

# Political Participation And Women In Indian

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**Abstract:** Women around the world at every socio-political level find themselves underrepresented in parliament and far removed from decision-making levels. The factors that hamper or facilitate women's political participation vary with level of socio-economic development, geography, culture, and the type of political system. Women themselves are not a homogeneous group; there are major differences between them, based on class, race, ethnicity, cultural background and education. Women who want to enter politics find that the political, public, cultural and social environment is often unfriendly or even hostile to them. Women can make a new world, much happier to live in provided we help the women do this for us and empower them politically. Political empowerment among women implies the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and the value given by the society to political role of women. The Indian constitution guarantees political equality among men and women through adult franchise. But there has been a difference between the constitutional rights and the rights enjoyed in reality by women.

The future of India cannot consist of dolls and playthings and if you make half the population of country a mere plaything of the other half—an encumbrance on others, how will you ever make progress.<sup>1</sup>

This extract from Jawaharlal Nehru's speech at the Mahila Vidyapeeth, Allahabad on 31 March 1928, had underlined his growing faith in the ideal of an open and egalitarian society which would progress through democracy. This real goal was nothing less than to build a dynamic nation and a new social and economic through the involvement of all segments of society, irrespective of caste, sex and religion.<sup>2</sup>

The worth of a civilization can be judged from the position that it gives to women of the several factors that justify the greatness of India's culture is that the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles. The constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measure of positive discrimination in favour of women.<sup>3</sup>

Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issue from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized in the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was setup an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the lower levels.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the political rights and equality, ideals of democracy for women are yet far from being realized. Women India are still fighting hard for equal participation in political sphere. The possibility for all citizens to participate in the management of public affairs is at the very heart of democracy. In India, however, the political arena remains largely dominated by men, and is even an exclusively male bastion in some of state legislature. Yet this neglects a fundamental principle of democracy, which the Inter-Parliamentary Union incorporated in the Universal Declaration on Democracy using the following words:

"The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences".<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in order to be a true institutional miniature of society and meet its needs, both Parliament and its governing bodies will have to be composed more and more of a balanced number of men and women.

Political participation is a process by which people take part in political activity with more or less clear choice or preference. Attendance at public meetings, taking part in agitation activities, attendance at study circles of political parties voting in elections, participation in electoral campaigns membership of a political party and membership in representative bodies are some of the important indicators of political participation.

Women political participation has been considered as a major measure of women's Empowerment. Democracy will fail in its objective if vast number of citizens (women) lacks equal opportunity to participate in government decision-making process. They should be equal partner in the nation building and political development. The section on 'Women in power and Decision-Making' of Beijing Platform for Action begins with the following paragraph:...(W)omen's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.<sup>6</sup>

In India, the space for women in political arena has declined since independence and their participation in politics has been limited to family connections rather than convictions and commitment. India got its first woman Prime Minister about before four decade in 1966 and the first woman President in 2007. As a Prime Minister and President of their performances were similar to their male counterparts but they were unable to increase the participation of women in politics, especially at the decision-making level, due to their representation from feudal and capitalist societies. Apart from Indira Gandhi, there have been many great women leaders in India like Sushma Swaraj, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Mayavati, Jayalalitha, Sonia Gandhi, and Mamta Banerjee; all of them major achievers and great leaders who made it to the center stage of Indian politics despite great difficulties. In fact, the Indian has a woman External Affairs Minister (Mrs. Sushma Swaraj), a woman Speaker of the Lok Sabha (Mrs. Sumitra Mahajan), and four Chief Ministers of States who are women (Mrs. Anandiben Patel and Mrs. Vasundhara Raje, Mrs. Jayalalitha Jayaram, and Mrs. Mamata Banerjee).

Women have been promoted to political position only when there was no other male member available to continue the family's distinctive place and thus, as a device to continue the privilege of the family. It is depressed facts that in the Lok Sabha women have never exceed fifteen percent of the body at any time since independence. The presence of women in governing bodies of parliament and state legislatures is undoubtedly too weak to have a major impact. The factors that hamper or facilitate women's political participation vary with level of socio-economic development, geography, culture, and the type of political system. Women themselves are not a homogeneous group; there are major differences between them, based on class, race, ethnicity, cultural background and education.

Recent reports in India indicate that many women politicians find it difficult to participate in an effective manner in politics. Domestic responsibilities, lack of financial clout, growing criminalization of politics and threat of character assassination have made it increasingly difficult for women to be part of the political framework.<sup>7</sup>

Societal and cultural norms imposed on women bar them from entering politics. They have to accept the dictates imposed on them and bear the burden of society. They also bear their deprivation and undermining status thinking as a culture of society. The society is full of prejudices and a victim of lack and poor awareness. Lack of participation of women in community based activities is also one of the major constraints. Almost all the resources are counted by male counterparts. Women do not have any say in these resources. They do not own income generation opportunities.

The exclusion of women from decision-making bodies limits the possibilities for entrenching the principles of democracy in a society, hindering economic development and discouraging the attainment of gender equality. If men monopolize the political process, passing laws which affect society at large, the decision-making process does not always balance the interests of the male and female populations. As noted in the Millennium Development Goals, women's equal participation with men in power and decision making is part of their fundamental right to participate in political life, and at the core of gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>8</sup>

In India, the political parties started to recognize the potential of women as a 'vote bank'. Women play important role in campaigning and mobilizing support for their parties, yet they rarely occupy decision-making positions in these structures. Women participate in great numbers in elections, as voters and play an enthusiastic part in electoral campaigns, as promoters and organizers.

The presence of women in the governing bodies of parliaments is undoubtedly too weak to have a major impact. All most all political parties hesitate to field women candidates According to Sushma Swaraj, "It is very difficult for a woman to make up her mind to enter politics. Once she makes up her mind, then she has to prepare her husband and her children and her family. Once she has overcome all these obstacles and applies for the ticket, then the male aspirants against whom she is applying make up all sorts of stories about her. And after all this, when her name goes to the party bosses, they do not select her name because they fear losing the seat".<sup>9</sup> The Women's Reservation Bill is still pending in Parliament, which ensure 33 percent women's reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies. Reservation of seats for women at National and State Legislature level is necessary because 'reservation' of seats for women would open up a possible entry point for them in politics, and this is necessary because it cannot be denied that a handful of women in legislative bodies cannot make their voice strong enough to be heard. It was recognized that women representation is small, their voices are not heard and they are often obliged to make compromises.<sup>10</sup> Reservation of seats in legislature is very necessary because it recognized that women will not give easy entry in the corridors of power without reservation and concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when political policies and national legislation are decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regards for the interests and aptitudes of both halves of population. Representation of women is important of their modernization. It enables women to come out of the shackles of tradition and selected life. It also leads to greater social and political awareness among women.

## References:

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5. Adopted in September 1997 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, this declaration was subsequently welcomed by the United Nations General Assembly.
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