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Women's Participation in Indian Politics: A Comprehensive Study

Dr. Kamaljit Kaur

Assistant Professor, Dayanand Mahila Mahavidyala, Kurukshetra, Kamaljit201985@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Women have a major role in politics. The number of female candidates in each election cannot fully capture the essence of any political system without their conversation. It is a significant sign of how well a real democracy is operating in any nation. In India, women's overall political participation is a divisive topic with widely differing opinions. For women to effectively participate in enhancing the institutional framework of democracy, gender equality is necessary. Women's participation in absolute numbers, is low in India. The basic motives for the low participation of women in the political parties as well as in the political process as a whole can be found in the patriarchal and feudalistic social structure of the country.

Introduction

Politics has been defined in various ways, but there is a common thread running through them: it is inevitable in any society. It is about representation policy, position, and power within the government in this area. According to Laswell, the political process is the shaping, sharing, and exercise of power. Feminist scholars have been very concerned about what constitutes politics so that it is basically a made activity. They have challenged the dominant hypothesis that politics is confined to the public sphere. Feminists also argue for a definition of politics.

Historical Perspective

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Women have always been an essential and indispensable part of society regardless of its structure. They hardly ever receive what is rightfully theirs. In historical India, women were revered as mothers, representing life, strength and purity with a great capacity for suffering, patience and sacrifice. They were revered and enjoyed equality within the family and in society throughout the Rig-Veda era. Duet a daughter's undesirable talent the status somewhat declined in the later Vedic period. In general, women were thought to be pure and they were excluded from extremely hygienic and spiritual roles.

Women's political participation in India remains significantly lower than men's, both as voters and as candidates (Rai 2017). Studies indicate that even women from politically active families often refrain from engaging in the active political process. Factors such as the increasing cost of elections, fear of violence and character defamation discourage women from entering politics (Crook 2010). Research also highlights that prior political experience makes many women dependent on established politicians resulting in their marginalization or exploitation within political systems (Chhibber 2002). According to a study conducted, women's participation as both voters and candidates is particularly low among marginalized groups, including Muslim tribal communities and those living in rural areas. Additionally, literature suggests that broader socio-economic issues such as unemployment, poverty, patriarchy, rising prices, corruption, and illiteracy directly impact women's political participation.

Research Objectives

- To assess the participation of women in the politics of India.
- To analyze present and past scenario till 2024.
- To identify key challenges.
- To depth study constitutional and legal provisions.
- To suggest improvements in women participation in politics.

Research Questions

1. From the early post-independence era to the present, how has women's political participation changed in India?
2. What disparities exist in the political representation of women in India at the federal, state, and municipal levels of government?

3. Much have reservation laws and constitutional requirements helped women in India become more represented and involved in politics?
4. What institutional and legislative initiatives can support women's meaningful and long-term involvement in Indian politics?
5. What significant obstacles still prevent women from entering, leading, and effectively participating in Indian political institutions?
6. What disparities exist in women's political representation in India at the federal, state, and municipal levels of government?

Scope of Study

The study focuses on women's participation in Indian politics. It primarily examines women's representation in political institutions, such as the Lok Sabha, the Raj Sabha, and the Panchayati Raj. The study relies mainly on secondary data collected from government reports, census data and publications by national and international organizations. The study also examines constitutional provisions, policies, and socio-economic factors influencing participation.

Research Methodology

The data used in this study has been collected from secondary sources, including the report of the Election Commission of India. This study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A multifaceted approach has been adopted for the study.

This study used birth quantitative and qualitative research methods. A multi-faceted approach has been adopted to study. Women's participation which involves in depth analysis of elections.

Women's voting rates were 71% in 2024 compared to 65.1% in 2014.

