Gender
WATCH

RAJIV GANDHI INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

SOCIAL JUSTICE, EQUITY AND COMMUNAL HARMONY

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

We bring to you a new format of our monthly publication Gender Watch. In this new format we bring to you not one but three articles. The lead essay is on the Amendments to the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, that have been pending since 2012. The article is an analysis of the amendments in the context of the philosophical, legal and feminist conceptualisation of obscenity and also the technological advancement of the last decade. The second article is on economic independence of women through the Self Help Groups. The article examines the impact of SHG on lives of women and also the criticisms that have come its way. Finally, given that we are a few months away from the general election, the third article looks at the current data on political representation of women and how important it is in a democracy for women to not only participate as voters but also be key decision makers in the state, institutions and political parties.

Hope you enjoy this issue!

Indecent Representation of Women Act

Morality and Freedom

Dr Sushree Panigrahi

The recent move by the Government to introduce the amendments to Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (IRWA) in the Lok Sabha (it has been passed in the Rajya Sabha in 2012) brings up some new and some old debates. The representation of women in media has been at the core of the feminist movements all over the world since the 1950s gaining momentum by the 1980s. Inspite of a long history of a woman's movement fighting against objectification and stereotyping of women, it still continues to remain largely unaddressed. The problem is further exacerbated by the presence of several media channels accessible through the internet.

At the time the Act was introduced in India, television channels were few and internet on the threshold of being a rage. Hence the Act covered the print media which was going through a period of tremendous growth catering to diverse groups of women. Activists and scholars had also started commenting on content in cinema and the debates were centered on portrayal and imagery of women. One of the central points of discussion has been the portrayal of women located in the tradition-modernity discourse and the limited understand of modernity and modern women in media. In this article here, we will begin with the historical context in which the Act on Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) was framed, we will then move on the post liberalization scenario with regard to media and of the changing landscape of media and entertainment and diverse avenues of entertainment today. We then move on to philosophical, feminist and legal understanding of morality and obscenity. It connects to an older debate on whether traditional understanding of obscenity/indecency limits creativity and new ways of representing women in media.

Background

It is essential to understand the historical context in which the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (from here on referred to as IRWA) was introduced in India. The IRWA was a result of the women's movement against the stereotypical depiction of women in print media that was taking place prominently in the West, namely the USA and found a resonance in India. In the 1970s, the women's movement launched an offensive against the representation of women in media- largely the advertisements in print media.

Feminists were concerned that mass media was stereotyping women in print and visual media. Several feminists wrote on this issue (Courtney and Sarah 1971; Ferguson et al., 1990, Whipple and Courtney, 1985; Zhou and Chen 1997) pointing that advertisements were geared towards the male gaze thus objectifying them. We must remember that in the 1970s –mass media was dominated largely by the print media and hence most of the research on representation of women in media focused on advertisements.

One such study conducted in 1970 analysed 729 advertisements across 8 publications and came to the conclusions that advertisements portrayed that women as: dependent on men, doing household chores and as sexual objects. Very few advertisements used images of working women in professional spaces. By 1972, when another study was conducted researchers did see some improvement in the number of working women but still hardly any advertisement showed women in independent roles nor were the working women shown in executive level jobs.

In 1958, the North American women were shown are housewives and working women, if any, were shown as low income earners and also unable to cope with work. In a comparison between the advertisements of 1958 and 1970 it was seen that men continued to feature in advertisements related to education, cars, industrial products, travel, entertainment, cigarettes, alcohol to name a few and women featured in advertisements related to food, beauty and household products, health care and clothing.

Gilly's (1988) comparative study on television commercials of Australia, Mexico and United States revealed that cultural differences influenced the content of advertisements. It was surprising to see that the feminist movement against media representation had not yielded much result as the commercials on American television continued to feature women in traditional and "culturally" accepted roles; while in contrast Australian and Mexico television showed women in more diverse roles.

India, China and other Neighbouring countries
Meanwhile in Asia- India, China, Pakistan, Nepal the trajectory of representation of women in print and visual media continued to be no different. Lin and Yeh in their article on portrayal of women in the advertising world in China write that many families in China are deeply influenced by Confucian philosophy which assigns women with certain roles and hence women were socialised by families to follow the traditional path of being care givers, producing children and looking after the home.

Taking Taiwan as an example, where women were historically perceived to be inferior to men – physically, mentally and spiritually, Lin and Yeh, trace how the economic growth of Taiwan led to increased levels of education, income and participation in entertainment of women. The media-television, advertisements, movies played an important role in reshaping women's ideas on femininity.

In Pakistan and India, the cultural references regarding women were similar and revolved around keeping a neat house, looking good- (which later on got translated into fashion for the modern woman) and additionally fairness creams. Fairness cream advertisements have under severe attack especially in the recent times and a counter campaign of dark is beautiful is being run. This is another debate altogether that can be discussed separately.

In India, the representation of women in media and especially the print media has to be analysed in multiple and diverse contexts- that of the colonial past, the role of women in

the freedom movement, the women's movement post independence and the increasing presence of media. Dissecting what she calls- 'Feminism in Print Media', Chaudhuri (2000) writes, "two important social processes within which any meaningful reading of popular media and feminism can be attempted today are the women's movement and the process of economic liberalisation initiated in India" (264: 2000). In this context she writes that the print media in India witnessed a change with economic liberalisation. Magazines now differed in content and style according to their supposed audience – middle class or upper/upper middle class women. Both were critical of each other – one speaking up against the 'false' western feminism and the other positioned in the women's reform and national movement.

Liberalisation led to an increase in choices in lifestyle and this was also reflecting the burgeoning number of magazines and advertisements bringing before Indian women the new avenues to be explored- career, clothes and material consumption. As Chaudhuri writes, " We now have a simultaneous focus on 'selling' and a construction of the ideology of consumption, individualism, free choice, the good life and feminism" (Chaudhuri, 268:2000).

Both Uma Chakravarty (2000) and Maitrayee Chaudhuri speak of the role of the Miss India pageant and the way in which feminists and activists were attacked for opposing it. For some it was a strange dichotomy that activists and feminists who stood for personal freedom and choice were now speaking up against the pageant which was reflective of freedom of choice, a new career option and international recognition for women. Of course, we have the third party – the right wing which opposed the Miss India pageant on totally different grounds.

The print media was therefore divided in its presentation of women and women's issues and Chaudhuri goes on to argue that several women involved in running of women centric magazines would deride the women's movement and brand feminists as trouble makers. She writes, "Feminists of 'choice' criticise women activists for their self appointed role as

liberators and their 'protest mode', but not for its 'Westerness'. The more middle class opposition, however is made on grounds of 'elitism', 'westerness', 'cultural rootedness', publicity seeking and the alleged failure to take up real issues" (275:2000).

In a similar vein on the changing imagery of women in advertisements in the context of economic liberalisation Uma Chakravarty (2000) speaks of the shift that has taken place in the years following liberalisation. The 'new woman' is no longer decorative props to sell products, rather they are active buyers themselves and therefore advertisements not only feature women as consumers but also specifically target women as buyers. This is further corroborated by Kumkum Sangari who says "New relations are being made between consumption, pleasure and culturally specific notions of femininity" (Sangari and Chakravarty, 1999: xviii).

One might argue that a divided women's platform is not unique to India. Even Western countries have witnessed different feminist voices ranging from the position of abrogating the reproductive role of women to those who spoke to reclaiming the soft feminine side of women. This is reflected in the different theoretical approaches to feminism. Imagery of women in media - print, television and cinema has been rooted in traditional values. Much scholarship exists on the tradition-modernity divide in cinema and print media.

