



GENDER AND POLITICS: THROUGH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

In general, "political participation" refers to the actions citizens take to influence or support governments and politics. Political involvement refers to citizens' actions that seek to support or influence government and politics. Women's participation in the political process is seen as a means of empowerment. Despite the fact that nearly half of the Indian population is female, political participation by women is significantly lower than that of men. This paper will discuss women's political participation in India and also talk about how it helps to empower women. Basically, empowering women means making them aware of their rights, educating them, and giving them, socio-economic, and political tools. It has been found that their low political participation is mostly due to a lack of good leadership and a lack of political knowledge. This paper will attempt to address the question of how women are participating in Indian politics and what role the government plays in women's empowerment. It will attempt to highlight the major factors preventing women from participating in politics. This study will explore the role of different political parties in the empowerment of women, especially in the political sphere. It is seen that political parties use women as a vote bank without addressing their demands and aspirations. This paper is an attempt to understand women's political participation in India and how it plays an important role in women's empowerment. The paper's methodology will be descriptive and analytical. The idea of women's empowerment and political participation is important because it is an emerging concept in current research.

Keyword: Women, Political Participation, India, Political Parties.

Introduction

As a measure of democracy's progress, women's participation in the voting process is a reliable indicator.' For women's interests to be reflected in governance, women must be involved in the decision-making process. Political participation derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government. Women's Political participation can be defined as those actions of women by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics. Women in India lack the critical mass needed to introduce gender perspectives in political decision-making processes at highest levels and to promote gender-friendly legislation. Despite this clear-cut constitutional mandate for providing equality to women in the public domain, including electoral politics, prejudice and discrimination against women in India continue even after 70 years of independence. In India, affirmative action for women and disadvantaged groups has been enshrined into the constitution. India's

Constitution (the 73rd Amendment Act), which was enacted in 1992, mandates that at least one-third of the seats in all of the country's locally elected governance bodies known as Panchayati Raj Institutions be reserved for women. This study will show that what kind of women's participation in Indian politics. This will also show the government policies and the role of political parties for the empowerment of women in political field. The important thing here is that there are many Head of the State and Head of the Government in South Asian States are women. Even the first women Prime Minister in the world was from South Asia, Sri Lanka.

Women's Political Participation in India

India is the world's largest democratic country. In the political arena, there were many women. There was a 65.63 percent female turnout in India's 2014 general elections, while the male turnout was 67.09%. Since independence time women's participation in political and social life becomes increasing day by day. "The Constitution of India establishes a parliamentary system of government, and guarantees its citizens the right to be elected, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and

form associations, and vote. After Indian independence from Britain, the Indian Constitution in 1950 officially granted women and men suffrage. Prior to universal suffrage, provincial legislatures had granted women the right to vote. This is enshrined in Article 326 in Indian constitution. India is a parliamentary system with two houses: Lok Sabha (Lower House) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House). Rates of participation among women in 1962 were 46.63% for Lok Sabha elections and rose to a high in 1984 of 58.60%. Male turnout during that same period was 63.31% in 1962 and 68.18% in 1984. State elections have seen a growing trend in women's participation, and in some cases

women's turnout is exceeding male turnout”(Alam,2015). India has a multi-party system with the 24 registered parties at the national level. “The three largest parties in India are the Indian National Congress (INC), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Communist Party of India (CPI). Political parties have increased outreach among women voters as India's party system has become more competitive. This has included the creation of women's wings in the largest parties.” The BJP's women wing is the BJP Mahila Morcha, the INC's wing is All India Mahila Congress, and the CPI's women wing is the National Federation of Indian Women (Shukla,2000)

Women's Participation in the Lok Sabha

Year	Total seat	Women contested	Women Elected	Percentage of women
1952	499	43	22	4.41
1957	500	45	27	5.40
1962	503	70	34	6.76
1967	523	67	31	5.93
1971	521	86	22	4.22
1977	544	70	19	3.29
1980	544	142	28	5.15
1984	544	164	44	8.9
1989	517	198	27	5.22
1991	544	325	39	7.17
1996	543	599	39	7.18
1998	543	274	43	7.92
1999	543	278	49	9.02
2004	543	355	45	8.03
2009	543	556	59	10.86
2014	543	636	61	11.23
2019	542	716	78	14

Source: Election Commission of India

Women's Participation in Rajya Sabha

Year	Total seats	Number of women	Percentage of women
1952	219	16	7.3
1957	237	18	7.6
1962	238	18	7.6
1967	240	20	8.3
1971	243	17	7.0
1977	244	25	10.2
1980	244	24	9.8
1985	244	28	11.4
1990	245	38	15.5
1996	223	20	9.0
1998	223	19	8.6
2004	245	27	11.1
2009	245	22	8.97
2014	245	29	11.83
2019	245	25	10.2

Source: Election Commission of India

Government policy towards women's political participation in India:

The constitution of India is the most vital document which talks about the political equality of Indian citizen whether men or women. From the time of independence Indian government makes many policies for the empowerment of women in political field. From independent time, women are becoming a part of political life. Many policies of Indian government which specially emphasized on women's participation in political field are mention bellow-

1. "The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women" (NPEW), 2001, was initiated by the Govt. of India, which laid down a inclusive policy for the advancement, empower of women in all fields.
2. The 108th Amendment Bill related to Women's Reservation Bill which was passed by the Rajya Sabha but the Lok Sabha has not yet voted on the bill. It proposes to amend the Constitution to reserve one third seats in the Lok Sabha, and in all state's legislative assemblies for women.
3. Indian government also implemented the United Nations convention on the political rights of Women (1952), which means women are also a part of political life.
4. "The Ministry for Women & Child Development" was established as a department of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in the year 1985 to drive the all-round development of women and children in the country. In 2006 this department was given the status of a Ministry, with the powers to formulate plans, policies and programs; enacts/amends legislation, guiding and co-coordinating the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of Women and Child Development.
5. The Indian government launched "Ujjawala" a new popular Scheme in December 2007 for prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation, and re-integration of victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.
6. Articles 343(d) and 343 (T) of Indian Constitution deals with the one-third of total seats for the direct election to local bodies for women's, These rights are successfully working in Indian local level politics and women became a part of political life.

Hindrances of women's political participation in India:

There are various factors which are responsible for the hindrances of women's political participation. These are mentioned bellow:

Male Dominated System

India is predominantly male dominated society. In every field we saw that male part is in the supreme position. Even in society, polity and economy men are regarded superior than women. Women not get full facility in every field, especially in politics. But things are changing. Presently we saw that women are becoming a part of political life also.

Lack of Economic and Political Resources

In India, the significant factor that constrains women's political participation is the lack of material resources available to women. Fadia states "Indian politics is about money, power and political networks. It is almost impossible to contest any election without adequate finance and access to political know how and training. Because women are less integrated within powerful political and economic networks, it is even more difficult for them to participate in large numbers or to play an important role in political decision making. Women are economically disempowered and gender prejudices discourage them from cultivating political contacts early on in their education and careers to prepare them for political roles in the future." Some parties have a separate women's wing but rather than empowering women or expressing their solidarity these often marginalize women further. (Fadia, 2014)

Social and Cultural Norms

Societal and cultural norms imposed on women bear them from entering politics. They have to accept the dictates imposed on them and bear the burden of society. "They also bear their deprivation and undermining status thinking as a culture of the society. The society is full of prejudices and a victim of lack and poor awareness, Rai said, Lack of participation of women in community based activities is also one of the major constraints." (Rai, 2011).

Religious Orientation

Indian society is deeply religious orientated society. Religious women not wanted to participate openly in politics. Religious orientation or affiliation came up as a very strong determinant in restricting women from politics. In religious oriented society priest are dominant positions. They not wanted that women to participate politics openly.

Violence against Political Women

Violence against women is also a source of hindrances of women's political participation in India. Violence against Women who choose the political path is an increasing concern. The assassinations of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 and Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1997 are the example of violation against political women.

Role of Political parties for Women's political participation

India has a multiparty system. There are many national and regional parties. Here we only discuss the national parties and its policies for the promotion of women's political participation. Indian National Congress (INC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Communist Party of India (CPI) are predominantly national political parties. All India Mahila Congress or Mahila Congress is the women's wing of the Indian National Congress Party. It is represented by the Pradesh Mahila Congress in all the states of the Indian Union. BJP Mahila Morcha is the Women's Wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party. National Federation of Indian Women is the women wing of Communist Party of India (CPI). All political party talks about women's empowerment but in praxis there is no special facility for women's political participation. Some of the policies of national political parties for the promotion of political participation of women are briefly mention bellow-

1. The Congress-led UPA established an independent Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2006 for the empowerment and upliftment of women.
2. The Indian National Congress is committed to the enactment of the Women's Reservation Bill to reserve 33 % of all seats in the Lok Sabha, and in all State legislative assemblies for women.
3. Indian National Congress policy is to open an Academy for Political Empowerment to provide elected women representative's legal and administrative education and develop their leadership skills.
4. Bharatiya Janata Party has various policies for the empowerment of women, but not especial policy about the empowerment of women in political field.
5. Communist Party of India has also many policies for the empowerment of women, but no special policy for the political empowerment of women.

Conclusion

So from the above discussion we may say that women's participation in politics is really an important concept. India is the world largest democratic country where half of the population is women. But women's political participation is still low in compare to other European countries. Many changes are happening in India for various radical movements in the context of the empowerment of women. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen in his book, 'India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity' mentioned that Women's empowerment can positively influence the lives not only of women themselves but also of men, and of course, those of children. Indian government is also helping through the use of various policies for the empowerment of women especially in political field. In Indian local politics women's participation is higher than the national level. Political parties are providing different orientation programs and different policies for women empowerment.

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