

Women Empowerment in Politics: A Study on Women Participation in 2019-2024 General Elections, Representation in Lok Sabha & Government

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Abstract

Gender equality in political participation is emerging as debatable issue and a major challenge in the world. Women, who constitute about 50 per cent of the population of India, are inadequately represented in the higher democratically elected bodies. Any development/welfare schemes will not be successful without contribution of women in public life. Women's involvement in political process is significant to strengthen democracy and for their struggle against gender related issues of marginalization, trivialization and oppression. There can be no true democracy unless there is equal participation of women in all positions of life and at the various levels of decision making in the higher political institutions. The 21st century demands crucial role of women in political arena and representation in higher law making bodies.

The difficulties and possibilities faced by Indian women in their pursuit of political equality will be covered in this paper. It will focus how women are now participated in voting (2019-2024) and political representation in parties to uphold their fundamental right to take part in politics. The study will also highlight how important it is to representation in higher legislative bodies as well as Union government in order to achieve political empowerment (gender equality) and true democratic government in India.

Keywords- *Gender Equality; Women Empowerment in Politics; Participation in Higher Legislatures; Poor Representation.*

1. Introduction

Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and make them confident enough to claim their rights.¹ Participation of women in political life is integral to the advancement of women.²The proper representation of women in terms of numbers and quality is absolutely essential for their meaningful partnership in the progress of the nation.³

Gender equality in political participation is emerging as debatable issue and a major challenge in the world .Women, who constitutes about fifty per cent of the people of India, are inadequately represented in the higher political elected bodies. Any development/welfare schemes will not be successful without participation of women in public life.

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Women's share in political process is significant to strengthen democracy and for their struggle against gender related issues of marginalization, trivialization and oppression.

Even after more than seventy six years of independent India, women still remain invisible and marginalized in higher decision making bodies'. National as well as regional political parties have not been sincere on this issue and to allot more seats for women.⁽⁴⁾ The proper representation of women in terms of numbers and quality is absolutely essential for their meaningful partnership in the progress of the nation⁽⁵⁾

Women's role in decision-making is one of the most important questions for consideration in the movement for their empowerment⁽⁶⁾. Women are still vastly under-represented in political and administrative posts that make important policy decisions affecting them.⁽⁷⁾

Although they constitute about 50 percent of the citizen and over the years their participation by way of voting has increased, yet their participation and representation in lawmaking and law implementing bodies are not very satisfactory⁽⁸⁾. Proper representations of women in terms of numbers and quality is absolutely essential for their meaningful partnership in the progress of the nation⁽⁹⁾. A truly vibrant political democracy requires all members of civil society to participate fully in making and implementing decisions⁽¹⁰⁾. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992/1993) called for one-third reservation of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities, expanding their participation in local governance.

2. Significance of the Study

As per the 106th Amendment Act, which includes a delimitation exercise, the women reservation will be put into effect following the first census. A third of seats should be set aside for women in order to encourage their active involvement in politics, support inclusive democracy, and introduce more policies that are focused on their issues and promote human development. Increasing their representation will help address the particular obstacles faced by women and result in more gender-sensitive policy. This disparity would be lessened and more equal participation of women in the Lok Sabha would be guaranteed with a 33% reservation. No state has more than 20% female lawmakers, while the national average for women's share in state legislative assemblies is a pitiful 9 per cent. India's female parliamentary representation is still far below than the 25% global average.

India's seven phase general elections, scheduled from April 19 to June 1 2024, determined the political direction of the world's most populous nation for the next 5 years. The 18th general election for the 543 Lok Sabha seats has begun on April 19 and be held in seven stages, with polling in each state starting at a different time. This is the first general election since the passage of the Women's Reservation Act in 2023, which reserved 1/3 rd of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

The difficulties and possibilities faced by Indian women in their pursuit of political equality will be covered in this paper. It will focus how women are now participated in voting and Political representation in parties in the general elections of 2019-2024 to uphold their fundamental right to take part in politics. It will also highlight how important it is to representation in higher legislative bodies as well as Union government in order to achieve gender equality and true democratic government in India.

a) Voter Turnout, 2019-2014

Table: 1 demonstrate how women voted in India's last two elections. The gender divide was finally narrowed by the 2019 election, when female recorded, at 67.18%, surpassed male turnout, at 67.02%. Women cast a significant number of voting in this election for the 18th Lok Sabha as well. Out of 642 million voters, 312 million were women. With both male and female voter recoded at over 66%, the gender gap in voting has virtually disappeared⁽¹¹⁾

Table 1: Indicate Voter Turnout, 2019-2014

Sl. No	Year	No, of Voters (Crore)	Women Voters (%)	Men Turnout (%)	Women Turnout (%)
1	2019	90	48.1	67.02	67.18
2	2024	97	48.7	65.80	65.78

Source: Election Commission of India, 2019-2024.