Traditional (Indian) women are portrayed as compassionate, forgiving, all sacrificing and very few were shown as professional women. The professional women – were shown as modern, western and lacking the compassion of the traditional woman. The divided opinion on women's role in society continued to reflect in media, with professional working women being vilified as home breakers or going against traditional norms. This led to many feminists speaking up against what was labelled as stereotypical roles of women in India. Over the years, some changes have crept in the way women are represented on media but not as much as one would have liked.

Women's movement in India and legislations

The decades of 1970s-1980s in India, witnessed a series of legislations aimed at bringing about a change in the status of women. These legislations were driven by the efforts of the women's movement which had picked momentum, influenced and led by liberal and Marxist feminists. Some of the Acts pertaining to women passed in the decades mentioned earlier were the - Indian Divorce Act (1969), The Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition)Act,1970,The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (34 of 1971),The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976,Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1976 raises the age for marriage of a girl to 18 years from 15 years and that of a boy to 21 years and makes offences under this Act cognizable, an amendment brought in 1984 to the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 made women's subjection to cruelty a cognizable offence. Though some of the enactments were amendments to existing laws, they were crucial amendments reflecting the changes that were coming about in Indian society.

Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986

The women's movement in India put the spotlight on the issue of representation of women in print media and legislation was formulated to address the same. It was introduced by Margaret Alva in the Rajya Sabha in 1986 and was in effect from 1987. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (IRWA), 1986, seeks to "prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner and for matters connected therewith or incidental

thereto."The Act penalises persons involved in the publication, distribution and packaging of such material. It, however, allows the publication of such material for scientific and learning purposes, and representation of ancient monuments carrying such imagery. The Act was primarily aimed at advertisements print media and included notices, circular, labels and wrapper.

The following table shows the number of crimes recorded under the IRWA:

Table 1

Year	Number of Crimes recorded as per IRWA
2010	893
2011	453
2012	141
2013	362
2014	47
2015	142
2016	38

Source: NCRB

Proposed Amendments

As mentioned in previous sections the Act passed in 1987 was based on representation of women in the print media. The Act was a result of the continuous effort of the women's movement to prevent and prohibit objectification of women. In the past decade, technological advancements and with it the increasing chances of misuse of images of women and various channels which the internet offers as entertainment necessitated an amendment to the existing Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act. The Amendment Bill has been passed by the Rajya Sabha in 2012 and the current Minister for Women and Child Development is reportedly keen to ensure passage of Bill in the Lok Sabha in the forth coming session. The Amendments suggested in the Act were a result of suggestions by the National Commission for Women and the Parliamentary Standing Committee.

a. Changes in Definitions

The bill also proposes the addition of new definitions to terms like 'indecent representation of women', 'electronic form' and 'publish'. The definition of 'electronic form' has been changed to include the generation and storage of such material in media, magnetic and optical, in accordance with the IT Act, 2000. It includes internet, Skype, Viber, WhatsApp and also SMS and MMS.

The term 'publish' will now include printing, distributing or broadcasting through audio-visual media.

Under the 1986 Act, the term "indecent representation" has been defined in Section 2(c) in this manner: "indecent representation of women" means the depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form or body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent, or derogatory to, denigrating, women, or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure the public morality or morals."

Under the 2012 Bill, the definition under Section 2(c) has been revised in the following words:

"Indecent representation" means (i) publication or distribution in any manner, of any material depicting women as a sexual object or which is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interests; or (ii) depiction, publication or distribution in any manner, of the figure of a woman, her form or body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent or derogatory to or denigrating women or which is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure the public morality or morals."

b. Penalties
The amendment enhances penalties for various offences in line with the IT Act, 2000.

- For representing women indecently, the penalty for the first offence was increased to imprisonment for three years and a fine between Rs 50,000 and Rs 1 lakh. Earlier the punishment was for two years and a fine of Rs 2,000

- Increase quantum of punishment for repeat offender.

c. Others
On the recommendation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee, the Human Resource Development Ministry looked into the question of being in films and television within the ambit of the Act.

The Committee further proposed a central agency for regulation and enforcement of the provision.

Obscenity, Morality and Censorship
The proposed amendment is a gender specific statute and penalises non consensual material over web. The idea of censorship, morality and obscenity are linked together and when tied to the women's movement present a rather complicated picture. Before we move on to a more nuanced understanding of obscenity and morality we need to first examine the scope of the proposed amendment. There is no denying that the debate of representation has moved on beyond the print media since when it first started in the 1950s and especially as now visual media includes the various forms of entertainment available on the internet. Other than entertainment the Act seeks to address the misuse of the internet and the mobile phone (SMS, MMS, Whatapp) to circulate morphed pictures of women or to misuse technology to harass and target women.

The Amendment also seeks to incorporate in its ambit television and cinema. As of now Television and Cinema are regulated by the Broadcasting Content Complaints Committee (which is an independent self regulatory body) and the Central Board of Certification respectively. As Chakraborty (2000) rightly points out that we have moved from the era of State controlled media- Doordarshan- to multiplicity of options in terms of television channels which soon diversified into regional channels targeting audience. This marked a definite shift in content with regard to the class and regional identities. She writes that the 1970's and 1980's, especially where content on television was concerned, it presented the woes and troubles of the middle and lower middle class. They seemed like real life stories. But the problem was that it didn't really represent the regional diversity - till each state started its own channel. In addition to this with the multiplicity of channels post liberalisation several channels with regional content were now available to the viewers,

but it was replaced by a homogenous content showcasing the life of the urban rich and in some cases the rural rich.

The stories of the poor and the rural India vanished from the landscape of entertainment. But this in no way implied any change in how women were represented in media- they continued to be portrayed as home makers and care givers or being objectified. The IRWA in any case was limited to print media – including posters, labels etc. so objectification of women in television and cinema has continued unabated barring a few instances of songs, scenes, movies which have been banned more on grounds of morality than objectification.

In the past decade, unprecedented growth in technology has resulted in diversifying options of entertainment beyond conventional media (television/cinema) and the internet reaching even rural areas. This has created another category of crime against women -cyber based gender violence-perpetuated through the internet and mobile through morphed pictures, videotaping women without their consent and also using it to harass them. Legislations need to introduced and amended in the light of the changes taking place in the society and the move to include mobile phone services within the IRWA is a welcome move. However, we also need to evolve in our views on obscenity and indecency and move beyond the lens of morality.

Philosophical, Feminist and Legal understanding of Obscenity

First let us begin with the idea of obscenity. What is it that offends people to the extent that they resort to even violence? Philosopher Fienberg writes that "Obscenity is the most extreme, unqualifiedly, negative kind of vulgarity" (1985). For him obscenity is a "charientic matter- it concerns non moral qualities of an action, representation or character" (1985). However Matthew Kieran (2002) posits a completely different view point. He is of the opinion that - one- "not all things disgusting and repulsive are obscene" (32: 2002) and second- that obscenity involves both violation of a moral norm and objectification and thus can be extended to include many actions and representations.

According to him, the issue of obscenity is defined by the response it elicits and in that "Obscenity abrogates the fundamental moral norm of respect for persons in virtue of denying or precluding their first person perspective"(Kieran, 37: 2002). He further points an interesting contradiction where the viewer may not find a gruesome rape obscene but a consensual sex scene obscene. Kairan (41-43: 2002) speaks of what he refers to as four unproblematic categories of obscenity linked to **cognitive-affective responses which are solicited by the following:**

a. Morally prohibited sexual actions- rape, pedophilia, necrophilia etc

b. Infliction of pain or extreme violence

c. Misuse of material which is not originally intended for morally prohibited actions - example sing photograph of children for pornography

d. Actions or objects which in a context are rendered obscene - consensual sexual activities in public, sexual orgy are some examples.

