

# Status of Political Representation of Women in India

Anamika Pundir<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Uday Singh Rajput<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Political Science and Human Rights, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Human Rights, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh

## Abstract

Indian women are continuously fighting for their rights since ancient time. The status of women in Indian society is full of ups and downs. It is well known that women actively participated in India's freedom struggle. Moreover in Constituent Assembly of India as well, women members played an important role in developing our constitution. Equal political rights were given to all citizens in the constitution, but the illiteracy, poverty, traditional patriarchal structure during that era were some of the big challenges that restricted women to enter in the public sphere. Nevertheless, from independence to the present, women have achieved success through their continuous struggle in the sphere of politics, but much remains to be achieved. Step by step, steady progress by women in political, social, economical and cultural fields is important steps towards developing inclusive democratic system in India.

**Keywords:** Political Participation, Voting Behaviour, Popular Schemes, Voting turnout, Women.

## Philosophical Underpinning of Political Participation

Democracy is a political system that depends on the participation of every citizen irrespective of any caste, class, religion, gender, ethnicity or place. A Representative system is better for democratic participation, therefore it can be comprehended that voters are bricks of democracy, and voting behaviour works as cement to construct the representative wall of democracy house. Politics is where only men can participate; women and men who were servants or defeated soldiers and foreigners were not eligible to participate in the state; this definition of citizens was given by Aristotle, the father of Political science. Many political scientists and philosophers also define women as secondary and not eligible for any other outdoor work, therefore politics is beyond their defined work, but Mary Wollstonecraft was the first woman who raised the question of prevailing myths. Women are also human beings and have right to determine what is right or wrong for them. They are also free to live their life in their own way. The well renowned Book 'A Vindication of the rights of women (1792) provides the base for the feminist movement.

## Historical Glance: Political Participation of Women in India

The first wave of feminism depended on women political participation and equal suffrage. The famous political philosopher John Stuart Mill first advocated for women suffrage (The Subjection of Women, 1869). Mao Zedong also said that women also hold up the half sky. After great struggle in 1920, the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in the USA constitution for women's voting rights, the journey of women's political

participation initiated. In India, in year 1921 Madras constituency gave the right to vote for men and women but to only those who had property. After independence, the Indian Constitution gave equal rights to vote for both men and women. However, In India, women voting and political participation have consistently been less as compared to men voters during the first Loksabha election. In India, women have not used their political rights; ideally, there are many reasons responsible as patriarchy, however women are known for only housework and this thinking of society is the base of all problems which women are facing. The low literacy rate of women is one of the main causes for financial dependence of them over men. Nevertheless rights given by the constitution are not followed in reality. India has a population of more than 138 crore, being largest democracy in the world. In any democracy, the most important is people's participation, which depends on voting patterns. There are 89.60 crores electors in India. Uttar Pradesh is the most populous and covers fourth largest state area of India and consists of 80 Loksabha seats. According to the election commission of India (2019), Women electors in Uttar Pradesh are 6,61,11,941 as, in any democracy, there are half the numbers of women voters.

### **Political Participation of Women: Current Status**

The political participation of women in India is found to be very less, although women contributes 50 percent population who also have equal voting rights. These electoral can be seen as missing voters because India is a patriarchal society, therefore instead of women having voting right in a democratic state, they cannot use it as much as needed. One can notice many reasons such as illiteracy, lack of knowledge about political institutions, their importance or significance, and the other side women are financially dependent on father, husband and son. Most women use their voting rights, not independently; women voters can be known as men having the double voting right but in a different body. Due to these reasons women's political participation has remained poor since the first election till present. Improvement in the voting pattern can be seen but that too is not in sufficient quantity. As mentioned above women's voting behaviour is affected by many factors such as education, interest, social structure as caste, class, and the patriarchal society. Mainly the voting behaviour of women is affected by the patriarchy. This voting is mostly the Recursive of male voting. National election survey found that 19 percent women are influenced by their family as far as voting is considered. But nowadays percentage of women voting independently is increasing. This raises the question that why women are voting or why many female voters are indifferent from voting. By every election year, the number of women's voting is increasing. These votes of women go to that party which addresses particular issues of women. From West Bengal to Kerala, the victory of Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Left Democratic Front (LDF) was found to be dependent on the high turnout of women electoral. In Assam, this voting power of women has also been recognised. The tradition of schemes that directly benefit women is old in the election. The political leader offers women free-riding buses, alcohol prohibition, security, and scholarships for girls. In 2019 the turnout of women exceeded that of men. Mostly it can be seen in Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and other states. This development can be observed in women voting mainly in rural areas. 13 percent rise can be observed if the election period from 1971 to 2014 is analyzed.