Women made up 312 million (65.78 percent) of the 642 million (65.79 percent) voters that cast ballots in the 18th Lok Sabha elections in 2024, which was slightly less than the 65.80 percent turnout for men and less than the 67.18 percent turnout for women in 2019. There were more women voters than men in 19 of India's 31 states and union territories, and in 18, the percentage of female voters above the state average turnout⁽¹²⁾ For the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, there are more than 15 percent more newly registered female voters (1.41 crore) than newly enrolled male voters (1.22 crore). The gender ratio has also improved, rising from 940 in 2023 to 948 in 2024.

b) Ticket Distribution by Political Parties (2019-2024)

Table 2: indicate the ticket distribution by Parties in the last two Lok Sabha elections. (2019-2024). In the 2019 elections, the Congress fielded 54 women (20%) out of 262 seats, a higher proportion compared to the BJP.

Table 2: Ticket Distribution by Political Parties (2019-2024)

Sl. No.	Party	Year	No, of Seats contested	No,of Tickets Women MPs	Women MPs (%)	No,of Women MPs Elected (%)
1	BJP	2019	437	53	12	8
2	Congress		262	54	20	11
3	AITC		42	16	38	56
4	BJD		21	6	28	83
1	BJP	2024	440	69	16.	31
2	Congress		327	41	13	13
3	AITC		48	12	11	11

Source: Election Commission of India, 2019-2024.

However, only 11% of the women fielded by the Congress emerged victorious. The Trinamool Congress fielded 16 women (38%) out of 42 seats, with 56% of them winning. Similarly, the BJD fielded six women (28%) out of 21 seats, and 83% of them emerged victorious. Despite these figures, the BJP sent the highest number of women to the 17th Lok Sabha, considering its sweeping success across India.⁽¹³⁾

The number of women fielded general elections has aded from 3% in 1957 to 10% in 2024. Among the 6 national parties, the BJP has the highest number and share of women candidates (at 16%). Two out of the three candidates of the NPP are women. Among local parties contesting more than twenty seats, the BJD (33% women candidates) and the RJD (29%) have the highest share of female candidates. 50% of candidates (20 out of 40 candidates) fielded by the Naam Tamilar Katchi are women. 6 individuals of the third gender were also contested elections. Of these, four

candidates are independents, and two are contested as candidates of unrecognized parties. There were 6 third gender candidates in the 2014 and 2019 elections as well. ⁽¹⁴⁾

c) Indicates women candidates contested in 2019-2024 General elections

Table: 3, indicates no of women candidates fielded in the 2019-2024 general elections. Amid discussions about the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, less than 10 per cent of the total number of candidates contested in the Lok Sabha election 2024 is women. As many as 150 Lok Sabha constituencies have zero women candidates found in this 7 phase election process, according to a report. This means that about 27.6 percent of the 543 Lok Sabha seats have no women in the fray. About 14.4 percent of candidates nominated by state parties were female.

Table: 3 indicates women candidates contested in 2019-2024 General elections

Sl. No	Year	Total candidates Contested	No of Women Contested (%)	Women Elected	Percentage
1	2019	7322	726(9)	78	9
2	2024	8360	797(9.3)	74	10

Source: Election Commission of India, 2019-2024.

Among the national parties, this figure is 11.8 percent, said the report compiled by the Quantum Hub (TQH), a New Delhi-based public policy research and consulting firm.

Only 7.1% of Independent candidates were women, the report said. The Lok Sabha Elections 2024 saw contribution of 799 women, which is about 9.5 percent of the 8,360 contenders in the 2024 general elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leads among the major parties with 69 women Lok Sabha nominees out of 440, making up 16 per cent of its total candidates. The Congress follows with 41 women out of 327 candidates, constituting 13 percent.

Odisha takes the Lead

Among states with at least 100 candidates, Odisha, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh had the record portion of women candidates, at 15.4 percent, 13.8 percent, and 13.2 percent, respectively. Rajasthan (7.1 percent), Haryana (7.2 percent), and Gujarat (7.2 percent) had the lowest share, the TQH report said. The smaller states of Manipur and Nagaland had no female candidates, it said. ⁽¹⁵⁾

There were 797 women candidates in all, with the BJP fielding the most with 69, followed by the Congress with 41. The Think group PRS found that sixteen percent of these female MPs are under forty years old. According to the data, thirty MPs, or 41% of the total, are female and were once Lok Sabha members. One MP has served in the Rajya Sabha out of the others.