The legal perspective on obscenity is enmeshed in both tradition and morality. As Sue Bessmer (1981) writes, "Traditional legal definitions of obscenity conceive of it as a portrayal of sexual matters which violates, in a patently offensive manner, some variant of what has been called the "Old Morality". Her problem with the legal definitions is that

it presumes that any matter related to obscenity is intrinsically related to sexual content. As a consequence obscenity then is linked to largely pornography, matter with sexual connotation and not other" vulgar, profane, violent matter" (1981:144). How this is at variance with the feminist perspective we will come to in a while.

The positioning of American law on obscenity is similar to the IRWA in India. There is moral context and sexual context in which obscenity is understood. In American law, obscenity is "referred to as sexual immorality; against traditional values, sex outside marriage" (1981: 145). It also condones sex outside marriage and sexual conduct. In obscenity laws, the word indecency is invariably included - though in case of the IRWA - the Act is primarily against indecent representation and obscenity is an essential part of it. In legal terms the word 'indecent' refers to material that is coarse, crude and vulgar or explicit. Bessmer concludes, "Thus, for jurists as for most traditional political theorists, obscenity raises the problem of how to protect an important social value, freedom of speech, whilst curtailing the purveyance of materials which offend or go against the dominant cultural norms in taste and sexual morality" (146).

How is the legal understanding of obscenity problematic for feminists? It is in several ways. The first point being that of a traditional understanding of obscenity- linked to morality, cultural values and social norms. Erotica has long been a part of women's movement. In that women have fought for their right to express sexual desire and this often has been in contrast with the traditional (often including religious) and social norms that restrict sexual freedom of women. At the core of the women's movement has been rejecting patriarchal social norms and a socialisation process that perpetuates ideas of gendered roles. Acceptance of erotica is thus a rejection of rules that bind women and deny them freedom of sexual choice.

The second point of contention between the legal perspective and that of feminists has been the former's focus on sexual content. Feminists seek to broaden the scope of obscenity by bring within its ambit material which may not be sexually explicit but may feature extreme violence against women or objectifying women for the male gaze. The third point that Bessmer points out is that there is need to distinguish between explicit material that is often used for educational purpose versus that is purely misogynist or violent. The law too therefore needs to take account of this while formulating laws on obscenity or indecency. This is not say that there is a uniform view on obscenity by feminists. There is a fractured view point among feminists too.

"For most feminists, by contrast, the subject matter of obscenity is not sex. Rather, it is power. Obscenity deals with domineering, aggressive, de- grading or objectifying relations between people, particularly male dominance over females. Feminists frequently do more than broaden the concept of obscenity to include non-sexual materials. They also generally treat as objectionable

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Portrayal of women in the Media

certain sexually oriented materials which most traditionalists regard as benign. Scantily-clad or "sexy" female models, presented in non-violent situations, are a staple in modern advertising. Yet many feminists regard this as degrading, exploitative and thus pornographic" (147:1981).

While the legal perspective seems to have a uniform view of obscenity, the feminist position is slightly more complicated given that the women's movement itself is fragmented.

Uma Chakravarty is of the opinion that the issue of representation of women has become problematic from women's rights issue. A arguments presented by her are similar to the previous discussion on culture and women-

" how women are being represented in the media is being viewed as an obsession with obscenity even the context of women's actions is being erased in this rewriting of the women's movement along a single homogenised axis of the deployment of a middle class Puritanism in the field of popular culture" (WS-12:2000).

Contextualising the Amendments to Indecent Representation of Women Act

Laws on obscenity/indecency are based on the premise that media impacts the behaviour of behaviour and the way they think. There is considerable research by mass media scholars on this issue and there are two camps - one that believes that media cannot change a person is a divided camp. As Katz writes (1987), one set of academicians, politicians and advertisers were convinced that mass media can bring about attitudinal and behavioural change but Lazarsfeld, Giddens and other Marxists were unconvinced that mass media could bring about such a change. They believed that mass media was largely status-status-quoist, thereby reinforcing existing dominant cultural ideas rather than fostering change.

Adorno(1973), Hall (1973) among several others have warned the media creates an illusion of freedom, however what it does is excludes choices and tells us what to think or what to do. Katz writes, "the hegemonic mission of media is not to tell us what to think or what to think about- but what not to think or what not to think about" (Katz, 31: 1987). Marxists scholars like Giddens (1978) are of the opinion that "class/cultures are not easily homogenised by the media"; Lazarsfeld writes that the fact that media cannot influence behaviour is a good things for democracy (158: 1948a).

The ever growing presence of social media all over the world - be it Facebook, WhatsApp etc leads to an impression of breaking barriers. However, Shriram Venkatraman in his book, *'Social Media in South India'* (2017), writes that social media recreates the same -caste, class and gender groups as exists in the society. According to him the interactions take place within the same socio-socio-economic groups not between them. He makes an interesting observation based on his field study, that the social media is seen as a masculine space where women have a limited role to play. He reports that during his study he found that women had restricted access to mobile phone and internet as the family feared that unmarried women might start interacting with boy and bring disrepute to the family or worse still fall in love with a boy of a different caste. Cases of girls/women not owning a mobile phone has been documented by various studies. So this case study

further proves the point that the media is not always a harbinger of change- rather it is status-quoist.

Belkaoui and Belkaoui write that people select communication messages are closely aligned to their beliefs and values. Lazarsfield and Merton point out, "advertising is typically directed to the canalizing of pre-existing behaviour patterns or attitudes. It seldom seeks to create significantly new behaviour patterns". The main argument presented here is that mass media merely reflects the society. On the other hand feminists argue that, "the negative impact of the current femininity depictions not only effect gender recognition but also force women to hide good personal characteristics in order to adjust their social behaviour to satisfy men's expectations" (Fels, 2000). On the other hand- advertisements can influence young girls and women and drive towards attaining the physical attributes or dress/present oneself in a way that is in tune with the perceived popular and acceptable image. According to Kang (1997), "visual transmission of symbolic meaning has a significant influence on the attitudes, beliefs and social awareness of the public; consumers come to view various product imagery as natural extensions of certain looks, attitudes or social positions".

So while research on impact of media is a divided house, but cannot write away the impact as is evidenced in daily lives with regard to fashion, popularity of celebrities and the often with it the inability to distinguish between reel and real life. Laws against obscenity in media are based on the belief that media impacts the audience.

Let us bring in arguments presented by both Chaudhuri (2000) and Chakraborty (2000) about the diverse view points on representation of women in media. One of the points both academics make is that there has been a strong backlash against feminism in (print) media. Feminists have been attacked for presenting an alternative to marriage, household chores for women. Traditionalists (including feminists) have attacked feminists and feminist inspired writings/images.

Feminism in India has been largely left wing led but we also have conservative and more

right wing feminists. The latter are more status-quoist and would not like to disturb what they believe is the natural order of society. Thus they speak out against any action that would disturb this natural order - for example - women focussing on careers rather than home, expressing sexual desire and so on. This is where the problem with laws dealing with obscenity and indecent representation come in. As Chakraborty states a homogeneous understanding of obscenity and indecency creates a problematic situation. A blanket law on obscenity and indecency might do just that.

The content on television and cinema caters largely to the traditional discourse of role of women. There have been a few instances where they have broken the norm, but it is rare. The Central Board of Film Certification in the past years has banned a few films which they felt were not in tune with 'Indian' culture. Often these films deal with homosexuality or female sexual desire and freedom. The IRWA amendments that we are discussing here, as pointed out earlier, seek to broaden its scope to include the internet, SMS and MMS.

