

## Participation of Women in Indian Politics

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### Abstract:

Despite playing a key role in the birth, upbringing and character building of human beings, Indian women are neglected and rebuffed the status that they deserve in the political sphere. During the freedom struggle, Indian women also fought for their rights to vote and to be elected. After India's independence, women's equal rights were established in every sector of society through various clauses of the constitution. Despite of government policies, financial allocations, declarations of goodwill, the picture of women's participation in politics in Indian society is not particularly promising. A greater number of women participating in politics will be good for Indian politics as a whole.

**Key-words:** Political sphere, Women's participation, Equal rights, Indian politics

### Introduction:

One of the hallmarks of democratic governance is the participation of the masses in politics. People's participation has always been identified as an important issue in India's democratic system. However, while the participation rate of male Indian masses has always been at a significant level in Indian democratic politics, the participation rate of Indian women has never been at that level. Women's participation in politics in pre-independent India was very limited. However, the level or rate of women's participation in politics in independent India has increased significantly, though not to the desired extent. In fact, women's participation in Indian politics remains limited. However, the trend of women's participation in Indian politics has not always flowed in the same direction. In the decades before independence, however, Indian women were seen to be quite active in politics. But in the two decades after independence, Indian women lost interest in politics for various reasons. However, from the 1970s onwards, Indian women and various women's organizations started getting involved in the political process.

### The Global Average of Women Representation in Politics:

According to the report of Global Data on National Parliaments (as of MAY-2022), female representation in national Parliaments globally was 26.2%. In America, Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa women's representation is above the average and in Asia and the Pacific region their representation is below the average. In the South Asian countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Bhutan have women's representation above India. The women representation is in Nepal- 34%, in Bangladesh- 21%, in Pakistan- 20%, and in Bhutan- 17%. For India, women participation in last Lok Sabha held in 2019 is below- 15%. One of the greatest political scientists Anne Phillips says- **"Women bring different skills to politics and provide role models for future generations."** Former president and defence minister of Chile argues--- **"For me a better democracy is a democracy where women do not only have the right to vote and to elect but to be elected."**\* Sweden and Norway are the two countries where women participation in politics is very high. Women constitute the 61.3% membership in Rwanda, the highest share of women in the parliament worldwide. 53.6% of female are in as members in Cuba, the second highest share followed by Nicaragua. Saudi Arab has the lowest participation of women in public life. Women's well-being can be improved by giving them political authority and putting them in positions of decision-making and law-making.

[\*Source: <https://www.brainyquote.com>]

### Historical Background of Political Participation of Women in India:

To explain the political participation of women in the Indian context, it is necessary to look into the history. During the Vedic Period women were held in a position of considerable honour. Women appeared freely at feasts and dances and joined with men in religious sacrifice. They could study and take part in social and religious activities. But they were not allowed to take part in political position. Gargi, Apa, Ghosa and so on engage themselves in social practices but not in political arena. Only man /men like Manu had the right to formulate the very law for society. Women were considerable importance in family life and in social life but not in administrative spheres. But, in post-Vedic Period women spoke freely in the public meetings like Sabha, Vidatha etc. In the Mauryan age, only the high caste women took part in administrative spheres. But low-caste women were deprived from such facilities of society. They were given secondary position in the Gupta Empire society. Prabhavati Gupta, the daughter of Chandragupta II,

was the famous woman ruler of the Gupta period. After the death of her husband Maharaja Rudrasenll, she effectively ruled the kingdom Vakataka from about 390 to 410.\*

[\*Source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>]

