

DISRUPTING THE GENDER-BLIND POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN INDIA

Relevant for: null | Topic: Role of Women and Women's Organization

India is believed to be resolutely moving forward as an economic entity. Not even the currently slowing growth takes away from this perception. Added to this is a celebration of the Constitution undergirding our democracy. So here, it would seem, is a country forging ahead economically while upholding freedoms for its people. Recent reports of gruesome assaults on women, involving rape and ending with murder, have jolted this narrative.

Democracy in India is directly impugned when the accused men allegedly receive protection from the ruling dispensation, as is the case in Uttar Pradesh, or when the police force fails to protect women, as was the case in Telangana. In a democracy where the political class deploys identity politics to capture power, it is striking that not only is the case of women left scrupulously untouched, their very existence is increasingly under threat from misogyny in society.

When a society adopts democracy as its form of governance, it presumes the beginning of a social transformation. It is acknowledged that this should entail the elimination of religiously endorsed privileges, the ending of domination by some over others and a general ushering in of equality of opportunity. This process is abetted by economic growth and the emergence of markets, which enable people to shed the constraints that have held them back. This is a more or less universal trajectory, though it first occurred in Western democracies.

While this process took a long time, it gathered speed after the Second World War when an economic boom unleashed emancipation movements, particularly in the U.S., which had as their focus black rights, feminism and sexual liberation. Why has India not had anything even close, movements that constitute the social transformation that must accompany democracy if the latter is to achieve its ends? This is often answered by recourse to the 'fatalistic attitude bred by Indian culture'. This we see to be false when we recognise the differentiation whereby not everyone is at the receiving end, most evident in the case of violence against women.

It is difficult to think of any part of the world where historic inequity has been removed entirely through the agency of the oppressed. An end to the most overt forms of domination of women in the U.S. came after at least half a century of education, which enabled women to imagine a life crafted by themselves. Education further enabled them to be economically independent, sloughing off the patriarchal norm that had bound them for ages.

The greater part of the spread of education in the U.S. was through public school system. By comparison, in India, very little of the myriad public policy interventions has been directed towards women's empowerment. Girls stop attending school due to the absence of functioning toilets there and women drop out of the labour force as they do not feel safe when travelling to work. This also restrains economic progress.

The empowerment of religion via 'Indian secularism' and a caste-laden political discourse has served to keep out a public discussion of the 'women's question' in India. It is not difficult to see that India's politics as 'honour among men' leaves patriarchy secure from challenge. The opposition of caste-based political parties to the Women's Reservation Bill only reflects this. They have no credible argument and rely solely on their numbers in a fractured polity. Affirmative action aimed at a far greater inclusion of women in India's institutions of governance, especially the police and the judiciary, is central to ending the violence against women. India's

gender-blind political discourse needs disruption.

Pulapre Balakrishnan is Professor, Ashoka University and Senior Fellow, IIM Kozhikode

You have reached your limit for free articles this month.

Register to The Hindu for free and get unlimited access for 30 days.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper ,crossword, iPhone, iPad mobile applications and print. Our plans enhance your reading experience.

Why you should pay for quality journalism - [Click to know more](#)

Please enter a valid email address.

To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

Subscribe to The Hindu now and get unlimited access.

Already have an account? [Sign In](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

To continue enjoying The Hindu, You can turn off your ad blocker or Subscribe to The Hindu.

[Sign up for a 30 day free trial.](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com