



Role of Political Parties in Facilitating Women Leadership in India.

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Abstract: This research paper shows the relationship between political parties and promotion of women leadership within the political system. Through various analysis of functioning of political parties by their election manifesto, recent electoral data and leadership structures of major regional and national political parties, the study analyses the present status of women in Indian politics. By examining the historical setup, current trends and challenges faced by women in political leadership roles, study tries to find out the role played by political parties in fostering women in decision making process.

Keywords: Political parties, Gender representation, Women political leadership

Introduction:

Political parties play an important role in any democratic set up and their influence lies far beyond of just contesting elections. Political parties play a significant part in overall development of the society and acts as a beacon of light for the society. In the context of Indian politics, the question of women's participation in politics have been there for a long time. Despite of recent works towards women's growth and their inclusivity in political system, still the difference between women's and men's participation in politics is quite evident. To understand the role political parties have played to increase women's participation in politics various factors need to be explored.

Post-Independence, Indian politics have undergone changes, yet women's participation in Indian politics have not been that much as compared to men. Political parties, the main stakeholders of Indian politics have continuously worked in the past for women's participation, but the progress in the work had been slow. Historically women were just seen as a household object required for doing household works due to the patriarchal system and their political participation in were barred due to the socio-cultural barriers of the society. Political parties as gatekeepers of Indian politics have the responsibility to challenge these barriers and include women in Indian politics.

In recent times, there have been sensitivity towards forming gender neutral policies and political parties have continuously functioned towards women's emancipation in the political setup. Many political parties are now forming dedicated women's wings where women can feel secure and act freely without any hindrances. However more work is needed in the party system and change in ideology is needed for including maximum women in the democratic system. Political parties must actively promote women leaders, give them equal opportunities for their overall growth and ensure that their voices are also heard in the decision forming process.

The role of political parties lies beyond the internal reforms as they also set up the narrative in the society for inclusivity of women in all works of life. Parties that work for gender inclusivity and prioritise women's causes create sustainable environment for better functioning of the women's in not just only political setup but in every work they do. Political parties have the responsibility to challenge the long-lasting rituals which are against gender equality and to promote a culture which fosters women leadership.

Electoral politics in India often is male dominating with more males contesting elections and taking part in electoral process, but in recent times, trend of more women's contesting election can be seen, as well as, more

women participating in electoral process is being known. Political parties must emphasize on giving more electoral seats to women and include them in decision making process in the parliament.

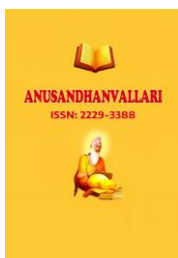
The role of political parties in enhancing women's participation in Indian politics is multifaceted. From internal reforms to forming political environment for participation of women in politics, political parties have a significant role in challenging the gender inequality prevalent in the society. A concrete effort of political parties is needed to actively promote women's participation in democratic system.

Historical Perspective:

Women in history did not had privilege to work in the society, their job was limited to household work and looking after their children. Apart from some notable exceptions majority of women were surrounded between four walls of their house's. Starting from 20th century women's got more responsibility in the society and post-independence doors for women's freedom were open fully and women started to participate in various aspects of life including legislative issues, social, financial, cultural and religious matters. Now they have become Doctors, Teachers, lawyer's, leaders etc.

Table 1: Contestant and Winners Gender Wise

General Election	Year	Total Number of Seats	Male			Female		
			Contestants	Elected	Winning%	Contestants	Elected	Winning%
First	1952	489	-	-	-	-	-	-
Second	1957	494	1474	472	32.02	45	22	48.89
Third	1962	494	1919	463	24.13	66	31	46.97
Fourth	1967	520	2302	491	21.33	67	29	43.28
Fifth	1971	518	2698	497	18.42	86	21	24.42
Sixth	1977	542	2369	523	22.08	70	19	27.14
Seventh	1980	542	4486	514	11.46	143	28	19.58
Eighth	1984	542	5321	500	9.4	171	43	25.15
Ninth	1989	543	5962	514	8.62	198	29	14.65
Tenth	1991-1992	543	8419	496	5.89	330	38	11.52
Eleventh	1996	543	13353	503	3.77	599	40	6.68
Twelfth	1998	543	4476	500	11.17	274	43	15.69
Thirteenth	1999	543	4364	494	11.32	284	49	17.25
Fourteenth	2004	543	5080	498	9.8	355	45	12.68



Fifteenth	2009	543	7514	484	6.44	556	59	10.61
Sixteenth	2014	543	7578	482	6.36	668	61	9.13
Seventeenth	2019	543	7322	465	6.34	716	78	10.74
Eighteenth	2024	543	7597	469	6.17	797	74	9.28

