

Political Participation of Women in India

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ABSTRACT: Women play active roles in the country's political activities to maintain a healthy political system and the welfare of the people. The socio-economic development of developing countries cannot be effectively carried out without the active political empowerment of women. Unfortunately, women were not included in the political process in all countries, particularly in developing countries, and were denied their rightful place in the power structure. Due to male superiority based on myths about women's intrinsic physical and mental incapacity, women have been denied their proper place in social, cultural, and political concerns. Male supremacy and the denial of women's political rights are not unique to Indian society. This has been a worldwide occurrence. The Constitution's 73rd and 74th amendments were ratified. These revisions mandated that one-third of the seats in rural and urban local governments and the chairpersonship be reserved for women of all categories. This study aims to investigate the role and function of women in the Panchayati Raj system. This study is based on a secondary source of data collected through different books, journals, articles, census reports, etc.

KEYWORDS: Women, Political Participation, India.

Introduction

Panchayati Raj has always played a significant role in Indian rural politics and empowered the weaker section of the society. The basic fundamental of Panchayati Raj Institutions is to ensure good governance in villages, which is the primary condition for holistic development. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992 is considered to impact women's participation in local government positively. In Gram Panchayats, this amendment has reserved from one-third to 50% of the seats for women candidates. It was a watershed moment for women's political empowerment since women's socio-economic standing in India's patriarchal society had not improved after six decades of independence. The Panchayati Raj was established on April 24, 1993, and since the 73rd Amendment Act came into effect, it has been an unpredictable and bumpy ride for Panchayats. The structure and process of Panchayats are equally important since they bring to bear and assign the appropriate duties to the members. If the Panchayats' general situation was depressing, another troubling feature was that nearly half of the rural population (women) was effectively kept out of the Panchayat territory. Women were completely excluded from traditional Caste Panchayats, Village Panchayats, and the British form of local governance.

Status of Women

After independence, India took a few significant efforts to administer rural India. After 1948, India's leaders devised a plan to decentralize the country's governmental structure. The district's hilly and rural areas are home to a large number of tribal people. This is because their livelihood and economic base are based on agrarian and livestock practices. Any change to this setup disrupts their living and survival conditions. Women have a profound bond with their land, and it is the core factor around which their lives revolve. The status of women is frequently discussed in terms of their income, employment, education, health, fertility, and roles within the family, community and society. The role of women is significant. Women play more critical social roles in society than other social groups because they are equally responsible for public actions encompassing social, economic, and political issues.

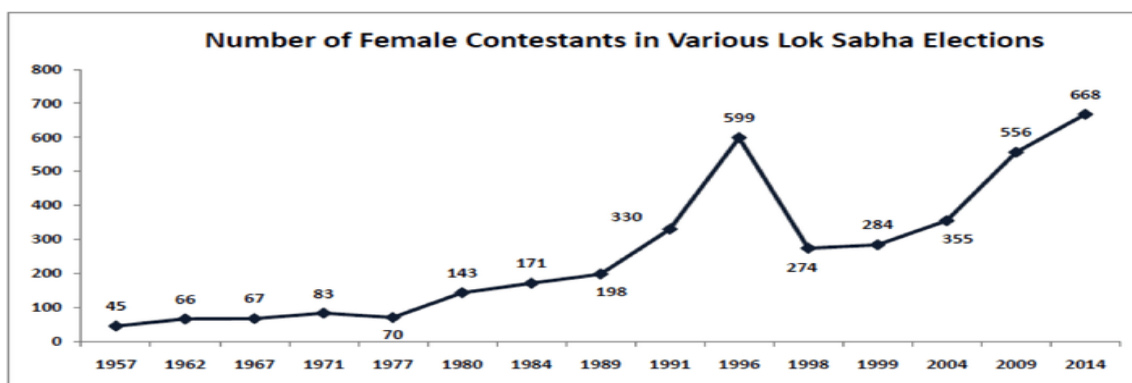
The study of electoral behavior is a crucial empirical examination of political involvement and political behavior patterns. It is one of the most critical aspects of the political system. Political engagement is a broad term encompassing a vast range of political activities and commitments that stem from the basic act of voting. In every aspect of life, women have long been oppressed by their male counterparts. Women's roles have traditionally been limited to housekeeping. Women's political participation began to acquire traction in the twentieth century. Women's political engagement is seen as one of the most important factors of progress. It reflects women's political awareness as well as their enhancement position. Individual capacity enhancement necessitates the acquisition of new abilities as well as new perspectives on oneself. It may also assist her in better adjusting to home power dynamics and her attitude toward the larger surroundings.

In general, women are involved in all aspects of politics, although they do not have nearly as much control as their male counterparts. The ability to make decisions on behalf of indigenous women is highly significant from their empowerment because their voices are frequently ignored. Women decision-making capacity should not be underestimated. Actual progress is impossible to achieve without the active participation of women.

Article 51 (A) (e) states that citizens have a fundamental need to abstain from practices that insult women's dignity. In panchayats and municipalities, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments established a 1/3 seat reservation for women. Political equality, the equal right to participate in political activity, and the equal right to vote are guaranteed by Articles 325 and 326, respectively. While many women have gained access to and enjoyed the latter, the entitlement to equal participation remains a distant goal. Due to a lack of opportunity for involvement in political structures, they have a small presence in these decision-making bodies. Women are the world's most politically marginalized group. Women make up 21.9 percent of national parliament members around the world. In India, only a 11.4 percent women are present in the National Assembly.

