

Women's Political Representation In Bihar: Challenges And Prospects

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Abstract: The study looks at the possibilities and problems of women holding political office in Bihar, India. Women face prejudice based on their gender, a lack of funding, and social constraints that make it hard for them to be active politicians. Women are still underrepresented in political institutions, even though the constitution mandates gender equality. However, reservation rules have helped to improve this situation. The research examines the dynamics of women's political involvement using a mixed-method approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative data. Advocating for specific initiatives to boost women's political engagement in Bihar, it stresses the importance of progressive cultural attitudes and supporting political parties in fostering the success and acceptability of women politicians.

Index Terms - Women's Political Representation, Bihar, Gender Discrimination, Reservation Policies

I. INTRODUCTION

India is the world's largest democracy and a rising power in the 21st century. However, the principles of democracy, particularly regarding women, have not yet been fully achieved. Women in India continue to face significant challenges in achieving equal representation in all areas, including politics. In 1966, India elected its first female prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and its first female president, Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, in 2007. The situation demonstrates clearly that women have always been accepted as leaders and politicians in Indian culture (Robin, 2012). However, this is hardly the story of the average Indian woman. Over the past six decades, women have consistently missed out on opportunities to participate in politics. Although the Constitution of India provides equal rights and opportunities to women on a level with men, political power remains mainly in the hands of men, making it a distant goal for the average Indian woman. Not all Indian women, but rather a smaller percentage of rich women, have actively participated in government processes. Women are still a relatively small political minority, with a very low percentage of them participating in both local and national politics (Jharta, 2011).

The issue faced by women in India is particularly serious due to various factors: In India, women's participation in politics has decreased since the days of the liberation movement, both in terms of number and quality, while in many other nations, women are making slow but steady progress. In India, government and politics play a more significant role in the social, economic, and power structures compared to nations with stronger civil societies (Beaman, et. al., 2011). Consequently, the marginalization of women in politics has an even more harmful impact in India. Violence, sexual harassment, and other crimes against women are becoming more common in many of our political groups. This makes it highly unsafe for women to participate in politics. At the state level, women's involvement received an even greater fall than in the Lok Sabha. This is apparent in Bihar, where the number of women voted for the Vidhan Sabha was 14 in 1952, 31 in 1957, and 26 in 1962.

However, during the 1967 elections, women were only able to secure a mere 11 seats. In 1969, their quantity decreased to 4. Subsequently, it stabilized at a low point of 13 during the most recent state assembly elections. Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% turnout for men. In 16 out of 29 states of India, more women voted than men. A total of 260.6 million women exercised their right to vote in April–May 2014 elections for India's parliament. Despite these achievements, women in India still face significant challenges. Gender discrimination, violence against women, and unequal pay continue to be major issues. Female foeticide and infanticide, particularly in rural areas, remain a significant concern. Women's safety and security are also a significant issue, with many incidents of sexual harassment and assault reported each year (Narayan, et.al., 2015). The limited presence of women in the legislature is believed to be caused by two factors: the availability of female candidates and the need for female politicians (Norris and Inglehart, 2001). Availability is influenced

by fundamental variables. Political elites are mostly selected from individuals with a high level of education, particularly those in specific professions such as law. Consequently, in the absence of educational and job opportunities, women will lack the essential human and financial resources required to make a political nomination. Overall, structural reasons suggest that women's engagement in the labor market and educational attainment will have a favorable impact on women's representation levels in politics (Paxton and Kunovich, 2003).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Barriers to Women's Political Representation

Mathipa and Tsoka, (2001) stated that barriers limiting the progress of women in attaining leadership roles within the education profession, specifically, and in the wider employment environment. Khan and Ara, (2006) found that Implementing gender-specific policies to integrate women into mainstream society was widely recognized as a requirement for attaining significant progress in underdeveloped countries such as Bangladesh. However, it was only in recent times that this problem has been acknowledged as such in terms of policy changes in both administration and local government sectors. Also, Fox and Lawless, (2011) demonstrated that competent women, despite equal qualifications and experiences, are less confident in their eligibility to run politics, questioning their skills and campaign mechanics compared to men. Krook, M. L. (2010) reviewed the 73rd Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) women's empowerment campaign in India focused on decentralization and constitutional reforms. There was a decrease in corruption and an improvement in government as a result of increased engagement. However, patriarchal culture and a lack of self-decision ability have made women's political journeys challenging.

