

Participation of Women in Indian Politics

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Abstract:

Since the country's independence, the engagement of women in Indian politics has been a topic of study by academics and has received attention from policymakers. Women's presence in elected entities and political leadership continues to be disproportionately low, despite the fact that progressive legislation and constitutional guarantees of equality have been passed. This study investigates the patterns, factors that determine women's political participation in India, as well as the implications of such participation. The study examines institutional, socio-cultural, economic, and party-level hurdles to women's political engagement by employing a mixed-methods approach. This technique includes a survey of secondary literature, analysis of electoral data, and case studies. The recommendations for policy that are included at the conclusion of the article are intended to increase women's representation and meaningful engagement.

Keywords: women in politics, India, political participation, gender representation, Lok Sabha, Panchayati Raj, women's empowerment, gender quota, Women's Reservation Bill, political parties, democratic governance.

INTRODUCTION:

One of the ways in which democratic inclusion may be measured and driven is through the participation of women in political processes. With the implementation of universal adult franchise in 1950, women in India were granted the ability to vote and to run for office in elections. Throughout the subsequent decades, the trend of women's engagement in political processes has been anything from consistent. On the one hand, the Panchayati Raj changes that took place in 1993 and the reservations that were made for women in local bodies was responsible for a significant increase in the number of women who participated in local governance. The representation of women in state legislatures and the national parliament, on the other hand, has remained low in comparison to the averages of other countries throughout the world.

These three fundamental questions are investigated in this paper:

1. With regard to the political representation of women in India at the municipal, state, and national levels, what is the current status and trend of this representation?
2. When it comes to women's engagement in Indian politics, what are the primary obstacles and reasons that make it possible for them to do so?
3. What kinds of institutional and policy changes have the potential to improve women's representation in both the descriptive and substantive realms?

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The participation of women in Indian politics has been investigated from a variety of vantage points, including history, culture, sociology, and institutional frameworks from a variety of disciplines.

Historical and cultural limitations are present. **Kantor (2002) and Chhibber and Kollman (2004)** point out that patriarchal norms, gendered division of labor, and conventional expectations all work together to limit the mobility, visibility, and political ambitions of women in India. According to **Rai and Spary (2010)**, socialization processes frequently direct women toward community-based or welfare activism rather than competitive electoral politics to achieve their political goals.

quotas and institutional reforms are necessary. Twenty-three percent of the seats in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) were set aside for women as a result of the historic 73rd and 74th Constitutional

Amendments, which were passed in 1992 and 1993. According to **Jayal (2006)**, this reservation policy resulted in a significant rise in the number of women who were descriptively represented at the grassroots level. **Beaman et al. (2009)** discovered that female leaders influenced policy priorities towards public goods such as water and sanitation. Other scholars, on the other hand, noted the challenges of "proxy representation," which is when male relatives control decision-making (**Ban & Rao, 2008**). Empirical studies demonstrate both positive and mixed outcomes.

Parties and the selection of candidates are discussed. During the process of candidate nomination and resource distribution, political parties play an essential role as gatekeepers. Several studies have demonstrated that women are frequently handed tickets for constituencies in which their parties have a lower likelihood of winning, which restricts their ability to achieve legislative success (**Rai, 2011**). According to **Kapur and Mehta (2017)**, the leadership structures of the party continue to be dominated by men, which limits the options available to women.

Socioeconomic factors are determinative. According to **Deshpande (2004)**, there is a favorable correlation between women's political engagement and education, urbanization, and economic independence from their families. Political access is still influenced by structural inequalities such as caste and class, despite the fact that they exist. According to **Kumar (2017)**, women who belong to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and membership in minority communities encounter a number of obstacles when attempting to engage the political system.

However, socio-cultural norms and party-level dynamics continue to constrain women's substantive representation, despite the fact that institutional reforms have made entry points available for women. This is the conclusion that can be drawn from the evidence that has been gathered. Intersectional methods are necessary in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the myriad of political experiences that women in India have had.

METHODOLOGY

The strategy that this study takes is a mixed-methods mix:

The examination of electoral data from the Election Commission of India for the Lok Sabha (national parliament) and selected state assemblies over the course of the past three decades in order to determine trends in women's representation is an example of secondary data analysis.

A qualitative review is a synthesis of articles, official reports, and policy papers that have been subjected to peer review and provide information on women's political involvement and reservation policies.

