

## INDIA TOWARDS GENDER JUSTICE IN POLITICS

The passing of the Women's Reservation Bill in Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament) on March 9, 2010 was a historic moment for Indian Democracy. In a giant leap for womankind that few countries had attempted, the upper house voted to amend the constitution to reserve one third of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies for women. For the bill was introduced several times earlier only to be thwarted and put down due to stiff resistance from certain political parties for reason best known to them, but this time around there was a show of unanimously barring a few exception, among political parties to see it through.

This would surely encourage more women to participate in the political affairs and take some valuable decisions at the higher level for the smooth operation of the country. The bill also recognizes the capability of women and spreads the message that women are equally capable in handling big responsibilities when compared to men.

The congress president Ms. Sonia Gandhi said the Govt. had decided to take the "huge risk" as it involved the larger issue of empowering women.

Women of the country expressed their gratitude to the U.P.A and their leader Smt. Sonia Gandhi, B.J.P and the Left parties for extending support to the Bill. Defending the Bill several Members of Parliament suggested that women of India should be given their due in the political process of the nation, and by passing it in Rajya Sabha, the political parties of India have walked their talk.

For gender justice in India was long overdue, and this is quite evident from the fact that even after 60 years of independence, and several legislation for reform have been introduced, the women of India have not been able to take their rightful place on Indian Political horizon. In 1952, their strength was only 4.4% in the parliament. Women's representation steadily rose in the next general election to reach 6.7% in the third Lok Sabha (lower house). But the trend reversed in the next three election, with women representing a meagre 3.4% in the 6<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha. (lower house)

Subsequent election witnessed an upward trend, except the 1989, election when the number of women M.P's dropped considerably. But from 1991 election, the number of women M.P's steadily rose to touch 8.07% in 1998 and in 1999, it was at 9.2%. In the current parliament women members contribute 11% of its strength, the highest ever. This

strategy progress in women's participation in politics could be due to a variety of reasons, the patriarchal mindset being the main among them.

It is not that women in India have never been in politics, they were always there even during the pre-democratic era. Indian history is replete with stories of several valiant women who protected kingdoms and guided their people. The independence movement of India would be incomplete without the mention of courageous women who spent their time and energy for the sake of the nation.

Presence of women in socio-political life is necessitated not just from the point of view of equity between men and women though it is of paramount importance but it is also become the distinctive contribution Women can make in society. There is a feminine perspective in individual and social life, quite from the masculine, and that is indeed valuable for social equilibrium.

This is visible in structures such as the Panchayati Raj (local elected govt. system) institution where women's presence and participation is ensured through legislation. And it is this wisdom gathered from the lower levels of democratic institutions that seek to translate itself in to reality in the Parliamentary structure.

The legislation to ensure greater presence of women in Parliament also serves to break the shackles of age-old bias against women. More often than not, women have been considered as home makers, with little role in social and political life.

It is a great joy that women indeed have proved their mettle in almost all aspects of human life and therefore it would be in the fitness of things to include women to accelerate the wheel of progress in India.

President Pratibha Patil has rightly said that "women of our country would be a major determinant of India's future progress and inclusive growth."

Ms. Meira Kumar, the first woman speaker of the Lok Sabha said 'The protection of women's rights and their empowerment is our collective responsibility and the government, social organisations and the civil society in partnership with the media need to create a congenial atmosphere and shape public opinion so that women have freedom to define and achieve their full potential and live purposeful lives'.

The bill is still pending in the Lok Sabha. One sincerely thinks that political parties cutting across party line will lead their unequal support to it. The Indian political land-scape is bound to change when the Parliament will have 33% of women members who will bring along with them their dream and aspirations for a better and equitable India.

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