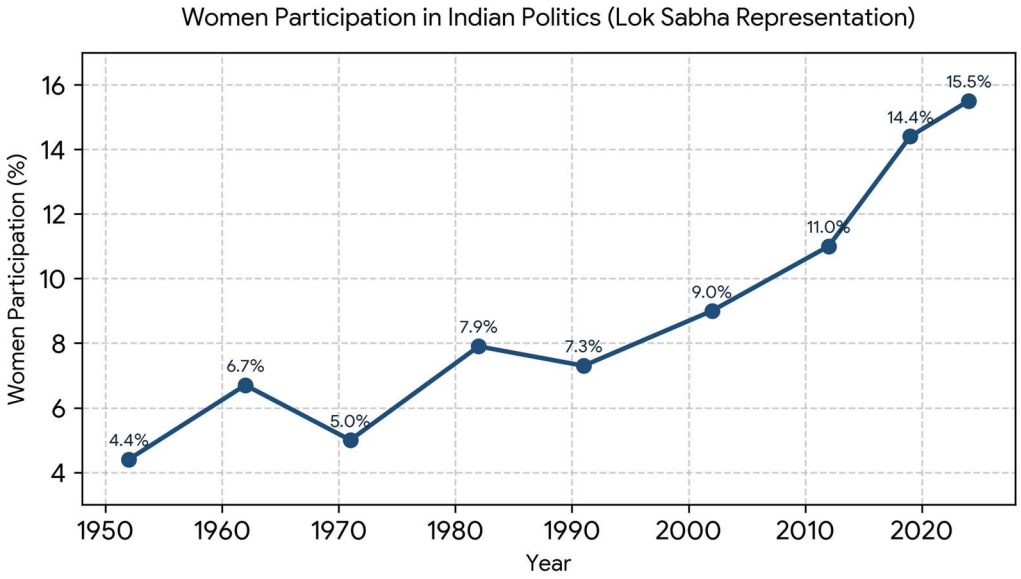

Figure 1: Women's Participation in Indian Politics (Lok Sabha Representation Till 2025)

Constitution and Legal Provisions

- 1/3 of the seats are reserved for women.
- In scheduled caste and scheduled tribes seats, not less than 1/3 of the total number of such seats to be reserved for women.
- According to the 73rd Amendment, thirty-three percent of seats in Panchayati bodies are reserved for women.
- Women take advantage of general features for direct election for membership and sarpanch at local as well as block l

State-wise Data Analysis of Women Candidates

Women's participation in Indian states varies greatly, according to the state-by-state research. While some states continue to have extremely low rates of female political engagement, other governments have consistently made progress in electing and nominating female legislators. States like West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Punjab have seen considerably more female participation in electoral politics, especially at the local government level.

The comparative analysis also indicates that a higher number of woman candidates does not necessarily translate into a higher number of elected representatives. Electoral success depends on multiple factors,

including political party support, constituency characteristics, campaign resources, educational background, and voter behaviour.

State	Women MLAs Elected	Total Assembly Seats	% Women's MLAs
West Bengal	41	294	13.9%
Bihar	28	243	11.05%
Uttar Pradesh	47	403	11.07%
Rajasthan	25	200	12.05%
Odisha	16	147	10.09%
Gujarat	15	182	8.02%
Haryana	13	90	14.44%
Punjab	13	117	11.11%

All things considered, the state-by-state analysis reveals enduring regional differences in women's political engagement throughout India. These results imply that although constitutional provisions have made it possible for women to participate in politics, there are still significant disparities between states in terms of candidate selection, electoral success, and leadership prospects. Reducing these differences and fostering more equitable political representation across the nation can be achieved through strengthening political party commitment, leadership development, financial support systems, and gender-inclusive election changes.

Finding / Discussion

Women's participation in the democratic process in India has increased over time, especially in the 18th Lok Sabha elections (2024). In 2024, the women's voting rate was 71.5%. In 2014, it was 65.1%.

In the 90-member Haryana assembly elections, 13 women were elected in the 2019 assembly elections, 8 women candidates were elected, five women MLAs elected to the state assembly from the BJP, and seven are from the Congress. Savitri Jindal elected from Hisar assembly seat. Jindal is the mother of industrialist Naveen Jindal, the BJP MP from Kurukshetra.

The comparative analysis indicates that women's participation in Indian politics has expanded considerably since independence; however, the nature and extent of this participation remain uneven across different political institutions. The findings suggest that the progress of women's political representation has been influenced by constitutional provisions, electoral reforms, reservation policies, changing educational opportunities, and the gradual transformation of social attitudes.

- The study observes a distinction between descriptive and substantive representation.
- The study finds a gradual expansion of women's political representation.
- A significant difference exists between representation at the local and higher levels of politics.
- The study identifies reservation as an important women's numerical representation.
- Socio-economic and cultural factors continue to influence women's political participation.
- Political parties remain an important factor in determining women's opportunities in electoral politics.

Conclusion

Women's involvement in politics is essential in any democracy. Although there has been significant progress, women, who structure almost half of the world's population, have long been denied equal participation across social, economic, and political spheres. In most countries, including India, there is a pervasive gender imbalance, and women's status in society is not what it should be. When compared to other nations, India presents a depressing picture. In the list of 193 countries, India occupies a distant 149th rank with only 11.6% women in parliament.

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