



---

**A STUDY OF FACTORS AFFECTING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO LOK SABHA ELECTIONS**

**Dr. Shashi Saurav**

Assistant Professor, Political Science

Department of Political Science and Public Administration

Dr. Shakuntala Misra National Rehabilitation University, Lucknow

**ABSTRACT**

India is one of the biggest and vibrant democracies in the world. It has been successfully working since its establishment. Regular elections at the union, state and local level; peaceful transfer of political power from one party to another as per the mandate received in the elections; proper representation of all the sections of the society; faith of the general masses in the democratic process of the country are some of the major indications of the success of Indian democracy. Political participation of the general masses is one of the most important requisite for the successful functioning of the democratic political system and when it comes to the participation of women in the political system of the country, then it became far more important not only from the point of view of gender equality and justice, rather also from the point of view of an all-encompassing democratic structure. Therefore, this paper tries to study political participation of women in India in the Lok Sabha elections and the major factors affecting political participation of women in India.

**KEY WORDS:** Democracy; Political Participation; Political Participation in India; Democracy in India

## **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

According to the Human Development Report 1993, prepared by the United Nations Development Programme “Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affects their lives. People may, in some cases, have complete and direct control over these processes in other cases the control may be partial or indirect. The important thing is that people have constant access to decision-making and power. Participation in this sense is an essential element of human development.”<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to the concept of political participation, it means participation in the political activities of the country which is a prerequisite for a democratic system. Participation of people in the act of governance is the only guarantee of successful functioning of a democratic system. In the absence of participation, there cannot be democracy. Political systems where there is no participation of the general masses are democracy only for name sake. When we talk about participation, it does not mean mere participation in the elections and casting votes. Participation means a continuous involvement in the political activities, political events, monitoring the functioning or the working of the system throughout. Besides this, political participation is not only ensures credibility of the political system and the people in charge of running the system, but also it ensures political obligation, which is very essential for a proper functioning of any political system. Political participation also ensures a close relation between the ruler and the ruled which in turn instill trust amongst the people for the state.

But it must also be accepted that it is not possible that all the citizens of the state can actively participate in the political activities due to many reasons, therefore Robert Dahl has categorized political participation of citizens into two categories: active citizens and passive citizens. Passive citizens are those who neither concern themselves nor participate in the political system. They have a feeling of apathy towards the political system. He called them as political stratum and explained various reasons for their feeling of apathy towards politics.”<sup>2</sup>

“Political participation is a broader and complex term, which expresses itself in various kinds of overt and manifests political activities.”<sup>3</sup> Keeping in mind the complexity of the concept of Political participation it will not be wrong to define it in the words of Myron Weiner who

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report 1993, UNDP, New York, 1993, p.1

<sup>2</sup> Dahl, Robert (1977) A Modern Political Analysis, New Delhi, Prentice Hall of India Private Ltd., p.32

<sup>3</sup> Schnofeld, William R, “The Meaning of Democratic Participation” World Politics, 28: 1(1975) 136-137 as in BhavanaJharta (1996) Women and Politics in India, New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publications, p. 13.

defined it as “any voluntary action successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate method, intend to influence the choice of public policies, the administration of public affairs, or the choice of political leaders at any level of government local or national.”<sup>4</sup>

## **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

In India, the society is stratified in to several sections which make the concept of participation even more complex. There is class, caste, religious, gender, lingual, regional, racial and many such cross-cutting diversities which makes the Indian society one of the most complex throughout the world. But putting aside all the other complexities, if we ponder over gender distinction and gender equality, we find that there is a clear-cut distinction between men and women not only in the field of politics but also in every sphere of human life. The same stands true in case of political participation of women in the politics of the country as well. Involvement of women in politics in India in the modern era can be traced back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The nationalist movement towards the end of the 19th century provided the necessary momentum and pull to draw an increasing number of women into the political main stream. A positive atmosphere for literacy and education of women was created by the social reformers of that time. Political consciousness among women can be seen during the freedom struggle. Thereafter, an Independent India with its new Constitution granted equal opportunity and rights in education and employment to the women and also provided equal rights of participation in the political process of the country. Discrimination on the basis of sex was out rightly rejected. Although, the Constitution of India has granted equal rights to the women, in practice, these rights are not properly taken benefit by the women in totality. Male dominance in all the spheres can be clearly seen and the same is true in case of political participation of women. With a few exceptions women have remained outside the domain of power and political authority. Despite women's mass participation in the national struggle, women's representation in the formal political structures has remained marginal.

Keeping aside all the other complexities of political participation, a simple study of participation of women in the Lok Sabha elections since 1952 can depict the real story of political participation

---

<sup>4</sup> Weiner, Myron (ed.) (1974) “Political Participation: Crisis of the Political Process” in Leonard Binder Crisis and Sequence in Political Development, London, Princeton, University Press, p.164.

of women in the country. Since 1952, the political participation of women has never been beyond 15 percent. (see Table 1) Although, there can be seen a rising trend in the political participation of women in the Lok Sabha since 1990s, but that too is not a satisfactory figure.