Source: Modified from table of pib.gov.in with data from Election Commission of India

Similarly, women participated in politics, though in small number post-independence. In the second Lok Sabha general elections only 45 women's participated in the election process out of which 22 won the election (All time majority winning percentage of women's 48.89%)¹. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was the only female cabinet minister in the first cabinet ministry². Mahatma Gandhi was strong supporter of participation of women's in politics, keeping his vision in mind several women's participated in politics and leaders like Indira Gandhi with her two tenure as prime minister from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 to 1984 provided the support for women's participation in politics. In 1992, 73rd constitutional amendment mandated that women hold one third of village government head positions. According to estimates, women make up to 30 to 50% of elected officials at local level in India, from 45 women's participating in second general elections to 716 women's participating in 17th general election of 2019³. The 2024 general elections witnessed highest ever number of women representation in the history of Lok Sabha election. Women's winning percentage remained higher than the male winning percentage.

Current Status of Women in Indian Politics:

Women participated in low numbers in starting years of politics post-independence. The numbers slowly increased with time, though the number is still not significant, still women's have achieved various political milestones in the short period of time. From Indira Gandhi to Pratibha Patil, from Sonia Gandhi to Nirmala Sitharaman various women leaders have achieved key political position in Indian politics. Women have showed that if given the right opportunity they can also succeed in every work and can do the job with equal determination, passion and quality if not better. Women in present times are more confident and are walking shoulder by shoulder with men in every aspect of life and are giving tough competition to everybody in this patriarchal society. Women's have achieved quite a lot in last few decades in every arena where they have worked, similarly women have reached certain milestones in politics also showcasing their true potential.

Table 2: List of some of the women leaders with their achievement in politics

Sr No.	Name	Achievement
1	Indira Gandhi	First Female Prime Minister of India
2	Pratibha Patil	First Female President of India
3	Draupadi Murmu	Present President of India
4	Sucheta Kriplani	First Female Chief Minister of India
5	Sheila Dikshit	Longest Serving Women Chief Minister of India
6	Meira Kumar	First Female Speaker of Lok Sabha



7	Nirmala Sitharaman	First Female Defence & Finance Minister of India
8	Sonia Gandhi	Longest Serving President of Indian National Congress
9	Sarojini Naidu	First Female Governor in India
10	Rajkumari Amrita Kaur	First Female Union Minister

However, despite of women achieving success in politics, social cultural challenges like gender-based barriers, violence against women in politics, still hinder their full participation. Efforts have been made to address these issues through awareness campaigns, promoting women's political empowerment.

Elections in India have witnessed a striking contrast in recent times with more female voters casting votes in the election than men. But increase in female voters casting votes have not turn into more women contesting the election. The data compiled by Indian parliamentary union, In India, women make up to 14.44% of the 17th Lok Sabha and as per the data of election commission of India, women represent 10.5% of all members of parliament as of October 2021.

Role of Political Parties:

Political parties play crucial role in enhancing women's participation political system. They provide the suitable environment in which women can grow not just as a political candidate but as well as a human being. Though India have moved further in representation of women in politics and promoting gender equality, still under representation of women in politics remains significant challenge. Political parties address issue through several initiatives like,

Firstly, political parties and recent times have consistently worked to increase the number of seats allotment to women in general elections. 726 women candidates contested the 17th general election out of which 78 women candidates got elected. Similarly, In the 2024 General Election, a record 797 women candidates contested the election. Out of them, 74 women were elected to the 18th Lok Sabha. Although the number of women contestants reached an all-time high, the number of women elected declined slightly from 78 in 2019 to 74 in 2024, indicating that increased candidature has not yet translated into proportional parliamentary representation. Women's representation in the Lok Sabha has increased significantly over the decades, rising from about 5% in the First Lok Sabha to approximately 13.6% (74 women MPs) in the 18th Lok Sabha elected in 2024. Although the long-term trend remains positive, the slight decline from 78 women MPs in 2019 highlights the need for political parties to nominate more women in winnable constituencies.⁴

Secondly, political parties are not only increasingly contesting more women candidates in general election, but also giving them more responsibility after the election. More women are now getting important portfolios in cabinet committee. As 11 women ministers were selected in prime minister Narendra Modi's new cabinet, highest in the last 17 years⁵. Providing important ministries to women not only boost confidence of those women's but also gives an important message to the society that every female is capable of doing anything and are capable to take any job as they like.

