

VOICES

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■ NOT EVEN ONE OF INDIA'S SEVEN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS HAS BEEN A WOMAN ■ NOT A SINGLE WOMAN HAS BEEN THE DEFENCE, FINANCE OR HOME MINISTER ■ NO WOMAN HAS EVER BEEN INDIA'S CHIEF JUSTICE

LAST AMONG EQUALS

WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

More than six decades after Independence, India remains a male-dominated society whose elected representatives cannot even agree on women's reservation in Parliament
by Prabhu Chawla

June 20, 1991. Prime Minister-designate P V Narasimha Rao had just woken up from his afternoon siesta at 9 Moti Lal Nehru Marg, New Delhi, to meet ministerial aspirants waiting in fevered anticipation outside his Race Course Road house. Among the many portfolios that were Rao's to allocate, his chief concern was Finance. As he settled down in his small but elegant study, Rao asked an aide to get the famous economist I G Patel in London on the phone. Patel ducked the embedded offer, but he had a suggestion: Dr Manmohan Singh.

Rao was relieved. It didn't last more than a few minutes, however. The tension came flooding back within a few minutes with a call from a powerful Gandhi family loyalist. The instructions were clear: induct Sheila Kaul, an aunt of Rajiv Gandhi, into the Cabinet with an important economic portfolio. Rao's pout became more pronounced as he decided to stand his ground. Sheila Kaul would be the Urban Development Minister. It was a 54-member Council of Ministers that Rao put together, with Kaul the only one of six women in it to get a Cabinet rank for the others were allocated insignificant portfolios.

Rao's decision wasn't defiance; it was merely the political perpetuation of a social order where women are no more than symbols. Rao wasn't being different either. His predecessors and successors more or less allowed or installed women in the ruling establishment only because it was a political compulsion. And that's the Great Indian Tragedy: politicians professing to women's empowerment

keeping them in the margins of power. The 20 Union Cabinets constituted after Independence have seen only 14 women with Cabinet rank. Parliament adjourned last month without even discussing the Women's Reservation Bill passed by the Rajya Sabha last year, a clear indication of the contempt for women our leaders—male and female—are blessed with. Even when Jaya Prada, the feisty Lok Sabha member from Rampur, reminded the House of its promise to half of India's population, not a single member from the Congress or BJP supported her.

Jaya Prada's isolation in the House of the People is an echo of India's male theme. From business to politics, and the bureaucracy to the judiciary, women have hardly any stake in responsibility and authority. We do have Pratibha Patil and Meira Kumar, but the nature of their offices only darkens the shadow of symbolism this state of affairs casts on our nation. And who can forget they weren't even the first choices. Patil became President only after the Left vetoed all other candidates, all men, and Meira Kumar was Cabinet Minister for a day before becoming the Lok Sabha Speaker.

An analysis of women's representation across various sectors reveals that it hardly crosses double digits. In the 32-member UPA Cabinet there are only three women ministers and none hold a significant portfolio. Ambika Soni, one of the seniormost Congress leaders has been given the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Kumari Selja is the socially correct Union Minister of Tourism, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. Mamata had the electoral clout to choose

the Railway Ministry for herself. It's strange that the 15th Lok Sabha has the largest number of women in parliamentary history, but their representation in government is pathetic. Soni explains the bias in terms of seniority. "There is no particular reason why women are not given key ministries. When portfolios are allocated, the leadership looks at seniority of leaders," she says, admitting that "fewer women MPs certainly limits the choice".

The irony is that a 120-year-old ruling party that was founded by a woman and is currently led

by a woman hasn't found a single woman to head any of the economic ministries so far—only Tarakeshwari Sinha was made Deputy Finance Minister by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1958. It seems none of India's 14 Prime Ministers found a female candidate capable of presenting a budget for the nation though women run domestic budgets quite efficiently. Even Indira Gandhi, the country's first and only woman Prime Minister, didn't include a woman in her Cabinet, let alone a woman the Home Minister, External Affairs Minister or Defence Minister. Now

when Sonia Gandhi wields real political power, she hasn't been able to break the male domination of government and her party.

