

Dimensions of Political Participation of Women in India

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ABSTRACT: Women's political participation helping in their empowerment is one of the central issues in the process of development of any country. Women's political participation in India is related to socio-cultural and economic factors. The representation of women MPs in Lok Sabha is slowly improving from 5 percent in the 1st Lok Sabha to 14 percent in the 17th Lok Sabha. The election in 2019 marked for the first time that female voter turnout almost equal to the male voter. Not only the largest number of female candidates contested for election, the number of women who actually won was also the highest ever. Many women MPs re-contested and won by large number of votes. However, the Ministry of 17th Lok Sabha consists of 58 Ministers of which only six are women. Out of 25 Cabinet Ministers only three are women. However, the present President of India, Madam Draupadi Murmu, a Santhal woman was also a two-time Member of Legislative Assembly from the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. Women's access to political power is increasing continuously and it should go parallel to their influence over and exercise of political authority.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development of the countries as women constitute around half of the population of any country. Women's political participation is one of the most important processes of their empowerment as it gives them the capacity to influence the decision-making process. Women's full and effective political participation is a matter of human rights, inclusive growth and sustainable development (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). The active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making and political involvement is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy (Mlambo and Kapingura, 2019).

Kumar (2017) states that in the twenty-first century, women are facing obstacles in their political participation worldwide. Women around the world at every socio-political level find themselves under-represented in parliament and far removed from decision-making levels. Half of the world's population are women, but today women only hold 23% of all seats in Parliaments and Senates globally (Chalaby, 2017; Radu, 2018). The United Nations (2011) concurs and states that, "women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women". Literature has shown that the factors that hamper or facilitate women's political participation vary with level of socio-economic development, geography, culture,

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and the type of political system (Shvedova, 2005; Alzuabi, 2016).

India ranks 148 globally in terms of representation of women in executive government and parliament, according to a report published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women. In terms of women ministers, India ranks 88 with only five ministers (18.5 percent) in the cabinet....This level of gender representation among ministers is better than the Asian average of 11% but far worse than the leader of the table, Indonesia, which gives 25.6% of its ministerial positions to women ([https://www.newindianexpress.com/17th March 2017](https://www.newindianexpress.com/17th_March_2017)). By comparison, Pakistan at 89, Bangladesh at 91, and Afghanistan at 99th rank fared better than India in the subcontinent.

Thus, in India the political participation of women is not spectacular compared with men which is often the case in most of the countries across the globe. Even today, illustration of women in Indian parliament is much from satisfactory. However, women's political participation now is quite encouraging compared to past times. The 73rd and 74th Amendment of the Constitution of India paved the way for emergence of women leaders at the grass root levels and helped in greater participation of women in political processes both at the state and national level. Political empowerment comes from the political participation of women in the political processes of the country. Women can better understand and represent their voices, needs and problems from a gender perspective.

The objectives of the present study are:

1. Explore different dimensions of women's participation in politics
2. To unfurl find out the degree of participation of women in casting votes
3. To find out the notch of political party wise women's contest in the elections
4. To unfold the proportion of women MPs in Lok Sabha since 1952 and state wise women MPs in Lok Sabha 2019 and proportion of women in Union Ministry.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The present paper has the objective to analyze

the political participation of women in India since independence in general and in 2019 general election in particular. The paper is based on the review and analysis of the data on political participation of women in India with specific reference to general election 2019. Data for the present study have been collected from secondary sources like different journals, books, newspaper, electronic media, e-newspapers and websites. The Lok Sabha Elections 2019 concluded successfully on 19th May 2019 and the result was declared on 24th May 2019.

Analysis and comparison have been done on the women's participation in the post – independence period to till date in matter of casting of vote, fielding of women candidate by different political parties in 2019 election, winning of women candidates in the above mentioned election. State-wise representation of women MPs, winning the confidence of people by old MPs and getting elected second time, distribution of portfolios to women MPs in Union Ministry and Cabinet etc have been presented.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Increase in Proportion of Women MPs in 17th Lok Sabha since 1952

With over 14 percent female MPs, the 17th Lok Sabha has the highest number of women candidates since 1952. The representation of women MPs in Lok Sabha has been slowly improving from 5 percent in the 1st Lok Sabha to 14 percent in the 17th Lok Sabha. The proportion of women MPs in Lok Sabha since 1952 is given in the following Table 1.

