

ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT:

Women's political participation in India has been a major topic of discussion in recent years, as it is essential for achieving gender equality and true democracy. Despite the presence of women in state and national parliaments, women still face several obstacles in terms of political representation. This includes the lack of women's involvement in political parties, which is still limited due to social stigma and patriarchal culture. Additionally, children's socialization and social norms can also have an impact on women's political participation. Despite over 60 years of democracy, women's rights have not been translated into real rights by the government or officials, leaving them in a patriarchal culture that does not recognize or value their involvement and contributions. Women's participation in politics is influenced by children's socialization and social norms. Women's participation in Indian political parties and governance is essential for the achievement of gender equality and true democracy. Unfortunately, women's representation in political parties and governance remains low due to the persistence of social stigma and patriarchal cultures.

Keywords: Women's political participation, gender equality, Indian politics, governance, Women's Reservation Bill, patriarchal cultures, social stigmas.

1. INTRODUCTION

The women's movement in India is working to address two major gaps in the country's democratic framework that prevent Indian women from participating in democratic processes. Women's participation in politics is as much a human right as it is a cornerstone of women's right to equal citizenship, and despite the progressive goals of India's Constitution, women's aspirations of full citizenship have not been fully realized and their involvement in society's economic and political concerns has remained limited. Men's dominance in politics must end, and women leaders are the key to our future. India's primary democratic deficiency is the lack of women in decision-making bodies, especially in state and national legislatures with no reservations. Women voters and political activists are often marginalised, and subjected to discrimination, harassment and violence, and policies do not adequately reflect women's values, needs and priorities. The Women's Reservation Bill has been in the political arena for almost 10 years, with heated debates in Parliament and beyond. The bill has passed in parliament. Women's participation in Indian political parties and governance is essential for gender equality and true democracy. Despite this, women's representation in political parties and governance remains low, due to lingering social taboos and patriarchal cultures. The Women's Reservation Bill aims to ensure that 1/3rd of seats in the parliament and state legislatures are reserved for women.

2. Historical evolution

Women in politics and governance in India have long been a subject of interest to scholars and researchers. The history, culture, and social context of women's political participation in India have shaped it over time.

Historically, women played a major role in the political institutions in ancient India. But with the rise of patriarchy and caste, women's position in society declined and their access to politics became restricted.

Women played an important role in the Indian freedom movement, fighting alongside men to achieve independence for the country. Women leaders such as Indira Gandhi (the first woman Prime Minister in India), Sarojini Nadkarni (the first woman President of India), and the late Annie Besant played key roles in the movement. Women have been active in economic activities, and domestic work, and have voted for better governance in the post-independence era. Today, women make up about 25% of the Indian central government with portfolios such as External Affairs, Commerce, and Human Resources Development. At the grassroots level, however, women are still under-represented in politics. The Women Reservation Bill, which seeks to ensure that a third of the Lok Sabha seats and the seats of the state legislative assemblies are reserved for women has been a topic of discussion for several years. The bill aims to increase the number of women in politics and to ensure that women are represented in decision-making bodies. Women's participation in politics and governance in India has been a subject of discussion for a long time. Women's Representation in Indian Parliament and State Assemblies

While the percentage of women in the Lok Sabha has increased since the first Lok Sabha from 5% to 15%, the number of women in state legislative assemblies (MLAs) remains low, and some states have very few or no female MLAs. "Sanjay Kumar explores the importance of women in India's political system and the marginalization they have faced in the past". importance of women's representation in India's Parliament as a metric for measuring progress in addressing gender inequality in the country. The various reasons why women are under-represented in Indian politics, include social norms, education, and financial restrictions. In conclusion, the number of women MLAs in the Indian Parliament and state assemblies remains low, although some progress has been made over the years, such as the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill (WRS), which seeks to provide women with a 33% quota in the Indian parliament and state legislatures.

3. Women and Gender

The socially created identities, roles, and expectations that a society accepts as suitable for people based on their perceived or assigned sex are collectively referred to as gender. Gender is a social construct that is fluid and dynamic, varying between cultures and periods, in contrast to biological sex, which is determined by physical traits like anatomy and genetics.

Beyond the conventional binary classifications of male and female, gender comprises a range of identities, including but not limited to transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming people. These identities are a reflection of a variety of self-expression, identification, and orientation experiences that could defy traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.

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A variety of tactics are used in the fight against gender inequality and in favour of women's empowerment, such as grassroots activism, advocacy campaigns, legislative changes, and educational programs. These initiatives seek to dispel institutional impediments, combat misconceptions, and advance gender parity throughout society.

All things considered, the idea of gender and women emphasises how critical it is to identify and confront the structural, social, and cultural elements that influence people's experiences according to their gender identification. Societies can work to create more just, equitable, and inclusive settings for all people, regardless of their gender identity or expression, by encouraging gender equality and inclusivity.

