



A Review on Political Participation and Voting Behaviour of Women in India

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The study aims to explore the voting behaviour and political engagement of women in India which shows the huge Inequality even in the democracy. The involvement of women in the elections is less than the global average of 20%. With the help of secondary data the key determinants of women participation in electoral context is linked by their attitude towards politics, social networking, media exposure and use of digital platform, it has been expected to provide them quotas but the problem of overlapping women's quotas in general and for lower background, with this the Ideological mobilisation as new social movement or feminisation of politics in Indian political setting to shape discourage, attitude and outcome as policy is necessary. Women as vote bank not only unite them but also solve almost all the problems of low representation to some extent, Elitism, Policy shaping, safety and security. According to data, this mobilisation is done successful by political participation on Digital Platform or on social media as we see it after 2014, online campaigning and agenda building to connect people become easier and to increase women's involvement in voting process including some more factors. This paper also finds some problems as demand of questions of future research for women in 21st century.

Keywords: *Women, Political Participation, Voting Behaviour, Feminisation of Politics.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

In a democracy, political participation of women is important not only in the perspective of empowerment but also for sustainability and reliability of democratic states and its values. A citizen's active engagement with civic institutions along with voting, candidature, campaigning,

holding political office and lobbying, either alone or in a group, is referred to as political participation (Arora, 1999) but women are under-represented in the legislature at both national and state levels. The involvement of women in the elections is less than the global average of 20%. The primary reason driving

Indian women to involve in elections is their belief that their votes are essential for choosing a capable government. Voting patterns indicate that rural women tend to cast their ballots more frequently than those in cities and metropolitan regions, with an 8% higher turnout among rural women in the 2009 general elections. Sociological research has explored the factors contributing to the reduction of voting among women in urban areas. It is noted that women from the India's eastern and southern parts vote more than their counterparts in the northern and western regions. This disparity may be linked to the more matrilineal societal patterns that are more prevalent in these areas which offer ample greater freedom and opportunities to women to get involve in public life and electoral processes. Women in non-Hindi speaking states took part more in election campaigns in comparison to Hindi speaking states in 2004 whereas women with employment participated more in campaigning than those who are not. This huge difference put a question that why this imbalance representation exists, what is the consequences of this imbalance's representation, and how can we increase their participation.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study titled 'Women's Participation in Electoral Politics in India: Silent Feminisation' depicted that in historical context which identified the initial phase of women's voting patterns showed that none of the political parties ever put any effort to mobilise the female voters and no concern has been made as for women at national and state level elections. Fake promises were manifested on gender issues by the political parties and are forgotten after their purpose get fulfilled. The failure of the women reservation bill witnessed the lack of seriousness of political parties in taking appropriate initiatives to increase electoral participation of women. In a study titled as 'Electoral Participation of Women in India: Key Determinants and Barriers', the author discussed about the key determinants and reasons for the low representation and electoral participation among women (Rai, 2017).

A study titled as 'Women in Politics: An Analysis in Indian Perspective' have discussed the women's participation in political domain through the prism of their parliamentary representation. This study gathered information about positions of

women in political set up in India, Asia, Brics countries, SAARC nations and the world as a whole. Also, the study strives to ascertain the trends in the role of women in Indian politics and underlying reasons for the same. At the same time a link has been tried to establish between political representation and empowerment of women (Yadav, 2018).

It is believed that gender inequality in politics kept women away from their entrance in active politics and denied their rise to leadership positions. In Northern Cyprus, no gender discrimination policy resulted in gain of equal rights to women as of men in many dimensions and therefore it was concluded that traditional political culture hinders the active political participation of women (Artac & Ogrlu, 2024).

The significance of women's participation gives some sort of satisfaction with the government along with one's own role. They hold that if one does that if one does not participate in the decisions that affect one's own life, one's self esteem is seriously damaged (Nie & Verba, 1979).

The concept of political socialisation and social psychology of politics are associated as socialisation in which roles related training to act in society and it is assumed that socialisation takes place at early stage. However, it has been opined that there is need to take cautions regarding blind assumptions and about psychological characteristics and political behaviour (Dowse & Hughes, 1972).

(Vohra & Sen, 1986), In their book 'Educations and Problems of Indian Women' have discussed the status of Women covering the historical perspective as well as reflected the variety in their roles from the Vehicle age till after independence. The authors highlighted the graphical ups and downs in the women's status from the vehicle age to the invade of the Muslim rule and Britishers.

The women's liberation movement in Germany impacted the political attitude of the women and in spite of being women were employed in the public Sphere their employment is considered as secondary to their 'real' roles. This has created two sociologies of work: The job model 59 for men and gender model for women (Noelle, 1981).

3. OBJECTIVES

- To know about the political engagement and voting patterns of women in India.
- To examine the factors for the women under representation in Indian politics.
- To study the consequences of under representation of women in Indian political domain.

