

## WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN INDIAN POLITICS

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### Abstract

*Although women's political engagement in India has made great strides over the years, it still faces several obstacles. This abstract delves into the background, present situation, and potential future outcomes of women's political engagement in India. Women in India have a long and storied political history that dates back to before independence. Notable leaders such as Sarojini Naidu and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit were instrumental in the fight for independence. Following India's independence, the country's constitution established a foundation for women's representation in government by enshrining the ideal of gender equality. But women still have a disproportionately low presence in legislative bodies, even if there are constitutional safeguards and progressive legislations. A complex picture emerges when one considers the present state of women's political engagement in India. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which required a 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, have enabled women to achieve great leaps in local government. The result has been a surge in grassroots political involvement and a notable rise in the representation of women in municipal administration. Still, compared to other developed nations, the number of women serving in federal and state legislatures is far lower. Women made up around 10% of the Rajya Sabha and 14% of the Lok Sabha's seats in the most recent elections. Women in Indian politics are underrepresented for several reasons, such as economic dependence, cultural constraints, a lack of political mentors, and violence. Another barrier that women face is that political parties are not always willing to support female candidates. Notwithstanding these obstacles, there are encouraging tendencies and initiatives that are trying to increase the number of women in political positions. There are a lot of groups striving to give women more political influence, including women's movements, international organizations, and civil society organizations. Additionally, while still in the works, the plan to reserve 33% of seats in parliament and state assemblies for women is a move in the right direction towards more equitable leadership. There is hope for a brighter future when more women in India take involved in politics. More women will certainly join politics as their economic independence, educational opportunities, and public profile grow. More women may feel empowered to enter politics if they see prominent female leaders achieving notable success. To sum up, women's political engagement in India has made strides, but reaching gender parity is still a long way off. Equal and meaningful involvement of women in Indian politics can only be achieved via ongoing efforts to overcome systemic hurdles, together with legislative changes and cultural transformation.*

**Keywords:** Women, Participation, Politics

### Introduction

One important measure of a democracy's strength is the number of women holding public office. The rise of women in politics in India, a nation with a long history of democracy, has been an inspiring and difficult process. Throughout India's political history, from the independence movement to the current day, women have been essential. The percentage of women serving on political boards is shockingly low, despite constitutional protections and a plethora of laws meant to advance gender parity. Adopted in 1950, the Indian Constitution forbids discrimination based on gender and upholds the ideal of equality. The political inclusion of women is strongly supported by this underlying framework. To increase the number of women serving as elected officials, several changes and regulations have been put in place throughout the years. In 1992, with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, women were finally granted the authority they deserved at the grassroots level: a third of the seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (local self-government). Yet, the reality of women's representation in higher political offices, including the Parliament and State Legislatures, belies these achievements. Despite making up over half of India's population, women only make up around a quarter of lawmakers in the lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha, and about ten percent in the upper chamber, the Rajya Sabha. These numbers show that there is still a significant gender disparity in political representation, since they are far lower than the worldwide average. The complete involvement of women in Indian politics is still hindered by a number of obstacles. It is not uncommon for patriarchal views and societal conventions to limit the political aspirations and chances of women. Having limited access to resources and being economically dependent only make these problems worse. In addition, women's election prospects are sometimes hindered since political parties are reluctant to nominate female candidates. Intimidation and harassment directed at women in political positions also serve as strong disincentives. In spite of all this, India is proud of the many strong female politicians who have come before us and set an example for the generations to come. Reservation policies have raised women's profile in local government, which is a testament to their leadership skills and abilities. There is a rising awareness of the need for gender-sensitive policies and frameworks, and civil society groups and women's movements persist in their advocacy for greater political inclusion. An in-depth examination of the historical development, present situation, and potential future outcomes of women's political engagement in India is laid forth in this introductory section. It emphasizes the significance of eliminating gender inequality in politics and the necessity of working together to remove the obstacles that prevent women from fully and equally participating in politics.

