

# Political Participation of Women in India

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## Abstract

The involvement of women in the Indian independence movement and the subsequent endowment of equal political entitlements in the Indian Constitution underscore the pivotal role of women in shaping the political landscape of India. The research design involves a thorough examination of the factors influencing women's political engagement in India, drawing on existing literature, electoral data, and statistical analyses. The study considers the impact of electoral reforms, such as reserving seats for women, as well as the role of political parties and civil society initiatives in fostering gender equality and diversity in politics. The study reveals a significant increase in women's participation in Indian politics over time, particularly in voluntary voting and their impact on economic performance as lawmakers. The findings underscore the importance of enhancing women's political participation for the creation of a more inclusive and democratic society.

**Keywords** - Women in Politics, Political Participation, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Electoral Representation.

## Introduction

In India, the subject of women's involvement in politics has always been discussed. Though the nation has made great strides in many areas, women's presence in politics has not changed. This essay seeks to give a historical account of women's involvement in Indian politics, pinpoint the barriers to their involvement, and offer recommendations for how to overcome them. The political landscape of India was significantly shaped by women's engagement in the Indian independence movement. Women were mobilized and helped fight for India's independence thanks in large part to the efforts of women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, and Kamala Nehru. Following independence, women were guaranteed equal political rights by the Indian Constitution, which included the ability to vote and run for office. Nonetheless, there are still not enough women in State and Parliamentary Assemblies.

Gender stereotypes and patriarchal views have posed a serious obstacle to women's political participation in India. Women are frequently thought of being inferior and unfit for leadership positions. The lack of resources and knowledge for women also has an impact on their political participation. Women belonging to marginalized populations, like Adivasis and Dalits, encounter several obstacles when attempting to pursue political and educational chances. For women, political violence and harassment are also serious issues. Threats to their safety, physical attacks, and verbal abuse are commonplace for female politicians. Women now hold more positions in local government organizations thanks to electoral measures such the reserve of seats for them. A third of the seats in local government organizations were set aside for women by the 1993 Panchayati Raj Act. Women's involvement in municipal politics has increased significantly because of this. By nominating more female candidates, political parties can also significantly contribute

to the advancement of diversity and gender equality. Initiatives from the civil society, including training and mentoring programs, can also assist women in gaining leadership experience and giving them the confidence to engage in politics.

Women's political participation in India is a complex phenomenon that depends on several factors. If women are to be empowered, they must develop greater self-awareness, political engagement, economic success, independence, and the ability to have meaningful discussions about topics that affect them. In India, 65.63% of women and 67.09% of males cast ballots in the legislative general elections of 2014. India ranks twenty-ninth in terms of the representation of women in parliament. Women have held the positions of president, prime minister, and chief minister in multiple Indian states. Indian voters have been electing women to numerous state legislative assemblies and the national parliament for a long time.

Indian women have been fighting for their rights since ancient times. The status of women in Indian society has seen numerous ups and downs. It is well known that women actively participated in the struggle for Indian freedom. In addition, women who served in the Indian Constituent Assembly played a significant role in the creation of our constitution. The constitution guaranteed equal political rights to all citizens, but at the time, poverty, illiteracy, and the prevailing patriarchal system were some of the main barriers that kept women out of the public eye. Women have come a long way in the political arena since independence and continue to fight for their rights, even though there is still more work to be done. Women have made consistent progress in social, political, and other spheres.

The Indian Constitution's political rights section grants everyone the right to vote at the age of eighteen. Political engagement is one such act that affects the decision-making and choice of political office holders. Political participation is impacted by voting rights. It is clear that women's representation in political institutions will not be assured, and their involvement will not serve the intended purpose until that time. The involvement rate among young women is also lower. For women's political engagement to increase, they must acquire an education and achieve economic independence.

