

**Original Article**

## **Women in Politics: The Disparity in Access to Political Participation**

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**Abstract (old) :**

To this very day, women in the society are still overshadowed by men in many aspects. There is also a clear acknowledgment from all the people around the world about the existence of marginalization of women from the political and public sphere of life. This issue exists in almost all the parts of the world. Since the establishment of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1789, a ladies' restroom was constructed for the women members in 2011. This fact clearly explains the situation of women in politics. But many countries have taken an initiative to uplift women in politics. In 2018, the Prime Minister of Spain, Pedro Sanchez has appointed 11 women and six men to the newly formed cabinet. When this news hit the world, his only response to the world was "unmistakably committed to equality". These developments are not consistent throughout the world. In India, since its independence, an increase in the enthusiastic participation of the women voters can be seen but that did not translate into proportionate electoral participation of women. There has been some progress in the political participation of women in the politics, but it has been slow and uneven. In the entire paper the reference to 'political participation' would carry the meaning of participation in the legislative decision making. The paper aims to explain the history of the political participation of women, explore the scenario of women in politics in India, detail the reasons for the marginalisation of women from politics, examine the survey conducted by the author, and propose her suggestions to encourage women to take part in politics.

**Keywords:** Women in Politics, Political Participation, marginalization

**Updated abstract**

This article aims to Analyze the underlying factors contributing to gender disparity in politics while exploring viable strategies to promote women's participation and leadership in governance. By ensuring equitable representation, societies can harness the diverse perspectives and leadership styles women bring to the political sphere, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and effective policymaking. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach. Empowering women through education, mentorship programs, and targeted political training can enhance their participation. Establishing gender quotas, promoting inclusive political environments, and implementing policies that encourage work-life balance are crucial steps toward achieving gender parity. Furthermore, raising public awareness and challenging traditional stereotypes can foster a more equitable political landscape. In

India, since its independence, an increase in the enthusiastic participation of the women voters can be seen but that did not translate into proportionate electoral participation of women. There has been some progress in the political participation of women in the politics, but it has been slow and uneven. In the entire paper the reference to 'political participation' would carry the meaning of participation in the legislative decision making. In their study of the history of women's political participation, the author explores the situation of women in politics in India. She details the reasons behind the marginalization of women in this sphere and examines a survey she conducted. Additionally, she offers suggestions to encourage greater involvement of women in politics.

**Keywords:** Women in Politics, Political Participation, marginalization

## **1.Introduction**

The participation of women in politics remains a critical issue globally, with many societies still grappling with gender inequality in political spheres. Despite significant advancements, women continue to face numerous barriers, such as patriarchy, political distrust, and limited access to leadership roles. This article explores survey findings that shed light on public perceptions of women's political participation in India and other countries, the impact of patriarchal structures, and the role of reservations in promoting gender equality in politics. The data reveals a strong awareness of these challenges, highlighting both support for reforms and concerns about their long-term effectiveness in ensuring equal representation for women

### **History of Political Participation of Women:**

When Finland was a part of the Russian Empire as an autonomous province, Finns were fighting to achieve independence from the growing pressure of Russia. So, various civil organizations and associations came into existence to fight back the oppressive rule. Being part of such organizations, women have actively participated in the freedom struggle. Later on, they had to form their own organizations to fight for winning the rights to vote and to equally participate in the politics basing their arguments on justice and equality. After the Great Strike of 1905, Finland achieved independence when the Russians

finally agreed to comply. Finland became the first country in the world to grant women the right to contest as an electoral candidate and the first country in Europe to grant Adult Suffrage. In the 1<sup>st</sup> election of 1907, out of 200 seats in 19 of them were occupied by the women of the country. This ideology had spread across the world and countries have evolved to include women in the decision-making bodies. Today, Finland the world's happiest country is led by a female and the youngest Prime Minister of either gender in the world, Sanna Marin, who leads her cabinet consisting 12 women out of 19 members.

