



THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN POLITICS AND CHALLENGES: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This study analysis the Role of women in Politics and Challenges they face everyday. The role of women in politics has improved totally over the years, with enhanced contribution in electoral procedures and representation in parliamentary bodies. Despite an accumulation in women's involvement in Politics, they remain to confront significant barriers, face several Challenges including gender based discrimination, limited admittance to resources, bounded depiction within political parties and socio-economic barricade etc. Women's representation in Indian parliament has expanded day by day, but it quietly lags behind Global standards. Women often lack access to financial resources, networks and mentorship. Presented study emphasize to require for policy and social changes to encourage women's involvement in Politics. This study high lights the Challenges faced by women in Politics, as well as their acquirement and progression. It highlights the continued struggle to encourage women's involvement in Politics, addressing the structural barricade and societal norms that hamper their progress. The approach of this study is exploratory in nature. To achieve the objectives of the research, descriptive, conventional, and analytical methods have been employed. An effort has been made to analyze the data within a historical context. In addition, data have been collected from secondary sources, including edited books, journals, and online resources.

Keywords: Political Parties, Socio Economic Barricade, Women in Politics, Gender Based Discrimination, Challenges for Women.

Introduction

Politics has always been a vital aspect of human society, tracing back to the earliest stages of civilization. In the beginning, small groups were led by a “Mukhia” or leader, whose word was final. However, as societies grew more complex, governance required more structured political systems. Politics thus emerged as a central part of human organization. Over time, both men and women have shown interest in governance, though the role of women has evolved significantly throughout history. Women’s participation in politics is now recognized as essential for overall development, yet India’s gender equality policies remain under scrutiny. After independence in 1947, efforts were made to strengthen women’s political involvement through decentralization and the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions, which also empowered marginalized groups. In modern democracies, gender balance is considered a key principle, ensuring equal rights and opportunities for both men and women to participate in decision-making processes. Despite progress such as gaining the right to vote and contest elections women still constitute less than one-fourth of Members of Parliament worldwide (Komal & Ajay, 2018)

Sociological research emphasizes that women’s participation in politics is essential for advancing gender equality and strengthening democracy. However, women continue to face significant challenges, including restrictive gender norms related to unpaid care work, political and institutional obstacles, violence and harassment, and limited access to financial resources. Overcoming these barriers calls for gender-sensitive governance, strict implementation of protective laws, and stronger support mechanisms to promote women’s political engagement at every level. Women face numerous challenges in participating in politics, not only in our country but across the world. A major barrier is that they are often burdened with family responsibilities and domestic work, which limits their public engagement. Traditionally, women have been viewed as symbols of honour and wealth for the family rather than as active decision-makers. During the British period, under the Government of India Act of 1935, women were granted the right to vote and contest elections, marking an important step toward their political involvement. The importance of women’s participation in decision-making can be gauged by their presence in political activities. In the first Lok Sabha elections of 1952, only a handful of women contested, with just two

from Assam. From 1952 till today, only nine women have been elected to the Lok Sabha from Assam. Despite the constitutional provision of 33% reservation for women, their representation in politics still remains remarkably low (Gajendra & Munin, 2025). Women's participation in active political life often depends on their family support and social position. The challenges they face in political engagement can be examined from multiple perspectives, including religious beliefs, workplace environment, gender inequality, legal frameworks, lack of promotional activities, and inadequate encouragement from political parties. Among these social factors, religion stands out prominently. Religion shapes cultural practices and rituals, guiding people's faith in God, miracles, scriptures, prayers, and community participation. It exerts a strong influence on politics, and the relationship between the two continues to evolve. Since the governance of a state is often intertwined with the religious views of its citizens, these beliefs directly impact the decisions of leaders and lawmakers. As Robert Swierenga observed, "People act politically, economically, and socially in keeping with their ultimate beliefs. Their values, morals, and actions whether in the polling booth, on the job, or at home are an outgrowth of the god or gods they hold at the centre of their being."