5. Participation of Women in Grassroots Governance

Women's involvement in local governance in India is a subject of interest to researchers and policymakers. While the Constitution guarantees equal citizenship for all women, women's representation in the electoral and public institutions remains low, mainly because of the structural barriers created by patriarchy. The Women's Reservation Bill seeks to ensure that 33% of seats in Parliament and state assemblies are reserved for women. The Bill has been tabled in Parliament for over a decade. Women's representation is also low in police forces and in the judiciary. At the grass-roots level, women have a representation of only 11% in India's Lower House of Parliament and 10% in the upper House of Parliament. In order to understand the level of women's participation in local government at the grass-roots level in India, the NEN conducted a study on government schemes and state institutions, as well as youth bodies at community level. Despite the reserved quota for women in the school management committees, the NEN found that women had a low representation in the school management committee (SMC). Youth bodies (YBs) also have a low representation in their executive. To sum up, the under-representation of women in grass-roots governance in India must be addressed through policy measures that are strategic and gender sensitive. For instance, affirmative action measures, such as reservation in local government structures and in community processes, can help to increase women's participation in the decision-making process. Strengthening women leaders' capacities through knowledge-sharing sessions and networking activities can also help to empower women leaders to assume leadership positions in governance and provision of public service. Encouraging the creation of women's collectives can help to strengthen interpersonal relationships, and education, and build trust and confidence among women. Empowerment of women at the grassroots requires a multi-stakeholder approach across the government, CSOs, and private sector.

6. Some Successful Women in Indian Politics

Examples of successful female leaders in India include the Indian National Congress President, Sonia Gandhi, and the United Progressive Alliance's (UPA) Chairperson, Sheila Dikshit. Indira Gandhi was India's first woman Railway Minister from 1998 to 2013, and she led the Congress Party to three successive electoral victories in Delhi. Additionally, she served as the Governor of Kerala and was a member of the Indian Parliament seven times and three times as a member of the Legislative Assembly. In West Bengal, she was the first female Chief Minister and played a key role in the state's transition from a left-leaning government to a right-leaning one.

These women have had a significant impact on Indian politics, holding important leadership roles and influencing political decisions at both the national and state levels. One of the most prominent female political leaders in India is Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, who is also the General Secretary of AIADMK. Mayawati, a Dalit leader from Uttar Pradesh, has been the Chief Minister four times and is a Jatav caste member who has had a major impact on the political landscape in Uttar Pradesh.

7. Women's Empowerment Policies and Initiatives

Women's political participation is an integral part of real democracy and equality. The Women's Reservation Bill (WRA) seeks to ensure women's representation in the decision-making process by reserving 33% of all Lok Sabha seats and state assembly seats. The bill has been on hold in Parliament for several years, showing the difficulties in implementing such reservations. Besides reservations and WRA, voluntary quotas have been successful in increasing women's space in parties and in political discourse in many countries. Women's participation at the local level in politics is also important in determining the need for political intervention to improve women's participation. Measuring women's political involvement is important in order to make sure policies and initiatives address the issues women face in terms of political participation. The fact that India has a large share of women at the local level of politics has been achieved through the reservation of seats for women in the government. The true spirit and unshakable courage of women during the freedom movement are also worth celebrating.

However, despite these efforts, women's participation in Indian politics is still low, with women in the Lok Sabha representing only 11% of the total number of seats, and the Rajya Sabha representing only 10.6%. In addition, the Women's Reservation Bill (WRA), which seeks to ensure that 33% of the Lok Sabha seats and state assemblies seats are reserved for women, has remained pending in Parliament for over a decade. Women are also under-represented in the police and judicial systems, with a combined representation of 5.33% in the police and 9.04% in the judicial system. To sum up, while many policies and initiatives have been put in place to increase women's representation in Indian politics, they are still under-represented. Therefore, it is essential to adopt more strategic, gender-sensitive policies to ensure equal representation across all social, political and economic structures.

CONCLUSION

The political and governance roles of women in India are complex and changing, with both successes and setbacks. Even though women have made great strides since independence, they still face obstacles to full political involvement. The number of female candidates for electoral office has not increased significantly over the past three decades, and no legislature has ever had a female majority of more than 15%. Patriarchal culture, fear, and violence have been cited as the main reasons for women's exclusion from political life. There have been some efforts to address the gender gap in governance, such as the reservation and quota of seats at the central or state levels. The 73rd constitutional amendment mandated the reservation of seats at a local level, which has resulted in a significant increase in female elected village leaders. Despite these efforts, women remain under-represented in decision-making bodies and experience discrimination, harassment and violence when it comes to political life.

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