However the most crucial factor of this research paper is to analyse the women voting behaviour. India consist a total 545 Loksabha constituency from states and union territories. Provision for nominating Anglo Indian for two seats has been abolished by 104<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment 2019 in the Parliament.

After independence, the Indian Constitution accepted universal adult franchise, but it did not secure seats for women in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies. Women's voting rights play a crucial role in Indian electoral politics for female voters. Women voters emerged as the highest vote bank in general and state assembly elections. The static data of women voters from third (1962) to sixteenth (2014) general elections demonstrate consistently reducing the difference of female voters in comparison to male voters. The difference between women and men voters' turnout is closed and reversed in the 2019 general election with a difference of only 0.17 Percentage. In the third Lok Sabha election, the number of women voters was 16.71 per cent less than men voters. (Chief Election Commissioner Shushil Chandra, 2021).

In the 2019 general election, it has happened for the first time that 78 women have been elected as MPs. On the other hand, the number of male MPs was 462 in 2014, which has decreased to 446 in 2019. Out of 8,000 candidates, the number of female candidates was less than 10 percent, but 14 percent of the women reached the parliament after winning. This is a sign of positive change coming in India's electoral politics(ORF,2019).

#### Increasing Trend of Women Voters

General Election ( Year)	Total Voting Turnout (%)	Men Voting Turnout (%)	Women Voting Turnout (%)
2009	58.21	60.24	55.82
2014	66.40	67.09	65.30
2019	67.11	67.01	67.18

Source – Website of Election Commission of India(ECI)

Voting behaviour of women is one of the essential factors to decide the future of Indian democracy. However the voting of women is also being affected by schemes and policies. They are not treated as the first voter. The women are those voters who can be attracted by the announcement of cheap schemes and by making promises to provide LPG gas cylinders, free travelling in buses, etc. In reality, women voters are essential to Indian politics, therefore there is a need of new or valuable promises. In eight states of India, women voted more than men. It can also be seen that the upcoming Loksabha election and women voting can surpass men voting by several electoral votes.

#### Voting Behaviour: Brief Understanding

The term 'voting behaviour' in research can be defined as a decision-making to choose right people. To use this right one requires some eligibility conditions such as age or property, education, profession, etc however it varies from one country to another. The other term, behaviour means attitude towards anything or someone, but when both words 'voting behaviour' come together, it presents a different meaning as 'The attitude of voters comes to select a particular political party or candidate. This attitude, known as voting behaviour, has to take shape with caste, class, education, property, political parties' agenda, family, media, and charismatic personality of leaders.

This research uses 'voting behaviour' to know gender-based voting behaviour. At this point, the term adds a particular word, 'women', which also limits this study. Women's voting behaviour also became a different term leads meaning the attitude of women in choosing any political party or candidate

throughout voting. With gender, the determining factors of voting behaviour also have different meaning. This study will try to identify these different factors.