In India, several women leaders have drawn heavily on religious faith in shaping their political careers. Uma Bharti, former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and Union Cabinet Minister under Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government, was a strong believer in Hinduism and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at an early age. Her political journey was closely linked with the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement of the 1980s and 1990s, organized by the Vishva Hindu Parishad. She was also associated with the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992, for which she later accepted "moral responsibility" (The Hindu, 2009). Similarly, Sadhvi Pragya, a BJP politician and Member of Parliament from Bhopal, has been an ardent follower of Hinduism since her student days. Initially active with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), she later entered mainstream politics. However, her name came into controversy after the Malegaon bombing of 29 September 2008, in which 10 people were killed. Her motorcycle was found at the blast site, making her a prime suspect in the case (The Hindu, 2023). Despite this, she contested the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from Bhopal and defeated senior Congress leader and former Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh. These examples illustrate that while religious faith can strengthen women's political identity, it can also damage

their public image when controversies arise. The careers of leaders like Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Pragya show how strong religious affiliations can simultaneously propel women into politics and hinder their long-term acceptance in public life. The working environment often proves to be uncondusive for women's active participation in politics. Broadly defined, the working environment encompasses the physical, social, and psychological conditions in which individuals carry out their duties. From a woman's perspective, this environment is frequently unsuitable due to factors such as inadequate maternity leave, lack of family support, weak security systems, and sexual harassment. Women encounter challenges at every stage of their careers: in the early stages, they often face discrimination and harsh treatment; in the middle stages, they experience insecurity as they struggle to balance professional demands with family and social commitments; and at higher levels, they confront greater responsibilities, longer working hours, and pressure to deliver results. To create a truly enabling environment, women require the Safety, Strength, and Security (Sarma, 2015).

Unfortunately, the experiences of many female political activists reveal how unsafe and hostile the environment can be. Phoolan Devi, widely known as the "Bandit Queen of India," endured severe sexual abuse and hardship before entering politics. Elected to Parliament in 1996 from Mirzapur (Uttar Pradesh) as a Samajwadi Party candidate, she lost in 1998 but regained the seat in 1999. Despite her achievements, her illiteracy and gender made her the target of ridicule and harassment by male politicians. On 15 July 2001, she was assassinated outside her official residence in New Delhi by Sher Singh Rana, reportedly in revenge for the Behmai massacre (The Daily Telegraph, 2001). In Assam, Mira Borthakur, a former State Secretary and Spokesperson of the BJP who contested the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, accused her party colleagues of harassment. She alleged that BJP activists uploaded her personal photographs online, shared her contact details on pornography websites, and subjected her to online abuse. Despite the seriousness of her claims, local media largely ignored her story, leading her to openly criticize journalists (India Today NE, 2020). A more recent case is that of Indrani Tahbildar, Secretary of the BJP's Kisan Morcha In Golaghat, Assam. After intimate photographs of her with Anurag Chaliha (the prime accused in her case) were circulated online, she was blackmailed and subsequently committed suicide on 11 August 2023 (Assam Tribune, 2023).

These examples highlight that the absence of a safe and supportive working environment not only discourages women from entering politics but can also threaten their dignity, career, and even their lives.

The Role of Women in Politics

Upgrading Democracy: Women's participation is fundamental to genuine democracy and effective governance, as it makes decision-making processes more inclusive and responsive to the needs of society as a whole.

Fostering Gender Equality: Greater representation of women in political leadership brings stronger attention to issues directly affecting women and contributes to the realization of broader gender equality goals.

Enhancing Governance: By occupying decision-making positions, women play a crucial role in advancing gender-sensitive governance reforms and in translating international frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women into actionable policies.

Major Challenges Faced by Women in Politics

Unpaid Care Work & Societal Norms: The disproportionate burden of unpaid care work limits women's availability for political engagement, a challenge further reinforced by societal norms that often judge women based on household roles.

Institutional & Structural hurdles: Existing democratic structures and decision-making systems frequently restrict women's opportunities, making the removal of institutional and structural obstacles vital.

Brutality & Harassment: Political violence including online abuse deters women from active participation, while also weakening public institutions and undermining the effectiveness of policy outcomes.

Socio Economic hindrance: Poverty and limited access to financial resources remain significant barriers to women's meaningful political involvement.

