

Political Empowerment of Women in India

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Abstract: This article efforts to analyse the status of political empowerment of women in India. The political empowerment of women is a social process crucial to development and progress. In India women are still facing different barriers in society. women remain seriously under represented in decision making position. It is not only problem in India it is also global concern. Women's participation in politics is essential. This will not only uplift their personally but will open the way for their social and economic empowerment. Their participation in public life will solve many problems of society. This articles is an attempt to a) discuss about the concept of Women empowerment and political empowerment of women; b) to throw light on constitutional provision for empowering women; c) to discuss about the obstacles to political empowerment of women; d) to suggest overcoming barriers to political empowerment of women; e) to make concluding remarks.

Keywords: women, articles, empowerment, India, political participation.

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Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives. The term "Women- Empowerment" defines a process that helps women in gaining control over their own lives. Moreover, Women empowerment means the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society.¹ It is multidimensional; that is social, political, economic and psychological perspectives all are included.

Politics is an obscure expression for many women, meaning the government of the country, which has traditionally been the business of men and as such women participate to a lesser degree than men in all political activities. Women empowerment is a global issue, which has gained impetus in recent decades. Women's empowerment and their full participation in politics is the basis of equality, development and peace.

Politics is important for increased equality between the sexes. However, politics is neither the only source of discrimination against women nor the only source of potential power for achieving equality. Nevertheless, it is a potential avenue for dealing with many forms of gender discrimination.² The constitution of our nation doesn't discriminate between men and women, but our society has deprived women of certain basic rights, which were bestowed upon them by our constitution.

I. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This paper has two objectives.

1. To know the constitutional provisions and political participation of women in India.
2. To promote women interests to enjoy their right in national and regional decision making process.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The required information regarding political empowerment of women in India has been collected by using the secondary source only.

Constitutional Provisions for empowering women in India:

1. To secure social, economic and political justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and of opportunity (Preamble of the Constitution).
2. Equality before law and equal protection of law (Article 14).
3. The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (1)).
4. Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children (Article 15(3)).³
5. Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment (Article 16).

6. Right to freedom (Article 19-22).
7. All the persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion (Article 25)
8. Freedom to manage religious affairs (Article 26).
9. To promote the welfare of the people by securing a social order permeated by justice—social, economic and political –and to minimise inequalities in income, status, facilities and opportunities (Article 38)
10. To secure: a) the right to adequate means of livelihood for all citizens.
d) equal pay for equal work for men and women (Article 39)
11. To promote equal justice and to provide free legal aid to the poor (39 (A)).
12. To secure the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement (Article 41)
13. Provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42).
14. To secure to all citizens a uniform civil code throughout the country (Article 44).
15. To provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years (Article 45). This directive was changed by the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2002. Originally, it made a provision for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years.
16. To promote the educational and economic interests of SCs, STs, and other weaker sections of the society and to protect them from social injustice and exploitation (Article 46).
17. To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all people of India transcending religion, linguistic regional or sectional diversities and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51-A (e)).
18. No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste and sex (Article 325).
19. Election to the House of People and the Legislative Assemblies of state to be on the basis of adult suffrage (Article 326).
20. Reservation of not less than one-third of total seat for women in direct election to local bodies, viz. Panchayats and Municipalities (Articles 343(D) and 343(T)).⁴

Women's Political Empowerment:

During the first 50 years after our independence, the question of bringing women in the forefront has been raised from time to time. After the depth study of various social and economic movements, it was realised that women participation in political decision making was very important. During the 1980s, the concept of women participation evolved in big way. Only towards the end of the century, our planning strategies started taking about women leadership and their empowerment. Our government policies and programmes have moved from the concept of women development to women participation in social and political affairs and this in turn leads to women empowerment.⁵

The term “political participation” has a very wide meaning. It is not only related to “Right to Vote”, but simultaneously relates to participation in decision making process, political activism, political consciousness, etc. Women in India participate in voting, elected as a candidate and political parties at lower levels more than men. Political activism and voting are the strongest areas of women political participation. The Government of India directed state and local governments to promote equality by class and gender including equal pay and free legal aid, humane working conditions and maternity relief, right to work and education, and raising the standard of living.⁶ To stop gender inequality in politics, the Indian government has instituted reservations for seat in local governments.

