

Women's Political Participation in India: Barriers and Remedies

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Abstract

One of the factors that impacts any country's progress is how women are treated in its society. The female population of the world makes up 50% of the total, same is the case in India. Women have long endured hardship in the Indian culture that is largely male dominant. We must develop the social, economic, psychological, and political strength of our nation's women. The engagement of women in politics is one of the main issues they face today. Not all women in society are granted the same rights to select the candidate of their choice, to run for office, to participate in election campaigns, or even to be affiliated with political organizations.

This research paper attempts to take into account a number of different factors, including historical and the latest developments in regards to political participation of women in India. It also examines the obstacles women face in achieving political parity with males. The researcher has chosen a doctrinal research approach, drawing on a variety of laws, papers, publications, and literature. According to the study's findings, Indian women although have some opportunities to hold offices or further their political participation, they still face obstacles like illiteracy representation by proxy, and pseudo decision making powers.

Key words: *patriarchy, laws for political participation, equality, women in politics, women empowerment*

Introduction

"We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back" - Malala Yousafzai

Government is the focus of politics, which also incorporates representation, policy, authority, and status. Political involvement is the term used to describe people's involvement in politics. It guarantees that people can participate in determining the society's common goals and the most effective means of accomplishing them. Engaging in politics entails more than simply exercising one's right to vote; it also entails sharing in decision- and policy-making at all stages of state administration. (Singh, 2020)

An important indicator of how developed a democracy is in any given nation is the engagement of women and their role in the electoral process. Women in the Indian subcontinent continue to be underrepresented in legislatures, both at the national and state levels, despite a number of provisions in the constitution. The fact that less than 20% of women serve in legislative bodies at the national level and in the majority of Indian states reflects a widespread exclusion of women from electoral participation and effective representation. (Deysarkar,2015).However, despite the fact that India is seen as a nation that values equality, politicians and lawmakers sometimes still adhere to old-fashioned patriarchal and male-dominated norms when it comes to controlling the populace and passing laws for the general welfare. This is a challenge when it comes to coming up with effective answers and also raises the question of what is more important: maintaining a long-standing practise or changing things up and attempting strategies that will bring about equality in society. Returning to the source will help with this.(Lee, 2018)

Literature Review

Chaudhary (2018) has opined for women's interests to be taken into account in governance, women must participate in decision-making. Women's concerns and opinions on social and political problems differ from men's, thus it's critical for governments to include women in decision-making processes in order to account for all societal positions.

Krook (2019)concludes that the presence of women in local government helps to dispel misconceptions about how women should behave in public and encourages other women to pursue a variety of careers. People began to have more faith in women's abilities to serve as effective local government representatives

Chakrabarty (2021), concluded the society recognizes the women's sincerity, dedication, and resistance to the criminalization of politics.To determine the need for policy intervention to increase women's political involvement, measurement of that participation is critical. Since its independence, India has recognized the importance of keeping track of gender statistics on political involvement. At the local level, the process of capturing women's participation is a developing field, and work is being done to enhance the current infrastructure.

Oberhauser (2021) has inferred that inability to understand Panchayat Raj norms impairs confidence in running for public office. Indian women can also be empowered through “bridging educational inequalities, renegotiating gender norms, gender division of labour, and tackling discriminatory attitudes.” Family may also empower women to engage, and when they have familial backing, they are more inclined to enter politics.

According to Radhakrishnan (2022), women's organisations have concentrated on the empowerment of Indian women in order to address challenges of discrimination and abuse. The fear of domestic and sexual violence undermines empowerment since it is linked to family support and increased position within the household. Poverty and illiteracy are two socioeconomic factors that restrict women from running for public office or even voting.

Based on the abovementioned submissions, the following objectives can be deduced:

- To discuss the current trends in regards to women’s participation in Indian Politics
- To explore the obstacles and barriers faced by Indian women in their participation in the Indian politics.