### **Theory for the research – Participation and Democracy**

People and their organizations are inseparable, according to Pateman's (1970) participatory democracy paradigm. For effective government, it is not enough to have democratic institutions at the national level; all citizens must be involved. Humans' perspectives and cognitive traits towards democracy will be shaped by socialization or institutional conditioning in different areas. All of this progress is a result of people being involved in the public policy processes. An intellectual component of participating in representative governance is developing one's political acumen and leadership abilities. Thus, the stability and longevity of representational programs through participatory systems might actively contribute to societal progress. Increased personal engagement between individuals and governing entities is one of the qualities that can only flourish in an environment where participation is encouraged and fostered. Potentially a game-changer for the economy if all governmental institutions were to become more democratic and encourage more social engagement within a culture. More public involvement in decision-making is possible when citizens have complete control over their lives and environments. Despite the fact that men and women

have equal legal rights and preferences, the disproportionate emphasis on these advantages for men diminishes the political and civic role of women, particularly in positions of leadership. This circumstance contributed to the generalized stigmatization of women, which persists even in modern democracies. The implications for political philosophers' discussions on governmental legitimacy are clear in light of this outcome. In their view, the implementation of the principles of fairness and careful thought is compromised when they prioritize the viewpoints of the hierarchical group members above the empowerment of women. Citizens' participation in government is defined by democratic theory as an approach to leadership that prioritizes care for all stakeholders. The goals of raising society's quality of living and strengthening minority representation through engagement from the upper class were incompatible whenever the former was pursued. Therefore, the idea of a shared purpose is fundamental to participatory democratic governance. With the passage of the Panchayati Raj Institutions Policy Act in 1992, the Indian government set out to end gender inequity. Half of the seats in its Local Self Government (LSG) will be reserved for women according to this law. As a result of this strategy, more women will be able to hold positions of decision-making authority inside government agencies. Individuals' sovereignty and security are strengthened by the power structures that guarantee them equal social rights as outlined in the law. Hence, it will be feasible to eliminate the continual division between administrators and people. Contemporary ideas of citizen engagement in democracy place an emphasis on the political power of marginalized groups rather than the ruling elite. 'No one is responsible for the average citizen's lack of action and apply the facts as presented for the hypothesis creating reason,' Sartori et al.(2017) said. Even in a society where everyone has a voice, the legitimate engagement framework has limitations. A large gender disparity in authority was discovered by Karpowitz et al. (2012). But as hypothesized, it vanishes under common rule, and women were underrepresented in positions of political power. By modifying institutional processes to fit a social context, participatory development has the potential to eradicate inequality. Justification for those obligated by political power and decision-making via free-willed discussion are necessary for its legitimate exercise, as Chant and Gutmann (2002) describe. Everything that the legislative or the judiciary decides must reflect our values and principles. But there are high requirements that must be satisfied for institutional engagement to serve this legitimizing purpose. Bryld (2001) argues that in the early 1990s, when modernist development was the dominant paradigm, most policy thinkers and practitioners rejected macroeconomic growth as the sole path to long-term prosperity in response to the widespread poverty and powerlessness that it spawned. The conversation shifted to a focus on women's advancement, which places greater responsibility on individuals and highlights the need of taking charge of their own development. Elevated influence necessitates reshaping the modern social order's governing structure, which in turn affects development efforts spearheaded by civil society. As a result, globalization has shifted its emphasis from domestic politics to the ways in which individuals and groups influence global policy. With an estimated one billion inhabitants, India is the second most populous country in the world. There is a wide range of religions and languages represented within this diversified community. The enormous difficulty of decentralizing democratic growth is brought to light by diversity. The scenario is still one of the most culturally and financially poor in the world, even though India has made great strides internationally since gaining independence. According to Palacios (2016), one factor that hinders participation might be the gender ratio of labor and competence inside organizations. The issue is not with the quota per se, but with the wisdom of reserving seats for women in a patriarchal culture like rural India. One of the most prominent schools of thought in

contemporary political theory, known as "participative governance," holds that people will make more reasonable political judgments if they actively engage in the process of reasoning. According to Ferguson (2011), excluding certain people from a feminist movement leaves it open to unjust attacks on other people who should be part of it. Political representation, according to Urbinati and Warren (2008), may give politics an idealizing component that can break down barriers to formal participation and segregation. Leadership development, according to the philosophy of participation and democracy, is the key to effective government. The women who have been elected to serve as panchayat members are the ones taking the lead here. Accordingly, it is critical to use the idea of participation and democracy to determine the obstacles that women leaders face in order for them to effectively lead.