Voting:

After Indian independence, the Indian Constitution officially granted women and men suffrage. This is enshrined in Article 326 in our constitution. India is a parliamentary system with houses: Lok Sabha (lower house) and Rajya Sabha (upper house). Rates of participation among women in 1962 were 46.63% for Lok Sabha elections and rose to a high in 1984 of 58.60%. Male Participation during that same period was 63.31% in 1962 and 68.18% in 1984. Women registered in electoral roll during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 65.53%, compared to 67.09% for men.⁷ The gap between men and women voters has narrowed over time with a difference of 16.7% in 1962 to 1.56% in 2014. See table no. 1

Table No. 1
Women Participation in General Election (Lok Sabha)

Elections	Men	Women	Gap
3 rd Lok Sabha (1962)	63.31%	46.63%	16.68%
8 th Lok Sabha (1984)	68.18%	58.60%	9.48%
16 th Lok Sabha (2014)	67.09%	65.53%	1.56%

State election has seen a growing trend in women’s participation, and in some cases women’s turnout is exceeding male turnout. Increased turnout of women was reported for the 2012 Vidhan Sabha elections (legislative assemblies) with states such as Uttar Pradesh reporting 58.82% to 60.29% turnout. In the 2013 assembly elections, women’s overall turnout was reported to be 47.4% and male turnout was 52.5%. Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Daman and Diu and Puducherry all reported higher turnouts among women than men in 2013.⁸

Elected Women Candidates:

Women participation in election as a candidate is a strongest area of women political empowerment. But India has poor elected women candidates since independence. To remedy low participation of women electors, India in 1994 established quotas (reservations) in constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) to reserve 33% of seats in local governments for women. Local governing bodies in India are called Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and one-third of seats and leadership positions must be reserved for women. States such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Orissa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal have increased reservations to 50%. The national government has also proposed to raise the level of reservation in PRIs to 50%. Seats reserved for women are rotated for assurance that each seat has an equal chance of being reserved. After the establishment of women’s reservation, political participation went from 4-5% to 25--40% among women, and gave millions of women the opportunity to serve as leaders in local government.⁹

The Women’s Reservation Bill (108th Amendments) has been introduced in the national parliament to reserve 33% of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats for women. But the Bill has yet to be passed by Lok Sabha. Since after independence women candidates had been elected very low in Lok Sabha as well as Rajya Sabha. See Table No 2 and Table No, 3.

Table No. 2
Percentage of Elected Women Candidates in Lok Sabha Election¹⁰

Elections	Total Seat	Women	Percentage (%)
1 st Lok Sabha (1951)	489	24	4.9%
5 th Lok Sabha (1971)	518	28	5.4%
10 th Lok Sabha (1991)	521	37	7.10%
16 th Lok Sabha (2014)	545	65	11.92%
17 th Lok Sabha (2019)	542	78	14.39

In the 1st Lok Sabha election (1951) women elected candidates were 24, out of 489 total candidates. In the 5th (1971) 10th (1991) and 16th (2014) Lok Sabha women member’s were 28, 37 and 65. Now women members are 78 in 17th lok Sabha (2019) and percentages of present women members is 14.39. It is highest percentage of women members in Lok Sabha since independence. Although the number women members in the Lok Sabha is very low compare to men. From 1951 to 2019 women elected candidates in Lok Sabha have been increased just 9.49%.

Table No. 3
Number of women in Rajya Sabha and their percentage¹¹

Year	Women	Percentage
1952	15	6.94%
1984	24	10.30%
2000	22	9.01%
2018	29	11.83%

Rates of number of women candidates in 1952 and 1984 were 6.94% and 10.30% for Rajya Sabha. But in 2000, number of women candidates were decrease to 9.01%, although later again increased to 11.86% in 2018. In the Rajya Sabha, Women’s percentage are much less than men.

