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A Journey of Indian women



Chief Editor Prof. Virag S. Gawande Director **Aadhar Social** Research & Development Training Institute Amravati

Editor Dr.V.R.Kodape Principal

Shri Kisanlal Nathmal Goenka Arts & Com, College Karanja (LAD) Dist. Washim

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Status of Indian Women in Indian Politics Dr Indal G. Jadhav

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Abstract:

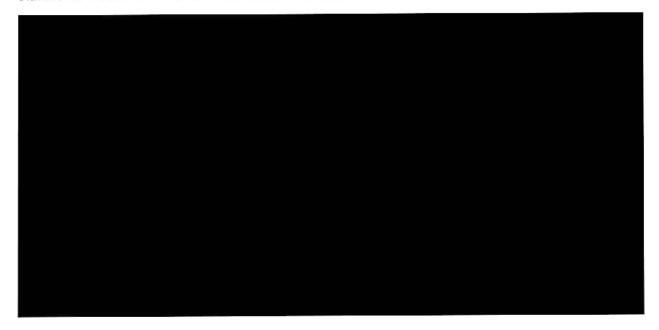
As the world celebrates International Democracy Day, there is a need for greater representation of women not only in the institutions and processes of democracy but also in every discourse of democratic politics. Women have historically been exploited and marginalised in India because of patriarchal societal norms and social institutions. Social reform movements that started in the 19th century were successful in promoting the welfare and empowerment of women. Women made an impressive contribution to the Indian freedom struggle, beginning with the Swadeshi in Bengal (1905-08), by organizing political protests, mobilizing resources, and holding leadership roles within those groups. The desire for equal political representation is a major aspiration of people of different classes in modern democracies. It is important to remember that political representation is of utmost functional importance as it can pave the way for social, economic and cultural empowerment of an individual, which are indispensable for leading a dignified life. Therefore, the promise of equal representation that a democratic system seeks to deliver is particularly important for the socio-political empowerment and upliftment of the marginalized and exploited sections of society.

A truly representative democracy seeks adequate representation of women in politics. Though representative governments have increased across the world in the last few decades, the participation of women has remained low. This is despite concerted multi-prolonged efforts in recent times to promote women's empowerment and improve gender equality. Women's representation in the Lok Sabha of India has remained just under 15%.

Keywords: Democracy, Equality, Patriarchal societal norms, Exploitation, Discrimination.

Women's Representation in parliament (Loksabha):

Number of women candidates in the Lok Sabha Election



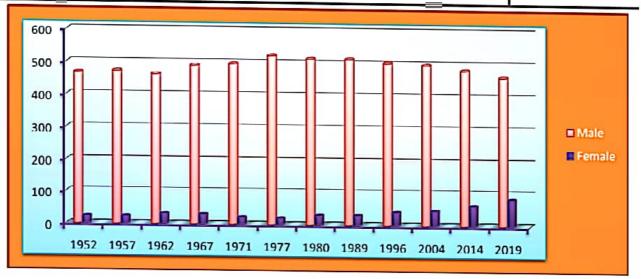
Number of male and female candidates Elected in the Lok Sabha Election





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Women Empowerment and Democracy:

Women make up 49.5 percent of the world's total population, however, they are the world's most marginalized class. Primitive but flexible structures of deeply rooted discriminatory patriarchal norms encompass almost all structures of social life around the world. The advent of modern approach and liberal values aimed at creating a more equal society has seen the consolidation of women's rights in the socio-economic as well as political spheres.

Especially since the 20th century, the issue of women's empowerment gained support from numerous social movements at different times in many parts of the world, notably, the second wave of the 'Women's Liberation Movement' gained serious momentum in the 1960s and 1970s and brought about sweeping reforms for the overall emancipation of women.

The sharp rise of the democratic form of government granted by the Constitution provided basic rights to all citizens and started a continuous movement towards women's empowerment. Although the pace and extent of women's gradual weakening from the clutches of patriarchal exploitation varied from region to region, a steady improvement in status and strengthening of women's agency was evident. The advent of modern attitudes and liberal values aimed at creating a more equal society has seen the consolidation of women's rights in the socio-economic as well as political spheres. Global References:

Despite various but multifaceted global efforts to facilitate greater participation of women in politics and other spheres of public life through various democratic offices and international institutions, the results have been slow and fraught with structural and psychological challenges. Despite modest improvements in recent decades, women's participation in politics remains relatively low. According to UN Women, as of September 2022, there were 30 women serving as elected heads of state and/or of government in 28 countries (out of a total of 193 UN member states). This is despite concerted multiprolonged efforts in recent times to promote women's empowerment and improve gender equality. According to the latest World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report, in 2022, "the global gender gap will close by 68.1 percent. At current rates, it will take 132 years to reach full parity. "Although the global average share of women in ministerial positions doubled between 2006 and 2022, it increased from 9.9 percent to 16.1 percent" and "the global average share of women in parliament increased from 14.9 percent to 22.9 percent."

