

## **Empowerment of Women through Participation in Indian Politics**

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### **Structured Abstract**

**Purpose:** This paper is an attempt to analyze the role of women's participation in national politics and also tries to understand whether or not women's voices and issues are clear to the public as matters of importance in India.

**Design / Methodology / Approach:** Information is based on the secondary data published by the Election Commission of India at different times.

**Findings:** The major findings of this study shows the role of women's participation in national politics and also analyzes whether or not women's voices and issues are clear to the public as matters of importance in India.

**Research Limitations / Implications:** Secondary data will help to make an idea of the role of the women in Indian politics. To know the reality of the effect in depth study with primary data will be of great help.

**Practical Implications:** The major findings of this study show that the women's participation in Indian politics gradually increases and that will help to lift up women empowerment.

**Originality / Value:** The major outcomes of this study may be helpful to the original decision makers of Indian Election process such that women's participation in national politics will increase in future for empowering women.

**Keywords:** Women, Participation, Empowerment, Obstacles, Decision Making.

**Paper Type:** Research Paper.

### Introduction

The idea of women empowerment is gaining ground on the basis of successful achievements by women in real life reality. Empowering women may be considered in general where they will be provided every freedom and opportunity to help them self-dependent. In specific situation they may be empowered in the power structure of the society. The word women empowerment essentially means that the women have the capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms. The principle of gender equality is protected in the Indian Constitution in its preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures, a position and indiscriminate in favor of women. Within the framework of democratic polity, our laws, developmental policies, plans and programmes are aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions to secure rights of women. The women's movement and a widespread network of Non-Government organizations (NGOs) having strong grass root presence and deep insight into women's concerns have contributed in stimulating initiatives for the empowerment of women. Women today are trying to understand their position in the society. Women have become increasingly aware of sexual inequalities in every sphere of life and are seeking ways to fight them. In these days of scam-ridden politics, the increasing role of money and mafia in elections keeps most of the women away from politics. Increasing violence and rudeness against them insult women and consequently they prefer to stay away from politics. What are the reasons of this bad situation? Issues may be various and varied but a few basic issues are as follows:

- a) Lack of consciousness
- b) Lack of social and economic empowerment
- c) Poor political willingness
- d) disadvantage of accountability mechanisms
- e) Lack of enforcement by the police force
- f) Lack of education related with gender culture etc.

The question arises, how greater participation of women in politics can be achieved? Generally, the answer is suggested in the form of 'reservation'. However, simple reservation will not solve the problem unless and until women are given adequate powers to function effectively and they themselves become more conscious and aware of their

rights and duties. The main stress should be on equal work and elimination of discrimination in employment. One of the basic policy objectives should be universal education of women, the lack of which tends to continue the unequal status quo. The popular UNESCO slogan should come in handy: 'educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a woman and you educate a family'.

### **Literature Review**

Over the decades, the issues concerning women have taken on new dimensions and received varied treatment by the United Nations and its specialized agencies. The principle of equality of men and women was recognised in the United Nations Charter (1945), and subsequently in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). In spite of the international announcements affirming the rights and equality between men and women still constitute a disproportionately small percentage of those participating in political decision-making and leadership. Many global conferences, including the Cairo Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), and the World Summit for Social Development (1995) have recognised that, despite the progress made globally in improving status of women, gender disparities still exist, especially in regard to participation in electoral politics. The study of Clots Figueras (2012), from which we know the identification strategy, pointed only on the importance of women's political representation in urban areas. According to Durgesh Kumar Dubey (2017) women who consist of almost half of the population need to be represented significantly in decision making bodies; this will be possible only when more number of women will take keen interest in representing weaker and deprived section of society. According to Francesco Burchi and Karan Singh (2020) women's political representation has a substantial effect on the probability of children completing primary education.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To discuss historical view of women political participation in Indian politics
2. To analyze the Political Participation of Indian Women at various election in India.
3. To figure out key challenges and to trace out the possible suggestions to increase the representation of women in Indian Politics.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study is primarily based on secondary data. The relevant secondary data has been collected from Election Commission of India's report, newspaper articles, and research article and from various Government websites and reports.

### **Historical view of Women political participation in Indian politics**

The status of women in India has seen many ups and downs since ancient times from at par status in ancient history to be in veils (Parda System) during the Medieval period. In the post independent India the status of women regained its strength and has been on a rise ever since. Women in post independent India have been participating in almost all types of economic activities, day-to-day household responsibilities, voting for a better governance and also in active politics. India has elected a women Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and a women President, Pratibha Patil. In the present Central Government, women comprise roughly quarter of the Indian Cabinet with port folios like external affairs, commerce and human resource development. At the ground level, India has a significant proportion of women in local level politics which have been achieved by reserving seat for women.

