

Female Political Participation in India

Swechaa Siingh*

PhD Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, India

CEO, Janpad Panchayat, PRD, CG Government.

E-Mail id- swechasingh@gmail.com

Abstract- Female political participation in India has seen significant evolution over the decades, with various measures introduced to promote gender equality in political spheres. Since India's independence in 1947, there has been a concerted effort to enhance women's roles in governance, particularly through legislative reforms and the establishment of local self-government institutions like the Panchayati Raj. These initiatives aimed to integrate women into political decision-making processes, offering a platform for their voices and leadership. This study employs a qualitative approach, including document analysis of relevant legislative amendments and interviews with female political leaders at different levels of government, to examine the landscape of female political participation. Although progress has been made, with increased female representation in local governance, the study uncovers ongoing challenges such as societal stereotypes, limited resources, and institutional biases that continue to affect women's full political engagement. The research underscores the need for continued reforms and supportive measures to address these challenges and advance gender equality in Indian politics.

Keywords- Political engagement, leadership, women rights, India, democracy

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1. INTRODUCTION

In order to achieve sustainable social and economic development, the World Bank considers empowering women to be a must. For poor countries to make significant progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (2019), gender parity and women's empowerment must be prioritized. Consequently, achieving gender parity and empowering women in politics requires a multi-pronged approach from every country. The ability to see oneself as a decision-maker is a key component of empowerment (King & Mason, 2001). Women may take charge of their life, make plans, set deadlines, and ask for help from the government and society when they're empowered. Although it may not always emphasize the same role that matters for men, it may be shown that women's function is essential for advancement, as it is in many cultures. Because of their prominent role in decision-making and societal development, it follows that women should get more support. The term "empowerment" refers to the feeling of having one's voice heard and one's input considered while making important decisions (Naz, 2006; Karl, 1995). In order to achieve inclusion, progress, and harmony, the Beijing Declaration of 1995 stressed the need of women's empowerment and full participation based on equality in all parts of culture, including involvement in decision-making processes and authority. As a result, the United

Nations established gender equality as the fifth Millennium Development Goal to be achieved between the years 2000 and 2015. Improving women's resources, talents, and accomplishments to attain equality in influencing and exercising political power is referred to as women's political empowerment (Alexander et al., 2016). Promoting women's political empowerment helps them break down barriers, gain confidence, see themselves in a positive light, and become active participants in decision-making processes. This, in turn, allows them to track and impact development efforts. Therefore, the national government usually takes the lead in promoting women's participation in politics, either by working to change public opinion or by creating more opportunities for women to have a say in policymaking (World Bank, 2001; Oxaal 1997). As a result, helping the culturally marginalized by encouraging the decentralization of power and authority is crucial. As a result, empowering the excluded portion requires more participation in decision-making. Disparity limits women's opportunities for growth and development, which in turn limits their potential to improve. Putting aside the fact that gender disparity is a human rights violation, it is clear that women in Scandinavia are grossly underrepresented in parliaments (Randall, 1987; UN, 2019).

Female empowerment has been the subject of several studies. There is a persistent gender gap in politics, according to scholars like Kabeer (2001), Devika & Thampi (2007), KB (2005), and Menon (2009). This gap is most pronounced in terms of women's lower organizational and decision-making power. A thorough comprehension of women's empowerment in political leadership positions necessitates delving into the core concepts of gender and power. The persistence of patriarchy and female oppression is shown by power dynamics, while gender emphasizes the patriarchal social order that favors men and views women negatively. Cultural disparities between Western nations and Asian subcontinents like India make it impossible for women's empowerment to be understood globally, according to Sharma (2010), who takes a cultural approach to the topic. However, there is a lack of substantial research on the decision-making skills (and the challenges they face when trying to put policies into action) of elected women leaders within their institutional setting. "Are the women leaders effective in their political engagement in a democratic style at the panchayat level?" is the research issue that this article focuses on. This article aims to investigate women's political participation.

An examination of women's participation in Indian democracy is the aim of this article. The following activities are detailed in this article:

1. Democracies rely on women's political participation.
2. To learn what women encounter on the path to political leadership. An empirical study grounded on the philosophy of participation and democracy is necessary to ascertain the stated goal.

While the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) initiative has increased women's voice in political decision-making, this article shows that there are still challenges to be solved when it comes to women's leadership skills. In order to better understand the experiences and obstacles encountered by female leaders in local governance throughout India, this article elaborates on the results of a factual study that was based on primary data collected from interviews with 25 elected women panchayat presidents who have been serving in their positions from 2015 to the current day.

