

Research Paper—Political Science



SEPT—2009

WOMEN IN POLITICS : GLOBAL AND INDIAN SCENARIO



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Introduction

One of the subjects of this conference is 'Women and Politics' which draws many connotations such as 'Women and the political aspects related to the condition of women in the country' or it may be only 'Women in Politics' or 'The Political Perspective of the Plight of Women' etc. Drawing flakes from this, we will discuss most of the dimensions of this subject as 'the Gradual Development of Women to the Political Empowerment' in general and 'Gender Politics' and 'Women in Politics' in particular.

Woman is the half of the world and also considered as the better half of a man after their nuptial knot. Spiritually as well, woman is the form of 'the Shakti' (the power) and is worshipped in different names not only in India but also all over the world. In our country, different goddesses are worshipped in different forms daily during the 'Navratri' festival. And not only this, the most powerful deity of wealth is a woman i.e. Goddess 'Laxmi'.

Since early times, women have been uniquely viewed as a creative source of human life. But in spite of all this perspective of

woman, she did never get the place of pride in the society that she deserved. In this paper, before going to the main subject matter i.e. Political Affiliations of Women, we will discuss the plight of woman keeping in view the world perspective in general and the Indian scenario in particular. At the same time, the historical development of the character and the psyche of the women and the society will be discussed in detail to understand the systematic oppression of the so called weaker sex by the masculine gender.

Revisiting History-For centuries, the traditional life of a woman presumed the responsibilities of housewife and mother. The attitude toward women in our country, at first was more favorable. In ancient India, for example, women were not deprived of property rights or individual freedoms by marriage. During 30 B.C. up to 3rd century A.D., the South India was ruled by 'Satvahanas'. It was unique about them that theirs was a 'Matriarchic' dynasty. Nevertheless, when they were allowed personal and intellectual freedom, women made significant achievements. In ancient India Maitreyee and Gargi were the well-known intellectual women. During the

Middle Ages, the women rulers influenced the whole eras, for instance, Queen Elizabeth of England in the 16th century, Catherine the Great of Russia in the 18th century, and Queen Victoria of England in the 19th century. Back in India Rani Laxmi Bai, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Raziya Sultan etc. were the ruling princesses during 19th century. Women were long considered naturally weaker than men, squeamish, and unable to perform work requiring muscular or intellectual development. This ignored the fact that the domestic chores also required heavy, sustained labour. Formal education for girls historically has been secondary to that for boys. In India, the picture was even grimmer.

Why the stake of men and women differ in politics.

1. Women face greater obstacles entering politics- Prejudice and cultural perceptions about the role of women, together with a lack of financial resources, are among the greatest obstacles to women entering politics. When a survey was conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on current parliamentarians, they responded differently. For male respondents, perceived lack of support from the electorate is the most important deterrent.

2. Women bring different views, perspectives and talents to politics- More than 90 percent of all respondents, male and female, agree that women bring different views, perspectives and talents to politics. Women lead efforts to combat gender-based violence and to ensure that issues such as parental leave, childcare, pensions, gender-equity laws and electoral reforms that enhance women's access to parliament appear on the legislative agenda.

3. Numbers do matter- Two-thirds of respondents say there are not enough women

serving on their parliament's committees. Fewer women means less influence by women and less progress on gender equality within parliament, and on incorporating their perspective in the work of *all* committees, whether they are dedicated to issues of gender equality and the status of women, or other concerns, such as finance, national security and foreign affairs.

4. Women and men prioritize differently- Male and female respondents who participated in the survey identify themselves as engaged in different policy areas. Men claim to be most active in foreign affairs, economic and trade issues, education and constitutional affairs, while they report low levels of activity in gender equality, labour and women's issues.

5. Political parties do matter- Political parties are important arenas for policy development and for setting political priorities, and are therefore one of key institutions through which gender equality should be promoted.

