

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN INDIAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

The position of women in society is the single most important factor in determining the level of progress made by any nation. Women make up half of the population on every inhabited continent on the planet. Women have always been the ones to suffer in this society since it is dominated by men. It is imperative that we inform the males of our nation of the injustices they have committed while simultaneously working to empower the social, economic, psychological, and political standing of our nation's women. There is no variation in the status of women from place to place. In a society such as ours, where on the one hand the goddess is a woman but on the other she is mistreated, oppressed, stifled, and exploited by the men, India is a country that exemplifies both. According to the report published by the United Nations, "women make up half of the world's population, do roughly two thirds of all work hours, receive one tenth of the world's income, and hold less than one hundredth of one percent of the world's property." The issue of women's engagement in politics is one of the most significant challenges they face in today's society. There are some women in our society who do not have the same rights as other women, such as the right to vote for the candidate of their choice, to run for political office, to participate in election campaigns, or even to join political parties.

Keywords: *women, political participation, patriarchy*

INTRODUCTION

There are many different approaches to describe what constitutes political participation. Not only does political participation entail the exercise of one's right to vote, but it also encompasses a wide range of other activities, such as joining a political party, engaging in electoral campaigning, going to party meetings, participating in demonstrations, communicating with party leaders, holding party positions, running for party leadership positions, competing in party elections, joining representative bodies, and contributing to decision-making. In each nation, the degree to which women are engaged in the political process and actively participate in elections can serve as a barometer of how mature and effective the democracy there is. (Women's Political Involvement and Participation in India)

Women's political participation can be measured in three different ways: their participation as voters; their participation as elected representatives; and their participation in the actual decision making process. Each of these facets contributes to the overall picture of women's political engagement.

Role of women in national struggle for freedom

In the early decades of this century, women in India entered the political process as a direct result of their tremendous engagement in the national battle for freedom led by Mahatma Gandhi. This participation allowed them to gain a voice in the political arena. At the initial meeting of the Indian National Congress, there were a total of six female delegates present. The Swadeshi and Boycott movements would not have been successful without the participation of women. Gandhi played a pivotal role in the advancement of women to leadership positions within the Non-Cooperation movement. Women had an active role in the movement, taking part in activities such as the boycotting of foreign goods, picketing in schools, colleges, and tribunals, and organising processions (charka). During the time of the Civil Disobedience Movement, a significant number of women took part in the "Dandi March," which was led by Gandhiji, and they were also directly involved in the process of extracting salt from sea water.

During the Quit India campaign in 1942, there were thousands of women and girl students who took an active role. (Ghosh 2010) Women political leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Amrit Kaur, Rameswari Nehru, and others were detained as soon as the Quit India resolution was approved and passed. Women played an integral role in the revolutionary operations of the radical subset of freedom fighters who advocated the violent removal of the British Raj. These freedom fighters felt that the British Raj could only be overthrown via the use of force. Among the women who participated in the revolution, notable names include Sister Nivedita, Sarala Devi Choudharani, and Madam Bhikaji Kama. There were around 1500 female soldiers serving in the Rani Jhansi Regiment of the Azad Hind Fouz. Commander Lakshmi Swaminatha, Janaki Davar, and Mayawati Arya were some of the most renowned among them.

Constitutional Provisions for Women

The Preamble to the Constitution of India assures all Indian citizens that they will enjoy Justice, Liberty, and Equality. The Constitution guarantees the equality of women and directs the state to take steps to eliminate the socioeconomic, educational, and political disadvantages that women experience.

Equality before the law and equal protection under the law are both guaranteed under Article 14 throughout the territory of India.

Article 15 of the constitution makes it illegal to discriminate against someone based on their religion, ethnicity, caste, sex, or place of birth. Article 15 paragraph 3 states have the ability to establish specific arrangements for the welfare of women and children.