Political Parties:

India has a multi-party system with the 7 national parties and 49 state or regional parties. Indian National Congress (INC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Communist Party Of India (CPI), Communist Party Of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) are the national parties of India. Political parties have increased outreach among women voters as India’s party system has become more competitive. This has included the creation of women’s wings in largest parties. The BJP’s wing is the BJP Mahila Morcha, The INC’s wing is All India Mahila Congress, and the CPI’s wing is the National Federation of Indian Women.¹²

Women’s involvement in political parties is tied to the increasing demand for equal rights. The INC has increased women’s participation by instituting a 33% quota for women in all level of party. In June 2009, the INC nominated a woman to become first speaker of Lok Sabha, and also supported the election of Pratibha Patil, India’s first female president. Women were involved in the early establishment of the BJP. The BJP has encouraged greater representation of women by developing women’s leadership programme, financial assistance for women candidates, and implementing a 33% reservation for women in party leadership positions. The CPI has also supported gender inequality issue including addressing issues of violence through the National Federation of Indian Women. Indian women have also taken the initiative to form their own political parties, and in 2007, the United Women Front Party was created, and has advocated for increasing the reservation of seats for women in parliament to 50%.¹³

Women participation in political parties remained low since independence. See the table no 4

Table No. 4
Status of National and State Political Parties and the representation given by them to women candidates.

YEAR	Total Candidates Fielded				Women Candidates Fielded & Share (%)			
	NP	SP	IN	TOTAL	NP (%)	SP (%)	IN (%)	TOTAL
1957	919	119	481	1519	34 (3.69)	2 (1.68)	9 (1.87)	45 (2.96)
1984	1244	277	3791	5312	63 (5.06)	5 (1.80)	94 (2.47)	162 (3.04)
2009	1623	2616	3831	8070	134 (8.25)	215 (8.21)	207 (5.40)	556 (6.88)

- NP-National Parties, SP- State Parties, IN- Independents

Although, one can see these days that most of the political parties of the country are crying for introduction and passage of women’s reservation bill, but if we see the representation given to women candidates by these parties during the previous general elections, one may get the idea about the true colour of these political parties as most of us may not rely on them given their past. If we have a look at the representation of women candidates from election to election basis then there is increase in the number of women candidates fielded by both national and state level political parties. But once the figures are compared with the subsequent increase in the male candidates fielded from time to time then this increase is not proportionate. Women representation by national parties increased from 3.69 % in 1957 to 8.25 % in 2009 and the average percentage of women representation during all the election by national parties remained at 6.07 %. Scenario of state level political parties is no way different. Women representation by state level political parties rose from 1.68 % in 1957 to 8.21 % in 2009, while as the average representation during all the general elections by state parties remained at 5.27 %. Similarly independent women candidates grew from 1.87 % to 5.40 % with average representation of 3.39 %. While as on the whole, at gross national level women representation during 1957 election was 2.96 % and this share percentage rose to 6.88 % during 2009 election with an average percentage of 4.49 % during all general elections.¹⁴

Political Activism:

Bharat Stree Mahamandal, one of the earliest women’s organizations, formed in 1910 and focused on helping women escape oppression from men. All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) was formed to advocate for women’s education and was helpful in passage of the “Hindu Code of Bills” between 1952 and 1960. AIWC was focusing on empowering and educating Indian women. The AIWC has over 100000 members and 500 branches in India, and helped with the passage of the Sarda Act, Maternity Act. Etc. Women were also active in the freedom movement in pretesting British colonial rule over Indian holding protests and public meetings in support of independence.¹⁵

The new wave of feminism in the 1970s was in response to gender inequality issue and stagnant development in India. The Committee on the Status of Women in India released a report in 1974, and had a significant influence in the re-emergence of activism towards gender equality. The report highlighted the significant differences between men and women in India, including the disparity in the sex ratio, mortality rates, employment, literacy and wage discrimination. The report fuelled the women's movement by signifying the ongoing discrimination towards women in India. Gender inequality has remained the focus of the women's movements with specific emphasis on issues such as the Uniform Civil Code, Women's Reservation Bill, and sexual violence against women.¹⁶

Indian women are significantly involved at the grass roots level of activism. The Chipko movements that arose in the 1970s is one example of success among the women's movement in India, as women protested the deforestation in Uttarakhand leading to the protection of the region. Since the Independence women's organizations have focused on issues of violence towards women. Women's movements have focused on rape, female mortality rates, female foeticide, dowry deaths, sati, and domestic abuse. Tragedies such as the Mathura rape case in 1972, the dowry death of Tarvinder Kaur in 1979, the death of Roop Kanwar by practice of sati in 1987, the gang rape of Bhanwari Devi in 1992, and the New Delhi gang rape case in 2012, have kept the movement focused on rape and given rise to many women's organization at the local and national level.¹⁷

Obstacles to Political Empowerment of Women:

There have many obstacles to political empowerment of women in our country. The level and forms of women empowerment or women's participation in politics is largely shaped by political, cultural, societal, psychological and economic barriers in the form of political apathy, violence, discrimination, illiteracy, negative attitudes, biasness, unconsciousness, valueless, dishonour, criminalization of politics, etc.