Theory for the study – Participation and Democracy

The fundamental assumption of Pateman's (1970) theory of participatory democracy is that organizations and their members are inseparable. If all people are not fully included, then having democratic institutions at the national level is insufficient for effective government. Humans' perspectives and cognitive traits towards democracy will be shaped via socialization or institutional conditioning in several domains. When a people becomes actively involved in its public policy processes, progress is complete. An intellectual component of participating in representative democracy is developing one's political acumen and

leadership strategy. Because of this, social development may be successfully aided by the representational program's durability and duration via the participatory system. Greater individual involvement between individuals and governing entities is one of the characteristics that participation fosters and encourages. There may be a lot of room for growth in the business sector if the governmental institutions were to become more democratic and increase cultural social connections. Citizens may be more actively involved in decision-making when they have total control over their lives and environments, which is one goal of government. Even if men and women have equal rights and privileges under the law, women are less likely to become involved in politics and civic life, especially when it comes to positions of leadership, because of the sex bias that favors men. The stigmatization of women as a whole was a result of this predicament, and it persists to this day in democracies. For political philosophers, this finding casts doubt on the authority of the state and has direct implications for their work. Their main concern was whether the ideal of careful consideration and justice was really implemented, or whether it was used to undermine the opinions of women in the hierarchical organization. As a philosophy obviously committed to the idea of consideration, participatory government is explained by a democratic theory. It always seemed to be at odds with the goal of improving society to encourage the involvement of the wealthy in order to increase minority representation. Therefore, the idea of a common goal is essential to participatory democratic management. In 1992, the government of India passed the Panchayati Raj Institutions Policy legislation to eradicate the innate gender gap. Female representation in the Local Self Government (LSG) is guaranteed by this legislation at 50%. This strategy has the potential to increase the number of women in positions of decision-making power inside government agencies. Sovereignty and security for its residents are enhanced via power structures by the equal social rights that are given by law to everyone. As a result, it would be possible to do away with the continuous divide between administrators and people. Rather than targeting the ruling class, contemporary ideas of participatory democracy place an emphasis on the political power of marginalized groups. "Whose responsibility is it to engage the average citizen and use the facts as they are for the purpose of developing hypotheses?" (Sartori et al., 2017). Even inside a participatory democracy, the model of legitimate interaction would not work. It was shown by Karpowitz et al. (2012) that there is a significant gender gap in authority. As previously said, nevertheless, it disappears under common rule, and women were underrepresented in positions of political power. Refining institutional procedures in response to social circumstances is one way that participatory development could reduce inequality. Political authority, according to Chant and Gutmann (2002), must be legitimated for the benefit of the governed and must be decided upon by free-willed discussion and debate. Whether in the

legislative or judicial branches, decisions must reflect our values and norms. But for institutional participation to play this legitimizing function, it must adhere to strict standards.

According to Bryld (2001), most policy theorists and practitioners in the early 1990s experienced the loss of agency and resources that came from the emphasis on modernist development. This caused them to change their tune from promoting rapid economic expansion as the only path to long-term prosperity. More women-centered advancement was the topic of discussion, which signifies a change toward more personal responsibility by putting the spotlight on the importance of each individual's role in their own development. Gaining more influence necessitates changing the way society is currently governed, particularly in relation to the role of civil society in growth. In a similar vein, the core focus of development has been the way individuals governed and participated in the internal society, and eventually, the world. Nearly one billion people call India home, making it the most populated country in the world. The religious and linguistic variety among this group is undeniable. Embracing diversity highlights the immense challenge of decentralizing democracy's expansion. India has achieved great strides globally since achieving independence, but the country's financial and cultural circumstances are still among the worst in the world. One barrier to participation, according to Palacios (2016), is the unequal allocation of labor and skills inside organizations depending on gender. The debate is not about the quota per se, but rather over whether or not it is appropriate to reserve positions for women in patriarchal societies like rural India. An important tenet of modern political theory is the notion of participatory governance, which holds that when everyone involved in a political debate gives an honest argument, the resulting political judgments will be coherent. It is possible to unfairly condemn individuals who should also be included in a feminist movement if it is not identified, as pointed out by Ferguson (2011). Political representation, according to Urbinati and Warren (2008), may provide politics with an idealizing element that goes beyond segregation and formal engagement in politics. In order to improve the quality of government, the democratic and participatory tenets stress the need of nurturing future leaders. The women who hold leadership positions in the panchayat are described in this article. In order to realize the potential of democratic and participatory leadership, it is essential to identify the challenges encountered by female leaders.

