

Women Leaders In Indian Political Parties And Their Contribution And Struggles.

K.NITHILA,
Ph.D. Scholar,
Department Of Political Science,
Government Arts College (Autonomous),
Salem-636007,

Dr.V.VEERAMUTHU, Ph.D.,
Head of the Department,
Department Of Political Science,
Government Arts College (Autonomous),
Salem-636007,

Abstract:

The making of the Constitution brought women legal equality. Though the constitutional provisions allowed the women to leave the relative calm of the domestic sphere to enter the male-dominated political sphere, the involvement of women in politics has been low key. The political contribution of women is a social process crucial to development and progress. The status of women is measured internationally by the participation of women in politics and their empowerment. Women remain seriously underrepresented in decision-making positions. but still, awareness should be created among women to participate in politics with courage. The findings on the participation of women in politics are increasing. It is significant in the study on political empowerment and participation of women in politics. To secure women's rightful place in society and to enable them to decide their destiny and for the growth of genuine and sustainable democracy, women's participation in politics is essential. This will not only uplift their personality but will open the way for their social and economic empowerment. Their contribution to public life will solve many problems in society. It concludes that the participation of women is essential as demand for simple justice as well as a necessary condition for human existence. This can be achieved not just by increasing the numbers but by ensuring that women leaders perceive the problems and effectively resolve the issues. The acceptance of their equality and confidence in their ability will go a long way in altering the political scenario.

Keywords:

Women, Political Contribution, Empowerment, Challenges, India.

Introduction:

Empowerment of Women The world over women is struggling to break the shackles that bind them and challenging the unequal distribution of power in society. Transforming the existing egalitarian pattern of gender relationships necessitates leadership in the state, markets, and civil society the key centers of power in the present globalizing economy. It is, therefore, imperative for women to be in the corridors of power and have the power to negotiate a better deal for themselves if they are to influence policy decisions that have an impact upon them. Empowerment of women in all spheres, in particular, the political sphere is critical for their advancement and the foundation of a gender-equal society. Women's political empowerment is premised on "three fundamental and non-negotiable principles:

- (a) The equality between women and men;
- (b) Women's right to the full development of their potentials;
- (c) Women's right to self-representation and self-determination".

Women's Participation In Freedom Struggle:

Women's participation in the freedom struggle began in the early 19th century in India. In 1817, Bhim Bhai Holkar fought bravely with the British Colonel Malkani and defeated him in guerrilla warfare. In the 1820s, Rani Channamma of Kitur fought with the British. Rani Laxmi Bai, Rani of Ramgarh, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Rani Jindan, Rani of Tulsipur, Zinat Mahal and others fought in 1857 against the foreign rule in the first war of Indian independence, euphemistically termed the 'Sepoy Mutiny'. Therefore, the part played by the women in the great outbreak of 1857-58 invited admiration even from the English. Many other women laid their lives on this battlefield, but their names remain unknown. However, there was no mass awakening among the women at this time but there was some sort of movement spreading slowly in them.

It was Gandhi who gave strength and inspiration to the freedom movement and drew into its women in large numbers. During the Edwin Montague reform period in 1917, women demanded franchise for the first time. Sarojini Naidu demanded the same conditions of the franchise for women as men have. Women sent petitions to the Franchise Committee urging the

grant of the vote for women on the same property qualifications as for men, or to at least women graduates. Other women like Hirabai Tata, Milan Tata, and Annie Besant also took up this issue. In 1918, Indian National Congress unanimously passed a resolution supporting voting rights for women. By 1926, women got the right to vote, on the same terms as men in all provinces so far as elections to the provincial legislature were concerned. Six million women got the right to vote. Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi, Hansa Mehta, Jaishri Raiji, Manibehn, and others formed Desh Sevika Sanghs and link between different states of India like Bengal and Punjab. In July 1930, women participated in the campaign against Viceroy Irwin and with black flags hidden shouted 'Irwin Go back.' They all came from Ambala, Lahore, and Shimla. Among the leading women participants were Mrs. Zutshi, Kamala Nehru's mother Mrs.Kaul, Parvati Devi, Smt. Asaf Ali, Satyavati from Delhi and Manmohini Sehgal. Begum Shali Nawaz along with Sarojini Naidu also attended the Roundtable Conference during 1930-32.

Not only these women were elected in the elections, but also by 1937 elections six women became cabinet members including Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit who became minister for local self-governments in United Provinces, and Begum Shali Nawaz in Punjab. Gandhi linked the participation of women in the Independence Movement with the social conditions of the time. He believed that women were the Satyagrah is and without them, he could not do anything. Gandhi's personality inspired confidence in them. His letters to various leaders show how he encouraged women. He believed that women could suffer more; therefore, they were fit for non-violent struggle. The writing of various women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and others show the tremendous impact of Gandhi on women.