## Methods

In order to analyze women's political engagement as a leader in a democratic society, this article analyzes the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) program that was implemented in India in 1992. It provides an overview of the many obstacles that women who hold leadership positions in the Local Self-Government (LSG) face. In order to address the issue of women's political engagement in democratic systems, this article conducted an analysis of the diverse literature that is currently available on women's political empowerment, participation, and leadership. An empirical study was conducted based on primary data from 25 women who were elected as Panchayat Presidents through a voting mechanism in one area in Kerala known as Idukki. The purpose of this study was to identify the problems that women leaders face in the decision-making process. The Malayalam language, which is the official language of the state of Kerala, was used to conduct an interview that was semi-structured and included open-ended conversation. As a result of the conversations with female politicians, study was conducted to investigate the unique obstacles that prevent women from participating in the democratically developing nation. Table 1 detail the characteristics of the individuals that participated in the survey.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Socio-demographic characteristics	Category	Total number of the sample
Gender	Female	25
Age	Age Under 30 years	2
	30-39 years old	2
	40-49 years old	10
	50-59 years old	10
	60 years old or more	1

Education	Up to high school	7
	Secondary school Diploma	10
	University education	5
	Professional training	3
Income (monthly)	Under € 250	3
	From € 250 to € 500	20
	From € 500 to € 1000	2
	Over € 1000	0
Family status	Married with children	24
	Married without children	0
	Unmarried	1
	Widow	0
Employment	Employed	12
	Un-Employee	13
	Pensioners	0
	Other	0

## Women in Indian Politics

Despite the fact that women's political empowerment is widely regarded as the foundation upon which all other accomplishments in any society are built, it continues to face a great deal of resistance, particularly in developing countries like India. However, in the developing world, due to deeply ingrained cultural, religious, and social beliefs about the position of females in a culture, it generates many constraints for females to be a component of decision-making in developing nations. This is in contrast to the situation in developed countries, where females have more opportunities and freedom to participate actively in political lives. Therefore, the analysis of women's status in a political system fails to adequately take into account the extent to which women participate in the power structure and the extent to which they are empowered politically. It is vital to empower females through a variety of programs and through the action strategy at the local, national, and societal levels in order to increase their participation in political processes. This will allow them to become more involved in political processes.