The social status and glory of Indian women declined to a great extent during the Middle Ages. The common woman is captivated within the four walls of house. However, several skilled women politicians were seen on the stages of Indian politics. And they proved themselves as the accomplished administrators. Razia Sultana ruled the throne of Delhi for four years (1236-40) after the death of father Sultan Iltutmis. She took an active role in politics and led the army from the front in the battle field. She successfully stretched the empire from Sindh to Bengal. She was skilful in governing the state. Another champion in governing the state was queen Durgavati of Gondwana. After the death of her husband king Dalpat Shah in 1645, she successfully ruled the kingdom in front of her minor son Bir Narayan. She was able to protect the integrity of Gondwana Kingdom in the face of several attacks by Raja Bahadur of Malwa and the Afghans of Bengal. Commander of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar in 1564 AD, Ashaf Khan invaded her kingdom and she faced 53,000 Mughal soldiers for two days. After the death of her husband Sultan Ali Adil Shah of Bijapur, Chand Bibi, daughter of Raja Hussain Nizam Shah of Ahmednagar, took over the administration as guardian of her minor son Ibrahim Adil Shah II in 1580 AD. The army of Mughal Emperor Akbar attacked Ahmednagar in 1593 AD, and captured the city in 1596 AD. During that acute crisis, Chand Bibi assumed leadership and successfully resisted the invasion of the Mughal army led by Akbar's son Murad. The Mughals could not able to capture her kingdom during Chand Bibi's lifetime. Mughal emperor Jahangir's wife Nurjahan actually took over the administration from her husband in the 1620 AD. Nurjahan remained at the apex of power during Jahangir's lifetime. After her husband's death in 1700 AD, Tarabai, the wife of Rajaram, ruler of the Maratha Kingdom, took over the throne as the guardian of their minor son Sivaji III. Under her leadership the Marathas invaded Berar, Gujarat and Ahmednagar and were able to acquire great extent of wealth and prestige. She was credited with maintaining the unity and integrity of the Martha Empire between 1700 to 1707 AD. Another heroic queen, Ahalyabai, took over the Holkar Kingdom after the death of her father-in-law Malhara Rao Holkar in 1768 AD. As an administrator, she showed considerable ability. Queen Laxmibai of Jhansi thwarted an attempt by Lord Dalhousie to take over her kingdom in 1853. She joined the rebels during the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 and bravely defended Jhansi from the British army led by Sir Hugh Rose. When Jhansi fell to the British, Laxmibai continued her fight from Kalpi. On June 17 in 1858, the queen of Jhansi Laxmibai died a heroic death on the battle field in the guise of a male warrior. Begum Hazrat Mahal took over the responsibility to defend and maintain the reputation of the state from the British after the surrender of husband Wazad Ali to the British. In 1856, the British occupied Ayodhya and sent Wazed Ali along with most of his family members to Calcutta (now Kolkata). Begum Hazrat Mahal felt humiliation and to take revenge, she decided to stay in Lucknow with his minor son BirjisKadir to protect Ayodhya's reputation for art, culture, and literature. Installing BirjisKadir as Nawab in August, 1857, the Begum abled to manage the government for about six months and was also able to maintain the independence of Lucknow. Besides ordering the subjects to fight against the British, Begum Hazrat Mahal herself appeared on the battlefield in February, 1858 and led from the front.

All these queens vividly highlight the power and skill of women in governing and protecting their states from enemy invasions. In the first three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the connection of politics with Indian women started from the national movements. Many Indian women belong to high society or upper middle class took part in nationalist movements. During the British Period, the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 and six women attended its first session as delegates. Two of the six women delegates were from Bengal. They were- KadambiniGanguly and SwarnakumariGhosal. In 1916, an Irish woman Annie Besant set up the Indian Home Rule League. She became the first women president of the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress. MrsSarojini Naidu became the first Indian woman to chair the National Congress session in Kanpur in 1925. Women played a vital role in the anti-partition movement (1905-1911) of Bengal and in "Swadesh and Boycott" movements. Women led from the very front in protest events like 'RakhiBandhan', 'Arandhan' and in rejecting foreign products and using indigenous products. Organizations like 'Swadeshi Bhandar', 'Swadesh Mandals', 'MahilaSamiti', 'Laxmi Bhandar' played an important role in promoting and spreading "Swadeshi" thinking. Sarojini Bose, KumudiniMitra, Sushila Sen, Kamal Kamini Gupta and other leaders were at the forefront of the Swadeshi movement. The role of

women in Azad Hind Bahini is also very significant. On October 22, 1943, when the Rani Jhansi Army was formed with women, Lakshmi Swaminathan was given the post of Commander-in-Chief of that army. She was also appointed as the Minister of Women's Affairs in the Azad Hind Government established in Singapore. About one and a half thousand women joined the Rani Jhansi army as soldiers. Except Swaminathan, Janaki Davar, Mayawati Arya, M. Satyavati Naidu, Shanti Majumdar and so many names are memorable in this context. There was a regular military training system for the soldiers of the Jhansi army. Army soldiers were prepared for the battlefield through lessons in the use of various weapons, service to the sick, and politics.