In recent national elections, the two largest national parties – the BJP and the Indian National Congress Party – usually contribute the largest numbers of women candidates and MPs because of their size and electoral prominence. In 2019, these two main national parties did not substantially increase their proportion of women candidates. The BJP fielded women candidates in 13% of party seats contested whereas the Congress Party fielded 12% women candidates.

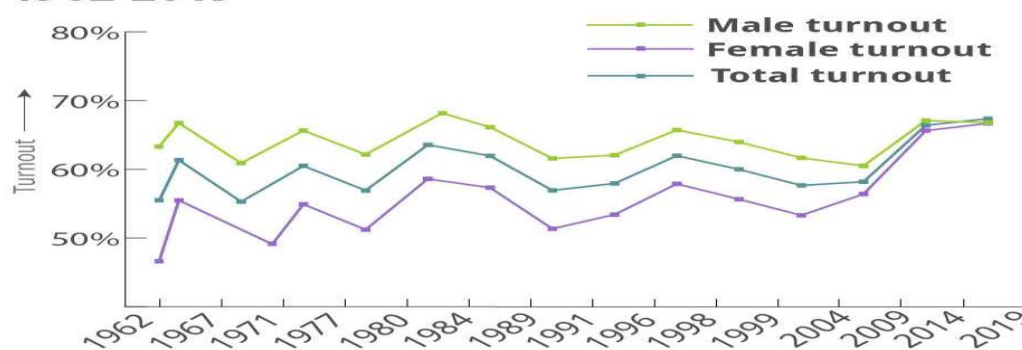
Figure 1: Female Candidate constants in Various Lok Sabha Elections from 1962-2019



<https://www.google.com/images>

Figure 2: Gender wise Participation in General elections from 1962-2019

Gender-wise participation in general elections, 1962-2019



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Source: Trivedi Centre for Political Data

<https://www.google.com/images>

Women Reservation

Women seats in Panchayats are reserved under the Constitution (73rd Amendment Act 1992). This modification was enacted to strengthen women's position, particularly at the village level, and to provide women with a political voice. In addition, the 74th Amendment Act of 1992 introduced Part IX-A to the Constitution. It allows for the formation of three different forms of municipal corporations. Not less than 33% of the total seats to be filled by direct election in every municipality (including seats reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) shall be reserved for women, and such seats may be allotted to them by rotation to different constituencies in a municipality.

Review of Literature

The existing literature on the role of women in the Panchayati raj system, as viewed by various academics, both positive and negative, is as follows: Bhargava (1992) described how grassroots women leaders become changemakers through political participation. Jayalakshmi (1993) identifies constitutional mechanisms used by women to achieve equality in social, economic, and legal matters. Women members of the Panchayati Raj institution, according to Jain (1994), can play a successful developmental role if they are given enough recognition and encouragement. Reservation provisions in municipal politics have provided and guaranteed women's empowerment socially, economically, and politically. According to Panda (1996), women become involved in municipal politics due to a family member's interest in community development. According to Arun (1997), the constitutional protections and rights issue is significant, and women must carefully assess whether they can deal with the problems of rural areas. Palanithurai (2001) has a similar idea about tribal women's roles in Panchayati raj institutions. They stated that the constitutional mandate on reserving seats for women in grassroots politics was a historic step that allowed women to become socio-political representatives and decision-makers.

Objectives of the Study

The study's objective was to investigate the Political Participation of women in India and the status of women in India.

Research Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature and only secondary data is used in this study collected through different sources such as articles, books, journals, census reports, etc.

Conclusion

The role of women leaders in the development process is a mix of bothersome and significant. Because of her illiteracy and low socio-economic level, the female leader could not exert influence over decision-making. Women are now able to participate in the voting process of the local self-governance system in huge numbers because of reservations. Women's leadership has been put under a lot of strain as a result of the criminalization of panchayat elections, which includes harassment and murder. Women leaders do not have the opportunity to defend their voices in front of senior males due to a social heritage of male superiority. While speaking in a meeting, they feel shy. Women in positions of leadership experienced a great deal of strain in their day-to-day operations, as power-hungry team members refused to recognize them on an equal footing. Although the number of women participating in political activities expanded considerably, it was discovered that women were simply rubber stamps in the hands of their family members or senior party members. The 73rd Amendment of 1993, which established a reservation for women at the local level, has contributed significantly to Indian women's empowerment.

Women's engagement in Panchayati Raj activities is frequently said to be dictated by male family members and that they do not act independently. With a few exceptions, more than half of the male-female members attend most Panchayat sessions. All agreed that women are attending more meetings now than previously and are encouraged to do so. Over two-thirds of males said that women members make previous preparations for attending meetings, and over half of them believe that they are doing so more today than before, indicating that the past perception of women members' inadequate engagement in panchayat activities was incorrect. Women's participation in Panchayati Raj meetings is seen to be hampered by family responsibilities, societal norms, and domestic duties, as well as a lack of education and awareness of the processes and functions of panchayats. Migrant tribal women and girls encountered a slew of issues shortly after arriving in cities, including difficulty communicating in the local language, housing, jobs, kids' education, local contacts, and acclimating to city life and surroundings.

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