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# POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: ANALYZING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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**ABSTRACT:**

India is the most populous country in the world and we have the largest democratic institutions in the world. The Constitution of India has given equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens without any discrimination. The Constitution treats women equal to man. Article 14,15,16 together make it abundantly clear that the vision of the Constitution is rooted in gender equality. India ranks 20$^{th}$ from the bottom in terms of representation of women in Parliament. It shows that the patriarchal society has not given equal opportunity and role of women has been confined to the domestic chores. The United Nations report states that "woman constitutes half of the world population, perform nearly 2/3 of works hours, receive one tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth percent of the world's property." One of the major problems encountered by women is that they are not in decision making roles. They are unable to take decisions for themselves. This predicament can only be alleviated with strong political participation of women, not just as electors but also as elected representative. Not all women are given the equal rights in the society to choose their desired candidate or stand in elections or go for election campaigns or even be associated with political parties. Women faces challenges such as 1. Discrimination, 2. Illiteracy, 3. Sexual Violence, 4. Overcoming Barriers to Participation 5. Structural Impediments 6. Limited Representation in Political Parties.

It shall be the attempt in this paper to identify and investigate the issues and challenges centering around political participation of women. Adequate assistance shall be taken from primary and secondary sources of law.

**Keywords:** Women in Politics, Democracy, Equality, Representation, Challenges

## INTRODUCTION:

India is expected to be the third largest economy in the world by the end 2030 after America and China. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), India's economy will grow by 6.8% compared to the US's 1.6%. despite the growth in country, women participation in country's economy, polity and society has not kept pace. As per the data of IPU in India, women representation is 14.44% in 17th Lok Sabha election. And it is only 9% in overall MLAs in India. Our neighbour country like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal has more women representatives than India. In the field of Bureaucracy, only 14% Secretaries in the IAS were women in 2022. In other sectors, only 20.37% of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) owners are women, 10% of stat-ups are founded by females, and 23.3% of women are in the labour force.

## WOMEN AS VOTER:

Women's voting participation did not quickly take off after independence. The number of women who voted in the most recent Lok Sabha election of 2019 marked a turning point in India's progress towards gender equality in politics and has been dubbed a "silent revolution of self-empowerment". There are several reasons for the rise in participation, particularly since the 1990s[1].

First, higher levels of literacy among women and their greater participation in the workforce have contributed to increasing their political awareness and confidence to cast their vote.

Second, the growth of the electronic media and the digital revolution have expanded the reach of awareness campaigns about voting rights, conducted both by Election Commission of India and other organizations.

Third, the Election Commission has adopted institutional measures to encourage women to vote, such as ensuring safety by guarding against intimidation, and providing separate queues for women at polling booths. Women-friendly 'pink booths' are set up where the entire staff including election officials, police and security personnel, are female. With heightened security measures during elections over the years, violence and intimidation of voters on polling day has largely declined, encouraging more people to participate, and not only the women. Fourth, women's reservations in panchayats and municipalities have also improved the representation of women in local power structures. Fifth, ideas of women's rights, technical advancements, and political reforms are gaining traction and inspiring more women to vote.

The rate of female turnout in 2009 was 55.8%, which was more than four percentage points lower than the rate of male turnout, which was 60%.36 percent. In reaction to this development, the Election Commission

[1] Amber Kumar Ghose, "Women's Representation in India's Parliament: Measuring Progress and Analysing Obstacles" *ORF Occasional Paper No. 382,* November 2022, Observer Research Foundation.

of India recognized that there was a significant gender disparity in voter turnout and came up with creative strategies to register more women voters. These strategies included organizing women's rallies, interacting with voters at the local level through the use of female mascots, and launching nationwide campaigns. Political parties began to recognize women's potential as voters at the same time and tailored their platforms to suit women's interests.

