

Empowering Women in Politics: Challenges and Success

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Abstract:

Empowering women in politics remains a pivotal element in the pursuit of gender equality and inclusive governance. While women make up a significant portion of the global population, their representation in political offices continues to be disproportionately low. In response, many countries have adopted quotas and gender-specific policies to address this imbalance. Quotas, in particular, have been a central mechanism, mandating a minimum level of female representation within political institutions. This paper explores the challenges and successes associated with these policies. On one hand, quotas can provide women with necessary access to political spaces, combat societal and institutional biases, and help change the political culture. However, challenges remain, including the potential for tokenism, resistance from established political elites, and the underrepresentation of women from marginalized groups. Moreover, gender-specific politics often risks reducing complex gender issues to a mere numerical goal, rather than fostering substantial policy change. This paper critically analyses case studies from various countries to evaluate how quotas and gender-specific politics have impacted women's political representation, their involvement in decision-making, and their influence on policy. In conclusion, while quotas can serve as a stepping stone toward greater gender equality, they need to be accompanied by broader structural changes to ensure lasting empowerment and meaningful participation for women in politics.

Despite comprising nearly half of India's population, women remain significantly underrepresented in Indian politics. This paper examines the challenges, opportunities, and strategies for empowering women in Indian politics. Using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis and qualitative interviews with women politicians and activists, this research identifies key barriers to women's political participation, including patriarchal norms, lack of education and economic empowerment, and violence against women. The paper also highlights opportunities for change, such as the implementation of gender quotas, increased access to education and economic opportunities, and the rise of women-led social movements. Finally, the research proposes strategies for empowering women in Indian politics, including targeted training and capacity-building programs, mentorship initiatives, and policy reforms to address gender-based violence and discrimination. The findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex factors influencing women's political participation in India and offer practical recommendations for promoting gender equality and empowerment in Indian politics.

Keywords: women's empowerment, Indian politics, gender equality, political participation, patriarchal norms.

Introduction:

In the 21st century, women have made progress and doing exceedingly well in various walks of life. They are overcoming the boundaries drawn for them and making their presence in almost every field possible. It is said that women are creators, protectors and nurturers of their families. They play significant role in imparting and inculcating various values to everyone around them. Feminine energy acts like a guiding force for society. But all of this goes in vain when the

basic human rights like safety of women, gender inequality, child marriage, violence on women's are violated daily. The constitution of India grants equality to women in all fields of life but it is still only on paper. Patriarchy continues to be rooted in the social system in all parts of India.

Naturally, when we talk about women's empowerment in India what we refer that women must need to be aware of their rights like the right to vote, property rights, freedom of movement, their legal rights, and many more, which means, empowering women is making women realize their self-worth, their abilities to determine their own choice and shaping the society where women can enjoy their respect and rights just like other humans. Women's empowerment is an essential factor that works for the betterment and development of society, community, and country. When it is to specifying women's population in the world we get the result of around 50 %. But when we focus on the people of India, it happens to be a disproportionate sex ratio which means the female population is comparatively lower than the male. Comparatively the western part of the world is very liberal about women's empowerment but women's empowerment in India is the least concern of society because of gender biasness. It is believed that the problem with literacy, population, and health issues won't solve until there's any solution for the gender biasness so that women can take a free part in building a society and a community where everyone's rights and demands will be paid attention to. If we pay more attention to how women's empowerment in India got momentum throughout the years, from the ancient to the modern period. Over time, Indian society has witnessed many up rises and downfalls when it came to empowering women.

Objectives:

1. Enhancing Gender Equality in Political Representation:
2. Promoting Women's Rights and Political Participation:
3. Addressing Systemic Barriers to Women's Political Involvement:
4. Increasing Awareness of Gendered Political Challenges:
5. Fostering Support Networks for Women in Politics:
6. Encouraging Policy Reforms to Support Women's Political Careers:
7. Strengthening Women's Political Voice in Decision-Making:

What is women's empowerment?