TABLE 1

<i>Proportion of women MPs in Lok Sabha since 1952</i>		
Number of Lok Sabha	Number of Women MPs in Lok Sabha	Percent of Women MPs in Lok Sabha
1 st Lok Sabha (1952-1957)	24	4.3
2 nd Lok Sabha (1957-1962)	24	4.3
3 rd Lok Sabha (1962-1967)	31	5.6
4 th Lok Sabha (1967-1971)	29	5.3
6 th Lok Sabha (1977-1980)	19	3.4
7 th Lok Sabha (1980-1984)	28	5.1
8 th Lok Sabha (1984-1989)	42	7.6
9 th Lok Sabha (1989-1991)	29	5.3
10 th Lok Sabha (1991-1996)	37	6.7
11 th Lok Sabha (1996-1998)	40	7.3
12 th Lok Sabha (1998-1999)	43	7.8
13 th Lok Sabha (1999-2004)	49	8.9

14 th Lok Sabha (2004 - 2009)	52	9.5
15 th Lok Sabha (2009 -2014)	59	10.7
16 th Lok Sabha (2014 -2019)	62	11.3
17 th Lok Sabha (2019-)	78	14.2

Source: www.feminismindia.com

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	1
Other Parties	315
Independent Contestants	222
Total	723

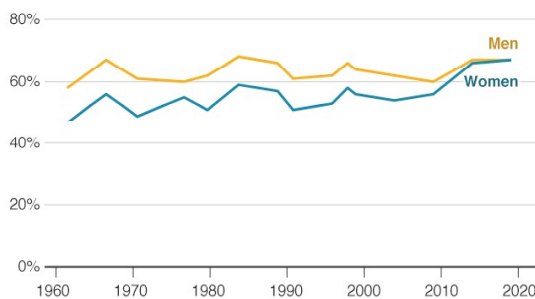
Note: Compiled from newspapers.

Women Voters Turnout Equal to Male Voter

Nearly half of India’s 900 million registered voters are women. Since independence, female voters have increasingly turned out to vote in greater numbers. But 2019 general election marked the first time that female voter turnout equal to male voter turnout.

Voter turnout finally equal for men and women

Female participation has been increasing since 1962



Source: Election Commission of India



Figure 1: Contest by women candidates in 2019 election

In 2019, a total of 723 women candidates contested the Lok Sabha elections against a total of round 8,049 male candidates. Congress fielded the maximum women at 54 followed closely by BJP at 53. Among the other parties, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) fielded 24 women candidates, the All-India Trinamool Congress (AITC) 23, the CPI(M) 10, the CPI - four, while the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) fielded one woman candidate. The Trinamool Congress distributed 17 out of 42 seats to women candidates. As many as 222 women contested the polls independently.

TABLE 2

Major party-wise proportion of women candidates contested for Lok Sabha 2019 in India

Party	Women
BJP	53
Congress	54
Trinamool Congress	17
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	24
All India Trinamool Congress (AITC)	23
CPI(M)	10
CPI	4

State-wise Women Candidates Contested for Lok Sabha Election 2019

There has been an increase in number of women candidates fielded in election 2019. The highest numbers of women candidates were fielded from Uttar Pradesh which comes to 104, followed by Maharashtra. 64 women candidates have been fielded from Tamil Nadu, 55 from Bihar, and 54 from West Bengal. In Odisha, the regional outfit in the helm of affairs gave one-third of the Lok Sabha seats to women candidates.

TABLE 3

State-wise women candidates contested for Lok Sabha Election 2019

State	Number of women candidates
Uttar Pradesh	104
Tamil Nadu	54
Bihar	55
West Bengal	54

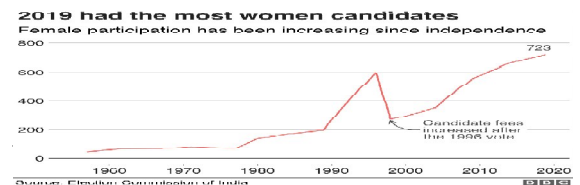


Figure 2: Decadal representation of women candidates contested in election.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-48366944>

Victory by Women Candidates

The year 2019 was one of the best years for women candidates. This election saw not only the largest number of female candidates contesting for election, the number of women who actually won was also the highest ever.

