

The Role of Women's Wings of Political Parties in Strengthening Female Political Leadership in Karnataka

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Abstract: This Article focuses on Women's wings in political parties to analyse the process of empowering and sustaining female political leadership in Karnataka. Much as there are constitution requirements and policies on the increased representation of women in political systems, women are limited in their representation in leadership roles within political organizations. This paper assesses the vital role of women's wings of political parties: The Mahila Congress, BJP Mahila Morcha, and JD(S) Women's Wing in the expenditure of women's political leadership in Karnataka. The research makes use of both quantitative electoral data analysis to complement it with interview data from sixteen women politicians, three party officials and four wing members. The research shows that women wings fill the leadership development gaps by offering structured training, mentorship, and mobilization plans. However, these wings experience many challenges such as; inadequate funding inadequate authority to make decisions for themselves continuing societal barriers. The study also shows that whereas women's wings have been helpful in opening new opportunities to an emerging crop of leadership within women, the outcomes are always resultative of institutional traps and cultural barriers. The research itself presents several examples when women's wings have been instrumental in incubating political leadership, especially at the grassroots. But they are not very prominent at higher levels of political hierarchy. This study also fills a gap in existing literature on the institutional playbook for women's political enfranchisement and provides specific suggestions for improving women's wings by increasing resources, independence, and leadership training. In light of these findings, this research benefits political parties, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders charged with the task of promoting women's political representation and effective political leadership in Karnataka and other regions.

Keywords: Women's political empowerment, Political party wings, Female leadership development, Karnataka politics, Gender representation, Institutional barriers, Political mentorship, Grassroots mobilization.

Research Objectives:

- ❖ Develop WOMEN as votes and make them politically informed and capable of leading the nation.
- ❖ Improve women political decision-making roles.
- ❖ Organise women voting for elections, and party politics.
- ❖ Promote gender sensitive policies and legislation.
- ❖ Improve connections and encourage more access to mentoring for women who are interested in leadership positions.

Interdiction

During the first half of twentieth century, Mysore State, which formed the present Karnataka state of India was in the forefront in enunciating progressive policies paving the way for the huge social transformation in the state. The Wodeyar kingdom's major ruler was of a progressive disposition and his reign was marked by

philosophy of educational reforms, health and social betterment¹. Out of the many Kings who ruled Mysore, Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV gave a major boost in ensuring reforms for the education and empowering the women. During its inception women got chance to come out of their houses and take up responsibilities in educational institution, which was a huge change that had brought transformation in structure of the society. This period also witnessed the efforts to mobilize women into various aspects of public life with some of the most basic measures on which the modern women's political and social activist base was built. One can see that the Indian independence movement provided the impetus helping women leaders come out and assert themselves as they had never done before². Many women from Karnataka province participated in the freedom struggle including Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and M. L. Thimmakka, and many more consciously supported the freedom movement of India against the British rule. These leaders did not just march or campaign but encouraged many other people to be involved in the movement. They observed directly and actively women for the first time enter into the political field getting transformed from mere beholders into constructors and pioneers of change. The acts of the women leaders in the nationalist cause provided progress to future generations to participate in political life with regard to Karnataka. After independence India's political reservation for equal rights and voting rights for women paved the way to greater political participation. Vivid measures were adopted by the government concerning the enhancement of women's participation in the political process. In Karnataka this finding was evidenced in the increased number of women engaging in politics through seats set aside for them in local associations and councils. While recognizing the malaise, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments prescribing one-third stipulation for women in Panchayati Raj structures quickened this process. Karnataka saw women in leadership, particularly more women in leadership positions from rural backgrounds took up leadership in Governmental institutions of the third tier of Local Self-Governance³. This period also knows the formation of women wings in the political party which acted as an organized means of women's political education and promotion⁴. All together, they paved the way for building a tradition for the further enhancement of the women's political leadership in Karnataka to take active part in the political systems.