Ill-treatment for women has been a ritual for men, for centuries this unjustified treatment is going on, and women are not allowed to have property, they will have no share in their own parents' properties, and they never enjoyed their rights to vote and there was absolutely no freedom to choose their own way of lifestyle or job and so on.

Now women's empowerment means exercising their power and their own actions. Which means having control over your own material assets, intellectual resources, and your own ideologies.

Women are shaping a Political Rejig:

Raising participation of women in India's political arena is one the most significant stories of the past decade. Female voters are playing bigger role in polls than ever before. A YouGov Mint survey showed not only do women lag in participating in politically oriented public activities, they are also likely to identify with political party.

One major reason is the male dominated nature of election campaigning, which is barrier to women's participation beyond polling booths. There is no conclusive evidence on whether men and women vote differently on issues, but emerging research suggests significant divergence. Women are more likely to prioritize development in water, sanitation and health care, while men prefer

infrastructure developments. Hence, the role of women's in shaping political choices cannot be discounted.

Women in Judiciary:

There is a growing demand for reservation for women in the judiciary. The women judges often face biases and stereotypes, affecting their career advancement. Having more women in the judiciary, and this holds true of other branches of the government such as legislature and executive. Greater representation of women will ensure better understanding of their needs and leads to better policies.

- In 1980, Justice M FathimaBeevi became the first woman judge to be appointed to the apex court.

Current Status of women in Indian judiciary:

- In the 75 years of history of the SC, there have been only eight women judges — the first was Justice FathimaBeevi, who was elevated to the bench after a long gap of 39 years from the date of establishment of the SC.

- There are only 80 women judges out of the sanctioned strength of 1,113 judges in the High Courts and the Supreme Court.

- There are six High Courts: Manipur, Meghalaya, Patna, Tripura, Telangana, and Uttarakhand where there are no sitting women judges. Appointments of judges in the higher judiciary

- Articles 124(2) and 217: govern the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and High Courts respectively.

- Under both provisions, the President has the power to make the appointments “after consultation with such of the Judges of the Supreme Court and of the High Courts in the States as the President may deem necessary”.

- Recently HimaKohli has been nominated as the Chairperson of the Supreme Courts ‘Gender Sensitisation and Internal complaints committee.’

Delimitation, Women's quota:

In September 2023, parliament amended the constitution to provide 33% reservation to women in loksabha and state legislative assemblies. A crucial provision in law makes implementation of women's reservation contingent upon the delimitation process. It states that the quota ‘shall come into effect after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose after the relevant figures for the first census taken after the commencement of the constitution bill 2023 have been published and shall cease to have effect on the expiration of period of 15 years from the date of such commencement.’

A 33% reservation in the current 545 member loksabha would mean 182 seats being kept for women. Only 363 seats would available for men.

Issue of SarpanchPatism in Politics:

Recently Supreme Court flagged the colonial mind-set among bearcats who habitually attempt to boss over elected representatives, especially in grassroots democratic institutions and said they must instead encourage women's participation and leadership in governance.

The phenomenon of unelected male relatives wielding political and decision making power behind women amounted to a sheer mockery of constitutional democracy. This is the situation 30 after the 73rd constitutional amendment act 1992 provided a one-third quota for women in village, block and district level of panchayat governance. The ministry of Panchayat Raj to look into the grievances made by the Supreme Court.

BalikaPanchayat:

BalikaPanchayat is managed by the people in the 11-21 age group and its main objective is to promote the social and political development of the girl child and to remove the evil practices from the society such as child marriage, and dowry system.

The countrys first ever girl Panchayat, BalikaPanchayat started in Gujarat under ‘BetibachaoBetiPadhao campaign. The ministry of women and child development should begin this initiative across the country.

The issue of gender equality in India.