"Strategies and Interventions for Enhancing Women's Political Representation"

As Caul, (2001) observed the implementation of candidate gender quotas has proven to be a significant method for enhancing the numerical representation of women in the national legislature. However, there was limited research that investigated the adoption of quotas on an international scale and Sainsbury, (2004) examined the integration of women's preferences into policies. The second part of the symbolic shift was to request to make democracy more gender specific. By reframing the problem of women's representation in such a way, political women were deliberately transformed from being a minority within each political party to being most of the population. This shift has enhanced the possibility of achieving descriptive representation. Govinda, R. (2008) analyzed the Bihar State Assembly elections focused on the voting habits and trends of different socioeconomic classes. It explored the various social, cultural, religious, and historical aspects that influenced voter turnout. This study analyzed the impact of social concerns and caste on election outcomes in the years 2003 and 2005.

"Impact of societal norms and cultural practices on women's political participation"

Orloff, (1993) analyzed that the provision of social services by the government has a significant impact on the material circumstances of women, influences the dynamics of gender relationships, determines political conflicts and involvement, and plays a role in the development and mobilizing of interests and identities. Lorber, (2001) stated that Women and men have historically been seen as having comparable capacities, and efforts have been made to improve the condition of underprivileged men and women in society. Singh and Raghuvanshi, (2012) highlighted threats to women's political engagement in India include patriarchal norms, gender-based violence, and underrepresentation, although the country also has room for improvement in this area..

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. "To identify the key challenges faced by women politicians in Bihar"
- ii. "To examine the impact of reservation policies on women's political participation"
- iii. "To investigate the role of political parties and societal attitudes towards women politicians."

IV. HYPOTHESIS

H1: "Women politicians in Bihar face significant challenges (gender-based discrimination, lack of access to resources, and societal pressure) which hinder their effective participation and representation in politics".

H2: "Reservation policies have a positive impact on women's political participation by increasing their representation in political institutions".

H3: "Supportive political parties and progressive societal attitudes lead to greater success and acceptance of women politicians".

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study "Women's Political Representation in Bihar: Challenges and Prospects" depends on both primary and secondary sources of information. The primary data is gathered using a structured questionnaire, employing purposive sampling to assure the inclusion of specific individuals. Secondary data has been acquired from many sources such as journal papers, books, websites, and magazines. Bihar has been selected as a study area. The questionnaire has been designed using demographic factors such as age, income, educational background, etc., as well as the variables of the study, which include reservation policies, Women's Political Participation, societal attitudes towards Women Politicians, and the Role of Political Parties. Because there was no defined target population, Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size, which came out to be 385. Therefore, a total of 385 questionnaires were sent to women who were engaged in politics, and 295 of them were completed and returned. Finally, the study used information from 210 people who filled out the whole questionnaire. The study utilized a mixed-method research technique. The data has been examined utilizing the SPSS and Excel software. The concept has been evaluated using correlation methods.

VI. RESULTS

Table 1 - Demographic Profile of the respondents

Sr. no.	Demographic characteristics	category	N	%
1.	Age	Below 26 years	52	24.8
		26-35 years	63	30.0
		36-45 years	42	20.0
		46-55 years	31	14.8
		Above 55 years	22	10.5
2.	Location	Urban	141	67.1
		Rural	69	32.9
3.	Educational level	Graduate	85	40.5
		Postgraduate	41	19.5
		Professional Degree	84	40.0
4.	Income Level	Less than Rs.20000	63	30.0
		Rs 20000-Rs 35000	84	40.0
		Rs 35000-Rs 50000	42	20.0
		More than Rs 50000	21	10.0
5.	Marital Status	Married	147	70.0
		Unmarried	63	30.0

"Table 1 displays the Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents in terms of their age, marital status, income level, educational level, and location. As per the Table 1, represents the majority of respondents were between the ages of 26-35 years, accounting for 30.0% of the total. The majority of respondents were married, accounting for 70.0% of the total. The majority of respondents were graduate i.e., 40.5%. The majority of respondents had belonged from urban area i.e., 67.1%. The table further reveals that the majority of respondents had earned between Rs 20000-Rs 35000 i.e., 40.0% of the respondents".

