



# Issues And Challenges Of Indian Women In International Politics

Isha

Research Scholar (Political Science)  
Dept. of Sociology and Political Science  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University)  
DayalBagh Agra-282005

Dr. Rachna Yadav

Assistant Professor  
Dept. of Sociology and Political Science  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University)  
DayalBagh Agra-282005

## Abstract-

India's growing influence on the global politics, women from India continue to face significant obstacles in international politics. This research paper examines the underrepresentation of Indian Women in international politics, highlighting the structural barriers, gender stereotypes and socio-cultural norms that hinder their participation. It also argues that Indian women's exclusion from global decision-making processes perpetuates gendered power dynamics, undermining India's potential as a global actor. The first objective of this paper is that Indian women face some challenges in international politics like gender discrimination, caste, class, religion second objective of this paper analyzes how these intersections impact their access to resources, network and decision-making positions and argues for inclusive policies to enhance Indian women's participation in global governance. This paper is based on secondary sources and methodology of this paper is descriptive and analytical. This paper studying that the ontological and epistemological underpinning of Indian women's absence in international politics, probing the nexus of power, knowledge and subjectivity that perpetuates them ensure. The study gestures towards a counter-narrative that reimagines the global as a contest terrain, where Indian women subjectivities and agencies are reconfigured as pivotal to the geopolitics of knowledge and power.

**Key Words-** Indian Women, International Politics, Gender Discrimination, Women Participation, Global Politics.

## Research Methodology-

This research paper adopts a **qualitative methodology** grounded in the analysis of **secondary data sources** to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by Indian women in global politics. The research design of this paper is **descriptive and exploratory** in nature. The research found its base in **intersectional feminist theory** and **diaspora studies** and helped in constructing theoretical framework.

## Introduction-

Indian women face significant challenges in international politics, reflecting the broader societal and cultural context. One major issue is the lack of representation, with women comprising only about 9-11% of candidates in recent state assembly and union territory elections (Winslow, 2010). This underrepresentation is compounded by a patriarchal mindset, evident in derogatory comments on social media and discriminatory

remarks directed at female politician International (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance IDEA, 2021).

Indian women face unique challenges when entering the realm of international politics, which are influenced by both global and domestic factors (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2020). These challenges stem from cultural, social, institutional, and political barriers, some of which are specific to India's socio-political context, while others are universal. Below are key issues and challenges faced by Indian women in international politics:

### 1- Cultural and Societal Barriers of Indian Women: -



FIG. 1 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Patriarchal Norms:** Indian society is deeply rooted in patriarchy, which affects women's participation in politics. Traditional views often confine women to domestic roles, discouraging them from pursuing political careers, especially in international arenas where travel and high public visibility are required (<https://www.orfonline.org>).
- **Gender Stereotypes:** Indian women in international politics often face gender-based stereotypes about their capability to handle global affairs. They are sometimes perceived as lacking the assertiveness or decisiveness deemed necessary for international leadership, which can limit their opportunities (<https://www.orfonline.org>).
- **Family Expectations:** Many Indian women are expected to prioritize family obligations over their careers. This expectation becomes a significant challenge in the demanding field of international politics, which often requires extended travel and a high degree of commitment (<https://www.orfonline.org>).

