



# Women in Politics in India: An Analytical Study

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## Abstract

This analytical study provides an overview of women in politics in India, focusing on their representation, challenges faced, and the impact of their involvement. It examines the historical background, highlighting key figures and milestones in women's political empowerment. The study explores the current state of women's representation in Indian politics, identifying factors contributing to their underrepresentation. It discusses the reservation policy and its impact on increasing women's participation at the grassroots level. Additionally, the study investigates the impact of women in politics on policymaking and governance, emphasizing the positive influence they have on various issues.

It delves into the challenges and barriers faced by women in Indian politics, including gender biases, stereotypes, and violence. Furthermore, the study suggests measures to empower women in politics, such as internal party reforms, education, training,

programs, and legal reforms. It highlights success stories of women leaders who have broken barriers and served as role models. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for comprehensive efforts to address gender disparities and create an inclusive and empowering environment for women in Indian politics.

Keywords : political empowerment, women leaders, party reforms, education, training.

## Introduction:

The role of women in politics is a subject of profound significance and study in the context of India, a country known for its rich tapestry of culture, diversity, and democratic governance. This analytical study delves into the intricate dynamics surrounding the participation of women in Indian politics. It seeks to shed light on the challenges,

opportunities, and evolving trends that have shaped the landscape of women's political representation in India.

India, the world's largest democracy, has a long and complex history of gender inequality, which has manifested itself in various spheres of society, including politics. Despite the nation's progressive and inclusive constitutional framework, the political arena has traditionally been dominated by men. Over the years, significant strides have been made to break down these barriers and encourage greater gender parity in politics.

The study will examine the historical context of women's involvement in politics in India, tracing the journey from the early days of the independence movement to the present day. It will explore the milestones and challenges faced by women in their pursuit of political leadership, highlighting key figures and movements that have played pivotal roles in this journey.

Moreover, the study will delve into the factors that have hindered women's participation in politics, such as socio-cultural norms, economic disparities, and institutional barriers. It will also analyze the impact of reservation policies and affirmative action measures designed to increase women's representation in elected bodies.

In addition to examining the challenges, this study will underscore the importance of women's participation in politics and the potential benefits it brings to the nation's development and governance. It will explore how the inclusion of diverse voices can lead to more equitable policies, improved governance, and greater social justice.

Furthermore, the study will present a contemporary assessment of the current state of women in politics in India, offering insights into recent trends, achievements, and ongoing struggles. It will also consider the role of women in various political parties and their representation in legislative bodies at the national and state levels.

As we embark on this analytical journey, it is important to recognize that the participation of women in politics is not merely a matter of numerical representation but a reflection of a broader struggle for gender equality and social justice. This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding women's participation in Indian politics and the implications it holds for the nation's democratic future. Through rigorous

analysis and insightful observations, it seeks to provide a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities facing women in politics in India.

## 1. Historical Background:

The historical background of women in politics in India is a complex and multifaceted narrative that spans centuries, marked by significant milestones, movements, and gradual progress towards greater inclusion and representation. To understand the present state of women in Indian politics, it is essential to explore this historical context:

The historical background of women in politics in India reflects a journey marked by progress, challenges, and ongoing struggles. While significant milestones have been achieved, there is still work to be done to ensure greater representation and participation of women in all levels of Indian politics. This historical context provides the foundation for understanding the current state of women in Indian politics and the efforts being made to address gender disparities in the field of governance.