The advancement of society and the preservation of human dignity both depend on the equality of men and women. Having complete control over one's actions is referred to as "women's empowerment." For the past 20 years, women's empowerment has been observed in India. The Indian government proclaimed 2001 to be the "Year of Women's Empowerment" to advance the idea that women and men should be treated equally as partners. Policy approaches have changed over time, moving from the idea of "welfare" in the 1970s to "development" in the 1980s and "empowerment" in the 1990s. This study concentrated on India, where democracy is thriving and the economy is expanding at an incredible rate.

Women actively participate in national politics to protect the welfare of the people and a stable political system. Developing countries cannot successfully implement their socioeconomic development plans without the active political empowerment of women. Unfortunately, women were kept out of politics and out of positions of power in many countries, particularly developing countries. Because of beliefs about women's innate physical and mental inferiority, male superiority has prevented women from taking their proper place in social, cultural, and political matters. Male supremacy and the denial of women's political rights are not unique to Indian society. This has occurred everywhere in the world. The Constitution's 73rd and 74th amendments were accepted. These modifications mandated that one-third of the seats in both rural and urban local governments, along with the chairmanship, be occupied by women of all types.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The background of women in Indian politics reflects a journey characterized by advancements, difficulties,

and continuous struggles. Even though important milestones have been reached, more needs to be done to guarantee that women are more represented and actively involved in Indian politics at all levels. The basis for comprehending the current situation of women in Indian politics and the initiatives being taken to address gender disparities in the field of governance.

**Pre-Independence Period (Ancient and Medieval India):** Women frequently played significant roles in politics and administration during this time. Some instances are the such as Rani Durgavati and Rani Padmini. But these were the exceptions, not the rule, and women's political engagement remained restricted.

**Women in the Independence Movement:** Women were given the opportunity to actively engage in politics during the early to mid-20th century fight for independence from British colonial rule. Leading lights in the freedom movement, including Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, and Kamala Nehru, promoted women's rights and increased public awareness of political issues.

**Period Following Independence (1947–present):** Following India's 1947 declaration of independence, the country enacted a democratic constitution that ensured equality for all of its citizens, regardless of according to gender. Women were given the opportunity to vote and began to engage in electoral politics. India conducted its first general election in 1952, and a number of women were chosen to serve in the Constituent Assembly.

**Reservation for Women:** Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were the local manifestation of India's reservation policies, which were implemented to address the underrepresentation of women in political office. In 1992, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were passed, requiring women to hold one-third of the seats in local bodies that are both rural and urban. **Women's Movements:** A variety of women's movements and organizations promoted gender equality and women's political empowerment during the post-independence era. Among them were the National Federation of Indian Women and the All-India Women's Conference.

**Advancements in State Politics:** Women have attained important political positions in a few Indian states. As Chief Ministers, Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal and Jayalalithaa of Tamil Nadu, for example, rose to prominence in politics. **National Leadership:** Women's representation at the national level has remained relatively low, despite the fact that India has had a few female presidents (Pratibha Patil, for example) and prime ministers (Indira Gandhi and her daughter-in-law, Sonia Gandhi, who declined the position but was a powerful political figure). **Obstacles and Gender Disparities:** In spite of progress, women in Indian politics encountered a variety of obstacles, such as violence, patriarchal views, and unequal access to opportunities and resources. There was still a gender disparity in political participation.

**Current Developments:** The necessity for increased female involvement in politics has come to light in the last few years. Women have taken on leadership positions in major political parties, and some states have experimented with raising reservation quotas.

## Representation and Participation

The representation and involvement of women in Indian politics are essential components of the larger conversation about democratic governance and gender equality. The dynamics of women's representation and involvement in Indian politics are examined in this section of the analytical study, which also highlights the opportunities, problems, and changing trends.

**Numerical Representation:** Women's representation in Indian politics is still below gender parity, despite years of progress. Despite making up nearly half of the nation's population, women are disproportionately

underrepresented in state and federal legislative bodies. The Lok Sabha (House of the People) and Rajya Sabha (Council of States), where women's participation hovers around 14–15% and 10–11%, respectively, are two places where this underrepresentation is most noticeable.

