

Women In Parliament From Uttar Pradesh: A detailed Study Of their contribution (1947 - 2000)

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Abstract: *An assessment of women's political participation is crucial for any discussion on gender equality. Throughout history, women have predominantly engaged in non-conventional politics, participating in independence movements, social movements, and feminist causes. However, their involvement in mainstream electoral politics has remained disproportionately low, limiting their access to political leadership roles. Various factors contribute to this inadequate participation, including patriarchal and cultural constraints, the criminalization of politics, financial challenges, the high cost of entering electoral politics, and the low social esteem associated with female political involvement.*

The socio-cultural context heavily influences women's political participation. The shift from women's development to empowerment began in 1991 with economic liberalization and meritocracy, fostering women's self-reliance. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act played a pivotal role in promoting gender equality at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, there is still a need for collaborative efforts from non-governmental and feminist organizations to advocate for the political empowerment of women. Mere legal rights are insufficient; there is a demand for political parties and society to actively support the grooming and training of women, enhancing their political skills and building female social capital conducive to electoral success.

Keywords: *Political Participation, women Empowerment, Liberalization, Mobilizing, socio-cultural context.*

I. Introduction:

The term 'Political Participation' encompasses various aspects beyond just the 'Right to Vote'; it also includes involvement in the decision-making process, political activism, political consciousness, and more. In India, women participate in voting, run for public offices, and engage with political parties at lower levels more actively than men. Their strongest areas of political participation lie in political activism and voting. To address gender inequality in politics, the Indian Government has introduced reservations for seats in local governments.

During India's parliamentary general elections, the voter turnout for women was 65.63%, slightly lower than the 67.09% turnout for men. India ranks 20th from the bottom in terms of the representation of women in Parliament. Women in India have held prestigious positions such as president and prime minister, as well as chief ministers of various states. Indian voters have consistently elected women to numerous state legislative assemblies and the national parliament for many decades. The Constitution of India establishes a parliamentary system of government and guarantees its citizens rights such as the right to be elected, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and form associations, and the right to vote. The Constitution also aims to address gender inequalities by prohibiting discrimination based on sex and class, outlawing human trafficking and forced labor, and reserving elected positions for women.

The government has implemented various legal and administrative measures to enhance educational and employment opportunities for women. After Independence, the Government of India earnestly embraced the cause of the overall progress of women, primarily aiming to achieve the dual goals of egalitarianism and democracy. In order to fulfill the objective of women's development, along with that of the weaker sections of society, the government initiated various schemes and programs.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was not only the first woman member of Free India Cabinet but also president of the International Red Cross. Padma Bhushan award Durga Bai Deshmukh held the distinction of being the sole woman member of the Planning Commission. Hansa Mehta was highly esteemed as the Vice-Chancellor of Baroda University, while Madhuriben Shah distinguished herself as the chairperson of the University Grants Commission. In the realm of career diplomats, C.B. Mouthamma made a notable impact as an Ambassador to Hungary and Ghana, while Rukmini served as the Ambassador to Denmark. The significant characteristic of the Indian social system is the widely held belief that women are considered inferior to men in all aspects, leading to the prevalent notion that they should be subjected to a subordinate position both within and outside the family. Culturally and traditionally, India is recognized as one of the most patriarchal societies, where the status of women is often overlooked, and the birth of a female child is unfortunately regarded as a misfortune.

Women of Power and Women in Power in Indian Politics:

It is remarkable that despite the low representation of women in Indian politics, certain female leaders enjoy significant political prominence. Figures like Javalalithaa, the leader of AIADMK, Mamata Banerjee, the leader of Trinamul Congress, and Mayawati, the leader of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), exemplify this phenomenon. Some of them lead influential and robust regional political parties that have formed alliances with major national political parties, both within and outside the national government. Indian politics has witnessed significant debates and discussions surrounding the participation and representation of women within political parties. Various mechanisms and schemes have been proposed to address the imbalance in political power-sharing by women in India. One prominent proposal is the reservation of 33 percent of seats at various levels in political bodies, including Parliament. This initiative aims to ensure a more equitable distribution of political power and provide greater opportunities for women to participate in decision-making processes at the highest levels of government.

After Independence Women's Political Participation in India:

After gaining independence in 1947, women's political participation in India has undergone significant changes, reflecting a gradual but substantial evolution. The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, laid the foundation for gender equality, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex and ensuring equal rights. Over the years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women participating in the electoral process. The first General Elections in 1952 marked a pivotal moment when women were granted the right to vote, contributing to a broader representation of their interests in national politics.

In terms of parliamentary representation, women have made notable strides. India has witnessed the emergence of influential women political leaders, with figures like Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi holding prominent positions, including the Prime Ministership. Additionally, the introduction of reservations for women in local governance bodies through amendments to the Panchayati Raj Act in the 1990s has played a crucial role in enhancing women's participation at the grassroots level. This reservation policy has resulted in a significant increase in the number of women representatives in rural and local governance, fostering a more inclusive political landscape.