0 women among 24 deputy chairpersons of the Planning Commission

Even outside the Central Government, Sonia hasn't been able to choose a single woman Chief Minister apart from Delhi. Even in cases where suitable female candidates were available to lead a state, the natural choice was in favour of a man. Ashok Gehlot was chosen as Chief Minister of Rajasthan over Dr Girija Vyas, Chairperson of National Commission for Women who was one of the front-runners for the job. Even in Punjab, the Congress preferred Capt. Amarinder Singh to Rajinder Kaur Bhattal. Down south, YSR Reddy was handpicked

after ignoring the claims of other female contenders like Renuka Chowdhury and Dr Geetha Reddy. In Delhi, Sonia has only five female members as part of her own 40-member Con-

1 woman among 17 Chief Election Commissioners so far in India

gress Working Committee and only one woman, Rita Bahugna Joshi, is a Pradesh Congress President. Of the nine AICC general secretaries, not one is a woman. After Ambika Soni in 1975, no woman has become the Youth Congress chief. Some Congress leaders wonder in private why Rahul was given preference over Priyanka, whose communications skills they admit are better than her brother's.

Not just the Congress, but other political parties are equally guilty of ignoring women in their power structure. The BJP doesn't have a single female state chief or a general secretary. Its 12-member parliamentary Board has a solitary woman member. Leader of the Opposition Sushma Swaraj doesn't agree. "I've never felt any discrimination. I've myself held key portfolios like telecom and health but have never felt any problem. Mrs Gandhi

26 women among 242 Rajya Sabha members as on March 30, 2011

was not from the BJP but women feel proud that she held such important positions, including that of Defence Minister."

Other regional parties like the SP, Akali Dal, National Conference, DMK, Indian National Lok Dal and Rashtriya Lok Dal are dominated by men. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi decided to appoint his son M.K. Stalin as successor and sent his daughter Kanimozhi to Delhi for the succession in the DMK to go smoothly.

Many other political leaders like the Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal, National Conference supremo Farooq Abdullah, Samajawadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, the late Andhra Chief Minister YSR Reddy, PMK Chief S. Ramadoss have promoted their sons in politics rather than their daughters. Supriya Sule, NCP MP, and daughter of Union Agriculture Minister Sharad

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0 women among 22 Governors of the Reserve Bank of India so far



GIRIJA VYAS

Chairperson, National Commission for Women

"It's basically the mindset. Because of it, women are not getting equal opportunities in government. There should be some special reservations for women till they get their due proportion of posts in government."



BRINDA KARAT

MP and CPI(M) Politburo Member

"More often than not, women are made ministers of state. There are so many competent women leaders in Parliament, but the ruling alliance has put very few of them in the Union Cabinet. The Congress, for instance, has so few of them."

Educate Women and See What Happens

OPINION | JAYA BACHCHAN

The issue of women not getting their fair share of power cannot be understood by confining our vision to politics. The context is — and always has been—our society, and how it treats women. Our traditions and cultural mores have long kept women at the periphery of all that really matters. In India, women can be gods of some importance but not cabinet ministers of any consequence.

Look within. Ours is a nation where women are exalted as devis, and paeans sung in their praise but come a time to get something done and credit be given for it, it's men who walk away with the honours. This is the way things are, this is the setting that produces the average Indian woman, and this is the stereotyping that must be left behind. It is only then we can produce a whole new generation of women like ICICI Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Chanda Kochhar.

It's also got a lot to do with the very Indian male dislike of taking orders from a woman. That is only logical in a society where the women are mostly bossed around all their lives. To be fair, this is a worldwide phenomenon. Take the US. I hoped Hillary Clinton would become president, not for the policies and politics she represented, and not just as a figurehead, but simply because it would have been a shot for equality heard around the world. But it was not to be. Our political processes are relatively infantile and feudal, so the state of affairs in India is not surprising even if it is saddening.

