

"Political Inequality: The Persistent Struggle for Women's Representation and Power"

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Abstract- This article addresses women's continued political inequity, despite their considerable numerical presence and voting rights. Women account for half of the global enfranchised population and the majority of the elderly, but they control only 10% of parliamentary seats and 6% of cabinet positions globally. In India, women's political participation remains low, with only 12.15% representation in the Lok Sabha as of 2014. Historical and institutional impediments, such as patriarchal norms, sexual abuse, and discrimination, have hampered women's political empowerment. Despite constitutional protections and restrictions in municipal administrations, women's participation in decision-making and political action is still limited. The article emphasizes the importance of concerted measures to break down these barriers and ensure that women may participate meaningfully in politics.

Keywords— Political Inequality, Women's Representation, Gender Discrimination, Political Participation, Patriarchy

I. INTRODUCTION

By and large, women still remain as politically powerless as they were before. Today, they represent half of the world's enfranchised population. In many parts of the world, they live longer than men and therefore form the majority of the elderly population. However, they hold only 10% of seats in the world's parliaments, a figure which has remained unchanged since 1990, and only 6% of ministerial positions. Women won the right to vote, on average, 47 years later than men, according to a survey by World Priorities, a Washington-based organization. When they finally gained the right to vote, there was apprehension among many politicians that women might vote differently from men. This led to the belief that women might vote exclusively for female candidates or even form their own political parties. However, this apprehension did not materialize. Women's votes merely added to the total number of votes without significantly altering electoral dynamics.

In India, a political lobby for women could not be effectively formed, and male politicians quickly realized that women would not vote differently from men and would generally follow the preferences of their male relatives. Consequently, there was no necessity for politicians to woo women voters separately. It has been in the interest of male politicians to maintain women's political apathy, both among voters and non-voters, with many still viewing voting as an obligation to be performed at the behest of their husbands or family elders, rather than considering political parties, issues, candidates, or their own problems.

The political aspirations of many women, which were active during the freedom struggle, have been overshadowed in the post-independence era by a thirst for power and the declining moral standards among politicians. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who had struggled in 1937 to get women elected or

nominated even to the Congress Working Committee, failed again to remedy the situation. He became preoccupied with his vision of building a modern India, while women failed to challenge male domination in the political sphere.

The Constituent Assembly, elected through a system of proportional representation by means of single transferable vote, had 296 members from the British Indian provinces. However, the number of women elected was small, with only 11 women elected from a few provinces. No women were included in important committees such as the Drafting Committee, Union Power Committee, and Union Constitution Committee. Moreover, there was no committee dedicated to issues concerning women.

II. SUPPORT OF THE CONSTITUTION:

The concept of equality in the Constitution was based on gender neutrality rather than gender equity. It did not enhance the power dynamics for women, nor did it address social imbalances or correct patriarchal attitudes that resulted in the lower status of women. The framers of the Indian Constitution did not intend to disrupt traditional gender roles.

Although the Directive Principles of State Policy mentioned equal rights for men and women in terms of livelihood and equal pay for equal work, legislation aimed at ensuring equal opportunities in education, credit, and employment was passed. However, no political initiatives have been taken by any party to dismantle structures—political, economic, and social—that oppress women. The government's approach, since independence, has been largely welfare-oriented, treating men as heads of households and women as housewives. This approach has perpetuated public patriarchy rather than improving the status of women, viewing them as passive recipients of development rather than active participants in nation-building.

III. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

Political participation encompasses not just the right to vote but also involvement in the decision-making process, political activism, and political consciousness. In India, women participate in voting, run for public offices, and engage with political parties at the local level more than men. Political activism and voting are the strongest areas of women's political participation. To address gender inequality in politics, the Indian government has instituted reservations for seats in local governments. Women's turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general election was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% for men. India ranked 20th from the bottom in terms of female representation in parliament. Women have held the positions of President and Prime Minister, as well as Chief Ministers of various states. Indian voters have elected women to numerous state legislative assemblies and the national parliament for many decades.