In the context of work opportunities, equality of opportunity is guaranteed by Article 16. No citizen can be discriminated against in terms of employment due to their religion, race, caste, gender, decent, place of birth, or domicile, or any combination of these factors.

Article 39 (a) ensures that every citizen has access to adequate means of subsistence; Article 39 (b) ensures that men and women receive equal pay for equal work; Article 39 (c) ensures that men and women maintain their physical and mental health and that children are not subjected to abuse at an impressionable age; and Article 39 (d) prohibits the exploitation of children.

The provision of a just and humane working environment, as well as maternity leave, is ensured under Article 42.

Articles 325 and 326 of the constitution respectively ensure political equality, the equal right to participate

in political activities, and the right to vote.

Article 243 (D) not only extends the political reservation for women that is already in place for panchayat elections to elected positions as well, but it also allows for the political reservation for women. (Chadha 2014)

The fact that what is guaranteed in the constitution is not actually realised in the operations of our country on a daily basis is, nonetheless, a really regrettable situation. Therefore, it is thought necessary to adopt particular legal provisions for women in accordance with the spirit of the provisions laid down in clause (3) of Article 15 of the constitution. These measures would be in line with the spirit of the provisions laid down in Article 15. Following the publication of the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, there has been a significant increase in the level of attention paid to the desire for a higher number of women to hold political office in India. It was suggested that there should be a policy of reserving of seats for women in political institutions, particularly at the grassroots level, in order to improve the amount of female representation in political institutions. The National Perspective Plan for Women initially proposed, in its first draught, that a 30 percent reservation be provided for women at all levels, from panchayat to parliament. However, in its final draught, the National Perspective Plan for Women restricted the reservation to only the panchayat level.

The demand received widespread support across the country, which led to the passage of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in 1993. These amendments mandated a reservation of 33 percent of seats in institutions responsible for local governance.

(Rai, 2011) The implementation of this policy has been met with no resistance in any of India's states. The Panchayath villages have become a political training ground for women, who have become self-confident and politically aware and are transforming local governance by sensitising the state to issues of poverty, inequality, and gender injustice. Panchayath Raj Institutions have brought about significant changes in the lives of women. The Panchayath villages have become a political training ground for women. The Eighty-first Amendment Bill, more commonly known as the Women's Reservation Bill, was presented to the Lok Sabha on September 12, 1996. However, it was met with opposition from a number of political parties over concerns of elitism and overlapping quotas for women in general and for lower caste women. As a result, the bill, which was presented 23 years ago, has not yet been passed. (Mandal 2003)

Political participation of women as Voter

In 1962, the percentage of women who exercised their right to vote was 46.6 percent, with a disparity in voter participation of 16.7 percent between men and women. In 1998, there were 53.63 percent of eligible voters who were women. The participation rate of women voters in general elections has been continuously increasing, reaching 65.54 percent (Rai-) in the general elections held in 2014, and in the general elections held in 2019, the participation rate of women voters was 67.18 percent. It even went as far as to push for a ban on triple talaq, a Muslim practise that allows for 'instant divorce' The Bharathiya Janata Party (BJP) in the general election 2019 tried to lure women voters through a number of welfare schemes like 'Beti Bachao Beti Padho' (Save the girl child, educate the girl child). This was one of the party's many campaigns aimed at attracting female voters. In their respective election manifestos, the BJP and Congress both made the pledge that if they were elected to power, they would implement a reservation

of 33 percent of seats in Parliament and state assemblies for women. In addition, the BJP manifesto included a promise that if they were elected to power, the government would work to increase the economic independence of women. In an effort to increase the number of female voters, the Poll Commission of India has installed "pink booths" in certain constituencies. These booths are reserved solely for female voters and are staffed entirely by female election officials.

