



A review of Women's political Engagement and Empowerment in India

Sandhya Rani ^{1 *}, Dr. Vijay Chaturvedi ²

1. Research Scholar, Shri Krishna University, Chhatarpur, M.P., India
allamsanju@gmail.com ,

2. Associate Professor, Shri Krishna University, Chhatarpur, M.P., India

Abstract: In democratic countries, attaining gender equality and promoting sustainable development depend on women's ability to participate in politics. Despite women's social and economic advancements, they are still under-represented in political leadership roles in India, the biggest democracy in the world. The historical, legal, and sociopolitical aspects that have shaped women's involvement in Indian politics are examined in this review study. Political parties' roles in influencing female leadership, changes in parliamentary representation, and the effects of constitutional revisions are all covered. Systemic obstacles include patriarchal institutions, prejudices within political parties, and socio-economic restraints still impede advancement, despite constitutional protections and legislative efforts to increase women's participation. In order to increase women's political engagement in India, this article stresses the necessity of affirmative action, changes to the law, and cultural changes.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Political Participation, Gender Equality, India, Parliamentary Representation, Policy Reforms

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INTRODUCTION

The biggest democratic state on Earth is, without a doubt, India. When we hear the term "Democratic" again, it's like being transported to the long-ago French Revolution. The brutal conflict started on July 14, 1789, when a crowd of Frenchmen attacked the Fort of Bastille. The famous statement served as a rallying cry for the French Revolution, which was a backlash against centuries of oppression and exploitation. Brotherhood, equality, and freedom. In the spirit of the aforementioned slogan, many developing and emerging nations around the world have embraced democracy as their political administrative system since then. This is because they believe that democracy can help them achieve their full potential, which in turn benefits society as a whole. [1]

Interestingly, the movement has not been as successful in achieving its ultimate aspirations in various states and under varied circumstances, despite its clear benefits and distinctive social amiability. Indeed, India has had sixty-seven joyous years of independence since gaining it in 1947. Our societal structure has changed significantly over this time. Democracy based on the universal adult franchise is now in place in the independent Indian state. All Indian citizens enjoy full equality before the law and in all spheres of public life. The independent states have provided our women with options for education, property, work, history, and competitiveness. [2]

In the realm of culture, it has likewise opened up these rights and possibilities. Despite the fact that it improved their social standing, women's political and administrative representation in our nation has

remained largely unchanged. [3]

There has been a long history of masculine dominance in politics. "Men have not fully acknowledged this truth that instead of accepting women as their friend, partner and companion, men has considered themselves as their masters," Gandhiji once said, referring to men's behavior and attitude towards women.

EMPOWERMENT

These days, the term "empowerment" is all the rage. Decent decentralization of power and authority is what it really entails. One of its goals is to increase representation of marginalized groups in policymaking. Simply put, empowering those without a voice. A person's ability to alter their situation and take charge of their life may be enhanced via the process known as empowerment. It alters the dynamic of power in the home and interpersonal interactions. Unless these portions are strengthened, the authority will be misused by others instead of the intended section.

"It empowers women so that they may be able to decide the direction of their lives through improvement in their lifestyle," says the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' definition of women's empowerment. To rephrase, it's a method that equips people with knowledge of power dynamics and the skills to influence those dynamics. [4]

Empowerment is a kind of power redistribution that fights patriarchal ideology and male supremacy. In fact, it's more of a process than an end product. Gender inequality is being institutionalized and reinforced via this transition.

The process of empowering someone to think, act, and govern their job in an independent manner is articulated. A person may take charge of their own life and their own fate via this procedure. Taking charge of one's material, human, intellectual, and financial resources is one kind of empowerment; another is fighting against the ideology that perpetuates male dominance and female subjugation. [5]

Women's empowerment is a process that helps them overcome their own subordination by enabling them to form groups, become self-sufficient, express their autonomy, and manage their own resources. Gaining more knowledge and skills may also be a component of the empowerment process, which in turn increases one's ability to take part in and shape their own life. 'Empowerment is an active process of helping women to achieve their full identity and power in all sectors of life. The most current approach to women development has arisen at the grassroots level.