Women voted in record numbers in the 2014 election, and the gender gap shrank to fewer than two percentage points. By the 2019 election, for the first time, the gender gap had closed and the female voter turnout at 67.18 percent overtook the male voter turnout at 67.02 percent. In this election to the 18th Lok Sabha too, women voted in large numbers. Overall, 312 million women voted, of 642 million voters, Rajiv Kumar, the Chief Election Commissioner said at a press conference. The gender gap in voting has all but closed[2], with both the male and female voter turnout at about 66 percent[3].

In the first General Election 1951-1952, 2.8 million women could not vote as they refused to disclose their names in the electoral rolls and identified themselves by relationships with male family members as "A's mother" and "B's wife".

**WOMEN AS CANDIDATE:**

Prior to increasing in the mid-1990s, the proportion of female candidates put up by major political parties in both the State Assembly and the Parliamentary elections remained relatively low until the early 1990s. According to political scientist Francesca R. Jensenius, women's presence in those seats grew when municipal reservations for them were implemented starting in 1992[4]. Following the 1996 General elections, a proposal was made to reserve seats for women in both the State Assemblies and Parliament. According to Francesca's research, all of the major political parties nominated a significantly higher number of female candidates than they did prior to 1996.

In order to encourage women's participation in local government, the central government introduced the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts in 1992. These acts stipulated that one-third of the seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), an Indian system of rural local self-governance, be reserved for women. Additionally, the 73rd Amendment supports allocating seats in PRIs to women and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, among other minorities. PRIs place a higher priority on the equitable distribution of public goods than do legislative and state legislatures, particularly for women in rural areas. Additionally, this strategy aims to convert policies for gender parity into targeted initiatives that advance gender equity locally. The results of multiple panchayat surveys demonstrate that communities finally came

[2] Available at: https://www.indiaspend.com/gendercheck/66-women-electors-voted-in-this-election-how-did-the-gender-gap-in-voting-close-910870 last visited June 20, 2024

[3] Available at: https://www.newslaundry.com/2024/06/10/66-women-electors-voted-in-this-election-how-did-the-gender-gap-in-voting-close last visited June 20, 2024

[4] Praveen Rai, "Electoral Participation of Women in India: Key Determinants and Barriers" Vol XLVI No 3 *Economic and Political Weekly* 47-55 (2011).

to embrace women's independent roles and activities, despite early opposition to power sharing with female leaders. A required reservation framework has improved the representation of women and their ability to exert agency in local government.

Furthermore, elected women representatives have benefited greatly from capacity-building support in decentralized planning and progress monitoring through the National Rural Livelihood Mission, a poverty reduction initiative run by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. Women now have a larger political voice and impact when voicing their issues and ideas. Additionally, there is proof that women who serve as Sarpanches—elected members of India's gram panchayats, a form of village-level constitutional self-government—increase the probability that women will be chosen to lead their communities. Approximately half of India's 3.2 million local elected legislators are women as of right now.

**WOMEN AS POLITICAL WORKERS:**

According to surveys conducted by the Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), women have become more involved in politics over the past thirty years. This includes attending political events, running door-to-door campaigns, distributing election pamphlets, and raising money for elections (see Table 6). Overall, though, this kind of participation is still modest. This indicates that women have become more politically mobilized as voters as a result of increased education, political awareness, and exposure to public life; however, a number of institutional and structural barriers still prevent them from fully engaging in the many other facets of electoral politics.

**ACHIEVEMENTS IN WOMEN'S LOCAL POLITICS PARTICIPATION:**

Municipalities or municipal corporations in cities and towns, as well as PRIs in rural areas, comprise India's third tier of local administration. In order to offer "new opportunities for local level planning, effective implementation and monitoring of various social and economic development programs in the country," the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments were proposed in 1992.The provision in these changes to reserve one-third of all seats in local body elections for women was one of their most significant and revolutionary features. Research indicates that the initiative caused a remarkable increase in women's local political participation. Since then, the reservation has been increased to 50% in 20 of India's 28 states.

The issue of "proxy representation," in which women elected to public office were mostly "controlled" by their male relatives, has also lessened.[52] The performance of elected women political leaders has improved as a result of numerous skill development initiatives and leadership training sessions offered by government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to women at the grassroots level.