- **Pre-Independence Era (Ancient and Medieval India):** In ancient and medieval India, women often had prominent roles in governance and administration. Examples include the likes of Rani Padmini and Rani Durgavati. However, these were exceptions rather than the norm, and women's political participation remained limited.
- **Women in the Independence Movement:** The struggle for independence from British colonial rule in the early to mid-20th century provided a platform for women to actively participate in politics. Figures like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, and Kamala Nehru played significant roles in the freedom struggle, raising awareness about political issues and advocating for women's rights.
- **Post-Independence Period (1947 onwards):** After gaining independence in 1947, India adopted a democratic constitution that guaranteed equality for all citizens, regardless of gender. The right to vote was extended to women, and women started participating in electoral politics. In 1952, India held its first general election, and several women were elected to the Constituent Assembly.
- **Reservation for Women:** To address the underrepresentation of women in political offices, India introduced reservation policies at the local level in the form of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 mandated that one-third of seats in local rural and urban bodies be reserved for women.
- **Women's Movements:** Throughout the post-independence period, various women's movements and organizations advocated for gender equality and women's political

empowerment. Prominent among them were the All India Women's Conference and the National Federation of Indian Women.

- **Progress in State Politics:** Some Indian states saw women achieving significant political positions. For instance, Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal and Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu became prominent political leaders who served as Chief Ministers.
- **National Leadership:** While India has had a few female Presidents (such as Pratibha Patil) and Prime Ministers (Indira Gandhi and her daughter-in-law, Sonia Gandhi, who declined the position but was a powerful political figure), women's representation at the national level remained relatively low.
- **Challenges and Gender Disparities:** Despite advancements, women in Indian politics faced numerous challenges, including patriarchal attitudes, violence, and unequal access to resources and opportunities. The gender gap in political participation persisted.
- **Contemporary Developments:** In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the need for greater women's participation in politics. Some states have experimented with increasing reservation quotas, and women have assumed leadership roles in major political parties.

**2. Representation and Participation:** Representation and participation of women in Indian politics are crucial aspects of the broader discourse on gender equality and democratic governance. This section of the analytical study explores the dynamics of women's representation and participation in Indian politics, shedding light on the challenges, opportunities, and evolving trends.

- **Numerical Representation:** Despite progress over the years, women's numerical representation in Indian politics still falls short of gender parity. While women constitute nearly half of the country's population, their presence in legislative bodies at the national and state levels remains disproportionately low. This underrepresentation is particularly evident in the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and Rajya Sabha (Council of States), where women's participation hovers around 14-15% and 10-11%, respectively.
- **Reservation Policies:** One significant step towards enhancing women's representation has been the introduction of reservation policies. As mentioned earlier, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments mandated one-third of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies to be reserved for women. These policies have resulted in a considerable increase in women's participation at the grassroots level, with many women serving as Sarpanches (village leaders) and in other leadership roles at the local level.

- **Role of Political Parties:** Political parties play a pivotal role in shaping women's political participation. While some parties have actively promoted women's leadership and representation, others lag behind. Women continue to face significant challenges in securing tickets to contest elections, and party leadership positions are often dominated by men. However, there is a growing recognition of the need for more women in leadership roles within political parties.
- **Women in State Politics:** Several Indian states have witnessed the rise of women leaders who have assumed the position of Chief Minister. Leaders like Mamata Banerjee (West Bengal), Mayawati (Uttar Pradesh), and Vasundhara Raje (Rajasthan) have demonstrated the potential of women in top executive roles. These instances serve as examples of successful women leaders at the state level.
- **Challenges and Barriers:** Women in Indian politics face numerous challenges, including societal norms, patriarchy, political violence, and unequal access to resources. Women are often viewed as "proxy" candidates for male family members and are subjected to harassment and discrimination within political parties and during campaigns.
- **Women's Movements and Advocacy:** Various women's movements and civil society organizations continue to advocate for gender equality in politics. These groups raise awareness, provide training and support for women candidates, and push for policy changes that promote women's political participation.
- **Media and Public Perception:** The role of media in shaping public perception of women in politics is significant. Positive media coverage can inspire more women to enter politics and counter gender stereotypes. However, negative, or biased reporting can reinforce existing biases and discourage women from participating.
- **Youth and Emerging Trends:** There is a growing trend of young women entering politics, particularly at the local level. This influx of fresh talent brings new perspectives and energy to the political arena, potentially reshaping the landscape of women's participation in the years to come.

