



Breaking the Barriers: Women's Active Participation in Indian Democracy

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Introduction

The inclusiveness principle is the foundation of India, the biggest democracy in the world. However, women, who make up about half of the population, must actively participate in a democracy for it to be representative. From their efforts during the liberation fight to their current participation in political arenas, women's involvement in Indian politics has seen tremendous change. However, institutional, societal, and systemic obstacles have prevented them from fully engaging in government.

The difficulties women in Indian politics encounter, the advancements made over the years, and the potential for developing a fair political system that supports women are all examined in this essay. This paper emphasizes the difficulties women encounter while highlighting their vital role in forming Indian democracy.

Keywords

Women's participation, Indian democracy, gender equality, political representation, sociocultural barriers, electoral reforms, grassroots empowerment, women leaders, gender stereotypes



Challenges confronted by Women in Indian Politics:

Social Barriers:

Women in India still encounter several barriers in their political journeys, even despite constitutional promises of equality. These difficulties fall into two general categories: social and political. Because of its strong patriarchal roots, Indian society frequently views politics as a field dominated by men. Women who want to be in politics often face opposition from their families and communities as well as from political organizations. Apart from that, women's participation in the democratic process is hampered by their limited access to political knowledge and education. Many women are still ignorant of their rights and the ways they might participate in governance, especially in rural areas. Moreover, women's traditional obligations, like early marriage and children, frequently leave them with little time or money to pursue careers in politics. Women are disproportionately burdened by these societal expectations, which make it difficult for them to enter and remain in politics.

Political Barriers

Political parties frequently oppose women because they are hesitant to nominate female candidates for office. Gender equality is rarely given priority by the male-dominated party leadership. Despite accounting for 48% of India's population, women are still remarkably underrepresented in both the State Assemblies and Parliament. Women make up just 13.6% of the Lok Sabha and 13% of the Rajya Sabha as of 2024, which is a stark underrepresentation. For women candidates, especially those from underrepresented groups, the high expense of election campaigns and unequal access to financial resources pose a serious obstacle.

Progress Made: Empowering Women in Indian Politics:

Notwithstanding these obstacles, India has achieved significant strides toward women's empowerment through electoral reforms, social movements, and legislative reforms. Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Indian Constitution forbid gender-based discrimination and guarantee equality. Additionally, Article 39 (a) emphasizes equal possibilities for men and women in terms of governance and employment. Women are now required to hold one-third of the seats in Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local authorities, thanks to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992. Millions of women have been allowed to take on leadership roles at the grassroots level because of this historic reform.



In order to mobilize women, raise awareness of their rights, and promote gender equality in politics, a number of women's organizations and non-governmental organizations have been essential. Systemic impediments have been addressed in large part by organizations like the National Commission for Women (NCW) and the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA). The Election Commission of India launched programs like Matdata Mahila Shakti with the goal of encouraging women to actively participate in democratic processes and increasing their voter turnout.

Elections and the Women :

To promote women's involvement, the Election Commission has implemented policies like voter education and gender-sensitive training for election officials. Mandatory steps to guarantee gender balance within party structures are still a ways off, even if several political parties have implemented voluntary quotas for female members. Future generations have been inspired by many women who have broken down barriers and made important political achievements throughout India's history. Indira Gandhi, India's first female prime minister, is still regarded as one of the country's most important political figures. Her ability to lead throughout pivotal events, including the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, demonstrated her strategic savvy and fortitude.

Conclusion:

Women's participation is still severely hampered by patriarchal standards, gender stereotypes, lack of representation in decision-making bodies, and financial limitations. Nonetheless, constitutional changes, popular empowerment, and the rise of strong female leaders have all contributed to advancements.

India must emphasize enacting the Women's Reservation Bill, improving training and education initiatives, and fostering an inclusive political culture that celebrates diversity if it hopes to further empower women. Social standards need to change to accept women in leadership positions, and political parties should implement gender-sensitive policies and aggressively support female candidates. In order to create a democracy that is more representative and egalitarian, these obstacles must be removed. In addition to fulfilling its constitutional obligations, India opens the door to creative governance and sustainable development by enabling women to actively engage in politics. Although the path to gender equality in Indian democracy is difficult, a more promising and inclusive future is achievable with teamwork.



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