**Reservation Policies:** The implementation of reservation policies has been a major step in improving the representation of women. As was previously mentioned, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments required that one-third of the seats in urban local bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) be set aside for women. Women's involvement at the grassroots level has significantly increased because of these policies; many now serve as Sarpanches (village leaders) and in other local leadership capacities.

The significance of political parties cannot be overstated in influencing the political engagement of women. Some political parties are ahead of the curve in actively supporting women in leadership and representation roles. Election tickets remain extremely difficult for women to obtain, and party leadership roles are frequently held by men.

Nonetheless, the need for more women to hold leadership positions in political parties is becoming increasingly apparent.

**Women in State Politics:** Several Indian states have seen an increase in the number of female chief ministers. Leaders like West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee, Uttar Pradesh's Mayawati, and Rajasthan's Vasundhara Raje have shown what can happen when women hold senior executive positions. These incidents provide as illustrations of effective female state leaders.

**Advocacy and Women's Movements:** Several civil society organizations and women's movements are still fighting for gender equality in politics. These organizations encourage policy changes that support women's political participation, increase awareness, and train and assist female candidates.

**Media and Public Perception:** The public's opinion of women in politics is greatly influenced by the media. Positive media representation can dispel gender stereotypes and encourage more women to pursue careers in politics. Negative or prejudiced reporting, however, has the potential to amplify preexisting biases and deter women from taking part.

Young women are increasingly participating in politics, especially at the local level. New talent in politics can bring fresh perspectives and energy, potentially reshaping women's participation in the future.

### **Reservation Policy**

Reservation policies have significantly increased women's political participation in India. These policies aim to address women's historical underrepresentation in political leadership roles. This section of the analytical study examines reservation policies for women in Indian politics, including their impact and ongoing debates.

In 1992, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments required women to hold one-third of seats in rural Panchayati Raj bodies (e.g. Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zila Parishads) and one-third of seats in urban local bodies (e.g. Municipalities and Municipal Corporations). The amendments aimed to increase women's participation and empowerment in local governance.

Locally, the reservation policy for women in PRIs has resulted in positive outcomes. There has been a significant increase in the number of women elected as Sarpanches and members of local governing bodies. Increased representation has brought more attention to issues affecting women, children, and marginalized communities in local governance.

**Women's Empowerment:** Local reservation policies have given women access to political decision-making. It provides a platform for individuals to express their concerns, participate in development

initiatives, and challenge traditional power dynamics.

It has not been extended to state or national levels. Women's representation in state legislatures (Vidhan Sabha) and national parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) is disproportionately low. Critics argue that reservation policies limit women's political influence to local issues, preventing them from shaping larger policies and legislation.

The effectiveness of reservation policies in empowering women in politics remains a topic of debate. Some argue that reservation-based elections may result in tokenism, where women are not given real decision-making power or taken seriously by their male counterparts. Some argue that these policies are necessary to end the trend of male-dominated political leadership.

**Intersectionality and Marginalized Communities:** Reservation policies have primarily benefited women from dominant caste groups. Women in marginalized and disadvantaged communities still face significant barriers to entering politics. Addressing intersectionality, including caste, class, and religion, is crucial for promoting inclusivity in politics.

Experts and activists call for comprehensive reforms to address women's underrepresentation in politics. The goal is to increase the number of women in leadership positions and foster an environment that encourages active and meaningful participation.

Some Indian states have increased reservation quotas for women in local bodies beyond the mandatory one-third. This has increased women's participation at the grassroots level.

### **Impact of Women in Politics**

Women's impact in politics in India is multifaceted, affecting governance, policymaking, and societal transformation. This section of the analytical study explores the impact and outcomes of women's participation in Indian politics. Women in politics frequently advocate for policies that address gender-specific issues, including healthcare, education, and violence against women. Their presence in decision-making bodies can prioritize these concerns.

Women leaders often support programs that empower women economically, socially, and politically, such as financial inclusion, skill development, and political participation initiatives. Women legislators have made significant contributions to enacting legislation that protects women's rights and promotes gender equality. This includes laws concerning dowry, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. Women in politics often advocate for marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as tribal populations and the economically disadvantaged.

