

Women power?

Women continue to be grossly under-represented in Parliament and the State Assemblies and even at the candidate level, underscoring the need for reservation for them in the legislature.

By **RAMESH CHAKRAPANI**

For nearly two decades, the issue of women's reservation in State Assemblies and Parliament has been marred by controversy. The Bill seeking to reserve a third of the seats in the legislature has been introduced and allowed to lapse several times. Although women's representation has steadily increased over the past seven decades since Independence, the state of affairs in Parliament and State Assemblies is far from encouraging and clearly points to the need for reservation of seats for women in the legislature.

Data from the Election Commission of India on the general election to the 16th Lok Sabha in 2014 and the Assembly elections present a dismal picture. Out of the 543 members of the 16th Lok Sabha, only 66 are women — a paltry 12.16 per cent, considering the fact that women make up half of the country's population. Also distressing is the fact that only 668 women contested for the 543 seats, of whom 206 contest-

No women in Parliament 2014, 16th Lok Sabha

State/Union Territory	Seats	Women contestants
Jharkhand	14	18
Haryana	10	11
Himachal Pradesh	4	5
Goa	2	2
Arunachal Pradesh	2	0
Manipur	2	2
Meghalaya	2	1
Mizoram	1	0
Nagaland	1	0
Sikkim	1	0
Tripura	2	3
Andaman & Nicobar	1	2
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	1	1
Daman & Diu	1	0
Lakshadweep	1	0
Puducherry	1	3
Total	46	48

ILLUSTRATION: RAMANUJAM VENUGOPAL

Women in Parliament 2014, 16th Lok Sabha



State/Union Territory	Seats	Contestants (Female)	Winners (Female)	% of Women among State MPs
Chandigarh	1	5	1	100
West Bengal	42	51	13	30.96
Uttarakhand	5	7	1	20.00
Gujarat	26	16	5	19.23
Madhya Pradesh	29	37	5	17.24
Jammu & Kashmir	6	3	1	16.67
Uttar Pradesh	80	126	13	16.25
NCT of Delhi	7	13	1	14.29
Assam	14	16	2	14.29
Odisha	21	17	3	14.29
Maharashtra	48	69	6	12.50
Tamil Nadu	39	55	4	10.26
Chhattisgarh	11	21	1	9.09
Punjab	13	20	1	7.69
Bihar	40	47	3	7.50
Andhra Pradesh	42	43	3	7.14
Kerala	20	27	1	5.00
Karnataka	28	20	1	3.57
Rajasthan	25	27	1	4.00



ed as independent candidates (all of whom lost). The statistics are telling. Major and minor political parties are still very parsimonious in nominating women as their candidates in parliamentary elections.

Shockingly, there were no women members of Parliament (MPs) from two major States, Haryana and Jharkhand, smaller States such as Goa and Himachal Pradesh, and several north-eastern States, apart from a few Union Territories.

West Bengal topped the list in terms of percentage of women among MPs, having sent 13 women to the Lok Sabha. Other States that ranked relatively high included Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh, with women

Women in Assemblies



State/Union Territory	MLAs	Constituencies	% of Women Among MLAs
Haryana	13	90	14.44
Rajasthan	28	200	14.00
Bihar	34	243	13.99
Madhya Pradesh	30	230	13.04
Punjab	14	117	11.96
West Bengal	34	294	11.57
Assam	14	126	11.11
Chhattisgarh	10	90	11.11
Jharkhand	9	81	11.11
Sikkim	3	32	9.37
Andhra Pradesh	27	294	9.20
Gujarat	16	182	8.79
Uttar Pradesh	35	403	8.68
NCT of Delhi	6	70	8.57
Tripura	5	60	8.33
Odisha	11	147	7.48
Tamil Nadu	17	234	7.27
Uttarakhand	5	70	7.14
Maharashtra	20	288	6.95
Meghalaya	4	60	6.66
Kerala	7	140	5.00
Manipur	3	60	5.00
Jammu & Kashmir	2	87	4.49
Himachal Pradesh	3	68	4.41
Karnataka	6	224	2.68
Goa	1	40	2.50
Arunachal Pradesh	2	60	1.66
Mizoram	0	40	0
Nagaland	0	60	0
Puducherry	0	30	0

Contestant ratio

State	Male	Female	Female (SC/ST)	Total	Male-Female ratio
Nagaland	185	2	2	187	92.50:1
Puducherry	181	6	1	187	30.17:1
Arunachal Pradesh	149	6	6	155	24.83:1
Mizoram	136	6	6	142	22.67:1
Goa	205	10	0	215	20.50:1
Jammu & Kashmir*	1,287	67	6	1,354	19.21:1
Tamil Nadu	2,605	143	51	2,748	18.22:1
Manipur	264	15	4	279	17.60:1
Gujarat	1,569	97	20	1,666	16.18:1
Tripura	234	15	6	249	15.60:1
Karnataka	2,772	175	34	2,948	15.40:1
Maharashtra	3,842	277	69	4,119	13.87:1
Meghalaya	320	25	24	345	12.80:1
Himachal Pradesh	425	34	6	459	12.50:1
Madhya Pradesh	2,383	200	81	2,583	11.91:1
Rajasthan	1,930	166	64	2,096	11.63:1
Uttarakhand	724	63	18	788	11.49:1
Andhra Pradesh	3,591	317	85	3,910	11.33:1
Odisha	1,303	117	54	1,420	11.14:1
Chhattisgarh	901	83	42	986	10.86:1
Uttar Pradesh	6,252	583	163	6,839	10.72:1
Kerala	888	83	12	971	10.70:1
Haryana	1,235	116	31	1,351	10.65:1
Punjab	985	93	29	1,078	10.59:1
Assam	896	85	14	981	10.54:1
Bihar	3,216	307	67	3,523	10.48:1
Sikkim	110	11	1	121	10.00:1
West Bengal	1,618	174	57	1,792	9.30:1
NCT of Delhi	606	66	9	673	9.18:1
Jharkhand	1,025	111	62	1,136	9.23:1

*Data available only for 2008 elections

accounting for at least 15 per cent of each of the State's MPs. West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh also had the highest number of women MPs.

The situation is dire in the State Assemblies too. Out of a total of 4,120 elected members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) across 28 States, the National Capital Territory of Delhi and the Puducherry Union Territory, only 359 are women, accounting from a mere 8.71 per cent. Only nine States had the percentage of women MLAs in double digits. Surprisingly, Haryana had the highest percentage of women MLAs, closely followed by Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, States that have traditionally scored low on various development indices, especially those relating to women's development.

The Uttar Pradesh Assembly had the highest number of women MLAs, at 35, closely followed by West Bengal and Bihar with 34 each. A look at the ratio of male to female contestants in State Assembly elections shows how the odds are stacked against women even at the candidate level. Most States had at least 10 male candidates for every female candidate, with the ratio rising above 15 in several key States.