Key Milestones

The timeline of the empowered motif for the female politicians of Karnataka definitely shows them crossing various significant phases that helped in melding women's political leadership. One of the important changes took place in 1993 when the option for women's representation in local government bodies was initiated in a bid to reform gender stereotyped politics. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments gave policy direction for a separate provision as a minimum of one-third of the States' Panchayati Raj institutions must consist of women. The results of this policy in Karnataka did not only enhance the women quota in the leadership positions, but also provided the political turnover to the rural and semi-urban areas. From this system of reservation, several thousands of women particularly from marginalized groups were able to participate in local governance. Most of these women as political novices fit well in the leadership roles assigned to them and began calling for solutions to local problems, advancing welfare programs, and providing some opposition to traditional Somali conventional culture and political practice that excluded women from the political process for centuries. The performance of women in such local structures demonstrated the feasibility of women ascendancy to higher echelons of leadership in the next tier of government.

¹ Miller Leslie, Miller Commission Report, Government of India, Gazetteer Vol.IV, Government Press, 1918.

² . Venkataramaiah C.K "Shri Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyaravara Charitre"

³ Umashankar Deepti, 2006, Women Empowerment: Effects of participation in Self Help Groups (SHGs), India Institute of Management Bangalore

⁴ Padma, M. B. (1993). The position of women in mediaeval Karnataka (276 pages). University of Mysore.

The formation of women wings in all the major political parties of the country brought an added increase to women's participation in Karnataka's political system. Realizing the importance of a systematic incorporation of women into party and political system, such parties Indian National Congress and Janata Dal formed 'Women's wings' that proved to be the primary platform for organizational control of women and germination of future leaders. It was through these wings that the KDP highlighted policy, training, and political mobilization to maximize women's organisational involvement and incorporate new female cadres into the mostly patriarchal party establishments⁵. In 1979 women held workshops, focusing on leadership skills and political policies, which also helped to create awareness among women on policies, governance and their citizenship and political roles. Women's wings also were showcase of mentorship programmes whereby elderly women leaders offered direction to the young ones in particular organizations on how to engage in the political system. This institutional support proved instrumental in more women coming out to assume visibility and proactivity in their assignments within a party and as candidates in leadership positions. The rising strength of women wings was evidence of the vital role of organizing women political leadership in Karnataka, since it inculcated women with skills as well as the support of other women⁶."

The other accomplishments of female politicians from Karnataka also indicate change of women political labour in the state. In the course of its journey of decades, Karnataka has given leaders in the form of women leaders who have achieved so much in local, state, and national areas. There are women like Margaret Alva starting her political career in the 1960s holding the post of Governor of several states apart from being a minister. Playing in the Congress party, Alva was known for her abilities to stand-up for herself and get things done with impunity in such sensitive fields as education and women rights, and many more, making her a role model to many women in the Indian political system. In the same manner, Uma Shree, a charismatic actress who later ventured into politics, also made an instant difference besides speaking for the destitute and she was particularly very influential in social cause related particularly to women. These leaders have crossed most of the hurdles that are accorded to women, and they are usually examples to many women who want to enter into politics. Women politicians from Karnataka have not merely brought relief for the individual victims, but also changed public policies across the state. Most of these leaders have played a significant role in encouraging the formulation of policies which encourage gender equity, social justice and wellbeing of woman and children. Its work has sometimes borne fruits in the form of positive changes in health care, education and the social security systems of Karnataka especially for the deprived sections of the society. Free and fair elections have also brought on board female politicians, which has changed public perception that women cannot do it as well as men in the provision of political leadership. Over the recent past, female leaders have assumed the mantle of championing causes that are not often addressed including; violence against women, reproductive health, and farm women's economic rights.

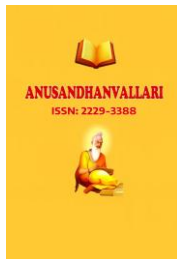
Women's Wings in Political Parties: Structure and Functions

In this analysis, two concepts stand out: women's wings within major political parties in Karnataka have been shaped for the enhancement of women's political roles in each of these parties' structures. Here's an overview of the structure across different parties⁷:

⁵ <https://bpac.in/b-engaged/b-pacs-study-on-analysis-of-participation-of-women-in-politics-a-case-study-of-karnataka-state/>

⁶ <https://thewire.in/politics/women-fought-well-in-karnataka-elections-yet-inclusion-in-politics-remains-a-distant-dream>

⁷ <https://www.ndi.org/dcc-parties>



Mahila Congress : It is part of the Indian National Congress with the roles of mobilizing women from the grassroots, promote their welfare and ensure that women are nominated as candidates in the party. It has a pyramidal organization from the state president to the district, taluk and booth level for total coverage⁸.