The hypothesis for the study are as follows:

H1 : There is a significant depravity in the current involvement of women in Indian Politics

H2 : The Indian women face significant barriers in their participation in Indian politics

Material and method

A doctrinal research methodology was used by the researcher for this investigation. National law, judicial rulings, and other primary data sources were examined in addition to data from secondary sources. Historical methods of inquiry are also employed to understand the origins and development of the women participation in Indian politics

Results and discussions

Historical context for women's participation in Indian politics

After India earned its independence, women's standing regained momentum and has been improving ever since. In India after independence, women have taken part in nearly all economic pursuits, daily domestic tasks, voting for improved governance, and active politics. (Sedai, Nepal & Jamas, 2020).

Facets of Women participation in Indian independence and changes in legislation

Women bravely underwent many forms of exploitation, torture, and misery to secure our freedom during the freedom movement. For their passion and unwavering devotion to serving India, several outstanding Indian women did not shy away from standing alongside freedom fighters in India. Indian women that embraced the national movement came from educated, liberal backgrounds at first. Gandhi saw that if all social groups are not fairly represented, full freedom cannot be attained. Authorities tried to implement reservations for women in order to improve the participation of women in active politics, but they were only partially effective due to the opposition of certain of the regional parties. (Pandey, 2016)

Sarojini Naidu, opposed reservations for women on the grounds that they are not weak, timid, or meek. She asserted that the demand for giving women preferential treatment is an acknowledgment of her own inferiority and that there has never been a need for it in India because women have always stood by the sides of men. With voices calling for reservation for women in with at least one-third of the seats, the issue of women's reservation once more gained attention in 1973. Eventually, through the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments of 1993, statutory women's panchayats at the village level were recommended. (Mahendravada, 2018)

The Present Situation

In accordance with the first objective of the study, it is inferred that women now hold important positions in politics and administration, including those of governor, chief minister, and minister in the cabinet and state governments, as well as those of presiding officials of legislature, judges of the Supreme Court and high courts, and officials to the Indian Government. (Chary, 2012)

Political participation of women in India is three faceted

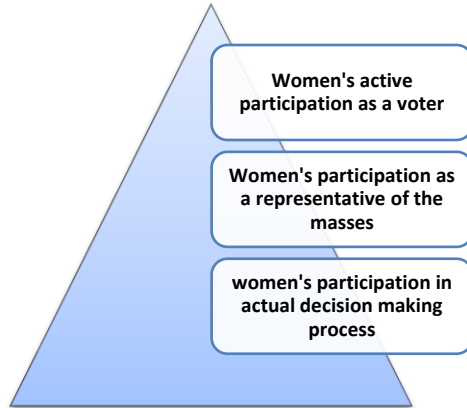
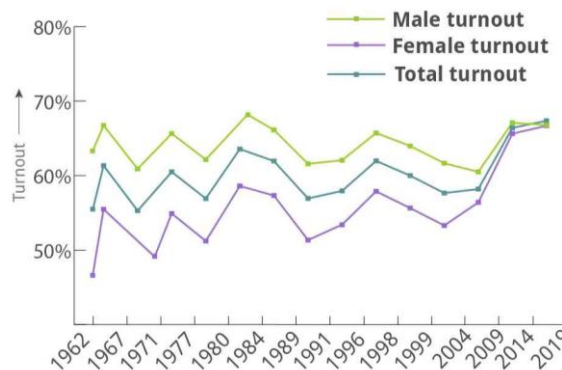


Fig 1.1 Three facets of women participation in Politics
Source: Election Commission of India

The Election Commission of India has data on first two facets of women’s political participation while the last one is still open for speculation.

Electoral Statistics in women voter turnout in India

The expanding influence of women voters and the steadily rising electoral participation of women in India have been two of the democracy's most encouraging recent trends. The turnout of women had increased by 20.55 percent by 2019. Men's participation only slightly increased, by 3.71 percentage points. The Lok Sabha elections in 2019 marked a turning point because it was the first time in the election's history that women's turnout was higher



than men's.