Political Apathy:

Political apathy is the important obstacle to political empowerment of women. Political apathy is a feeling of disinterest in the sense of politics or apathy towards politics. It can be categorized as the indifference of an individual and a lack of interest in participating in political activities. This includes lack of interest in election, political events, public meetings, and voting. Generally in India we show political apathy among women more than men due to political unconsciousness, criminalization of politics, no hope of changes, etc.

Sexual Violence:

Sexual violence is one of the significant barriers to women's capability of participating in politics. Child marriage, domestic violence and low literacy rates have lowered Indian women's economic opportunities and contributed to sexual violence in India. Widespread sexual violence is attributed to the fact that violence within marriage is not against the law, and sexual violence goes largely unpunished. Martha C Nussbaum states that "in the larger society, violence and the threat of violence affects many women's ability to participate actively in many forms of social and political relationship, to speak in public, to be recognized as dignified beings whose worth is equal to that of others."¹⁸

Discriminations:

Although the Indian Constitution removed gender inequality among caste and gender, discrimination continues to be a widespread barrier to women's political participation. A 2012 study of 3000 Indian women found the barriers in participation, specifically in running for public office, in the form of illiteracy, work burdens within the household and discriminatory attitudes towards women as leaders.¹⁹ Discrimination is further perpetuated by class. Dalit women are continually discriminated against in running for public office. The Government of India requires reservation of seats for SCs and STs, but women suffer from abuse and discrimination when serving as elected officials.

Illiteracy:

India has one of the largest illiterate populations. In January 2014, United Nations reported 287 million adults in India are illiterate.²⁰ The Census, 2011 reveals that the total literate population is 74.04% comprising 65.46% females and 82.14% males. Illiteracy limits the ability of women to understand the political system and issues. Problems with exploitation, such as women being left off of voters lists, have been reported as illiteracy limits the ability of women to ensure their political rights are exercised.

The major obstacle to women's full activities in politics is almost universal societal attitude that values the domesticity of women. But it is also true symbolically that attributes considered for the political effectiveness are seen as essentially masculine. And the declining moral values, the increasing use of money to achieve political power and the criminalization of politics are also factors which discourage women to take an active part in politics. The status of women is directly related to the decision making process, and unless women

are associated more closely with this process, equality and justice to women cannot be achieved. Women participation in politics is very much related to certain important aspects of women's life such as marriage, family and employment.

Overcoming Barriers to Political Empowerment of women:

To overcome barriers of women's political empowerment we should take some necessary steps.

- **Women Education:**

Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. Educated women will know their rights and able to defend themselves better. They are considered active in politics. By educating women, economy of the country increases. They also contribute towards health and well being of the family. Women Education leads to decrease in domestic violence.

- **Training:**

Today's political participation requires information, knowledge, and an exposure to the various experiments, strategies and actions which again require some training, education and constant interacting. So proper training should be providing to women's for better result.

- **Voice Against Gender Inequality:**

Women can be empowered by decreasing the gender inequalities in all sectors of the society especially in education sectors.²¹ All educated men, women and civil society should organised voice against gender inequality. Media can also play an important role in this regard.

- **Create Safe workplaces:**

Women can be empowered through the creation of safe working environment. The work places should be safe for the members' especially female members of the society. People will like to send their daughters and wives to work if they are assured of safe environment at workplaces.

- **Avoid Normalcy Bias:**

Normalcy bias is the tendency to overlook impending danger, confirming to oneself that nothing harmful will happen even if the person senses a danger. We should be alert enough to scan and accept the danger surrounding us. Avoid undermining the importance of dangerous cues and be vigilant enough to meet the situation.