While there is a case for SMS and MMS, the position on Internet could be problematic. There have been an increased viewership of entertainment provided through web-series, short films etc on the internet. It has been observed that the content of these programmes have moved away from the tradition-modernity discourse which has been discussed widely among sociologists and cultural studies expert. The internet caters to a new, urban India and projects women as professionals, exploring choices outside marriage, breaking caste barriers and so on. While this may not be true of all content and some may be vulgar and explicit but the danger that the amendments bring is that it will open up the field to traditional/conservative forces which would not like media to represent women in ways unfamiliar and uncomfortable to them. As Chakraborty (2000) points out that television has become homogenised and in a sense does not represent the rural, the poor or changing options for women. As we have discussed earlier the definitions of obscenity and indecency become problematic because they are more often than not rooted in tradition, cultural values and religious beliefs which are being constantly challenged by women's movement.

The problem that arises is any shift in representation of women may be contested on grounds of obscenity/indecency. This could curtail creativity and exploration that is currently being witnessed in web-series and short films available in the internet. A narrow understanding of obscenity might well undo whatever changes that are coming in representation of women. Just like the movie - Lipstick Under My Burkha was censored, similar programmes on the internet that explore freedom of women to make choices especially sexual freedom might be attacked and withdrawn on grounds of obscenity.

Conclusion

The increasing number of cyber crimes and misuse of technology, especially against women speak of the need for laws and policies to protect women from Gender-based Cyber Violence (GBCV). The amendments in the IRWA are a step in that direction. In a

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The False Mirror: Representation of Women in Indian Advertising

conference held in TISS, Mumbai in 2018, both lawyers and judges pointed out that there is a marked reluctance among the police to register cyber based exploitation or abuse of women. This is because, as Justice Prabha remarks, due to the absence of physical injury or marks to justify the claim of violence. The situation is complicated in rural areas because research suggests that rural women are less likely to own a phone and also lack of access to internet. GSMA Connected Women Report on Gender in Technology (2015) and State of the World's Children, a UNICEF report published in 2017 say that: 36% of women in India are less likely to own a mobile, second only one third internet users being women. As a result, the police are reluctant to address cyber based crimes and ask women to either change numbers or block the harasser. There has been a considerable increase in number of cyber crime, even though the percentage (0.25%) in terms of the total crimes committed is very low. Between 2014-2015- there was an increase of 20% in cyber crimes against women, in 2015-2016 cyber crimes against women increased at the rate of 6%. While we do not have a comprehensive law dealing with cyber crimes against women - stalking, trolling and harassment, some laws (gender neutral) address the issue - for example, Section 66A prohibits sending offensive messages causing annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury etc through a communication device. As of now women resort to this to report online threats and sexual harassment. Section 509: word, gesture or act intended to insult modesty of women, Section 499: defamation; Section 503: Criminal Intimidation are some of the laws through which women currently address issue of GBCV, in the absence of a comprehensive law that takes action against cyber offenders. It cannot be stressed enough that GBCV needs to be addressed urgently.

The Indecent Representation of Women, is slightly different in scope because it incorporates in its ambit the creative communication field. The present law was made in a context which I now changing due to the technological advancements made in the past decade. As with any innovation, increased access to mobile phones and internet has led to its misuse especially with regard the women. Inclusion of SMS and MMS in the Amendments comes at a time where there have been several instances of morphed pictures of women/girls being shared via SMS, MMS and other social media platforms, videos of gang rapes have been circulated in many instances across the country. Services such as WhatsApp now make it even easier to share such videos and pictures. The increased penalty as per the amendments is a welcome move.

What is problematic as discussed in detail is the moralistic tone of the amendment that states – *"deprave, corrupt or injure the public morality or morals."* We need to move away from the Victorian notion of morality which underlies many of our laws. This needs to broken down or state clearly what is the understanding of the law of public morality. A blanket usage of the term may lead to constant petitions by self professed guardians of morality against any move by women to break the mould.

Opinion on the impact of media on morality or otherwise is disputed. Research on impact of mass media has not proved conclusively whether people's behaviour or attitudes are

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Representation of Women in Film

impacted by mass media. We have also seen the debates that took place post liberalisation in the context of stereotyping of representation of women in media and the opposition to any change. In the past three decades, the fight against stereotyping of women in India has moved at a snails pace and some changes have come in the past 3 years. It is important to keep the change going and not reverse it with archaically worded laws. The amendments to Indecent Representation of Women, should protect the freedom and right of women especially in the creative world and distinguish between voice of women and abuse of women.

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Self Help Groups in India
A Silent Revolution

Subhrali Kachari

Introduction

In the last few decades, there have been several programs, schemes and other initiatives by both government and non-government organizations in India aiming at inclusive growth and development of the deprived sections of the society – namely women, scheduled caste and tribes, minorities and also the geographically isolated and backward areas. One of the key inputs apart from training in skills and access to markets, was the access to credit. This was enabled through a new type of financing called microcredit, where poor people, usually women, establish a small group, typically of five and they take a loan from an external lender, with each member guaranteeing the repayment of the loan of the other four. This group collateral, based on peer information and peer support for repayment, and peer pressure in case of intention to default wilfully, led to very high repayment rates.

This method was tried in the mid-1970s by several people, the most well-known of whom is Prof Mohammed Yunus of Bangladesh. He began it as a pilot project in 1976 and built it into a very large program, reaching millions of women. This later became the Grameen Bank and in 2006, Prof Yunus was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in building the field of microfinance in Bangladesh and all over the world. Though microcredit appears to be and is often called "group lending" it is lending to individuals, with a group guarantee.

In India, the nationalized public sector banks and their subsidiary regional rural banks were mandated to give loans to poor people since 1971. These were given to individuals without any group guarantee. But since 1980, this was tied-up with a government subsidy scheme under the nationwide Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP), the process got vitiated and loans were often not repaid. This discouraged bankers to give new loans to the poor. As large number of people became defaulters, a loan waiver was declared in 1989 for loans below Rs 10,000.

The concept of Self Help Group is based on many similar informal rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), known by various names in various countries – such as *bishis* and *chittis* in India and *tontins* in Africa. The idea was popularized in its current

form in south-east Asian countries and the German development agency GTZ worked on it in Indonesia. It was popularized through the Asia Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Association (APRACA). In India, the development Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), MYRADA started this model in 1985 in Karnataka and then it was taken north by NGO PRADAN to Rajasthan in 1987.

SHGs are informal unregistered groups, formed usually by women living in the same neighbourhood, from similar socio-economic background with an objective of solving common problems through mutual help and cooperation.

Most SHGs first start with members saving a regular amount in every meeting. Initially this kept with one of the members and later the amount is used to give small loans to members with only residual amount left with the SHG. Over a period of time, it became clear that the savings amounts were too little to promote any significant income generating activities and were mainly used to meet household and emergency needs. This is when the idea of using SHGs to lend external funds was tried. In 1986-87, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) started assisting MYRADA to support the SHGs by giving a bulk loan to MYRADA, which on-lent the amount to SHGs and they in turn on-lent to their members.

Later, it was felt that external funding could come from a bank branch located in or near the village. By 1992, with economic reforms being launched and banks asked to reduce non-performing loans and pursue profitability, loans to the poor became just a trickle.

In this period, the idea of using Self Help Groups (SHGs) as channels for credit to the poor was formulated. This required opening a bank account is opened in the name of the group in a nearby bank branch. As guidelines did not permit this, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) permitted a pilot project in 1992, to link 3000 SHGs with banks. The RBI issued guidelines for banks to enable SHGs, which are not legally registered, to open bank accounts by specifying the name of the Group, the names of all the members, and the names of two or three group leaders who can operate the account.

The banks began by keeping the savings of the SHGs. Once an SHG demonstrated regular attendance and savings, typically after about six months to a year, the banks have a loan to the SHG of up to three to four times of the amount saved. The SHG then used this total fund to lend to the members for various activities, which may include both household needs and income generation.

The Tamil Nadu Women's Empowerment Project was first of its kind around 1990 to incorporate the concept of SHGs into state sponsored programs. Since then SHGs have been associated with women mainly, though a SHG can comprise exclusively of men or a mixed group of men and women.