The gender disparity in voter turnout has shrunk significantly in the 2019 election, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Voting Percentage in various Lok Sabha elections

General Election	Year	Male	Female	Total
1st	1952	-	-	61.2
2nd	1957	-	-	62.2
3rd	1962	63.31	46.63	55.42
4th	1967	66.73	55.48	61.33
5th	1971	60.90	49.11	55.29
6th	1977	65.63	54.91	60.49
7th	1980	62.16	51.22	56.92
8th	1984	68.18	58.60	63.56
9th	1989	66.13	57.32	61.95
10th	1991	61.58	51.35	56.93
11th	1996	62.06	53.41	57.94
12th	1998	65.72	57.88	61.97
13th	1999	63.97	55.64	59.99
14th	2004	52.65	44.65	48.74
15th	2009	60.2	55.8	58.2
16th	2014	67.1	65.6	66.4
17th	2019	67.01	67.18	67.09

Source- Statistical Report- Election Commission of India, 2019 & Voting Percentage in various lok sabha

elections- Official website of Chief Electoral Officer- Government of Uttarkhand , 2014.

According to the findings of a study that was carried out by Lokniti, which is a joint programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the number of women who cast their votes in elections has significantly increased over the past few years. This is a direct result of women asserting their fundamental right to vote and choose who will represent them in government. Women living in urban areas who had access to higher education and who were married said that the influence of their families had less of an impact on who they voted for. According to the findings of the study, women who were more exposed to the news through a variety of news media had a greater interest in politics and were more active on online platforms for political activities. This was in comparison to rural women who did not have access to education and women who were either not exposed to the news or had a low exposure to the news. According to the findings of the study, a woman's better socioeconomic position is correlated directly with the greater amount of exposure she has to various forms of news media.

Women`s Representation in legislature- Even if the percentage of women who vote in elections has gone up, there are still not enough of them in parliament for adequate representation. They made up 4.4 percent of the total members in the lower house back in 1952, but that number has since climbed to 12 percent in 2009 and 14 percent following the 2019 election. There is, in point of fact, reluctance on the part of all of the main political parties to field women candidates during elections. When attempting to explain why a significant percentage of women candidates are not selected by parties, the illusive element of 'win ability' is often utilised as a disguise. It would appear that the primary explanation for this is the fact that political parties still have decision-making structures that are dominated by men. During the general election in 2019, the Congress party fielded 54 female candidates, whereas the BJP only fielded 53. Third place goes to the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which had 24 women running for office, followed by the Trinamool Congress (TMC), which had 23 women running for office. While the CPI (M) had ten candidates and the CPI fielded four female candidates, respectively. (The 24th of May, 2019, Zee News) Only 126 women were elected to one of the 435 seats that the BJP was running for. The situation was the same in Congress, with only 12.9 percent of its candidates being women. The Mayawati-led BSP competed for a total of 383 seats, however the percentage of women candidates was only 6.3%.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study women participation in Indian politics.
2. To study political participation.

Current trends

Only 22 of the total 29 states had female candidates for the House of Representatives in the general election that took place in 2019. In addition, the legislatures of seven of the states were entirely devoid of women. Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim were the seven states that were involved. Sikkim was the smallest of the seven states. The states of Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal each elected 11 female candidates for the position of Member of Parliament (MP). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had the highest number of successful female candidates for the position of Member of Parliament, with 41. (News 18, 2019)

Despite the fact that the number of women elected to the Lok Sabha during the general election in 2019 was higher than ever before, there is still a long way to go until women have equal representation in Parliament.

The percentage of women in positions of leadership and political participation in parliament is shockingly low across the globe.

As of the 1st of February 2019, women made up only 24.3% of all national lawmakers. (International Political Union–United Nations, Women map of Women in Politics, 2019) As of the month of June in 2019, there are 11 women serving in the role of Head of State, and there are 12 women serving in the role of Head of Government. Rwanda has the greatest percentage of female legislators in the world, with 61.3 percent of the seats in the lower house of legislature being held by women. This is followed by Cuba, which has 53.2 percent, and Bolivia, which has 53 percent. (Organization of the World Economy) According to Table 2, India has a much lower proportion of female representatives in its national legislature compared to its immediate neighbours, including Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. A picture as gloomy as this is all the more surprising when one considers that India has produced a number of courageous and effective female politicians and administrators dating back to the early mediaeval period of Indian history. These women have demonstrated their worth in the arenas of politics and administration.