2. LITERATURE OF REVIEW

Ghosh (2023) one crucial indicator of how far India has come in its fight against gender inequality is the number of women serving in the country's parliament. As the biggest and one of the most robust parliamentary democracies on the planet, India is home to 662.9 million women. This article provides a historical assessment of the progress made in women's representation in Parliament over the last

decades, coinciding with the country's 75th anniversary of independence. It contrasts the percentage of women in lower-level legislative posts with their representation in parliament. It points out that women's voter turnout has been steadily rising, but that removing long-standing institutional barriers has made it difficult for women to participate in political politics. It contends that women may be more actively involved in electoral politics if there is a shift in institutional power and a corresponding gain in socioeconomic freedom.

Kapoor et al. (2023) this study uses data on state assembly elections in India from the first one in 1951 until 2019 to examine historical changes in women's engagement in democracy as voters, competitors, and legislators. Based on the paper's analysis of the surge in women's political engagement in these three areas, it is clear that India's democracy is thriving. Throughout India's 73 years of democracy, female voters have outpaced male voters in terms of participation. Over the last decade, there has been a steady and dramatic narrowing of the gender difference between voters and electors, and it has vanished completely. The writers draw attention to the fact that, over the specified time frame, both the number of constituencies represented by female candidates and the number of female lawmakers joining legislatures increased.

Varghese (2020) this study looks at the changing dynamics of women's political engagement in India, including its historical development, present obstacles, and the results of legislative initiatives. Women still have a low representation in higher political posts, notwithstanding constitutional protections and legislative actions such as the 73rd and 74th Amendments that establish reservations in municipal government. This research delves at the influence of political parties, cultural norms, and socioeconomic constraints as they pertain to women's political involvement. The study emphasizes the successes and ongoing challenges of attaining gender parity in political leadership using a mixed-method approach that incorporates quantitative data analysis and qualitative interviews with female politicians. The study also provides suggestions for creating a more welcoming political climate in India and evaluates the success of programs that encourage women to run for office.

Thammaiah (2020) The maturity and efficacy of a democracy can be measured by the extent to which men and women participate equally in decision-making and crucial policy-making. As the largest democracy in the world, India strives to eliminate gender inequalities through its constitution, which bans discrimination based on class and sex. An examination of women's voting patterns in India reveals that there has been a rise in female turnout in recent years, but they are still under-represented in legislative bodies. This paper examines the sociocultural and economic factors that contribute to the low political participation of women in India, and

it concludes that a quota for women is the only way for them to achieve their rightful place in society.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study examines the implementation of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) program of 1992 in India to examine the political engagement of women as leaders in a democratic society. Research looks at how the policy affected female leaders in local government and the obstacles they encountered when trying to have their voices heard. In order to provide the theoretical groundwork, a thorough literature study was executed on the topic of women's political empowerment, participation, and leadership.

The empirical research supplemented the literature analysis by drawing on primary data gathered from 25 women who were elected as Panchayat Presidents via a vote system. For in-depth insights, a semi-structured interview method was used, which included open-ended talks. To facilitate understanding, these roundtables were held in regional languages with the intention of identifying the unique challenges that women have while seeking positions of leadership within India's Panchayati Raj system.

The respondents' demographic and professional characteristics, outlined in Table 1, were analyzed to understand the influence of socio-economic factors on their leadership capabilities. The data gathered was analyzed to identify recurring themes and challenges, providing a clearer picture of the obstacles faced by women leaders in local self-governance throughout India.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Respondents Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Category	Total Number of Respondents
Gender	Female	25
Age	Under 30 years	2
	30-39 years old	2
	40-49 years old	10
	50-59 years old	10
	60 years old or more	1
Education	Up to high school	7
	Secondary school	10
	Diploma	5
	University education	3
	Professional training	0

Monthly Income	Under ₹20,000	3
	₹20,000 to ₹40,000	20
	₹40,000 to ₹80,000	2
	Over ₹80,000	0
Status of Family	Married with children	24
	Married without children	0
	Unmarried	1
	Widow	0