FEMINIST EMPOWERMENT

When women are empowered, it might imply that they have the same rights as men and more freedom to pursue their interests in all areas of society. Economic independence, self-sufficiency, a healthy sense of self-worth, the ability to deal with adversity, and a voice in decision-making are the cornerstones of women's empowerment.

"The advancement of equality, development and peace necessitates women's full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision making process and access to power," reads.[6]

United Nations Women's Economic and Social Forum states that women can be empowered when they: learn about gender relations and how to change them; believe in themselves, their abilities, and their right to control their own lives; have agency over their own decisions; be able to bargain for better terms; and, finally, be able to organize and influence the course of social change to bring about a more equitable economic and social order on a global scale.

One definition of empowerment is the act of questioning established power relations and taking charge of one's own power dynamics. It encompasses a wide spectrum of actions that challenge fundamental power relations, from individual self-assertion to communal mobilization.

The United Nations identifies five aspects of women's empowerment.

1. The value women place on themselves;
2. The freedom to have and make one's own decisions;
3. The freedom to pursue one's interests and make use of available resources;
4. The right to live one's own life, at home and away; the capacity to shape societal trends toward greater economic and social stability on a global scale; and the capacity to exercise agency over one's own life.

When defining women's empowerment, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) takes into account the following two aspects:

- 1) Learning about gender relations and how they may be improved
- 2) Coming to terms with one's value as an individual, having faith in one's capacity to bring about positive change, and accepting responsibility for one's life.

As Bhargava points out, "the phrase women empowerment has different dimensions, political, social and economic and it is a process of redistribution of resources in the society in such a way that oppressed class like women get equal access and control over the resources"

"Empowerment as an active, multidimensional process which enables women to realise their full identity and powers in all sphere of life," says J. K. Pillai. [7]

Parimala Kapur argues that "women's empowerment" occurs when women "gain control over decision making in home community, society and nation and control over financial resources like money and access to money." This includes material, human, and intellectual resources such as knowledge, information, ideas, and financial resources.

In this part, we will examine the legal framework in India that promotes women's empowerment, as well as the extent to which women have participated in and benefited from political life, including their representation in Parliament, the number of ministers they hold, and their presence at the highest levels of government. While this may not ensure full empowerment, it is a precondition for women to be politically empowered to participate and be represented in national legislatures and ministerial councils. Investigating these factors will provide insight into the trajectory of women's political empowerment in India since

independence.

Since India's independence, men and women have had equal voting rights. "No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex...", reads Article 325 of our Constitution. This guarantees that every person has an equal opportunity to participate in the country's basic election process. Our constitution ensures not only the right to vote, but also the right to run for any and all public posts. This ensures that women in India may freely participate in politics.[8]

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment Act of 1992 was a watershed moment in India's history for women's political emancipation. The statutes that established constitutional status for both urban and rural local bodies also mandated the reservation of at least one-third of the total seats for women, in addition to the reservation of seats for members belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. By doing so, women were assured of an equal opportunity to take part in the local democratic organization that serves as the hub for grassroots policymaking and planning.

Worldwide, women make up 24.5% of parliamentarians, according to statistics compiled by the Inter Parliamentary Union. When looking at the percentage of women in parliament, India comes in at 143rd place out of 190 nations. "The dismal performance in comparison to neighboring nations like Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Bhutan is quite worrisome. Women make up half of the population in some countries, including Cuba, Mexico, Spain, Sweden, and Finland. Because of this, there has to be a shift in the law to encourage more women to take part in politics.[9]

WOMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION IN INDIA SINCE 1952

Table 1.2 below shows the percentage of women serving in India's lower house of parliament from 1952 to the present. During the 2019 General Elections in India, 78 female candidates were elected. Since gaining independence, this is the largest proportion of female lawmakers the nation has ever elected. Seven hundred twenty-four women were among the 80,049 candidates that ran for office in the nation. In the 2014 general election, the corresponding statistics were 8,163 and 636. [10]

The chart below also makes it clear that women have never had a substantial role in the Indian Parliament. It was far lower than 10% for the most of democratic history. Any country, but notably a democratic one, would do well to avoid this.