6. Parliaments are not gender-sensitive institutions- More than half the respondents believe that gender equality is only "occasionally" or "rarely" mainstreamed in parliament. While there have been sporadic attempts to modernize some parliaments, by and large much more needs to be done to improve the gender sensitivity of parliaments by changing cultural mores and modernizing working arrangements to accommodate the specific needs of parliamentarians. Gender equality should be one of the measures of institutional performance of parliaments.

Political Leadership Attributes-

1. Special Attributes found only in Women Politicians- A particular concern for justice and the ethical dimension of politics, derived in part from their experience of injustice. A talent for setting priorities and

accomplishing complex tasks learned in the course of balancing competing demands for their time and attention in the family, at work and in the community.

2. Why Women Politicians are not preferred by Men-In the early 1940s, a British diplomat summed up his view of women and political life that is still widely believed. There were three feminine qualities—“zeal, sympathy and intuition” — that he considered dangerous in international affairs unless kept under the firmest control. The ideal diplomat, in his view, needed “male” qualities such as “impartiality and imperturbability”, and, he surmised, needed to be “a trifle inhuman”.

3. Some differences in women’s and men’s leadership styles-

Men’s Leadership Styles-Maintained a complex network of relationships with people outside their organizations.-Identified themselves with their jobs.-Had difficulty sharing information.

Women’s Leadership Styles-Maintained a complex network of relationships with people inside and outside their organizations.- Saw their own identities as complex and multifaceted.- Scheduled time for sharing information. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a recent candidate for the presidency of Liberia, has stated her belief that: “The vision of women is one of inclusion not exclusion, peace not conflict, integrity not corruption, and consensus not imposition.”

Women in the Politics: World View- In this sector, it is interesting to note that the proportion of women who reigned as powerful queens in their own right or as consorts during the more than 2,000 years before the advent of democracy far exceeds the proportion of women government leaders in our century. More than two decades after the first United Nations conference on women in 1975, the

statistical picture for women’s participation at high levels of decision-making remains bleak, certainly in the terms spelt out by the Platform of Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. Since the end of the Second World War, 28 women have been elected as heads of State or Government. Only Norway and Sweden have so far achieved gender equality at the cabinet level.

1. The Norway Model- In 1972, when Norway’s small, new Social Democratic party ruled that women should be elected to half its posts at each level, political life throughout the country took a turn towards gender balance. By the spring of 1976, all six parties in parliament had either a woman leader or one who strongly favoured women’s issues. Eager to attract new voters — or keep others from defecting — each party increasingly nominated women candidates. Almost all institutionalized quotas. Today, 40 per cent of parliamentary seats are reserved for women. Moreover, since 1988, Norway’s Equal Status Act has mandated at least 40 per cent representation on all other public committees, boards and agencies, both elective and appointive. Nonetheless, in Norway, as in the rest of Scandinavia, old gender patterns persist in the workplace, even in public-sector jobs.

2. Plight of Women Politicians in the World- At present, only in the Caribbean do women represent more than 20 per cent of ministers in fields outside the social fields and in departments of justice. In Africa, women have held a handful of high executive offices, including ministries outside the areas of social affairs. These included, in 1994, Uganda’s Vice President, Botswana’s and Liberia’s Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Burundi’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ghana’s Minister of Trade and Industry. At the international level, of the

185 United Nations Member States, only seven women head permanent diplomatic missions as of mid-1997: the Dominican Republic, Guinea, Jamaica, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein and Turkmenistan. At the United Nations Secretariat level, only five United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, of which there are 36 altogether, are headed by women: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme. Women also head important entities dealing with human rights, the war crimes tribunals and the disarmament institute.

3. Women at ministerial and sub-ministerial levels-The number of women ministers worldwide doubled from 3.4 per cent in 1987 to 6.8 percent in 1996. Globally, 15 countries have achieved 20 per cent to 30 per cent women at the ministerial level. In 48 countries, there were no women ministers. Globally, women held only 9.9 per cent of all sub-ministerial positions (Deputy Minister, Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary). In 136 countries, women held no ministerial positions concerned with the economy. In 1997, two women headed Governments, while three others were heads of State. For parliaments, the record world average of women's representation was reached in 1988, when women representatives accounted for 14.8 per cent of all parliamentarians. In 1995, this dropped to 11.3 per cent. The current world average of 11.7 percent still indicates a situation in which women are regarded at best as a "special-interest group" rather than half of humankind.