## WOMEN'S ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA:

A historical overview of women's rights in general and their involvement in electoral competition both historically and thematically can be traced back to the Swadeshi movement in Bengal (1905–08), which initiated Indian women's involvement in nationalist activities and raised awareness of the issues surrounding women's suffrage and voting rights. When tracing the history of the Indian women's suffrage movement, Forbes (1979) notes that organized women's demands for equality with men came from British women's influence rather than from views of Indian women's needs.

As a result, British women reformers who lived in India helped to recreate the drive for women's suffrage in India in the early 20th century, using Britain as a model. When the Women's Indian Association was founded in Madras in 1917 with the main goal of "seeking an enlarged role for women in public life," the first demands for franchise came to be. Significant literature discusses how these initiatives impacted different regions of India and linked to the nationalist movement. Women's suffrage eventually had to confront nationalist concerns, and its goals had to be explained in terms of Indian nationalism and connected to the nationalist debates over political rights and colonial status that dominated public opinion in the 1920s and 1930s in India.

Limited voting rights were granted to certain women in various Indian provinces between 1920 and 1929 as a result of the women's suffrage movement, beginning in Madras. However, due to property requirements, these privileges were granted to a very small number of Indian women. Later, a larger group of women were granted the ability to vote by the Government of India Act of 1935, but there were still restrictions, such as literacy, property ownership, and marriage to men of property. One woman was granted the right to vote for every five men under the Act. The 1935 Act gave women 41 reserved seats in the provincial legislatures and limited reservations in the central legislature, notwithstanding the women's movement's opposition to gender-based seat reservations.

The creation of inclusive voting places for women did not receive much coordinated or coordinated effort throughout the post-independence era. Women were not guaranteed seats in the legislature by the 1950 Constitution. Following independence, social norms shaped opportunities and views of women's political participation, which in turn limited women's legislative participation. Women occasionally shared certain views, but men occasionally held them exclusively. After independence, women's widespread involvement in politics during the independence fight seems to have decreased. As opposed to being motivated by curiosity and social pressure to actively engage in politics, women's participation in politics and political competitiveness has been limited to familial ties. In response to this problem, political parties, mirroring the dominant social narrative, consistently barred women from electoral participation. However, as tokens for their contribution in the struggle for India's independence, political parties allotted women a few seats in the general elections. This becomes evident from the first Lok Sabha elections in 1952, where women could win and occupy a paltry 4.4 per cent of the total seats in the Lower House.

## HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK:

In India after independence, women's status regained momentum and started to grow. Women started to participate in social, political, economic, cultural, and religious spheres of life. Their goal while attending educational institutions is to pursue a higher degree. Realizing the value of education, they went on to become professions, including doctors, lawyers, scientists, instructors, educators, directors, executives, and so forth. In the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum, India is placed eighteenth in terms of political empowerment. India's standing was greatly impacted by Indira Gandhi's two periods as prime minister, from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 till her death in 1984. Gandhi's significance as a well-known female politician cannot be understated. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment, passed in 1992, requires that one-third of village government head positions be designated for women.

The program was put into place to increase women's participation in local politics. The number of women elected to local councils has increased as a result of the law mandating women's representation in politics. India has been monitoring the proportion of female panchayat representatives; data suggests that women comprise between 30 and 50 percent of local elected officials. Some Indian states that do not have any female ministers are Nagaland, Sikkim, and Manipur. Not a single state has more than one-third of its ministers being female. Tamil Nadu leads the way with 13% of female ministers, but 68 percent of states have fewer than 10% of female leaders.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the challenges faced by women in politics
2. To examine the factors which restrain women for participating in politics
3. To study how to overcome the challenges faced by the women in politics

## WHY WOMEN ARE UNDERREPRESENTED?

Women leaders have more difficult problems than men leaders. There are several reasons why women aren't allowed in politics. There are a number of reasons why there are less women in politics, including the current cultural value system, the divide between the public and private spheres in terms of domain identity, and the dominance of men in political institutions. Because of their little percentage within India's internal political party system, they have been unable to gather support and services for fostering their political constituency. Political parties do not provide women with the necessary financial support to run for office[5].