The one woman leader we had was Indira Gandhi; everybody else pales in comparison. Time and tradition constantly conspire to wound achievers like, say, Mohsina Kidwai who had a great political career but which never really translated into the kind of



ever upward growth that could have been reasonably expected. BJP leader Sushma Swaraj is a beacon for Indian womankind now; her charisma and energy is just fantastic. I wish her well and hope she gets her due. Another heartwarming sight is that of a woman being the country's foreign secretary. But these are only exceptions.

Reservation of seats for women in Parliament and state legislatures is not the answer. Change cannot be forced from above. Equal opportunities for women are not a handout; this kind of change has to rise up and across society. The argument that all opponents of women's reservation are backward is overly simplistic; it detracts from the main issue.

And then we have guard against what is already happening at the grassroots, where a frighteningly large proportion of women elected to political positions are filling in for their husbands or fathers, probably inspired by a certain woman chief minister who did the same for her husband. I don't want to see that happening in our Parliament.

The solution is education. Educate women and see what happens. I am a great optimist and believe that this one initiative alone can address the gender imbalance in our polity. Of course, it can't be like other government's social initiatives, progressive legislation and great expenditure adding up to poor results. It must deliver. A social awakening will inevitably follow and equality will start trickling up, right to the top of our power structures.

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of the family unit. Equality, like charity, begins at home. Egalitarian, forward-looking families constitute progressive communities which in turn build up a nation that ensures equality. It's a long road, but I believe we can get there. We should.

Pawar, remains optimistic. "With more women coming into Parliament, political parties giving tickets to women will, I feel, change the scenario. Nothing is a male bastion any more."

The few women in positions of real political power behave like men, making their own kind suffer.

0 women among 13 Attorneys General so far in India

Take, for example, Mamata Banerjee, who is yet to upgrade any one of her female colleagues to a senior position. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati doesn't believe in grooming any woman leaders in her party while former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa perhaps thinks there is no other woman who can keep the AIADMK together. Harsimrat Kaur, Akali Dal MP, believes a grassroots approach will remove all hurdles. "I think women need to do more work at the local level before assuming bigger roles. But I think, when given responsibility, most women carry it out better," she says.

It is perhaps the indifference of the male leadership across the spectrum that prevents women from getting important posts in governance. During the past six decades, India has never had a woman as Cabinet Secretary or Defence Secretary; or for that matter, a Union Home Secretary. Of the 150-odd secretaries to the government of India, less than 10 are women. No woman has so far become a Chief Vigilance Commissioner or a Chief Election Commissioner in India. Not one of the 30-odd chief secretaries in the states is a woman. More often, most of the women candidates for the position have been ignored even if they were senior to their male colleagues. For example only two of the 21 foreign sec-

1 woman among 29 Supreme Court judges, including the Chief Justice

retaries have been women. One of them, Chokila Iyer, was appointed Foreign Secretary only after protests shook the bureaucracy at Kanwal Sibal being chosen over a dozen senior officers, including Iyer. Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao put it best in an address on "Women in Public Service"

at a DRDO workshop in Delhi recently. "Some estimates have put the number of women at around 8 per cent in the top ten civil services. This is certainly not commensurate with a rising and developing India."

Of the 250-odd Central PSUs, not a single woman has made it to Chief Executive Officer. Public sector banks are yet to get a female chief executive. It is shocking that while the Reserve Bank of India has had a couple of women Deputy Governors, the top job has always been with a man. It is obvious that the political leadership doesn't find women good enough to be in charge of governmental monitoring and regulatory bodies. While hundreds of IAS officers have found lucrative post-retirement havens in the government, no woman has been so lucky.

