



drishti

Women Representation In the Temple of Democracy

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This article is based on **“The 40 per cent promise”** which was published in The Indian Express on 22/10/2021. It talks about the need to increase women representation in representative institutions at the Center and the State levels.

Recently, a political party decided to reserve 40% of its party tickets for women in the State Assembly elections to be held next year. This has again started the debate on increasing women representation in Parliament and State assemblies.

- As per the data compiled by the **Inter-Parliamentary Union**, of which India is a member, women represent 14.44% of the total members of the **Lok Sabha**.
- As per the latest **Election Commission of India (ECI)** data:
 - As of October 2021, **Women represent 10.5%** of the total members of the **Parliament**.
 - The scenario for women **Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs)** across all state assemblies in India is even worse, with the national average being a pitiable 9%.
 - In the last 75 years of independence, women’s representation in Lok Sabha has **not even increased by 10%**.

Reasons for Low Representation

- **Gender stereotypes:**
 - The role of managing household activities has been traditionally assigned to women.
 - Women should be **encouraged to move outside** their stereotypical roles and participate in the decision-making process of the country.
- **Competition:**
 - Politics, like any other field, is **a field of competition**. At the end of the day, Women politicians are their competition as well.
 - Many of the politicians fear that, in case of women reservation, **their seats can rotationally be reserved** for women candidates, thus, making them lose any chance of even fighting from their seats.

- **Lack of Political Education:**
 - Education influences the **social mobility** of women. Formal education such as provided at educational institutions create opportunities for leadership, and impart leadership essential skills.
 - Because of a **lack of understanding of politics**, they do not know about their basic and political rights.
- **Work and Family:**
 - **Uneven distribution of family care** responsibilities means that women spend far more time than men in home- and child-care.
 - A woman not only has to give her time and effort at time of pregnancy and childbirth, but it **continues till the child is dependent** on parents for care.
- **Lack of Political Networks:**

The **lack of openness** in political decision-making and **undemocratic internal processes** pose a challenge for all newcomers, but particularly for women as they tend to lack insider knowledge or political networks.
- **Lack of Resources:**
 - Because of their low proportion in the inner **political party** structure of India, women fail to gather resources and support for nurturing their political constituencies.
 - Women do not get adequate financial support from the political parties to contest the **elections**.
- **Social Conditioning:**
 - They have to **accept the dictates imposed on them** and bear the burden of society.
 - **Public attitudes** not only determine how many female candidates win a general election **but also directly and indirectly** how many are considered and nominated for office.
- **Unfriendly Environment:**
 - Overall political parties' environment too is not women-friendly, they have to **struggle hard and face multi-dimensional issues** to create space for them in the party.
 - There has been **increasing violence in politics**. A significant rise in **criminalization, corruption, insecurity** has driven women out of the political arena.

Government Efforts

- **The Women's Reservation Bill 2008:**

It proposes to amend the Constitution of India **to reserve 1/3rd of all seats** in the Lower house of Parliament of India, the Lok Sabha, and in all state legislative assemblies for women.

- **Reservation for Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions:**
Article 243D of the Constitution ensures participation of women in **Panchayati Raj Institutions** by mandating not less than **one-third reservation for women** out of total number of seats to be filled by direct election and number of offices of chairpersons of Panchayats.
- **Parliamentary Committee On Empowerment Of Women:**
 - The Committee on Empowerment of Women was constituted for the first time in 1997 during the 11th Lok Sabha of the Parliament for improving the status of women.
 - The Members of the Committee are expected to work together for the empowerment of women cutting across party affiliations.

Way Forward

It is the **need of the hour** in a country like India to have **equal participation of all** the sections of society in mainstream political activity therefore necessary steps should be taken to promote it.

- **Passage of Women's Reservation Bill:**
 All political parties have to reach a consensus and ensure the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, which calls for reserving 33 percent of seats in Parliament and all state legislative assemblies for women.
- **Promoting local bodies female lawmakers on State level:**
 - There is a pool of women out there who have been **sarpanches**, and members of local bodies, with experience of governance at the local level over a period of three decades.
 - They are waiting to play a larger role in state assemblies and in Parliament.
- **Women Quotas in political parties:**
The Gill formula: There is a need to implement the proposal of the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** to make it mandatory for the recognized political parties to ensure putting of minimum agreed percentage for women in State Assembly and Parliamentary elections, so as to allow them to retain the **recognition with the Election Commission** as political parties.
- **Promoting Inner party democracy:**
 A truly democratic political party in which the various positions like president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer etc are filled by the election process, will give a fair chance to all female members of the party.
- **Deconstructing stereotypes:**
 - Society needs to **deconstruct the stereotype of women** as limited to household activities only.
 - It is important **for all institutions (state, family and community)** to respond to women's specific needs such as bridging gaps in education, renegotiating gender roles, the gender division of labor and addressing biased attitudes.

Conclusion

Young Indian women represent **aspirational India** possibly more than any other grouping today. Given half a chance, they may bring a new energy into our stagnant politics, and move it towards delivery of basic needs- **health, nutrition, education and livelihoods**.

Drishti Mains Question

“In the last 75 years of independence, women’s representation in Lok Sabha has not even increased by 10%.” Comment. Also, suggest measures to increase women representation in Parliament as well as the State legislature.