H1: Women politicians in Bihar face significant challenges (gender-based discrimination, lack of access to resources, and societal pressure) which hinder their effective participation and representation in politics.

Table 2 – Regression Analysis

Objectives	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R	R2	F	t-value	p-value	Hypotheses Result
Objective 1	Challenges Faced by Women Politicians > Participation and representation in politics	0.58	0.145	0.021	4.467	2.114	.036	Supported

“Table 2 shows the regression analysis for the hypothesis, which represent the significant impact of challenges faced by women on politicians’ participation and representation in politics. The dependent variable is participation and representation of women in politics to test the hypothesis. $F = 4.467$, demonstrating the impact of challenges faced by women on politicians’ participation and representation in politics. The standardized Beta coefficient of 0.145 reflects a modest positive relationship. Moreover, the $R^2 = 0.021$ and p-value is 0.036 ($p < 0.05$) of the participation and representation of women in politics, an alternative hypothesis is accepted”.

“H2: Reservation policies have a positive impact on women's political participation by increasing their representation in political institutions”.

Table 3 – Regression Analysis

Objectives	Hypotheses Result	R	t-value	Regression Weights	F	R2	p-value	Beta Coefficient	Hypotheses Result
Objective 2	Supported	0.226	3.342	Reservation policies > Participation and representation in politics	11.167	0.051	.001	0.195	supported

“Table 3 shows the regression analysis for the hypothesis, which represent the significant impact of reservation policies on politicians’ participation and representation of women in politics. The dependent variable is participation and representation of women in politics to test the hypothesis. $F = 11.167$, demonstrating the impact of reservation policies on politicians’ participation and representation of women in politics. The standardized Beta coefficient of 0.195 reflects a modest positive relationship. Moreover, the $R^2 = 0.051$ and p-value is 0.001 ($p < 0.05$) of the Participation and representation of women in politics, an alternative hypothesis is accepted”.

H3: Supportive political parties and progressive societal attitudes lead to greater success and acceptance of women politicians.

Table 4 – Regression Analysis

Objectives	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	Hypotheses Result	R2	R	t-value	F	p-value
Objective 3	Supportive political parties and progressive societal attitudes > success and acceptance of women politicians	0.149	Supported	0.055	0.235	7.778	6.041	.003

“Table 4 shows the regression analysis for the hypothesis, which represent the significant impact of Supportive political parties and progressive societal attitudes on success and acceptance of women politicians. The dependent variable is a success and acceptance of women politicians to test the hypothesis. $F = 6.041$, demonstrating the impact of Supportive political parties and progressive societal attitudes on success and acceptance of women politicians. The standardized Beta coefficient of 0.149 reflects a modest positive

relationship. Moreover, the $R^2 = 0.055$ and p-value is 0.003 ($p < 0.05$) of the success and acceptance of women politicians, an alternative hypothesis is accepted”.

VII. DISCUSSION AND FINDING

Representation of women in election is a highly debatable topic especially when it comes to places where they are deprived of their basic rights. Rai, P. (2013) and Heller, P. (2011) highlighted patriarchal practices, proxy representation, and male intervention as cultural barriers that prevented women from achieving political empowerment in reserved seats in Bangladesh and India. It suggested working to remove those obstacles and increasing representation of women in decision-making roles. Bryld, E. (2001) stated that the gender stereotypes and violence against women and girls were the targets of the Do Kadam Barabari Ki Ore initiative in Bihar, India. Nevertheless, difficulties with execution were noted, especially in contexts with low literacy rates. To solve these problems, the report recommends a conversation backed by evidence.

The present study stands out for its rigorous methodology and comprehensive analysis, “offering significant insights into the dynamics of women's political participation in a region with complex socio-political challenges”. By employing a mixed-method approach and a structured questionnaire, the study ensures the reliability and depth of its findings.

