

Women's Participation and Role in Politics in India

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Abstract

The term "political engagement" has a variety of meanings. It is connected to the 'Right to Vote' and participation in decision-making, political activity, political knowledge, and other factors. Women vote, run for office and join political parties at a lower rate than males in India. Women are most active in politics when it comes to activism and voting. The Indian government has introduced seat reservations in local governments to address the gender imbalance in politics. In India's legislative general elections, women voted 65.63 percent of the time, while males voted 67.09 percent of the time. Many Indian states have had female presidents, prime ministers, and chief ministers. In India, women have long been elected to state legislatures and the national parliament. Through this research paper, I want to state that women's engagement in politics is not a new notion in India. Many women revolutionaries have played crucial roles in the battle for freedom. Many women entered politics due to the Freedom Movement, and many of them made significant sacrifices for the country.

KEYWORDS: Parliament, political, engagement, reservation

1. Introduction

The major objective of this research is to look at the variables that make it difficult or easy for women to participate in political politics. Women's political rights and equal participation in electoral politics have been increasingly significant in international politics over the years, and the United Nations and its specialized organizations have dealt with them in various ways[1]. The Indian Constitution establishes a parliamentary government structure. It gives citizens the right to vote, be elected, speak freely, gather and form associations, and assemble and organize associations. The Indian Constitution aims to eliminate gender disparities by outlawing discrimination based on sex, class, human trafficking, and forced labor and reserving elected posts for women [2]. State and municipal governments in India have been ordered to promote gender and class equality, including equal pay and free legal help, humane working conditions and maternity leave, employment and education rights, and raising the standard of living. Women played a significant part in the early twentieth-century Indian independence movement, pushing for independence from Britain [3][4]. Women's political engagement has always been minimal, even though independence provided equal rights for women and men are enshrined in the Constitution.. In India, both affluent and poor states are seeing increased involvement. In the 1960s, there were 715 female voters for every 1,000 male voters; in the 2000s, there were 883 female voters for every 1,000 male votes[5] [6]. By cleaning

up voting lists and eliminating missing or deceased members, the Election Commission of India hopes to boost voter turnout.

2. Women's participation in the post-independence period

At the activist and academic levels in post-independence India, a considerable number of women's autonomous groups have grown up fighting patriarchy and taking up a variety of problems such as violence against women, increased participation of women in political decision-making, and so on. India has a thriving women's movement, but it still has a long way to achieve gender equality and justice. In India, women's empowerment is still a contentious subject. She is still considered a second-class citizen for various reasons, including illiteracy, conventions, traditions, poverty, ignorance, and her lack of interest in political empowerment, which results in government policies without sufficient understanding and direction. It is critical for women's empowerment that they actively engage in the nation's democratic process.

3. Participation of Women's in the Politics of India

3.1. Panchayati Raj Institutions for Women

The provisions about 33 percent reservation for women in local self-government organizations in the Indian Constitution's 73rd and 74th amendments have brought about a silent revolution. They have brought about a significant change in India regarding women's engagement in political affairs at the grass-roots height. In India, women have a far greater representation in Panchayati raj institutions than in Parliament. States like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan have set aside 50% of panchayat seats for women, while Sikkim has set aside 40% of seats for women. This is a watershed moment for women's effective engagement in the decision-making process at the grassroots level. Several women representatives in panchayats in Maharashtra, Gujarat, and West Bengal have received widespread praise for their efforts. As a result, women are making considerable progress in politics, where their growing engagement is fast empowering them. Women, on the other hand, do not have enough representation in the Lok Sabha. The percentage of elected women in the Lok Sabha has never risen over 12%. Women have a little more significant representation in the Upper House, owing to indirect elections and the appointment of a few female MPs.

3.2. Voting

Despite the fact that most men and women did not gain the right to vote until 1947 under British colonial rule, the campaign for women's suffrage began in the early 1900s in response to a national suffrage movement. [7]. Following India's independence from the United Kingdom in 1947, the Indian Constitution allowed women and men to equate voting rights in 1950. Provincial legislatures have granted women the ability to vote before universal suffrage [8]. Chennai was the first city in India to offer women's suffrage in 1921, according to British administration records, but only to men and women who owned property. The privileges provided in reaction to the suffrage movement were restricted to reading standards and property ownership, including property ownership by couples [9]. Because they were poor, most Indian women and men were denied the right to vote. This changed in 1950 when all adult Indian citizens were granted universal

suffrage [10]. Universal suffrage gave all women the ability to vote in 1950. The Indian constitution stipulates this under Article 326.

