

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN GENERAL ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Political participation and women empowerment have become increasingly important topics in recent times. Women empowerment refers to the process of creating a more equitable society in which women can exercise their rights, access opportunities, and have a voice in decision-making processes. Democracy requires the full participation of all citizens, including women, in political processes. Participation of women in politics is not only a basic right but also a vital aspect of democratic societies and is also essential for creating more representative and responsive governance. The link between political participation and women empowerment is undeniable; as political participation is one of the most effective ways for women to achieve empowerment. For strong and effective democratic system, the participation of women is essential. Women empowerment in India is the most effective tool for development as these days; women across the world are actively working as a leader and surpassing others in all the spheres of life. The constitutional provisions for women in India are a reflection of the nation's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. These provisions aim to protect women from discrimination, promote their wellbeing, and ensure their equal participation in all aspects of life.

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.

Keywords:- Women, Political Participation, constitutional provision, General elections, Obstacles and suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

All human beings are born free and equal in the dignity and rights and everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, gender, language, religion birth or other status.^[1] But it is most unfortunate that women have suffered inferior position of men in almost all societies of world. Same as political sphere women also face discriminations, political participations of women is very low as compared to men. The constitution of India grants equal suffrage to both men and women. There are many constitutional provision and government schemes for the empowerment of women. But due to many reasons, large numbers of mass of women are kept out of political arena. The issue of political participation of women and empowerment has gained prominence in recent years as a result of global efforts to achieve gender equality. Women have been underrepresented in political leadership positions worldwide, and their voices have been largely excluded from decision-making processes. However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of women's participation in politics as a means of achieving gender equality. Women empowerment aims to promote gender equality and create a more just and equitable society where women can thrive and contribute to their fullest potential. Political participation is a key factor in women's empowerment. Through political participation, women can influence decision-making processes, hold leaders accountable, and advocate for their rights and interests.^[2] Political

participation can also provide women with the skills, knowledge, and networks necessary to pursue leadership positions and engage in public life. Women's political participation is not only a basic right but also a vital aspect of democratic societies.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA – HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The struggle for political participation and women's empowerment in India has a long and complex history, dating back to the colonial period and continuing through the present day. During the colonial period, women's political participation was limited due to patriarchal social norms and British policies that excluded women from political decision-making. However, there were some women who were involved in political activities, such as the Indian National Congress and the Quit India Movement. Women also played an active role in the Indian independence movement, with many participating in protests and acts of civil disobedience. Leaders such as Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Nehru were prominent figures in the movement.^[3] The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, guaranteed equal rights and opportunities for women. However, women's political participation remained limited, with few women elected to parliament or state assemblies. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a resurgence of the women's movement in India, with feminist groups advocating for greater political participation and empowerment. The movement called for measures such as reservation of seats in parliament and state assemblies for women and increased representation in political parties.^[4]

In the 1990s, the Indian government introduced reservations for women in local government bodies, known as the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This was followed by reservations for women in municipal councils and other local bodies. These measures provided women with a platform for political participation and decision-making.^[5] In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the need for greater political participation and empowerment of women in India. Initiatives such as the Women's Reservation Bill and the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign have sought to address gender-based discrimination and violence against women, and promote women's rights and opportunities in political and social spheres.

CONSTITUTION PREVISIONS FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN IN INDIA

Constitutional provisions for women in India are a series of safeguards embedded within the Indian Constitution aimed at ensuring gender equality and empowering women across various facts of life. These provisions are designed to protect women against discrimination, promote their well-being and ensure their equal participation in the political, economic, and social spheres.

- 1. (Article 14) Equality before law for women :** According to Article 14, the state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.
- 2. (Article 15) Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, cast, sex or place of birth.** (Article 15 (1)) the state shall not discrimination against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, casts, sex, or place of birth or any of them. (Article 15(3)) The state makes any special provision in favour of women and children.
- 3. (Article 16) Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment:** (Article 16(1)) their shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state.
- 4. (Article 19) Freedom of Speech and Expression:** Article 19(1) (a)) states that, all citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression.

5. (Article 21) Protection of life and personal liberty: No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

6. (Article 39) Directive principles of State Policy: Article 39(a)) the state to direct its policy towards secure for men and women equally the rights to an adequate means of livelihood.

Article 39(d)) directs the state to secure equal pay for equal work for the both men and women.

(Article 39 (A)) To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic of other disabilities.

7. Article 42 of the constitution incorporates a very important provision for the benefit for women. It directs the state to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of the work and for maternity relief.