Indian women also started fighting for their right to vote and to be elected during the freedom struggle. In 1917, even before British women got the right to vote, Sarojini Naidu presented a petition to the British Parliament demanding suffrage for Indian women. In 1919 another delegation was sent to the South Borough Commission to demand women's suffrage. Describing the matter as an internal matter of India, the Commission left the matter to Indian legislatures. By 1929, women's suffrage was recognized alongside men's in all provincial legislatures of India. In 1931, at the Karachi session of the National Congress, the issue of equal political rights to Indian women was accepted without opposition.\*

[\* Source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>]

#### **Political Participation of Indian Women after Post- Independence:**

Women's participation in Indian society, especially in politics is not satisfying. After India's independence, women's equal rights were established in every sector of society through various clauses of the constitution. Despite of government policies, financial allocations, declarations of goodwill, the picture of women's participation in politics in Indian society is not particularly promising. A greater number of women participating in politics will be good for Indian politics as a whole. Gaining more financial support and social rights, women empower themselves and it will be great advantage for Indian politics.

#### **Preamble of the Constitution:**

Under the Constitutional law, women have equal rights as men so as to enable them to take part effectively in the administrative of the country.

#### **Equality before law**

Article 14 embodies the general principles of equality before law and equal protection of laws. Prohibition from discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth

Article 15(1) and (2) prohibits the state from discriminating against any citizen only based on any one or more of the aspects such as religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

Article 15(3) makes it possible for the state to create special provisions for protecting the interests of women and children.

Article 15(4) capacitates the State to create special arrangements for promoting interests and welfare of socially and educationally backward classes of society.

#### **Equality of Opportunity**

Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State. Article 39 requires the State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood [Article 39(a)]; and equal pay for equal work for both men and women [Article 39(d)]. Article 39A directs the State to promote justice, on the basis of equal opportunity and to promote free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities.

#### **Humane Conditions at Work**

Article 42 directs the State to make provision for securing justice and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

#### **Fundamental Duty**

Article 51A enjoins upon every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

#### **Reservation of seats for Women in Panchayats and Municipalities:**

Article 243 D (3) and Article 243 T(3) provide for reservation of not less than one third of total number of seats in Panchayats and Municipalities for women to be allotted by rotation to different Constituencies. Article 243 D (4) T(4) provides that not less than one third of the total number of officers of chairperson in the Panchayat and Municipalities at each level to be reserved for women.

**Voting rights/Electoral law**

- Not less than one-third seats shall be reserved for women. Such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.
- The office of the chairperson in the Panchayat at the village or any other level shall be reserved for SCs, STs and women in such manner as the legislature of state may, by law provide.
- Reservation of seats for women in Municipalities is provided

To uphold the Constitutional mandate, the state has enacted various legislative measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide support services especially to working women. Although women may be victims of any of the crimes such as ‘Murder’, ‘Robbery’, ‘Cheating’ etc, the crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are characterized as ‘Crime against Women’. These are broadly classified under two categories.

[Source: National Commission for Women.]

**Representation of Women in Indian Parliament:**

From the first general election held in 1952 to the results of the eighteenth general election held in 2024, it can be seen that the percentage of women representation in the Lok Sabha increased from 4.9% to 13.6%. Only 22 out of 149 elected representatives were women in first general election held in 1952 and in last general election held in 2024, the number of women representatives increased to 74 out of 543 seats. The Lok Sabha comprises of a total of 543 seats. 543 out of 545 seats elections had been conducted by the Election Commission of India. The rates of women representatives are increasing. But the rate of increase is very slow and not satisfactory. The reluctance of political parties to field women candidates is noticeable and very poor. Biju Janata Dal (BJD) declared 33% reservation for women in 2014 general election. Trinamool Congress (TMC) would allocate 41% of Lok Sabha poll tickets to women in 2019 general election. The National Congress and Bharti Janata Party (BJP) fielded over 50 women candidates each in the Lok Sabha Elections 2019. Some celeb women candidates are Urmila Matondkar, Hema Malini, Kirron Kher, Kanimozhi, Sadhvi Pragya, Sonia Gandhi, Priya Dutta and others. A total of 74 women were elected to the 18th Lok Sabha in the 2024 general elections, accounting for approximately 13.6% of the total 543 seats.