According to Janet Mukwaya, Minister of

Gender and Community Development in Uganda, "The woman politician has to learn to balance her time between politics and her traditional gender role of social reproduction and housekeeping."

Women's participation in local politics has long been viewed as an extension of women's traditional involvement in household management. This idea can be used either to devalue or to promote efforts to increase women's numbers in local government, where their political activity has so far been most marked. However, current trends towards the devolution of power may make holding local office a far more powerful and prestigious occupation than it has been up to the present. Because so many women still shoulder disproportionate responsibilities for household management and therefore cannot leave home for remote capitals, devolution provides a significant means of making their voices heard nationally. A Canadian attorney, speaking on measures to right gender imbalance in private-sector employment as well as political representation, commented, "They say affirmative action doesn't work. But I say we really haven't tried." In Central and Eastern Europe, where quotas for many categories of representation, including gender, had existed in a wide spectrum of public institutions before the transition to market systems in the late 1980s, women's participation in legislatures dropped sharply — from 22 per cent in 1987 to 6.5 per cent in 1993. This was largely as a result of competitive politics introduced in the wake of democracy. But it has begun to increase once more. In Hungary, Poland and Turkmenistan, the proportion of women members of parliaments has risen respectively to 11.4, 13 and 18 per cent, the last two figures above the world average.

Women in Politics in India-Women remain under-represented in governance and politics in India. If we consider a global scenario, India is placed poorly at 97th place among 180 countries in women’s representation in the parliamentary houses. Even Asian developing countries like Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand and Indonesia stand better than India. Although no legal impediments hinder women’s participation in the political process, but there are few considerations to ponder upon. A 1998 “Times of India” report revealed that “domestic responsibilities, lack of financial clout, rising criminalization of politics and the threat of character assassination” are making it increasingly difficult for women to be part of the political framework. A party’s concern with levels of representation of certain groups within its ranks, and consequences for legitimacy of the party among the under-represented groups might be the motive for including women. Together with “kinship link” and state initiatives, an important factor impacting on women’s access to political life seems to be social and political movements.

Through the experience of the Indian Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI), 1 million

women have actively entered political life in India. Although the Parliament recently rejected a hard-fought-for female quota for its members, in 1993 and 1994, constitutional amendments allotted one third of the seats in local councils, both urban and rural (gram Panchayats) to women. Since the creation of the quota system, local women, the vast majority of them illiterate and poor have come to occupy as much as 43 per cent of the seats, spurring the election of increasing numbers of women at the district, provincial and national levels. There were 6 women in the Cabinet. A large proportion of women participated in voting throughout the country (with turnout rates slightly lower than those of men), and numerous women were represented in all major parties in the national and state legislatures. For a better analytical approach, the 14th Lok Sabha of India has been well analyzed as a sample and found that the women elected for the Lok Sabha are not only better educated but also younger lot of the society. It proves the apathy that women, in spite of being in better position to take decisions as regard the mental and physical health, they are not provided the opportunity to lead in the political arena.

Table-1: Women in Politics: Parliamentary Representation (Selected Countries)

Rank	Country	Lower or single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats*	Women	% W	Elections	Seats*	Women	% W
1	Rwanda	9 2008	80	45	56.3%	10 2003	26	9	34.6%
2	Sweden	9 2006	349	164	47.0%	---	---	---	---
3	South Africa	4 2009	400	178	44.5%	4 2009	54	16	29.6%
4	Cuba	1 2008	614	265	43.2%	---	---	---	---
5	Iceland	4 2009	63	27	42.9%	---	---	---	---
6	Finland	3 2007	200	83	41.5%	---	---	---	---
7	Netherlands	11 2006	150	62	41.3%	5 2007	75	26	34.7%
8	Denmark	11 2007	179	68	38.0%	---	---	---	---
11	Spain	3 2008	350	127	36.3%	3 2008	263	79	30.0%
12	Norway	9 2005	169	61	36.1%	---	---	---	---
14	Belgium	6 2007	150	53	35.3%	6 2007	71	27	38.0%
16	New Zealand	11 2008	122	41	33.6%	---	---	---	---