Table 2 Women`s Representation in South Asian Countries

Country	Chamber	Percentage of women
Afghanistan	House of People	27.87
Bangladesh	Parliament	20.63
Bhutan	National Assembly	14.89
India	House of People	14.39
Iran	Islamic Parliament of Iran	5.88
Maldives	People of Majlis	4.6
Nepal	House of Representatives	32.73
Pakistan	National Assembly	20.23
Srilanka	Parliament	5.33

Source-Inter Parliamentary Union, Compare data on Parliament, December 2019.

Women in Decision-making position in India

It is essential to the continuation of democracy for women to take part in the decision-making process. In 1952, at the United Nations convention on the rights of women in politics, this reality was acknowledged

for the first time. At each and every congress held around the world, the importance of women's political participation was emphasised. They deliberated over and planned several approaches to accomplish this purpose. Significant discussions on women's empowerment took place in (a) Mexico in 1975 during the World Plan of Action (b) Copenhagen in 1980 during the Copenhagen Programme of Action (c) Nairobi in 1985 during the World Conference on the United Nations Decade of Women (d) and Beijing in 1995 during the World Congress of Women (1995). (Fadia, 2014)

September of 2015 saw the member states of the United Nations overwhelmingly establish a new global agenda with the goal of eradicating poverty by the year 2030. A specific objective to achieve gender equality is included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This objective seeks to put an end to discrimination and violence against women and girls and ensure equal participation and opportunity in all aspects of life. The full and active participation of women, as well as providing them with equal chances for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life, is the means by which this objective is intended to be accomplished. (UN-Women)

Mamta Banerji- Mamta Banerji is a leader with a fiery personality. On August 9, 1997, Mamta caused a vertical split within the Congress (I) party in West Bengal. She asserted that the Trinamul Congress was the legitimate Congress. After defeating Somnath Chatterjee, a veteran Communist politician, in the general election of 1984, Banerji became one of India's youngest parliamentarians. He is also one of the youngest in the world. She became the Chief Minister of West Bengal in 2011 after winning an overwhelming majority in an election that brought an end to the Left Front's administration of the state, which had lasted for 34 years. (Sinha 2006)

In the 2000s, women such as Sonia Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj, Nirmala Sitharam, and Smriti Irani rose to prominence in their respective fields.

SushmaSwaraj- She was sworn in as the Union Cabinet minister for Information and Broadcasting in March 1998, under the leadership of Prime Minister Vajpayee. In addition, she was given additional responsibility for the ministry of Telecommunication. During the 15th session of the Lok Sabha, she presided as the opposition leader. Between the months of May 2014 and May 2019, she held the position of Minister of External Affairs under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

SmritiIrani – At the age of 43, she is currently the minister in the council of Ministers that holds the title of youngest minister. In the 2019 general election, she was victorious and she defeated Rahul Gandhi, who was the President of the Indian National Congress. She has been tasked with extra responsibilities as the Minister of Women and Child Development in addition to her current role as Minister of Textiles.

Nirmala Sitharaman- She holds a seat in the Rajya Sabha in India. Her tenure as India's Minister of Defense began in 2014, and she was sworn in as India's Minister of Finance in 2019, becoming the country's second female Finance Minister after Indira Gandhi.

PrathibhaPatil- She was the first woman in the history of India to ever assume the role of President, and she was India's 12th President.

Sheila Dikshit made a new milestone by serving as the Chief Minister of Delhi for a total of 15 years,

making her the individual who served in that capacity for the lengthiest period of time. Kiran Bedi was the first woman in the annals of the Indian Police Service to ever enlist as a member of that organisation (IPS). Following her retirement in January of 2015, she joined the Bharatiya Janata Party as a member. She was a crucial person in the fight against corruption in India and played a significant role in the movement. On May 22nd, 2016, she was appointed to her current role as Puducherry's lieutenant governor, which she has continued to serve in ever since.

