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ISSN (Online): 2455-7838

SJIF Impact Factor (2016): 4.144

UGC Approved Journal No: 48844

EPRA International Journal of

Research & Development (IJRD)

Monthly Peer Reviewed & Indexed
International Online Journal

Volume:2, Issue:6, June 2017



Published By :
EPRA Journals

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ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)

Volume: 2 | Issue: 6 | June | 2017

GENDER, VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The marginalization of women in electoral politics is deeply embedded in the party system and the imbalanced gender power relations in the main political dispensations in India. They continue to be discriminated against not only in terms of seat allotments to contest elections but also within the rank and file of major political parties. The present paper is an attempt to study the impact of violence on the political participation of women.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Violence, Political Participation, Political Marginalization

GENDER, VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN

Political participation is the basic feature of any democratic system. Nature, success and effectiveness of any democracy largely depends upon the extent to which system provides equal, effective and participation in actual terms to all its citizens. Since women comprise of almost half of the population, they cannot be ignored in this sphere, rather require priority attention. It is very important to know the extent of their participation without which we can not assess democratic participation and frame right policies and strategies. Although women have been granted equal rights in the political system, yet they have remained second class citizens in terms of political participation and political power. For a democracy to be a real democracy it is very important that women in large numbers come forward to take part in politics. However, at ground level, they largely remain inactive and indifferent towards politics. Due to age-old traditions and attitudes they are disadvantaged and discriminated by being limited to their homes or work. Politics is generally regarded as man's affair and political life is

considered to be a masculine activity. Even women themselves are unwilling to engage in type of activities that are deemed to be necessary for election to any public office. Their representation in Parliament as well as State Legislatures is not very significant. The states which are ahead in other parameters for equality of women such as literacy, favourable sex ratio, working population, fertility rate, mortality rate, freedom in daily activities, etc. are not showing any major progress in the political front. This minimal participation of women is an indication of comparatively less effective democratic system. However, their participation in grass-root democratic institutions like Panchayat and Municipal Corporations has increased mainly due to reservations. Such increases in their participation are a very good sign for future and bring a change in the political culture of the country especially if such reservation is extended to women in Parliament and Assemblies. The present paper is an attempt to study the impact of violence on the political participation of women. The issue of violence in the polity is directly linked to that of women's participation in politics.

India can take pride in women were being at the top of the positions in polity with Ms.

Pratibha Patil as President of India and Ms. Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister of India, Ms. Sonia Gandhi as Chairperson of United Progressive Alliance and President of Congress Party and Ms. Sumitra Mahajan as Speaker of present Lok Sabha. India was also one of the few countries who granted voting rights to women with independence whereas in the west women has to struggle from thirty years to almost a century to get this right. However, if look at larger political set up at all levels or within political parties, we hardly find names of women leaders. It is very difficult to name even ten women leaders of modern India. We can see more number of women leaders in pre-independence India than in modern era especially in so called glamorized 21st Century. Women's average representation in parliament of India has increased from 4.4 in 1952 to 11.2 per cent in 2014 even that is far below the world average of 20 per cent.

Martha C. Nussbaum highlighted a significant barrier to women's capability of participating in politics to be the threat of violence. She further states that "In the larger society, violence and the threat of violence affects many women's ability to participate actively in many forms of social and political relationship, to speak in public, to be recognized as dignified beings whose worth is equal to that of others. The marginalization of women in electoral politics is deeply embedded in the party system and the imbalanced gender power relations in the main political dispensations in India. They continue to be discriminated against not only in terms of seat allotments to contest elections but also within the

rank and file of major political parties. The reasons for women being on the fringes are varied but the focal factor that excludes them from the process is the patriarchal and male-dominant party competition structure that continues to exist in the Indian subcontinent. This not only dissuades females from electoral politics but also acts as a barrier in their quest to share political power. In contrast to the exclusionary policies followed by parties and the poor representation of women in legislative bodies both at the national and state levels, their participation as voters has seen a significant push in the late 1990s and reached an all-time high in the recent Lok Sabha election.

It becomes imperative in this context to review the participation of women in the various stages of elections to find out why it continues to remain uneven and distorted even after six decades of independence. The political participation of women can be analyzed using a triangle model deconstructing their electoral interactions at three stages within the framework of general elections. At the top are women in the Lok Sabha. Their representation has increased from 22 seats in the 1952 election to 61 seats this year, a phenomenal increase of 36 percentage points. However, gender disparity remains skewed as nine out of ten parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha are men. Both national and regional parties are following the policy of exclusion of women in allotting seats. The reason for not giving tickets to women candidates at the national and state level is based on the perception that they lack the 'win-ability' factor.

