

Political Participation of Women

Active participation of women in politics is determined by the political culture, social freedom and gender equations in society. Even though the National Freedom Movement saw the participation of both elite and masses, women's participation and engagement in politics still has its challenges and obstacles.

UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, held in 1979 affirmed women's right to vote, their political rights and privileges. It is called the Human Rights Bill of Women.

But, according to the Economic Survey, the voting gap between men and women is more than 10% in India. Representation of women in Parliament, the highest and largest political policy-making body in the country is less than 15%. The first Lok Sabha formed in 1951 had 22 women MPs, which amounted to only 4.50% of the total representatives in the Lower House of the Parliament.

In the 16th Lok Sabha, formed after the parliamentary elections of 2014, only 66 of the total 543 MPs are female members. Though this is a three-fold increase compared to the first Lok Sabha, women still make up only 12.15% of the total Lok Sabha MPs. The Rajya Sabha currently has 31 female MPs out of 244 total members. Despite having prominent national and regional political leaders like Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati, late J. Jayalalitha, etc.

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This curtails access to policy and decision making, losing resource allocation authority and impedes gender mainstreaming. Women should not be a mere spectator of politics. They should exert pressure, mobilize support and bring forth fresh political perspectives and obtain political power.

In the grassroots level, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provides reservation of seats and posts for women in grass root level democratic institutions. This has to be extended to all areas of political and government institutions, democratic organizations to ensure active engagement of women in politics. There has been demand for reservation for women represent-

ation in parliament for decades. But, the legislation to reserve 33% seats to women in parliament, tabled in 2008 was never allowed to become a law. The bill was passed in Rajya Sabha, the Lower House of Parliament in 2010, but lapsed in Lok Sabha, the Upper House.