



Women's Representation in India: Progress and Obstacles

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Abstract

Due to some stereotype social and periodic ideological differences, Indian women have been facing massive discrimination from various social, economic and gender perspectives. These inequalities are still being continued by Indian society at various levels. Gender inequality is one of the crucial among different types of discriminations. Women have been facing a lot of discrimination in India for decades. Many great souls have tried to bridge this gender gap through their efforts during classical and modern times. Political representation is one of the significant current attempts to bridge the gender inequalities in contemporary India and world at large. Women's political expression was considered unacceptable by politicians once, but, in the 21st century, the days have changed due to many developments. Now society cannot move further without women's involvement in the root cause issues of the community.

Politics is one of the prime factors in these issues. Now many powerful institutions and organizations have been encouraging women in politics actively. There is no doubt that the international women's movements have shown an immersive effect on these developments. As a result, women's representation gradually increased across political institutions. Women's representation in the Indian parliament is a fundamental metric to bridge the gender inequalities in the country. India has the most significant female population, 662.9, in the most resilient parliamentary democracy in the world. It compares women's representation level and their share in the lower levels. It argues for the institutional transformation of women in political activities. This paper opens the imperative of gender equality and political representation in national and international legislatures and constitutional and legal obligations at various levels to achieve gender equality by underlining. After that, this paper discusses the patterns of women's representation and compensation for their share in seats in state legislatures and self-governments since independence.

Key Words:

Women, Representation, Parliament, turnouts, Gender, Marginalization.

Introduction:

Democracy gives an equal opportunity for representation to every sect of people in the country. An excellent picture of women is the prime quality of a genuinely representative democracy. Representative government has increased rapidly worldwide, but unfortunately, women's representation is still at a low level. This is the pure symbol of women's inequality and partiality worldwide-this gender discrimination takes place considerably in third-world countries. According to United Nations analysis, 30 women served as nation heads and crucial areas out of 193 United Nations member countries. This representation is deficient and does not reflect any civilization and modernity in the 21st century. Many prolonged efforts have always been taking place to promise women's empowerment and gender equality.

Empowering women is very crucial to bridge gender inequalities. Legislative representation and participation in law-making are fundamental elements of gender equality. Legislature plays a very prominent role in the rising of debates and discussions on various government themes and other programme-related government accountability issues. Women's representation in the national parliament is crucial to bridging gender inequality in parliamentary politics. India has 662.9 million women population.

The global average female representation is only 26.2 per cent in the national parliament as of May 2022. As for the United Nations report, this is a meager rate of women's representation. America, Europe and Sub-Saharan African nations remained above the average of women representation. Asia, along with India, the Pacific region, and the Middle East nations, remained a low representation of women. There is a lot of variation within the Asian countries, especially South-Asian nations enrolled significantly worse than the rest of the region: Nepal 34 per cent, Bangladesh 21 per cent, Bhutan 17 per cent and Pakistan 20 per cent. Indian women's representation remained 15 per cent in the Lok Sabha (the lower house). This low level of expression indicates women's political conditions in India. Afghanistan enrolled 27 per cent of women representation which is better than India. With 26.4 per cent of the lower chamber and Unicameral and 25.6 per cent of Upper chamber representation, 26.2 per cent of women's representation remained very low.

Table 1**Women's Representation in Parliament by Geographical Region**

Region	Parliamentary representation of women in percentage)
Americas	34.6
Sub- Saharan Africa	26.0
Middle East and North Africa	16.8
Europe	31.1
Asia	20.9
Pacific	20.9

Source: Global Data on National Parliament (as of May 2022)

Gender Inequality in politics:

A woman has been facing tremendous discrimination on various grounds in society. This discrimination caused a lot of gender inequality in the case of politics also. Proportionate political representation among the country's population is a fundamental ethos of modern constitutional democracy. Even though there is 49.58 women population around the world, which means one-half of the world, women's political initiation remains low. Women have historically been politically marginalized in both developing and developed nations. As of 2022, there are only 30 women heads of government worldwide. This is the highest percentage of gender inequality. According to a **United Nations** report, "**Highest power will not be reached to women for another 130 years**". Only 21 per cent of women ministers in all the world executive positions, and only 14 countries achieved 50 per cent of women in the cabinets. This rate is increasing by 0.52 per cent annually. "**Gender equality in ministers positions all the world parliaments' will not be achieved before 2077**" (UNO, 2022). Overall percentage of women parliamentarians in the world is 26%.. It is 11 per cent of up from 1995. Family, Church, Youth, elderly, disabled, social affairs, and environment are women's five most common portfolios. Since the 19th-century social movements are successes in various reforms. Women's reforms made women's condition little good. Several Institutions and organizations supported women's rights and fought against gender discrimination.

The United Nations charter supported (UNO, started in 1945) women's equal rights. A feminist movement taken voice during the 1960 and 1970s. The convention on eliminating all forms of discrimination was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. This convention is also known as the International Bill of Rights for Women. Article 1, in this convention (CEDAW), upholds women's right to hold political and public office. In 2000, UN member Nations adopted eight-millennium development goals in the name of the Millennium Declaration. Promoting gender equality was the one goal among those 15 convention goals. United Nations extended the Minimum development goals from 15 to 17 in January 2016. According to this, the 5th goal seeks to **"achieve gender equality and empowering all women and girls", ensuring "Women's full participation in the political sphere and equal opportunities for all levels of leadership and decision-making in economic, political and public life"**. After these reforms, the gaps in gender equality have been decreasing gradually.

Women in Indian Politics: A Historical Analysis:

Women had to endure discrimination in India at different periods of Indian history. India has a history of marginalization and exploitation of women based on the patriarchal structure of society and mindsets. Since the 19th century, women have been pushing towards well-being and empowerment due to social reformation movements. Women have taken a unique role in the national movement since 1905. After independence Indian constitution has given equal status to women and men in social, economic and political spheres. Part 3 of the Indian Constitution guaranteed fundamental rights to both men and women. Directive Principles of state policy provide economic empowerment to women by providing equal pay for both men and women. Any citizen who completed over 25 years can contest in elections for the Lok Sabha (lower house) and 30 for the Rajya Shaba (Upper House). Political equality and the right to vote are provided by articles 325 and 326 of the Constitution.

Indian Constitution provides some provisions that offer reservations for certain sections of the nation. For example, Schedule Tribes and Schedule Castes are the beneficiaries of reservation system. Women also got some particular quotas while drafting the Constitution. But it was opposed by leading women's political organizations and Political Parties. Especially, Congress stated that **"women should be able to elect on the equal status of women"**. Later, the women population has been increasing many demands and arguments were raised for the support of women. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments of the Indian Constitution provided 1/3 of the total number of seats for women in local self-government and municipal bodies. This amendment has allowed women to make decisions at the grassroots level—the proposal of women's reservation in parliament and state assemblies is still going through various controversies and oppositions. India has taken several steps towards women's empowerment in marriage and empowerment. Supreme Court has given equal inheritance rights to Hindu families.

Progress of women's Political Representation:

Three parameters play a vital role in women's participation in politics in India, such as at national, state, and local legislative bodies. Worker-related activity, such as party workers and supports parameter considered as a fourth one.

Women as Voters:

India has given women the right to vote women as early as India gained independence. But women's participation in voting was enthusiastic in the early days of freedom. It has been increasing gradually. Primarily 2019 Lok Shaba elections enrolled the highest rate of gender equality in the nation. 2019 Lok Shaba election, women voting has given positive indication towards government empowerment programmers. Women's empowerment has been called the "**Silent Revolution of Self- Empowerment**". Women's participation has been increasing since the 1990s. There are many influential factors behind it.