1. **Patriarchal mindset:** women are often considered inferior to men. This mindset is deeply ingrained in society and affects the way people perceive women's abilities to lead and participate in politics.

[5] Aradhana Sharma, "Challenges faced by women leadership in politics" *IJPSG* 60-62 (2019).

2. **Lack of Education:** Women in India have historically had limited access to education, which has hindered their ability to participate in politics. Even though there have been improvements in recent years, many women still lack the necessary education and skills to run for political office.
3. **Social norms:** Women in India are often expected to conform to traditional gender roles and are discouraged from pursuing careers in politics. Social norms and stereotypes dictate that women should prioritize their roles as wives and mothers, and politics is often considered a man's domain.
4. **Violence and harassment:** Women in politics are often subjected to violence and harassment, both physical and online, which can deter them from entering politics or speaking out on issues. The lack of safe and inclusive spaces in politics is a significant barrier to women's participation.
5. **Limited representation in political parties:** Women are often underrepresented in political parties, making it difficult for them to rise through the ranks and secure party nominations for elections
6. **Unequal opportunities:** Women in politics often face unequal opportunities, such as lower salaries, less access to resources, and limited networking opportunities. This inequality can make it challenging for women to compete with male candidates and succeed in politics.
7. **Structural impediments:** there is a general perception that women should be preferred for "soft" ministries like Social Welfare, Culture, Women and Child Development.

## HOW WOMEN CAN BE MORE EFFECTIVELY REPRESENTED IN POLITICS?

1. **Ensure seats by political parties for women:** Political parties should ensure that women are given adequate representation in candidate selection for elections. They should make an effort to recruit women candidates and give them priority in winnable seats.
2. **Reservation of seats:** most effective way to reserve seats for women in legislative bodies. This has been implemented in some states like Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal, where a certain percentage of seats are reserved for women in local bodies.
3. **Encourage participation from local women leaders:** Women's representation in politics can be increased by encouraging and supporting local women leaders. This can be achieved through mentorship programs and other support initiatives.
4. **Speak about the violence against women in politics:** Violence against women in politics is a significant barrier to their effective representation. Steps such as raising awareness, creating safe environment etc. should be taken to address this issue and ensure the safety and security of women in politics.
5. **Education and proper training:** will help women to build their confidence and skill set, and understand the complexities of politics.
6. **Remove social and cultural barriers:** Women's effective representation in politics can be hindered by social and cultural barriers such as patriarchy and gender norms. These issues should be addressed

through campaigns, education and awareness programs, and social reform initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana.

7. **Provide support for work life balance:** Many women face challenges in balancing their political responsibilities with their family and personal lives. Providing support for work-life balance, such as flexible schedules, childcare, and parental leave, can help to address this issue.

## CONCLUSION:

After 75 years of Independence, India continues to face many challenges in the realization of inclusive and genuine democratic governance. The primary democratic deficit throughout the country is the under-representation of women in decision-making bodies, particularly in the state and national legislatures where there are no reservations available for women. Women's marginalization from political life is preventing them from participating in society as complete and equal citizens. This also reduces the capacity of decision-making bodies to effectively govern or address the needs and priorities of all members of the community.

Effective government depends on women participating in politics, and this article makes the case for fostering an atmosphere that would encourage more women to do so. Additionally, it recommends enhancing the constitutional legal framework to better meet the needs of women seeking political office. By having access to finance, employment, and education, women should also have financial empowerment. It is also recommended that political party members receive leadership development for aspiring female leaders in addition to gender awareness training. Gender-sensitive and egalitarian policies should be part of political parties' platforms and methods of operation, and their implementation should be assessed. To improve women's possibilities of empowerment, it is imperative to focus on important topics.

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