### **Indian Freedom Movement**

Women participated in the freedom movement with true spirit and fearless courage and faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom. Many great Indian women like, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakmi Pundit, Annie Beasant need no introduction for their dedication and devotion to the service of India. Indian women who joined the national movement were initially from educated and open-minded families. All changed with the beginning of Gandhi who converted the freedom struggle into a mass movement involving all sections of society. He understood that the freedom cannot be achieved if all the sections of the society are not truly represented. His most successful campaign against the imperial rule was fought on the issue of salt tax which brought Indian Women to the forefront. Local issues started getting debated and women took centre stage in this regard.

### **Women Reservation Bill**

Post Gandhi, India experienced centralization of planning which resulted in higher inequality in political decision making at the various levels. While Government was deeply concerned of issues

of gender equality, women were not always a part of such decision making. Although, India has seen women participating in politics as the longest serving Prime Minister, as Chief Ministers of various states, members in national parliament and state legislative assemblies in large numbers. In order to enable better women participation in active politics, authorities had been trying to put in reservation for women but have not been successful in true terms due to non-support from some of the regional parties. Back in history, one of the prominent member of freedom struggle, Sarojini Naidu rejected reservation for women, citing that women are not weak, timid or meek. She claimed that the demand for granting preferential treatment to women is an admission on her part of her inferiority and there has been no need for such a thing in India as the women have always been by the side of men. The issue of women's reservation again came to limelight in 1973 with voices recommending reservation for women in atleast one third of the seats and eventually statutory women's panchayats at the village level were recommended to take care of the neglect of women in rural development programmes through 73<sup>rd</sup> & 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments in 1993. Women's Reservation Bill, was passed in Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010. But Lok Sabha could not clear the bill due to resistance of some regional parties on certain provisions of the bill.

### **Panchayati Raj Reforms**

Indian Constitution made provisions relating to the establishment, power and responsibilities of the panchayats through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in 1993 with three tier system, viz, panchayats (village governance bodies) at the village, intermediate and district levels in every state, except provision of skipping intermediate level in states with less than twenty lakh population. The states have been empowered through law for the composition of panchayats. The reform provided for reservation of both and leadership positions for the Scheduled Castes, tribes and women. A normal duration of five years for panchayats has been provided with the authority of preparing the electoral rolls and conducting elections in the State Election Commission. The State Government is also empowered to make laws providing criteria for disqualification of candidature from panchayat elections and also to legislate with respect to maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and their audit. Apart from providing political empowerment, the Panchayati Raj reforms endow the panchayats with necessary powers and authority to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon panchayats at the appropriate level foreconomic development and social justice under their jurisdiction. This has helped all the sections of the society particularly the weaker sections including women to take part and to share the responsibility of governance and development at least at the sub district levels.

As the legislation provides for reservation for women, the number of women elected representative at local level has sharply increased. India has been maintaining the record number of women representatives at the panchayat level and statistics indicate that 30-50% of local level elected representatives are women.

### Political Participation of Indian Women

The present study is concerned not with political participation in general, but it is only a micro-level study concerned with political participation of women that too at the grassroots levels of political functioning. Participation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions has been an area of much interest in India. Participation in the local government institutions has been viewed as essential in promoting women's consciousness and development at the local level as well as in training them for participation in the wider politics. The socio-economic environment will have a direct impact upon political participation. Socio-economic variables include education, occupation, income, age, caste, religion, sex, family background, residence etc. Thus generally, participation tends to be higher among better educated, members of higher occupational and income groups, middle aged, dominant ethnic and religious groups, people with political family background, settled residents, Urban dwellers and members of voluntary associations. However, the correlation between political participation and some of these socio-economic variables may vary from culture to culture in different political contexts and their effect on political participation may not be stable. Political participation of women can be measured in three different ways, their participation as a voter, their participation as an elected representative,

From Table 1 we see that in Lok Sabha election percentage of women voters declined from 47.95% in 2004 to 47.62% in 2014. Table 2 shows the voting percentage of women all over the states in the most recent Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and Panchayat elections. In this table we see that all over the states voting percentage of women is very high in Panchayat election compare to Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha election. Over the all states voting percentage of Jharkhand is maximum(58.56%) in Panchayat election, but voting percentage of Bihar is highest( 14.81%) in case of Vidhan Sabha election. In case of Lok Sabha election, voting percentage of women is highest(28.57%) in West Bengal compare to all states. As per the provisions of Article 243 D of the Constitution, one third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in Panchayats (local self Government) at all levels and also those of the chairpersons are reserved for women. Even some states like, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar,

Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tripura and Uttarakhand have legislated for 50 % reservation for women. In Sikkim, reservation for women is 40 %. As a result of this initiative, out of about 28 lakh elected members in Panchayats, around 10 lakh are women. The last 15 years of Panchayati Raj in India have seen women go from strength to strength in terms of their political participation. From Table 3 we see that Women politicians elected at Lok Sabha vote in India. Here we see that in 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (2019) total number of women politicians elected was 78, but in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha it was only 52 and 64 respectively. So in this table we observe that in the last 19<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha number of elected members of women politician have been increased.