In India, Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru recognising the women's potential, have supported and encouraged them to participate in the politics of the independence movement. As there was high dissemination of education among the women of the society, we could see the establishment of female organisations in the start of 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the first time, Sarojini Naidu, in 1917, had put forth a demand for voting rights for women to the British Parliament which led to formulation of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms that granted voting rights to 10 lakh women voters yet they had to wait for 13 years to exercise that right. This was the first attempt made by Indian women to enter into the political sphere. These rights were granted on the basis of fulfilment of certain limit of property proprietorship. Later, The Government of India Act 1935, had widened the granting of these rights to women

again on the basis of fulfilling certain limit of property, proprietorship, education, marriage, etc. Again, for every 5 men, 1 woman was granted the right to vote. This Act also reserved seats for women in the provincial and central legislatures. So, in 1937 elections women took advantage of these reservations and secured 80 seats in the legislature, making British India the third highest country in the world along with US and Soviet Union in terms number of women in the legislature in that year. With the constitution granting equal rights to men and women and not fixing any reservation criteria for women in candidacy after the independence led to the decline in the support for inclusive electoral spaces for women has again decreased the percentage of women's participation in the political sphere. We can say that women were allowed to enter the public arena during the independence movement as 'it was a tactical necessity of national liberation struggle'. But they were pushed back to their submissive position when their need is over. Many countries like Finland have achieved success in quantitatively and qualitatively equating the men and women in their political sphere but India, after 74 years of its independence yet remains as a country with one of the least percentages of women's participation in the world.

### **Reasons for Improper Representation of Women in the Decision-Making Assemblies:**

- The age-old concept of patriarchy which is deeply ingrained in the society is the most

important hindrance for participation of women in the society. Men look at women as a domestic housewife and as an inferior to themselves. They influence over all the decisions made by her including her choice of electoral participation. These kind of traditional and immoral norms of the society change the mind-set of the women and leave them dependent on their husbands

in all their matters and this reduces the confidence and faith in themselves which will not be helpful to someone who is aspiring to enter into political arena. Immoral 'Moral' obligation of a woman to not voice her opinions and remaining apolitical results in marginalisation of women. Many orthodox people consider the otherwise behaviour as unacceptable as the mass consciousness evaluates such behaviour as shameful and against the 'normal' role of a woman. Political institutions in India are male-dominated who do not appreciate women in polity and are not concerned about improving the position of women in the politics as their participation increases the competition of winning an election.

- Education plays a very important role in shaping the leaders of the society. In India, where girls are seen as a burden to the family, spending money on their education seems absurd

to them. Though the government had granted children the right to free education, yet these families do not send these girls to schooling, as their duty is regarded to fulfil domestic work of a house. The process of getting educated takes a person through different phases of change. It opens a person to imbibe knowledge and builds mature and envisioned thinking. Without proper education, women will not be in a position to understand the complexities in the political atmosphere. Even if a woman finishes her basic education and aspires to choose a career of her choice, these choices are controlled by her family which is again discouraging.

- Due to the inferior position of women in the society, it is hard for them to access the political networks and secure support from the political parties. It is difficult for them to tap

financial resources which is required for making into the political sphere of a society. Lack of connections and co-

operations of a woman pursuing political career with other public organisations like trade guilds, labour unions and social groups limits her interaction with the working society which constitutes a major portion of the population of the community which in turn reduces winning moral support which is a necessity as a politician.

- Society generally perceives 'politics' to be a 'dirty game' which is a reality in India as this political distrust of the people is rampant due to the prevalence of corruption, nepotism, cronyism, etc. which discourages women to take part in electoral politics.
- The onerous burden upon the women to fulfil the professional work and domestic tasks dissuades women to not to participate in the politics of a society because as discussed above, India is a patricentric society, so men do not share the household work of the family and it is solely seen as an obligation of women to do the household chores.
- Reports of assault, abuse, intimidation, objectification, violence against politically active women has risen concerns about the security these women in the society. These were been reported by those women who have been dedicating themselves for developing their society and they were been insulted and objectified for just being a woman. These acts are a blatant violation of human rights and on the top of that it gravely impedes the access of political sphere to the women of the society.

The above discussed reasons are focused on the main issues in India, but there might be many reasons which might vary on individual basis regarding excluding of women from the political arena of a society.

From 1907 to 1995, the percentage of women in the 'Eduskunta' or the Finnish Parliament started from being 10% to being 33% with an extraordinary percentage of 39% in 1991

elections. Yet, to encourage women to take part in the governance of the country, the Finnish Equality Legislation had included the gender quotas, restricting to at least 40% representation of both the genders in the government and advisory committees, institutions, etc. Today's

polity of Finland clearly puts forth the success of gender quotas. Another example of implementing reservations in politics which needs to be acknowledged is the Rwanda's gender quota. While recovering from a genocide, Rwanda had created a new constitution with a provision of gender quota mandating reservation of 30% of seats for women in the parliament. In the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women's report of "Women in politics: 2020", Rwanda holds 1<sup>st</sup> position for having the highest number of women parliamentarians of 61.3% in the Lower House.

