

Women in politics: An analysis of Women Representation in State Legislative Assembly of Sikkim

Karma Sonam Bhutia

Abstract

Gender equality in politics is still a distant reality across the globe, with only one-third of the countries exceeding the global target of 30 per cent women's representation in legislative bodies. The under-representation of women in national parliaments, therefore, poses a problem in terms of both the practice and the theory of politics. In practical terms, the under-representation of women in political leadership is even more remarkable when one realises that women have succeeded in gaining access to other sectors of society in many countries. Moreover, equality between men and women is now a leading political principle across the globe. Taking part in decision-making however, in politics as well as in the private sector, typically remains a male privilege. As far as women is concerned, very few of them hold leadership roles in decision-making processes. This unfortunate reality holds true especially at the national and state levels and Sikkim is no exception to this. It is in this backdrop, this paper seeks to study the representation of women in politics in Sikkim and to shed light on the reason of low representation. Besides, the author also seeks to provide strategic and practical recommendations for advancing women's representation at all levels in the decision-making process.

Keywords: Women, Gender Equality, Participation, Representation, India, Sikkim

1. Introduction

Women constitute almost half of the world population but their participation in the formal political structure and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant. Milbrath and Goel (1977) has observed that "it is a tradition in almost all societies that politics is mainly an affair of men and that women should fall in line with them politically". The changes brought by the modern industrial societies are eroding this sex difference but the impact of tradition is still visible. Men tend to be more psychologically involved in politics than women. Discrimination against women, according to Chafe (1972), "finds in the deep rooted structure of society, in the roles women play and in a sexual division of labor which restricted females primarily to the domestic sphere of life". Therefore, it is argued that only substantial social changes capable of demolishing the structural basis regarding the traditional views of male and female roles is necessary to modify the existing trends in the political participation of men and women.

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women's representation in legislative bodies. The under-representation of women in national parliaments, therefore, poses a problem in terms of both the practice and the theory of politics. In practical terms, the under-representation of women in political leadership is even more remarkable when one realises that women have succeeded in gaining access to other sectors of society in many countries. Moreover, equality between men and women is now a leading political principle across the globe. Taking part in decision-making however, in politics as well as in the private sector, typically remains a male privilege. But the women's participation in the legislature and in politics has certain benefits not only to women but to the general society as a whole. For instance, Thomas (1991) in her study of women in US state legislatures notes that women legislators were most successful in passing legislation dealing with women, families and children. Likewise, Flammang (1985) argues that female politicians have been observed to approach their participatory roles as public officials more creditably. According to Flammang, women have been more responsive to constituents, being better at the human relations parts of politics and places more emphasis on constituency service. Indeed, women legislators have attached different weights and meanings to the notion of representing women (Reingold 2000). But as far as women in concern, very few of them hold leadership roles in decision-making processes. This unfortunate reality holds true especially at the national and state levels and Sikkim is no exception to this. It is in this backdrop, this paper seeks to study the representation of women in politics in Sikkim. Besides, this paper also seeks to provide strategic and practical recommendations for advancing women's representation at all levels in the decision-making process.

2. Constitutional Provisions for Women in India

In 1950, the Constitution of India granted women the right to vote and to run for parliament. It also declared that men and women are equal in all spheres. Beginning with that, international developments such as the UN-sponsored decade for women launched in 1975 and the UN conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 not only lent momentum and even respectability to the women's movement, but also provided the impulse for several state policies for the enhancement of women's status. Besides, India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. Yet, India had fared poorly among the developing nations in the index measuring women's political participation. Concerned about the near absence of women from established political structures, scholars have tried to explain this gap between the extension of political rights and access to the centers of power. They have pointed to the historical and cultural factors that have moulded the process of specific politicization of men and women in India

and created a 'gender typed' role for them. Others have talked of division between the public and the private spheres as the division between men and women in Indian society and consequently categorize politics as a male domain.

