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Women Empowerment through politics in India

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Abstract:

Women empowerment may mean equal status to women, opportunity and freedom to develop herself. This research paper uses the descriptive method of study. The secondary sources are given more importance in this paper. The article of research journals, working of research paper, thesis and books of famous sociologist used as the secondary source of information.. Studies have revealed that increased women's participation has resulted in a bigger economic benefit, increased cooperation across party lines and more sustainable conflict resolution.

Keyword: *Discrimination, Empowerment, Loksabha, Panchayati Raj, Panchayati Raj, Illiteracy*

Introduction:

Women's empowerment as a phenomenon is not something absolutely new. It has been there throughout history in almost all societies for a variety of reasons. Women empowerment may mean equal status to women, opportunity and freedom to develop herself. The focus of empowerment is equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self- esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in the process of decision-making [1]. On the voting front through adult franchise was granted in 1937, it was the progressive spirit that pervaded the making of the constitution that made it a reality. The Constitution of India guarantees equal rights to men and women as voters and citizens.

Methods and materials:

This research paper uses the descriptive method of study. The secondary sources are given more importance in this paper. The article of research journals, working of research paper, thesis and books of famous sociologist used as the secondary source of information.

Generally, in India, registration and participation of women as contestants is less than that of men. In recent past, records show that there has been an increase in the percentage of women who vote. Such participation is also contingent on the mobilisation efforts made by political parties, NGOs, Action Groups and the general awareness among the community of the importance of women exercising their franchise. Again a note of caution is required, lest it be assumed that political participation always indicates political awareness on the part of the women voter. Usually, however, countries that do hold regular elections show an improved recognition of women as a political constituency and parties and candidates tend to adopt pro-women stances and appeal specifically to women's votes, especially at the time of elections. This becomes very evident when we look at consecutive elections in the Indian context,

Wherein there is a growing consciousness of the need to woo the women voter and the need to pay attention to the needs and issues of women, in the election manifestos of political parties [2]

Since independence, due to exercise of their franchise, Indian women have been exposed to the political processes and are showing increasing awareness about not only lack of rights but also their utility. A majority of illiterate rural women are also politically sensitive and aware of the various issues confronting them. Women get easily mobilised in the political processes by the political parties who approach women bringing about social changes and gender equality in political power-sharing. In all the elections held since independence, women had the voting rights. The percentage of seats won against the seats contested is showing a declining trend only because the number of women contesting elections has increased sharply. However, it may be seen that voting by women in all tiers of Government has always been a feature of the Indian Polity since 1947. Due to the paternalistic family and male dominated political structures which do not provide space for women in decision-making bodies, women constituted 3.1% of the total contestants in 1996 election and did not occupy more than 6.10% of the total seats in the

state legislative assemblies and parliament. The number of women contestants in Parliamentary elections has not increased significantly over the years [3].

Political parties are still reluctant to field women candidates at national level. As shown in table I, in the early days of the Indian republic, the number of women representatives was a mere 22, which was a lowly 4.4% of the total seats in the Lok Sabha.

Table 1: Women presence in the Loksabha of India [8]

Lok Sabha	Year	Total of seats	No. of Women Members Elected	Percentage of women
1.	1952	489	22	4.50
2.	1957	494	27	5.47
3.	1962	494	34	6.88
4.	1967	523	31	5.93
5.	1971	521	22	4.22
6.	1977	544	19	3.49
7.	1980	544	28	5.15
8.	1984	544	44	8.09
9.	1989	529	28	5.29
10.	1991	509	36	7.07
11.	1996	541	40	7.39
12.	1998	545	44	8.07
13.	1999	543	48	8.84
14.	2004	543	45	8.29
15.	2009	543	59	10.87
16.	2014	543	62	11.42

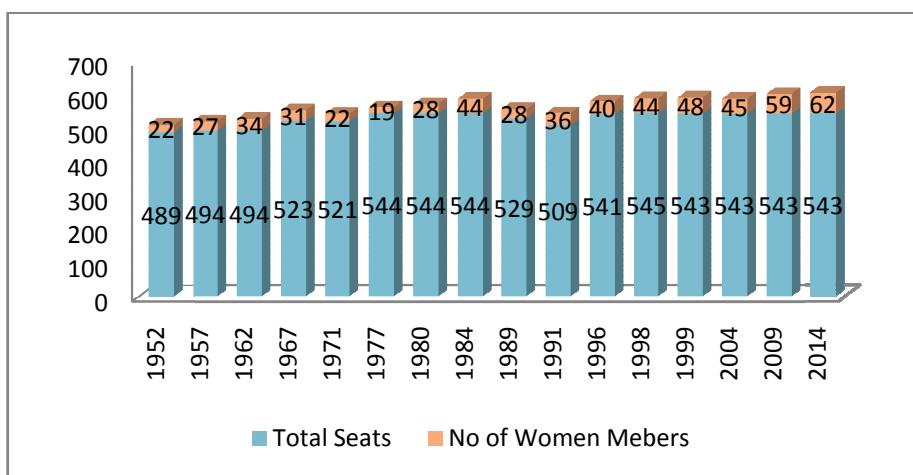


Fig. 1: Women presence in Loksabha

The sixth Lok Sabha in the year 1977 saw an all time low of just 19 women representatives. The Twenth Lok Sabha had 44 women i.e. 8.8% of the total.