BJP Mahila Morcha: The women's wing of the BJP aims at evolving women through a systematic form of organization are given importance to participation in the leadership and extension works. The BJP Mahila Morcha has both state level and district level and blocks the level committees having specific aims and objectives to mobilize the female votes to come forward to support the BJP party Scraping women welfare Policies within the state and to train the potential women leadership for coming soon in the party⁹.

JD(S) Women's Wing: In this paper, an analysis of Janata Dal (Secular)¹⁰ party's women wing will be conducted to show the mobilization of women support for the party. This wing is usually health oriented and targets the rural areas; it exists with themes like agriculture, women and child, rural health and development amongst others. Like other political parties it organizational structure starts from state to the village level.

Regional Party Women's Units: Even smaller regional parties in Karnataka form women's wing as some regional and local issues may interest the women voters. These units are relatively more informal than the broad national party appendages but offer essential vehicle for involving women in politics and leadership. All of these wings not only ensure the welfare of women within the party confining to political realms but also is solely vested with the responsibility of political activism of women voters as well as core issues that specifically pertain to women welfare in the context of Karnataka.

Women's wings in Karnataka's political parties have focused on empowering women through education, networking, and advocacy.

Political education and training

Leadership Development Programs: The programs are a form of leadership development for women, and it is meant to build them the skills they will need to take an active role inside the party and inside the larger political system¹¹.

Political Awareness Campaigns: Women's wings campaign on political issues to effect wider participation of women in governance and civic responsibilities¹².

Electoral Process Training: It involves training women in the basics of the electoral process campaigning, voting are they prepared well to take active part in elections?

Networking and Support

Creating Women's Political Networks: Women's wings build networks to help women within and between parties build a stronger collective power.

Mentorship Programs: Upcoming women leaders are mentored by senior female leaders, sharing insights and advice for the way forward in the political arena.

⁸ <https://inc.in/congress-sandesh/others/congress-and-women-empowerment>

⁹ <https://www.bjp.org/mahila-morcha-0>

¹⁰ <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/karnataka/janthakal-case-jds-womens-wing-2010588>

¹¹ <https://www.undp.org/publications/empowering-women-stronger-political-parties>

¹² <https://www.undp.org/publications/empowering-women-stronger-political-parties>

Resource Sharing Initiatives: These efforts furnish to women access to resources like political materials, knowledge and support structures to help them along their political venture¹³.

