

Women's Reservation Bill for Gender Equality in India: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Women in India have played important roles in politics, although their representation remains lower compared to men. The role of women in Indian politics has been evolving over the years. Women's participation includes voting, running as candidates, holding political offices, and influencing decision-making process. Indira Gandhi became India's first Prime Minister in 1966, marking a significant milestone, but the representation of women in politics still lags behind. The Women's Reservation Bill, introduced in 1996, aims to provide a one-third reservation for women in Indian politics, but has not been passed into law. In September 2023, India's Legislature passed a landmark bill requiring one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, the Delhi Legislative Assembly, and state legislative assemblies across the country and opening the door for more women to enter national politics. The objective of this research paper is to identify the barriers to women's empowerment and the problems they faced. The report also discusses the present condition of women's empowerment in India and what factors are influencing their current situation. It has been discovered that, in comparison to men, women in India are not given the same authority and position. By adopting different programs and initiatives, The government of India has made several attempts to empower women on a national level. The present research paper aims to postulate women's potential political sector and

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government of India programs.

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Introduction:

The political participation of women is crucial for societal equality and development. India's Constitution guarantees equality and suggests special provisions for women. Despite the Indian constitution's provisions for gender equality, women's representation in the Legislative Committee and political participation remains low. Women rights are primarily usurped by the male population. . Overcoming on societal barriers and fighting for equal representation have been key components of India's women's political empowerment journey. India is a patriarchal society, but it has produced a number of strong female leaders, such as Droupadi Murmu and Indira Gandhi, women like Pratibha Patil , Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerje and Mayawati have significantly influenced Indian politics and motivated a new generation of women to actively participate in political discourse and pursue

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leadership role. As a result, they can play a role models in the political landscape of the Nation. India has made progress in the political empowerment of women, but more work needs to be done to guarantee fair representation and meaningful involvement.

India ranks 127 out of 146 in gender parity and 48th out of 146 in Political Empowerment according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023. Women make up 48 percent of India's population, but their representation in the 16th Lok Sabha is only 11.8%, the highest in the country's history. They represent only 10.5% of Parliament members and 9% in the state assembly. Despite 75 years of independence, women's representation in the Lok Sabha remains below 10%. Women's issues are often overlooked due to low representation in politics.

In India, rising crimes against women, female infanticide, and foeticide persist, and violence in small towns and metropolitan cities requires women to make decisions and policies in their favour. The United Nations has outlined gender equality as a key sustainable development goal in “Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023”. Women’s participation in politics is essential for women empowerment. Gender quotas have been enacted in 137 countries worldwide, which has opened the door for more women to enter politics. Active involvement in political activities, decision-making, and policy formulation enhances their social, political, and economic status and strengthens democratic institutions. Gender equality in Political Representation and decision-making is essential for a real democracy. The Research Paper highlights the persistent challenges faced by women in India in terms of social, economic and political participation, largely due to discriminatory legislative frameworks and social norms.

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Objective:

The followings are the objectives of this paper:

- To study the specific barriers and obstacles that deter women from entering politics.
- To analyse existing gender disparities within political systems.
- To analyse the impact of women's participation in politics.
- To Study the sustainability of women's political empowerment efforts.
- To discover the ways in which this problem can be hand-out.
- To study the role of Parliament in dealing with this problem.

Methodology:

To conduct this study historical approach is used. The research design is descriptive. The present study is based on the data collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data is collected from the authentic reports of Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023 by The United Nations, The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs Report and Global Gender Gap Report 2023 by The World Economic Forum. The main literature that were used as mainly secondary sources such as books, articles, journals, unpublished desertions, newspapers, and internet to objectively gather data and arrive of conclusions.

Discussion:

The 20th century has seen a significant increase in women's roles and status, impacting both developing and developed countries' economic and political fabric. It will take 286 years to remove discriminatory laws. Governments have implemented policies to achieve gender parity, including quotas for women in governmental bodies and increasing political participation in traditionally low-involved countries. Women given the importance in society, practically all countries after World War II made a commitment to empowering them and

amending their constitutions as required to guarantee that they had the same rights as men. The Constitution Drafting Committee, led by Baba Saheb Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, paid appropriate attention to women's empowerment when framing the Indian Constitution. The State has the authority to enact laws that promote positive discrimination in favour of women. The country's aims to encourage women's advancement in various spheres through its laws, development policies, and programs. The Fifth Five Year Plan (1974–1978) established women's empowerment as a central issue determining their status. The Indian Constitution promotes gender equality through its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles, It gives the State the authority to enact laws that promote positive discrimination for women. To protect women's rights, the National Commission for Women was founded in 1990 by an act of parliament.