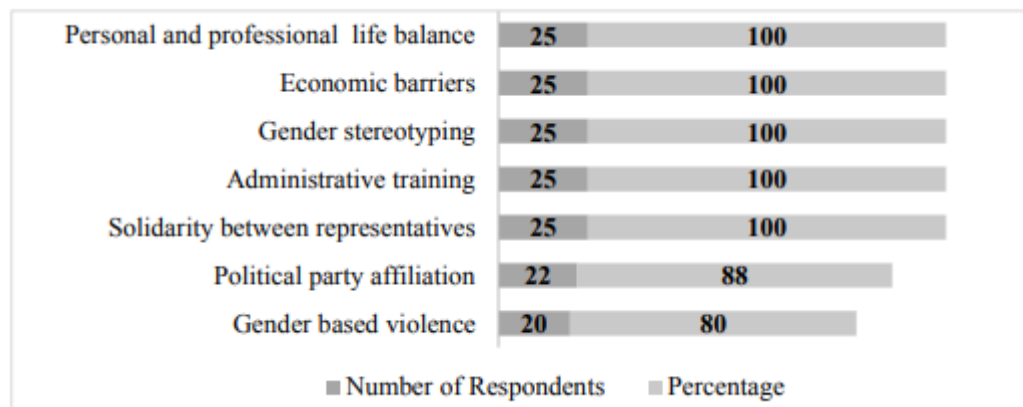
## Case study

More than half of India's population identifies as female; as the world's second most populous country, it is crucial to elevate the underrepresented women in leadership roles. Traditional, religious, racial, and familial norms all play a role in keeping women from achieving political parity in Indian culture. There is still patriarchy that prevents women from achieving political power, particularly in male-dominated political parties where women have a lower likelihood of rising to the position of most important leader due to unequal opportunity. On top of that, women have less opportunities to run for government due to systemic barriers created by discriminatory laws and organizations. It is worth noting that women in politics experience several forms of violence, including psychological and emotional abuse in addition to physical and sexual assault (Nanda, 1999). It is also evident in Indian politics that women are not adequately encouraged to enter politics and that they are permanently excluded from positions of power (Hughes & Dubrow, 2018). Rather than being encouraged to become active citizens, traditionally, women in India are expected to stay at home and take care of the household. Because of domestic abuse and financial hardship, women just did not have the time to actively participate in politics. The Panchayati Raj system is organized into three levels: the village/town level, the intermediate level, and the district level. In order to give women more agency in Indian politics, Mahatma Gandhi called for a decentralization of authority to the village and municipal levels. "Panchayati Raj Institutions" is the name given to this system. In 1992, by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the government made this advocacy a crucial act. Raj means "rule," while "Panchayat" means "village council." "Rules in a Village Council" is the literal translation of Panchayati Raj. A panchayat, or council of five people, constitutes a village in India. The panchayat has a number of authorities that pertain to its management. As a result of the policy's widespread adoption across India, the empowerment of panchayat has emerged as an essential component of state governance. The town or village from whence the female officials hail is the same one. Thanks to their familiarity with the area, they are able to take on many development issues and help combat violence against women in the town or village. As a result, Kerala is well-known for its development methods; nevertheless, unlike any other Indian state, Kerala's Panchayati Raj institutions are really producing results. Because of the devolution of authority, authority over resources, and responsibility, local councils in Kerala have become strong administrative hubs since the Panchayati Raj Act was passed in 1994. There are now 941 Grama Panchayats, 152 Block Panchayats, 14 District Panchayats, 87 Municipalities, and 6 Corporations that make up LSG in Kerala. Coordination of these 1200 local entities is the responsibility of the Local Self Government Department.

## Results

One of the fourteen districts that make up the state of Kerala, Idukki was established on the 26th of January in 1972. Idukki District is home to a total of 52 Grama Panchayats, which are responsible for various social security schemes and development activities. Among the tasks of the panchayat, the most important ones are the evaluation of the usage of various funds, the monitoring of the process of generating money for the panchayats, the arrangement of all births and weddings, the approval of by-laws produced by the village or town level panchayat, and the supervision of distribution. In the time that has passed since the introduction of the PRI, there has been a significant rise in the number of activities that are carried out by the village hall. Therefore, as a result of the decentralization of authority, the day-to-day operations of the village panchayats have been elevated to a greater degree of local administration and administrative responsibility. Due to the fact that the Idukki district is one of the districts that has demonstrated successful development activities, the purpose of this study is to investigate governance in this district. This research

conducted an empirical analysis based on direct interviews with twenty-five women who hold the position of president in the panchayat. The purpose of this analysis was to determine the difficulties that elected women representatives face. This article examines a variety of challenges that were encountered by the respondents, including but not limited to the following: maintaining a balance between their personal and professional lives, overcoming economic obstacles, overcoming gender stereotypes, obtaining administrative training, fostering solidarity among representatives, being required to have a political party affiliation, and experiencing gender-based violence.



**Fig. 1. Challenges for women in politics**

Source: Author

The tension between job and family is an issue that affects people of both sexes; yet, the majority of authors focus solely on women (Poelmans, 2001). In spite of the fact that parental participation is a big barrier to a woman's professional advancement, the majority of the time, women experience a great deal more conflict than men do because of the sheer number of tasks they take on. Hochschild (1997) contends that it is possible for both men and women to have a preference for spending more time in the workplace in order to avoid the duties of parenting. On the other hand, women tend to devote more time to their children, although men are better motivated to work than women are when they are in the workplace. In a period when male coworkers are spending an increasing amount of time working independently, the majority of women continue to carry out their professional and family duties (Figes, 1994). As seen in Table 2, maintaining a healthy balance between one's personal and professional lives might be detrimental to a woman's political career. India is one of the nations in the world that does not have women's equality, despite the fact that there are a great number of efforts and programs in the country. In the course of the discussion on the difficulties associated with political engagement, all of the respondents are in agreement that the responsibility of caring for one's house and one's children is a substantial obstacle that prevents them from being active in a political career. The findings of the interviews indicate that the cooperation of spouses and the parents of the husband is necessary for a woman to have a successful political career. This is due to the fact that the majority of the elected women representatives of the Panchayati Raj system are married and have children.