This pilot project was a success and based on a review of it after three years, the RBI accepted the SHG model as alternative credit model and appointed NABARD as the led agency for SHG promotion. SHGs were introduced as a core strategy for the empowerment of women in India's Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) and became one of the largest and fastest growing micro-finance program in the developing world (Planning Commission 2002).

NABARD got SHGs promoted not only by NGOs, but also by social workers, health workers, village level workers, banks, Vikas Volunteer Vahini (VVV) Program of NABARD and other development institutions. While Karnataka and Tamil Nadu were pioneers, other state governments took up the program of promoting SHGs through government development agencies, such as the Society to Eliminate Rural Poverty (SERP) in Andhra Pradesh, and Kudumbshree in Kerala. Later the SHG movement spread to other states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh,Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and Assam.

By 1999, the IRDP was redesigned as the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) and replaced the idea of bank loans to individual with bank loans to SHGs and SHGs on-lending to their members. With the SGSY groups also suing the SHG model, the number of SHGs shot up although the quality of groups in terms of attendance, participation, savings regularity and credit discipline came down significantly. Eventually, this was attempted to be corrected through the redesigned SGSY, which was named the National Rural Livelihood Mission.

Recommended video link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6a2OXV6wSs

Conception of Self-help Groups and Experiences of CORD, a Conversation with Dr. Kshama Metr

As per the NABARD Status of Microfinance In India, 2017-18 Report,

"The SHG movement, which started as a link between the unbanked and the formal banking system to cater to the credit needs of the poor, now boasts of savings account balance of Rs 19,500 crore and credit outstanding of over Rs 75,500 crore. With more than 5000 channel partners and 8.7 Million groups touching more than 100 Million rural households, it is probably the world's most widely participated grassroots oriented microfinance program."

Impact

While SHGs primarily function as a way to access microfinance and leads to financial inclusion but it was observed that it sets off a series of other changes such as creating group solidarity among members, enhancing confidence and capabilities through training, gaining experience in economic activities of small scale and developing a collective decision making. The SHG model has effectively encouraged the habit of saving among members, which brings them under the banking net. With passage of time, the SHGs also motivate members to take up social responsibilities particularly related to development of the village/region. Researches on various regions of India qualify the recordable change brought by SHGs in uplifting the status of women in the households and empowering them socially, politically and economically.

The SHG model is based on participatory approach, through which it aims to bring a positive change in the position of women on almost all fronts, notably: economic, social and political. As stated by L.Bennett, group formation for women development is a powerful tool in weakening of inside and outside dichotomy (Bibi, 2011). Linda Mayoux (author of Sustainable Learning for Women's Empowerment) uses the term 'virtuous spirals' to explain how one positive effect of micro loans of SHGs triggers other positive effects with respect to women.

Economic: The function of providing micro credit is the first step in bringing positive changes on the status of women. There have been enough studies on different parts

of the country to prove that microfinance indeed has increased the household income (Kumar, 2013). After being members of SHGs and participating in the transactions, women are now efficient handler of the household finances. The financial independence gives a lot of confidence, bargaining power and involvement in family decision making.

The loans gained by the SHGs are mostly invested in locally viable enterprises and areas of cultural expertise. For instance, most of the Groups take up cultivation of animals, poultry and handloom sector as these areas have been a traditional expertise of women. A survey on SHGs of Anantpur district of Andhra Pradesh tells that before joining the SHG, women were mostly engaged in agriculture, house hold work and some women were also seen working as coolies. These livelihood ways provided with very low economic compensation as they were unorganized and they lacked skills.

Other studies indicate to the increase of 23% income in particular areas of Tamil Nadu after the operation of SHG and women in Karnataka estimate the increase of their income to be from 25 to 50 %. Apart from increase in income, SHGs have led to financial inclusion of women as each member of SHG has a bank account and is able to enjoy the modern banking facilities. The common banking facilities availed are the institutional credit and access to government schemes. With awareness of bank loans and government welfare plans, women are also seen taking loans individually to establish shops, farms or other micro business. Learning of transactions and accounts has opened up new margins of women as entrepreneurs at local level (Sudan, 2005). The SHGs have also helped in removing a bit of stereotyping of gender roles in economic areas.

However, few thinkers have also expressed their fears related to misuse of credits and low entrepreneurial skills of women. Linda Mayoux writes that women might get caught in quagmire of these loans and get positively disempowered. Megan Moodie, while talking about the negatives of micro credit quotes Aminur Rahman to state that pressure to pay timely is so high that women often take loans from money lenders at exorbitant prices and when they are not able to repay it, have to go through the same kind of torture and problems (Moodie, 2008).

Political: The meetings, group discussions, contacts and conversation with officials have made women politically aware leading to a substantial increase of their political participation. In many states, SHGs have been linked with the local self-government Institutions, which gives direct involvement of women in political sphere. Being a member of SHG gives confidence, exposure and leadership skills, which help the woman candidate to pursue their political career and gain seat in Panchayat. According to the Livelihood Implementation Project in the Himalayas members of women SHG were elected heads of 170 local governments out of the 669 in the region. Most importantly, SHG gives women the ability to spend which is of utmost importance in a political contest.

In many states it has been found that SHG members attend panchayat meetings regularly as they have developed an understanding and interest in matters of village administration (Salgaonkar, 2009).The women SHGs can act as a support for the women representatives of the Gram Panchayat who are consensus candidates and are unable to work independently. Women SHG can also work as a pressure group and force the administration to take up issues related to women. Surla village in Topanga, Goa is an example of SHGs acting more like administrative body taking responsibilities of the village. A primary school in this village had not appointed sufficient teachers and was

out of stock for mid-day meal. One of SHGs took up the matter, was able to arrange the mid-day meal stock and appoint teachers after a few meetings. In another case at Guirim village, Goa one of the SHGs took up the issue of blocked and polluted wells, approached the local Panch, gathered resource and hands and finally cleaned up the wells.

Social: SHGs are not just economic arrangements but also social projects (Moodie, 2008). Apart from providing financial help to women, SHGs have helped in bringing change in other aspects of the society as well. Megan Moodie in her research on the micro-finance groups of Rajasthan found that the members of the groups had not been much benefitted monetarily and they had also learnt that the main representative of the group had swindled loans. However they kept their association with the group alive and visited the meetings regularly. Moodie explains this saying *"Microcredits have become one of the several platforms of articulation from which women can comment on different kinds of local exchange, its real products is not economic and social but both"*. This implies that SHG is an immediate and accessible platform where the local and daily problems are discussed and comprehended. The discussions are not confined to earning sources, but they mostly frame around household problems and issues of raising daughters.

The SHGs have worked extensively in many parts to bring sensitization regarding health and education and the members have been found to be very particular about sending their daughters to school. Studies reveal that there was 24% rise in kangaroo care and 14% rise in exclusive breast feeding in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the areas where SHG functioned. According to a Lancet study published in 2010, women in Self Help Groups in South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa were 40% less likely to die in childbirth and 25% less likely to see their new born baby die. Studies have also shown the increase in the use of birth control and family planning among the members of SHG.A larger amount of women attend the programs on the nutritional development organized by panchayat and they also ensure timely immunization of their children.

Participation in Development: Member of Parliament Jairam Ramesh describes how SHGs have become active participants in the process of development. The SHGs in Andhra Pradesh are working in various fields e.g. marketing of commodities like soybean, maize, neem and coffee, timely distribution of pensions, functioning of a community based food security system, dairy intervention with livestock trade, non- pesticide management in agriculture, export of spices and some large scale projects like the project of land development. The role of SHG in these areas has resulted in community development and sustenance, making women a crucial and active participant of the process.