Historically, women have been underrepresented in Indian politics, with a low percentage in the Indian Parliament and state legislatures. Socio-cultural factors like patriarchal norms, traditional gender roles, and societal attitudes contribute to this underrepresentation. Women face barriers to participation, such as limited access to education and resources, balancing family responsibilities and political careers. Women earning 23% less than men globally and spending three times as much time in unpaid domestic and care work. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues with increased sexual violence and care work. There is

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Need of more comprehensive efforts to promote gender equality and empower women in Indian politics.

India is a nation born out of long freedom struggle and aimed for equal representation of diverse groups, including genders, religions, and ethnicities. As a democratic nation, it prioritized equal representation in democratic bodies like the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and state legislative assemblies. However, the rise of men taking care of these democratic bodies alone and a decline in women's representation in these democratic organization led to need the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill in India Women's underrepresentation in politics persists, despite improvements in the Gender Equality Index in 2022. However, women continue to face under-representation in legislatures, despite the fight against a misogynistic system. The participation of women as a voter in elections has increased, with Nearly equal turnout in 2019 national elections. Women's representation as elected in the Lok

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Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, remains low, with only 14% and 13% of seats held by women in the Parliament, respectively. However, last month India's legislature passed a landmark bill requiring one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, the Delhi Legislative Assembly, and state legislative assemblies across the country and opening the door for more women to enter national politics.

Empowerment Women in Indian Politics:

Empowerment involves providing women with the necessary power, enabling them to become economically independent, self-reliant, and participate in development activities, overcoming challenges and fostering positive self-esteem. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD1985) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) in India have been actively working to protect the rights and legal entitlements of women. In 1971, the first committee formed for women's representation in democratic bodies. The committee demanded women's reservation in local body, did not in legislative assemblies, leading to The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments which granted one-third of seats reservation for women, with SC/ST women also receiving one-third of these seats in elected bodies to the decentralized governance structure known as Panchayats and urban local bodies. This has led to some progress at the local level, with more women actively participating in local governance. However, this representation has not translated into significant participation at the state or national levels. The Women's Reservation Bill, introduced in 1996 by the United Front Government of HD Deve Gowda as the 81st Amendment Bill. Unfortunately, Lok Sabha dissolved, and the issue was revisited in 1998, 1999, 2002 and 2003 without concrete action. Unfortunately, Lok Sabha dissolved, and the issue was revisited in 1998, 1999, 2002 and 2003 but without concrete action. The Rajya Sabha then passed the bill in 2010 and allowing women to be reserved on a rotational basis through a draw system, with one seat

reserved once in every three consecutive general elections. The Lok Sabha never passed Women's Reservation Bill in Lok Sabha.

The Women's Reservation Bill is still valid for 27 years after the passage of the law.

According to The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs reports that out of 542 Lok Sabha members, only 78 are women. State legislatures have women's representation below 15% a alarming level. The national average for women in state assemblies is around 8%. The percentage of women MPs in Lok Sabha is 14.94, while in Rajya Sabha it is 14.05 percent. The Women's Reservation Bill is a crucial step towards ensuring equal representation and empowerment of women in India's political structures.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development established a committee in 2013 with the recommendation that women should be granted 50% of the seats in local government bodies, State legislative assemblies, the Parliament, ministerial positions, and decision-making bodies within government. Because of resistance from regional parties, six prior attempts to enact the gender quota attempts were unsuccessful. Political Party leaders and proponents of women's rights celebrated the law this time. However, hurdles like delayed implementation and democratic backsliding threaten the quotas' benefits, with many parties have voiced concerns over the inclusion of a sub quota for women from historically underprivileged castes. It aims to empower thousands of women who often feel suppressed by men. This is the need of the hour that The Women's Reservation Bill requires immediate approval from the Lok Sabha.

The bill includes the following points:

- ❖ The Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies of the States will reserve one-third of the seats for women to be filled through direct election.
- ❖ The Constitution grants one-third of seats to women from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes under The Article 330 (1) and Article 332 (1).

- ❖ In the Lok Sabha, women from states with less than three representatives are not granted a reserved seat.
- ❖ If a state has less than three seats reserved for SC or ST, women from these groups are not considered for reservation.
- ❖ Women will be allocated seats on a rotational basis.
- ❖ The reservation of seats for OBC women and minority women is not reserved.
- ❖ The Rajya Sabha and state legislative councils do not have any reservation seat for women.

