



Women in Uttar Pradesh politics: Progress since independence

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Abstract

India, the world's largest democratic country and often termed as an emerging super power of the twenty first century, has completed its sixty seven years of independence, but the principles of democracy, particularly for women are yet to be realised. Women in India are still fighting to attain their basic rights in every sphere of the society. Indian culture and tradition is dominated by patriarchal societies so it is obvious that here politics is men's domain. Men often decide whom their wives vote for. However, few elite class women who particularly belong to privileged backgrounds have climbed up at political stage and successfully won seats in the National and State legislatures and the poorer section of women are left without a representation.

Keywords: independence, politics, representation, assembly

Introduction

Gender equality is a prerequisite for the effective participation of women in strengthening the institutional structures of any democracy. The political position of women in India is indeed ironical, when we consider the fact that India is the largest democratic system where everyone should have the right to contribute to decision making and represent their interest. Women are not well represented in the country in spite of the fact that they form almost half of the population in India. The number of women in Legislatures at the State and National level is still not commensurate with their numbers in the society^[1]. Their representation in elected bodies including the two houses of Parliament has always been negligible. Similarly, the number of women in the Legislative Assemblies of the Indian States is also very disappointing. It is undoubtedly true that political institutions are predominantly comprised of men. The other half of the Indian population is politically marginalised, socially harassed, economically deprived, culturally exploited and religiously sidelined. Unless this trend changes, the meaning of Indian democracy is nothing but a mere farce and all claims and display of political equality are simply a charade.

Since political representatives deal with scarce national resources, influence civil rights and determine social policies, the inclusion of women from the Legislatures is highly critical in furthering their interests. If women are under-represented from such places where rules and regulations are enacted and approved, they will be unsuccessful in influencing women centric issues like sexual harassment, maternity leave, reproductive rights, female health care etc. Even if the male law makers express pro female sentiments, misleading gender stereotypes will continue to persist in places where women are

marginalised. It is a biological fact that women are the ones who bear the child and gives birth to it and in almost every country in the world. It is the mother who does most of the childrearing. In general, the notion of innate female inferiority is responsible for perpetuating gender inequality in societies^[2].

Women's Representation in the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh (1952-2012)

A comparative analysis of the strength of both elected men and women members in the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh makes it evident that women's representation in the Assembly is very disappointing as it wasn't even able to cross the level of 10 percent. Since Independence, the Assembly elections have been held sixteen times so far. Although with the passage of time women's representation in Assembly has increased gradually during the years from 1952 to 2012, the ascension in numbers is hardly significant.

Women in Uttar Pradesh have enjoyed representation in the state Assembly since the colonial regime. The Government of India Act 1935 was a landmark in the archives of women's political representation in the Assembly, in which total 228 members were elected in the Assembly from the sixteen different constituencies. Out of the six seats reserved for women in these constituencies, one was reserved for general urban woman, three for general rural women and two seats were for Muslim women; one for Muslim Urban woman and one for rural Muslim woman^[3]. In the 1937 Assembly election twelve women members were again elected; irrespective of their castes, colour and religion. Again in 1946, nine women were elected to the Assembly.

¹ Rashmi Shrivastav, "Minority Representation of a Political Majority Group: Women in Indian Democratic Process", *The Indian Journal of Political Science* (New Delhi) Vol. 66 (2), (April- June 2005), p.233, <http://www.jstore.org/stable/41856126> (accessed on 22 June 2014).

² Ann Oakes and Elizabeth Almquist, "Women in National Legislatures: A Cross National Test of Macrostructural Gender Theories", *Population Research and Policy Review* (Netherlands) Vol. 12 (1) (1993), p. 71, <http://www.org/stable/40229788> (accessed on 11 April 2014).

³ A. K. Shukla, *Political Status of Women* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Corporation 2007), p.78.

After Independence the first Assembly election of Uttar Pradesh was held in the year of 1952 and the total number of Assembly seats was 347. In the first Assembly election a total of 25 women candidates contested and out of these 11 women were elected. It is quite clear that the first Assembly has only 3.17 percent women representation. However, the situation got much better in the next Assembly elections of 1957, in which a total 39 women contested and 24 got elected out of the total of 341 constituency seats. In the third Assembly election of 1962, the representation of women was much poorer than in the previous Assembly; it had only 20 women (4.65 percent) representatives out of the total strength of 430. However the number of women candidates contesting the election was much higher. A total of 60 women candidates contested for the third Assembly.