Another example on how SHGs have contributed to community development, is the transformation of Teliya Village in Jharkhand by SHGs assisted by PRADAN through investment in innovations such as new farming techniques, renovated roads, irrigation equipment, year round crop planning and new sanitation system. SHGs have also been empowering women from different sections of the society. There are SHGs exclusively for Scheduled Caste communities, Scheduled Tribes and minorities which work under different missions or yojanas. One such is the National Rural Livelihood Mission which led to formation of village organizations.

The concept of SHGs was taken from rural areas to urban areas by the Kudumbshree program of Government of Kerala, and based on the learnings of that, it was incorporated in the design of the National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM).

Bottlenecks and challenges

Though the SHGs have made a lot of progress and emerged as one of the most effective model of development, a few challenges remain.

Restricted beneficiaries: The SHGs are mostly seen to work within a particular group who can pay the money back and fulfill the targets. As a result, the model keeps out extremely poor women without assets, who come with the risk of being a defaulter at loan payment or women who are physically at a difficult state to complete the tasks. This has resulted to the exclusion of elderly poor, disabled women, landless labourers, migrant women who leave village during lean agricultural season and are unable to save, or the single women as they are expected to get married and leave the village (Murthy). Until an evaluation mission pointed out the injustice in 1999, Mahalir Thittam program of government of Tamil Nadu had a rule that only married girls could join the program.

Ignores the difference between different groups of women: Critiques of the SHG model state that the program is not equipped to deal with the differences between women of different households, communities, and other backgrounds. Women from upper castes or higher margins dominate the women from weaker sections in the group who are less vocal about their problems and opinion. This became more of a tendency when the SHG program was scaled up nationwide in 1999 after the government poverty

Recommended video link

http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/video/2015/09/04/in-rural-india-it-takes-a-village-and-womens-self-help-groups-to-improve-livelihoods

In Rural India, It Takes a Village — and Women's Self-help Groups — to Improve Livelihoods

alleviation program SGSY adopted the SHG strategy. It got further aggravated when SHGs began to be sued as vote banks before elections.

Though groups of dalit women have been able to take strong steps, the mixed groups (dalit and non dalit) have hardly taken up dalit issues, like discrimination in water and road accessibility. The SHGs that have members from different caste and communities find difficulties in functioning and taking up varied issues e.g. Women with daughters want to take up the issue of dowry whereas women in the same SHG who have son/sons do not want to take up the issue (Murthy).

Other factors: Critics argue that repayment of the loan does not necessarily mean that women have used/taken the loan for themselves but the resources could have been used by a male member of the family. High demand of loans by women sometimes reveals the social pressure on women to collect money for their in laws or husbands. In some households it has been seen that women now have to care more about the financial status and care of children without any change in the power dynamics between the family members.

Way forward

For better functioning and to expand its influence areas, the SHGs need to be made more inclusive in terms of target communities and broad in terms of its function areas.

More Inclusive: SHGs with optimum results would be the one which attends to needs and capabilities of women of every group and age. E.g Wishwa Women's Service Society in Tamil Nadu operates in a way that both old and middle aged women can be a part of. It has promoted shops, most of which have gained license from government for supplying food grains and sugar. The older women stay in the shops and the middle aged women go for the collection of the supplies and fill the accounts. Another program in Andhra Pradesh, from the former South Asia Poverty Alleviation Program of UNDP had opened up avenues for organizations for single women at Mandal level. The single women were members of SHGs at the village and Mandal level. When single women moved out of their villages after marriage, the organization at Mandal level helped them to gain membership of SHGs in a new village.

Increase in productivity: A study by S.Beevi and Devi (2011) in Kollam districts of Kerala concludes that SHGs which have business plan or functions under a particular project are able to use the resources judiciously and derive better results than SHGs which engage in basic lending and borrowing(Velickakam, 2018). The reasons for the difference in results can be traced to the use of guidelines, institutional training and most importantly a vision which comes with an enterprise and makes the organization function faster and efficiently. Surveys also says that mobilization of women is rapid and throughout with the intervention of the state government (Ramesh, 2007). For example, 80 lakh women were mobilized in 15 years in Andhra Pradesh under efforts of the state government, whereas Sewa and Dhan Foundation mobilized 8 and 2.6 lakh women in 35 and 17 years respectively. This case clearly asks for more involvement of the government in funding and operating SHGs.

Transformation of roles: Bibhu Mishra (2018)frames a few ways through which the SHGs can contribute more to the development process. Currently SHGs function as microfinance units which operate with savings and loans. These organizations can be

turned into business units by inserting more capital. Village organizations and cluster level federations are gradually becoming strong and can function as business units. Kudumbshree program in Kerala and SERP(Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty), Andhra Pradesh are good examples in this front. The SHGs can be used to deliver government services and social service schemes. As the SHGs will be formed by the members of the village, they will therefore be more approachable and transparent.

Conclusion

Activist Srilatha Batliwala defines empowerment as the process, and an outcome of the process, by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual process and challenge the ideology of patriarchy and gender based discrimination in all institutions and structures of the society (Yesudian, 2006). Self Help Groups have brought a silent revolution leading to many visible and invisible changes to empower women. SHG is also a vital agency as it is based on participation which is a rightful claim for everyone, especially the excluded group and is instrumental in achieving wider goals (Narayan, 2003).The top- down development strategies could not succeed much as it treated people was objects of developments and provides them what the government agencies rather than what the people want (Narayan, 2003). The success of SHGs can be credited to its design of accommodating the local realities which vary from place to place. Scholar Julia Elyachar discussed the relevance of SHG in reference of preserving culture. She states that micro loan or SHGs do not ask the group to abandon their cultural practice en route to become modern to help themselves and the economy(Moodie, 2008). The current scenario convinces that SHGs have become an integral part of India's growth and development whereas it still has a long way to go. Here the role of the state and business groups is something to look for, as they can largely enhance and enlarge the role of SHGS.

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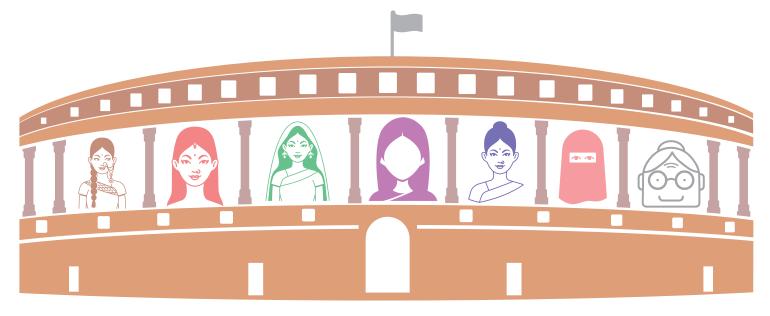# Political Representation of Women in India

Need for Change

Dr Sushree Panigrahi and Subhrali Kachari

Introduction

It was in the year 1917, much before India gained independence that women involved in the national struggle for freedom put forth their demand for voting rights. This was led by Saraladevi Chaudhrani in her proposals before Montague-Chelmsford in 1918 (Khanna, 2009: 55). It was nearly 30 years later that this effort bore fruit. It was post the Second World War that many women in several countries across the world gained equal voting rights. It also led to an interest in research on women's involvement in politics but these studies "focused on state institutions and political parties as the most important sites of political participation, and because the presence of women in these sites was significant, the conclusions drawn were that either women were disinterested in and/ or uninformed about politics or that their interest and knowledge derived from the male head of household" (Walia and Allwood, 2004: 375).