Women in politics challenge gender stereotypes and societal perceptions, influencing public discourse. Women leaders can motivate other women and girls to pursue leadership. Women in politics use their platforms to raise awareness about gender disparities, including pay gaps, lack of representation, and discrimination.

Women leaders in local governance prioritize improving basic services such as healthcare, sanitation, and education, resulting in a direct impact on community quality of life. Women leaders promote civic engagement, encouraging more women to participate in community decision-making.

Women in politics serve as role models for future leaders, demonstrating their ability to excel in male-dominated fields. Increasing Women's Political Aspirations: Visibility of women in leadership positions inspires more women to pursue higher positions in politics.

Women leaders often advocate for economic opportunities for women, such as entrepreneurship, credit, and income-generating programs, in order to promote social and economic development.

**Social Welfare:** Women in politics aim to improve the welfare of women, children, and families, including reducing maternal and infant mortality rates.

**Addressing violence and discrimination:**

Women in politics actively combat discrimination and violence against women, advocating for stricter laws and better enforcement.

**Raising Awareness:** They use their positions to raise awareness about gender-based violence and harassment, promoting social change.

Indian women leaders have contributed to global discussions on climate change, peacekeeping, and gender equality.

Women's political participation in India has faced numerous challenges and barriers, both historical and contemporary. This section of the analytical study examines the challenges and barriers that have hindered women's political participation and advancement.

**Patriarchal Norms and Stereotypes:**

**Traditional Gender Roles:** Deep-rooted patriarchal norms assign women to domestic roles, making it difficult for them to enter the male-dominated sphere of politics. Stereotypes regarding women's leadership and decision-making abilities continue to undermine their credibility as political leaders.

**Violence and harassment:** Women politicians face physical threats and violence, such as assault and vandalism, which can discourage them from active political participation. Women in politics often face verbal abuse, including harassment, character assassination, and derogatory comments.

Women often face financial barriers when running political campaigns, including fundraising networks, and financing. Gender disparities in education hinder women's access to information and knowledge, limiting their ability to participate in informed political discourse.

**Balancing family and politics** can be challenging for women, leading to pressure to prioritize domestic roles. **Social stigma:** Women entering politics may face backlash from their communities for challenging traditional gender roles.

Women face underrepresentation in political leadership positions, making it challenging to secure party tickets and nominations. **Limited Decision-Making Power:** Women in political parties may have limited influence over party policies and strategies.

**Electoral Violence:** Violence and intimidation can disproportionately impact female candidates in India's elections. The "winner-takes-all" electoral system may discourage women from entering politics due to their perception of a high-stakes, winner-centric environment.

**Reservation Policies and Tokenism:** Critics argue that reservation policies can lead to token representation, where women elected through reservations may not have real decision-making power or be taken seriously by their male counterparts. **Limited scope:** Reservation policies are primarily implemented at the local level, resulting in limited gender diversity in state and national politics.

**Media bias and misrepresentation** can lead to negative portrayals of female politicians, emphasizing their appearance and personal lives over their policies and capabilities. Women politicians may face less media coverage than their male counterparts, making it difficult to establish public profiles. **Intersectionality and**

**Caste-Based Discrimination:** **Caste and Class Barriers:** Women from marginalized communities face discrimination based on both gender and caste/class background, limiting their political opportunities.

**Institutional barriers** include a lack of internal democracy in some political parties, which can hinder women's advancement and influence. **Ineffective Complaint Mechanisms:** Institutions often lack effective ways to address harassment and discrimination against women in politics.

## Women's Empowerment in Politics

The obstacles and difficulties that women in Indian politics encounter must be addressed in a comprehensive manner if women are to be empowered. The analytical study's part on women's empowerment in Indian politics looks at various programmes and tactics.

**Empowerment via Education:** Promote females' education to help them become more knowledgeable, capable, and self-assured so they can participate in politics with greater knowledge and competence. Give female applicants financial assistance and resources, especially if they come from underrepresented backgrounds.