Table 1: Representation of Women in Lok Sabha 1952-2014

Lok Sabha	Total no. of seats (Elections Held)	No. of Women Members who won	% of the Total
First (1952)	489	22	4.4
Second (1957)	494	27	5.4
Third (1962)	494	34	6.7
Fourth (1967)	523	31	5.9
Fifth (1971)	521	22	4.2
Sixth (1977)	544	19	3.4
Seventh (1980)	544	28	5.1
Eighth (1984)	544	44	8.1
Ninth (1989)	529	28	5.3
Tenth (1991)	509	36	7.0
Eleventh (1996)	541	40*	7.4
Twelfth (1998)	545	44*	8.0
Thirteenth (1999)	543	48*	8.8
Fourteenth (2004)	543	45*	8.1
Fifteenth (2009)	543	59	10.9
Sixteenth (2014)	543	61	11.2

* Including one nominated member

Source: Election Commission of India

However, an analysis of the success rate of women candidates as compared to men reveals that it has been higher in the last three general elections. In 2014, the success rate of women was 9 percent as compared to men at 6 percent. The under-representation of women in the Lok Sabha, and from crucial decision-making positions such as in the Cabinet is pointers of their systematic exclusion from the political structure and the deeply embedded gender basis in Indian society. Though women head a significant number of

national and state-level political parties, the overall representation of women within the rank and file of these parties is dismal.

Women who have made their presence felt in inner-party circles have also been relegated to the second rung of leadership and have failed to breach the glass ceiling. They rarely play any role in formulating policies and strategies in political parties and are at best assigned the job of keeping an eye on women's issues and mobilizing them if need be for electoral benefits for their parties.

Table 2: Seats allotted to women by national parties in general elections

National Parties	2004		2009		2014	
	Contested	Won	Contested	Won	Contested	Won
All India	355	45	556	59	668	61
Congress	45	12	43	23	57	4
BJP	30	10	44	13	37	28
Others	280	23	469	23	574	29

Source: Election Commission of India

Though women continue to be under-represented in legislative bodies and relegated to the fringes in party cadres, their participation as voters has taken a quantum leap. The participatory upsurge witnessed among women as voters in the 1990s reached its peak in the general election held in 2014. Their participation in the electoral process as voters has steadily increased from 46.6 percent in 1962 to around 65.7 percent this year. The difference in voter turnout among men and women, as wide as 16.7 percent in 1962, has narrowed to 1.5 percent in 2014.

Though the voting participation of women is not poor in comparison to men's, their participation as contestants and representation in law-making bodies is very shocking. Though voting is an important indicator of political participation and mobilization, it is not necessarily indicative of representation. Political participation does not mean merely exercising of political rights like franchise. It also involvement of women in a wide range of political activities such as membership in political parties among the electors and most important is involvement in the decision making bodies of the Government of the States.

Table 3: Male-Female Representation in Punjab Assembly (2007 and 2012)

Year	Male	Female	Total
2007	109 (93.16%)	8 (6.84%)	117 (100%)
2012	103 (88.03%)	14 (11.97%)	117 (100%)

Table 4: Male-Female Representation in Haryana Assembly (2009 and 2014)

Year	Male	Female	Total
2009	81 (90.00%)	9 (10%)	90 (100%)
2014	77 (85.56%)	13 (14.44%)	90 (100%)

The data in the table 3 and 4 clearly show under-representation of women in assemblies of Punjab and Haryana. In Punjab in 2007, 55 women candidates contested and in 2012, 93 women candidates contested whereas in Haryana, 67 women contested in 2009 and 116 women contested in 2014. According to a study by UN Women, it is rampant 60% of women do not participate in politics due to fear of violence; 45% per cent of women candidates in India face physical violence and threats. The study also found that lack of enforcement of laws and support from police and judiciary, the socio-economic divide and current power structures are the major reasons for this violence. Moreover, first generation women politicians face discrimination at all levels in

politics and are not allowed to make decisions while being side-lined within political parties as it was perceived that they would be able to win less political seats.

The reservation of 33 percent seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in the 1990s gave women a sense of sharing power with men equally. It acted as a catalyst and provided much-needed momentum, which resulted in the upsurge of women voters. The highest voter turnout among women in this election could be due to many reasons but the intense voter awareness campaigns of the Election Commission and door-to-door campaigns by political parties are the most plausible determinants to explain this phenomenon. The analysis of the pattern of women's voting

reveals that they have never voted en bloc like Dalits and Muslims in any election. It also shows that there has never been a concerted effort by political parties in mobilizing them. A quick scan of the manifestos of major political parties in the last few general elections shows that gender issues figured prominently. But manifesto promises on women's issues are clichéd and are conveniently forgotten afterwards. The failure in passing the women's reservation bill in parliament is a clear testimony of the lack of seriousness and will of political parties in addressing women's issues.