It was only later in the 1980s that scholars refined the concept of political participation moving it beyond political parties and elected bodies. This drew attention to women's participation in social movements and community organizations. Meanwhile, feminist scholars argued that women's participation needs to be examined in their specific

locations, across states and nations. Spivak (1994) adds that women's political participation needs to be further broken down into caste, class and religion since women are not a homogenous category. Internationally, women's participation and representation in politics and political institutions was being discussed in the 1980s and 1990s. "The Beijing Platform For Action" declared that women should occupy at least 30% of political decision making positions" (Karam, 2007:17). It was also recognized that political representation has to be understood not in isolation but in conjunction with unemployment, poverty and economic dependence.

In India, scholars suggest that the reasons for the low rates of political participation of women are social, economic and even psychological. Khanna writes,

" qualities such as rationality, self-discipline, competition, universality, are considered to be important for political participation. These are considered to be in abundance in the males. On the contrary women are associated with qualities like submissiveness, impulsiveness, indiscipline and irrationality. This gender stereotype leads to the marginalization of women in the politics" (Khanna, 209: 57).

The dichotomy of the private-public spheres which relegates women to the private sphere of the home and the men to the public sphere has resulted in women not being adequately represented in political parties and politics. It is a common perception that women cannot 'handle' the complications that come with politics. So much so that even when it comes to casting votes, women are often dictated by family members on which political party and candidate they should vote for. Economic factors are also a deterrent as given the low participation of women in the work force, they do not have monetary resources required to fight elections nor are their families ready to support them financially.

While India has had a lady Prime Minister, several Chief Ministers and Governors, but considering that women constitute nearly half of the population of India at 48.5% (Census 2011), Women constituted 4.4% in the first Lok Sabha of 1951 general election a figure that has taken more than seven decades to double. The neighboring countries Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan have higher women representation than India.

Women's representation in the political parties and consequently in state legislative assemblies and parliament is inadequate and has been largely restricted to working as volunteers in social programmes of the government or campaigning as political wives or daughters. As Anuradha Bhoite points in what she calls the 'dejure' and 'defacto' perspectives- the former referring to the Constitutional promise of equality of men and women and the latter that is the reality of women not being political decision makers nor enjoying equal opportunity. This is so because the public sphere of political participation is seen as a male bastion in which women have very little or no role to play.

Recommended video link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3FBjLVZ9ig

Women and Power - Lack of women in politics

Analysis of the results in the 16th Lok Sabha Elections: Gender Perspective

Currently out of the 543 Members of Parliament only 66 are women (highest till now), which is only 12% against the global average of 22.4%. Similarly in Rajya Sabha out of 245 Members of Parliament, only 28 are women, which is 11%. The presence of women in the State Assemblies is lesser in some cases and the average is a tiny 9%. Rajasthan, Bihar and Haryana have representation of women in almost 14 % of the MP/MLAseats, whereas Nagaland and Pondicherry have zero women representation in both central and state assembly. The table below shows the slow pace at which the number of women representative has increased over the years.

Table 1: Number of women elected to Lok Sabha

General Election	No. of Women	Percentage Elected
First (1951)	22	4.4
Second (1957)	27	5.4
Third (1962)	34	6.7
Fourth (1967)	32	5.9
Fifth (1971)	22	4.2
Sixth (1977)	19	3.4
Seventh (1980)	28	5.1
Eight (1984)	44	8.1
Ninth (1989)	28	5.29
Tenth (1991)	39	7.02
Eleventh (1996)	40	7.36
Twelfth (1998)	44	8.07
Thirteenth (1999)	49	9.02
Fourteenth (2004)	51	9.51
Fifteenth (2009)	59	10.9
Sixteenth (2014)	66	12

Source: Occasional paper series 1/2008, Rajya Sabha Secretariat

The 16th Lok Sabha has seen the highest number of women contesting elections since the 1957. Out of the total 8,136 candidates, 668 were women, viz. 8.21 percent of the total candidates. This is an increase of more than one per cent from the 2009 general election figure.

Interestingly, the success rate of women in the 16th Lok Sabha elections is in fact better than that of male candidates. In the 16th Lok Sabha elections, 61 women candidates out of 668 (i.e. 9.13 per cent of the total women candidates) got elected to the Lok Sabha. While for the male candidates, the success percentage was only 6.36 per cent (Of the 7,578 men who contested the polls, 482 emerged victorious).

Table 2: Women representatives from different states in 2014 and 2009

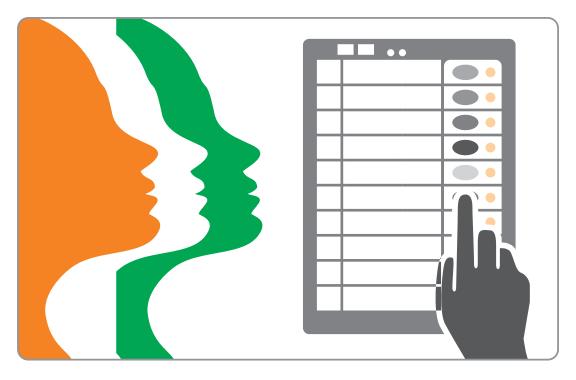| States	Number of women candidates won 2014 out of the Lok Sabha seats	Number of women candidates won 2009
Andhra Pradesh	3 (42)	5
Assam	2(14)	2
Chandigarh	1(1)	0
Chattisgarh	1 (11)	2
Gujarat	4(26)	4
Jammu and Kashmir	1(6)	0
Karnataka	1(28)	1
Madhya Pradesh	4(29)	6
Maharashtra	3(48)	3
Punjab	1(13)	4
Tamil Nadu	4(39)	1
Bihar	3(40)	4
Kerala	1(20)	0
Delhi	1(7)	1
Odisha	2(21)	0
West Bengal	14(42)	7
Uttarakhand	1(5)	0
Uttar Pradesh	13(80)	13
Haryana	0	2
Meghalaya	0	1
Rajashthan	1(25)	3
Total	61 (543)	59

Source: Election Commission of India

Even though the major political parties in India have always clearly stated their support for reservation of women in parliament, very few women play an active role within the parties. In the last General Elections of 2014, as shown by the table below, the number of women of candidates from the political parties was very insignificant.

Tab 3. Political Parties and the number of women candidates in General Elections 2014

Political Parties	Number of women candidates
Independent	133
Aam Aadmi Party	39
INC	33
BJP	20
BSP	16
Samajwadi Party	16
Trinamool Congress	12

Source: Data from Association from Democratic Reforms

The Role of Political Parties and State

The Indian Constitution clearly states that it guarantees to each citizen- whether man or woman equal opportunity and rights. Specific provisions for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are mentioned in order to undo the injustice meted out to them for decades. The Committee on the Status of Women (1975) noted that there should be reservation for women at the municipal level and also in political parties. Women were also to be included in the Panchayats. But no action was taken on this. Post the Mandal issue, women too started demanding reservation of seats. Wadia and Allwood write, " it is the (women's) movement's party based section that has been most vocal in favouring the reservation of seats for women, arguing that in order to empower women, women's movement must enter the political area not only to redefine that space but also to engage in the brokering of power that takes place in political institutions" (2004: 382).

The National Perspective Plan headed by Margarat Alva (NPP) 1988-2000 recommended 30% reservation of seats in Panchayats and Zilla Parishad. States like Karnataka and Gujarat were among the first to implement it. Soon after, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment of 1993 brought in one-third reservation for women in the local level government bodies. This had two positive impacts – one in the first three years, 350,000 women entered the local self government, the agenda now widened to include- heath, education, water and fuel.

However the nomination or election as the Panch by itself does not guarantee a dominant - political or social role of women. In most cases, there are consensus candidates, nominated by the men of the village who are bound to remain obliged to those who

Recommended video link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reFc2JSCi38

Political participation as a tool of women's empowerment

nominate them and function as directed by the men. In many cases, it is the husband of the women panch or the male head of the household who wield the actual power and the woman panch is merely a puppet in their hands. The husband/male head assumes the power of the panch and performs all functions whereas the women panch hardly visit the meetings and discussions.