**Training and Capacity Building:** Provide courses and seminars aimed at enhancing the political acumen and leadership abilities of female politicians. **Reforming the law and promoting policies:** In order to advance women's rights and overcome gender imbalances in a variety of contexts, including politics, advocate for and adopt gender-sensitive legislation. Promote changes to election laws that will provide female candidates equal opportunities, such as equitable representation on party lists.

Think about extending reservation quotas to state and federal legislatures in addition to Panchayati Raj entities in order to boost the representation of women in politics. Implement and enforce current reservation policies in an efficient manner.

Promote internal democracy inside political parties and provide women the same opportunities to rise to positions of leadership. Expand the political party's women's wings to provide female members with networking, mentoring, and assistance.

The media should highlight female politicians' accomplishments and policies rather than their looks or personal lives in order to increase public awareness of these women in politics. **Campaigns for Public Awareness:** Encourage gender equality and women's political engagement for improved governance.

Create programmes for women's leadership development so they can get the knowledge and self-assurance needed to assume positions of political leadership. **Mentoring:** Assist female politicians throughout their political careers by matching them with knowledgeable mentors.

In order to meet the special requirements and difficulties faced by women, gender mainstreaming must be incorporated into policymaking and programmatic efforts as part of gender-responsive governance. Effective resource allocation for activities and projects that consider gender is made possible through gender budgeting. Through community mobilisation, women in politics are supported and encouraged, and the advantages of diversity representation are emphasised. Encourage women to take part in community decision-making and local governance so they can develop their political networks and acquire experience.

To enhance the formulation of policies and programmes, collect and evaluate data on women's representation in politics, political involvement, and obstacles. Undertake investigations and analyses on the influence of women in politics, emphasising their roles in social development and governance. Work together with nations and international organisations to exchange lessons learned and best practices for advancing women's political empowerment. Consider the intersectionality of gender, caste, class, and religion to guarantee inclusivity in initiatives for political empowerment.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

India's first female prime minister was Indira Gandhi. She held four terms in government and was one of the most powerful politicians in India. Her ability to lead at pivotal times, such as the Bangladesh Liberation War, has had a profound effect on Indian politics.

From 2007 to 2012, Pratibha Patil, the first female president of India, held the office. Her ascension to the most important constitutional position in India represented a noteworthy accomplishment for female politicians.

The All-India Trinamool Congress was started by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee (AITC). Her grassroots activity has earned her recognition, and her leadership has had a major impact on state politics.

Leading BJP figure Sushma Swaraj serves as India's Minister of External Affairs. She was acknowledged for her diplomatic abilities and her capacity to build relationships with people in India and abroad.

Mayawati: Mayawati is a well-known representative of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. Her advocacy for the rights of marginalised communities, particularly Dalits, has transformed the caste structure in the state.

Jayalalithaa: J. Jayalalithaa, sometimes known as "Amma," was a charismatic politician and entertainer who served as chief minister of Tamil Nadu for multiple terms. One of her leadership's defining traits was the emphasis she placed on infrastructure development and welfare programmes.

Nirmala Sitharaman: India's Finance Minister is Nirmala Sitharaman, a well-known member of the BJP. Her leadership in banking and industry is well known, and she has played a significant role in shaping India's economic policy.

Smriti Irani: A well-known member of the Bhartiya Janata Party, Smriti Irani began her career as a television actress and has served in several key ministerial capacities, including those of women and child development and textiles. It is commonly known that she is involved in politics and government.

Maneka Gandhi: A minister in multiple governments, Maneka Gandhi is a member of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Her contributions to animal welfare and environmental protection are well known.

Poonam Mahajan is a well-known young lawmaker and leader of the Bhartiya Janata Party. She has aggressively campaigned to encourage women and young people to enter politics and has effectively represented her constituency.

Nandini Satpathy: Nandini Satpathy was Odisha's first female chief minister. Her focus on social welfare and development programmes set her term apart.

### **Techniques to boost Indian women's political involvement**

Despite the country's numerous regulations promoting gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in Indian politics and policy. Women's political inclusion has garnered international attention thanks to solutions that support women's descriptive representation, or the guarantee of women's presence in political spheres.