A study of data from the Election Commission indicates that this time, the 30 female candidates running for the BJP, 14 for the Congress, 11 for the TMC, 4 for the Samajwadi Party, 3 for the DMK, and 2 for the JDU and LJP(R) won the polls. The 18th Lok Sabha will have the most female members since 1952 with about 13.62% of its MPs being female. At 78, or more than 14% of the total, the 17th Lok Sabha had the greatest proportion of women lawmakers.

In the 2024, Lok Sabha elections, Hema Malini of the BJP, Mahua Moitra of the TMC, Supriya Sule of the NCP, and Dimple Yadav of the SP held onto their seats. However, it was the victories of contenders like Misha Bharati and Kangana Ranaut that stole the show. The youngest nominees to win were Priya Saroj, 25, of the Samajwadi Party, who contested for Machhlisahr, and Iqra Choudhary, 29, of the Kairana seat.

Notably, with 50% of their candidates being women, parties like Naam Tamilar Katchi have attained equal gender representation. The Nationalist Congress Party and the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), both of which had 40% female candidates, were two more parties with notable female presence. While the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) had 29 per cent female participation, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) both had thirty three per cent.⁽¹⁶⁾

d) Women's Representation in Lok Sabha (2019-2024)

Table 4: Women's participation in Lok Sabha (2019-2024)

Sl. No.	Year	Lok Sabha			
		No,of Seats	No, of Men MPs	No, of Women MPs	Women MPs (%)
1	2019	543	465	78	14.00
2	2024	543	469	74	13.62

Source: Election Commission of India, 2019- 2024.

Table: 4. show that the per cent of women in the lower house of Lok Sabha indicate greater inequality in relation to the total number of seats. The average representation of male from 2019 to 2024 is 90 per cent and for female it is nearly 10 per cent. This Table shows that the women have not found adequate representation at the top governing structure of Lok Sabha.

The 17th Lok Sabha General Elections held in 2019 year, 78 women MP's were elected. In the history of Lok Sabha elections', it is believed that the turnout of 14% was the highest. The data analysis discussed above clearly demonstrates the need to reserve 1/3 of the seats for women in the parliament. It wasn't until the 16th Lok Sabha, in 2014, that the share of elected women in the Lok Sabha reached 12%. From 2009 to 2014, there was a slight 0.4% gain in the number of women representatives. In the 16th general elections (Lok Sabha), there are 11.23 percent more women overall than men (8.9 percent).

The number of women MP's elected to the Lok Sabha has decreased to 74 from 78 in 2019. West Bengal leads the nation with 11 female MPs elected to the Lower House, out of all the women elected to the House nationwide.

e) Women Political Status

Table 5, lists the number of Indian female in the higher leadership positions across a range of political arenas. It mentioned the women current status of important positions in India, including the President of India and president of the political party, Member of parliament and current West Bengali chief minister Mamata Benarji, who have served as role models for all Indian women leaders.

Women's participation has been given a new dimension with the inclusion of women's stalwart ministers Nirmala Sitaraman and Annapurna Devi in the present Union Council of Ministers, which is led by Narendra Modi. In India, numerous female politicians have held the position of chief minister in various states. In the Indian Union, female leaders have also been named governors of several states.

Table- 5: Women Political Status in India-2019-2024

Sl. No.	Name of Female Politicians	Political Party	Belonging State	Positions Occupied
1	Dropadi Murmu	-	Orissa	President of India
2	Sonia Gandhi	INC	UP	Ex-President of INC
3	Mamata Banerjee	TMC	WB	C.M, West Bengal
4	Mayavathi	BSP	UP	National President of BSP, Ex-CM, U.P.
5	Menaka Gandhi	BJP	UP	Ex-Minister for Women & Child Welfare
6	Nirmala Sitharaman	BJP	TN	Ministry of Finance
7	Brinda Karat	CPI(M)	WB	Ex-Member, Rajya Sabha
8	Kiran Bedi	BJP	DL	Ex-Lt Governor, Pudechhery
9	Supriya Sule	NCP	MH	Member, Lok Sabha
10	Mehbooba Mufti	PDP	J&K	Ex-CM, J&K
11	Priyanka Gandhi	INC	Kerala	Member of Parliament
14	Mohuva Moitra	TMC	WB	Member of Parliament
15	Dimple Yadav	SP	UP	Member of Parliament
16	Navaneet Kour	Independent	Maharashtra	Member of Parliament
17	D.Purandeswari	BJP	AP	Party President, Ex- Minister
18	Hemamalini	BJP	UP	Member of Parliament
19	Misa Bharti	JDU	Bihar	Member of Parliament
20	Kangana Ranaut	BJP	HP	Member of Parliament

Source: *Election Commission of India-2019-2024*

f) Women Participation in Union Council of Ministers (2019-2024) Table-6: Table- 6: Women Representation in Union Council of Ministers 2019-2024

The representation of women in the Indian Council of Ministers during the Indian governments from 2019 to 2024 is shown in the table 6. On June 9, Narendra Modi took the oath of office as prime minister for the third time with an extended government.