Table 1: LOKA SABHA WOMEN MPs

Sl. No.	Years	Number of Women MPs	Percentage of Women MPs
1	1951	22	4.50%
2	1957	22	4.45%
3	1962	31	4.18%
4	1967	29	5.58%
5	1971	28	5.41%
6	1977	19	3.51%
7	1980	28	5.29%
8	1984	43	7.95%
9	1989	29	5.48%
10	1991	39	7.30%
11	1996	40	7.37%
12	1998	43	7.92%
13	1999	49	9.02%
14	2004	45	8.29%
15	2009	59	10.87%
16	2014	66	12.15%

The table shows that the first Lok Sabha in 1951 had 22 women MPs. The current Lok Sabha has 66. Over the span of 53 years and 16 Lok Sabha elections, this represents a three-fold increase in the number of women MPs. From 5% in 1951, women MPs now constitute 12.2% of the Lok Sabha. The increase has been steady, with some exceptions during the 6th Lok Sabha in 1977, the 9th Lok Sabha in 1989, and the 14th Lok Sabha in 2004. The data shows a marked increase from 1991 onwards, with a significant rise in women MPs from 5% to 7% in 1991 and a continued upward trend since then. Understanding the factors behind this watershed year and the continuous rise, as well as the decline in numbers during 2004, is crucial.

IV. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PARTIES:

Women's participation in political parties has remained low. In the 1990s, women made up only 10.12% of party membership. Indian women have also taken initiatives to form their own political parties, such as the United Women Front Party in 2007, which advocates for increasing the reservation of seats for women in parliament to 50%. Women led only four of India's political parties from 1980-2010, and women candidates made up only 4.3% of all candidates. As of the 2014 general elections, 12.15% of Lok

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VI. CHALLENGES TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION:

1. **Sexual Violence:** Sexual violence is a significant barrier to women's capacity for political participation. In India, sexual violence is compounded by issues such as child marriage, domestic violence, and low literacy rates, which reduce economic opportunities for women and contribute to sexual violence. Martha C. Nussbaum states that "In the larger society, violence and the threat of violence affect many women's ability to participate actively in many forms of political relationships, to speak in public, and to be recognized as dignified beings whose worth is equal to that of others."
2. **Discrimination:** Although the Indian Constitution removed legal gender inequalities, discrimination persists, especially in political participation. A 2012 study found that barriers include illiteracy, household burdens, and discriminatory attitudes. With a literacy rate of 53.7% among Indian women compared to 75.3% for men, these factors limit women's political participation and discourage collaboration with other women.

VII. OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION:

- **Empowering Women:** Strengthening women's roles in politics and society.
- **Imparting Education:** Enhancing educational opportunities for women.
- **Programs for Women:** Implementing initiatives under the National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
- **Self-Development Programs:** Encouraging self-help and entrepreneurial ventures.
- **Vocational Training:** Providing skills for employment and entrepreneurship.
- **Ending Gender Inequality:** Addressing systemic gender biases.
- **Strong Women Wings in Political Parties:** Creating robust female representation within political parties.
- **Alliances Among Women's Groups:** Forming coalitions to advance women's interests.

To increase women's political participation, India implemented quotas (reservations) in the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, reserving 33% of seats in local

governments for women. The Women's Reservation Bill (108th Amendment) has been submitted in Parliament, reserving 33% of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats for women, however it has yet to be enacted by the Lok Sabha and signed into law. Today, Indian women confront numerous problems. Women's issues are unlikely to be resolved unless they actively participate in influencing public policies, laws, and government programs. Women's organizations, self-help groups, and educated female leaders must actively participate in politics.

VIII. CONCLUSION:

The end emphasizes the continuous struggle for women's political representation and empowerment. Despite gains in voting rights and some advances in parliamentary representation, women are still severely underrepresented in political decision-making both globally and in India. Structural impediments, including as entrenched patriarchal beliefs, gender discrimination, and violence, continue to restrict their political participation. While constitutional protections and reservations have created some opportunities for change, they have not addressed the underlying imbalances. To effect genuine change, there must be a coordinated effort to empower women through education, political involvement, and societal transformation. Only by removing these systemic hurdles will women be able to achieve true political equality and fully contribute to nation building.

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