate" that there is a clear link between women's participation in a Self Help Group (SHG) and their empowerment.
- Reforming education to stem the Girl's dropout from the school might be an enabling factor to promote women's participation in all decision including political process.
- The recent Administrative Reforms Commission repeats a long-standing recommendation that the selection of school teachers in rural schools be delegated to each *panchayat* instead of making it state-wide vindicates the above point of making education accessible and affordable.

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