It is highly disproportionate compared to the female population worldwide. The WEF report also highlighted that, despite gradual improvements, the gender gap in the labor market, care work, wealth accumulation and skills education and significantly undercut the stress levels that still plague large sections of the female population. It has been interestingly highlighted that while the number of women in leadership positions in different industries has increased over time, women are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions in industries where they are overrepresented. Also, women leaders in politics are likely to involve more women in political and government positions. South Asia is one of the geographies that show low levels of gender equality across various political and socio-economic



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parameters underpinning deep-rooted and rigid patriarchal structures and conservative traditions that prevent adequate women empowerment in the region.

Gender Equality in Indian Democracy:

India is the largest and strongest democracy in the region which has provided equal political and civil rights to both men and women since the beginning of its independent post-colonial existence as a constitutional democracy. Apart from the political right to vote and contest elections as given in Articles 325 and 326, Part III of the Constitution of India guarantees the fundamental rights of men and women. In the state policy guidelines, economic empowerment is ensured by providing equal pay for equal work to both men and women as well as humane conditions of work and maternity comfort. Women's participation in Indian politics

has undoubtedly increased over time.

In terms of participation in elections as voters, women's voting has increased significantly over the years and in the last national elections in 2019, women voted in almost equal numbers compared to men – hailed as the 'silent revolution of women's self-empowerment'. Such increased political participation of women is attributed to increased literacy rates and greater political awareness due to the dissemination of information through digital and electronic media.

Women's participation in Indian politics has undoubtedly increased over time. In terms of participation in elections as voters, women's voting has increased significantly over the years and in the last national elections in 2019, women voted in almost equal numbers compared to men – hailed as the 'silent revolution of women's self-empowerment'. However, as far as women's participation in legislative politics is concerned, statistics on women's representation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha (the lower and upper houses of India's parliament) indicate that female voter participation in elections has increased significantly. In Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the proportion of women representatives in Parliament remains very low.

In the 2019 elections, the highest number of women representatives have been elected to the Lok Sabha so far. It is only 14 percent of the total membership in the present House. The situation of women's representation in the Upper House or the Rajya Sabha is equally low, and despite relative improvements over the years, the figure of 13 per cent of the total membership of the House has not yet been crossed. The situation is worse when the average percentage of women representatives remains below 10 percent in state assemblies, also known as Vidhan Sabhas. In a country where women constitute half of its population, only 10-14 percent of women representatives in national and state legislatures reflect the deep structural conditions of gender inequality in the field of legislative representation in India.

The Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW) observed in their 2020 study that "less than a tenth of the 50,000 candidates contesting central and state elections are women." The number of women ministers in India has also increased over time, but the proportion is much lower than that of men.

Awareness Regarding Political Rights of Women:

For the third level of local self-government bodies, i.e. Panchayats and Municipalities, the passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992 provided for reservation of one-third of the total seats for women in these bodies. Studies have suggested that the policy of reservation of seats for women has led to an unprecedented increase in the political participation of women in local government bodies. Based on the positive results of reserving one-third seats for women, some states like Odisha have legislated for 50 per cent reservation for women in their local bodies. Although there were initial concerns about 'proxy representation of women', over time women representatives have become more aware of their political rights and familiar with governance experiences, making them true representatives of grassroots political decision-making in India.

The long-standing demand for the Women's Reservation Bill 2008, which mandates reservation of one-third of parliamentary and state assembly seats, has been lingering for a long time due to lack of political consensus on the issue. The lack of institutional pressure and the inability of political parties to facilitate the growth of a significant class of women leaders in national and state-level politics is a concern for gender-inclusive politics in India.

Despite positive changes in politics at the local level, without adequate representation of women in high political positions, it is difficult to systematically incorporate issues of holistic women's empowerment into policy-making and governance.





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However, while women's participation in state-level and national representative politics remains relatively low due to institutional inaccessibility and structural barriers, increased political mobilization of women may create favorable conditions for overcoming such barriers. Participation in Indian democracy that ensures descriptive as well as substantial representation of women in institutions of politics and governance is the need of the hour.

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