India has made attempts to pass a women's reservation bill in 1996, 1998, 2002, and 2003 but remained unsuccessful. In 2008, the United Progressive Alliance introduced the Women Reservation Bill in the Rajya Sabha and got passed, but currently it is still pending in the Lok Sabha. In the Local administrations called Panchayati Raj Institutions, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the seats are reserved for women but some of the states extended the reservation upto 50%. Success was seen in many parts of India and in some areas, women sarpanchs were more than half of the total number of all the sarpanches in India. One of the most important and the recent statistical review on the topic is the "**Women In Politics: 2020**" map created by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the UN Women<sup>1</sup>, which clearly puts forth the numbers and the percentages of women holding the parliamentarian, ministerial and leading positions around the world. An article "**Why Women in Politics**" written by Sandra Pepera from the National Democratic Institute succinctly describes the reasons for the necessity of women in politics. A journal article "**Political Participation of Women in India**" written by Manuka Khanna provides

information in depth as to why Indian women are not found in the political sphere of the country. *“Women in the European Union”* is a reading material of the University of Helsinki where a subtopic named *The situation of women in politics- Finland* provided deep insights about the history of Finnish women’s involvement in the political sphere which helped the author to understand the evolution of the position of women due to the cultural and political change in the Finnish community. The time’s newspaper article *“Finland’s Sanna Marin, the World’s Youngest Female Head of Government, Wants Equality, Not Celebrity”* explains about the success of Marin as a Prime Minister and her strong women-dominated cabinet which helped the author to understand the impact of the political past on the present day. National Geographic’s article *“Rwanda’s legislature is majority female. Here’s how it happened.”* written by Kennedy Elliott briefly describes about the Rwanda’s history of the making of gender quotas in the legislative assemblies which has helped the author to understand the results of implementation of reservation quotas in the country. An editorial *“Women’s Reservation Bill”* explains about the attempts made by the parliament of India to introduce reservation quotas to women and also about the information of the introduced reservation bills in the parliament. *“Status of Women in Politics”* is a journal article written by A. Thankodi and M. Sugirtha which helped the author to understand the history of involvement of women in the political movements of independence period and about the position of women in the past and present. The objectives of the research paper helps the reader in comprehending the overall plan of the research paper. The author of this research aims:

1. To understand the history of the women’s access to the political participation.
2. To decipher the reasons for the exclusion of women from the political domain of a country.

3. To analyse the initiatives of the countries that have more number of women holding political power.
4. To assess the political situation of India with respect to the political participation of women.
5. To break down the data collected from the questionnaire initiated by the researcher.
6. To put forth the author’s suggestions to tackle the deprivation of women’s involvement in politics in India.

This is a comprehensive analysis of survey data related to women’s participation in politics, and it covers several aspects such as gender, political participation, patriarchy, reservation, and political distrust. Here's a brief summary and interpretation of each section:

The survey data provides valuable insights into the perspectives surrounding women’s participation in politics, highlighting key issues such as gender inequality, the impact of patriarchy, and the need for reservations to promote women’s political empowerment. According to the responses, a significant majority of participants believe that women in India do not have equal access to political participation. While 62.5% disagreed with the idea of women’s equal participation in politics, only 25% agreed, with the remaining 12.5% expressing uncertainty. This indicates that there is a strong recognition of gender inequality in political opportunities within India, and a general consensus that women are marginalized in the political sphere.

The survey also expanded its scope to the global context, questioning whether women have equal access to political participation abroad. Here, 48.8% of respondents disagreed with the notion that women enjoy equal opportunities in politics globally, while 17.1% agreed, and 34.1% were unsure. This data reveals that many respondents perceive gender inequality in politics as a worldwide issue, with women in many countries still facing

significant barriers to political participation. These findings suggest that the issue of gender inequality in politics is not limited to one country, but is a pervasive problem that requires global attention and reform.

One of the most striking results from the survey was the overwhelming support for the equal importance of voting rights and political participation. An astonishing 97.5% of respondents agreed that the right to equal access to political participation is as important as the right to vote. This highlights a strong belief in the necessity of not only encouraging women to vote, but also empowering them to take on decision-making roles within political spheres. However, despite this recognition of the importance of women's involvement in politics, the survey found that political institutions, including the Election Commission of India, have failed to take meaningful steps to encourage women to participate as political leaders. The focus remains largely on women as voters rather than as active participants in political decision-making.

Another key factor identified in the survey was the role of patriarchy in hindering women's political participation. A resounding 82.5% of respondents agreed that traditional patriarchal structures within families discourage women from engaging in electoral politics. This finding underscores the deeply ingrained societal norms that limit women's freedom and opportunities to engage in public and political life. The data suggests that overcoming these societal barriers is essential for enabling women to fully participate in politics, and that changing patriarchal attitudes will be key to achieving gender equality in this area.