Fig 1.2 Gender-wise participation in General Election 1962- 2019
Source: Trivedi Centre for Political Data

In Vidhan Sabha or state Assembly elections, there has been an even higher rise in the participation of women. According to data provided by Election Commission of India, women's participation in state Assembly elections climbed by an astounding 27 % between 1962 to 2017–18. It should be noted that not all states have seen an increase in women voting. In reality, the result has been a modest reduction in women voters' turnout in some states.(Pande,2018) Fig 1.1 shows the gender-wise participation of women as compared to women along the years of 1962 to 2019.

Participation of women in Indian politics as a representative

Due in large part to the reservation made for women in the 73rd amendment to the Indian constitution, women are highly represented in local government. There have been questions over whether women are actually running for office. There have been claims that males have been in power using their women as proxies, and there are currently few reliable ways to recognise real female participation. (Jaiswal, 2018)

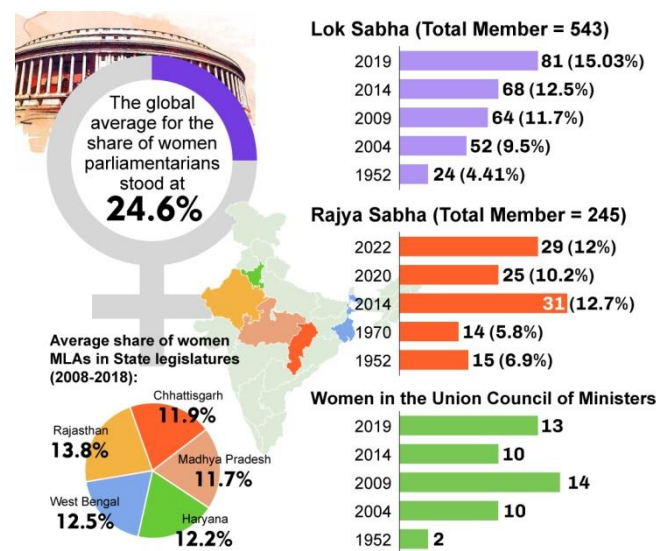


Fig 1.3 Women participation in Indian Parliament 2019

Source: Hindustan Times (2022)

At all three levels, the second characteristic of women winning elected office is also noted. India has a solid history of having women in all of the significant positions, but overall female participation in politics is not very adequate.

Challenges and Impediments to Women's Non-Participation in Indian Politics

The second objective of the study examines the challenges faced by the Indian women in political participation.

Illiteracy- It is one of the primary obstacles for women to enter politics in this nation. India has one of the highest rates of illiteracy. Women's understanding of the political system and concerns is limited by illiteracy. Many women are occasionally taken off the voter list due to illiteracy, which prevents them from exercising their political right. (Chhibber, 2018)

Participation as a Candidate by Proxy- There is evidence that some women were elected to positions of power due to reservation policies, but they merely served as the male members of their families' spokespeople. This suggests that on-roll female participation may be greater than what is actually the case on the ground. (Krishnaswami, 2020)

Stance Initiatives Measurability- The quantitative data on women's local-level political engagement is available, but the qualitative data on their active participation—including how they use the decision-making capacity that is made available to them—is not well quantified. Although the legislature has allowed for their significant presence in the current situation, most places still lack their valuable influence in the system. It is possible to make an effort to document how women perform in discussions, take the initiative to introduce legislation, and participate in other democratic processes.

Conclusion

To determine the need for policy intervention to increase women's political involvement, measurement of that participation is vital. Since its independence, India has recognised the importance of keeping track of gender demographics for participation in politics. At the local level, the process of capturing women's participation is a developing field, and work is being done to enhance the current infrastructure.

Possible steps for robust participation of women in politics

Taking appropriate steps to eradicate illiteracy-The more we educate, the more individuals will be mindful of their liberties. As we work to eliminate illiteracy, we also transform people's thinking, making them more sensible in their approach to problems encountered by diverse segments of society.

Application of technology-In India, mobile penetration is higher than that of electrical connections. The developments in digital communication may be used to document the genuine participation of women in Panchayat operations by measuring their participation and ballot share in making a judgment in the Panchayat. (Dejong, 2021)

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