Unfortunately, in the fourth Assembly (1967) the number of women contestants declined; only 39 women contested for this Assembly election. Result was also disappointing because only 7 women got elected which made around 1.64 percent of the total strength of 425 members. Surprisingly, the number of women candidates rose in the fifth and sixth Assemblies. In the Fifth Assembly, a total of 18 women were elected from 55 women contestants and the Sixth Assembly had 22 women representative, elected from 92 candidates. Unfortunately, this figure could not be maintained in the Seventh Assembly, the level of women's representation had gone down abruptly and reached to just 12 women members. It was around 2.82 percent of the total strength of 425.

In the eighth Assembly a total of 20 women candidates were elected, the ratio of women to the total 425 members was around 4.70 percent. Representation of women continued to remain meagre almost in all the Assemblies, except for the Ninth Assembly (1985). Women's representation was quite better in the 1985 Assembly elections; the number of women members touched the 31 and crossed the level of 7 percent of the total members. This became possible due to the fact that Congress had initiated the policy to encourage women participation in politics and therefore women were preferred over men candidates while finalising the nominations for elections. The most noteworthy point in the 1985 Assembly elections was that out of the 31 elected women members, 26 had been elected from congress seats ^[4]. In the Tenth Assembly, the number of women members again declined from 31 to 19. In the eleventh Assembly the number of women candidates dropped sharply from 19 to 10, merely 2.35 percent out of the total 419 seats. The trend of poor representation further continued in the Twelfth Assembly, in which only 11 women were elected, making it 3.5 percent of the total membership of 422 in the Assembly. Unlike previous Assembly results for women, the representation of women in the Thirteenth Assembly increased considerably. It had 21 women members out of a total of 424 memberships. However, the record of 1984 Assembly elections could not be broken. Although, the number was yet again quite high in the Fourteenth Assembly when the number of women MLA reached sharply to 26, in 2007 elections the number again dipped further to 23 women members (see table 1).

⁴ Pitam Singh, *Women Legislators in Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company 2003), p.77.

Table 1: Women's Representation in the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh (1952-2012)

Year	Name of the Assembly	Total seats	Women contested	Women won	Women %
1952	First	347	25	11	3.17
1957	Second	341	39	24	7.00
1962	Third	430	61	20	4.65
1967	Fourth	425	39	07	1.64
1969	Fifth	425	55	18	4.23
1974	Sixth	424	92	22	5.17
1977	Seventh	425	63	12	2.82
1980	Eighth	425	85	20	4.70
1985	Ninth	425	168	31	7.30
1989	Tenth	425	207	19	4.47
1991	Eleventh	419	226	10	2.35
1993	Twelfth	422	253	13	3.05
1997	Thirteenth	424	190	21	4.90
2002	Fourteenth	403	344	26	5.94
2007	Fifteenth	403	370	23	5.70
2012	Sixteenth	403	582	35	8.68
	Total+ Avg.	-	-	312	5.12

Source: Statistical report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, Election Commission of India, New Delhi from 1952 to 2012.

In the present Assembly (2012), results were pleasantly surprising, especially for women. This Assembly returned with more women faces; their representation in lower house (Legislative Assembly) seemed much improved, touching the number of 35 women members. The number of women candidates standing for elections has also been increased. More surprisingly, all the political parties have included more women candidates in their party lists. A total of 582 women candidates were in fray for the Sixteenth Assembly elections, out of which 35 got elected successfully.

Table 2: Women's Representation in Lok Sabha from Uttar Pradesh (1952-2009)

Lok Sabha	Year	Total seats	Contested Women	Elected Women	Percentage
1 st	1952	69	-	4	5.79
2 nd	1957	68	6	3	4.41
3 rd	1962	86	14	6	8.82
4 th	1967	85	13	7	8.23
5 th	1973	85	16	4	4.70
6 th	1977	85	13	3	3.52
7 th	1980	85	35	7	8.23
8 th	1984	85	44	9	10.58
9 th	1989	85	41	6	7.05
10 th	1991	85	50	3	3.52
11 th	1996	85	107	9	10.58
12 th	1998	85	56	9	10.58
13 th	1999	85	61	9	10.58
14 th	2004	80	61	7	8.75
15 th	2009	80	100	12	15%
Total	-	-	617	98	
Avg.	-	-	41.13	6.53	

Sources: Statistical Report on General Elections from the First to Fifteenth Lok Sabha elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

The statistical analysis of the available data on the average

number of women members in Lok Sabha from Uttar Pradesh (1952 to 2009) shows that the average of women candidates as contestants was around 41.13 percent (total 617 women) per election and the average number of elected women was just 98, around 6.13 women per election. It is evident from the table that there is a vast difference in the number between contested women and elected women. Although women have much more actively participated in politics, they have been poorly elected. It is significant to note here that women are taking more and more interest to participate in Lok Sabha elections and the number of participants has been increasing day by day and fortunately, the number of women losing in the elections has not affected their participation. However, the only concern here is that the representation of women in the apex bodies of political hierarchy, like Lok Sabha, is very dismal.