First, the women's high literacy rate and massive work participation made them aware of political activities and their importance. Women's education has given them the confidence to vote. The growth of electronic media and the digital revolution is the second factor in increased women's political participation. Electronic media has provided several awareness campaigns about vote and voting rights of women, which the election commission of India and other organization sponsors. Election commissions providing institutional methods play a significant role in increasing women's representation election process. It guards against intimidation and gives separate lines for women voters near polling booths. The election commission has set up "**Pink- booths**" for women. Arranging women officials' security guards and police is one of the main reasons for increasing women's participation in the voting system. Fourth, women's involvement in local-level politics increased due to women's reservations about politics, technology and information. Above all, these factors promote women's representation in politics.

Women as candidates:

Women candidate's representation has been deficient up to the 1990s in Indian politics. From the mid-1990, this representation started growing slightly. According to many political scientists, women's reservation at the gross roots level is the main reason behind the immense women's representation. Reservation at the local level has given new hope and confidence to women about their political rights. After the 1996 general elections, the proposal of women's reservations in parliament and state assemblies came into the discussion in front of parliament. This demand showed women their future in Indian politics and their role in politics. Because of this, many women have started raising their voices for political representation. **According to Francesca, all the political parties began enrolling the highest women representation in their political parties after the 1996 general elections.** Women run two types of constituencies in India. According to economists Mudit Kapoor and Shamika Ravi, women show more willingness to contest in constituencies where a higher proportion of men are.

Secondly, Francesca's study revealed that women were willing to challenge where seats were reserved for scheduled tribes and Schedule Castes. To make women heard is the prime reason behind this contest. Increasing the presence of political parties is the second explanation. Even though women's representation grew gradually, women's representation remained low compared to men's. Of the 8,049 candidates, less than 9 per cent were women in the 2019 general elections.

Table 2:

Female Candidates in General Seats and Reserved Seats, Before and After 1996 (%)

	Before 1996	After 1996	Change
Congress Party, non-Reserved	7.7	9.5	1.8
Congress Party, SC- reserved	7.2	12.5	5.3
Congress Party, ST-reserved	9.5	14.8	5.3
BJP, non-reserved	4.8	8.6	3.8
BJP, SC- reserved	0.0	5.9	5.9
BJP, ST- reserved	4.2	6.7	2.6
Other parties, non- reserved	2.5	5.6	3.1
Other parties ,SC- reserved	2.4	6.4	4.0
Other parties, ST-reserved	2.9	7.9	5.1

Source: Francesca R Jensenius, "Competing inequalities? On the Interaction of Gender and Ethnicity in Candidate Nominations in Indian Elections", Government and Opposition, Volume 51, issue 3.

Women Representation in Parliament:

Parliament and state legislature bodies are not only law-making bodies but also accountable representative claims. These houses are the houses of different constituencies, identity groups and interest groups. Parliamentary democracies like India are prime examples of this form of government. Even though women's participation increased as voters and representatives, women remained very low compared to their male counterparts. The 2019 election was the highest one that enrolled the maximum proportion of women representatives. However, it was less than 15 per cent of the total membership.

There is a lot of variation between the women candidates and M.P. across states and parties. Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal enroll the highest number of women M.P.s in the last Lok Sabha elections. In proportion, 14 per cent of M.P.s is women in Uttar Pradesh and 26 per cent in West Bengal. Regarding political Parties, Indian National Congress fielded 54 women and 53 women from Bhatia Janata Party in the 2019 general elections. Overall, U.P, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Bihar have given more women candidates in the 2019

elections. In terms of percentage, Goa has provided the highest proportion of women candidates with 17 per cent of total candidates. The parties like BijuJanata Dal(BJD) in Odisha and TMC in West Bengal filed more women candidates.

All the above, Rajya Shaba's representation of women is slightly lower than Lok Shaba. Upper house representation has yet to cross 13 per cent, according to 2020 data. In state legislative assemblies or Vidhan, Sabhas remained below 10 per cent yet.