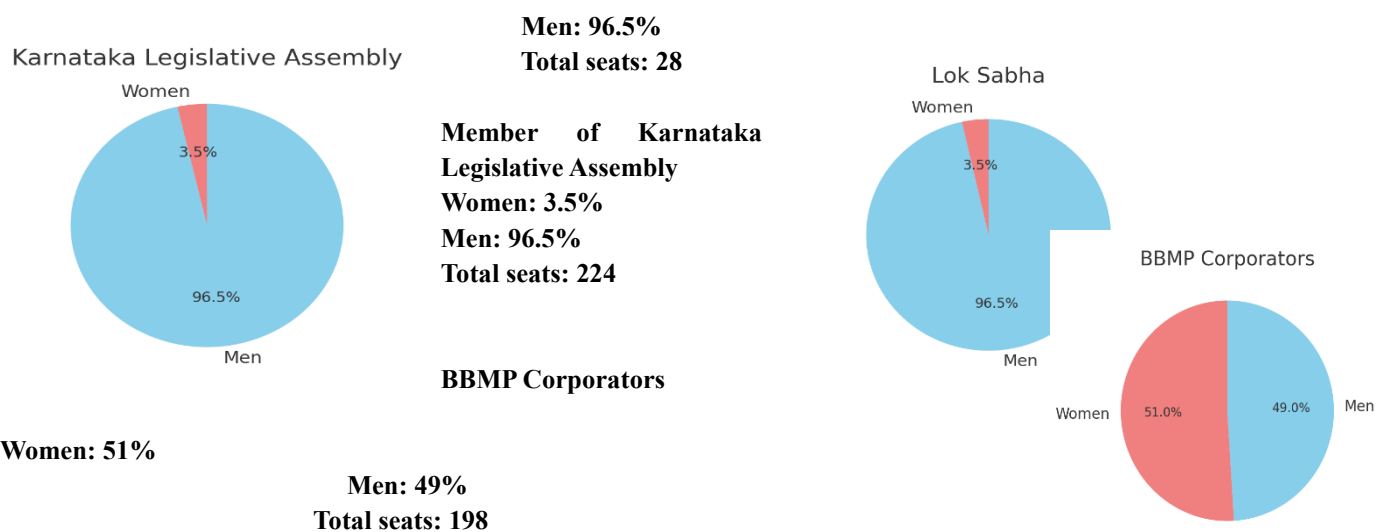
Advocacy and Representation

Gender-Sensitive Policy Advocacy: Women's wings are those who fight for policies that will address gender-based issues and fight for reforms in areas such as in the areas of health, education and safety¹⁴.

Representation in Party Decision-Making: Getting women a seat in the decision-making process of whatever parties they are serving, offers to plug the gender divide, and put women's perspective at its creation¹⁵.

Campaign for Women's Issues: Issues related to women's safety, employment, and social justice are being taken up in focused campaigns to shape public opinion and policy in ways that will improve lives of women and women's rights and wellbeing. Together, these core functions intend to bolster women leadership, encourage women's empowerment and nurture gender sensitive policies in Karnataka's political arena¹⁶.

Women Participation, Status & Empowerment - Karnataka



Sources: <https://bpac.in/b-engaged/b-pacs-study-on-analysis-of-participation-of-women-in-politics-a-case-study-of-karnataka-state/>

Participation of Women and Men in Karnataka Legislative Assembly (KLA) Elections

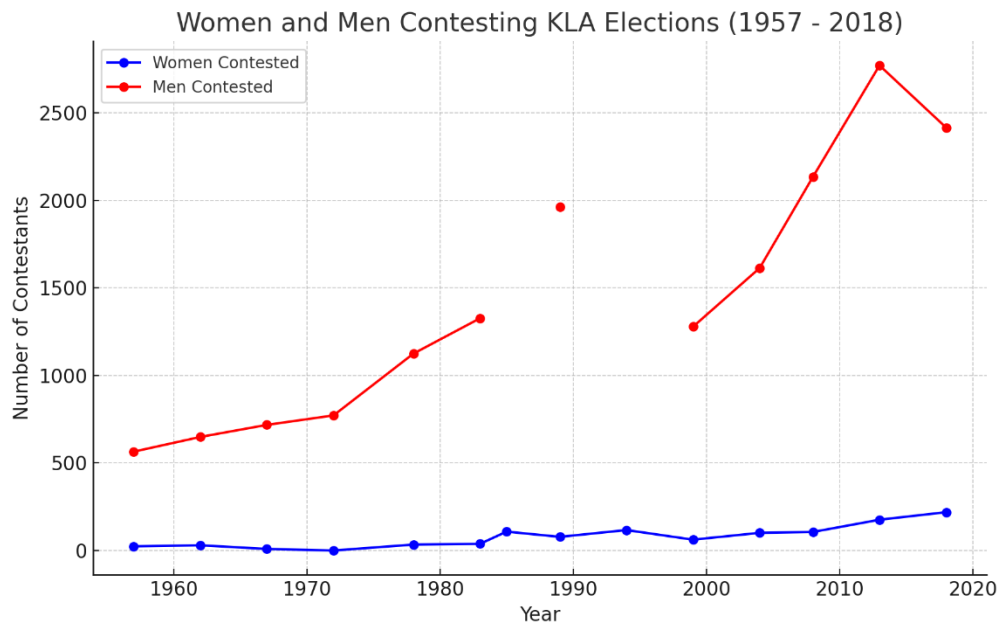
¹³ <https://www.wrc.org.uk/blog/empowering-black-women-leaders-through-the-network-for-black-women-leaders-nbw-24>

¹⁴ Susheela Kaushik (1996), Women and political participation in Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. New Delhi.

¹⁵ Susheela Kaushik (1996), Women and political participation in Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. New Delhi.

¹⁶ Parveen Seth (1979), Political participation of women New Delhi.

This chart represents the number of women and men who contested in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly elections from 1957 to 2018. The data highlights the increasing participation of women in recent years.



Sources: <https://bpac.in/b-engaged/b-pacs-study-on-analysis-of-participation-of-women-in-politics-a-case-study-of-karnataka-state/>

Karnataka Legislative Assembly (KLA) from 1957 to 2018.