### 2- Under representation and Lack of Visibility of Indian women in international level: -

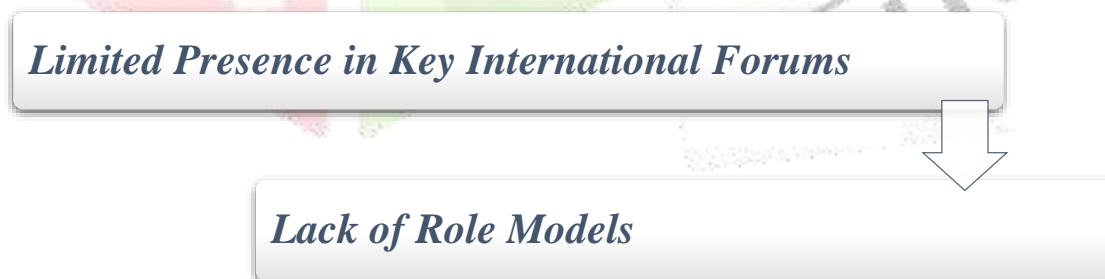


FIG. 2 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

1. **Limited Presence in Key International Forums:** Indian women are under-represented in key international bodies such as the United Nations, G20 and other global institutions. While a few women have risen to prominent positions, the overall number remains low compared to their male counterparts (<https://www.unwomen.org>).
2. **Lack of Role Models:** The relatively small number of Indian women in high-profile international political roles leads to fewer role models for young women aspiring to enter global politics. The lack of visible success stories reinforces the perception that international politics is a male-dominated field (<https://www.unwomen.org>).

### 3- Institutional and Structural Barriers of Indian Women: -



FIG. 3 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Dynamics of Political Party:** Indian political parties are male-dominated and women often face significant barriers to entering or advancing within these structures. Party nominations, support for election campaigns and mentoring opportunities tend to favor male candidates, making it difficult for women to gain the necessary political experience to compete internationally (National Commission for Women NCW, 2020).
- **Glass Ceiling:** Even when women manage to enter the political arena, they often face a "glass ceiling" that prevents them from attaining leadership positions in international diplomacy or global decision-making bodies. This limits their ability to influence key global issues such as security, economics and climate policy (National Commission for Women NCW, 2020).
- **Underrepresentation in Leadership:** Women are underrepresented in high-ranking positions like heads of state, ministers and top diplomatic roles. Even when women are involved in politics, they often face a "glass ceiling" that limits their progression to the highest echelons of power (National Commission for Women NCW, 2020).
- **Political Parties and Networks:** Political party structures are often dominated by men making it difficult for women to navigate or advance within these institutions. Women's political networks are also generally less powerful or connected and compared to their male counterparts (National Commission for Women NCW, 2020).
- **Quota Systems:** While gender quotas are introduced in many countries to increase women's participation, they can sometimes be seen as symbolic rather than meaningful change leading to tokenism without real empowerment (National Commission for Women NCW, 2020).

### 4- Access to Resources and Networks in International Level: -



FIG. 4 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Funding:** Like many women globally Indian women face challenges in raising the necessary financial resources to compete in politics particularly for international positions. Campaign donors and sponsors are more likely to back male candidates or established figures with proven influence limiting women's ability to build a strong political base (Sylvester, 2002).
- **Global Networks:** Indian women may lack access to international networks that are crucial for career advancement in international politics. Building relationships with influential global leaders and

organizations is essential but women often find themselves excluded from male-dominated circles of power (Sylvester, 2002).

- **Education and Training:** Women may have less access to political education, leadership training and mentorship opportunities which are crucial for navigating the complex political landscape (Sylvester, 2002).

#### 5- Violence, Harassment and Intimidation facing by Indian Women in International Level: -



FIG. 5 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Gender-Based Violence and Harassment:** Indian women in politics both at home and on the international stage, face threats of violence, harassment and intimidation. Online abuse, character assassination, and threats are common and these forms of aggression can be more pronounced for women in visible leadership roles (Sharma, 2001).
- **Public Scrutiny:** Women in politics often face harsher public scrutiny regarding their personal lives, appearance and behavior compared to their male counterparts. This scrutiny is amplified when they operate on the international stage which can deter some women from pursuing such roles (Sharma, 2001).
- **Cyber Harassment:** The digital age has introduced new forms of harassment where women politicians are disproportionately targeted through online abuse, trolling and cyber threats. This adds an extra layer of difficulty in engaging in public life (Sharma, 2001).