India has a two-house legislative system: the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Women's involvement in Lok Sabha elections peaked at 46.63 percent in 1962 and reached 58.60 percent in 1984. During the same period, male turnout was 63.31 percent in 1962 and 68.18 percent in 1984. The gender disparity between male and female voters has reduced over time, from 16.7% in 1962 to 4.4 percent in 2009 [11][12]. In the last 50 years, voter turnout for national elections has been stable, fluctuating between 50 and 60 percent. Female turnout increased in the 2012 Vidhan Sabha elections, or legislative/state legislatures, with places like Uttar Pradesh registering 58.82 percent to 60.29 percent turnout [13]. Women's overall turnout was 47.4 percent in the 2013 legislative body election, while male turnout was 52.5 percent. In 2013, in the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Daman & Diu, and Puducherry, women outnumbered men [14]. Voter outreach has included door-to-door voter list of registration, and voters will be provided a picture id with polling station information in the 2014 elections to improve voter turnout. Women voters account for a portion of India's increased voter turnout. Through education and outreach on college and university campuses, ECI has sought to boost female voter registration and involvement. Voter turnout has also increased due to improved security at voting stations [15] [16].

3.3. Elections in 2014- Position of women

In India's 2014 parliamentary general elections, women voted 65.63 percent of the time, compared to 67.09 percent for men. 13 More women voted than males in 16 of India's 29 states. In the April–May 2014 elections for India's Parliament, a total of 260.6 million women exercised their right to vote [17]. To address poor female voter participation, India introduced quotas (reservations) in constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) to reserve 33 percent of seats in local governments for women [18]. In the national Parliament, the Women's Reservation Bill (108th amendment) was presented, which would grant 33 percent of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats to women. The bill must still be passed by the Lok Sabha and signed into law. The argument over women's reservations began in the 1920s and persisted until a compromise with the United Kingdom was reached in the 1930s, enabling women to vote in urban areas [19][20].

Women's chairs are rotated to ensure that every seat is available. With the creation of women's reservations, political participation among women grew from 4-5 percent to 25-40 percent, allowing millions of women to participate as leaders in local government [21][22]. Before the 73rd amendment, the Indian state of Odisha created reservations, in 1992, 28,069 women were elected, and in 1997, 28,595 women were elected. Poorer women have gained representation in panchayats, although women are selected as Chairpersons from various socioeconomic classes have been elected (sarpanch) [23][24]. Concern about reserving seats in elected offices for women continues. When it comes to educating women for leadership roles, the topic of training has become increasingly important. In Tamil Nadu, it was discovered that women lack the education and skills needed to comprehend panchayat processes [25].

Their families also influence women's involvement in governance. In terms of connections, familial influence may be a source of support or a barrier for female politicians [26]. Women can use their links to their families to help them run for government at both the national and local levels. Role of women as proxies for male family members have been questioned, yet women may still significantly impact policy decisions [27][28]. The impact of women's reservations has grown in various public commodities, such as water and highways. The most commonly addressed problems by female elected leaders are drinking water and road upgrades [29]. For males, the most pressing issues are roads, irrigation, education, and water. Domestic violence, childcare, and maternal health are all issues that women are more likely to bring up [30].

4. Parties in Politics

India has a multi-party system at the national level, with seven registered parties. The three most dominant political parties in India are the Indian National Congress (INC), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Communist Party of India (CPI) [31][32]. Political parties have extended their outreach to women voters as India's party system has gotten more competitive. As a result, women's wings have emerged in the major political parties. The party's wing groups are the BJP Mahila Morcha, the INC's All India Mahila Congress, and the CPI's National Federation of Indian Women [33]. The rising demand for equal rights for women is connected to women's engagement in political parties. The INC remained in power until the 1990s. Other parties arose to fight the INC by focusing on poverty as the INC turned away from welfare politics. The INC was elected to power in 2004 [34] with the help of women's participation. The INC increased women's participation by setting a 33 percent quota for women at all levels. The INC endorsed Pratibha Patil's election as India's first female president and proposed a woman to be the first female speaker of the Lok Sabha in June 2009. In the early phases of the BJP's establishment, women were involved [35].