Table 1: The number of women serving as members of India's parliament since 1952

Year	Seats	Women MPs	% of Women MPs	Seats	Women MPs	% of Women MPs
1952	219	16	7.3	499	22	4.41
1957	237	18	7.6	500	27	5.40
1962	238	18	7.6	503	34	6.76

1967	240	20	8.3	523	31	5.93
1971	243	17	7.0	521	22	4.22
1977	244	25	10.2	544	19	3.29
1980	244	24	9.8	544	28	5.15
1984	244	28	11.4	544	44	8.9
1989	244	28	11.4	517	27	5.22
1991	245	38	15.5	544	39	7.17
1996	223	20	9.0	543	39	7.18
1998	223	19	8.6	543	43	7.92
1999	223	19	8.6	543	49	9.02
2004	245	27	11.1	543	45	8.03
2009	245	22	8.97	543	59	10.86
2014	245	29	11.83	543	61	11.23
2019	245	26	10.61	543	78	14.36

Female candidates' strength throughout all Lok Sabha elections

Of the 78 female candidates that were elected, 41 are affiliated with the governing Baratiya Janata Party, 9 with the Trinamol Congress, and 6 with the Indian National Congress. Additionally, two independent candidates—one from Maharashtra and one from Karnataka—won the election this year, rounding out the total number of winners. As a result, the governing party has 52.56% of the vote, the biggest opposition party, INC, has 11.54%, and Trinamol Congress, 7.69%. The left and its allies did not get any points. In this respect, the regional parties also fared poorly. When it comes to the representation of women, this plainly shows that the parties are at odds with one another. [11]

Table 2: Power of female candidates in every Lok Sabha election

Year	Females	Males	Total	% of Female winning	% of Male winning
1952	43	1831	1874	51.16	26.05
1957	45	1473	1518	60.00	31.7
1962	70	1915	1985	50.00	24.0
1967	67	2302	2369	44.80	21.3
1971	86	2698	2784	24.40	18.5

1977	70	2369	2439	27.10	22.1
1980	142	4478	4620	19.7	11.5
1984	164	5406	5574	25.60	9.2
1989	198	5962	6160	13.60	8.5
1991	325	8374	8699	12.00	5.9
1996	599	13353	13952	6.70	3.8
1998	274	4476	4750	15.70	11.2
1999	278	3976	4254	17.30	12.3
2004	355	5080	5435	12.30	9.8
2009	556	2514	8070	10.61	6.44
2014	636	7527	8163	9.74	6.39
2019	724	7321	8049 *	10.77	6.35

The following table provides an overview of the patterns in contestants for the Lok Sabha elections. There was a 1.2% rise in the number of female candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections compared to the 2014 elections (2014 -7.79:2019 -8.99). From 43 in 1952 to 724 in 2019, the number of women participating in politics has increased, although the number of women actually elected remains low.” The constitutional requirement has resulted in a large number of women serving in local administrations, but the representation of women in the federal legislature remains dismal.[12]

The Congress party allocated 54 tickets, the maximum amount, to female candidates in the current general election. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) offered 53 female candidates an opportunity, but other important parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) had 24, the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) had 23, the CPI(M) had 10, the CPI had four, and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) had one. In addition, 222 female candidates ran for office on their own. When it came to this, the majority of regional parties also did badly. Despite failing to secure a single seat, women candidates were allocated 48.64% of the ticket by the Naam Tamizhar Katchi (Unrecognized) of Tamil Nadu. Among the top in our nation, this share ranks. If political parties are serious about giving women a fair shot at running for office, they need to come to a real agreement and do something about it. None of the aforementioned would help advance women's political participation in India. [13]

