

The Language Of Sexism In Politics

Discrimination against women has been a long running phenomena in the Indian society at all levels and fields. Its 2019, we have started movements, broken stereotypes and reached new heights. And yet, there are times when our progressive pronouncements take a hit. In the past decade, India's economic growth has shown tremendous increase but its progress towards gender inequality has been fairly disappointing.

The Internet describes sexism as "Prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender. Sexism can affect anyone, but it systematically and primarily affects women and girls. It has been linked to stereotypes and gender roles, and may include the belief that one sex or gender is intrinsically superior to another". Sexism towards female political candidates is most apparent during election times. Male candidates making sexist comments about their female colleagues is something that is widespread in the political spectrum and must be tackled at every level of governance. Over the years, women in power have tried to fight their way through to be treated equally and get the same level of opportunities and respect as their male

colleagues in the political realm.

It's not surprising that the campaign for 2019 Lok Sabha Election also began with the harsh sexist remarks by some candidates against their female opponents. Political discourse this time went to an all-time low. Instead of concentrating on 'real issues', politicians of all political shades attempted to demoralise their counterparts with all kinds of personal, offensive, and unethical comments like 'Khakhi Underwear', 'beauty but no quality', 'jeans and sari', 'chocolate faces', rough vs beautiful faces', 'size of bindi', 'facial everyday', showing complete disrespect towards dignity of women. Women in politics are just politicians so why is the criticism not based on flawed politics instead of personal attacks based on beauty, body language or clothes? Sexism is slow, toxic and is happening every day, whether its unnoticed or unintentional. Even subtle sexism can have real impacts on candidates. Very few people acknowledge that they hesitate to vote for a woman. While increasing representation of women in the public spheres is extremely important, which might be attained through some form of affirmative action, an attitude shift

is essential for women to be considered as equal within their homes and in broader society. Sadly, the political reality in India is the same as actual reality. Despite increasing rates of economic growth, even today, the world's largest democracy reeks of patriarchy and misogyny.

Make no mistake, sexist comments during the election campaign is not something unique to India but it is a common phenomenon all around the world, even in countries and societies that claim to be equitable. Women routinely face questions which male candidates never have to encounter. When it comes to media coverage of female candidates, the focus is usually on appearance, work-life balance and family roles. Their leadership and authority are questioned based on their clothes and appearance. While we never see any male candidates

being scrutinised for the same. Politics is not a field which is particularly famous for its gracious behaviour but the misogynistic remarks which the female candidates are subjected to, reflects the mind-set of men who are not comfortable seeing women holding positions of power. So, how do we see the same politicians respecting the larger female population? Why are we so obsessed with the personal life of female candidates specifically? It is time to ask these questions and form a formal code of conduct. Hardly any party takes any serious action, which makes it easier for male candidates to repeat such actions. How much sexism actually changes the way voters perceive the candidate and influences votes is a matter of debate. While these comments are seen as 'harmless' by male candidates, there are multiple instances to show that it changes the way electorate views certain politicians.

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