Table 3:
Women's Representation in the Lok Sabha(Since 1980's)

Year of Election	Number of Women Representatives	Percentage of Women Representatives (%)
1984	43	8
1989	29	6
1991	39	7
1996	40	7
1998	43	8
1999	49	9
2004	45	8
2009	59	11
2014	66	12
2019	78	14

Source: Election Commission of India

Table 4:**Women's Representation in the Rajya Sabha: (Since 1980's)**

Year of Election	Number of Women Representatives	Percentage of Women Representatives (%)
1982	24	10.1
1984	24	10.3
1986	28	11.5
1988	25	10.6
1990	24	10.3
1992	17	7.2
1994	20	8.3
1996	19	7.8
1998	19	7.7
2000	22	9
2002	25	10.2
2010	27	11
2020	25	10.2

Source: Election Commission of India

Women as Political Workers:

Centre for developing societies revealed surprising facts about women's participation in political activities. According to CSDS, women's participation in political movements, such as joining election rallies, conducting door campaigns, distributing election pamphlets and collecting election funds, has gradually increased over the last three decades. However, this participation remained low yet. Lack of education, being active in public life, and political awareness of women are the main reasons for low activation. Various institutional and structural challenges also influence women's activities in political issues.

Women Participation in Local Politics:

India is implementing the third tier of government at the local level in the form of municipalities and PRIs in rural areas. The 73 and 74 amendments (1992) have improved local-level representation in some remarkable ways. It provides new opportunities at the local level, planning and maintaining social and economic

programmes. One of the essential aspects of this amendment is women's one-third of political reservation in local bodies. According to studies, this policy raised women's participation immersive way at the local level.

The "**Proxy Representation**" challenge also impacts women's representation in Indian politics. Due to proxy representation, women's political activities are losing their effectiveness—family members of the women controlling women's political movement. Government organizations and many No- governmental organizations are working towards promoting women's leadership in politics.

Inaccessibility of Institutions:

parties are the vehicles of the parliamentary and state legislatures in India. Due to this, political parties' independent candidates are unable to fight and win and they remained weak. Election tickets and contests in a particular constituency are essential tasks in parliamentary politics. Political parties are pledging to promote adequate representation for women. But, in practice, it remained deficient level. Women's representation is uneven in some political parties, but it stays better in some places. Political Scientist **Kanchan Chandra** stated that "**women get tickets in politics either they have family political connections or dynamic politicians**". Regular routes of accessibility are minimal. According to analysis, 40 per cent of all women candidates in the 2019 elections belong to dynasty politics. And a fascinating fact is that women candidates win in less percentage than men. This is one reason to get men more seats in elections. According to analysis, women have less chance to win over men in the polls.

Based on this analysis, we know two crucial things about women's participation in electoral politics in India. Even though India has a solid patriarchal norm, women's representation is growing gradually, and at the same time, women's financial independence is also being stabilized.

Secondly, women's representation in the parliamentary and state legislatures remained low, but the local level of political activity has improved due to women's reservation. Political parties remained inaccessible for women to contest in elections after 75 years of Indian independence.

Two crucial reforms are needed to bridge this gap. **First**, the Indian constitution should be amended so that every political party should give one-third of the total number of seats to women in every election. The Representation of People Act should be amended to enable this strategy. Political conscience would make this accurate in the future upcoming challenge in this way. Political conscience could sort out structural challenges. Decreasing the highly centralized nature of ticket distribution and promoting inclusive politics are the solutions for women's political representation. The women's reservation Bill 2008, which made one-third of women's seats compulsory in every election, will have to be revived. This bill is still pending in the Lok Sabha due to strong opposition from some parties.

Conclusion:

Women's political participation in Indian politics is prolonged and low. One thing is evident no one can call any democracy can be authentic unless women's voices are heard. India should make the reforms in such a way that women should take an equal part in political activities as workers and active members. Educational opportunities, financial stability, the relative erosion of social opportunities, and media awareness can create a suitable environment for women engaged in politics. Women's organizations and networks should lead in promoting women's empowerment in politics. Women's political mobilization can be ramped up the reforms in Indian politics towards women's political representation at parliamentary and state legislature levels. More women should work on the policy-making platforms to discourse on policy-making.

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