4. METHODOLOGY

Desk review method is used in this study in which analysis and examination of existing literature is done. The data and information are gathered from numerous secondary sources which are relevant to the study. Keywords like electoral processes, political participation of women in India, voting behaviour and patterns, women's attitude towards politics etc are used to search related published articles and online data. This study incorporates the information, data and figures from the year 1972 to 2024 with the help of secondary sources like journals, reports, websites, academic databases, online newspapers, magazines, published research and review articles.

5. OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

- **Women:** Any female who has reached the age of 18 years and limited in her political participation.
- **Political Participation:** The extent of the engagement of women in political landscape in India.
- **Voting Behaviour:** The attitude or behaviour of the women towards voting and politics in India which is influenced by several factors like education, employability, demographic variables, media exposure and so on.

6. FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

Historical Perspective

With the exploration of the historical point of view, the under representation of women has been noticed from the Swadeshi movement in Bengal during 1905-1908 and Female suffrage movement in India ([Forbes, 1979](#)). With due effect of the Govt. of India act, 1935, 41 seats were reserved for women in the elections of 1937. During the post-independence period, the absence of the united and focused efforts was witnessed in order to create inclusive electoral space for women. After independence, there has been

decline in the women's mass participation in political domain. Their political engagement was confined to familial connections as their extent of participation was not based on curiosity and social inspiration to participate actively. The political parties having dominant social attitude often barred women from electoral participation in the first Lok Sabha election in 1952 ([Baseline Report, 1998](#)). In the lower house of the parliament, women only secured 4.4% of the seats. The serious consideration on reservation of the seats for women was taken after CSWI report, 1976 and the recommendations for 30% quota for women was given by the National Perspective Plan for Women in 1988. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments were enforced in 1993 which incorporated the 33% of women's reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

7. Reasons for low representation of women in Indian politics

- **Socio-Historical Influences:** Women's political engagement is significantly affected by socio-historical influences, particularly those linked to nationalist movements and contemporary social policies and the gendered aspects of citizenship. These dynamics often create circumstances in which women are marginalized in governmental structures, elections, and community organizations. For instance, nationalist movements can reinforce traditional gender roles, sidelining women's contributions in favour of male leadership. Furthermore, social policies may fail to address the unique barriers women face, exacerbating gender disparities in political involvement ([Vissandje et al., 2006](#)).
- **Absence of Reserved Seats:** The absence of reserved seats for women in legislative bodies represents a critical challenge. Overlapping quotas can result in some women gaining representation, particularly those from privileged backgrounds, while those from lower castes are often left out. This leads to an inequitable political landscape where the diversity of women's experiences is not adequately represented. Additionally, elitism within political systems tends to favour women from wealthier backgrounds, complicating the pursuit of equal prospects for all women and

undermining the chances of all those who are economically disadvantaged.

- **Political Party Support:** A significant barrier arises from the lack of consensus and inclination to support women candidates for elections among political parties (Basu, 1992). This reluctance frequently caused by ingrained gender biases and perceptions that women may be less viable candidates. Without robust backing from political parties, women face substantial challenges in securing the resources and visibility needed for effective competition. This absence of support perpetuates the underrepresentation of women in politics.
- **Patriarchal Political Framework:** The ongoing existence of a patriarchal political framework, intertwined with class, caste, and gender hierarchies, poses a major obstacle to women's electoral participation (Baseline Report 1998). This framework tends to prioritize male leadership and upholds traditional gender norms, making it challenging for women to enter the political arena. Women may encounter societal stigma or resistance when seeking political office, particularly in communities where traditional roles are strongly endorsed. Additionally, marginalized women face compounded barriers that further limit their political involvement.
- **Limited Awareness and Resources:** Women's political aspirations are also hampered due to lack of awareness and understanding of the electoral process. Women may deny access to the resources or education necessary to navigate political systems effectively. Moreover, insufficient support from families and political organizations intensifies this issue, as women often do not receive the encouragement or assistance needed to pursue political ambitions. This lack of support can diminish their confidence and ability to engage in politics, further limiting their representation in governance.

8. CONSEQUENCES OF LOW POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

- **Limited Empowerment:** Participation in the political sphere plays a critical role in enhancing the empowerment of women,

boosting both their social standing and personal confidence. Women involved in local governance not only improve their socio-economic conditions but also encourage other women in their communities to engage. Low political participation often results in women relying on male family members for representation, further reinforcing traditional gender norms and limiting their voice in decision-making processes (Bhalotra et al., 2020).

