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WOMEN NEEDS RESERVATION IN INDIA



Sharanabasappa.B.Ragi
Guest Lecturer, Dept. of Sociology, Gulbarga University.



ABSTRACT

Every year, for the last decade or so, around this time, noises are made on the issue of women's representation in Parliament. Some shout, some request, some reason, some argue, all hope that somehow this year the vexed issue of whether there should be reservation of seats for women in Parliament is finally resolved. Predictably, the day, the month, the year passes, Parliament convenes and reconvenes, and nothing much happens. The debate continues, inconclusive for all time it would seem.

KEYWORDS : *Women Needs Reservation , women's representation , male politicians .*

INTRODUCTION :

Those who support reservation for women in Parliament argue that without a quota, women will continue to be excluded and the most important decision-making body in the country will remain dominated by male politicians as it is at present and has been in the past. The counter argument holds that merely reserving seats for women will not ensure that any kind of gender or women's perspective will enter decision-making processes as the women who enter through this route are as likely to be the wives, sisters and relatives of male politicians as they have been in the past. Hence, why should these men be given a chance to extend their area of influence by inducting women who will, in any case, follow their command?

Then there is the other argument about "elite" women making it through this route and the exclusion of poor and lower caste women. So if there is reservation for women, it should be further broken up into quotas according to caste.

LOST FOCUS

As is inevitable when such a debate stretches out over decades, the main focus somehow gets lost. In the meantime, many things have changed in Indian politics, not least the caste make up of Indian politics. And women too have become far more prominent in most political parties, including the Left parties, as compared to a decade back. You have women like Jayanti Natarajan, a lawyer, who is spokesperson for the Congress. In the past, we have seen Sushma Swaraj fulfilling the same function

for the BJP. And Brinda Karat is a very visible face and voice of the Left. Of course, the women ministers remain confined to the “soft” ministries. We have still to see a woman heading Home Affairs, or Defence, or any of the economic ministries. Yet, there are professional women holding high positions in the area of finance, there are women in the bureaucracy who have now breached many barriers, and younger women are entering professions that their mothers thought were closed to their gender. So competence or knowledge on these issues cannot be an argument anymore in confining women politicians to certain portfolios.

The other reality is the presence of more than one million women elected to panchayats and nagar palikas. Even if some of them are proxies for their husbands, many more have won elections from general seats after first entering through the quota system. They now “own” their special style of governance. Indeed, hundreds of studies and reports have recorded the transformation in the quality of governance that these women have brought to local self-government. Will these women be content to remain for-ever at the local government level or are they justified in believing that they could bring their experience to higher levels of government? Without reservation at the State assembly and at the national level, do they stand a chance?

FUTURE GROWTH

Given the track record of Indian politics, it is unlikely that many of them will get much further unless they have a father, godfather, brother, uncle or some male relative that sees the advantage of inducting them into the higher levels of politics. This will mean only a select few will make their way up while the majority will remain where they are. Of course, it can be argued that the majority of grassroots male politicians also generally remain where they are and that only very few progress further. So, why should women be given preferential treatment?

At the end of the day, the jury is out on the issue. If reservation of seats for women in parliament had been instituted at the point when the subject was first mooted, perhaps today we would have seen the difference it can make with many more women occupying the seats in the Lok Sabha. But with the debate having dragged out for so long, and the determined procrastination by every government, the merits of the argument appear to fade.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Reservation or not, what needs to happen is a drastic change in our attitudes. Ultimately, gender matters and yet does not. If a man or woman is considered competent, they should get the job. Women are defence ministers in many countries around the world, the latest being Spain. They have got these positions because they were considered as competent as the next male. And the fact that they were women was not held against them in giving them a job considered the exclusive reserve of male politicians in the past.

So whether more women enter the political process through the reservation route, as they have in countries like South Africa, or through a consciousness in political parties that they must ensure diversity in their ranks, as the Labour Party did in Britain, it is clear that the women who gain entry into politics can succeed and have a role in governance only if the men accept them as equals. Legislation, unfortunately, does not alter attitudes.

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