**Table 2. Harmony between one's personal and professional lives**

Indicators	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Household responsibilities	25	0	0	0	0
Time management	25	0	0	0	0
Working under stress	25	0	0	0	0
Family support	24	0	0	1	0
Family in politics	22	1	0	2	1
Decision making in house	18	3	0	2	2

There are many obligations that women have around the house, which makes it difficult for them to devote more time to social development. This is especially true when they are needed to work at night on occasion. During the time of the flooding that occurred in Idukki in 2018, all of the respondents stated that they were required to coordinate various departments in order to prevent any further loss of life within their local self-government. This required them to travel a significant amount, with other colleges and other party members at specific times. It appears that such collaboration is difficult to accomplish. On the other hand, a more substantial portion of the respondents (18) are in agreement that after beginning a career in politics, they experience an increase in their personal life in terms of increases in confidence, power, and self-esteem, as well as an increase in the freedom to make decisions in their family and community. While discussing the significance of providing assistance to one's family, a woman politician who is 31 years old and with a professional degree provided an explanation:

*“I was a person with no interest in politics before marriage. However, after marriage, my husband, who is active in politics and his family, supported me to be the candidate for the LSG election, and then I joined a party. I am very sure that without the support of my husband, I will never be able to have a political career”.*

According to a study published by the World Economic Forum in 2018, a comprehensive approach need to center on eliminating the basic and structural challenges that women face when it comes to running for public office and conducting successful campaigns. Additional difficulties are created for women as a result of their lack of access to money and the pressures exerted by institutions, which produce working situations that are stressful and unstable. Because of these structural inequities, a comprehensive effort to assist female candidates is required. Capital is one of the most powerful resources, and in a number of countries, the majority of candidates, regardless of their gender or background, are at a disadvantage since the costs of lobbying are prohibitively expensive. According to Knight et al. (2004), women were even less likely than males to have significant links to the financial matters of their families. The many economic obstacles that a woman must overcome in order to become an active political leader are outlined in Table 3. Every single person who took part in the interview shared their opinion that one of the most



significant issues before entering the political field is the absence of financial stability. Such a circumstance compels them to look for employment elsewhere. In addition to this, the majority of those who participated in the survey are in agreement that the monthly compensation they receive for their leadership position is rather low and not enough to cover their expenses effectively. For women who do not have a strong financial base in their family, entering the political arena is considerably more difficult. This is especially true if they wish to participate in an election or to run a campaign for an election.

**Table 3. Economic barriers**

Indicators	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Low salary	25	0	0	0	0
Lack of funding for campaigning	24	1	0	0	0
Travelling in non-working hours	23	1	1	0	0
Lack of economic stability in election	22	2	1	0	0
Inability to have different jobs	20	1	1	2	1
Spending from own	16	4	2	1	2

Women who hold leadership positions in a panchayat are obligated to carry out government initiatives in a timely manner. In spite of this, there are circumstances in which leaders, regardless of the level of financial stability they possess, may occasionally spend money that they have earned themselves in order to participate in societal development (for the purpose of traveling). Consistently, women leaders are prevented from working in politics due to their incapacity to meet their financial obligations. Regarding the numerous economic obstacles that leaders face in order to remain in politics for extended periods of time, one respondent who was 53 years old and had completed high school further stated that:

"I come from a household with a middle-income, and as a result, I am responsible for taking care of my husband's parents and my two children. My hubby works in agriculture. On account of this, I am also involved in the agricultural activities. After being chosen as the president of the LSG, the only time I currently have is to assist my husband in his farming endeavors. This has led to a decrease in revenue compared to what it was previously. For this reason, I am of the firm belief that in order for a woman to have a successful political career, she must either have a steady salary or the financial standing of a wealthy individual.