In order to address all these issues, the Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Within the framework of a democratic polity, the laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

However, in spite of such provisions in the Constitution, the decades following independence witnessed a decline in the women's participation in politics. Though there has been a marked increase in their voting turnout and election campaigning. While there have been significant gains in these two areas, women continue to be under-represented in legislative bodies both at the national and state level and in political parties. It has been observed that post-independent women are playing a significant role in less conventional activities such as environmental movements, anti-alcohol agitations, peace movements, etc. which equally effect power relationships as they have the capacity to influence the State. Yet politics proved to be a very inhospitable terrain for women and continues to be the male domain where entry to women is severely restricted. This has resulted into a poor representation of women in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies.

3. Women and Legislative Representation in India

In India, women were given their political rights along with independence but their participation in politics is not so impressive (Chhetri 2014). Over the last 16th Lok Sabha elections, the representation of women has witnessed a very slow improvement. The First Lok Sabha election was held in 1952 where only 22 women members were elected out of total 499 members, which was just 4.4 per cent. Though a the number of women representation were increase in second and third election of Lok Sabha to 27 and 34 respectively but starts declining from the fourth election held in 1967. The number was increased only in the year 1996 i.e. in the eleventh election of Lok Sabha where 39 women candidates were elected. In 1999 polls, 284 women had contested the election and 49 were elected and in 2004 election, 355 women contested the election of whom 45 won (Chhetri 2014). The 2009 Lok Sabha

election saw the increase in the number of women members in the Lok Sabha. A total of 59 women candidates were elected in the fifteenth Lok Sabha election held in 2009 which account to 10.86 per cent of total, (Chhetri 2013). Of the total of 556 women candidates contested in 2009 Lok Sabha election, 59 were elected. In 2014, the Sixteenth Lok Sabha was held and 62 women got elected as the members of Lok Sabha which account to 11.42 percent, one of the highest ever since independence (see Table 1). Total of 668 women candidates contested the sixteenth Lok Sabha election. Of the total 62 elected women members, 4 are from INC, 30 from BJP, 11 from All India Trinamool Congress and 4 from AIADMK. The BJD and YSRCP has 2 members each in the present Lok Sabha. The Apna Dal, SP, SAD, SHS, NCP, CPI (M), JKPDP, LJP and TRS each has one member in the Lok Sabha. If we see the state wise women members in the Lok Sabha, 13 are from Uttar Pradesh, 12 from West Bengal, 5 each from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, 4 from Tamil Nadu, 3 each from Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2 each from Assam and Odisha and the State of Chattisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttarkhand each has 1 women members in the Lok Sabha. Delhi and Chadigarh each has 1 women member in the Lok Sabha.

Table 1
Women Members in Lok Sabha (1951-2016)

Year	Total No. of Seats	Total No. of women Members	Percentage to Total
1952	499	22	4.4
1957	500	27	5.4
1962	503	34	6.8
1967	523	31	5.9
1971	521	22	4.2
1977	544	19	3.5
1980	544	28	5.1
1984	517	44	8.1
1989	544	27	5.2
1991	544	39	7.2
1996	543	40	7.4
1998	543	43	7.9
1999	543	49	8.8
2004	543	45	8.2
2009	543	59	10.87
2014	543	62	11.42

(Sources: Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, Chhetri 2014)

The representation of women in Rajya Sabha has shown similar pattern to that of the Lok Sabha. Women members in the Rajya Sabha has ranged from minimum of 15 (6.12%) to the maximum of 38 (15.51%) (see Table 2). The total representation of women in Rajya Sabha has never gone beyond 38. At

present there are 27 women members in the Rajya Sabha of which 24 are elected and three are nominated. The State of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu has 3 members each in the Rajya Sabha. The State of Maharashtra, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh has 2 members each in the Rajya Sabha. The State of Tripura, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Assam, Karnataka, Haryana, West Bengal, Punjab, Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh and Chattisgarh has 1 women members each in the Rajya Sabha.