Gender Deficiency: Despite rising democratic aspirations, a persistent gender gap in the public sphere continues to hinder women's equal participation in politics (Kuotsu, 2016).

Handling the Challenges

Legal & Policy Reforms: Governments must strengthen and enforce laws that prevent political violence, ensure accountability for perpetrators, and guarantee access to justice for affected women.

Encouraging Platforms: Efforts to empower women politically require support for initiatives such as the Arab Network for Women in Elections, along with advocacy for broader legal and structural reforms that create enabling environments for women's participation.

Challenging Social Standards: Transforming traditional gender roles and promoting shared responsibility for unpaid care work are essential steps toward expanding women's engagement in the political sphere.

Allocation and Reservations: In contexts such as India, seat reservations for women in state and national legislatures are viewed as constructive measures for deepening democratic practices and addressing the persistent gender gap in political representation.

Women in Indian Politics: Women's political empowerment is considered the foundation for broader progress in any nation, yet it continues to face numerous challenges particularly in developing countries like India. While women in industrialized nations often enjoy greater opportunities and freedom to engage openly in political life, deeply rooted cultural, social, and moral perceptions in developing societies create significant barriers to their participation in decision-making. Therefore, analyzing women's role in a democracy requires going beyond their mere presence in positions of power and addressing the need for true political emancipation.

To strengthen women's democratic participation, it is essential to implement initiatives and action plans at the state, national, and global levels. The idea of empowerment is especially significant, as it seeks to bring women closer to equality with men and reduce gender disparities. Political empowerment enables women to act as responsible members of their communities, with the autonomy to share authority, influence decision-making, and make strategic choices that shape society. True equality is inseparable from active civic engagement, and women's participation in elections plays a dual role: advancing their own development while contributing to overall societal progress. Leaving a section of the population politically marginalized ultimately weakens the democratic fabric.

Political Factors Pathetic Women's Participation

Masculine Model of Politics: Traditionally, political systems have been shaped around male-dominated values, traditions, and lifestyles. Instead of emphasizing cooperation, partnership, and community building, politics is often framed as a competitive arena of rivalry, conflict, and “winners versus losers.” Many women feel disconnected from such a framework, which either discourages them from entering politics altogether or forces them to adopt a male-oriented political style. As a result, women’s involvement in politics remains limited.

Lack of Party Support: Although women actively engage in lobbying and community mobilization, they are rarely given leadership or decision-making roles within political parties. Despite the availability of campaign funding, women often cannot access these resources. Candidate selection processes also tend to prioritize so-called “male traits” as the criteria for eligibility. Furthermore, women face additional personal challenges balancing responsibilities toward their families, children, and spouses which makes the decision to pursue a political career even more difficult.

Weak Collaboration with Women’s Organizations: Political regimes may publicly endorse women’s representation, but often fail to effectively coordinate with women’s organizations and civil society groups that could strengthen this goal. The responsibility of ensuring gender equality cannot rest solely with the state; it must be supported by women’s organizations, NGOs, and other civic institutions. Embedding equality in legislation and national policy, along with affirmative action measures, is essential to secure fair representation ideally aiming for at least 50% participation of women in decision-making roles at all levels.

Insufficient Education and Training Systems: Increasing the number of women qualified for political careers requires investment in education and specialized training. Early exposure through local governance opportunities, leadership training, and skill-building in areas such as gender politics, lobbying, networking, and public administration can prepare women for political roles. Gender sensitization programs for both men and women are equally important to create an environment conducive to balanced political participation.

Democratic and Electoral Systems: The structure of a nation’s electoral system significantly shapes women’s political participation.

In many developing countries, gender inequality in the voting process itself continues to limit women's representation. Evidence suggests that proportional representation systems are generally more effective in enhancing women's political participation than plurality-based systems (Mayer, 2011).

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that women's participation in politics remains limited. Despite rapid changes in socio-economic activities, the political working environment has largely remained unchanged. Gender inequality continues to be a significant barrier discouraging women from active political engagement. Moreover, a substantial majority of candidates and elected representatives in electoral politics are still predominantly male.

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