- **Reduced Legitimacy of Elections:** When voter turnout is low, it can significantly impact the perceived legitimacy of election outcomes. A significant portion of the population choosing not to vote raises doubts about whether the elected officials genuinely reflect the people's will. This can foster disillusionment among the public, which lead to the lack of trust in the democratic process (Blais & Massicotte, 2002).
- **Skewed Representation:** Low turnout at the polls typically results in the underrepresentation of certain demographic groups. For example, older, wealthier, and more educated individuals are more interested in voting, which can lead to policies that favour their interests while neglecting the concerns of women, youth, minorities, and economically disadvantaged groups. This disparity often deepens social inequalities (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).
- **Policy Imbalance:** When voter turnout is low, elected officials may cater more to the interests of the voters who do participate, often leading to policies that don't reflect the needs of the larger electorate. This disconnects between government actions and the preferences of the broader population can worsen social and economic disparities (Gallego, 2010).
- **Underrepresentation of Women:** In India, women's political representation remains critically low which holds only around 14% of the seats in the Lok Sabha as of 2022 (Inter-Parliamentary Union). This underrepresentation directly influences the policy agenda, as studies implied that female lawmakers are more inclined to focus on issues such as health, education, and social welfare, which may otherwise be neglected in

a male dominant political environment (Mansbridge, 2005). The lack of female representation reduces advocacy for women's rights and perpetuates systemic inequalities.

- **Reinforced Gender Inequality:** The lack of participation of women in political decision-making processes strengthens social and economic inequalities. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, countries with higher levels of female political representation are more likely to close gender gaps in education, health, and employment. In India, for instance, the introduction of women's quotas in local government has led to increased spending on services which benefit women and children directly (Chattopadhyay & Duflou, 2004). This highlights how women's involvement in governance can promote more equitable resource distribution.
- **Reduced Accountability:** Political parties typically align their platforms with the concerns of their primary voter base. When women are underrepresented in voting, their specific needs often go unaddressed. The National Commission for Women has documented instances which are critical to women, such as domestic violence and reproductive rights, are left out of political party manifestos and legislative discussions. This lack of attention to women's issues can result in policies that fail to address the difficulties that women encounter.
- **Lack of Role Models:** The women's presence in political leadership serves as an important source of inspiration for younger generations. UN Women underscores that female role models in leadership positions inspire young girls to pursue similar paths. The absence of female political leaders can create the opinion that career in politics is not a viable option for women, limiting their future participation. The Institute for Social and Economic Change has found a correlation between higher female representation in politics and increased political ambition among young women.
- **Increased Gender Polarisation:** A political environment that is dominated by men can heighten gender-based stereotypes and increase societal polarisation. (Nussbaum,

2011) explored that how gender biases often hinder women from involving in political life and hinder their ability to take on leadership roles. This polarisation can fuel resistance to policies aimed at promoting gender equality, creating a cycle of exclusion. Additionally, women who do enter politics often face harassment and discrimination, which can discourage other women from participating.

- **Weakened Democratic Health:** For a democracy to function effectively, it must reflect the views and interests of all its citizens. Lower participation among women diminishes the democratic process, as it means that policies may be shaped by preferring the interests of only a small portion of the population. International IDEA stressed that democratic legitimacy is reliant on including the diverse voices. Without women's active participation, key perspectives on governance and policy are overlooked, which diminishes the quality and effectiveness of democracy.
- **Economic Impact:** The underrepresentation of women in political decision-making processes also has significant economic implications. Studies depicted that when women hold more political power, economic outcomes improve. They are more capable to champion policies that foster economic development and social welfare. The McKinsey Global Institute reports that achieving gender parity in the workforce could contribute an additional \$770 billion to India's GDP by 2025. This highlights the importance of women's participation not only for the achievement of social justice but also for driving economic progress.

8. SUGGESTIONS

- Implication of gender quota should be done in both national and state legislatures to ensure minimum women's political representation. Countries like Rwanda has achieved 60 % of representation of women in the legislatures.
- Emphasis should be given on the effective participation through political education, skills and training like public speaking, campaigning and advocacy. National Democratic Institution has shown such training which enhance confidence and

readiness for office among women (NDI, 2019).

- Mentorship programs focusing on boosting confidence and providing guidance for navigating political concerns by launching 'She leads' initiatives in connection with experienced mentors (Centre for American Women and Politics, 2020).
- Raising awareness and mobilisation among women for the cause of political participation through social media, advocacy groups, educational resources and other digital platforms.
- Financial assistance provisions should be meant for the female candidates for bearing campaign expenses so as to overcome economic barriers and encourage women to increase participation (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2020).
- Flexibility in voting procedures should be provided with the help of postal ballots and mobile polling units to make voting easier for women with caregiving responsibilities.
- Inclusive political environment should be created with the help of initiatives like 'Men Engage' to advocate for women rights and support their participation in politics (Smith, 2016).
- Legal frameworks should be executed with strength to ensure protections against harassment and discrimination for creating safe political environment for women.

10. CONCLUSION

The Indian government is working on increasing the women's political participation through various constitutional provisions in spite of that woman kept hold on only 14 % of seats in the Lok Sabha. Socio-economic barriers uprooted with patriarchy and colonialism rendered the opportunities for a satisfactory women's representation in Indian politics. Upliftment of political participation of women through social media and digital platforms is on the prior concern. Numerous approaches are in the progress to be implemented to ensure minimum female political representation like drafting gender quotas at national and state levels, education and training on political perspectives, mentorship programs to develop political skills and confidence among women, flexible electoral processes and legal frameworks. To overcome the

barriers to women's political participation in India requires complete change across societal, cultural and structural domains.

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