Employment Status	Employed	12
	Unemployed	13
	Pensioners	0
	Other	0
Political Party Affiliation	Yes	25
	No	0
Religious Group Affiliation	Yes	18
	No	7
Other Organizational Leadership	Yes	22
	No	3

Women in Indian politics

Despite the widely recognized notion that women's political empowerment is the foundation for all other progress in any community, it faces several challenges, particularly in developing countries such as India. Although women in industrialized countries have greater opportunities and freedom to participate actively in political affairs, in developing countries, deeply ingrained cultural, religious, and social beliefs about the role of women in a society impose numerous limitations on their participation in decision-making processes. Hence, the level of women's involvement in the power hierarchy and their political empowerment remains insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of women's status within a political system. Enhancing the participation of women in politics requires the implementation of many initiatives and the adoption of action plans at the municipal, national, and societal levels.

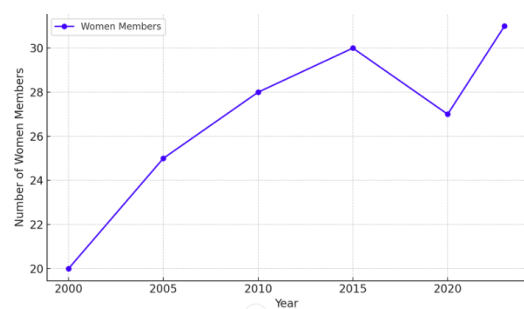


Figure 1: Number of women members in Rajya Sabha (Council of States)

Source: Women Members in Rajya Sabha

The percentage of women serving in India's Senate. Still, there was no nationwide uptick in political participation or significant improvements when the Panchayat Raj institutions legislation was put into action. This is primarily because of the patriarchal mindset and the difficulties that women in northern India encounter. The overall decline in the representation of women in parliament may be attributed to several causes. This means that the time period before to and after the implementation of Panchayat Raj institutions is statistically indistinguishable. Scholars and activists started to focus on the issue of women's empowerment in the 1980s. Gender equality and the rights of women were topics of discussion and controversy in India's political arena at the turn of the twentieth century. Participation in politics include the right to vote, participate in contests, be eligible to run for office, and serve as a legislator or campaign manager.

Case study analysis-

India is home to more women than men, making it the most populated nation in the world. As a result, empowering women in underrepresented roles is critical. Many things contribute to women's marginalization in Indian politics, but one of the most important is the oppression they face due to their gender, color, religion, and family status. Because patriarchy is still very much alive and well, women still have very little chance of becoming very powerful political figures, especially in political parties where the head honcho is a man. There are structural obstacles that prevent women from pursuing political engagement, including discriminatory laws and organizations. Not only that, but women in politics clearly face a wide range of types of violence, including sexual assault, psychological abuse, and physical attack (Nanda, 1999). Indian politics mirrors the global trend of women's underrepresentation and persistent exclusion from positions of power (Hughes & Dubrow, 2018). Women in traditional Indian culture are expected to stay at home and take care of the house rather than becoming involved in politics and other civic duties. Consequently, women did not have the time or resources to actively participate in politics due to the lack of family and inadequate support. There are institutions at the village/town, intermediate, and district levels that make up the Panchayati Raj system, which is structured hierarchically. Mahatma Gandhi advocated for a decentralization of authority at the village and municipal levels to increase women's political empowerment in India. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) are the official moniker for this system. In 1992, the government passed this proposal as a basic provision via the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Separately, "Panchayat" means "Local Council," while "Raj" means "Rule." A village council is governed by a set of norms and principles called Pachayati Raj. In India, each village has its own governing body called a panchayat. This body consists of five members who each have certain powers that

they use to run the panchayat. The policy's adoption by all Indian states has made the panchayat's empowerment a vital cog in the wheel of governance. All of the female officials come from the same town or village. They are able to battle the victimization of women in the village/town and handle other development challenges thanks to their experience of the region and locality. That is why Kerala's progressive development mechanisms are so well-known. But you must realize that Panchayati Raj institutions in Kerala work a little bit differently than in any other Indian state.

