



WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTION PROCESS IN RAJASTHAN: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This is a comprehensive analysis of women's participation in elections and electoral process in Rajasthan. Rajasthan is known for its low HDI ranked 23rd as per HDI UNDP method-2021 which directly indicate the lower women's participation and Low Female Voter Turn out Rate. As the data were gathered and analysed, a different picture came with positive colours. Here in Rajasthan, Female VTR is not less than Male VTR. Even Since 2018 vidhan Sabha General Elections, Female have been surpassing the male voters. This article is covering all aspects from current scenario to factor influencing VTR, Political Parties' role, Challenges and constraints for their free will participation and also presenting some case studies.

Index Terms- Election, Women Participation, Voter Turn out Rate.

1. INTRODUCTION

The state of Rajasthan, known for its rich cultural heritage and historical significance, has also been a significant arena for political activity in India. Women's participation in the electoral process in Rajasthan is a crucial indicator of the state's progress in terms of gender equality and democratic inclusiveness. This article delves into the historical context, current scenario, challenges, and future prospects of women's involvement in the electoral process in Rajasthan.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1 Pre-Independence Era- Before India gained independence in 1947, the role of women in Rajasthan, like in much of India, was largely confined to the domestic sphere. The social structure was deeply patriarchal, and women had limited access to education and political engagement. However, some progressive movements and leaders advocated for women's rights and suffrage.

2.2 Post-Independence Developments- Post-independence, the Indian Constitution granted equal voting rights to men and women. Rajasthan, along with the rest of India, saw women participating in elections as voters and candidates. The state has witnessed various phases of women's political involvement, with significant milestones over the decades.

3. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

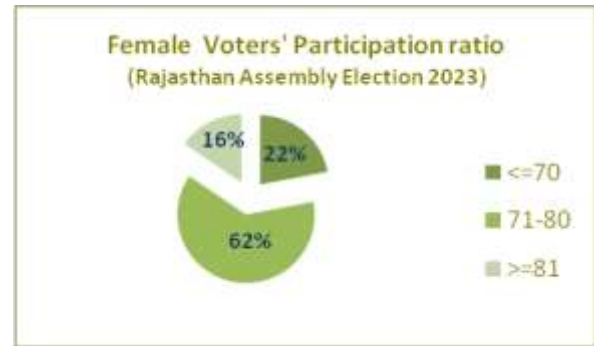
3.1 Constitutional Provisions- The Indian Constitution provides a strong framework for gender equality, including the right to vote and the right to contest elections. Articles 14, 15, and 16 ensure equality before the law and prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender.

3.2 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments- The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 were landmark developments for women's political participation. These amendments mandated the reservation of one-third of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (rural local bodies) and Urban Local Bodies (municipalities) for women. This policy has had a profound impact on women's participation at the grassroots level in Rajasthan.

3.3 Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act- The Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, in alignment with the constitutional amendments, has provisions for women's reservation in local governance. This act has facilitated the entry of a significant number of women into local politics, laying the foundation for their broader political engagement.

4. CURRENT SCENARIO

Voter Participation in Rajasthan Assembly General Election- 2023 can be depicted through the following Pie Diagram. Only 16 percentage of total assembly constituencies (31) were received above 80 percent female VTR while 125 constituencies were witnessed Female VTR between 71-80 percent. It is a good sign for awareness programmes that Rajasthan have to work only in 44 constituencies to enhance Female VTR.



4.1 Statistics and Trends- In recent elections, Rajasthan has witnessed an encouraging trend in women's voter turnout. For instance, in the 2018 Rajasthan Legislative Assembly elections, the voter turnout was 74.21%, with women's turnout almost equal to men's. This reflects a growing awareness and enthusiasm among women to exercise their democratic rights. In 2023 Rajasthan Legislative Assembly elections, the Female VTR is slightly higher than Male VTR. 74.74 VTR were recorded in comparison to 74.57 Male VTR. Total 88 constituencies were reported as higher Female VTR than Male which is surprisingly hats off moment to the stake holders.

5. FACTORS INFLUENCING VOTER TURNOUT

Several factors contribute to the increasing voter turnout among women in Rajasthan:

5.1 Awareness Campaigns: Government and non-governmental organizations have been actively conducting awareness campaigns to educate women about the importance of voting.

5.2 Improved Accessibility: Efforts to improve accessibility to polling stations, including setting up women-friendly booths, have played a significant role.

5.3 Social Media and Technology: The use of social media and technology has made information more accessible, empowering women to participate actively in the electoral process.

6. WOMEN CANDIDATES AND REPRESENTATION

6.1 Legislative Assembly- The representation of women in the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly has been gradually improving. In the 2018 elections, out of the total 200 seats, 24 women were elected, marking a slight increase from previous elections. Though in 2023 this number dropped to 20 but their powerful presence showing acceptance and support for women candidates.

6.2 Local Governance- At the grassroots level, women's participation has been more substantial, thanks to the reservation policies. Women hold a significant percentage of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions and municipalities, with many serving as sarpanches (village heads) and councillors.

7. POLITICAL PARTIES AND WOMEN CANDIDATES

7.1 Major Political Parties- Major political parties in Rajasthan, including the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have been fielding an increasing number of women candidates. However, there is still a long way to go in terms of achieving gender parity in candidate selection.