17	Nepal	4 2008	594	197	33.2%	---	---	---	---
19	Germany	9 2005	612	197	32.2%	N.A.	69	15	21.7%
26	Switzerland	10 2007	200	57	28.5%	10 2007	46	10	21.7%
27	Portugal	2 2005	230	65	28.3%	---	---	---	---
28	Austria	9 2008	183	51	27.9%	N.A.	61	15	24.6%
29	Afghanistan	9 2005	242	67	27.7%	9 2005	102	22	21.6%
30	Peru	4 2006	120	33	27.5%	---	---	---	---
33	Australia	11 2007	150	40	26.7%	11 2007	76	27	35.5%
34	Viet Nam	5 2007	493	127	25.8%	---	---	---	---
36	Iraq	12 2005	275	70	25.5%	---	---	---	---
39	Singapore	5 2006	94	23	24.5%	---	---	---	---
44	Pakistan	2 2008	338	76	22.5%	3 2009	100	17	17.0%
“	United Arab Emirates	12 2006	40	9	22.5%	---	---	---	---
45	Canada	10 2008	308	68	22.1%	N.A.	93	32	34.4%
49	China	3 2008	2987	637	21.3%	---	---	---	---
“	Italy	4 2008	630	134	21.3%	4 2008	322	58	18.0%
“	Philippines	5 2007	239	49	20.5%	5 2007	23	4	17.4%
53	Poland	10 2007	460	93	20.2%	10 2007	100	8	8.0%
56	United Kingdom	5 2005	646	126	19.5%	N.A.	746	147	19.7%
60	Bangladesh	12 2008	345	64	18.6%	---	---	---	---
“	Venezuela	12 2005	167	31	18.6%	---	---	---	---
62	France	6 2007	577	105	18.2%	9 2008	343	75	21.9%
“	Sudan	8 2005	443	80	18.1%	8 2005	50	3	6.0%
65	Israel	2 2009	120	21	17.5%	---	---	---	---
“	Uzbekistan	12 2004	120	21	17.5%	1 2005	100	15	15.0%
67	Bolivia	12 2005	130	22	16.9%	12 2005	27	1	3.7%
68	Turkmenistan	12 2008	125	21	16.8%	---	---	---	---
“	United States of America	11 2008	435	73	16.8%	11 2008	98	15	15.3%
70	Indonesia	4 2009	560	93	16.6%	---	---	---	---
“	Zimbabwe	3 2008	210	32	15.2%	3 2008	93	23	24.7%
78	Chile	12 2005	120	18	15.0%	12 2005	38	2	5.3%
79	Greece	9 2007	300	44	14.7%	---	---	---	---
81	Russian Federation	12 2007	450	63	14.0%	N.A.	169	8	4.7%
84	Republic of Korea	4 2008	299	41	13.7%	---	---	---	---
“	Ireland	5 2007	166	22	13.3%	7 2007	60	13	21.7%
“	Jamaica	9 2007	60	8	13.3%	9 2007	21	3	14.3%
“	Paraguay	4 2008	80	10	12.5%	4 2008	45	7	15.6%
90	Uruguay	10 2004	99	12	12.1%	10 2004	31	4	12.9%
93	Thailand	12 2007	480	56	11.7%	3 2008	150	24	16.0%
“	Romania	11 2008	334	38	11.4%	11 2008	137	8	5.8%
“	Hungary	4 2006	386	43	11.1%	---	---	---	---
“	Malaysia	3 2008	222	24	10.8%	N.A.	64	20	31.3%
97	India	4 2009	543	58	10.7%	7 2008	243	23	9.5%

Source: IPU Report-2009.

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