8. Article 51 (A) (e) is related to women. It states that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religion, linguistic, regional or sectional diversities: to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

9. Article 243 D: Reservation of seats.

Article 243 D (1) seats shall be reserved SC

(a) The Scheduled Casts; and

(b) The Scheduled Tribes,

(Article 243 D (3), 243 T (3) & 243 R (4) not less than one third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the scheduled casts or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes. In this way Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has brought about several constitutional provisions for establishing social equality. The constitution not only grants equality but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.^[6]

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN GENERAL ELECTIONS

India is the largest democracy in the world with a three layer governance structure: central government, state government and city/village government. The election to all these three is done by an independent body of Election Commission which is constituted separately at state and central level. At the national level, the head of government, prime minister, is elected by the members of Lok Sabha, lower house of the parliament of India. All members of Lok Sabha are directly elected through general elections which take place every five years, by universal adult suffrage. Unlike most of the other democracies of the world, India gave women voting right since the first election. But women political participation is not satisfactory. Table no.-1 shows the results of various general elections in India since 1952 to 2024 the representation of women candidates in elections.

Table no:-1

Representation of Women in Lok Sabha Elections since 1952-2024

Lok Sabha Election year	Total No. of seats(election held)	No. of women candidates who won	% of the total
1952	489	22	4.4
1957	494	27	5.4

1962	523	34	6.7
1967	521	31	5.9
1971	544	22	4.2
1977	544	19	3.4
1980	544	28	5.1
1984	529	44	8.1
1989	509	28	5.3
1991	541	36	7.0
1996	545	40	7.4
1998	543	44	8.0
1999	543	48	8.8
2004	543	45	8.1
2009	543	59	10.9
2014	543	61	11.2
2019	542	78	14.36
2024	543	74	13.6

Sources:-various reports of Election Commission [⁷]

Table no.-1 shows the political participation of women various General Elections held in india. The first Lok Sabha election in 1952 had only the 4.4 percent women members. The sixth Lok Sabha election in 1977 witnessed the smallest proportion of women in parliament at mere 3.5 percent only. It was record of sort in 2009 when 59 women were elected to the lower house of parliament. 59 women out of 543 meant the Lok Sabha represented by 11 percent of women.

In the 16th Lok Sabha election in 2014, 61 women leaders have made their way to the parliament. This is the highest number of Lok Sabha seats won by women and constitutes 11.23 percent of the total 543 parliament seats. Although the number of women MPs increased from 59 to 61 under the Modi government, it still remains far below the global average of 21.3 percent.

In 17th Lok Sabha election in 2019 total 78 women candidates participated and 78 candidates won in the general elections. Women accounted for slightly over 14 percent of the total 542 elected MPs. This marked the highest-ever representation of women in the lower house of parliament at that history.

In the 2024 General election in India a total of 74 women were elected as members of parliament. This figure accounts for approximately 13.6 percent of the total 543 seats in the lower house, marking a slight decrease from the 78 women elected in the 2019 elections.

Obstacles to Political Participation of women:

Despite the importance of women's political participation, there are several hurdles that prevent women from fully participating in political processes. One of the main barriers is cultural and social norms that limit women's roles and responsibilities. In many societies, women are expected to focus on their domestic responsibilities and are discouraged from participating in public life. Additionally, women face discrimination and harassment in political spaces, which can discourage them from participating. Economic barriers, such as poverty and lack of resources, can also limit women's ability to participate in politics.[⁸]

Suggestions to overcome the barriers to political participation of women

There are several strategies that can be used to overcome the barriers to women's political participation. Education and awareness-raising campaigns can help to inform women about their

rights, the political process, and how to engage in political activities. This can help to overcome the lack of knowledge and confidence that may prevent women from participating in politics.^[9] Legal and policy reforms can help to remove barriers to women's political participation. This can include reforms to electoral laws, such as introducing quotas for women's representation or providing financial support for women candidates, as well as reforms to laws that discriminate against women or restrict their freedom of movement or expression. Women's leadership training programs can provide women with the skills and knowledge needed to participate in politics, such as public speaking, campaign management, and negotiation skills. These programs can also help to build women's confidence and provide them with the support needed to overcome barriers to political participation.^[10]

Hence, a comprehensive approach that involves a combination of these strategies can help to overcome the barriers to women's political participation and promote greater gender equality and representation in decision-making.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, political participation and women empowerment are critical for achieving gender equality and promoting inclusive and sustainable development in any society. Women's participation in politics can help to ensure that their voices are heard and their perspectives are taken into account in decision-making processes. As more and more women become politically active and hold positions of power and influence. The constitutional provisions for women in India are a reflection of the nation's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Our nation continues to work towards creating an enabling environment for women to participate in politics and decision-making at all levels, and to address the systemic barriers that continue to hold women back. Only then can we truly achieve a world where women are empowered and able to realize their full potential.

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