When it comes to justice, women seem to be missing from top positions. In a 29-member Supreme Court, there is only a single female judge. Of the 137 retired Supreme Court judges only three were women. India is yet to appoint a Woman Chief Justice. Supreme Court advocate T. Anamika believes, however, that the situation is improving. "Look at the

52 women among the 608 High Court judges in India

number of women lawyers in courts and compare it to 20 years ago," she says. Semi-urban areas and rural areas are a different world, Anamika points out. "Men have always tried to suppress women in semi-urban areas. Though I'm against reservations for women, they are needed because women are not being treated as equals. Even if a sarpanch of a village is a woman, she is indirectly controlled either by her in-laws or others," she says.

There's no getting around reservation, though. Says Ranjana Kumari, Director, Centre for Social Research: "The stumbling block for women in not getting important positions in the government and equal opportunities is women's reservations. Once it is ensured, women will have to be given important positions in the government."

Obviously the bias against women runs deep in the political class. On the contrary, women's representation in the private sector is much higher; more than 100 women run companies with a total annual turnover of over Rs 100 crore. The corporate sector recognizes gender equality as an incentive to growth: for job interviews, American Express insists that at least one-third of candidates be from the fairer sex; for Bharti Enterprises, it is 25-30 per cent.

ALONE AT THE TOP, AND LOVING IT

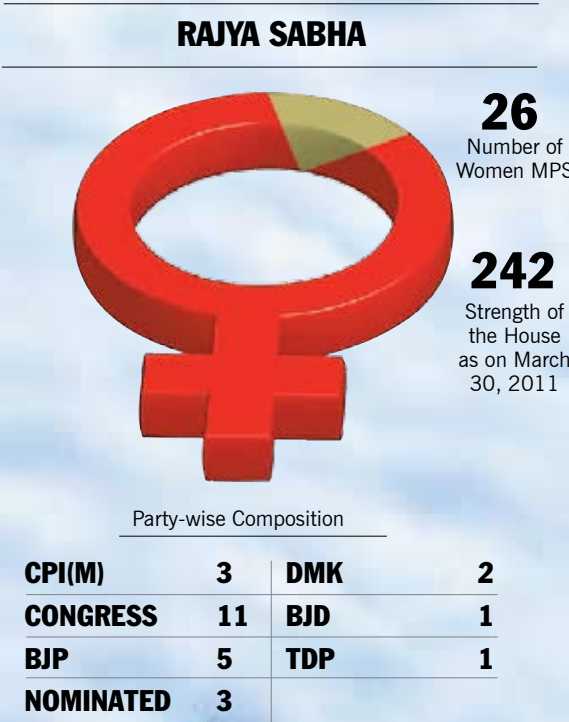


Sonia Gandhi Congress President **Mamata Banerjee** Railway Minister **J. Jayalalithaa** AIADMK leader **Mayawati** UP Chief Minister **Sushma Swaraj** Senior BJP Leader

Women do rise to the top in our nation's politics, at the Centre and in the states, but it seems rather unfortunate that they do not address the very gender imbalance they have confronted all the way. Historically, woman leaders in Indian politics have avoided promoting other women to positions of power.

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

LOK SABHA				
Lok Sabha	Total No. of seats	No of Women Members Elected	Percentage of the total seats	
First	1952	489	23	4.70%
Second	1957	494	22	4.45%
Third	1962	494	31	6.27%
Fourth	1967	520	29	5.57%
Fifth	1971	518	21	4.05%
Sixth	1977	542	19	3.50%
Seventh	1980	542	28	5.16%
Eighth	1984	542	42	7.74%
Nineth	1989	543	29	5.34%
Tenth	1991	543	37	7.10%
Eleventh	1996	543	40	7.36%
Twelfth	1998	543	43	7.91%
Thirteenth	1999	543	49	9.02%
Fourteenth	2004	543	45	8.29%
Fifteenth	2009	543	59	10.82%