Women's Representation in Major Political Parties of Uttar Pradesh (1952- 2012)

In a democratic setup, the political route for decision making usually leads to the system via political parties. Thus, while analysing the representation and participation of women members in various political parties, it becomes imperative to note, in general the promises or programmes they have for the uplift of women in, and to what extent they encourage women within their own party or organisation.

Besides voting in elections, contesting elections is also a very important dimension of participation. The actual attitude of a party towards women can be gauged by the numbers of tickets which has been giving to women in the elections. A comparative study of attitudes of major political parties towards women during the elections has been also critically analysed.

As far as the attitudes of major political parties in Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections are concerned; at the time of elections declarations are made for 15 to 20 percents seats to women by political parties, but in reality no party has been able to achieve the mentioned target. In case of the contestant candidates, the difference between men and women is much sharper. Candidates fielded by the various political parties are still male centric and women account only for 5 to 10 percent. Table 3 (reflects the performance of various political parties, especially in terms of position of women in Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections form 1952 to 2012. The parties also failed to live up to the expectations of women. Political party's Gender bias against women in the list of party's candidates is illustrated in table 3. No serious efforts appear to have been made to mobilise women as a political pressure group by any political party. Women candidates still have to struggle against great odds, no matter which party they belong to^[5].

Looking at the attitude of Congress (INC) towards women, it may be observed from Table 3 that INC was the leading party for filling seats by women as compared to other political parties. The Indian National Congress has been one of the most successful political parties for a long time in both Parliament and Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections ever since independence. From the first Assembly elections of 1952 to that of 1989, Congress was in power for almost all tenures

(except Janta Government in 1977) in the state. Table 3 depicts that the majority of women members in Assembly elections invariably belong to the Congress Party. In the first Assembly election of Uttar Pradesh in 1952, all 11 elected women belonged to the Congress party. The women's number stood at 23 in the second Assembly, 19 in the third Assembly and 6 in the fourth Assembly elections. The non Congress party contributed to only one seat in the second, third and fourth Assembly of Uttar Pradesh while all the rest were elected for Congress seats. Congress' hold on women's representation marginally decreased in fifth Assembly elections in which a total of 19 women were elected out of which 15 belonged to Congress, one was elected from SSP and 3 were elected from BKD. However, Congress again dominated women representation in the sixth Assembly, in which a total of 21 women were elected, out of which only one woman was from a non Congress party.

However, the seventh Assembly election of 1977 was not in favour of Congress and at that time Janta Party emerged as the victorious party, representing 9 women (75 percent) alone in the Assembly. Therefore, the representation of women considerably decreased as only 3 women came to the seventh Assembly from Congress. A total of 12 women were elected, in which one woman representative was from SSP.

Congress Party had the overall highest representation in Assembly till the 10th Assembly, so it is obvious that it has fielded more women in its party seats as well. Congress distribution of seats for women, though not equal to male members, was better in comparison to other parties. Table 3 reflects that the position of women regarding the seats fielded by women in Congress party are always higher than other party except in 13th Assembly of 1996. In this election, Congress had given only two seats to women candidates. In the last Assembly elections of 2012, 29 seats had been given to women by Congress out of which only two women were elected. On an average, however, Congress has the highest number of women both as contestants as well as elected members. However, when the INC had a downfall, naturally the women representation too suffered.

From 1977 onwards other political parties were able to return with more women faces in the Assembly, obviously at the cost of Congress party. The Janta party is the only other party which came into power with the massive vote of 352 seats in the Assembly. Looking at the Janta party's performance regarding the representation of women in table 3 the status of elected women as well as women contestants is very disappointing, except in seventh Assembly where 10 seats were given to women candidates out of which 9 women were successfully elected from Janta party. But soon the number of women representatives in this party started decreasing. Janta Party's predominance was only for few years, after which it started giving lacklustre performance during its whole political life. However, it recently merged with BJP in the year of 2013. Here, It is imperative to note that Janta Party came into existence in 1977, the main components of this party were the Congress (O) headed by Morarji Desai, Charan Singh's Lok Dal, Jan Sangh and Socialist Party, Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) got merged and form the Socialist Party). Both PSP and SSP, which were recognised as National Parties of that time, but

⁵ Shrivastav, n. 3, p. 235.

they never gave priority to women candidates during their political period (table 4.3 (a) and 4.3 (b).