**Women Elected to the Lok Sabha, 1951-2024**

Sl. No.	Election Year	No. of Women Representatives	% of Women Representatives
1.	1951	22	5
2.	1957	22	5
3.	1962	31	5
4.	1967	29	5
5.	1971	28	5
6.	1977	19	4
7.	1980	28	5
8.	1984	43	8
9.	1989	29	5
10.	1991	39	7
11.	1996	40	7
12.	1998	43	8
13.	1999	49	9
14.	2004	45	8
15.	2009	59	11
16.	2014	66	12
17.	2019	78	14
18.	2024	74	13.6

[Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi]

**Representation of Women in Rajya Sabha:**

Representation of women in Rajya Sabha from 1952 to 2022 is very poor like Lok Sabha and even, less than Lok Sabha. In 2014, there were 31 women members in the Upper Chamber constituting 12.7% which is the highest representation of women in the House. The representation was lowest in 1970, when 14 women members were there in Rajya Sabha constituting 5.85% of the House. Representation of women in Rajya Sabha in 1952 were 15 women members which constituted 6.99% of the membership. Their representation increases gradually. Now the membership of women in Rajya Sabha are 24 in 2022. It constitutes the 9.8% of House. The oldest female member of Rajya Sabha was Smt. Uma Nehru. She joined as a member of Rajya Sabha in 1962. The youngest members of Rajya Sabha were Smt. Jayanthi Natarajan and Kumari Sushila Tiria. They were elected as members in Rajya Sabha in 1986 at the age of 32. The oldest nominated member was Smt. Fathema Ismail who was at the age of 75 and the youngest member was Smt. Shabana Azmi who was 46 years old. Smt. Prathibha Singh was the longest serving woman member of Rajya Sabha. She was member of Rajya Sabha for 22 years without break from 31 December in 1970 to 6 July 1992. We may safely mention some high-profile female members of Rajya Sabha are – Smt. Indira Gandhi, the first and only woman Prime Minister of India, Smt. Nargis Dutt, Smt. Vyjayanthimala, Smt. Rukmini Devi, Smt. Hema Malini, Prof. (Mrs) Asima Chatterjee and others. Smt. Violet Alva, Dr (Smt.) Najma Heptulla and Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil successfully act as a presiding officer in Rajya Sabha. However, it is unfortunate that their contributions have not been widely known. As early as in 1952, Smt. Savitri Devi Nigam raised the issue of poor representation of women in Rajya Sabha. On International Women's Day on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1996, the Rajya Sabha adopted a Resolution – adequate reservation of seats for women's representation in state legislatures and in Parliament.

**Women Elected to the Rajya Sabha, 1952-2022**

YEAR	NO. OF WOMEN	PERCENTAGE (%)	YEAR	NO. OF WOMEN	PERCENTAGE (%)
1952	15	6.9	1988	25	10.6
1954	17	7.8	1990	24	10.3
1956	20	8.6	1992	17	7.2
1958	22	9.5	1994	20	8.3
1960	24	10.2	1996	19	7.8
1962	18	7.2	1998	19	7.7
1964	21	8.9	2000	22	9
1966	23	9.8	2002	25	10.2
1968	22	9.6	2004	28	11.4
1970	14	5.8	2006	25	10.2
1972	18	7.4	2008	24	9.8
1974	18	7.5	2010	27	11
1976	24	10.1	2012	26	10.6
1978	25	10.2	2014	31	12.7
1980	29	12	2016	27	11
1982	24	10.1	2018	28	11.4
1984	24	10.3	2020	25	10.2
1986	28	11.5	2022	24	9.8

[Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi.]

**Representation of Women in Legislative Assemblies of States:**

In India, the number of women in Legislatures in various state assemblies is similarly out and out disappointing. The number of women representatives in the Legislative Assembly has never reached in 15%. The highest percentage of membership of women in state Legislative Assembly is 14.44% in 2018 in Chhattisgarh and the second highest percentage of membership of women in West Bengal state

Legislative Assembly is 13.70% in 2021. The reservation one-third of the seats in the state Legislative Assemblies for women have not met with success till date. There is a need for more women's representatives in State Legislative Assemblies to give importance to various issues and special needs of women to properly raise issues of their interests. According to the data from ECI (Election Commission of India) out of the total 4896 MPs/MLAs across all over India, only 418 or 9% are women. Sorry to say, the representation of women in State Legislative Assemblies' elections across the country like India has not increased since the independence. Although India has a glorified history of women, they are become less in participation in politics and in decision-making of the states. Regional political parties of India must give watchful look on at more candidature to women candidates in legislative elections in comparison to national political parties of the country. A chart which is given below vividly highlights the hiatus between male and female elected Members of State Legislative Assemblies election of various states of India.