Gender discriminations even make veteran women politicians ignored and for new entrants, it is still more difficult unless they get patronage from powerful men in the society. Violence has been identified as one of the root causes of lower participation of women in political governance. Insensitive political culture of the country itself has raised an alarming need for the issue of violence against women in politics to be undertaken at research level and addressed effectively. Violence against women in politics is a major problem in India, yet it still remains a relatively new and unreported issue."The intensely competitive world of men dominated politics their patriarchal mindset and masculine model of political system, is in itself a major obstacle to women's political participation. In India, politics ensures status and is a lucrative source of income and power over which men desire to control. The reluctance of political parties to nominate women candidates is a crucial factor, denying women's participation in governance. This nomination is extended to them in some peculiar situations i) husband or father has been implicated in a case and cannot get throne ii) male is the central politics and female to be kept in state politics or vice versa iii) death of the male iv) in the name of keeping the party intact, etc. In addition, character assassination has been used intentionally and unintentionally by men, women and society as a tool to violate women politicians, forcing many women politicians to quit their political career. Moreover, media as well as civil society are not fully acknowledging the credibility of women politicians. Many women politicians silently suffer violence accepting it as a part of the unchangeable Indian culture. The deep-rooted cultural barrier and the inability to break this silence have for a long time hampered women's political participation. Until this silence is broken, women's effective participation at all levels of politics in India will continue to be a dream. Violence in modern democratic societies has taken new forms and is posing unprecedented challenges to civil society. One of the most visible effects is the marginalization of women in politics both as contestants and electorates. The elections take in a turbulent atmosphere rife with different varieties of violence. The incidents of violence reported in many parts of the country such as from U.P., Bihar,

etc., workings of so called Ranbir Sena, Dalit Sena, Breen Brigade, Mehams, Beas violence, etc. create fear of violence amongst people and further discourages women to be a participant in the political process. It confines and restricts the lives, movements and activities of women. Electoral politics in India today increasingly relies on violence and intimidation. A candidate is considered a 'winning' candidate if he commands money power and hoodlum power- to capture booths, rig votes and terrorize different segments of society and even opponents in which women generally lags behind. Women, in any case, have to negotiate many forms of violence both in the home and outside. When in addition, violent conflicts erupt in society, women get pushed back into the domestic sphere, made further invisible and silenced.

It is very pertinent to mention that 73rd and 74th Amendments introduced reservations in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Municipal Corporations and brought forward women in political sphere. However, it is the only area where women is visible as participant in political front. It has happened mainly due to reservations. It is under compulsions that political parties are giving tickets to women in elections and this system has to be followed in toto in Parliament if we have to bring change in political atmosphere at the national level by increasing participation of women. If there will be reservation for women in Parliament then like in PRIs and MCs, political parties will have to give tickets to women candidates and result will be the increase in representation of women in Parliament. Violence in any form is bad but when it is marginalizing women further, it needs to be checked and challenged. It can be done only by way of reservations which will bring compulsive change in the mindsets of the people and political parties. The non-committal attitude of political parties to allocate tickets to women and the fear of violence is emerging as a major reason for declining participation of women in the political system. The women who are venturing to campaign or contest elections in such a violent atmosphere are directly or indirectly connected with powerful male political heavyweights which are not very positive signs for democracy as it is marginalizing women in politics. The existing situation can be challenged and changed by introducing reservations for women in Parliament. To conclude, the only silver lining in the dark clouds hovering over women's participation in formal politics has been the marked increase in voting turnout among women. The women's movement and gender politics in India is currently divided over the question of affirmative action for women in parliament and state legislatures. It centres around two main issues: first, the issue of overlapping quotas for women in the general category and for those in backward

caste communities and second, the issue of elitism. Thus, affirmative action for women in legislative bodies is the need of the hour as it would go a long way in removing obstacles that inhibit their participation. It would bridge the wide men-women gap in the electoral set-up and pave the way for gender-inclusive electoral politics. Nepal has elected Bidhya Devi Bhandari as its First women President on 28th October, 2015 and is pushing for more gender equality in politics and work life. Nepal's Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist-Leninist, had lobbied actively for the new Constitution to require that either the president or vice president be a woman. India can also take such a step for top positions in parliament. The study recommends that election commissions in India and especially in North-West India should take steps to recognise and promote women while institutionalising their participation in politics. It moreover proposes that law-influencing agencies should form positive pressure groups for political funding and create awareness among women voters.

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