

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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Introduction

In the ancient Indian women held a high place of respect in the society as mentioned in Rigveda and other scriptures. Volumes can be written about the status of our women and their heroic deeds from the vedic period to the modern times. But later on, because of social, political and economic changes.

Political participation means exercising the Right to Vote, Political Activism, Power of Sharing, Membership of Political Parties, Electoral Campaigning, Attending Party Meetings, Holding Party Positions, Contesting Election, Co-decision making, Co-policy making at all levels of governance of the state. simply put, it is process through which individuals plays a role in political life deciding the common goals of the society and determining the best way to achieve it. Women in India participate in voting, run for public offices and political parties at lower levels more than men. Political activism and voting are the strongest areas of women's political participation.

Right to Vote

The rights granted in response to the movement towards suffrage were limited to qualifications of literacy and property ownership, including property ownership of husbands. This excluded vast majority of Indian women and men from voting, because they were poor. This changed in 1950 when universal suffrage was granted to all adult Indian citizens. In 1950, universal suffrage granted voting rights to all women.

To remedy low participation of women electors, India in 1994 established quotas (reservations) in constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) to reserve 33% of seats in local governments for women. The Women's Reservation Bill (108th amendment) has been introduced in the national parliament to reserve 33% of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats for women. The bill has yet to be passed by Lok Sabha and signed into law. The discussion of women's reservations began in the 1920s and continued into the 1930s until a compromise was reached with Britain to allow women in urban areas to vote. Discussion of women's reservations were again introduced in 1974 by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in India, but India did not fully establish quotas in local government until 1994. Local governing bodies in India are called Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and one-third of seats and leadership positions must be reserved for women. An Indian state, established reservations prior to the 73rd amendment and they had 28,069 women elected in 1992 and 28,595 women elected in 1997. Class differences have manifested with poorer women gaining presence in panchayats, but women of a higher class being elected as chairpersons.

This is enshrined in Article 326 in our constitution. India is a parliamentary system with two houses: Lok Sabha (lower house) and Rajya Sabha (upper house). Rates of participation among women in 1962 were 46.63% for Lok Sabha elections and rose to a high

in 1984 of 58.60%. Male turnout during that same period was 63.31% in 1962 and 68.18% in 1984. The gap between men and women voters has narrowed over time with a difference of 16.7% in 1962 to 4.4% in 2009.

Voter turnout for national elections in the past 50 years has remained stagnant with turnout ranging between 50 and 60%. State elections have seen a growing trend in women's participation, and in some cases women's turnout is exceeding male turnout. Increased turnout of women was reported for the 2012 Vidhan Sabha elections (legislative/state assemblies) with states such as Uttar Pradesh reporting 58.82% to 60.29% turnout. In the 2013 assembly elections, women's over all turnout was reported to be 47.4%, and male turnout was 52.5%. Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Daman and Diu, and Puducherry all reported higher turnouts among women than men in 2013. To combat gender inequality in politics, the Indian Government has instituted reservations for seats in local governments. Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 95.63%, compared to 67.09% turnout for men.

It is believed that though increasing the number of women in national government may not guarantee an impact on governance, a critical mass of women in power can bring about transformation in leadership.

Table 1: Women Participation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha 1952 - 2004

	Lok Sabha			Rajya Sabha		
Year	No.of Seats	No.of Women MPs	% of Women	No.of Seats	No.of Women MPs	% of Women
1952	499	22	4.41	219	16	7.31
1957	500	27	5.4	237	18	7.59
1962	503	34	6.76	238	18	7.56
1967	523	31	5.93	240	20	8.33
1971	521	22	4.22	243	17	7
1977	544	19	3.49	244	25	10.25
1980	544	28	5.15	244	24	9.84
1984	544	44	8.09	244	28	11.48
1989	517	27	5.22	245	24	9.8
1991	544	39	7.17	245	38	15.51
1996	543	39	7.18	223	19	8.52
1998	543	43	7.92	245	15	6.12
1999	543	49	9.02	245	19	7.76
2004	543	45	8.28	245	DNA	DNA
2009	543	59	10.86	245	22	8.98
2014	543	61	11.23	241	28	11.62
Average	530	35	6.59	240.00	21	9

Source: Election Commission of India's website (www.cci.gov.in).

The table 1 shows that in the first Lok Sabha, out of 499 seats, there were 22(4.41%) women members elected to the house in 1952. In the subsequent elections their number fluctuated. It was in 1984 that the highest number of women members, ie.44 (8.09%) out of 544 members entered the Lok Sabha. But this trend was not seen in the following elections. Their number was only 28 (5.22%) in 1989 and increased to 39(7.17%) in 1991. That women's share in voting is not properly reflected in their overall representation in the highest law-making body of the country is a fact which should be taken into account while discussing women's political participation.

Women Involment in Political Parties

Women's involvement in political parties is tied to the increasing demand for equal rights. The INC held power until the 1990. As the INC moved away from welfare politics, other parties arose to challenge the INC using poverty as the center of their agenda. The INC regained power in 2004 with the help of women's participation. The INC has increased women's participation by instituting a 33% quota for women in all levels of the party. In June 2009, the INC nominated a woman to become first speaker of Lok Sabha, and also supported the election of Pratibha Patil, India's first female president. Women were involved in the early establishment of the BJP. The BJP has encouraged greater representation of women by developing women's leadership programs, financial assistance for women candidates, and implementing a 33% reservation for women in party leadership positions. BJP has received women's support by ocusing on issues such as the Uniform Civil Code to extend equal rights to women and men regardless of religion.

Political Activism

Women's education and was helpful in the passage of the Hindu Code of Bills between 1952 and 1960. The Committee on the Status of Women in India released a report in 1974, and had a significant influence in the reemergence of activism towards gender equality. The report highlighted the significant differences between men and women in India, including the disparity in the sex ratio, mortality rates, employment, literacy, and wage discrimination. To overcome issues of discrimination and violence, women's organizations have focused on the empowerment of Indian women. Empowerment is tied to the support of family and improved status within the household, which is undermined by the threat of domestic and sexual violence.

Conclution

The Constitution of India attempts to remove gender inequalities by banning discrimination based on sex and class, prohibiting human trafficking and forced labor, and reserving elected positions for women. The Government of India directed state and local governments to promote equality by class and gender including equal pay and free legal aid, humane working conditions and maternity relief, rights to work and education, right to vote and raising the standard of living. It is hoped that before long a consensus may emerge on the issue of women's reservation among political parties of India and women will get their rightful place in central and state law-making bodies. Women were substantially

involved in the Indian independence movement in the early 20th century and advocated for independence from Britain. Independence brought gender equality in the form of constitutional rights, but historically women's political participation has remained low.

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