### **Correlation between Political Mobilisation of Women and Populist Schemes**

Women are emerging as significant vote banks in the present time. Government schemes for women are affecting the attitudes of women, which increase the number of women voters. Nitish Kumar, the chief minister of Bihar, initiated schemes such as Cycle Yojana, Kanya Vikas scheme, etc to attract voters. In the state of West Bengal, Kanyashree Prakalpa encouraged education. Growth in literacy rate is a critical factor for women to access the public sphere. Women-led movements such as the Pinjra Tod movement, Shaheen Bag movement, and farmer protest movement have also mobilised women voters.(Pratyusha Pramanik, 2021)

For the upliftment of women, it is necessary to improve their economic, social, and political status. There is no doubt that women's political participation is improving at the grassroots level. It is also true that active political participation also depends on economic independence. Mainly in India, women are not educated and are also entangled in the net of child marriage. Due to that they are restricted in their homes only. It indicates the dependency of women. Even if women are elected in Panchayati raj, their husbands work on behalf of elected female candidates (Shiv Kumar Lal). "The Missing Women" concept given by Amartya Sen is mainly for developing countries. They have found some interesting facts from 1962 to 2012. Firstly, they found that gender bias in voting is decreasing over time. In the 1960s, Women voters were 715 per 1000 and in year 2000's it went upto 883 voters per 1000. This increment of voting is also seen in backward states such as Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In the 1990s, the participation of women increased dramatically while on the other side males remained stagnant. Women voters created an criticeffect on election outcomes (Kapoor and Ravi, 2019).

Soumya Kapoor Mehta remarks that the women voters became the independent voting bloc. Political parties also have a concern about increasing women as voters. These votes of women go to those parties that address their particular issues. The tradition of schemes that can directly benefit women has become old in the elections now. The political leaders offer women free-riding buses, alcohol prohibition, security, and scholarships for girls. In 2019 the turnout of women votes exceeded that of men. Mostly it can be seen in Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Tamil Nadu. This improvement of women voting can be seen in rural areas as well. If one focuses on period analysis, the result from 1971 to 2014 is significant and shows 13 percent improvement(Soumya Kapoor Mehta, 2021).

“Are women voting at a higher rate now than before? The given answer is optimistic that women voters surprisingly increase their voting power. Why is it so surprising? As in 2004 the gap between men or women voting was 8.4 percent while in 2014 the gap reduced and the difference was of just 1.8 per cent. This change in women's voting behaviour has emerged because Indian women have now become more educated, independent, wealthier, and politically aware. The Indian election commission has tried to make more accessible voting for women to improve security on polling booths (Milan Vaishnava, 2018). Voters have the power to decide the Indian political map, but still, it can be seen as silent power because women are that voters who can be attracted by the announcement of cheap schemes and make invaluable promises as LPG gas cylinder, free travelling in buses, etc. In reality, women voters are an essential part of Indian politics, and they need a new or valuable promise. In eight states of India, women participation in voting is more than men. In the upcoming Lok Sabha election, women voting can surpass men voting

number, but this point is also notable that incensement in women voting is not sufficient in the decision-making process. The political parties aim to attract women voters through schemes and scholarships. The importance of women voters is the determining feature of Indian politics in a democracy (Suja Asrar, 2019). Women constitute half the population. However, in 2015 only 12 percent of Indian legislators were female. While in America, this number is 19 percent in the Senate and 29 percent in the Common house of the United Kingdom. However, this representation of women in legislation is not enough to participate in decision making(Iyer and Mani, 2018).

Constitution also provides provisions for reservation of women's political participation at local levels by 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment. Use of technology and other initiatives are helpful to measure women's participation, such as proxy candidate decision-making initiatives. Many possible approaches for measurement of political participation among women, such as the application of technology, advanced analytical systems, developing women participation scores will play a significant role(Richa Shanker, 2014). Now women have an essential role in constituting legislative assembly in several states. Nevertheless governments of different states are launching women-centric plans and schemes such as Matru Vandana Yojana, Ujjwala Yojana, Awas Yojana, and others. Congress also promised to introduce the women reservation bill. The gender gap between male and female voters is decreasing day by day. Women voters have increased from 47 percent in year 2014 to 48.13 percent in year 2019( Bansal, 2019).