State-wise Women MPs in Lok Sabha 2019

Out of 542 MPs in the lower house, 78 are women with Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal leading at 11. Of the total 21 Lok Sabha seats in Odisha, a total number of seven women candidates are women. In West Bengal, altogether the state has sent 11 women MPs to Lok Sabha. Uttar Pradesh with its 80 seats in the

Lower House, emerged as winners with 11 women members. A total of eight women winners are found from Maharashtra, six numbers of women winners are from Gujarat. Four women winners are from each Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Three numbers of women have own from three States i.e. Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Rajasthan. Two women each from Karnataka, Jharkhand and Punjab have own. Assam, Kerala, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Meghalaya and Tripura have one woman representative in each State. Despite a total of 10 seats in Haryana, only one woman has won which depicts the existing patriarchal mindset. A total of eight states including Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Goa, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and five Union Territories including Andaman and Nicobar Islands Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Lakshadweep and Puducherry have failed to send a single woman MP. Union Territories have a total of 13 seats including seven seats in NCT of Delhi out of which only two women have won out of the total candidates. Many women MPs re-contested in 2019 and own in large number of votes. As many as 27 sitting women MPs retained their seats in Lok Sabha polls.

Proportion of Women in Union Ministry

The 17th Lok Sabha has 78 women MPs with female representation at 14.2 percent – highest since Independence, higher than the 16th Lok Sabha in 2014 which had 62 women representatives. The six women MPs in the 16th Lok Sabha were Sushma Swaraj (Foreign Minister), Smriti Irani (Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Textiles), Uma Bharati (Drinking Water and Sanitation Minister), Harsimrat Kaur (Food Processing Industries Minister), Menaka Gandhi (Women and Child Development Minister) and Nirmala Sitaraman (Minister of Defence). The 15th Lok Sabha had only two women cabinet ministers – Smt. Chandresh Kumari Katoch (Minister of Culture) and Kumari Selja (Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment).

However, the Ministry of 17th Lok Sabha consists of 58 Ministers of which only six are women MP and three of them have been allotted cabinet berths. The three women Cabinet Ministers are Smt. Nirmala Sitaraman (Ministry of Finance and Ministry of

Corporate Affairs), Smt. Harsimarat Kaur Badal (Ministry of Food Processing Industries), Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani (Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Textiles). These three women MPs were also a part of the previous Cabinet formed in 2014. There are no female representatives among the nine Ministers of State (Independent Charge). Out of 24 State Ministers 3 are women. Smt. Renuka Singh Saruta is in charge of Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Sushri Debasree Choudhuri is in charge of Ministry of Women and Child Development. Niranjana Jyoti is in charge of Ministry of Rural Development. The six ministers and their States are as follows: Nirmala Sitaraman, Smriti Irani (U.P.), Harsimrat Kaur Badal (Panjab), Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, Renuka Singh Saruta (Chhattisgarh), Deboshree Choudhuri (West Bengal).

CONCLUSION

There has been little improvement in the political participation of women in India in recent years. Though the percentage of women MPs has increased over the years, it is still lower in comparison to some countries. These include South Africa (43%), UK (32%), USA (24%), Bangladesh (21%) (www.prsindia.org). Women have historically comprised a mere fraction of the candidates in India's general election, and 2019 was no different. Only 723 of the 8,049 candidates were female which is less than one in 10%. Though the BJP and the Congress are fielding maximum number of women candidates yet percentage is still low in comparison to the total their nominated candidates. Although the number of women candidates was much lower than male candidates, it was still higher than in the previous elections. A depressing statistic is that if every woman MP elected to the Lok Sabha over every parliament since independence will be counted, these together would not fill a single Lok Sabha of 543 directly elected seats. This is despite the prominence of several senior women leaders in Indian politics. The % of women MPs in 2019 election is far from satisfactory. Leave aside the half way mark, even a 33 percent representation seems to be a distant dream. Women's access to political power is increasing continuously and it must go parallel with their influence over and exercise of political authority. It is a transformative and steady process. Along with the

numerical increase in the political participation of women, increase in political efficacy of women can bring real political empowerment of women.

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