Representation of Women in Parliament and Administration Compared to former socialist countries, India's position is very low, as far as women in Parliament are concerned. When Russia has 34.5 percent of parliamentary seats and Norway and Rumania have 34.4 percent each, India has only 7.5 percent of women's representation in parliament. Thirteenth Lok Sabha had 9.02 percent of women members (see table). However, even this representation is above some of the economically developed countries like the USA (5.3 percent), UK (6.3 percent) and France (6.4 percent).[16] In India's case, a minimum of one-third (33.3 percent) representation for women is reserved in all the three tiers of panchayats. Beyond these local self-governments, the top-level legislature in India could not so far come to any decision on reserving

seats to women in parliament. UN target is to achieve 30 percent of the representation of women in politics by 2005.

The lack of women political candidates is a potentially critical barrier to their eventual representation in government. For instance, in India's recently concluded 2019 national election, about 14% of those elected to parliament were women (Jenselius and Verniers 2019). But only 9% of the candidates were women! So, conditional upon contesting, women exhibit somewhat stronger chances of winning than men. The same holds at the state level too. We analyzed data from India's state assemblies over 1980-2007 and found that while women comprised 5.5% of all state legislators over this period, only 4.4% of the candidates were women. In the US, women held 24% of the seats in Congress in 2019, while about 29% of candidates in the 2018 midterm elections were women.

Influential Female Political Leaders In India:

we have seen women politicians revered by many but scrutinized by many more. But prejudice could not silence all of them. Here are six women in Indian politics who took a stand and made sure their voices were heard, loud and clear.

Sonia Gandhi Known as the 'Reluctant Politician', Italian born Sonia Gandhi came to India in 1968 after marrying Rajiv Gandhi. She led a life sans politics until her husband's assassination in 1991. When Sonia Gandhi was asked to lead the Indian National Congress, she initially refused, but eventually agreed to take on the mantle in 1998 after the party was left in shambles post the 1996 elections. She quickly gained pace and became one of the most powerful women in India and the world. In 1999, Sonia Gandhi was elected Leader of the Opposition of the 13th Lok Sabha. In 2004, she became the chairperson of the National Advisory Council. However, she resigned from both these positions in 2006 following the office-of-profit controversy. When Congress failed to acquire an absolute majority in the 2006 elections, it formed a coalition with 15 other parties - United Progressive Alliance (UPA). While Sonia Gandhi was asked to lead this, she chose economist Manmohan Singh instead. In 2010, she was re-elected as the chairperson of the National Advisory Council and served until 2014. In December 2017, she retired as the president of Congress, passing the baton to her son Rahul Gandhi, but remains an active politician.

Vasundhara Raje Vasundhara Raje was born in 1953 in Mumbai to parents belonging to opposing parties, making her path to politics quite uncertain. In 1972, she married into the royal family of Dholpur, Rajasthan, but separated from her husband a year later. In 1984, she finally decided to start her political career and became a member of the National Executive of BJP. The next year, she was not only elected to the 8th Rajasthan Assembly from Dholpur but also became the vice-president of BJP's Yuva Morcha. From 1989, she won four consecutive Lok Sabha elections from Jhalawar. In 2003, she was chosen as the state's BJP president. Vasundhara Raje is currently the Chief Minister of Rajasthan - the first female chief minister of the state. In 2014, she launched the Bhamashah Yojana in the state - a scheme to transfer financial and non-financial benefits to women recipients. In 2017, she launched the Start initiative to help startups with their end-to-end needs. In June 2018, Vasundhara Raje received the 'Chief Minister of the Year' award for her significant work in IT and e-governance.

Mayawati Das Born to a Dalit family in 1956, Mayawati Das had no political influence in her family. She was inclined towards teaching and entering the police force. Dalit politician Kanshi Ram recognized her talent for public speaking and persuaded her into joining politics. In 1984, Mayawati Das took her first official step by joining his Bahujan Samaj Party. In 1989, she contested and won in the 9th Lok Sabha General Elections from Bijnor. In 1994, she became a member of the Rajya Sabha. In 1995, she created history by becoming Uttar Pradesh's first Dalit chief minister. Since then, Mayawati Das has been re-elected four times and her last term ended in March 2012. During her last term, she started a project worth Rs.6,000 corer to build memorials of many Dalit icons. While her supporters were proud of this initiative, the Opposition criticized the humongous expenditure. In 2001, Kanshi Ram made Mayawati Das his heir to the Bahujan Movement. In 2003, she became the National President of BSP due to his ill health. After his death in 2006, Mayawati Das supervised his last rites. This could be perceived as BSP's stand against gender bias, as only male relatives are allowed to perform the last rites. She was also re-elected as the National President of BSP shortly after. Currently, Mayawati Das is a member of the Rajya Sabha.