Just like other sorts of social stereotypes, gender stereotypes are expectations of what individuals are expected to do in real life in general. When perceivers come across a community of people who are involved in a physical activity that is comparable to their own, they are likely to automatically infer that the talents and personality qualities of these persons are similar to their own. According to Eagly and Steffen (1984), certain stereotypes may be seen as a representation of the delineation of social classes into more comprehensive aspects of the social order. According to Lopez-Saez et al. (2008), the location of

social institutions has a significant amount of importance in terms of maintaining or improving gaps between men and women. The many different gender preconceptions that women in politics have to contend with are outlined in Table 4. Discrimination based on gender is one of the most significant challenges that women encounter in the political sphere. Furthermore, despite the fact that Kerala has been successful in implementing a variety of development programs inside the state, patriarchy is still prevalent in Kerala. All of the leaders who took part in the interviews unequivocally accept the reality that women are less likely to be able to attain higher positions within their party and to participate in decision-making processes. Despite the fact that the PRI policy guarantees equality within a panchayat governing body, there are occasions when the lack of cooperation and support from male colleagues makes it difficult for female leaders to pursue a variety of development measures.

**Table 4. Gender stereotyping**

Indicators	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Patriarchy	25	0	0	0	0
Less opportunity for higher positions	23	2	0	0	0
Society expects higher standards	23	2	0	0	0
Less voice in upper level party meetings	2	22	1	0	0
Male representatives support	20	3	1	1	0
Not tough	19	4	1	0	1
Women are weaker	17	2	2	0	4
Less decision-making capacity	15	3	2	1	4

Almost seventeen women representatives have acknowledged that such inequality contributes to the perception that women in society are weak or not tough enough to lead the society (19). This stigma prevents women from taking leadership roles in society. As a result, it is of the utmost importance to alter the mentality of the society in Kerala, which stigmatizes women as being incompetent rather than capable. One of the respondents, who was 41 years old and had a Bachelor's degree, provided the following information while addressing the acknowledgement from society about the leadership of women: "As a women leader, I had to undergo various stigmas of our society on a daily basis, particularly when it comes to decision-making in our panchayat." There are some males in the area who are of the opinion that a woman is not as intelligent or courageous as a man when it comes to taking major policy steps. Because of this, there were occasions when I had to act like a strong lady, even in the way that I modulated my voice, in order to give the impression to others that I am a serious and rigorous leader. Misinterpretations of this nature need to be addressed and eradicated from society.

## Conclusion

There has been great progress in women's political engagement in India over the years, but there is still a long way to go before we reach genuine gender parity. Throughout India's political history, women have played an essential part in defining the democratic character of the country. This is seen in their contributions to the liberation movement and current government. Women still do not have the representation they deserve in political decision-making bodies, even though there are constitutional protections and legal initiatives to promote gender equality. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution have greatly increased women's involvement in local governance and empowered them at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, women's representation in higher political posts is still low, notwithstanding this accomplishment. Traditional gender roles, economic dependence, and institutionalized bias within political parties are the main causes of women's underrepresentation in Indian politics. Further discouraging women from actively participating in politics is the pervasiveness of violence and harassment towards them. To promote equal political participation, a diversified strategy is necessary in light of these constraints. It is encouraging to see that women's movements, international bodies, and civil society groups are persistently striving to remove these obstacles. Although it is still pending, the plan to reserve 33% of seats in parliament and state assemblies for women is a big step toward creating gender-inclusive leadership. More women are getting involved in politics, and it's partly because powerful women are getting more attention. The prospects for women's political engagement in India are bright in the long run. Women will become more politically active as their level of self-awareness, educational attainment, and economic independence rises. To foster an enabling climate where women may fully and equally engage in politics, it is crucial to implement legislative reforms in addition to social changes. Finally, although we have come a long way, we still have a long way to go before we see female balance in Indian politics. To ensure that women may make important contributions to India's governance and development, it is necessary to address systemic hurdles, promote gender-sensitive policies, and cultivate an inclusive political culture. In addition to bolstering Indian democracy, achieving this objective would provide the groundwork for a more fair and equal society.

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