



**POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN
REPRESENTATION IN GENERAL ELECTIONS IN INDIA AND ASSEMBLY
ELECTIONS IN HARYANA**

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Abstract: *Indian women are relatively disempowered and they enjoy lower status than that of men from times immemorial. Gender gap exists regarding access to education and employment. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. The Indian Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Empowerment is one of the key factors in determining their success. Though women form a sizable part of India's population, their political representation and participation is definitely below the mark. The fact that women are grossly under-represented at the political level in Central and State government, is a testimony to lack of political power in the hands of women. In this paper attempt is made to analyze the women representation in general elections and in assembly elections in Haryana.*

Keywords: *political participation, women empowerment, reservation, general elections, political activism*

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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation is related to 'Right to Vote', participation in decision making process, political activism, political consciousness, etc. Women in India participate in voting, run for public offices and political parties at lower levels. Political activism and voting are the strongest areas of women's political participation.¹ To combat gender inequality in politics, the Government of India has reserved seats for women in local governments.

With gender-based violence ripping the country apart and appalling apathy becoming more and more evident across political class, it is argued that greater representation of women in Parliament will see an end to it. Even during the campaigning for the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections, most of the parties had vouched to bring in more reforms and make laws more 'women-friendly.' Although the present Lok Sabha has the largest number of women, India still has to be more accommodating to induct more women MPs so that issues concerning them get more prominence and are raised frequently in Parliament.

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN GENERAL ELECTIONS IN INDIA

It was a record of sorts in 2009 when 59 women were elected to the lower house of Parliament. 59 women MPs out of 543, meant the Lok Sabha was represented by 11 per cent of women. That was the highest number of women MPs elected to the Parliament since Independence. Simultaneously, Rajya Sabha witnessed 10.6 per cent women's participation.

In the 16th Lok Sabha, 61 women leaders have made their way to the Parliament. This is the highest ever number of Lok Sabha seats won by women and constitutes 11.23 per cent of the total 543 Parliamentary seats.

Going back to the initial days after independence, it appears that the situation had been more than grim. The first Lok Sabha had only 4.4 per cent women members. The sixth Lok Sabha in 1977 witnessed the smallest proportion of women in Parliament at mere 3.5 per cent. Although the number of women MPs increased from 59 to 61 under the Modi government, it still remains far below the global average of 21.3 per cent.

In a recent study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), India is placed at 111th position in the list of 189 countries having women representatives in Parliament. Even the lesser developed neighbours of India such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal have around 20, 19 and 30 per cent women members in their respective parliaments.



Women turnout during India's 2014 parliamentary general elections was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% turnout for men². Their representation has increased from 22 seats in the 1952 election to 61 seats this year, a phenomenal increase of 36 percentage points. However, gender disparity remains skewed as nine out of ten parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha are men.

In 1952, women constituted 4.4 percent of Lok Sabha members, and now account for around 11 percent, but it is still below the world average of 20 percent.

Table 1: Representation of Women in Lok Sabha 1952-2014

*Note: * Including one nominated member ,Source: Election Commission of India*

Lok Sabha	Total no. of seats (Elections Held)	No. of Women Members who won	% of the Total
First (1952)	489	22	4.4
Second (1957)	494	27	5.4
Third (1962)	494	34	6.7
Fourth (1967)	523	31	5.9
Fifth (1971)	521	22	4.2
Sixth (1977)	544	19	3.4
Seventh (1980)	544	28	5.1
Eighth (1984)	544	44	8.1
Ninth (1989)	529	28	5.3
Tenth (1991)	509	36	7.0
Eleventh (1996)	541	40*	7.4
Twelfth (1998)	545	44*	8.0
Thirteenth (1999)	543	48*	8.8
Fourteenth (2004)	543	45*	8.1
Fifteenth (2009)	543	59	10.9
Sixteenth (2014)	543	61	11.2

However, an analysis of the success rate of women candidates as compared to men reveals that it has been higher in the last three general elections. In 2014, the success rate of women was 9 percent as compared to men at 6 percent.

5380 candidates (out of 5432 candidates) have contested in the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections. Women make up a mere 7% (402) of the 5380 candidates. This is a drop from the 556 women candidates who contested in the last General Elections (2009), and the highest ever number of 599 in the 1991-92 General Elections. One third of the 402 women candidates in this year's elections are Independents. Amongst major political parties, Aam Aadmi Party



(AAP) seems to be serious about the cause of women representation – it has given tickets to the largest number of women candidates, 39. In contrast, the BJP has fielded 20 women candidates. AIADMK is the worst performer here, with a mere 4 women in contention. In contrast, Trinamool Congress has 12 women candidates and BSP has 16.