Brief illustrative case studies from states where women's representation has been relatively higher and lower will be presented in order to illustrate the aspects that are contextual related.

TRENDS IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION:

Women's political representation in India has followed a trajectory that is not uniform ever since the country gained its independence. The most major breakthrough occurred in 1992–1993, when the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were passed. These amendments reserved one-third of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and urban local councils for women. This percentage was later increased to fifty percent in a number of states. The implementation of this reform resulted in a significant increase in the number of women who participated in grassroots activities. As a result, millions of women now hold positions of authority, including those of sarpanch, ward member, and municipal councillor. Studies conducted by Beaman et al. (2009) have demonstrated that elected female representatives frequently place a higher priority on public goods such as water supply, sanitation, and education, which ultimately results in observable enhancements to the governance of local communities. On the other hand, the representation of women continues to be quite low at both the state and individual national levels. The percentage of women who are members of the Lok Sabha has steadily climbed over the years, going from approximately 5% in the 1950s to nearly 14–15% in the 2019 elections, which marked the greatest proportion of female members of parliament in the history of India. In a similar vein, the representation of women in state assembly typically varies greatly from one region to another, with southern and eastern states typically reporting higher levels of women's representation than northern states. India continues to lag below the worldwide average, and women continue to be underrepresented in positions of legislative and executive authority, despite the fact that this sluggish upward trend is continuing. Although there have been instances in which

political parties have fielded a greater number of female candidates, women's admission into winnable areas has been restricted due to institutional impediments such as patriarchal norms, economic restrictions, and campaign techniques employed by political parties. The Women's Reservation Bill, which proposes to reserve one-third of seats in Parliament and state legislatures, has been debated for decades but has not been enacted. As a result, the goal of achieving gender parity in the higher echelons of politics remains an unfinished task.

Lok Sabha	Total Members	Women Members	% Women
1st (1952)	489	22	4.50%
2nd (1957)	494	27	5.47%
3rd (1962)	494	31	6.28%
4th (1967)	520	29	5.58%
5th (1971)	521	22	4.22%
6th (1977)	544	19	3.49%
7th (1980)	544	28	5.15%
8th (1984)	544	43	7.90%
9th (1989)	529	28	5.29%
10th (1991)	545	39	7.16%
11th (1996)	545	40	7.34%
12th (1998)	545	43	7.89%
13th (1999)	545	49	8.99%
14th (2004)	545	45	8.26%
15th (2009)	543	59	10.87%
16th (2014)	543	62	11.42%
17th (2019)	543	78	14.37%

PRS Legislative Research. (2019). *Vital Stats: Women in Parliament*. Retrieved from <https://prsindia.org>.

Year	Total Seats (All States)	Women MLAs	% Women
1962	3,421	86	2.5%
1980	3,887	146	3.8%
1990	4,120	196	4.8%
2000	4,120	284	6.9%
2010	4,120	327	7.9%
2019	4,120	418	10.1%

Source: Election Commission of India (2019); Inter-Parliamentary Union (2019)

Year	Level of Panchayat	Reservation for Women (%)	Actual Representation (%)
1993	Gram Panchayat	33%	36%
2005	Block Panchayat	33%	38%
2010	District Panchayat	33%	40%
2015	All Levels	33–50% (varies by state)	46%

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2015); National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD)

CONSEQUENCES OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

The involvement of women in Indian politics has resulted in significant repercussions. These repercussions can be broken down into three categories: social, political, and economic. The inclusion of women in democratic processes has not only helped to enhance democratic inclusiveness, but it has also contributed to the formation of governance priorities and improved accountability.

The participation of women in legislative bodies has been associated with the formulation of policies that are more attentive to gender issues. According to research conducted by Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004), studies have shown that female legislators are more inclined to prioritize issues including health, education,

sanitation, child welfare, and violence against women. This broadens the policy agenda beyond the typical concerns of economics and security. For example, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which have a policy of reserving one-third of their seats for women, have demonstrated statistically significant improvements in the amount of money invested in drinking water, educational institutions, and medical facilities.