Sl. No	Year	Total	No of Women Ministers	Percentage
1	2019	78	11	14.10
2	2024	74	7	9.45

Source: *Election Commission of India2019- 2024.*

Under Modi 3.0, the Council of Ministers consists of fifty-eight freshly elected member of Parliament in the Lok Sabha and twelve MP's of the Upper House. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was joined by 71 ministers who took the oath of office. In addition to thirty Ministers of State and five Ministers of State with Independent Charges, thirty Cabinet Ministers were selected. Only two of the seven female ministers in the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, the Finance and Women and Child Development held cabinet positions.

In 2014, Prime Minister Modi appointed eight female ministers during his first term. By the end of the 17th Lok Sabha, he had reduced the number of female ministers from six at the beginning of his second term to 11. A minor decrease in the number of women MP's voted to the Lok Sabha occurred in 2024, with 74 elected as opposed to 78 in 2019⁽¹⁷⁾.

3. Discussion

Voting- The gender gap in political engagement is widened in 2024 as female voter turnout fell from 2019 despite more women registering to vote. Political leaders claim that over the years, a concerted effort has been made to promote increased female participation in politics. After 70 years and 18 general elections since independence, the usual polling pattern in India has been men outnumbering women, which was broken in the 2019, 17th Lok Sabha election. Voter turnout of women finally overtook that of males.

Hailed from Political Families – The study reveals that it has been an improvein the number of women aspirants contesting general elections over the years. In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, there were 556 women are in the fray, making up 7% of the total 7,810 candidates. This number has been increased to 640 (8 percent of 8,205) in 2014 and to 716 (9 percent of 7,928) in 2019. As per the data by the election watchdog Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), in the 2024 general elections, 9.5 percent of the total candidates in the election are women.

Among the 67 candidates allotted seats in 2024 elections, a significant number hail from political families. Notable examples include Bansuri Swaraj from New Delhi candidate, the daughter of the late BJP leader Sushma Swaraj; D. Purandeswari from Rajahmundry loksabha seat contenstent, the state unit president of Andhra Pradesh and a former minister in the UPA, as well as the daughter of the late N.T. Rama Rao; and Kriti Singh Debbarma, the sister of Tipra Motha Party founder Pradyot Kishore Manikyha Debbarma.

Representation in Parliament - Due to indirect elections and the nomination of female candidates, there are more women in the upper chamber than in the Lok Sabha. It peaked in 1990 at 15.5 percent, and since then, a downward trend has persisted. As a result, having 33% of women in higher legislative bodies in India has become a long-term goal. Women Reservation Act a significant step in reducing the dismal representation of woman in the higher legislature. The study reveals that highest elected body in India remains men dominated both in opinion and person.

Women Status - The health ministry was given to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the first woman to serve in the federal cabinet in 1947. For fifteen years, Indira Gandhi worked as India's first female prime minister. Sonia Gandhi has been a strong female leader for the All India Congress committee in recent years. She was instrumental in the UPA governments established by the Congress in 2004 and 2009.

Low Representation in Ministry- The number of female ministers have significantly decreased throughout the tenure of governments, raising questions about the ruling party's commitment to gender inclusion in governance. With the exception of 2004 (10 members), the data indicates that women have continued to be low in the Council of Ministers.

Nirmala Sitharaman and Annapurna Devi are in the Cabinet of the present Modi govenment, while the other women have sworn to serve as ministers of state. The other women have sworn in as ministers of state, are Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, Darshana Jardosh, Meenakshi Lekhi, Pratima Bhoumik,. There are not many women in the portfolios of home, finance, defence, and industry ministries. They were assigned less significant ministries like welfare, health, local government, etc., because they are primarily seen as women-specific organizations. The study indicates that men will continue to hold the majority of union council minister positions.

4. Conclusion

The increase of seats in higher decision making bodies will have an impact on the status of women and thereby leading to political empowerment of women. This is expected to guarantee a way to bring a sense of equality of gender in India. The study shows that introduction of reservation has opened up political arena for large number of women and

offered them opportunity to express their social strength and become close participants in higher legislatures. The participation of women members in higher legislative institutions like Lok Sabha, state assemblies has helped them to change their social and political life. The government must take the initiative to execute this inclusion. Legitimate democracy may never be realized if women are kept out of democratic processes. In addition to being the foundation of their right to equal citizenship, women's political involvement is a fundamental human right. The future of the country is in the hands of female leaders who complete the all-round participation.

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