Table 2
Women Members in Rajya Sabha (1952-2015)

Year	Total No. of Seats	Total No. of Women Members	Percentage to Total
1952	219	16	7.31
1957	237	18	7.59
1962	238	18	7.56
1967	240	20	8.33
1971	243	17	7.0
1977	244	25	10.25
1980	244	24	9.84
1984	244	28	11.48
1989	245	24	9.80
1991	245	38	15.51
1996	223	19	8.52
1998	245	15	6.12
1999	245	19	7.76
2005	243	25	10.29
2006	242	25	10.41
2008	242	23	9.50
2010	244	25	10.24
2014	242	28	11.57

Sources: Rajya Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi; Chhetri 2014)

Therefore, the representation of women in Parliament which has remain a maximum of 11.42 per cent in the Lok Sabha and a maximum of 15.51 per cent in the Rajya Sabha thus far is far from satisfactory, especially when we compare it with other countries of the world. The low representation of women in the decision-making organizations is due to the political parties that harbour very conservative view about women. Different parties though champion the cause of women in their manifesto, but during election time they give tickets mostly to men and only to few elite women. The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 2010 as approved by Rajya Sabha recently, seeks to reserve as nearly as possible one third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament, and the state legislative assemblies including Delhi. This is the latest legislative initiative to increase women's political

representation in India. If enacted, it will result in an increase in women in the national legislature simply because it requires a certain percentage of women to be elected (Chhetri 2014). The number of women in the Lok Sabha would increase to 182 in one stroke, from the current level of 62 MPs (11.06 %).

Women representation in State legislatures has also been equally dismal. Less than 9 per cent of 4118 law makers in state assemblies across India are women (Chhetri 2014). At present the total percentage of elected women in State Assemblies is 8.47 per cent. The highest percentage of women members in the State Legislative Assembly to the total number is Haryana with 14.44 % women members and Mizoram, Nagaland and Poducherry with no women members in the State Legislative Assemblies (Table 3).

Table 3
Women Members in State Legislative Assemblies in India

S. N.	State	Year of Election	Total No. of Seats in the Legislative Assembly	Total No. of Women Members	Percentage to Total
1.	Andhra Pradesh	2014	175	18	10.28
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	2014	60	2	3.33
3.	Assam	2012	126	14	11.11
4.	Bihar	2015	243	28	11.52
5.	Chhatisgarh	2013	90	10	11.11
6.	Delhi	2013	70	6	8.57
7.	Goa	2012	40	1	2.50
8.	Gujarat	2012	182	12	6.59
9.	Haryana	2014	90	13	14.44
10.	Himachal Pradesh	2012	68	3	5.8
11.	Jammu & Kashmir	2014	87	2	2.29
12.	Jharkhand	2014	77	8	10.39
13.	Karnataka	2013	224	6	2.68
14.	Kerala	2011	140	7	5
15.	Madhya Pradesh	2013	231	30	12.98
16.	Maharashtra	2014	288	20	6.94
17.	Manipur	2012	60	3	5
18.	Meghalaya	2013	60	4	6.67
19.	Mizoram	2013	40	0	0
20.	Nagaland	2012	60	0	0
21.	Odisha	2014	147	11	7.48
22.	Poducherry	2011	30	0	0
23.	Punjab	2012	117	14	11.96
24.	Rajasthan	2013	200	28	14

25.	Sikkim	2014	32	3	9.37
26.	Tamil Nadu	2011	234	21	8.97
27.	Telangana	2014	119	09	7.56
28.	Tripura	2013	60	5	8.33
29.	Uttarakhand	2012	70	5	7.14
30.	Uttar Pradesh	2012	404	32	7.92
31.	West Bengal	2011	294	34	12

(Source: Election Commission of India; Chhetri 2014)

4. Women and Legislative Representation in Sikkim: Past and Present Scenario

Sikkim the erstwhile sovereign monarchical country became the 22nd state of Indian Union in May 1975. It is situated in the western part of the Eastern Himalayas and has been hemmed by three international boundaries and a state of West Bengal. It is bounded by China (Tibet) to the north and northeast, Nepal to the west, Chumbi valley of Tibet and Bhutan to the east and the Darjeeling district of West Bengal to the south (Chhetri 2009). Sikkim consists of four districts and nine sub-divisions. The total population of the state is about 6.07 lakhs, with women accounting for about 47 percent of the total population.