**Women Elected to the State Legislative Assemblies**

SL. NO.	Name of State / Union territories	Year of Last General Election to Legislative Assembly	Percentage Of Seats won by Women (%)
1	Andhra Pradesh	2019	8.00
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2019	5.00
3	Assam	2021	4.76
4	Bihar	2020	10.70
5	Chhattisgarh	2018	14.44
6	Goa	2022	7.50
7	Gujrat	2017	7.14
8	Haryana	2019	10.00
9	Himachal Pradesh	2017	5.88
10	Jammu and Kashmir	2014	2.30
11	Jharkhand	2019	12.35
12	Karnataka	2018	3.14
13	Kerala	2021	7.86
14	Madhya Pradesh	2018	9.13
15	Maharashtra	2019	8.33
16	Manipur	2022	8.33
17	Meghalaya	2018	5.08
18	Mizoram	2018	0.00
19	Nagaland	2018	0.00
20	Odisha	2019	8.90
21	Punjab	2022	11.11
22	Rajasthan	2018	12.00
23	Sikkim	2019	9.38
24	Tamil Nadu	2021	5.13
25	Telangana	2018	5.04
26	Tripura	2018	5.00
27	Uttarakhand	2022	11.43
28	Uttar Pradesh	2022	11.66
29	West Bengal	2021	13.70
30	NCT of Delhi	2020	11.43
31	Puducherry	2021	3.33

[ Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi.]

### **Participation of Women in Local Politics:**

There is a wide ranging history of decentralization of powers from the Centre and the States to the local level. The National Development Council approved the recommendations of the Balwant Rao Mehta Committee on 12 January in 1958 and agreed to form Panchayat Raj institutions in all the states. It may be difficult to develop a uniform Panchayat System in India, a diverse country. Keeping in mind, the committee makes a question on democratic decentralization--- states should be given the freedom to form Panchayats according to their needs and requirements. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October in 1959, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister in India, formally launched the very Panchayat System. Most of the states in India have enacted laws for the formation of Panchayats in their respective legislatures. 12 states and one union territory formed 'Tristar' (three-tier) Panchayats. 4 states and 2 union territories formed twotier Panchayats, 4 states and 4 union territories formed Single-tier Panchayat systems.

Through the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian constitution 1993, 33% seats are reserved for women in Panchayats and Municipalities. As a result of this reservation, a large number of women are directly participating in Indian rural and urban administration. Their awareness and skills about responsibilities and awareness of own rights and powers are proven by various surveys and studies. We must include women especially in local governments-Municipalities and in Panchayats. Since, women are the real architecture of society, they are well aware of the real issues and problems of society. Their insight and perspective might be sustainable over all development of society. Women must take vital role in public space and thus they must do away with stereotypes and the conventional notions about them. It may also be said that common people will get confidence in women as good public administration. Only women can minimize the criminalization of politics.

### **Conclusion:**

Not in the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha or State Legislative Assemblies, but in the organizational sphere of India's major political parties, the number of representatives in particular organizations is quite low. A look at the Congress Working Committee, the Bharatiya Janata Party's Parliamentary or the Communist Party's Central Committee shows that women's representation in these important political committees is very poor. Women members of the Congress Working Committee are five out of thirty two members including president. Only six women are in the National Executive Members of the Bharatiya Janata Party. In the case of the Janata Dal, there are no women in the Political Affairs Committee and the Parliamentary Board. There are fifteen women out of eighty five members in New Central Committee of 23rd Party Congress in 2022 of CPIM. Seventeenth male members are elected in Politburo but there is no single female member. In terms of the organization of political parties, increasing the number of women among key decision makers will lead to more qualified and interested women politicians in the country's politics as a whole, especially in the electoral arena. In this context, the political parties should be the foremost initiative.

Greater participation of women in politics should not be viewed from a narrow perspective. This is not a feminist claim. The success and prominence of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, the role of politicians like SuchetaKripalani, NandiniSatpathi, Jayalalithaa, Mayawati, Rabri Devi, Uma Bharti, BashundharaRaje, Sheela Dixit, Mamata Banerjee, Mehebooba Mufti etc. as Chief Ministers and the efficiency of women in Panchayats and Municipalities put an end to all doubts about their competence in politics and administration. Greater participation of women in politics, more socioeconomic rights for them, more empowerment will be good for Indian politics as a whole. It is not possible to improve the entire society by keeping half of the society. A bird can't fly with its one wing, so a society can't be progressed without the wellbeing of women.

**"As long as women of India do not take part in public life,**

**There can be no salvation for the country."- Mahatma Gandhi**

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