Reasons for meagre participation of women in Politics

Even though the proportion of women who are eligible to vote in India has increased significantly, their participation in the country's decision-making bodies and the formulation of important policies has been significantly lacking. This leaves a lot to be desired. It is believed that the characteristics of women, the socioeconomic and cultural context in which they are raised, as well as India's political environment as a whole, are largely responsible for the limited amount of participation that women have in the sphere of politics in India. One may even point to the widespread disinterest that women have in politics as a possible explanation for their underrepresentation in key political positions. However, such apathy is the result of the social settings in which women are raised. This has been the case throughout history. Things are more difficult for women in general because they have less access to educational facilities, less economic freedom, the role that society expects a girl child to perform in the future, the social taboos, and the difference in attitude that parents and other relatives have towards a boy and a girl. Politics is seen as a dangerous game by the majority of women.

Solution to strengthen women`s political participation-

Women in India have made significant headway across a variety of fields that were traditionally male-dominated. They have established a strong reputation in the sectors of commerce, the arts, medicine, engineering, the legal system, and culture. However, they have been unsuccessful in gaining foothold in politics, which implies that there is a need for specific consideration regarding the representation of women in politics. The following potential solutions should serve as the basis for this:

- By organisations of civil society taking an active role in teaching women about the rights to which they are entitled. Training programmes should be organised at the village and national level by extension personnel's for the purpose of raising awareness among women on their rights, how they can break out of their sociocultural obstacles, and training on a variety of topics of women's health and empowerment.
- Panchayat Raj Institutions should be provided. Training could be provided in a variety of areas, including the provisions of the 73rd amendment, the writing of records, the conducting of meetings, an understanding of the structure of bureaucratic organisations, and government programmes for the rural poor.
- Women should be encouraged to self-organize through Mahila mandal and other forms of self-help groups. It is important for the government to provide financial assistance to organisations like these that are actively promoting the participation of women in political arenas and are having success doing so.

- The media has an important part to play in ensuring that any gender-based comments are avoided and instead focus on emphasising the excellent contributions that women in politics have made.
- The government must show that there is gender equality in the bodies that make decisions. This can be accomplished not only by increasing the number of women who hold ministerial and elected positions, but also by developing a work culture that is gender – equitable in state institutions. To ensure that female leaders are able to function in an open and inclusive work environment, the government could adopt gender-responsive policies and practises in governing institutions such as parental leave, child care services, and fixed hours for voting, debate, and negotiating in decision-making bodies such as national and regional parliaments.
- An effective, interim method to boost the number of women who have access to decision-making positions is potentially a quota system for women that has been thoughtfully crafted and is being carried out in the appropriate manner. (Increase the number of girls and women who participate politically and give them more power to make decisions) A quota system was a factor in all of the countries that had more women in legislative positions. The introduction of quotas for women had a significant influence on Rwanda, which now has the highest percentage of female lawmakers in the world (61.3%).

CONCLUSION

In recent years, there has been a discernible rise in the number of female voters who participate in elections. However, they continue to have a very small voice in the legislative process. The only way to expand the number of women who participate in politics is for civil society organisations to actively engage in the process of teaching women about the rights that they are entitled to. Bypassing the decades-old Women Reservation Bill is necessary for the government in order to demonstrate that gender equality exists among their decision-making bodies. A quota system was a factor in all of the countries that had more women in legislative positions. The introduction of quotas for women had a significant influence on Rwanda, which now has the highest percentage of female lawmakers in the world (61.3%). The current administration is an inclusive one for women, with six female ministers; this gives rise to the optimism that in the years to come, a greater number of women will hold positions of authority in which key decisions are made.

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