#### 6- Balancing Personal and Professional Roles of Indian Women: -



FIG. 6 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Work-Life Balance:** Like many women globally Indian women in international politics struggle to balance the demands of their political careers with family responsibilities. The lack of institutional support for childcare or family-friendly policies within political organizations exacerbates this challenge. The demands of political life which often require travel, long hours and intense pressure can conflict with family responsibilities, a burden that disproportionately falls on women. Lack of family-friendly policies in political institutions often exacerbates this challenge (Tharoor, 2021).
- **Perceived Conflict of Interest:** Indian women politicians are often judged more harshly for prioritizing their careers over traditional family roles. This perception can affect their credibility and electability both domestically and internationally. Women in politics often face criticism about their ability to balance their political career with traditional family roles which can hinder their credibility or electability in the eyes of the public (Tharoor, 2021).



## 7- Intersectionality: Caste and Class Barriers facing by Indian Women in international level: -

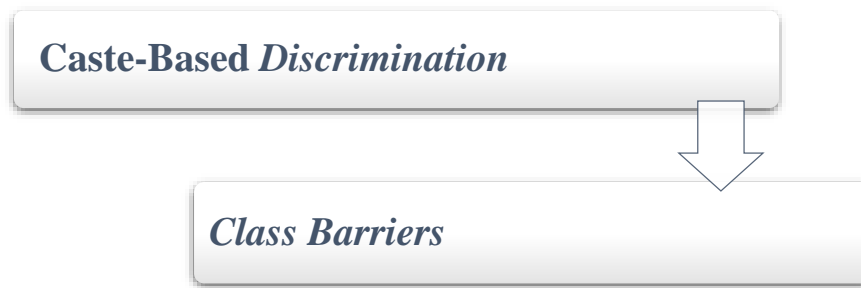


FIG. 7 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Caste-Based Discrimination:** In India caste dynamics play a significant role in determining access to political opportunities. Women from marginalized castes, such as Dalits or Adivasis, face compounded challenges of gender and caste discrimination which limits their ability to rise in politics domestically let alone internationally (Winslow, 2010).
- **Class Barriers:** Women from lower economic backgrounds face greater difficulties in accessing education, political platforms and international opportunities. Wealthier women or those from political dynasties tend to have better access to resources and networks that can support international political ambitions (Winslow, 2010).

## 8- Policy Exclusion of indian women in international politics: -

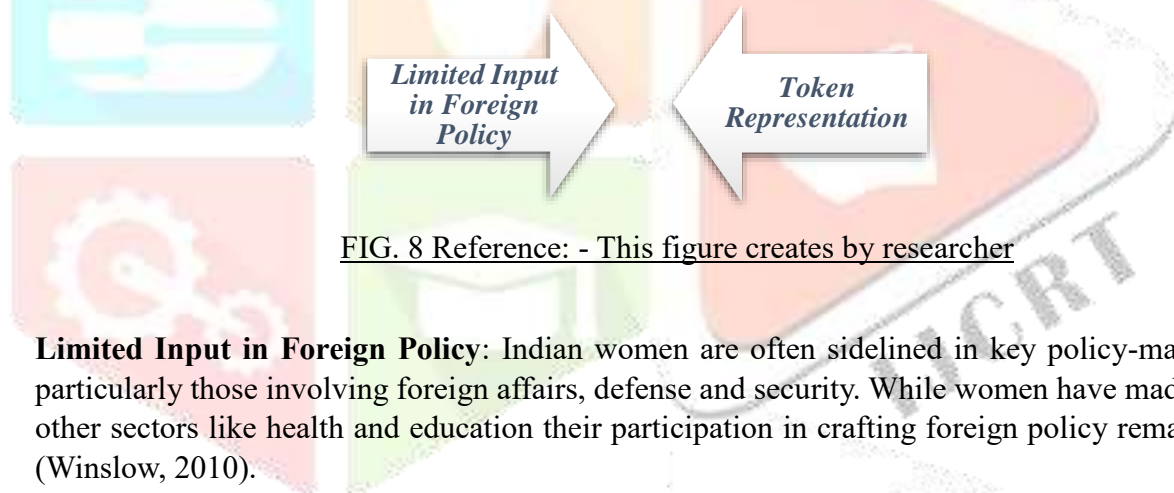


FIG. 8 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Limited Input in Foreign Policy:** Indian women are often sidelined in key policy-making areas, particularly those involving foreign affairs, defense and security. While women have made strides in other sectors like health and education their participation in crafting foreign policy remains limited (Winslow, 2010).
- **Token Representation:** Even when women are given roles in international delegations or negotiations, they may not have substantive power or influence. Tokenism where women are included for symbolic reasons without genuine decision-making authority, is a common issue (Winslow, 2010).