In the second place, the engagement of women in politics has been crucial in confronting patriarchal norms and rethinking leadership roles in a political culture that is dominated by other males. Increasing the visibility of women in politics, from village councils to Parliament, generates role models that motivate future generations of women to follow political careers, hence lowering the gender gap in political ambition (Krook & O'Brien, 2012). This is because women are more likely to pursue political careers than males. Thirdly, there are considerable advancements in democratic governance and economic growth. The participation of women in political processes helps to bolster the legitimacy of democratic institutions by ensuring that a wider range of people are represented. It has been demonstrated through empirical study that diverse decision-making bodies have a tendency to be more accountable and transparent (UN Women, 2020). According to **Beaman et al. (2012)** there is a correlation between increased female political representation in India and greater governance outcomes as well as a reduction in corruption at the local level.

On the other hand, women's political participation is subject to a number of limitations and a variety of consequences. A significant number of women who have been elected to public office continue to face structural obstacles, such as a deficiency in financial resources, support from political parties, and social acceptance. According to **Buch (2010)** instances of "proxy representation," in which women occupy office but male relatives exert actual authority, are examples that show the continued existence of gendered imbalances of power. In spite of these constraints, the gradual increase in the number of women who are participating in the Parliament of India from 22 women in the first Lok Sabha (1952) to 78 women in the seventeenth Lok Sabha (2019) represents a significant transformation in the political landscape of India.

Policy Recommendations:

Despite gradual progress, women's political participation in India remains significantly below global averages. To bridge this gap and ensure substantive representation, the following policy measures are recommended:

Implement the Women's Reservation Bill at the Parliamentary and State Levels:

The long-pending Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill proposing 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies should be enacted. Evidence from Panchayati Raj Institutions demonstrates that reservations increase women's political visibility and improve governance outcomes (**Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004**).

Strengthen Political Party Mandates:

Political parties should be legally required or incentivized through state funding reforms to nominate a minimum percentage of women candidates. International best practices, such as gender quotas in party lists, can be adapted to the Indian context (**Krook, 2009**).

Capacity Building and Leadership Training:

Women in politics often face skill gaps in campaigning, digital literacy, and policy advocacy. Government agencies, civil society organizations, and universities should collaborate to provide leadership training programs for aspiring women politicians, particularly from rural and marginalized communities.

Ensure Financial and Institutional Support:

One of the major barriers for women entering politics is inadequate financial resources. Measures such as state funding of elections, transparent campaign financing, and earmarked funds for women candidates would help create a level playing field (**Rai & Spary, 2019**).

Strengthen Legal Protections Against Gender-Based Violence in Politics:

Many women in politics experience intimidation, harassment, and even physical violence. Stronger laws, reporting mechanisms, and support services are needed to safeguard women politicians' rights and encourage greater participation (UN Women, 2020).

Promote Gender Sensitization within Political Institutions:

Regular gender-sensitivity workshops for elected representatives, political party cadres, and bureaucrats can challenge stereotypes and reduce resistance toward women leaders.

Leverage Media and Technology for Awareness:

Media campaigns should highlight successful women leaders as role models and raise awareness of the importance of gender-balanced governance. Social media platforms can also be used to amplify women's voices in politics, especially among younger generations.

Encourage Intersectional Inclusion:

Policies must ensure representation not just for elite women but also for women from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and minority communities, recognizing the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender in politics (Jha, 2018).

CONCLUSION:

Since the country's independence, there has been a gradual but significant increase in the number of women who participate in political processes in India. The increased trend demonstrates growing knowledge and acceptance of women in government. In the first Lok Sabha, which was held in 1952, there were only 22 women MPs. In the seventeenth Lok Sabha, which is currently being held in 2019, there are 78 women legislators. Despite this, the overall percentage of women is still significantly lower than the norm for the entire world, which highlights the fact that structural and cultural barriers continue to exist.

It has been suggested in both the academic literature and the empirical evidence that women's participation has significant repercussions. These repercussions include the expansion of democratic inclusiveness, the strengthening of accountability, and the introduction of policy priorities that address the needs of marginalized groups, particularly in the areas of health, education, and social welfare initiatives. At the same time, women politicians continue to confront prejudice based on their gender, financial limits, and limited support within political parties. These factors frequently reduce their representation to a symbolic presence rather than being a source of meaningful influence.

Policy proposals, such as the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill, required gender quotas at the party level, leadership training, financial support systems, and better legal safeguards, are essential to the process of addressing these problems. Furthermore, in order to guarantee that women from a variety of backgrounds are afforded equal access to political platforms, it is essential to have intersectional representation, media presence, and efforts that create capacity.

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