In Sikkim, the women are more empowered socially and politically but their participation in politics is not so impressive. Over the last 9th Assembly elections, the representation of women has witnessed a very slow improvement. The first election of the State Legislative Assembly of Sikkim was held in the year 1974 before the merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union. The Legislative Assembly which was elected prior to the merger was continued till 1979. The second election of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly was conducted in the year 1979. The subsequent elections were held in the year 1985, 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 and the recent one in the year 2014.

Table 4
Women Members in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly

Assembly Election	Year	Total Number of Seats	Numbers of Women Members	Percentage (%)
First	1974	32	01	3.12
Second	1979	32	Nil	00
Third	1985	32	Nil	00
Fourth	1989	32	01	3.12
Fifth	1994	32	01	3.12
Sixth	1999	32	01	3.12
Seventh	2004	32	03	9.37
Eight	2009	32	04	12.5
Ninth	2014	32	03	9.37

(Source: Election Commission of Sikkim; Chhetri 2009)

The Assembly election held in the year 1974 prior to the Sikkim's merger saw only one women candidate becoming the member of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly out of 32 members which comprise merely 3.12 per cent of women representation in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. In the subsequent Assembly election of 1979 and 1985 no women candidate were able to win the Assembly elections. The Assembly Election of 1989, 1994, and 1999 returned only one candidate each in the Sikkim legislative Assembly. The 2004 State Assembly Election gave three women members to the Assembly. The number was increased to four after the 2009 Assembly election. However, again the number of women members in the State Legislative has come down to three in the 2014 Assembly Elections (see Table 4).

From the above analysis and observation it clearly shows that the representation of women in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly since the beginning is very inadequate. Although after joining the Indian Union there has been improvement in different aspects of life in the Sikkimese society, the womenfolk in Sikkim is yet to make a desired result with regard to their share in politics as far as their representation in the State Assembly is concerned. Various electoral data shows that in Sikkim the female electoral participation as voters has seen a notable upsurge as voter turnout figures of different Assembly elections shows which are held till now. The marginalisation of women in Sikkim from electoral participation stems mainly from political party competition, as national as well as regional political parties in Sikkim discriminate not only in terms of seat allotments in the electoral fray, but also in the party rank and file and chain of command. Therefore, we find poor allotment rate of seats to women by political parties in the elections to the State Legislative Assembly and marginalisation within the party structure in Sikkim. This could be attributed to a large extent to the party competition structure in Sikkim as it is encumbered by inherent male dominance and a patriarchal mindset that excludes women from the electoral process.

5. Concluding Remarks

Given the above literature and analysis, it can be concluded that women representation is dependent on multiple factors, which increase or decrease the role of women in political matters of a country. Their significance and prediction power, however, varies from situation to situation. The reason to fact is that every state provides different social, political, economic and governmental role to different sectors of society. In developing countries like India the women are still in the backyard and treated as such in almost all aspects of life. If any country is sincere in giving due role to their women in the parliamentary affairs, she must take up the matter on all fronts particularly, proportional electoral system, sufficient quotas, clear cut human rights for women especially the political rights, high GDP growth rate and more opportunities of education and increased labor force participation of women in a

country. Therefore, it can be concluded that the political participation of women and their representation in legislative bodies, the trend which is prevalent in the country, the Sikkim is also no exception to it. As far as state of Sikkim is concerned, the representation of women in legislative assembly is not satisfactory. A lot of improvement is needed so as to acquire the desired result in this direction. Taking into consideration the improvement which has taken place in the local governance all over India as well as in Sikkim especially to ensure women representation, there is a definite need for affirmative action on the part of policy makers to change the condition and also to increase the representation of women in legislative bodies. In terms of specific policy lessons for Sikkim and to allow for greater women's participation to shape and influence policy processes towards improved equity for women, following recommendations is suggested. Multiparty politics is crucial to achieve substantial women's political participation; women must be part of political parties and internal processes to drive change from within; proportional representation electoral systems increase prospects for a fairer representation of women in politics and government, through political parties, especially in the absence of constitutionally mandated representation quotas and a strong women's movement is necessary for setting standards, norms and accountability.

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