The BJP has created women's leadership programmes, financial assistance for female candidates, and a 33 percent reservation for women in party leadership positions to promote increased female participation [36]. The BJP has earned women's support by highlighting issues like the Uniform Civil Code, which guarantees equal rights to men and women regardless of faith. Women's participation in political parties remained low in the 1990s, with just 10-12 percent of female members. Women in India have also started political parties, with the United Women Front party forming in 2007 and calling for a 50% quota of seats in Parliament for women. [37][38][39].

5. 50:50 Female Candidates

5.1. Why are there so many women?

Women's participation in politics, according to study conducted by the World Institute for Development Economics Research, may benefit the country as a whole. It indicates that female applicants are more capable than male applicants in numerous areas [40]. Female candidates, for example, are less likely to incur criminal charges than male candidates. Women are skilled at canvassing in their areas and following up to ensure that road development projects are finished [41]. If women were represented equally and elected to power, citizens' socioeconomic rights, such as the right to a reasonable standard of living,

housing, health, and victim's rights, would take on new relevance. It's only just that the better half of the population has a better chance of being heard in politics. [42].

5.2. Making it a people's demand is a good way to start

To say the least, the low ratio of women in India's Parliament and Assemblies is worrisome and need quick action to enhance female political participation. Individuals should first advocate for the reintroduction and passage of the Women's Reservation Bill. They are, however, capable of more. [43].

5.3. What happens to women in this situation?

Since independence, no political party has attempted to change the framework of the parliamentary system in terms of gender representation, thereby disappointing women's hopes. True, India's first female prime minister was Indira Gandhi. She did have the advantage of being born into one of India's most prominent political families, though. [44].

6. Activism in Politics

Women's groups in India first emerged in the early 1900s, and after a period of limited activity from the 1950s to the 1970s, they reappeared in the 1970s [34]. One of the first women's groups, Bharat Stree Mahamandal, was formed in 1910 to help women in fleeing male dominance [45]. Women's organizations have typically been established with the aid of males, allowing just a few women to work. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was formed in 1927 to advocate for women's education, and it played a key role in the passage of the Hindu Code of Bills between 1952 and 1960. [36] Women took part in the liberation struggle as well, holding rallies and public meetings in support of India's independence from British colonial rule [46].

7. Women at farmers' rally

In the 1970s, a new wave of feminism arose in response to concerns of female inequality and sluggish growth in India. In 1974, the Committee on the Status of Women in India issued a report that impacted the reemergence of gender equality activism [47]. The research revealed substantial disparities between men and women in India, such as the sex ratio, death rates, employment, literacy, and wage discrimination, among other things. The study fuelled the women's movement by highlighting India's continued gender inequality. The focus of the women's movement has been on gender inequity, with particular attention on topics like as the Uniform Civil Code, the Women's Reservation Bill, and sexual assault against women [48]. India has established informal and official women's groups at the rural, urban, national, and state levels. Various concerns such as the environment, poverty, empowerment, and violence against women are addressed by women's groups in India. The AIWC, which was founded in 1927 and focuses on empowering and educating Indian women, is one of India's most important women's organizations [49].

8. Difficulties in Women's Participation

Women's political engagement is mostly determined by cultural and socioeconomic constraints such as violence, prejudice, and illiteracy.

8.1. Sexual assault is a serious problem

The danger of violence, according to Martha Nussbaum, is a substantial obstacle to women's capacity to participate in politics. In India, issues like education and marriage aggravate sexual assault. Women are sexually molested on a regular basis. Indian women's economic possibilities have been harmed by child marriage, domestic abuse, and poor literacy rates, which have all led to sexual assault. "24% of Indian males have perpetrated sexual violence at some time in their life, 20% have forced their partners to have sex with them...38% of men confessing they had physically assaulted their relationships," according to a 2011 survey. The fact that domestic abuse is not illegal and sexual violence is usually unpunished is blamed for widespread sexual violence. "Violence and the fear of violence impairs many women's ability to engage actively in various types of social and political connection, to speak in public, to be acknowledged as dignified people whose value is equal to that of others," writes Martha C. Nussbaum [50].