WOMEN CABINET MINISTERS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

nRajkumari Amrit Kaur Health (1947-55, 1955-57)	and Family Welfare (1984-86) Transport (1986),
nDr Sushila Nayar Health (1952-55, 1962-67)	Urban Development (1986-89), Tourism (1988-89)
nIndira Gandhi Information and Broadcasting (1964-66). As PM from 1966 to '77 and 1980 to '84, she held various other ministries, including External Affairs (1967-69), Atomic Energy and Planning (1967-77), Finance (1969-70), Information and Broadcasting (1971-74), Space (1972-77), Home (1970-73), Defence (1975-77 and 1980-83) and External Affairs 1984.	nMamata Banerjee Minister of Railways (1999-2000 and 2009-present), Minister without portfolio (2003-04)
nAbna Mati Industry (1977-79)	nKumari Selja Minister of Tourism (2009-1), Minister of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (2009-present), additional charge of Culture (2011-present)
nRenuka Devi Barkataki Culture, Education and Social Welfare (1977-79)	nSushma Swaraj Minister of Information and Broadcasting (1996, 1998 and 2000-03), Minister of Health and Family Welfare, and Parliamentary Affairs (2003-04)
nSheila Kaul Urban Development (1991-95), Urban Affairs and Employment (1995)	nUma Bharati, Minister of Youth and Women's Affairs (2000-02), Minister of Coal and Mines (2002-03)
nMohsina Kidwai Rural Development (1984), Health	

Many prominent women of Indian origin head multinational companies overseas. A 2009 study by global executive research firm, EMA Partners, of 240 medium and large domestic and

foreign companies in India said that 11 per cent of Indian CEOs are female—the banking and financial services sector has 54 per cent female leadership, the media and life sciences have

11 per cent each, and Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and consulting have 8 per cent each.

That doesn't mean the glass ceilings don't exist in the Indian corporate world. A 2007 survey by executive search firm Redileon indicates that only 392 of 1,500 firms have a woman on their board. Only 10 directors in the 30 BSE Sensex companies are women.

figures) while senior Indian women bosses are only in 36 per cent of companies; China has 91 per cent. Many women head important NGOs as well.

It is the hypocrisy of a culture which worships women as divine that our political and social elite don't find them worthy of mortal equality. In 1730 AD, Tryambakayajvan, an official in the service of the king of Thanjavur quoted the ancient Brahmin scholar Apastamba in his treatise on women: *Mukhyo dharma smrtishu vihitto bhartshushrushanam hi* (The purpose of a woman is to be of service (or a slave) to their husbands)" The irony is that from mythology to politics, it is our women who have husbanded culture and society—Sita our virtue, Ma Anandamayi and Mirabai our spirituality, Rani Lakshmi Bai our patriotism, and Sarojini Devi the song in our hearts. The Indian woman is not just a pretty face; if it took a single face to launch a thousand ships and bring down the towers of Troy, 496 million faces are enough to destroy India's ivory towers.

0 women among 38 Chief Justices of India

The study goes on to say that the pay packets of Indian women executives in the duration of their entire career average are 40 per cent lower than their male colleagues. Out of the 200 of the world's biggest conglomerates in the Fortune list, 77 per cent have least one women director (2006

THE LUCKY THIRTEEN

13 women among 323 Chief Ministers in India after Independence



SUCHETA KRIPLANI Uttar Pradesh CONGRESS



NANDINI SATPATHY Orissa CONGRESS



SHASHIKALA KAKODKAR Goa MGP



SYEDA ANWARA TAIMUR Assam CONGRESS



JANAKI RAMACHANDRAN Tamil Nadu AIADMK



J JAYALALITHAA Tamil Nadu AIADMK



MAYAWATI Uttar Pradesh BSP



RAJINDER KAUR BHATTAL Punjab CONGRESS



RABRI DEVI Bihar RJD



SUSHMA SWARAJ Delhi BJP



SHEILA DIKSHIT Delhi CONGRESS



UMA BHARTI Madhya Pradesh BJP



VASUNDHARA RAJE Rajasthan BJP