**3.Reservation Policy:** Reservation policies have been a critical and transformative component of women's participation in politics in India. These policies were introduced with the intention of addressing the historical underrepresentation of women in political leadership roles. In this section of the analytical study, we delve into the reservation policies for women in Indian politics, their impact, and the ongoing debates surrounding them.

- **Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs):** The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 mandated that one-third of seats in local rural Panchayati Raj bodies (such as Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zila Parishads) and one-third of seats in urban local bodies (such as Municipalities and Municipal Corporations) should be reserved

for women. These amendments aimed to increase women's participation at the grassroots level and empower them in local governance.

- **Positive Impact at the Local Level:** The reservation policy for women in PRIs has had several positive outcomes. It has led to a substantial increase in the number of women elected as Sarpanches (village heads) and members of local governing bodies. This increased representation has resulted in greater attention to issues related to women, children, and marginalized communities in local governance.
- **Women's Empowerment:** Reservation policies at the local level have empowered women who were previously excluded from political decision-making. It has given them a platform to voice their concerns, participate in developmental initiatives, and challenge traditional power structures.
- **Challenges and Limitations:** While the reservation policy has been successful at the local level, it has not been extended to the state or national levels. Women's representation in state legislatures (Vidhan Sabha's) and the national parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) remains disproportionately low. Critics argue that this limited scope of reservation policies restricts women's political influence to local issues, preventing their participation in shaping broader policies and legislation.
- **Debates on Efficacy:** There is an ongoing debate about the effectiveness of reservation policies in truly empowering women in politics. Some argue that it might lead to tokenism, where women elected through reservations might not have real decision-making power or be taken seriously by their male counterparts. Others contend that these policies are necessary to break the cycle of male-dominated political leadership.
- **Intersectionality and Marginalized Communities:** Reservation policies have primarily benefited women from dominant caste groups. Women from marginalized and disadvantaged communities still face significant barriers in entering politics. Addressing intersectionality, which considers factors like caste, class, and religion, is a crucial aspect of promoting inclusivity in politics.
- **Need for Comprehensive Reforms:** Many experts and activists advocate for a more comprehensive approach to address women's underrepresentation in politics. This includes not only increasing the number of women in leadership positions but also creating a conducive environment for their active and meaningful participation.
- **Increasing Reservation Quotas:** Some states in India have experimented with increasing reservation quotas for women in local bodies beyond the mandated one-third. This has led to even greater women's participation at the grassroots level.

**4. Impact of Women in Politics:** The impact of women in politics in India is multifaceted and extends across various dimensions of governance, policymaking, and societal transformation. This section of the analytical study examines the influence and consequences of women's participation in Indian politics.

- **Policy Formulation and Prioritization:**
- **Gender-Specific Policies:** Women in politics often advocate for policies that address gender-specific issues, such as healthcare, education, and violence against women. Their presence in decision-making bodies can lead to the prioritization of these concerns.
- **Empowerment Initiatives:** Women leaders frequently champion programs and initiatives aimed at the economic, social, and political empowerment of women, including schemes for financial inclusion, skill development, and political participation.
- **Legislative Impact:**
- **Enacting Pro-Women Legislation:** Women legislators have played pivotal roles in the formulation and passage of legislation aimed at protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality. This includes laws addressing issues like dowry, domestic violence, and sexual harassment.
- **Advancing Social Justice:** Women in politics often advocate for marginalized and vulnerable groups, including women from marginalized communities, tribal populations, and the economically disadvantaged.
- **Influencing Public Discourse:**
- **Changing Perceptions:** The presence of women in politics challenges traditional gender stereotypes and perceptions about women's roles in society. Women leaders can inspire other women and girls to pursue leadership positions.
- **Highlighting Gender Disparities:** Women in politics use their platforms to draw attention to gender disparities, raising awareness about issues like the gender pay gap, lack of representation, and discrimination.
- **Local Governance and Grassroots Impact:**
- **Improved Service Delivery:** Women leaders in local governance often focus on improving basic services like healthcare, sanitation, and education, which can have a direct impact on the quality of life in their communities.
- **Promotion of Civic Engagement:** Women leaders encourage civic engagement and participation, motivating more women to get involved in community decision-making processes.
- **Role Modeling and Aspirations:**
- **Inspiring Future Leaders:** Women in politics serve as role models for future generations of women leaders, demonstrating that women can excel in traditionally male-dominated fields.
- **Encouraging Political Aspirations:** The visibility of women in political leadership positions encourages more women to enter politics and aspire to higher offices.
- **Championing Social and Economic Development:**
- **Economic Empowerment:** Women leaders often advocate for economic opportunities for women, including entrepreneurship, access to credit, and income-generating programs.
- **Social Welfare:** Women in politics work towards improving the welfare of women, children, and families, including measures to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates.
- **Addressing Violence and Discrimination:**
- **Anti-Discrimination Efforts:** Women in politics actively work to combat discrimination and violence against women, pushing for stricter laws and better enforcement.
- **Raising Awareness:** They use their positions to raise awareness about issues like gender-based violence and harassment, contributing to societal change.
- **Global Impact:**