8.2. Discrimination

Despite the fact that the Indian Constitution abolished caste and gender inequality, discrimination against women continues to be a major obstacle to their political involvement. The hurdles to participation, particularly in vying for political office, were discovered in a 2012 survey of 3,000 Indian women, illiteracy, domestic work constraints, and discriminatory views regarding women as leaders. Discriminatory attitudes are reflected in the barriers that Indian women face, such as limited access to information and services. Women rely on information from male family members or community members. Women also lack leadership experience as a result of their domestic responsibilities. Many Indian women do not engage because of the load of home responsibilities. Women, unlike males, have less opportunity to participate in groups and acquire leadership abilities. Men have controlled India's political arena for many years, therefore they have limited public space [51].

Discrimination is exacerbated by social class. In India, Dalit women from the lowest caste face persistent discrimination while standing for public office. The Indian government mandates that seats be reserved for Dalits and Scheduled Castes, yet women who serve as elected officials face harassment and prejudice. Dalit women are harassed by being refused information, disregarded or silenced in meetings, and in certain circumstances, having their elected positions petitioned to be removed [52].

9. Literacy

India has the world's biggest illiterate population. The United Nations claimed in January 2014 that 25.6 percent of all adults in India are illiterate. The literacy rate among Indian women is 65.46 percent, which is much lower than the literacy rate among males, which is 82.14 percent. Women's capacity to comprehend the political system and concerns is hampered by illiteracy. Problems with exploitation have been observed, such as women being kept off voter lists, because illiteracy hinders women's capacity to exercise their

political rights [53]. "Because literacy is related in general with the ability to travel beyond the house and to stand on one's outside of it," Martial said of political involvement, it also has to do with women's capacity to meet and work with other women." Women, according to Niraja Jayal and Nirmala Buch's research, are "If they are uneducated, they are constantly ridiculed and degraded in the panchayats. Nussbaum also discovered that literacy may help women gain dignity and independence in politics by providing them with access to communications such as memoranda and newspapers, which can help them become more knowledgeable about political problems. [54].

10. Overcoming Participation Barriers

Women's groups have concentrated on the empowerment of Indian women to overcome challenges of discrimination and violence. Family support and increased status within the home are linked to empowerment, which is harmed by the fear of domestic and sexual violence. Poverty and illiteracy are two socioeconomic factors that prohibit women from running for public office or even voting. The inability to comprehend Panchayat Raj laws erodes one's faith in their capacity to hold public office [55]. Indian women can be empowered by "bridging gaps in education, renegotiating gender roles, gender division of labour, and addressing biased attitudes," according to the report. Women can also be empowered to participate by their families, and when they have family support, they are more likely to run for office [56].

The Indian government has tackled women's empowerment by combining all initiatives for women under the National Mission for Women's Empowerment (NMEW). "Enhance economic empowerment of girls and women via skill development, microcredit, vocational training, and entrepreneurship," according to NMEW's purpose. The National Policy for Women's Empowerment was enacted by the Indian government in 2001. The policy emphasises "women's growth, development, and empowerment." The strategy focuses on reducing gender inequity and violence against women in particular. The United Nations has also aided Indian women's empowerment by fighting to eradicate violence against women in the country [57].

11. Conclusion

When it comes to women in politics, the sexism they experience in their everyday lives is magnified. They are criticized nationally in public, and public opinion is far more critical to their professional success. Femininity must be demonstrated to a far higher degree, and these women are subjected to a much broader range of criticism [58]. Because many conventional notions of femininity conflict with the characteristics of successful politicians, female politicians find themselves at a fork in the road. Female candidates confront politicized motherhood, which causes people to choose solid and logical politicians over moms, who are typically perceived as soft and emotional, who may ignore their children to achieve their political goals. These attitudes, which are still prevalent in American society, placed both moms and childless female politicians in a political dilemma[59] [60]. Women of color are represented in different class-specific representations that perpetuate negative stereotypes and prejudice, eventually delegitimizing their political activity. The media portrays women politicians as inherently

unsuited to occupy government, from accusing them of identity politics to commodifying images of hypersexualization.

Furthermore, in the twenty-first century, a new type of "welfare queen" has developed, one that specifically targets women Socialist Democrats [61][62]. According to the findings, women play a vital role in campaigning and organizing their political parties. The initiative may be used to push for women to be included in decision-making roles in these organizations [63]. The degree of development of a nation is one of the critical features of society that corresponds with women's representation levels. Liberia's government adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone, regardless of gender, colour, nationality, religion, or belief, has the right to participate in their country's governance [64][65]. Women make up more than half of Liberia's population, and their equal access to political decision-making positions and involvement is a source of pride for the country [66][67].

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