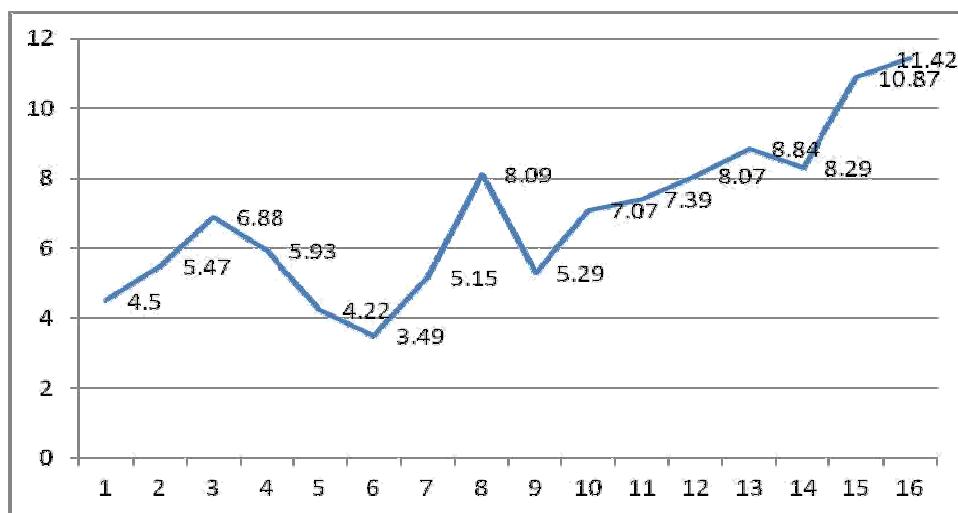


Fig. 2 Percentage of Women in parliament [8]

From the records available of the past 50 years, since the independence, it is seen that the strength of women in the political field as reflected in State legislatures remained at ab average of 3% to 5% of those elected. At the level of Parliament, the position of women members has varied between 5% to 7% [4].

Some studies of Parliamentary participation indicate that women members participate more actively in 'women's issues' - health, welfare, atrocities against women, crimes like dowry and violations of human rights. This participation is confined to the more articulate women. In issues such as defence, finance, politics etc., their participation is relatively limited.

After 1993, women's participation in local governments increased quite radically, with the enactment of the legislation providing 33 precent reservation of seats for women in local bodies. The legislation and its implementation has added another level in political participation [5].

The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1992) to the Indian Constitution have served as a major break through towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in political power structures. This Amendment provided for reservation of one third of seats for women at level of local governance in urban areas.

There was a bill on 2008 as women's reservation bill or the constitutional amendment 104th which clearly states that women has 33% reservation to participation in politics.

Table 2: Women in Panchayati Raj Institution, 1996-2010 (figure in percentage)

Level/ Year	1996	2000	2008	2010
Gram Panchayat	31.3	31.3	36.3	38.4
Panchayat Samiti	-	20.7	36.4	37.2
Zilla Parishad	31.8	31.8	36.6	35.8

Challenges to women's participation:

Sexual violence: A 2011 study found, "24% of Indian men have committed sexual violence at some point in their lives, 20% have forced their partners to have sex with them...38% of men admitting they had physically abused their partners." Widespread sexual violence is attributed to the fact that violence within marriage is not against the law, and sexual violence goes largely unpunished.

Discrimination: Although the Constitution of India removed gender inequalities among caste and gender, discrimination continues to be a widespread barrier to women's political participation. A 2012 study of 3,000 Indian women found the barriers in participation, specifically in running for political office, in the form of illiteracy, work burdens within the household, and discriminatory attitudes towards women as leaders.

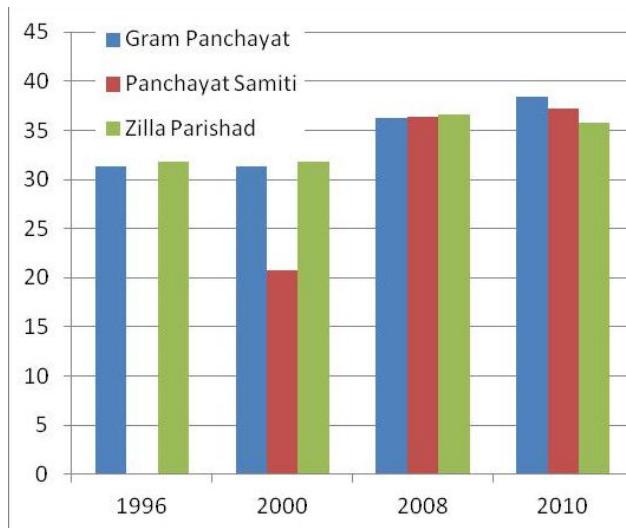


Fig 3 Women in Panchayati Raj Institution, 1996-2010 (figure in percentage) [8]

Illiteracy: Illiteracy limits the ability of women to understand the political system and issues. Problems with exploitation, such as women being left off of voters lists, have been reported as illiteracy limits the ability of women to ensure their political rights are exercised.^[52] Martha C. Nussbaum concerning political participation stated, "Because literacy is connected in general with the ability to move outside the home and to stand on one's own outside of it, it is also connected to the ability of women to meet and collaborate with other women."^[6]

Overcoming barriers to participation: To overcome issues of discrimination and violence, women's organizations have focused on the empowerment of Indian women. Empowerment is tied to the support of family and improved status within the household, which is undermined by the threat of domestic and sexual violence [7,8].

Conclusion:

Political parties cannot remain indifferent towards women who constitute 586.5 million population and nearly 48.46 per cent of the electorate (2011 Census). Although almost all parties have attempted to build women organisations to secure their support and make their organisations more broad based, but in practice they have fielded much less proportion of women candidates in the elections giving them proportionately much less representation in the legislative bodies than their actual population strength .

It is important to have both quantity and quality in the women taking part in governance. Studies have revealed that increased women's participation has resulted in a bigger economic benefit, increased cooperation across party lines and more sustainable conflict resolution. It is important to raise women's engagement in politics by raising their awareness of opportunities available, building confidence and skills.

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