

Role of Women in Politics

Anu Malhotra

Introduction

The present Lok Sabha has 61 women leaders which is just 11% of the 543 seats. 89% seats are being represented by men. Not a single woman has won a seat from Jharkhand, Haryana and Meghalaya. The party wise distribution of seats is as follows. BJP-29 women, Trinamool congress 10, AIADMK and Congress with 4 women MP s each.

Even though women are close to half of the population, they are under-represented in all political positions. This was also reflected in the 2014 elections during which only 632 members ran for office as compared to 7527 men.

According to the data available from Geneva based Inter-Parliamentary Union IPU, Pakistan has 20.7% women representation in parliament, Bangladesh-19.3%, and Nepal 29.9%. The largest democracy in the world, India elected its first woman President in its 60th year of Independence.

In 1925, Gandhiji said –As long as women do not take part in public life, we are not likely to attain Swaraj. The 1940s saw active participation by Indian women in the National struggle for independence. Women leaders played a major role in the movement. Sarojini Naidu, Vijailakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Aruna Asaf Ali were some of the educated elite women who joined politics in large numbers.

Why do we have so few women politicians?

Domestic responsibilities, lack of finance, growing criminalization of politics and threat of character assassination has made it increasingly difficult for women to be a part of the political frame work. Women are constantly under media glare with the media waiting for them to make the slightest mistake. Moreover women politicians point out that even within the political parties, women do not get leadership positions

The present women politicians are doing exceedingly well. We have External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, CM Vaundhara Raje Sc India, Mamta Banerjee, Anandi Ben Patel and Jaya Lalitha to name a few. Sushma Swaraj is the second lady to hold this position after Indira Gandhi. One of her major achievements has been Operation Rahaat in which 7000 people were successfully evacuated from Yemen. The CM of Rajasthan, Vasundhara Raje Sc India has implemented key schemes such as Bhamashah Yojana, Sarkar Aapke Dwar and has drawn major investments in the state. Then we have Irom Chanu Sharmila, the Iron Lady of Manipur who has been on the longest hunger strike ever.

Coming to the grassroots level, who hasn't heard of Chavi Rajawat, Sarpanch of Soda village in Tonk district. After doing an MBA from Pune and working with companies like Airtel and Times

of India group, she came back to her village and has been working to bring roads, toilets, solar power, rain water harvesting to her village.

Former investment banker and MBA degree holder, Aarti Devi is the Sarpanch at Ganjam Village Orissa. She has started a major literacy campaign for women in the Panchayat where only signatures would be recorded for official applications instead of thumb impressions. She was also nominated for the Rajiv Gandhi Leadership award, 2014.

Ask these women about political reform and their answers reflect concerns every woman and mother can relate to. They focus on three things –healthcare ,education and the funds to make this happen. Women Panchayat Leaders talk about building separate bathroom for girls which will reduce the number of female dropouts in schools. The demand for greater representation of women in political institutions in India was taken up by setting up of the Committee on the status of women in India(CSWI).The CSWI suggested that women s representation in political institutions especially at the grassroots level needed to be increased through a policy of reservation of seats for women.

The passage of the Women's Reservation Bill which seeks to reserve 33% of the seats in Lok Sabha for women could be instrumental in sending a powerful message of women empowerment.

Women in general are making their mark in all fields. German Chancellor, Angela Merkel has been named as Times Person of the year. Chanda Kochar, CEO, ICICI Bank has made it to the Fortune List of 25 most powerful women in the Asia-Pacific region.

Why do women make better politicians?

Women have the patience to hear the problems of the public. They are more willing to explore compromise. According to Renuka Chowdhry MP, women nurture the family and look after the children. They make judicious decisions and egos rarely come in the way. In politics also, these skills are required. A women politician would give greater importance to women rights and help in developing policies that will increase the importance and respect of women.

At the meeting of Parliamentary Presiding Officers from across the world, The Indian President, Mr Pranab Mukherjee has said that gender sensitive Parliaments were better suited to deal with social problems such as violence, female foeticide and human trafficking.

Having more women in the Lok Sabha would not necessarily eliminate all the issues that the women of India face everyday. But it would show, half the nation that the other half or better –half is capable of being leaders, politicians and role models.

Lecturer

S.S. Jain Subodh PG (Autonomous) College

Refernces

1. Political participation and attitudinal transformation of rural women—ISBN 13 9788188 Poonam Vats
2. the newspaper.net/ women-and –politics. 8th January 2016 7pm
3. Mohan Shantha et al Women and political participation in India