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Political Status Of Women In India

Tanushree Matubbar

Resource Person, Department- Political Science
Mahatma Gandhi Government College, Mayabunder

Abstract: The political status of women in India has undergone significant transform since independence, yet challenges remain in achieving true gender parity. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and the introduction of affirmative actions such as reservation of seats in local governance through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, women's representation in higher political offices remains limited. Social norms, gender-based discrimination, lack of access to resources and patriarchal structures continue to hinder women's active political participation. However, the increasing visibility of women in grassroots politics and the growing number of female political leaders signal a shift toward greater inclusivity. This examines the historical context, current trends, legislative measures and the socio-cultural barriers impacting the political empowerment of women in India, it highlights the need for sustained efforts, including political education, institutional reforms and gender sensitive policymaking, to ensure equitable participation of women in India's democratic processes.

Keywords: Political, Women, Participation, Equal, Rights, Discrimination.

Introduction

The political status of women in India reflects a complex interplay of historical legacies, constitutional provisions and socio-cultural dynamics. Since gaining independence in 1947, India has made notable strides in promoting gender equality, including granting women the right to vote and participate in the democratic process on equal footing with men. The Indian Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender, laying the foundation for women's political participation. Over the years, policies such as the reservation of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions have enhanced women's presence in local governance. Despite these advances, women's representation in national and state legislatures remains disproportionately low. Deep-rooted patriarchy, limited access to resources and systemic biases continue to restrict women's full engagement in politics.

In India, which is the world's largest democracy, equal rights and status for women are enshrined in the Constitution. Adopted in 1950 after freedom was won from British colonial powers, the constitution reflects the spirit of the freedom movement, which is focused on individual rights and non-discrimination on the basis of caste, class and gender. It also incorporates affirmative action practices to overcome discrimination against women in social, cultural and political spaces. Women's equality is guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution.¹ Nevertheless, even after 77 years of freedom and democracy, Indian women do not enjoy full and equal rights of citizenship. This remains a major challenge to realisation of true democratic governance. In addition, patriarchal values are deeply embedded in many of India's social, political and cultural structures, which lead women to face discrimination and apathy in their public and private lives.

Despite making up 48 % OF India's population and 47.5 % of the registered voting population, women currently hold only 11 % of lower house seats and 10.6 % of upper house seats in national parliaments.² Further, in 2012 only four women held ministerial positions. This amounts to a disappointing 9.8 % of all ministerial roles.³

The women's movement in India has been vocal in highlighting the marginalisation and discrimination that women face across the country and has demanded space within the political arena. In response to pressure from women constituents, as articulated by the women's movements, the Government of India passed the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution in 1992.⁴ This mandated that 33 % of seats be reserved for women at the local level of politics. The reservation of seats for women in local politics means that in contrast to state and nominal parliaments, women's participation in local governing bodies is much higher. Since the implementation of the reservation system, women's political participation in local-governance has sky-rocketed. Currently, over 1.5 million women hold position in Panchayati Raj Institutions, 36.8 % of all those elected.⁵

Women leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions has led to active and vocal participation of women in local governance and has proven to be beneficial for women and for wider communities. Elected women representatives experience higher self-esteem and confidence. They feel more respected by their families and communities and have stronger decision-making skill.⁶ The incorporation of women's perspectives in decision-making processes has also meant that governance at Panchayati Raj level is more reflective of the needs, values and views of the whole community rather than just of male constituents.⁷

Unfortunately, the process of deepening democracy by increasing the participation of women has not been replicated at the state and national levels of governance and the struggle, therefore, continues. Moreover, it is evident that the reservation of seats for a woman in Panchayati Raj Institutions has not removed all the barriers to women's engagement with political sphere. Nevertheless, the process of democracy for over six decades has led to large-scale mobilization of marginalized groups who are demanding their share. Furthermore, the reservation of seats for women has been successful in increasing the number of women holding seats in local bodies of governance as well as giving voice to women's issues and concerns. They have challenged gender discrimination in political, social and economic structures. They have also transformed social perceptions of women by re-defining them as political actors, leaders and decision-makers.

Conclusion:

The political status of women in India has seen gradual improvement, especially at the grassroots level, due to progressive policies like reservation in local governance. However, true political empowerment remains a distant goal at the higher groups of power. While legal and constitutional frameworks support gender equality, societal norms, lack of political will and structural barriers continue to impede women's full participation in politics. Achieving meaningful representation requires not only policy reforms but also a shift in societal attitudes, enhanced political education and the creation of an enabling environment where women can lead without fear or prejudice. Empowering women politically is essential not just for gender justice, but for the overall strengthening of Indian democracy.

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