- **Part-Time Job Opportunities:**

Government should be create greater number of part-time job opportunities for women empowerment. In India, mostly women are housewives. So they don't get any opportunity for full-timework. Hence, more part-time and flexible jobs should be created so that more and more women get engaged into commercial activities.

- **Advantaging Government Scheme:**

Our Indian Government has taken some women empowerment schemes for women empowerment, viz. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) (1986), Janani Suraksha Yojana (2005), UJJAWALA (2016), SWADHAR Greh (2015), Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)(2009), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) (2005), etc. But Government should have to ensure to get facilities to women. Government should be taken more effective schemes to women empowerment.

- **Don't Seclude:**

Try to give equal importance to all the members and make all of them feel included. Never ignore someone intentionally, which could make them feel psychologically unsafe. A discussion with all the concerned members in the group regarding a matter will help to wipe out confusions which might arise later.

- **Support And cooperation:**

Need to full support of women's family members specifically husband to political empower of women. Family and colleagues should also support and cooperation to women. If women get family support and official's cooperation, they can easily participate in politics.

- **Consciousness:**

Our Indian Constitution provides many rights to all around development of women. But Men are more conscious about constitutional rights than women. Government should take necessary steps to make women conscious through education, media and various schemes. NGOs and women organizations should take more steps to empower women.

- **Sharing Family Responsibility:**

In our society women take fully household responsibilities to her family. So Need to lessen women household responsibilities to give opportunity to participate in politics. Men should be made to realize the necessity of sharing family responsibility on an equal footing. If Women get more time, they can more engage to politics.

- **Realization of Political Parties:**

Political parties have to realize that the issues pertaining to women are not issues to be dealt with separately by women only. These are to be discussed and decided at the national levels. The progress of the nation depends on the development of manpower which includes 50 percent of women power unless this bitter truth is accepted there is no hope of any significant change for the development of women.

- **Political Freedom:**

Although political freedom is often interpreted **negatively** as the freedom from unreasonable external constraints on action, it can also refer to the **positive** exercise of rights, **capacities** and possibilities for action, and the exercise of social or group rights. The concept can also include freedom from "internal" constraints on political action or speech (e.g. social **conformity**, consistency, or "inauthentic" behaviour). The concept of political freedom is closely connected with the concepts of **civil liberties** and **human rights**, which in democratic societies are usually afforded legal protection from the **state**. Government should have to take necessary steps so that women can exercise their political freedom.

- **Collective Action:**

Government and organizations should organize healthy environment to get combined strength and collective action by the women.

- **Women's Forum:**

Set up elected women's forum in each state with few active representations from each district including elected women at three-tiers, women's groups and make a state level forum.

- **Encourage Journalists:**

Encourage national and regional level journalists to write articles, success stories on women, those who are in the local as well as national politics so that other women will be motivated to come forward in the politics.

III. CONCLUSION:

Women play an important role in making a nation progressive and guide it towards development. Women empowerment and gender equality in India is an alarming issue. Some problems such as dowry, domestic violence, sex selective abortion, female infanticide and obviously lack of political participation are still prevalent. As per the 2011 Census, women are subject to disadvantages as compared to men in terms of literacy rates, labour participation rates and earnings. Hence, these socio-economic conditions prevent the entrance of women into running for public office and even voting. Political parties have important role to women's political empowerment. And women's organizations have to focus on the empowerment of women. Political empowerment of Indian women can also occur through "bringing gaps in education, renegotiating gender roles, the gender division of labour and addressing biased attitudes.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also tried to empower women focusing on issues of education, violence, and leadership. The Government of India has addressed the issue of empowerment by consolidating all programmes for women under the National Mission of Empowerment of women (NMEW) (2011). This mission of NMEW is to "enhance economic empowerment of girls and women through skill development, micro credit, vocational training and entrepreneurship".²² In 2001, the Government of India passed the National Policy for the Empowerment of women. This policy focuses on "the advancement, development and empowerment of women".²³ Specially, the policy focuses on ending gender inequality and violence against women. Through this paper I have tried to elaborate the barriers of political empowerment of Indian women and how to overcome these barriers. To finish my paper with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's speech-

“If you educate a man you educate and individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered.”

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