Female representation in the House of States and the Upper House

The percentage of women in the upper house has been relatively stable at roughly 10% since 1952, taking into account the structure of the election and the influence a party has in selecting its candidates in the indirect elections to the house. Just 26 women, or 10.61% of the house, were members of our parliament's upper chamber in 2019. All political parties have persistently disregarded the importance of women's representation in the law-making process, putting women's empowerment in our nation at risk, even though

the Rajya Sabha election is not a direct election and therefore has a better chance of presenting equal or more women.

Another important factor to consider when studying women's political empowerment is the number of women holding ministerial posts. Just six women, including three in cabinet positions, make up the present government, which took office after the 2019 17th Lok Sabha election. Only 4.76 percent of the 63-person council of ministers are women. Even though they have a huge majority in parliament, the administration is still unable to fill the cabinet positions with women. What this further implies is that our country's male-dominated political establishment is averse to empowering women. [14]

Table 3: Female representation in the Union Council of Ministers from 1999 onwards

Year	Number of Women Minister			Total
	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Deputy Minister	
1999	3	3	2	8
2004	1	6	0	7
2009	4	0	3	7
2012	1	0	4	5
2014	5	0	1	6
2017	6	0	2	8
2019	3	0	3	6

After India attained independence the ministry that took oath under the Prime Minister Only one woman served as a minister to Jawaharlal Nehru. This is when Ms. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur became head of the health department and played a key role in establishing AIMS. Afterwards, women began to have a presence in the united council of ministers, but they had relatively minor roles.

One woman was named minister during Ms. Indira Gandhi's first term as prime minister of India, while three women were appointed ministers during her third term. Once again, a single woman served as a council of minister in the first non-congress administration. The union council of ministers in India had its greatest participation of women, respectively. This data further demonstrates how patriarchal Indian politics is.

The existence of a female head of state or government is another element studied in relation to women's political empowerment. India is a Parliamentary Democratic Republic, meaning that every five years, the elected members of Parliament and each state legislature indirectly elect the president to serve as head of state. The Prime Minister of India is the leader of the government and has a majority in parliament.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the only female prime minister of India. For over 14 years, beginning in 1966, she served as prime minister. The guys maintained a firm grip on the position of top dog after her, and no one

came close to challenging her. In 1967, during the fourth presidential election, Manohara Holkar was the first woman to run for president on an independent ticket. [15]

It is clear that males have a lot of power in Indian politics, as only one woman ran for prime minister and four women ran for president. Despite their inherent worth, women are consistently underrepresented and allocated a pitiful portion of the pie. To this day, women in India remain politically powerless, as the proportion of female lawmakers in the lower house is only 14.36% and in the upper house it is 10.61%. Because of this, we need to think deeply about the subject and shed light on how women see their role in politics.

CONCLUSION

Since India's independence, women's political participation has made slow but steady growth. Although constitutional amendments like the 73rd and 74th have made it easier for grassroots organisations to participate, their influence in national politics is still restricted. The firmly established patriarchal character of Indian politics is reflected in the data, which shows a consistent gender imbalance in cabinet posts and parliamentary seats. Structural obstacles, such as socio-cultural prejudices, a lack of political mentoring, and financial restraints, still limit women's political advancement, even if there have been some gains in recent elections. To close this gap, we need a shift in society values, more political will, and new policies. Gender quotas in legislatures, more female-friendly party platforms, and education initiatives may all help get more women into political office. To really empower women, we must create conditions where they can actively shape decision-making, not just participate in politics. A more inclusive and representative democracy cannot be achieved without addressing the issue of gender inequality and empowering women to take on leadership roles in politics.

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