Sushma Swaraj Sushma Swaraj was born in 1952 in Ambala, Haryana and began to engage with politics at an early age due to her father's involvement in the RSS. While pursuing law in the early 1970s, she joined the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) - a student

wing of the RSS. In 1974, she campaigned for Arun Jaitley contesting for the role of President of the DU Students Union. Despite her familial and collegiate ties with the RSS, Sushma Swaraj was influenced by socialist ideas. Her beliefs were strengthened when she met Swaraj Kaushal, a renowned Supreme Court advocate, who she married later. In 1974, she supported Jayaprakash Narayan's Bihar movement against the then central government led by Indira Gandhi. Following this, a 21-month-long Emergency was declared in 1975. Intending to boycott the government, Sushma Swaraj joined JP's movement, providing free legal aid to many activists. After the Emergency was lifted in 1977, the Janata Party was formed. She became a member and garnered a lot of support from women and young voters. At the age of just 25, she became Janata Party's youngest cabinet minister. She also became the president of the party's Haryana wing at 27. She made history by becoming Delhi's first female Chief Minister for 3 months in 1998. In 2009, she became the Leader of the Opposition replacing Lal Krishna Advani. From 2014, she has been serving as the Union Minister for External Affairs. Today, she is popular among the youth, for many reasons including her active Twitter presence. Hundreds of Indians tweet to her every day, seeking her help to solve crises.

Sheila Dikshit Sheila Dikshit was born in Punjab in 1938. Her late father-in-law Uma Shankar Dikshit was a well-known activist during India's freedom struggle, and later went on to become a Union Minister and confidant of the Nehru-Gandhi government. Sheila Dikshit assisted him at this post and caught the attention of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. She was then nominated as a delegate to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, where she represented India between 1984 and 1989. She eventually became Delhi's longest-serving Chief Minister. Her feistiness led her to run a drive against the violence faced by women in 1990, that landed her and 82 colleagues in jail. In 2014, she was briefly appointed as the Governor of Kerala, but she resigned just five months later. In 2008, she was awarded as the Best Chief Minister by Journalist Association of India, Politician of the Year in 2009 by NDTV, and in 2013 the Delhi Women of the Decade Achievers Awards by ASSOCHAM. However, in 2008, she was accused of misusing funds sanctioned by the Central Government for personal use. In 2009, she faced a lot of criticism for granting parole to Manu Sharma, convicted for the murder of Jessica Lal.

Mamata Banerjee Popularly known as didi, Mamata Banerjee is the current Chief Minister of West Bengal. She was born in 1955 in Kolkata. She had taken a vow to never get married and stand by it even today. Her father was a Congress activist and she would accompany him to processions. While she was still in school, Mamata Banerjee joined the state's Congress (I) Party. In college, she served as the General Secretary for the Mahila Congress from 1976 to 1980. In the 1984 general elections, she became one of the youngest members of the Lok Sabha and was made the General Secretary of the All India Youth Congress. In 1997, she separated from the Congress Party and established the All India Trinamool Congress which immediately became the primary Opposition party in West Bengal. From 1999 to 2001, she joined BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and served as India's first female Union Cabinet Minister of Railways. However, after the Tehelka exposé of 2001, Mamata Banerjee quit the NDA, only returning in 2004. In 2011, she was elected as the Chief Minister of West Bengal, making her the state's first female Chief Minister. Through this, she also ended the 34-year rule of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). In 2016, she was re-elected for a second term. In 2017, Mamata Banerjee was recognized by the United Nations for her Kanyashree initiative launched in 2011, which has helped to educate millions of girls in West Bengal

In contrast to this large gender gap in candidacy, there is no gender gap in voting in India, with women turning out to vote at the same rates as men in state and national elections after 2010. In the US, women's voter turnout has been higher than that of men since 1970. What might explain the low political candidacy of women? In a survey conducted in India's largest state of Uttar Pradesh, we find that women are also much less likely to report being part of other electoral activities such as participation in campaigns, listening to candidate speeches, or membership in political parties (Iyer and Mani 2019). We found that women lag on several potential determinants of political participation, such as knowledge about how political institutions work, their self-assessed leadership skills, and their voice in key household decisions (for example, only one-third of women report having a high level of input into household repair decisions). A similar 'ambition gap' has been documented for women in the US, despite their much higher levels of education and labor force participation compared to India (Lawless and Fox 2010). Women in rural India also face significant mobility restrictions (for example, 46% of women in our survey report requiring permission even to go to nearby places such as a friend's

house), while women in urban India often forgo important opportunities due to concerns about safety (Borker 2018). All of these factors, together with education, household wealth and religion or caste, can explain approximately 69% of the gender gap in electoral political participation. This suggests that improving women's knowledge, self-confidence, voice, and mobility can have significant effects on their political participation.¹

Types Of Quotas:

There are two main types of electoral quotas, depending on where they are located in the recruitment process: candidate quotas and reserved seats. Candidate quotas seek to affect the supply of candidates, ensuring that a proportion of candidates presented for election are women. These quotas can either be legislated, where the law specifies a minimum percentage of candidates who must be women, or they can be voluntary, where a political party voluntarily adopts a specified target of women candidates to put forward to contest the election.²¹ Reserved seats stipulate that a certain proportion of seats in a legislature or parliament must be awarded to women.