- **International Diplomacy:** Women leaders in India have represented the country on the international stage, contributing to discussions on global issues such as climate change, peacekeeping, and gender equality.

5. **Challenges and Barrier:** The participation of women in politics in India has been significantly influenced by a range of challenges and barriers, both historical and contemporary. This section of the analytical study explores these challenges and barriers, which have limited women's entry into and progress within the political arena.

- **Patriarchal Norms and Stereotypes:**

- **Traditional Gender Roles:** Deep-rooted patriarchal norms assign women primarily domestic roles, making it difficult for them to break into the male-dominated sphere of politics.

- **Stereotypes:** Stereotypes about women's capabilities, leadership, and decision-making abilities persist, undermining their credibility as political leaders.

- **Violence and Harassment:**

- **Physical Threats:** Women politicians often face physical threats and violence, including assault and vandalism, which can deter them from active political participation.

- **Verbal Abuse:** Verbal harassment, character assassination, and derogatory comments are commonly used as tools to silence women in politics.

- **Lack of Access to Resources:**

- **Financial Barriers:** Women often lack access to the financial resources necessary for mounting political campaigns, such as fundraising networks and campaign financing.

- **Educational Disparities:** Gender disparities in education limit women's access to information and knowledge, affecting their ability to engage in informed political discourse.

- **Family and Social Pressure:**

- **Balancing Family and Politics:** Women often find it challenging to balance family responsibilities with political careers, leading to family pressure to prioritize domestic roles.

- **Social Stigma:** The decision to enter politics can be met with social stigma, as women who challenge traditional gender roles may face backlash from their communities.

- **Lack of Representation in Political Parties:**

- **Underrepresentation in Party Leadership:** Women are often underrepresented in leadership positions within political parties, making it difficult to secure party tickets and nominations.

- **Limited Decision-Making Power:** Women within political parties may have limited influence in shaping party policies and strategies.

