

Women's Participation in Electoral Politics in India: An Overview of The Four General Elections

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation at all levels of politics is essential to achieve true democracy. The present paper gives an overview of the Indian general elections of 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 to understand the actual state of women's participation in electoral politics in India.

The paper begins with a brief overview of the constitutional provisions and initiatives that have been implemented post - independence to increase the political representation of women including the monumental 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. Importance of recently passed women's reservation bill "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023" is also discussed.

The paper analyses women's participation in the Indian general elections of 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 as voters, as contestants and their representation in parliament. Suggestions have been given in the paper to increase women's participation in politics.

Findings from the study reveal that there is steady progress in women's electoral participation in India in recent years, still more women are needed to make India a truly representative democracy.

Keywords: Democracy, Electoral Politics, General Election, Political participation, Women.

Introduction

Women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine

democracy.¹ It ensures that the voices of half the population are heard and considered in the decision-making process. The present paper gives an overview of the Indian general elections of 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 to understand the actual state of women's participation in electoral politics in India.

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature, based on secondary data. The secondary data is collected from journals, newspapers, websites including Election Commission of India's website.

Constitutional Provisions for Women

The constitution of India guarantees gender equality in all social, political and economic domains, such constitutional provisions include fundamental rights of men and women (part 3), the directive principles of state policy (part 4- article 38, 39 (a), (d) and (e), 42, 44, 45), articles 325 and 326 that guarantee political equality and the right to vote.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments provided the reservation of one-third of the total number of seats for women in panchayati raj institutions and municipal bodies. Studies have shown that the provision of reserved seats led to a phenomenal rise in the political participation of women and ensured remarkable political empowerment of women at the grassroots. Although, concerns have been raised over the genuine participation of women as an elected representative.² "Sarpanch Pati" culture (a practice where the husbands of women elected as heads of Panchayats unofficially represent them and make decisions on their behalf) undermines the constitutional mandate of women's representation and limits their actual participation in local governance.³

Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam

The 106th constitutional amendment act, the "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam", ensures the reservation of one - third of the total seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. The electoral landscape would become more inclusive and responsive to the concerns of women as a sizable number of women leaders will now participate in India's legislative politics at the national and state level.⁴

¹"Political Participation of Women." UN Women Asia and the Pacific <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org>

² 1.Shanker, Richa. " Measurement of Women's Political Participation at the Local Level: India Experience." UNSD.<https://unstats.un.org>

³ 2025. "Sarpanch Pati" Culture Under Spotlight in New Digital Campaign- PIB Press Information Bureau.

⁴ Ghosh, Ambar Kumar. 2023. "Women's Reservation Act: An imperative for women's greater political

An Overview of Women’s Participation in the Indian General Elections of 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019

How many women voted and contested elections?

Women’s participation as voters increased gradually. In the lok sabha election of 2019, historically, the gender gap between female and male voters was bridged and even female voter turnout percentage was higher than male voter turnout percentage (Table: 01). If we compare the lok sabha election of 2019 to the lok sabha election of 2004 there is a huge difference of approximately 14% in female voter turnout (Table: 01). Women are turning out to vote in higher numbers than men in state assembly elections too in recent years. Indian women are steadily becoming more literate, more educated and wealthier. This could be making them more politically aware.⁵

Table: 01

Year of Election	Female Turnout (%)	Male Turnout (%)	Total Voter Turnout (%)
2004	53.3	61.6	58.0
2009	55.8	60.2	58.2
2014	65.3	67.0	66.4
2019	67.1	67.0	67.1

Data Source: Election Commission of India (<https://eci.gov.in>)

While female voter turnout rate in parliamentary and state assembly elections have increased over time, the proportion of women candidates contesting elections compared to male candidates remains unsatisfactorily low. Still there is a positive increase in the number of female candidates (Table: 02).

participation.” Observer Research Foundation. orfonline.org <https://www.orfonline.org>

⁵ Vaishnav, Milan. 2018. “Indian Women Are Voting More Than Ever. Will They Change Indian Society?”Carnegie Endowment for International Peace carnegieendowment.org

Table: 02

Year of Election	Total number of candidates	Number of female candidates	Percentage of female candidates (%)
2004	5,435	355	6.5
2009	8,070	556	6.8
2014	8,251	668	8.0
2019	8,040	716	8.9

Data Source: Election Commission of India (<https://eci.gov.in>)

How many women got elected to parliament?

The data on women’s representation in the 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th Lok Sabha show that the number of women parliamentarians has remained way too low compared to their male counterparts (Table: 03). The 17th Lok Sabha has the highest number of female members of parliament, 78 in all.⁶

Table: 03

Year of Election	Number of women representatives in the Lok Sabha	Percentage of women representatives in the Lok Sabha (%)
2004	45	8.2
2009	59	10.8
2014	61	11.2
2019	78	14.3

Data Source: Election Commission of India (<https://eci.gov.in>)

⁶2019. “Record 78 women MPs in new Lok Sabha.” The Economic Times <https://m.economictimes.com>

Data suggest that participation of women in electoral politics is getting better over time and the last general elections of 2019 has been the best in terms of women's participation as voters, as contestants and as elected members of parliament.

Suggestions to improve women's participation in politics

Erosion of patriarchal mindset and social prejudices. Male-dominated social structure, where taking care of family and household is considered to be the primary duty of a woman, should be changed. Due to such a patriarchal mindset, women in politics do often face improper remarks and humiliation. On the campaign trail, women candidates have to deal with more than just political hostilities. Physical harassment, sexual slurs and innuendos are part of the package deal for them.⁷

Women should be economically self - reliant. In India, most women are still financially dependent on their family, which makes their participation in politics even more challenging. Women should be given quality education that will eventually help them to be self - dependent and politically aware. Access to electronic media and social media would make women aware of their social and political rights.

Political parties should be more inclusive. Most parties do not give adequate tickets to women candidates. Getting party tickets without having a family political connection is even more challenging for women. Political parties tend to use women only as "vote banks" and ignore their real issues. Although the number of female political party workers is increasing and more women are taking part in election campaigns in recent years.

Using money and muscle power to influence the elections are still very common in many parts of the country. Use of money and muscle power and criminalisation of politics should be discouraged.

Setting up female friendly "pink booths" has encouraged more female voters to vote.⁸ More such initiatives by the government and Election Commission of India would spur women to take part in the electoral process.

As Kofi Annan said, "Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building

⁷ 2014. "Women politicians face sexist slurs, pawing; seek safety inside cars." Times of India <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>

⁸ 2022. Chawla,Simer. "Pink booths set up for women in Kanpur to increase voting percentage." India Today.

good governance.”

Conclusion

As noted in this paper, participation of women in Indian electoral politics has been increasing. Erosion of social prejudices and patriarchal mindset, quality education, economic self - reliance, access to media etc. would help more women to take part in electoral politics.

As data suggest female voter turnout rate is getting higher than male voter turnout, political parties are compelled to give attention to women issues, it is evident that women issues are now taking centre stage in party manifestos.

Still more women are needed in politics to make India a truly inclusive democracy. In this context the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam is monumental as it paves the way for much-needed greater political participation of women in Indian politics.

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