## Conclusion

It can be concluded by stating that in every election, the number of women voting has increased considerably. At present the difference between male or female voting participants is just 1.8 percent. It has revealed that women have become the most significant voting bank. In India, it is known that women are not unrestricted as men; therefore these women's voting rights are primarily used in favour of men's decisions. Every political party recognizes the importance of women voters that is why they try to attract them with various schemes and policies. However, the problem starts now because no political party have any primary agenda to improve the condition of women in society. They are not concerned about their genuine issues such as security of women and girls, their education, job, reservation in parliament, career, etc. All political parties try to gather women's vote by launching populist schemes such as scooty schemes, laptops for girls, free riding in busses and the metro, etc. Nevertheless these factors lead women voters to vote for a specific political party and candidate.

## Reference

1. Kaur, Hardeep (2008), "Voting Behaviour in India and its Determinants", International Journal of Current Engineering and Scientific Research, 5(2):116-120.
2. Kumar, Sanjay and Rai, Praveen (2019), "Bharat Mein Matdan Vyvhaar Ka Mapan", New Delhi: Sage Publication
3. Roy Prannoy and Sopariwala R Dorab(2019), "The Verdict: Decoding India's election", Haryana: Penguin Random House India
4. Rai, Praveen (2017), "Women's Participation in Electoral Politics in India: Silent Feminism, South Asia Research, 37(1): 58- 77.
5. Visser, Max (1996), "Voting: A Behavioural Analysis", Behaviour and Social Issues, 6(1): 23-34.



6. Pramanik, Pratyusha (2021),” Understanding The Emerging Women Vote Bank India, Feminism in India, 5 April 2021, [URL:https://feminisminindia.com/2021/04/05/vote-bank-women-india-assembly-elections/](https://feminisminindia.com/2021/04/05/vote-bank-women-india-assembly-elections/)
7. Mehata, Kapoor, Soumya(2021), “How Women are Shaping Fortunes in India” The Hindustan Times, 7 May 2021
8. Uttar Pradesh: Census 2011 Data, Dainik Jagran [URL:https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/uttar-pradesh-large-district-by-population-as-per-census-2011-1371803067-1](https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/uttar-pradesh-large-district-by-population-as-per-census-2011-1371803067-1)
9. Statistics of Uttar Pradesh, Government of Uttar Pradesh [Online Web] Accessed 15 December 2021 [URL:https://up.gov.in/upstateglance.aspx](https://up.gov.in/upstateglance.aspx)
10. Kapoor, Mudit and Shamik Ravi (2019), “Women Voters in Indian democracy: A silent Revolution”, The Print, 11 May 2021.
11. Vaishnava, Milan (2018), “Indian Women are Voting More Than Ever. Will They Change Indian Society?” Carnegie Endowment For International Peace,8 November 2018
12. Asrar, Shuja (2019), “Women a Silent ‘Majority’ on India’s Electoral Map.” The Times of India.”
13. Kawoosa, Mohammad, Vijdan (2019), “Loksabha Election 2019: In 2019 Polls, Women look to bridge Historic Turnout Gap.” The Hindustan Times, 17 May 2019
14. Shanker, Richa (2014), “Measurement of Women’s Political Participation at the Local Level: India Experience, Central Statistics Office, India
15. Roy, Prannoy and Sopariwala R.Dorab (2019), “On the Rise: Women Voters in India, Significance, and June 2019.
16. Poojari Omkar ( 2021), “The Rise of Women Voters: A Key Element Behind India’s Electoral Outcomes” Newsclick 6 January 2021 URL <https://www.newsclick.in/The-Rise-Women-Voters-Key-Element-Behind-India-Electoral-Outcomes?amp>
17. Bansal, Aanchal (2019), “Number of Women Voters Increases But Still Not 50%, The EconomicTimes,12March 2019
  - a. URL: [https://m.economictimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/number-of-women-voters-increases-but-still-not-50/amp\\_articleshow/68366988.cms](https://m.economictimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/number-of-women-voters-increases-but-still-not-50/amp_articleshow/68366988.cms)
18. <https://www.orfonline.org/hindi/research/role-women-strengthening-indian-democracy-51915/>