- **Electoral Challenges:**



- **Electoral Violence:** Elections in India can be marred by violence and intimidation, disproportionately affecting women candidates.
  - **Winner-Takes-All System:** The "winner-takes-all" electoral system can discourage women from entering politics because they may perceive it as a high-stakes, winner-centric environment.
  - **Reservation Policies and Tokenism:**
    - **Token Representation:** Some critics argue that reservation policies can lead to tokenism, where women elected through reservations may not have real decision-making power or be taken seriously by their male counterparts.
    - **Limited Scope:** Reservation policies have primarily been implemented at the local level, leaving state and national-level politics with limited gender diversity.
  - **Media Bias and Misrepresentation:**
    - **Biased Reporting:** The media sometimes portrays women politicians in a biased or negative manner, focusing on their appearance and personal lives rather than their policies and capabilities.
    - **Lack of Coverage:** Women politicians may receive less media coverage compared to their male counterparts, making it difficult to build public profiles.
  - **Intersectionality and Caste-Based Discrimination:**
    - **Caste and Class Barriers:** Women from marginalized communities often face compounded discrimination due to both their gender and caste or class background, limiting their political opportunities.
  - **Institutional Barriers:**
    - **Lack of Internal Democracy:** Some political parties lack internal democracy, making it difficult for women to rise through party ranks and assert their influence.
    - **Ineffective Complaint Mechanisms:** Many institutions lack effective mechanisms to address harassment and discrimination against women in politics.
6. **Empowering Women in Politics:** Empowering women in politics in India is a crucial endeavor that involves a multifaceted approach aimed at addressing the challenges and barriers women face in the political arena. This section of the analytical study explores strategies and initiatives to empower women in Indian politics.
- **Educational Empowerment:**
    - **Promote Girls' Education:** Encourage and incentivize the education of girls and women to enhance their knowledge, skills, and confidence, making them more capable and informed political participants.
  - **Financial Support and Resources:**
    - **Access to Funding:** Facilitate access to campaign financing and financial resources for women candidates, especially those from marginalized backgrounds.

- **Training and Capacity Building:** Provide training programs and workshops to enhance the political and leadership skills of women interested in politics.
- **Legal Reforms and Policy Advocacy:**
  - **Gender-Sensitive Legislation:** Advocate for and enact gender-sensitive legislation that promotes women's rights and addresses gender disparities in all spheres, including politics.
  - **Reform Election Laws:** Advocate for reforms in election laws to create a more level playing field for women candidates, such as ensuring fair representation in party candidate lists.
- **Reservation Policies:**
  - **Expand Reservation Quotas:** Consider expanding reservation quotas beyond local Panchayati Raj bodies to state and national legislatures, allowing for increased representation of women in higher-level politics.
  - **Effective Implementation:** Ensure the effective implementation of existing reservation policies and mechanisms for their enforcement.
- **Political Parties and Internal Democracy:**
  - **Intra-Party Democracy:** Encourage political parties to adopt and practice internal democracy, ensuring that women have equal opportunities to rise through party ranks and hold leadership positions.
  - **Women's Wings:** Strengthen women's wings within political parties to provide support, mentorship, and networking opportunities for women party members.
- **Media and Public Awareness:**
  - **Media Sensitization:** Sensitize the media to report on women politicians fairly and substantively, focusing on their policies and accomplishments rather than their appearance or personal lives.
  - **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the public about the importance of women's participation in politics and the benefits of gender equality in governance.
- **Leadership Development:**
  - **Leadership Programs:** Establish leadership development programs that specifically target women, equipping them with the skills and confidence needed to assume leadership roles in politics.
  - **Mentorship:** Pair women politicians with experienced mentors who can provide guidance and support throughout their political careers.
- **Gender-Responsive Governance:**
  - **Gender Mainstreaming:** Implement gender mainstreaming in policymaking and governance, ensuring that policies and programs address the specific needs and challenges faced by women.