This issue has gained a central position in political and social debate. In India, the Constitution provides that there shall be no discriminations on basis of sex, i.e. gender. Laws also regard both men and women equal, yet in practical life, there is a wide gap in matters of development, progress and prosperity. Women, though are called to be provided with equal opportunities in matters of education and jobs, are clearly not avail of them. Level of education is obviously not equal but even proportionately literacy level has also a wide gap among male and female. Sex ratio shows a gap of 67 women less than per one thousand men in India. Social practices and policies are yet not so developed to provide females enough chances for their all over development. Debates are there to provide them more and more reservations in education and jobs apart from facilities for their upliftment. In some fields, a few female persons have achieved glorious success but they are exceptions and not generality of Indian gender issues.

Gender Bias:

Sometimes in the zeal of protecting women, feminism grows to the extent of chauvinistic approach. This leads to complete bias picture of the society and organisation. The women’s organisation, focused on the rights and upliftment of women, should be made more inclusive to have better understanding of the society. Gender bias occurs due to personal values, educational and social upbringing of a person. Gender bias can easily crept in women’s organisation due to higher sensitivity towards the women specific issues. Intervention and opinion of men can bring a new perspective. Having men in women’s organisation will also make them sensitive towards crimes and mis-happening against women. Men member can suggest measures for upliftment of women and protection of their rights in the society. False allegations of crimes and harassment raised against men, taking advantages of existing women friendly law, should be examined not only by women but also by a men member. Male member can provide moral support to the organisation of women and thus encourage them by assuring that in fight against injustice women are not alone. Therefore, to bring counter and complementary view of the societal values, men members in women’s organisation can be useful to make it unbiased.

Violence against women:

It is disheartening that even after 75 years of independence females remain unsafe in our society. The main problem is deep rooted patriarchal mind set which is impeding our country in achieving her full potential. Some suggestions for creating a safer environment for woman are mentioned below:

- (a) India must ratify all global and regional treaties which concerns safety women. It will increase pressure on government to take this matter at utmost priority.
- (b) Women helplines should be made operational round the clock.

(c) Women must be financially empowered by providing necessary education, skills as well as financial support for starting business.

(d) Specialized fast track courts should be set up to punish perpetrators and provide sense of closure to violence survivor women.

(e) Police stations must be made gender sensitive.

Finally, awareness about equal rights of women in society is must. It is not only responsibility of government and police but is everyone's responsibility to create a safe environment for women.

Status of Rural Women:

Rural women in India are less literate than rural men. According to 2011 census, the populations of rural women who are literate are 58.8 percent (Census, 2011). The status of women is not effectually recognised in rural communities. They experience discriminatory treatment as compared to their male counterparts. Mostly women are deprived of certain rights and opportunities in rural areas because of the people's mind-set. Rural women are vital and productive workers in India's national economy. There is also statistical bias in under estimating the role of rural women in development. Women work for longer hours than men and contribute substantially to family income, they are not perceived as productive workers Women are silent workers who are struggling to complete her household duties from dawn to dusk. In rural areas, very few women have ownership over land or productive assets.

Role of Women in Rural Growth Women are key agents for rural growth and development in India. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. When women are economically and socially empowered, they become a potent force for change. Women are an integral part of any society and they play a crucial role in the economy of both developed and developing one. The rural women, play many social and economic roles inside as well as outside the home, but their contribution does not receive due recognition by the society. The rural women are extremely skilled on various income generating activities. They are playing a vital role in the economic well-being of the families and society as a whole in rural India.

Conclusion:

The importance of women's political empowerment cannot be overstated. It facilitates direct engagement in public decision-making, ensures better accountability to women, and helps undertake reforms that promote gender equality in public policy. Moreover, women's participation in politics dismantles the patriarchal nature of Indian politics, focuses attention on gender issues, and contributes to stronger attention to women's issues.

To further enhance women's political empowerment, it's essential to address the challenges they face. These include gender gaps in political ambition, patriarchal societal norms, and the high cost of contesting elections. Measures such as reservation for women in parliament and state assemblies, training and capacity-building programs, and mentorship initiatives can help overcome these obstacles.

Ultimately, women's empowerment in Indian politics requires a multifaceted approach that involves both top-down and bottom-up strategies. By promoting women's participation in politics and addressing the challenges they face, India can move closer to achieving true gender equality and empowering women to become leaders and changemakers.

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