While there are many reforms being made with respect to women empowerment and equality. Tiwari, N. (2008) and Ali, M. (2010) emphasized on the Women's Reservation Bill that was introduced in 1996 with the aim of reserving seats for women in state and central legislatures. Despite the increase in female participation in elections, they have faced challenges in electoral contests and law-making due to party neglect. Jackson and Chattopadhyay, (2000) reported that 73rd Constitution Amendment Act has achieved great progress in advancing gender equality in politics in the world's biggest democracy, India. Less than 10% of government employees are women, even though women play a crucial role in society. “The advancement of democracy in India depends on this. The findings of the study reveal critical insights into the dynamics affecting women politicians in the region. The regression analysis supports Hypothesis 1, indicating that significant challenges, such as gender-based discrimination, lack of resources, and societal pressure, adversely impact women's political participation and representation, though the relationship is modest ($\text{Beta} = 0.145$, $p = 0.036$). Hypothesis 2 is also validated, with reservation policies demonstrating a positive effect on women's political representation ($\text{Beta} = 0.195$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that such policies enhance women's presence in political institutions. Furthermore, Hypothesis 3 is supported by evidence that supportive political parties and progressive societal attitudes contribute positively to the success and acceptance of women politicians ($\text{Beta} = 0.149$, $p = 0.003$). These findings underscore the importance of addressing systemic challenges, leveraging reservation policies, and fostering supportive environments to improve women's political engagement and representation in Bihar”.

Although elections should be gender biased. Louis, P. (2002) and Kapoor and Ravi, (2013) noted that gender was a cultural concept that described the relative importance of men and women. There was a lack of female political representation in India as males tended to control the political sphere. If women wanted to advance in society, they had to take part in politics. Despite 75 years of freedom, women's political engagement has not improved. The research examined issues such as women's equal involvement in decision-making, addressed legal shortcomings, and sought to build coalitions for support. Its goal was to enhance women's empowerment and identify flaws in the law. Pandit, L. A. (2010) evaluated that being involved in politics gives people, especially women, the capacity to shape policy and decision-making processes. There must be a shift in both the quantity and quality of women's involvement in power corridors if we want inclusive politics to succeed, even if the number of women voting has risen.

The study's detailed demographic analysis adds contextual relevance, highlighting the diverse experiences of women politicians. Overall, its methodical approach and focused examination of both challenges and supportive factors make it a valuable contribution to understanding and improving “women's political representation in Bihar”.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study on “women's political representation in Bihar” reveals significant challenges that hinder their effective participation and representation in politics, despite constitutional guarantees of equality. It identifies gender-based discrimination, lack of access to resources, and societal pressure as primary obstacles, supported by regression analysis that indicates a modest positive relationship between these challenges and women's political engagement ($\text{Beta} = 0.145$, $p = 0.036$). Additionally, the research highlights the positive impact of reservation policies, which enhance women's representation in political institutions ($\text{Beta} = 0.195$, $p = 0.001$), and “underscores the role of supportive political parties and progressive societal attitudes” in

fostering the success and acceptance of women politicians (Beta = 0.149, $p = 0.003$). The findings suggest that while there have been some improvements in women's political participation, systemic barriers remain prevalent, necessitating targeted interventions to address these challenges. The study emphasizes the importance of leveraging reservation policies and creating supportive environments to enhance women's political engagement in Bihar, ultimately contributing to a more equitable political landscape. "The research's rigorous methodology and comprehensive analysis provide valuable insights into the dynamics affecting women's political participation, underscoring the need for continued efforts to empower women and improve their representation in decision-making roles".

8.1 Implication limitation and recommendation for further studies

8.1.1. Implications

- The findings highlight the significant challenges faced by women politicians in Bihar, including gender-based discrimination, lack of access to resources, and societal pressure. Addressing these systemic barriers is crucial for improving women's effective participation and representation in politics.
- The positive impact of reservation policies on women's political representation underscores the importance of such affirmative action measures in increasing women's presence in political institutions. Continued support and implementation of reservation policies can further strengthen women's political engagement.
- The study emphasizes the crucial role of supportive political parties and progressive societal attitudes in fostering the success and acceptance of women politicians. Fostering an enabling environment is essential for women to thrive in the political sphere.

8.1.2. Limitations

- The study is limited to the state of Bihar and may not be fully generalizable to other regions of India with different socio-cultural contexts.
- The sample size, although adequate for the study, may not capture the diverse experiences of all women politicians in Bihar.
- The study relies on self-reported data from the respondents, which may be subject to potential biases.

8.1.3. Recommendations for Further Studies

- Future studies could expand the geographical scope to include other states or conduct comparative analyses across different regions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of women's political representation in India.
- Qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, could be employed to delve deeper into the lived experiences and perspectives of women politicians.
- Longitudinal studies tracking the progress and challenges faced by women politicians over time could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of interventions and policy changes.

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