Year	Total Seats in KLA	Number of Women Won	Women's Representation (%)
1957	179	13	7.3%
1962	208	18	8.7%
1967	216	5	2.3%
1972	216	0	0%
1978	224	8	3.6%
1983	224	1	0.4%
1985	224	8	3.6%
1989	224	0	0%

Year	Total Seats in KLA	Number of Women Won	Women's Representation (%)
1994	224	7	3.1%
1999	224	6	2.7%
2004	224	6	2.7%
2008	224	3	1.3%
2013	224	6	2.7%
2018	224	8	3.6%

Sources: <https://bpac.in/b-engaged/b-pacs-study-on-analysis-of-participation-of-women-in-politics-a-case-study-of-karnataka-state/>

Key Observations:

1. The total number of seats increased from 179 in 1957 to 224 in 1978 and remained constant thereafter
2. Highest women's representation: 18 members (1962)
3. Zero representation in two elections: 1972 and 1989
4. Recent trends show relatively low representation, ranging between 3-8 members
5. The percentage of women representatives has never exceeded 8.7% (1962)
6. Most recent election (2018) had 8 women representatives¹⁷ (3.6%)

Challenges Faced by Women's Wings in Political Parties

The women's wings of the political parties are playing an important role in projecting female representation and in selecting issues important to women. But they have several considerable challenges that make them less effective and impactful. Here, we examine three primary challenges: social and cultural barriers, internal party boundaries, and low level of influence in decision making¹⁸.

1. Internal Party Barriers

Often, women's wings in parties find themselves embroiled with structural constraints which limit their ability to add value. Tokenism is another common problem where women's wings are symbolically included because by doing so it will give that particular party more image, but not really involved on making any kind of decision derivation. Instead, these wings assist me to prevent these wings from talking, and campaigning on behalf of women, and are an integral part in conversations on public policy. In addition, they are plagued with limited resources (i.e., poor funding, staff, and training opportunities)—and these severely limit their independence and the level of initiatives they can pull off. Even restrictive party structures further shrink women's wings in Australia, as often traditional hierarchies within political parties exclude women's wings from having a direct role in strategic decisions, reducing women's wings to being in a supporting capacity rather than empowering them as an essential player.

¹⁷ <https://bpac.in/b-engaged/b-pacs-study-on-analysis-of-participation-of-women-in-politics-a-case-study-of-karnataka-state/>

¹⁸ Chatterjee, Bandana; (2004) Women and Politics in India, in Rakhahari Chatterjee (ed) Politics India - The State Society Interface, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi

2. Social and Cultural Hurdles

Many barriers to women's participation in politics are imposed by society's longstanding gender biases and by patriarchal expectations. The fact is that gender biased stays alive — we see fatal cases when someone scrutinizes a female politician the way they are scrutinized because of her appearance or personal life and not by virtue of the way she performed professionally. They diminish women's credibility and discourage strong women from joining or even from joining in within political organizations. There are even societal expectations, which prevent women's wings from extending any further, as themselves they may somehow be expected to focus on the needs of their family, above all else. And these are patriarchal norms that exclude women's wings and that continue to perpetuate the idea that politics is for men and not for women, hindering recruitment, retention and the development of women into leadership in the party¹⁹.

3. Limited Influence in Decision making.

Yet women's wings within parties usually do not have actual decision-making power. However, party wings of many women's wings function with limited autonomy, without formal voting power and seats on major decision-making committees, and so many women's wings lack the ability to influence party policy or strategy. Women's wings often depend on male party leaders for approval of their initiatives and this can slow things down and reduce the impact of their programs. The major challenge lies not only with limited pathways to higher leadership, but also with job rigor and minimal compensation²⁰. Members of women's wings struggle to move up to senior positions within the party hierarchy not with routes established or their rights, but within the party which is then able to influence the party's broader agenda and governance. In the end, women's wings have problems that are many faced from inside party structures and everywhere society. The elimination of these barriers will require deliberate political parties' attempts to offer women's wings more autonomy, resources, visibility and thus have a bigger space in strengthening female political leadership.

Women's Wings' Effect on Female Political Leadership

Political party women's wings are vital venues for developing female political leadership. They are essential in fostering future leaders, influencing policy decisions, and boosting women's political participation. We examine the effects of women's wings in three main areas below: significant success stories, policy influence, and greater involvement.