7.2 Women-Specific Initiatives- Some political parties have introduced women-specific initiatives and wings to encourage more women to join politics. These efforts aim to create a conducive environment for women to participate and succeed in the political arena.

8. CHALLENGES

8.1 Socio-Cultural Barriers

8.1.1 Patriarchy and Gender Norms- The deeply entrenched patriarchal norms in Rajasthan pose significant challenges to women's political participation. Women often face societal pressure and resistance when stepping into the political domain, which is traditionally seen as a male bastion.

8.1.2 Limited Educational Opportunities- Limited access to education for women, especially in rural areas, hampers their ability to engage effectively in the political process. Education is a crucial factor in building confidence and competence among women to participate in elections.

8.2 Political and Structural Barriers

8.2.1 Party Politics and Tokenism- Political parties often engage in tokenism, fielding women candidates in constituencies with slim chances of winning. This practice undermines genuine efforts to increase women's representation in legislative bodies.

8.3 Violence and Intimidation- Women candidates and voters often face violence and intimidation during elections. This includes threats, physical attacks, and social ostracism, which discourage many women from participating in the electoral process.

8.4 Economic and Financial Constraints- Economic dependence on male family members restricts women's ability to participate in politics. Campaigning requires substantial financial resources, and without economic independence, many women find it challenging to run for office.

8.5 Lack of Resources- Women candidates often lack access to the necessary resources for effective campaigning, such as funding, networks, and media coverage. This puts them at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts.

9. CASE STUDIES

9.1 Successful Women Politicians- "Vasundhara Raje"

Diya Kumari, the Deputy Chief Minister of Rajasthan, is a prominent figure in Indian politics. Her leadership has been a source of inspiration for many women aspiring to enter politics. Her tenure and political journey highlight the potential for women to rise to significant positions in the state.

9.2 Grassroots Leaders- Women Sarpanches

There are numerous examples of women sarpanches in Rajasthan who have made significant contributions to their communities. These grassroots leaders have implemented development projects, improved local governance, and inspired other women to take up leadership roles.

- Case of Chhavi Rajawati, a sarpanch from a small village Soda, 60 km from Jaipur in Tonk district in Rajasthan, has become a symbol of women's empowerment. Despite facing initial resistance, she successfully implemented various development initiatives in her village, proving the capability and potential of women leaders at the grassroots level. She has been reported to be the youngest person to hold the office of sarpanch.
- Guljan Khanum, the sarpanch of a quite village of Gagana which is 10 km far from Ajmer, Rajasthan is committed to transform the lives of young girls in her remote community, beyond her administrative role as the head of the gram panchayat, she dedicates her days teaching English and History to the girls. The catalyst that flung her into village administration was her indomitable desire to break the societal traditions that sought to curb women's education, pushing them into early marriages. Tailoring, beauty parlor courses, and computer courses have been introduced for skill-development through various NGOs. Guljan's vision is clear – economic self-reliance coupled with education is the key to women's empowerment. The women in Gagwana are not just learning; they are thriving, running successful businesses, and contributing to their households and communities alike.
- Radha Devi (in yellow saree) is the lady sarpanch of a village in Rajasthan. Despite the Right to Education Act, 1000s of children across Rajasthan do not make it to school. Women sarpanch leaders stepped in to ensure that this trend reverses and girls attend school. Taking the help of local NGOs and self-help groups, Radha Devi confronted the school authorities in her village and persuaded parents into sending their kids back to schools.

10. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS

The 'Shakti Booth' earlier known as 'Pink Booth' are the initiation by Election Commission of India where all Polling officers are female. This campaign has had a positive impact on women's participation and empowerment in electoral process. Rajasthan were taken one step ahead and made at least one Shakti Booth in every Assembly Constituency. This special female brigade were trained separately in small batches and empowered by hands-on trainings to perform their election duty very well. Through training and capacity-building programs, this campaign enhances the leadership skills of women, enabling them to perform their roles effectively.

11. FUTURE PROSPECTS

11.1 Encouraging Young Women- Encouraging young women to take an interest in politics from an early age is crucial. Educational institutions and civil society organizations can play a significant role in nurturing future women leaders.

11.2 Digital Campaigns- The use of digital platforms for campaigning and voter engagement can provide women candidates with cost-effective and wide-reaching tools to connect with their electorate. Training women in digital literacy and campaign strategies can be a game-changer.

11.3 E-Governance- E-governance initiatives can make the electoral process more transparent and accessible. By leveraging technology, women can participate more effectively in governance and electoral processes.

11.4 Building Support Networks- Creating support networks for women in politics, including mentorship programs and peer support groups, can provide the necessary encouragement and guidance for women to navigate the political landscape.

11.5 Changing Mindsets- Continued efforts to change societal mindsets about women's roles in politics are vital. Public awareness campaigns, media representation, and community dialogues can contribute to shifting perceptions and breaking down barriers.

CONCLUSION

The participation of women in the electoral process in Rajasthan has seen significant progress over the years. Despite numerous challenges, the state has witnessed a gradual increase in women's voter turnout and representation in political offices. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve true gender parity in politics. Concerted efforts from the government, political parties, civil society, and the community are essential to create an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation in the electoral process. The future of Rajasthan's democracy depends on the active and equal involvement of women, ensuring that their voices and perspectives are represented in the decision-making processes that shape the state's development.