## 9- Media Bias and Representation of Indian women: -

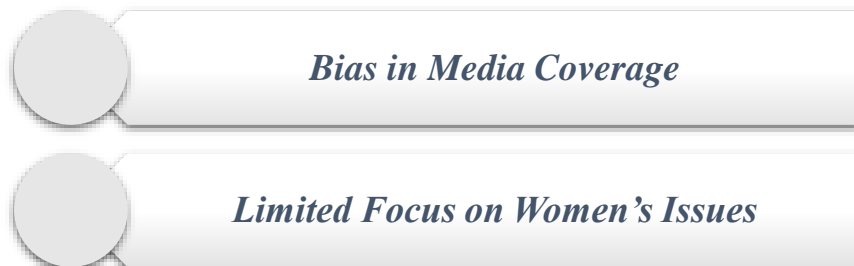


FIG. 9 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Bias in Media Coverage:** Indian women politicians are often subject to biased media coverage, with more focus on their appearance, personal lives, and familial roles than their male counterparts. This skewed representation affects how they are perceived both domestically and internationally diminishing their political credibility (Sharma, 2001).
- **Limited Focus on Women's Issues:** Indian women in politics often struggle to bring attention to issues that disproportionately affect women, such as gender violence, reproductive rights and access to education. These issues may be sidelined in international forums dominated by male leaders and mainstream political agendas (Sharma, 2001).

#### 10- Slow Progress on Gender Parity which is still facing by Indian women in international level: -



FIG. 10 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Slow Institutional Reform:** Despite India's active role in advocating for women's rights on global platforms progress on gender parity within political institutions remains slow. The implementation of gender quotas and affirmative action policies is often met with resistance which limits women's entry and growth in international political spaces (<https://feminisminindia.com>).
- **Patriarchal Diplomacy:** The world of diplomacy and international relations is still largely patriarchal and Indian women often find it challenging to break into this elite field where informal male-dominated networks prevail (<https://feminisminindia.com>).

#### 11- Global Inequality and Intersectionality facing by Indian women at Global level: -

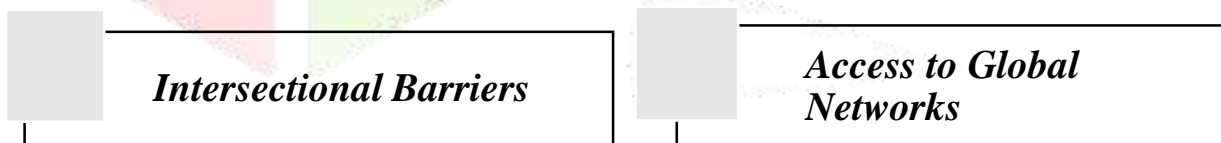


FIG. 11 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Intersectional Barriers:** Women from marginalized communities, including women of color, indigenous women and women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, face compounded challenges. They are often underrepresented and face both gender discrimination and other forms of systemic bias (<https://feminisminindia.com>).
- **Access to Global Networks:** In international politics, networking and diplomatic relations are crucial. Women are often excluded from male-dominated spaces limiting their access to important global networks and opportunities (<https://feminisminindia.com>).

## 12- Give Lack of opportunity to Policy-Making Power of Indian women in international politics: -

### *Limited Influence in Key Areas*

FIG. 12 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Limited Influence in Key Areas:** Women are often underrepresented in key decision-making areas such as defense, security and foreign policy, areas that are central to international politics (Bhatia, 2020). They are more likely to be assigned to social and cultural portfolios, reinforcing gender stereotypes (Tharoor, 2021).