1. A rise in involvement

Increasing the number of female political candidates is one of the most important effects of women's wings. Women's wings enable women to participate actively in politics by offering networking opportunities, resources, and training. They frequently plan mentorship programs, leadership development courses, and workshops with the express goal of preparing women for political challenges. In Karnataka, for example, the BJP Mahila Morcha and the Karnataka Mahila Congress have played a significant role in promoting women's participation in elections at all levels, from the state assembly to local bodies. A more inclusive political climate has been fostered by this endeavour, which has resulted in a discernible rise in the number of women holding political office²¹.

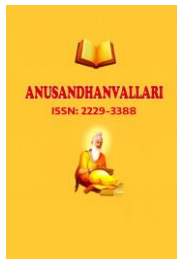
2. The Impact of Policy

Women's wings have also been effective in promoting legislative changes that benefit women, tackling important topics like social justice, health, and gender equality. These wings can highlight urgent women's problems in party platforms and legislative agendas by organizing members and using their combined voice. The Karnataka Mahila Congress, for instance, has been instrumental in promoting laws and regulations that address the rights of women in the workplace, in education, and in safety. They have a direct impact on the

¹⁹ Desai, Neera & Krishnaraj, Maithreyi (eds); (1987) *Women & Society in India*, Ajanta, New Delhi

²⁰ Sarkar, Tanika; (2002) *Heroic Women, Mother Goddesses: Family & Organization in Hindutva Politics*, in Tanisha Abraham (ed), *Women & Politics of Violence*, Shakti Books, New Delhi

²¹ <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/governance/political-participation-of-women>



socioeconomic situation of women in Karnataka through a number of legislative efforts that protect them from domestic abuse and provide them equal opportunity in work and education²².

3. Success Story Examples

Several prominent female leaders in Karnataka have been raised by women's wings and have become well-known as a result of their participation in these groups. Shobha Karandlaje, a well-known BJP leader who started her political career in the women's wing, is one example. Since then, she has occupied important roles, such as minister in the Karnataka government, and is known for her contributions to rural development and women's empowerment. Another example is B. K. Sangama, who has been actively involved in the Karnataka Mahila Congress and has contributed to a number of projects that have advanced the representation and rights of women. These achievements demonstrate how women's wings act as stepping stones for women hoping to assume political leadership positions²³.

Conclusion

The development of Karnataka's women's political party wings has been crucial in supporting the state's female political leadership. These wings give women a forum to express their issues, rally support, and become more visible in a historically male-dominated political environment. These groups' emphasis on women-related topics, like social justice, health, and education, has not only improved the political dialogue but also given women the confidence to assume leadership positions. The potential of women's wings to develop a new generation of female leaders is among its most important effects. These wings give women the information and abilities they need to successfully negotiate the challenges of political participation through training courses, seminars, and mentorship programs. By facilitating the exchange of tactics and experiences, their networking opportunities create a community of support that inspires women to strive for and attain leadership roles. Furthermore, women are now more represented in decision-making processes as a result of political parties having women's wings. These groups support greater involvement of women in party structures and political campaigns while working for internal reforms. As a result, the number of women running for office and holding important political positions in Karnataka has gradually but significantly increased. This kind of representation is essential because it guarantees that women's interests and viewpoints are taken into account when formulating policies, which eventually results in more inclusive governance. There are still difficulties in spite of these developments. Social conventions and gender biases still prevent women from participating in politics. In addition to operating inside the political system, women's wings must take part in larger social initiatives to alter attitudes and dispel myths that impede women's political ambitions. To guarantee that the work of women's wings results in real political outcomes, party leadership must also continue to support these initiatives. To sum up, Karnataka's women's political party wings are essential to bolstering female political leadership. These groups make a substantial contribution to the democratization of politics by empowering women, fighting for their representation, and tackling gender-specific concerns. Women's political participation will be crucial to building a more just society as Karnataka continues to face development and governance obstacles. Political parties must acknowledge the importance of these wings going forward and make a commitment to creating an atmosphere that allows women to succeed as leaders and guarantees that their opinions are recognized and acknowledged in the political sphere.

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²³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2014). Gender Equality Women's participation and leadership in governments at the local level Asia and the Pacific 2013. Bangkok.

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