The issue of reservations for women in politics also emerged as a significant point of discussion. When asked about the need for reservations to promote women's political participation, 51.2% of respondents expressed support, while 34.1% were uncertain, and 14.6% opposed the idea. Those who opposed reservations cited concerns over the longevity of such measures, comparing them to the

reservations for SC/ST communities and fearing that permanent reservations could disadvantage other groups. This indicates that while there is support for reservations, there is also a call for ensuring that such policies do not create long-term imbalances in political representation.

Furthermore, when considering the types of reservation quotas for women, the majority of respondents (58.5%) favored implementing reservations in both political parties and legislative assemblies. Only 9.8% of respondents opposed any form of reservation. This preference for a comprehensive approach to reservations reflects an understanding that gender equality in politics must begin at the grassroots level and extend to all aspects of political life, from party representation to legislative decision-making.

Lastly, the issue of political distrust was also highlighted as a significant barrier to women's participation in politics. Almost half of the respondents (46.3%) agreed that political distrust in male-dominated political institutions hinders women from engaging in political activities, while 31.7% disagreed and 22% were unsure. This suggests that many respondents recognize the mistrust women may feel toward a political system that is predominantly controlled by men, further reinforcing the challenges that women face in entering and succeeding in politics.

In conclusion, the survey results reveal a widespread recognition of the barriers women face in politics, both in India and globally. While there is strong support for initiatives such as reservations and greater political representation for women, there are also significant concerns about the sustainability of such measures. The data emphasizes the need for political institutions to not only encourage women to vote but also to foster environments where women can become active leaders and decision-makers. Overcoming patriarchal structures and addressing political distrust will be crucial in ensuring that women are able to fully participate in political processes and achieve true gender equality in the political

sphere.

## Conclusion

The concept of barring women from the public arena has been existing in the society since Later Vedic Period. In many countries, inspiring measures were taken to uplift women in the decision-making sphere. But India, being the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> most populated country has women underrepresented in the political institutions having only representation of 14.4% in Lok Sabha and 10.4% in Rajya Sabha. Women are just seen as a domestic robot and nothing more. Their freedom of choice is stripped away since their day one. The data exhibited above reflects the opinion of the society on the women's involvement in the politics. Majority of the respondents accept the fact that inequality exists in the society which deprives women their right to equal access to political participation and they have also agreed to the fact that these impractical social concepts called as patriarchy, superiority and inferiority to this day prevail in the society which obstruct the development of women not just in politics but in all the arenas of social life. Respondents also recognised that equal importance should be given to the women's right to vote and the right to equal access to political participation as they have acknowledged the notion that political institutions have been promoting women to come forward and vote but were not doing the same in terms of encouraging women to take part in the decision making of the government. Receiving a positive note on the implementation of gender-based reservations across the world, when the author posed this view to her respondents, a good percentage has voted for yes but the others were negating and sceptical about the long-term issue of the reservations remaining the same without any change when the development was witnessed as if with the reservations of SC/ST castes in the long term which have affected the opportunities of OC castes. So, these respondents demanded for a strict deadline for

the reservations. The majority of the respondents are affirmative to implement the reservation quota in the Legislative Assemblies as well as the political parties. Respondents have also considered political distrust as a reason for barricading women's political participation because when people lose faith in the political system of the country due to the deceiving interests of their politicians, they would not be concerned about the scenario, and the possibility of the occurrences of the chaos will be high. And in such cases, women would not take a risk in participating in the decision-making body which is opposed by the people. The hypothesis formulated by the researcher has resulted in being correct.

The researcher is standing on promoting reservation quotas to women in all the political institutions. But in the light of the detailed analysis, the researcher came up with a proposal of increasing the fixed number of seats in the legislative assemblies. The last changes to the fixed number of seats of the parliament was in 1976, after assessing the population density, the number of seats was increased. From the 1976 to 2020, the population had doubled so the assembly has to consider the author's proposal. This might also benefit those politicians who are not ready to promote women in the political sphere due to the risk of increasing competition and reducing their winnability percentage. But eventually there has to be a structural change from the core moral and cultural aspects of the society in respect to recognizing women's choices, presence, and treating them as an equal to their counterparts and respecting them as what they are, because if this immense change from the grassroots does not occur, then any constructive and legislative change would be redundant. This imbalance needs to be redressed to bring a situation when the percentage of women in the political institutions would be more than men, that situation should be accepted as normal and left unnoticed and a paper on this subject would be redundant.

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