Barriers to Women Political Participation: The level and forms of women's participation in politics are largely shaped by cultural and societal barriers in the form of illiteracy, discrimination, and violence. Several barriers hinder women's political participation, limiting their representation in electoral politics. These barriers often stem from societal norms, cultural expectations, and historical biases. Here are some key barriers:

❖ **Illiteracy:** India has the largest illiterate population globally. According to the United Nations report in January 2014, 25.6 percent of all adults in India are illiterate. The literacy rate among Indian women is 65.46%, significantly lower than the literacy rate among men, which is reported at 82.14%. Illiteracy poses a barrier to women's understanding of the political system and issues. Problems like exploitation, such as women being excluded from voter lists, have been reported due to illiteracy, limiting women's ability to ensure their political rights are exercised.

❖ **Discrimination:** Even though the Constitution of India has eliminated gender inequalities among castes and genders, discrimination remains a pervasive barrier to women's political participation. Class exacerbates this discrimination. Dalit women, belonging to the lowest caste in India, face persistent discrimination when seeking public office. While the Government of India mandates the reservation of seats for Dalits and Scheduled Castes, women endure abuse and discrimination when serving as elected officials. Dalit women encounter harassment through denial of information, being ignored or silenced in meetings, and, in some instances, facing petitions for their removal from elected positions.

❖ **Patriarchal and Political Constraints:** Societal norms and cultural traditions often uphold male dominance, relegating women to subordinate roles. These deeply ingrained beliefs can discourage women from actively participating in politics.

❖ **Violence and Harassment:** Women are sexually abused. Child marriage, domestic violence and low literacy rates have lowered Indian women's economic opportunities and contributed to sexual violence in India. 2011 study found, "24% of Indian men have committed sexual violence at some point in their lives, 20% have forced their partners to have sex with them 38% of men admitting they had physically abused their partners.

❖ **Criminalization of Politics:** The prevalence of criminal activities in politics can deter women from entering the political arena. The associated risks and potential violence may dissuade women from pursuing political careers.

❖ **Social-Cultural Barriers:** The political participation of women is often influenced by the socio-cultural context in which they live. In some communities, traditional gender roles and expectations limit women's involvement in public life.

❖ **Financial Backwardness:** Economic disparities and financial challenges can act as barriers to women's political participation. The high costs associated with political campaigns, including advertising and travel expenses, can be prohibitive for many women, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Women Political Participation in India 1947 to 2000: Many political parties have women's wings or cells aimed at promoting women's participation in politics. These wings work on various issues related to women's rights and empowerment. The Indian government has implemented reservation policies to enhance women's representation in local bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities). The Constitution (73rd and 74th Amendments) mandated reservation of seats for women in local governance bodies, leading to a significant increase in women's participation at the grassroots level.

Table: Participation of Women in Indian Parliament

Year	Women MPs in Lok Sabha (%)	Women MPs in Rajya Sabha (%)
1952	22 (4.5%)	5 (2.3%)
1962	37 (7.6%)	9 (4.2%)
1972	19 (3.9%)	11 (5.1%)
1982	28 (5.7%)	13 (6.0%)
1992	42 (8.6%)	25 (11.6%)

Source- Statistical Report

Renowned Female Politicians in India:

❖ **Indira Gandhi:** Indira Gandhi, the first and only female Prime Minister of India to date, held office from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 until her assassination in 1984. She remains one of the most influential figures in Indian politics, known for her strong leadership and decisive actions.

❖ **Mamata Banerjee:** Mamata Banerjee is the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the founder of the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC). She has emerged as a powerful regional leader, known for her fierce advocacy for the rights of the state and her strong stance against the central government.

❖ **Jayalalitha:** Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jayaram is also the general secretary of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). She joined politics in 1982. In 1984, she became a Rajya Sabha MP.

❖ **Mayawati:** Mayawati, the leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), has served multiple terms as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. She is a prominent Dalit leader and has been influential in mobilizing support from marginalized communities.

❖ **Sonia Gandhi:** The President of the Indian National Congress, Sonia Gandhi has been a prominent figure in Indian politics. She has served as the chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and played a significant role in shaping the country's political landscape.

❖ **Sushma Swaraj:** Several times Member of Parliament and three times Member of the Legislative Assembly, Sushma Swaraj, the BJP leader, is now the Union Minister Of External Affairs of India. She is the second woman to hold this position after Indira Gandhi.

These are just a few examples, and there are many other influential women leaders across various political parties and levels of government in India.

II. Conclusion:

The increase in the number of women voters is positively correlated with both the number of women contesting elections and the number of women winning elections. Essentially, as the number of women voters rises, so does the participation of women as candidates and their success in elections. Where a significant surge in women voter turnout is directly influenced the presence of women candidates and their electoral victories. It is evident that a higher representation of women in Parliament can enable them to effectively address the various challenges they encounter. This increased presence can lead to the formulation of laws aimed at addressing these issues. Additionally, the enactment of the women's reservation bill could potentially revolutionize the political landscape of India, offering a powerful tool for women's empowerment. Such a measure, if implemented, has the potential to be a significant stride forward in ensuring gender equality and amplifying women's voices in the political sphere.

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