Another main political party of India after independence was Jan Sangh (later renamed as BJP) which was formed in 1951. Attitude of Jan Sangh towards women was detestable since the very beginning. Looking at the distribution of seats, it can be seen that Jan Sangh's tilt towards gender bias, fielded seats mostly by men almost in all Assembly elections. It is evident from table 3 that while Jan Sangh fought for Assembly, the level of women seats never went above 3 seats. In 1980 Jan Sangh was renamed as BJP, and then for the first time BJP came up with 4 women contestants. Moreover, the number of women contestant in BJP increased gradually with the passage of time and in the last Assembly election of 2012, 35 seats were given to women candidates (see 3).

Other main political parties in Uttar Pradesh are Samajwadi party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Both these parties have emerged from the soil of Uttar Pradesh and now form the model of bipolar party system in Uttar Pradesh. Women's representation in both parties SP and BSP, has suffered due to their biased outlook towards male candidates.

If we analyse from a gender point of view, the women headed parties also ignored women during the seats filling by candidates. The parties, irrespective of their leadership, in terms of gender discrimination appear to be desperate to win the seats at any cost. It is clear that the chief command of BSP Ms. Mayawati also neglected women during the distribution of party tickets. From quite some time, the Congress has also not been able to present adequate women's representatives despite having Sonia Gandhi as its leader.

As far as the present Assembly is concerned, the representation of women has slightly increased, both as contestants as well as elected members. The total number of women contestants in the last Assembly of 2012 were 582 including independent candidates. The number is higher than that in the previous election of 2007. Party-wise, the figures are; INC fielded 29 women candidates that are seven candidates less than 2007, BJP-35, BSP-31, SP fielded 31, 1 from RLD and the rest fought as independent candidates or from registered parties. After the election results, the ruling Samajwadi Party turned up with the highest number of women, 20 women MLAs out of its total tally of 224. Only three women MLAs have been elected to power from BSP and despite being headed by a woman leader only 3 percent of its MLAs are women. However, 7 women MLA belonged to BJP, INC on the other hand had only been able to send 2 of its women's representatives to the Assembly. One woman was elected from the registered party Apna Dal. It is also a woman headed party. As a result, the strength of elected women marginally rose from 3.17 to 8.68 percent in the lower house.

In general, the overall assessment of the performances of major political parties towards women disclosed that almost all political parties represented more or less the same poor number of women in the Assembly, but it is pretty clear from table 3 that they always got better representation during the Congress party rule. As far as the ratio of women in the distribution of seats is concerned, it is embarrassing that leaders of various political parties always prefer their victory to stabilizing the sex ratio or the representation of women in politics.

Table 3: Party wise elected women in Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly (1952 -2012)

Year	Assembly	Total Seats	Elected women	IND	INC	JS/BJP	PSP	SSP	BKD	JP	BSP	SP	RLD
1952	1 st	347	11		11								
1957	2 nd	341	24	1	23								
1962	3 rd	430	20		19	1	-						
1967	4 th	425	7		6		-	1					
1969	5 th	425	19		15		-	1	3				
1974	6 th	425	21		20		-		1				
1977	7 th	425	12	1	3					9			
1980	8 th	425	20		17				2	1			
1985	9 th	425	31		26				5				
1989	10 th	425	19	1	8	2				7	1		
1991	11 th	425	10		1	6				3			
1993	12 th	425	13			7					1	5	
1997	13 th	425	21	1		11			-		3	6	
2002	14 th	403	26		1	6			-		6	12	1
2007	15 th	403	23		1	5			-		10	5	1
2012	16 th	403	35	1	3	7			-		3	20	

Sources: Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, Election Commission of India New Delhi from 1952 to 2012.

Thus the all statistics reveal that since independence, women's representation in actual decision making has been low, revolving around figures like 3, 4 or 5. In terms of power sharing men play the role of the proverbial big brother by grasping lion's shares of power and leaving infinitesimal share to women. This figure proved that women kept aside from the power sharing and the reason for this is to be found in the unequal distribution of power in our society. Subsequently,

not a single Assembly in the country has adequate representation, either for the election of legislators or the selection of ministries.

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