**Table 1: Representation of Women in the Lok Sabha (1952-2019)**

LOK SABHA	YEAR	FEMALE MEMBER	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL SEATS
1	1952	22	4.41	499
2	1957	27	5.40	500
3	1962	34	6.76	503
4	1967	31	5.93	523
5	1971	22	4.22	521
6	1977	19	3.49	544
7	1980	28	5.15	544
8	1984	42	7.72	544
9	1989	27	5.22	517
10	1991	39	7.17	544
11	1996	40	7.35	544
12	1998	43	7.92	543
13	1999	49	9.02	543
14	2004	45	8.31	542
15	2009	59	10.85	544
16	2014	62	11.42	543
17	2019	78	14.36	543

Source: Election Commission of India

At the level of local self-government, due to reservation for women, we can notice the participation of women. But a close look at the socio-political realities at that ground level can reveal the truth of such representation and participation.<sup>5</sup> Coming to the participation of women in the politics of the country at the National level, one can find several factors affecting their participation.

### **FACTORS AFFECTING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

There are several factors affecting political participation of women in India which can be broadly classified into socio-cultural, economic, educational and political factors.

---

<sup>5</sup>The “SarpanchPati” culture, robs off the women citizens of a leader who actually represents them, and defies the whole purpose of reservation as most of the women sarpanches end up only as a name in the government’s list of sarpanches and the face of empowerment just stays limited to the paperwork, whereas the ground reality stands in stark contrast with the paperwork reality. See Malik, T. “SarpanchPati: Are Women Mere Faces For Elections?”, Nov 15, 2022 at <https://feminisminindia.com/2022/11/15/sarpanch-pati-are-women-mere-faces-for-elections/> visited on 1 December, 2022

Firstly, the socio- cultural factors affecting the political participation of women in India should be considered as the politics is just a reflection of the society. The society having a discriminative mindset regarding the roles to be played by genders can never practically accept equality as its value. Women have long been denied equality due to this mindset, the reflection of which can clearly be seen in the politics of the country. Politics was considered to be the domain of male dominance, which discouraged women participation in politics. A common mindset of the people throughout the country, with few exceptions, is that neither politics is made for women, nor women are made for politics. This is the main factor which negatively affects women participation in politics.

Secondly, there are certain economic factors which affect the political participation of women in the country. Economic or financial freedom is one of the important factors behind empowerment of any particular class or section of the society. Women lack the economic base which would enhance their political participation. As far as participation of women in politics in the country is concerned one can clearly notice that still a large percentage of women are not self-sufficient in economic terms. They are dependent on their male counterparts. Economic dependency over the male is also an important reason for lower participation of women in politics and therefore, can be considered as an important factor affecting the participation of women in politics.

Education can be considered as another important factor affecting the political participation of women in the country as it is the breeding ground for empowerment of any section of the society and the same is true in case of women. As the literacy rate of women in the country is still very low, they fail to understand their social, economic and political rights. Lack of education place them in a position where they fail to understand the value of their political rights which, in turn, negatively affect their participation in politics. Most of the women are not even aware of their political rights and in case they are aware, then they are denied the opportunity to participate due to several socio-cultural and economic reasons.

Last but not the least, there are many political factors which has negatively affected the participation of women in politics of the country. To start with we can notice that the political parties playing an important role in the politics of the country never bother to represent women as their candidate in the elections. "Political parties have always been reluctant to give tickets to women. They prefer to give tickets to the male candidates. The parties are usually against taking risk of putting up women as candidates because of the social attitudes which disfavor women's

entry into politics.”<sup>6</sup>They are only given chance to contest election if and when it becomes necessary to do so for attaining their political goals, but not for promoting the women. “Their presence is mere symbolism rather than real power wielding.”<sup>7</sup>The same is true in case of considering women in the formation of council of ministers. There are only a few women who were provided key positions in the council of ministers. This is not the case in any one or two governments, rather since independence the absence of women participation can be noticed.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

From the above study we can understand the different factors affecting political participation of women in India. In order to enhance and ensure participation of women in politics of the country, it is necessary to emphasize on education of women which is surprising very low even after so many decades of our independence. The mindset of the people regarding the participation of women must be changed and they must not be confined to the household activities. Opportunities must be given to this section of the society to grow in all spheres of their life and also in the political sphere. Economic independence is one of the most important remedy for empowering the women politically and ensuring their participation. Until and unless, women in the country are economically independent it will never be possible to bring them into politics. Even at the grass root level, keeping aside some exceptions, the representation of women and their participation is only ornamental. They are dominated by their family members and they are even not in a position to take their decisions independently.

Besides all this, the most important thing which must be done to ensure participation of women in politics of the country is to bring reservation for the women in the legislature and also in the executive. Political parties in the country must ensure participation of women in their organizational setup and also promote them as their candidates in the elections at the Union and at the State level. It is the need of the hours to make some constitutional arrangements for the participation of women in politics because women are not confined to a caste, religion, region, class, language or culture. Their participation will be the participation of almost fifty percent of the population of the country, which are denied their rights not due to legal issues, rather due to social, cultural, economic and political issues which are discussed in this paper.

---

<sup>6</sup>Khanna, M. (2009): Political Participation of Women in India, The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol.70, No. 1 (January-March, 2009), pp. 55-64

<sup>7</sup>Kaushik, S. (2000): Women and Political Participation, in Niroj Sinha (Ed.) Women in Indian Politics, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, p. xvi