Findings of the Study-

Table 1: Challenges for Women in Leadership

Challenge	Description	Frequency (%)
Gender Bias	Discrimination based on gender affecting leadership roles and decision-making.	68%
Socio-Cultural Norms	Cultural expectations and norms that limit women's participation in leadership roles.	62%
Lack of Support	Insufficient support from family and community for women in leadership positions.	54%
Political Intimidation	Threats or intimidation from political rivals and parties.	48%
Limited Access to Resources	Scarcity of resources and facilities to support effective leadership.	56%

This table summarizes the various challenges faced by women in leadership roles within the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). It highlights specific issues such as gender bias, socio-cultural norms, and the lack of support from family and community. The frequency percentage indicates how common these challenges are among the women Panchayat Presidents interviewed. For example, a high percentage of respondents (68%) reported facing gender bias, which significantly impacts their leadership effectiveness and decision-making capabilities.

Table 2: Personal and Professional Life Balance

Aspect	Description	Frequency (%)
Time Management	Difficulty balancing personal responsibilities with official duties.	72%
Family Responsibilities	Impact of family duties on their ability to fulfill leadership roles.	65%
Work-Life Balance	Struggles to maintain a healthy work-life balance.	60%
Professional Growth Opportunities	Limited opportunities for professional development and training.	57%
Emotional Stress	High levels of stress due to balancing multiple roles.	64%

This table outlines the difficulties women encounter in balancing their personal and professional lives. It includes aspects like time management, family responsibilities, and maintaining a work-life balance. The frequency percentage reflects how prevalent

these issues are among the study participants. For instance, 72% of the respondents struggle with time management, affecting their ability to effectively perform their official duties while managing personal responsibilities.

Table 3: Economic Barriers

Barrier	Description	Frequency (%)
Financial Constraints	Insufficient financial support for their initiatives and roles.	70%
Resource Allocation	Limited access to economic resources for development projects.	63%
Poverty	Economic hardship affecting the ability to participate effectively.	58%
Dependence on External Funding	Reliance on external funding for various activities and programs.	55%
Economic Inequality	Disparities in economic conditions affecting women's political participation.	60%

This table details the economic barriers that women face in their leadership roles. It covers issues such as financial constraints, limited access to resources, and economic inequality. The frequency percentage shows how often these barriers are reported by the women Panchayat Presidents. For example, 70% of the respondents cited financial constraints as a major challenge, which hinders their ability to carry out development projects and other initiatives.

Table 4: Administrative Tasks and Training

Task/Training Area	Description	Frequency (%)
Administrative Burden	Heavy administrative workload impacting efficiency.	66%
Lack of Training	Insufficient training in administrative and governance skills.	69%
Limited Technical Support	Lack of technical support for handling administrative tasks.	61%
Inadequate Resources for Training	Insufficient resources allocated for proper training and skill development.	64%
Capacity Building	Need for more comprehensive capacity-building programs.	67%

This table focuses on the administrative tasks and training challenges encountered by women leaders in the Panchayati Raj system. It highlights problems such as administrative burden, lack of training, and inadequate technical support. The frequency percentage indicates how widespread these issues are. For example, 69% of respondents mentioned a lack of training in administrative and governance skills, which impacts their effectiveness and efficiency in handling official responsibilities.

Table 5: Political Party Affiliation

Aspect	Description	Frequency (%)
Party Support	Varying levels of support from political parties for women leaders.	59%
Political Patronage	Influence of political patronage on the election and functioning of women Panchayat Presidents.	52%
Party Loyalty	Expectations of loyalty to the party impacting decision-making.	60%
Internal Politics	Challenges arising from internal party politics and rivalries.	66%
Party Training	Availability of party-provided training and development programs for women leaders.	57%

This table examines the influence of political party affiliation on women's leadership roles. It includes aspects like party support, political patronage, and expectations of loyalty. The frequency percentage represents the extent to which these factors affect the respondents. For example, 59% of the participants noted varying levels of support from their political

parties, which can affect their ability to lead effectively and make independent decisions.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that despite the positive intentions of the 1992 Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) policy in promoting women's leadership, significant challenges persist. Women leaders face substantial gender bias, socio-cultural barriers, and inadequate support from family and communities, which impede their effectiveness. Balancing personal and professional responsibilities proves difficult, with 72% of respondents struggling with time management and work-life balance. Economic constraints further hinder their ability to lead effectively, while a lack of administrative training and technical support exacerbates these issues. Additionally, political party dynamics affect their leadership roles, with varying levels of support and political patronage influencing their autonomy. Addressing these multifaceted challenges through targeted reforms, enhanced support systems, and increased training and resources is crucial to empower women and strengthen local governance.

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Corresponding Author

Swecha Siingh*

PhD Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, India

CEO, Janpad Panchayat, PRD, CG Government.

E-Mail id- swechhasingh@gmail.com