## 13- Mentorship and Role Models making a difficult task for Indian women: -

### *Lack of Female Role Models*

FIG.13 Reference: - This figure creates by researcher

- **Lack of Female Role Models:** There are fewer women in senior international political roles making it difficult for younger women to find mentors and role models. The absence of female leadership in high-profile positions can also perpetuate the notion that politics is a male-dominated sphere (<https://feminisminindia.com>).

Despite these challenges there are numerous examples of women who have made significant strides in international politics pushing for greater representation and equity. However, achieving gender parity requires addressing these systemic barriers through policy reforms cultural change, and international support for women's leadership.

**Role of Indian women in International Politics-** The role of women in international politics has grown significantly over the past few decades though it remains an area where gender inequality persists. Historically politics and diplomacy were male-dominated fields with women's voices marginalized or excluded altogether. However as global movements for gender equality gained momentum and societal attitudes shifted women began to carve out important spaces for themselves in international decision-making (Bhatia, 2020).

Women play crucial roles in addressing global issues such as peace building, human rights, climate change and economic development. Their participation brings diverse perspectives to the table which are essential in crafting more inclusive and comprehensive policies. International organizations including the United Nations have increasingly recognized the importance of women's leadership in achieving sustainable peace and development as reflected in frameworks like the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UN Women Report, 2020).

Despite these advancements women in international politics still face significant challenges, including underrepresentation, societal stereotypes and institutional barriers. However, women leaders like Angela Merkel, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Jacinda Ardern have demonstrated the critical impact of female leadership on the global stage, contributing to a growing acknowledgment of the need for gender-balanced representation in international politics (Inter-Parliamentary Union Report, 2022).

## Success Stories and Hope

Despite these challenges, there are notable examples of Indian women who have made significant strides in international politics. Leaders like **Indira Gandhi**, (Jayakar, 1992) who became a global stateswoman, and **Sushma Swaraj**, who served as India's Foreign Minister, have paved the way for future generations (Devika, 2006).

However, systemic changes are needed to ensure that more Indian women can participate fully and equally in international politics.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms, increased political will, and supportive policies that encourage women's participation in politics both at home and on the global stage.

## Conclusion:

The participation of Indian women in international politics has made significant strides, yet it continues to be constrained by a myriad of challenges. Despite the growing presence of women in global forums, their representation remains disproportionate and often symbolic. Cultural norms, systemic gender biases, and structural barriers have historically restricted women's political ambitions and access to decision-making roles.

However, as India positions itself as a rising global power, the inclusion of women in international politics is not just a matter of equality but also a strategic necessity. Women leaders bring diverse perspectives, foster inclusive policies, and contribute to sustainable solutions in global diplomacy and conflict resolution. Initiatives aimed at education, leadership training, and dismantling societal stereotypes are critical to addressing these challenges (National Commission for Women NCW, 2020).

India must leverage its constitutional commitments to gender equality and expand opportunities for women in political and diplomatic domains. By addressing systemic inequalities and fostering an environment where women can thrive as leaders, India has the potential to not only redefine its global image but also set an example of inclusive and equitable governance in the international arena (Chattopadhyay, 2012).

The journey toward equal representation in international politics is ongoing. It requires a concerted effort from policymakers, civil society, and international institutions to ensure that Indian women are empowered to play a transformative role in shaping the global future (Mukherjee, 2015).

The engagement of Indian women in international politics reflects both progress and persisting challenges. While several Indian women have broken barriers to assume influential roles on the global stage, their overall representation remains limited. Structural inequities, cultural constraints, and systemic biases continue to impede their active participation and leadership in international diplomacy and decision-making (National Commission for Women (NCW, 2020).

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. Policy reforms promoting gender equity, enhanced educational and leadership opportunities, and robust institutional support systems are crucial to enabling women to transcend societal and professional barriers. Furthermore, fostering an inclusive political environment that values diverse perspectives is imperative for achieving gender parity in global governance (Mukherjee, 2015).