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN HARYANA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

For the first time in Haryana, known for its skewed sex ratio, 13 women entered the state Assembly out of 116 women candidates who contested the polls in Haryana assembly elections in 2014. Bhartiya Janta Party, which got the majority, has given the maximum eight women candidates to the 90-member Haryana Assembly. Congress has three women candidates declared as winners while Indian National Lokdal and Haryana Janhit Congress have one each. Among the sitting women MLAs who were re-elected include Congress ministers Geeta Bhukkal and Kiran Choudhary, Renuka Bishnoi (HJC-BL), Shakuntla Khatak (Cong) and Kavita Jain (BJP).

Apart from them, other women candidates who have won the election include Santosh Yadav, Seema Trikha, Latika Sharma, Rohita Rewri, Bimla Chaudhary, Prem Lata and Santosh Chauhan Sarwan (all BJP) and Naina Singh Chautala (INLD).

The second highest number of 93 women candidates who contested the Haryana assembly polls was in 1996 and out of them only four were elected. This was followed by 68 in 2005 when 11 women candidates were elected. As many as 49 female candidates contested in 2000 and out of them four were elected. Among the women who contested the October 15, 2014 Assembly elections, 10 represented the Congress, 16 contested as candidates of the INLD, 15 of the BJP, five of Haryana Janhit Congress (BL) and six as candidates of the Bahujan Samaj Party.

To remedy low participation of women electors, India in 1994 established quotas (reservations) in constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) to reserve 33% of seats in local governments for women. The Women's Reservation Bill (108th amendment) has been introduced in the national parliament to reserve 33% of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats for women.³ The bill has yet to be passed by Lok Sabha and signed into law. The discussion of women's reservations began in the 1920s and continued into the 1930s until a compromise was reached with Britain to allow women in urban areas to vote. Discussion of women's reservations were again introduced in 1974 by the United Nations Commission on



the status of women in India, but India did not fully establish quotas in local government until 1994.⁴ The national government has also proposed to raise the level of reservations in PRIs to 50%.⁵

Seats reserved for women are rotated for assurance that each seat has an equal chance of being reserved. After the establishment of women's reservations, political participation went from 4-5% to 25-40% among women, and gave millions of women the opportunity to serve as leaders in local government. State Odisha has established reservations prior to the 73rd amendment and they had 28,069 women elected in 1992 and 28,595 women in 1997.⁶

1. The issue of training has become an increasing concern with preparing women for the role of leadership.
2. Family also plays a significant role in women's participation in government. Familial influence can be a barrier or a support system for female elected officials in terms of connections. Family connections can help women seek elected positions at both the national and local government level.
3. There has been concern over the role of women as proxies for male family members, but women may still have important effects on policy decisions.
4. The effect of reservation for women has been increase in the number of public goods, including water and roads. Drinking water and road improvements are issues that are most frequently raised by female elected officials. Women are also likely to bring welfare issues such as violence against women, childcare, and maternal health to consideration.
5. The under-representation of women in the Lok Sabha, and from crucial decision-making positions such as in the Cabinet, are pointers of their systematic exclusion from the political structure and the deeply embedded gender basis in Indian society. Though women head a significant number of national and state-level political parties, the overall representation of women within the rank and file of these parties is dismal.
6. Women rarely play any role in formulating policies and strategies in political parties and are at best assigned the job of keeping an eye on women's issues and mobilizing them if need be for electoral benefits for their parties.



7. Both national and regional parties are following the policy of exclusion of women in allotting seats. The reason for not giving tickets to women candidates at the national and state level is based on the perception that they lack the 'win-ability' factor.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Empowerment is tied to the support of family and improved status within the household, which is undermined by the threat of domestic and sexual violence. Socio-economic conditions, such as poverty and illiteracy, prevent the entrance of women into running for public office, and even voting. Inability to understand the rules of Panchayat Raj undermines the self-confidence to participation in public office. Empowerment of Indian women can also occur through "bridging gaps in education, renegotiating gender roles, the gender division of labour and addressing biased attitudes."⁷ Women can also be empowered to participate by family, and when familial support is present they are more likely to run for office.

The Government of India has addressed the issue of empowerment by consolidating all programmes for women under the National Mission of Empowerment of Women (NMEW). The mission of NMEW is to "enhance economic empowerment of girls and women through skill development, micro credit, vocational training and entrepreneurship."⁸ In 2001, the Government of India passed the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women. The policy focuses on "the advancement, development, and empowerment of women."⁹ Specifically, the policy focuses on ending gender inequality and violence against women. The United Nations has also encouraged empowerment among India women by campaigning to end violence against women in India. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also tried to empower women focusing on issues of education, violence, and leadership.

CONCLUSION

The representation ratio of women in general and Haryana assembly election is same 11.20% but there is need of more number of women representations in the parliament and in the state assembly to secure the future of women and for social, economic and political development of women.

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