Presence does not, however, imply voice. In politics and public policy, women's voices—their needs, interests, and demands—remain underrepresented. Insufficient representation of women's viewpoints in political institutions results in persistent and irreversible differences in the accessibility of policies and their impact on society.

This inequity is particularly apparent in India, where women are persistently underrepresented in politics even with the greatest gender quota legislation in the world. Rather than concentrating on the extent of women's political inclusion, national initiatives to reduce political gender inequities in India have mostly addressed gender parity in political institutions.

Election quotas and women's organisations, or Self-Help organisations, are two current institutions that are widely used in India to promote gender equality but are rarely thought to act in combination. It has



been demonstrated that the former greatly increases the political participation of women. SHGs are a bottom-up institution that encourages the mobilisation of women's demands, in contrast to electoral quotas, which are a top-down institution that guarantee women's representation in positions of political power.

The Inclusive Democracy and Development (ID2) Lab, in partnership with the Transform Rural India Foundation (TRIF), will evaluate the effectiveness of three current interventions that connect top-down and bottom-up institutions to spark systemic change in order to guarantee that Indian women's voices are heard in politics.

These three actions are: setting up forums exclusively for women to participate in politics as citizens representatives; developing networks of female elected officials and bureaucrats; and providing capacity-building and assistance to female elected representatives. Finally, by evaluating the combined effects of these interventions on gender equality outcomes, the study team intends to discover a scalable strategy to alter the representation of women's voices in Indian politics and policy.

In Indian legislative politics, women have taken a while to inevitably find their positions in politics inside parties. More women need to be represented on these forums in order to shift the discourse surrounding governance and policy-making and bring India one step closer to becoming a fully inclusive and representative democracy.

## Conclusion

The research on women in Indian politics shows a complicated and changing environment in which women have achieved great progress but still face many obstacles. The present analytical study has investigated diverse facets of women's involvement in Indian politics, offering valuable perspectives on their historical context, portrayal, obstacles, tactics for empowerment, and notable achievements. Women have made significant progress in breaking down barriers and achieving leadership positions at the local, state, and national levels in India's political landscape. In establishing policies, promoting gender equality, and attending to the needs of women and marginalized communities, women leaders have been instrumental.

Nonetheless, obstacles like violence, underrepresentation in political parties, restricted access to resources, and patriarchal norms persist in impeding women's advancement in politics.

The report emphasizes how critical it is to address these issues with comprehensive reforms, gender-sensitive legislation, and community-based empowerment programs. The promotion of gender equality and inclusivity through awareness campaigns, financial assistance, educational opportunities, and legal reforms should all be part of the Indian government's efforts to empower women in politics. Increasing women's leadership in political parties and extending reservation policies are also essential steps in the direction of increased representation.

The issue of women's involvement in politics in India is complex and has ramifications for gender equality, democracy, and good governance. Even with laws and constitutional provisions supporting gender equality, women are still underrepresented in political decision-making at all levels. Women are still disproportionately underrepresented in state legislatures and the national parliament, despite some significant progress, such as the establishment of reservations for women in local governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions. Women's access to politics and success in office are still hampered by structural obstacles such as entrenched political power dynamics, socioeconomic inequalities, and patriarchal norms.

There are encouraging indications of development, though. The importance of women's political participation has been brought to light by grassroots movements, civil society initiatives, and political advocacy efforts. These efforts have also pushed for policy reforms to address gender disparities in politics. A changing environment for women in Indian politics is also indicated by the ascent of female leaders in several political parties and their growing presence in public conversation. Going forward, persistent work is required to eliminate structural obstacles and establish a supportive atmosphere for women's full and equal engagement in politics. This calls for all-encompassing approaches that address the sociocultural norms and attitudes that support gender inequality in addition to institutional and legal barriers. Improving the leadership and representation of women in politics can lead to more responsive and inclusive governance, better representation of different viewpoints, and ultimately the realization of social justice and gender equality in India's democratic processes.

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