As India strives to solidify its position as a major player in international politics, the active participation of women must be viewed as a strategic advantage. Their contributions can enrich diplomatic dialogue, promote inclusive decision-making, and drive innovative solutions to global challenges. Prioritizing gender inclusion is not only a matter of justice but also essential for building a more representative and equitable global order (Sharma, 2001).



By empowering women to take on leadership roles in international politics, India has the potential to inspire transformative change and reaffirm its commitment to equality and progress on the world stage. This endeavor will require sustained efforts from policymakers, civil society, and international organizations to ensure a more balanced and inclusive political landscape for future generations.

## References-

3. Basu, A. (1996). Women's movements in India: Transformations, contradictions, and challenges. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 2(3), 89–110.
4. Baylis, J., Smith, S., & Owens, P. (Eds.). (2020). *The globalization of world politics* (8th ed.). Oxford University Press.
5. Bhatia, R. (2020). Representation of women in India's foreign policy decision-making. *India Review*, 19(1), 25–41.
6. Bhattacharya, S. (2018). Indian women diplomats: Challenges and achievements. *South Asian Journal of International Affairs*, 14(1), 18–34.
7. Cassidy, J. (Ed.). (2017). *Gender and diplomacy*. Routledge.
8. Chattopadhyay, R. (2012). Gender and governance in India: Lessons from Panchayati Raj. *International Political Science Review*, 33(4), 450–472.
9. Devika, J. (2006). *Women in politics and public life in India*. Zubaan Books.
10. Enloe, C. (2004). *Bananas, beaches, and bases: Making feminist sense of international politics*. University of California Press.
11. Feminism in India (FII). (2021). Gender gap in Indian politics. *Feminism in India*. <https://feminisminindia.com>
12. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). (2021). *Women's political participation: Asia report*. IDEA.
13. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2022). *Women in parliament: Annual review*. <https://www.ipu.org>
14. Jayakar, P. (1992). *Indira Gandhi: A biography*. Penguin Books.
15. Mazumdar, V. (1994). *Women and politics in India*. Kali for Women.
16. Mohanty, C. T. (2003). Under Western eyes revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(2), 499–535.
17. Mukherjee, R. (2015). The role of gender in Indian foreign policy: Historical and contemporary perspectives. *India Quarterly*, 71(4), 322–339.
18. National Commission for Women (NCW), (2020). *Status of women in decision-making roles in India*.
19. Nussbaum, M. C. (1999). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge University Press.
20. Observer Research Foundation (ORF). (2023). Women and India's role in global governance. <https://www.orfonline.org>
21. Oxfam India. (2019). *Breaking barriers: Gender equality and political participation*. Oxfam.
22. Pant, H. V. (2018). *India's foreign policy: A reader*. Oxford University Press.
23. Rai, S. M. (2002). Gender and the political economy of development: From nationalism to globalization. *International Studies Review*, 4(3), 75–92.
24. Sharma, U. (2001). *Indian women in politics: Empowerment in the making*. Atlantic Publishers.
25. Sylvester, C. (2002). *Feminist international relations: An unfinished journey*. Cambridge University Press.
26. Tharoor, S. (2021). Soft power and gender inclusivity in Indian diplomacy. *Journal of International Relations Studies*, 6(2), 95–120.
27. Tickner, J. A. (1992). Feminist perspectives on international relations. *Columbia International Affairs Online*.

28. Tiwari, R. (2017). Challenges for women in global governance: An Indian perspective. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52(3), 45–53.
29. UN Women. (2020). Women in diplomacy and international politics. <https://www.unwomen.org>
30. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2018). *Gender equality in political participation: Global trends and challenges*. UNDP.
31. Pandit, V. K. (2015). India's trailblazing diplomat. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 15(2), 45–56.
32. Winslow, A. (Ed.). (2010). *Women in global politics*. Peter Lang.