Candidate quotas There are now some 50 countries that have legislated candidate quotas for women, several of them implementing candidate quotas since the early 1990s. Where quotas are legislated, political parties have usually had to update their party nomination procedures to ensure compliance with the law. In addition to legislated quotas, hundreds of political parties in more than 30 countries have voluntarily adopted their policies of quotas for women. In such cases, the party sets its own

Recognition is dawning that women are indeed becoming a political force, both nationally and internationally. In this context it would be noteworthy to recall the observations of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen in his book, "India Economic Development and Social Opportunity", "Women's empowerment can positively influence the lives not only of women themselves but also of men, and of course, those of children". Political parties cannot remain indifferent towards women who constitute 586.5 million population and nearly 48.46 percent of the electorate (2011 Census). Although almost all parties have attempted to build women organizations to secure their support and make their organizations more broad-based, in practice they have fielded much less proportion of women candidates in the elections giving them

proportionately much less representation in the legislative bodies than their actual population strength. Former CEC M.S. Gill's proposal to make it mandatory for all political parties to nominate at least a third of women candidates for the seats deserves to be commended. If they are not prepared to accept the principle of representation within their parties, what moral right do they have to advocate reserving parliamentary constituencies for women?

The inclusion of the perspectives of women and their contribution to politics are prerequisites for democratic development and contribute to good governance, and political parties are the primary vehicles for political participation. It can be politically and financially advantageous for political parties to promote women's empowerment initiatives actively throughout the electoral cycle. By openly and formally supporting women's participation through reforms, political parties can alter public opinion, generate new support bases, attract new members, increase the flow of public funding to the party, and improve their standing with other countries, among other political and practical benefits. The formal support of political parties is required to overcome the barriers to women's participation in politics. Gender biases are prevalent in all the countries of the world and are reflected in social, economic, and political life. In many countries, women continue to be discouraged from direct competition with men and public exposure and interactions and are instead assigned roles that steer them away from decision-making. Such biases fuel and perpetuate women's lower economic status and relative poverty worldwide, which are among the most important and immediate barriers that make women's political participation near impossible at any stage of the electoral cycle. For example, women have control over fewer resources, if any at all, and therefore cannot finance their campaigns to be nominated or stand for elections.

Conclusion:

Political parties cannot remain indifferent towards women who constitute 586.5 million population and nearly 48.46 percent of the electorate (2011 Census). Although almost all parties have attempted to build women organizations to secure their support and make their organizations more broad-based, In India the political contribution of women isn't spectacular compared with men. This will not only uplift their personality but will open the way for their social and economic empowerment. Their participation in public life will solve many problems

in society. In India, women have more freedom and involvement, particularly in Indian political parties.

References:

1. Weiner, Myron, Osgood, John (eds). Electoral Politics in the Indian States: The Impact of Modernization, Manohar Publisher, Delhi, 1977.
2. Broockman, D E (2013). “Do female politicians empower women to vote or run for office? A regression discontinuity approach”, *Electoral Studies* 34: 190–204.
3. Vidya, K.C., Political Empowerment of Women at the Grassroots, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, p.15.
4. Biju M.R., “Women Empowerment in India, Changing Socio-Political Equation”, in M.R. Biju (ed.), Women Empowerment, Politics and Polities, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p.218.
5. Niroj Sinha (ed.), Women in Indian Politic, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2006, p.55.
6. Raj Bala, The Legal and Political Status of Women in India, Mohit Publications, New Delhi, 1999 p.3.
7. Minault, Gail. The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan. South Asia Books, 1989.
8. PTI United nations(2017), India ranking in women political empowerment, 8. Pamela Parton (June 2017), women’s political empowerment a global index, 1900-2012,
9. D.Syamala Devi and G.Lakshmi (Jan-March 2005), political empowerment of women in India.
10. Yogendra N, Sahu SN, Lakshmi. Political Empowerment of Women, Indian Journal of Public Administration, January-March, 2005, LI(1).
11. Women in Politics 2008, as on January, 200913. Sharma Dr. Sheetal. Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, Kurukshetra: A Journal on Rural Development, March 2015, 63(5).
12. Puja Mandal, essay on the role of women in politics, youarticlelibrary.com
13. Farzana Afridi (January 2013), political empowerment of women, www.livemint.com

14.<http://www.bgipu.org>.

15.www.financialexpress.com

16.www.sciencedirect.com

17.www.jstor.org