- **Gender Budgeting:** Incorporate gender budgeting practices to allocate resources effectively for gender-sensitive initiatives and projects.
  - **Community Engagement:**
  - **Community Mobilization:** Engage communities in supporting and promoting women in politics, emphasizing the benefits of diverse political representation.
  - **Women's Participation in Local Governance:** Encourage women's participation in local governance and community decision-making processes, providing opportunities for them to gain experience and build political networks.
  - **Research and Data Collection:**
  - **Collect Data:** Gather and analyze data on women's political participation, representation, and barriers to better inform policy and program design.
  - **Research and Studies:** Conduct research and studies on the impact of women in politics, showcasing their contributions to governance and societal development.
  - **International Collaboration:**
  - **Exchange of Best Practices:** Collaborate with international organizations and countries to exchange best practices and lessons learned in promoting women's political empowerment.
  - **Inclusivity and Intersectionality:**
  - **Intersectional Approaches:** Recognize and address the intersectionality of gender with other factors like caste, class, and religion to ensure inclusivity in political empowerment efforts.
7. **Success Stories:**
- **Indira Gandhi:** Indira Gandhi was the first woman to serve as the Prime Minister of India. She held this office for four terms, making her one of the most influential political figures in India's history. Her leadership during crucial moments, such as the Bangladesh Liberation War, has left a lasting impact on Indian politics.
  - **Pratibha Patil:** Pratibha Patil served as India's first female President from 2007 to 2012. Her election to the highest constitutional office in the country was a significant milestone for women in Indian politics.
  - **Mamata Banerjee:** Mamata Banerjee is the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the founder of the All-India Trinamool Congress (AITC). Her leadership has had a significant impact on state politics, and she is known for her grassroots activism.
  - **Sushma Swaraj:** Sushma Swaraj was a prominent leader of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and served as India's Minister of External Affairs. She was known for her diplomatic skills and her ability to connect with people both within and outside India.
  - **Mayawati:** Mayawati, a leader from the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), has served multiple terms as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Her advocacy for the rights of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, has reshaped caste politics in the state.

- **Jayalalithaa:** J. Jayalalithaa, also known as "Amma," was a charismatic leader and actress who served multiple terms as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Her leadership was marked by a strong focus on welfare programs and infrastructure development.
- **Nirmala Sitharaman:** Nirmala Sitharaman is the Finance Minister of India and a prominent member of the BJP. She has played a crucial role in shaping India's economic policies and is known for her leadership in finance and commerce.
- **Smriti Irani:** Smriti Irani, a former television actress, is a senior BJP leader who has held significant ministerial portfolios, including Minister of Textiles and Minister of Women and Child Development. She is known for her active role in politics and governance.
- **Maneka Gandhi:** Maneka Gandhi, a member of the Nehru-Gandhi family, has held various ministerial positions in different governments. She is known for her work in animal welfare and environmental protection.
- **Poonam Mahajan:** Poonam Mahajan is a prominent young leader of the BJP and a Member of Parliament. She has actively worked to engage youth and women in politics and has represented her constituency effectively.
- **Nandini Satpathy:** Nandini Satpathy was the first woman Chief Minister of Odisha. Her tenure was marked by a focus on social welfare and development programs.

### Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study on women in politics in India reveals a complex and evolving landscape where women have made significant strides, yet numerous challenges and barriers persist. This analytical study has explored various aspects of women's participation in Indian politics, providing insights into their historical background, representation, challenges, empowerment strategies, and success stories.

- India's political landscape has seen notable achievements in women's participation, with women breaking barriers and attaining leadership positions at the local, state, and national levels. Women leaders have played crucial roles in shaping policies, advocating for gender equality, and addressing the unique needs of women and marginalized communities.
- However, challenges such as patriarchal norms, violence, limited access to resources, and underrepresentation in political parties continue to impede women's progress in politics. The study underscores the importance of addressing these challenges through comprehensive reforms, gender-sensitive policies, and grassroots empowerment initiatives.
- Efforts to empower women in politics in India should encompass educational opportunities, financial support, legal reforms, and awareness campaigns that promote gender equality and inclusivity. Expanding reservation policies and promoting women's

leadership within political parties are also vital steps toward achieving greater representation.

- Success stories of women leaders in Indian politics serve as powerful examples of determination, resilience, and the potential for change. These stories inspire future generations of women to pursue leadership roles and actively contribute to the nation's governance.
- In conclusion, the study recognizes that while significant progress has been made, there is still work to be done to ensure equal and meaningful participation of women in Indian politics. Achieving gender equality in politics is not only a matter of justice and democracy but also a means to enhance the effectiveness of governance and address the unique needs and perspectives of all citizens, regardless of gender. By addressing the challenges and building on the successes, India can move closer to a more inclusive and representative political landscape that reflects the diversity and aspirations of its people.

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