In September 2023, India's legislature passed a landmark bill requiring one-third of seats for women in the lower house of parliament (Lok Sabha), the Delhi Legislative Assembly and state legislative assemblies across the country and opening the door for more women to enter national politics. There has been seen various efforts by government to pass the national gender quota reform in Parliament from 1996. India's new law, gender quotas to be implemented after delimitation. It will not be in effect until the 2029 general elections, as India's decadal census, which was scheduled for 2021, has been delayed indefinitely. The reservation will increase women's political representation after its implementation.

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Challenges Faced by Women in Indian Politics:

The situational reality of women's status in India is not adequately addressed by the Constitution, laws, policies, and plans. Social and economic structures are at the core of gender inequality, which is reflected in declining female ratios, violence against girl children and adolescent girls, social stereotyping, and discrimination. Indian women face numerous challenges in politics, including gender bias, stereotyping, limited access to resources, cultural barriers, violence, women continue to face underrepresentation in critical decision-making roles within Indian politics. , lack of support mechanisms, and electoral challenges. Financial constraints and lack of backing from powerful political circles restrict women's ability to compete on an equal footing with male counterparts. Cultural barriers, such as prioritizing family responsibilities over political ambitions, create a dilemma for women. Upper caste women from wealthy families often contest elections in villages, but their power is often a facade due to male dominance and lack of economic independence. This has led to a significant gap between representation and participation, affecting women and Dalits, as well as the rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless. women face challenges in politics due to family and financial constraints, sexism, patriarchal structures, gender roles, and the perception that women are not suited for certain jobs. The conservative fabric of Indian culture often poses significant hurdles for women in politics. Societal expectations of prioritizing family responsibilities over political ambitions create a dilemma for women, forcing them to strike a delicate balance between personal obligations and professional aspirations. Violence and harassment, including verbal abuse and physical assaults, deter women from actively participating in politics. Despite their presence within and outside the political realm, women face underrepresentation in critical decision-making positions limiting their influence on shaping policies that directly impact their lives and the lives of other

women. Women have limited access to resources like money, education, and social networks, which hinder their ability to compete with established male politicians.

Importance of Women's Political Empowerment in Indian Politics:

The reservation of women in Indian politics aims to address historical and contemporary gender disparities and promote gender equality in political representation. It bridges the gender gap by providing opportunities for women to participate in decision-making processes. Reservation encourages political empowerment by giving women a platform to voice concerns and represent marginalized communities. It promotes inclusive governance by ensuring diverse perspectives are represented in policy formulation. Women representatives often bring unique perspectives to policy discussions, focusing on education, healthcare, women's rights, and family welfare. They serve as role models, challenging patriarchal norms, and contributing to broader societal changes. Women are also required to make policies that are not solely for one gender, but for all. A balanced gender ratio in these spaces can lead to more democratic and authentic laws.

Suggestion:

The Indian Constitution aims to ensure justice, social, economic, and political equality for all citizens. India is working to empower women including legal changes, education, economic empowerment, political engagement and health promotion. Empowering women's political participation in India is crucial for achieving gender equality and improving governance. To facilitate this, several suggestions can be made, including promoting education for girls and women, implementing reservation policies, organizing political training programs, changing traditional gender roles and expectations, establishing mentorship programs, providing financial support, promoting media and public awareness, advocating for legal reforms, creating networking opportunities, engaging young women in politics from an early age, organizing community outreach, encouraging women's organizations, implementing gender-

responsive budgeting, encouraging inclusive political parties, and regularly assessing the progress of these initiatives.

Furthermore, addressing issues like domestic violence, sexual harassment, and discriminatory practices in politics is essential. Networking can be a powerful tool for building political influence, and young women should be engaged in politics from an early age. Community outreach can educate women about their political rights and opportunities for participation. Supporting women's organizations can provide valuable resources and support for aspiring female politicians. There exist several tactics that may be engaged to enhance the representation of women in Indian politics include combating gender-based abuse and harassment, promoting knowledge of women's rights, enhancing autonomous decision-making, and changing the electoral process. Women's political engagement may be increased through eliminating patriarchal thinking, establishing independent monitoring mechanisms that forbid family members from influencing women's decisions.

Conclusions:

The central and state governments in India are working to empower women but they face discrimination and marginalization in various aspects of society, including social participation, political participation, economic participation, education, and reproductive healthcare. Women are economically poor and less literate than men, making education crucial for empowerment. Additionally, women are often weaker and face workplace harassment, such as rape and dowry harassment. Because of patriarchal inclinations and sexism in political parties and institutions, which threaten democracy and deny women equal rights and opportunities as specified by the Constitution, the underrepresentation of women in legislation is a seriously problematic issue. To achieve women's empowerment, it is essential to reduce feminized poverty, promote education, and prevent and eliminate violence against women.