Table 3: Performance of women candidates in recent elections

National Parties	2009		2014		2019		2024	
	contested	won	contested	won	contested	won	contested	Won



All India	556	59	668	61	726	78	797	74
Congress	43	23	57	4	55	6	41	13
BJP	44	13	37	28	54	41	69	31
Others	469	23	574	29	617	31	687	30

Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

Thirdly, political parties are equally providing chances to women MP to take part in parliamentary debates and ask questions in the parliament. As per the data of Lok Sabha, women participated on an average in 33 debates compared to 42 debates of men⁶ which shows that women are equally participating in debates of the parliament. Same way both men and women have more than 75% attendance in Lok Sabha⁷. Attendance and participation in Lok Sabha ensures that members are performing their legislative duties.

Fourthly, political parties have time to time done the policy changes to make way for more inclusivity of females in Indian politics. From 73rd amendment in 1992 which mandated that women hold one third of village government head position, to recent talks of providing 33% of seats in parliament and state legislative through women's reservation Bill. Political parties have played important role in enhancing women's participation in the political system of India.

Furthermore, political parties play an important role in changing societies perception by providing leading role to women in the political system of Indian politics. Political parties send a powerful message that women are equally capable to do any work and no gender-based discrimination should be done with the women's. Political parties play a multifaceted role in enhancing women's participation in Indian politics.

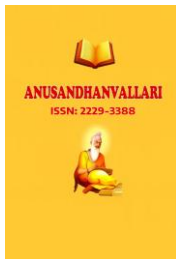
Challenges for Women in Indian Politics:

Women in life faced numerous challenges in the pre-independence period, though their sufferings have reduced post-independence, but still there are challenges that women have to face in their day-to-day life. Life of women in Indian politics is no different as they have to face various challenges in their political life to succeed at this level. One significant obstacle is the deeply imbedded gender stereotypes and cultural norms which often wants women to do household works which hinders women's participation in the public life and creates barrier to their entry into political spaces.

Another critical challenge is the patriarchal society which thinks women are capable for doing household works only and important decision-making processes and leadership roles could not be done by the women. Only 78 female candidates have been elected in the 17th general election from the 726 women contesting election⁸. Though the numbers have increased in the recent times, it is still not satisfactory enough. Women encounter resistance and discrimination not just from the society but also from the political party which it is part of.

Financial support is one of the major obstacles for women entering political system. Contesting election requires money and funding for campaigns and political initiatives can be a major challenge for anyone let alone women. Women's generally do not have the financial resources needed for political activities making their journey in the political setup more challenging.

Safety concerns for women also poses challenge in front of women entering politics. With rising cases of violence and harassment against women politicians, women's participating in politics have a threat of physical harm and lack of secure environment can lead to women withdrawing from active politics. Safety of women in all walks of life should be the top priority and government should facilitate an environment where women can work freely without any fear. Furthermore, limited education, less freedom to make their own decision and lack of awareness



among women hinders their participation in politics. Government should work on creating a supportive environment to encourage women's participation in Indian politics and make the Indian democratic system more powerful.

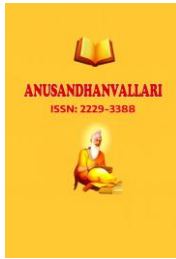
Conclusion:

The paper proposes to create a sustainable environment for women participation in Indian democratic system where they are free to participate in electoral process and provide their equal views in decision making process. It additionally proposes to have improved policies and an established lawful system. The research has studied about the role of political parties in facilitating women's participation in politics and found out that there had been progress in women's participation in Indian politics. Despite progress, persistent barriers such as gender bias, financial restraint, lack of opportunities have slowed women's advancement in leadership roles. Political empowerment of Indian women compared to the world has been lacking as India ranks 59th in the world⁹. Continuous improvement is needed for more inclusive empowerment of Indian women.

The 2024 Lok Sabha election reflects both progress and persistent challenges in women's political representation. While the election recorded the highest-ever number of women contestants, the number of women elected declined marginally compared with the previous election. This demonstrates that merely increasing nominations is insufficient unless political parties field women candidates in electorally competitive constituencies and strengthen institutional support for their campaigns. The implementation of the Women's Reservation Act is expected to further improve women's representation in future elections. Political parties play a crucial role as gatekeeper, influencing candidate selection, enabling growth in women's leadership. Research highlights the significance of political parties in making gender sensitive policies which provides incentive to women to participate in politics in great numbers. Research also gives significance to the current position of women in Indian politics with the achievements they have incurred in the political system with the numerous challenges they face in their day-to-day life while they are in politics. The research contributes to the ongoing process in politics and provides insight that can guide the political parties to make strategies for enhancing women's leadership and shaping a more inclusive democratic governance.

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