After the 73rd Act, there has been a constant demand for similar reservation of women in the parliament. The Amendment Bill for the Reservation for Women, which was first introduced in 1996, is still pending in the parliament. This bill seeks to reserve 33% of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. It also reserves nearly one third of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for women of those groups. This bill has not been passed yet as some political parties feel that this bill is a gateway for the upper class women to enter the houses, which will change the caste composition of the parliament.

The reservation of seats for women candidates by the political party itself is one of the commonly suggested ways to ensure adequate number of women representative. A report submitted by the Jayanthi Natrajan committee on the Women Reservation Bill uses the Gill formula as submitted by the Election Commission to project the efficacy of reservation by the political parties. The doubts stated in the report are that the political parties might nominate women mostly in the areas where they are expecting defeat, which will totally dilute the intention of the reservation.

Brinda Karat (CPI-M): *"the bill will change (the country's political) culture because women today are still caught in a culture prison. In the name of tradition, stereotypes are imposed and we have to fight them every day. These stereotypes will also be broken (by the bill)."*

Mulayam Singh Yadav (Samajwadi Party): *"The ones who get elected through the Women's Reservation Bill will be the wives and daughters of officers and businessmen, the kind who get whistled at."*

Mayawati, Bahujan Samaj Party Chief: *"I seek reservation for women belonging to the Dalit, Backward Classes, religious minorities and the poor upper castes within the proposed 33 percent for women in Parliament and Assemblies. At the same time, the existing system of 22 percent reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes should not be disturbed."*

A study done by Richard Matland shows that reservation of seats by political parties can lead to significant change in the scenery. The gender quota within parties was seen adopted in Norway in the 1970s. By 1995, 84 parties in 36 countries had reserved seats for women. The adoption of gender quota by parties like British Labour Party and Norwegian Labour party led to significant increase in the number of women Parliamentarians in the respective country. Once a party moves to gender quota for ideological reasons, the other parties generally follow due to laissez faire (Matland, 1998).

Recommended video link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYJiAMmgykw

Sarokaar - Women's Participation in Politics

In India, the report of the Natrajan Committee mentions that most of the major national political parties have given consent to reserve party tickets for women candidates. The women who are backed by political parties have also been seen to perform better than the independent candidates and have higher chances of winning.

Table 3: Women contestants in the previous elections

General Election	Total no. of Women contestants	Women Candidates from political parties	No. of Women elected	Elected women from political parties
Sixth (1977)	70	41	19	17
Seventh (1980)	143	77	28	27
Eight (1984)	162	63	42	39
Ninth (1989)	198	87	29	26
Tenth (1991)	314	N.A	44	N.A
Eleventh (1996)	599	125	40	36
Twelfth (1998)	274	107	43	31
Thirteenth (1999)	284	104	49	35
Fourteenth (2004)	355	110	50	30

Source: Occasional paper series 1/2008, Rajya Sabha Secretariat

The political parties have not taken effective steps to prove accelerate women participation and representation within parties and the political system. The parties need to issue more tickets to women candidates and promote the women members in the party. A declaration of a minimum quota by a party will increase its volunteers at the ground level and more number of younger women will take interest in politics to build up their careers.

Forms of reservation for women in other countries

In 1990, United Nation's Economic and Social Council had endorsed a target of 30% women in the decision making process around the world by 1995. However, the target has still not been reached and only 16% of the parliamentarians in the world are women (Secreteriat, 2008). The UN World Conference on 'Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace' in Beijing stated the inequality between man and women in sharing power and decision making is critical area where advancement is urgently required.

More than forty countries have introduced electoral quotas through different legislations and in around fifty countries quotas have been introduced for political parties. The participation of women in countries like Argentina, Costa Rica, Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa have increased to a significant mark and have almost reached par with the Nordic countries. There have been two ways to increase the women participation (Matland, 1998). The Nordic and the western countries used an incremental track by trying to gradually increase women's participation at every level. These countries mostly reserved party quotas.
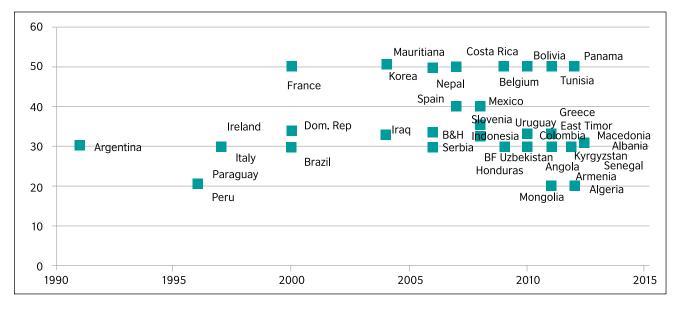
The Latin American countries doubted that just increasing women's access to political resources might not increase women's representation, hence legal quotas were used. Most of the remaining countries are seen to apply reserved seat quotas instead of candidate quota. The international community has put a lot of emphasis on increasing women representatives and in many post conflict countries - Afghanistan and Iraq, gender quotas of 25-35% have been introduced (Secretariat, 2008).

Fig.1: Countries ranked on the basis of women in National Parliaments

Rank	Country	Lower or Single House			
		Elections	Seats	Women	%W
1	Rwanda	03.09.2018	80	49	61.3
2	Cuba	11.03.2018	605	322	53.2
3	Bolivia	12.10.2014	130	69	53.1
4	Mexico	01.01.2018	500	241	48.2
5	Grenada	13.03.2018	15	7	46.7
94	Bangladesh	05.01.2014	350	71	20.3
96	Pakistan	25.08.2018	341	69	20.3
132	Brazil	07.10.2018	513	77	15
135	Bhutan	18.10.2018	47	7	14.9
153	**India**	**07.04.2014**	**542**	**64**	**11.8**
Read the Entire list of Rankings at http://archive.ipu.org					

Source: Inter Parliamentary Union, http://archive.ipu.org

Fig. 2: Quota for women candidates in political parties in different countries

Source: Quota Project, International IDEA, Stockholm University and Inter-Parliamentary Union

Way forward

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and has been in force since 1981. India is a signatory member of the convention. This urges India to bring a law to address the unequal representation of women in parliament. The increase in the number

of women in the Parliament will also help in formation of a women lobby to push forward the gender related matters. Prasad rightly says " The entry of women into politics and decision making structures can change the policies, vision and structure of institutions. They could redefine political priorities, and place new items on the political agenda to address gender specific concerns and provide a new perspective on mainstream political issues" (2007: 63).

A separate Committee should be formed to recommend on how to increase the political participation of women. The Socio-Economic Caste Census data (2011) and Gender Atlas can be used to determine the constituencies with the immediate need of women representatives in the Parliament. The issue of women's representation is often marked by debates on religion, caste and class as women cannot be considered a homogenous group. The commonly raised questions on women representation are – can an upper middle class woman represent the concerns of poor women in the slums or will an upper caste woman prioritize issues of a Dalit woman. Similar concerns have blocked the Women's Reservation Bill- that of monopoly by a certain caste/class of women. The previous experiences from the reservation of women in Panchayat says that though women's presences gets ensured, no effort for the promotion and sustenance of their leadership is shown by the parties (Buch, 2009).

Active participation and increased representation of women in politics is essential not only to widen the political agenda to include more women centric issues but also to encourage women to step out into the public sphere. This will help break barriers which limit women to household chores and also change mindsets that perpetuate to stereotype women as unsuited for politics. For women to become a considerable force in political activity, political parties and the State need to ensure that more and more women are placed in decision making bodies and institutions. It has been observed that the key barriers to women's political representation are social and economic, therefore efforts have to be made to increase representation in spite of these challenges. This may well reverse the existing conditions which prevent women from participating in politics and will further lead to a positive impact on the social and economic status of women in society.

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