To empower Elected Women Representatives there have been issued to all States/UTs and other Central Ministries implementing all Centrally Sponsored Schemes (by Government of India) as follows:

- 1) All the States/UT Governments may make an impression upon Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to ensure the safety of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs), particularly those belonging to the weaker sections. They should not be physically injured, assured or dishonored in any manner on any count. Discrimination of any kind against them should not be allowed.
- 2) To put a control on the cases proxy attendance by relatives of EWRs, States have been advised to initiate departmental proceedings against the officers in whose presence such meetings are held.
- 3) To advise the concerned authorities of PRIs that meeting of Mahila Sabha / Palli Sabha to be held prior to Gram Sabha Meeting (village meeting) and recommendations/decisions of Mahila Sabhas mandatorily transmitted to Gram Sabhas who should consider the proposals imperatively.
- 4) In the quorum of Gram Sabha, inclusion of at least half of the number of women voters should be mandated. States which have not mandated such a provision should do so.

- 5) PRIs should be involved in any Integrated Plan of action to prevent and combat women trafficking, problems in disturbed areas, displacement due to land acquisition etc. Related matters may be taken up in Mahila Sabha in case of issues of children and women.

### Conclusion

India has a rich history of measuring political participation of women since its independence. The decentralization of governance which is taking place for last two decades has increased the importance of measuring participation of women in decision making. Proper gender budgeting has already been worked out for inclusive growth of women & girls by allocating one third budget for the women in all the schemes. The Indian Government has a lot of emphasis on utilizing real time data for measuring different social indicators and using them for policy intervention. With more responsive data on women participation, better gender budget initiatives aim to move the country towards a gender equal society.

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**Web Resources**

11. <http://www.elections.in/political-corner/women-members-of-parliament-in-india/>

**Table 1**  
**Women's participation in the Lokh Sabha Election**

Voters					Votes polled by women	
Year	Men	Women	Total Voters	% Women	From total voters (%)	From women voters registered (%)
2004	34,94,90,864	32,19,97,066	67,14,87,930	47.95	44.4	53.6
2009	37,47,58,801	34,22,26,300	71,69,85,101	47.73	45.8	55.8
2014	42,66,51,513	38,79,11,330	81,45,91,184	47.62	NA	NA

Source: Various reports of Election Commission

**Table 2**  
**Voting percentage of women all over the states**

STATE	LOKHSABHA	BIDHANSABHA	PANCHAYAT
Andhra Pradesh	7.00%	8.16%	33.46%
Assam	14.29%	11.90%	36.89%
Bihar	7.50%	<b>14.81%</b>	50.00%
Chhatisgarh	9.09%	11.11%	54.50%
Goa	0.00%	2.50%	32.33%
Gujarat	15.38%	6.59%	33.02%
Haryana	0.00%	10.00%	36.50%
Himachal Pradesh	0.00%	4.41%	50.11%
Jammu & Kashmir	16.67%	3.45%	0.00%
Jharkhand	0.00%	9.88%	<b>58.56%</b>
Karnataka	3.57%	1.33%	43.62%
Kerala	5.00%	5.00%	51.85%
Madhya Pradesh	17.24%	13.48%	50.47%
Maharashtra	10.42%	3.82%	49.93%
Odisha	9.52%	4.76%	0.00%
Punjab	7.69%	11.97%	34.93%
Rajasthan	4.00%	14.00%	50.00%
Tamil Nadu	10.26%	7.26%	35.00%
Tripura	0.00%	8.33%	36.01%
Uttar Pradesh	16.25	8.93%	39.99%
Uttarakhand	20.00%	7.14%	56.13%
West Bengal	<b>28.57%</b>	11.56%	38.43%

Source: Various reports of Election Commission of India.

**Table 3**  
**Women politicians of Lok Sabha vote in India.**

<b>Lok Sabha (Year elected)</b>	<b>No. of women politicians elected</b>
17th (2019)	78
16th (2014)	64
15th (2009)	52

**Source: Various reports of Election Commission of India.**