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## Political sociology of women empowerment in India: From ancient to modern

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### Abstract

The status of women is a significant reflection of the social justice in a society. Women have contributed to the progress of humanity in every age. Since ages status of Indian women has been subjected to many changes. Her position cannot be explained on linear graph. Right from the Vedic period down to the modern times women's status has been marked by vicissitudes in the process of their socio-economic and political development. Human ecology has been one of the important factors in deciding her political role. Transformation in polity, social set up and economic changes determined the woman's political role and her status. In ancient India, women held equal status with men in all the sphere. She enjoyed equal status in public life. The Medieval period witnessed a gradual decline in the position and status of women in India. Social evils and practices like Early Marriages, Purda Pratha, Sati Pratha, Polygamy, Dowry system and Female Infanticide slowly and gradually deteriorated the state of women and they confined to the four walls of their family lives with no provision to interact the outside world. Besides this Women in the high esteem and position proved to be good administrators. In modern times Indian women have attained high position including that of President, Prime minister, and Speaker etc. As Alfred Lord Tennyson says, Woman is for the hearth, Man is for the field. Man is to command; woman is to obey. All else is confusion. Present paper interrogates the issue of (I) women status from ancient to modern, (II) why woman is not able to register her effective presence in formal power system? (III) To explore the reasons behind the existing scenario. On the basis of extensive review of literature hypothesis is built that all the stake holders lacking will to empower the woman. Research objective are (a) to understand the historical background of women empowerment, (b) To analyse the role of woman in national movement, (c) critical evaluation women participation in formal power institutions after independence. It also explores that as the society is developed in twenty first century but on the other side status of women is deteriorated after so many constitutional provisions and what are the factors behinds this. At present, the position of women in politics is deplorable. Their representation in state and national politics is far from satisfactory and is insignificant. Women have rights to participate in the basic political activities, such as voting, attending political meetings, or discussing politics etc but unfortunately they are still remain marginalised in politics.

**Keywords:** women, politics, status, society, ancient

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### Introduction

Since ages nations have been engaged in conferring about the place of women in the society. The status of women is a significant reflection of the social justice in a society. Women have contributed to the progress of humanity in every age. Status of women in politics can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power. Women around the world at every socio-political level find themselves under represented in nation parliament far removed from decision making levels. Women who want to enter politics find that political, cultural and social environment are often unfriendly. Since ages status of Indian women has been subjected to many changes. Right from the Vedic period down to the modern times women's status has been marked by vicissitudes in the process of their socio-economic and political development.

### Participation of women in Indian Politics: Historical Experience

The political participation of women in Indian politics could be experienced in different stages. During Rig-Veda times women enjoyed status of equality with men. Women along with men received education, participated in popular assemblies (Sabha and Samities) and took part in debate and discussions. Women like Gargi and Maitreyi were well names. They had rights in the social, economic, religious and political fields. They were not treated as inferior or subordinate but equal to men. The position of Indian women deteriorated during the medieval and early British period. In this period female infanticide, child marriage, prohibition of female education, purdah, and sati was the main social evil affecting the position of women in their life socially. But one should not forget that history is a witness to the efficient and courageous women who proved their mettle in the field of politics and administration such as Rajia Sultan who occupied the throne of Delhi for four years (1236-1240), Rani Durgawati ruled for fifteen years before she lost her life in a battle in the hands of Mughal emperor

Akbar's general Asaf Khan in 1564. Chand Bibi defends Ahmednagar against the mighty Mughal forces of Akbar in 1590s. Jahangir's wife Noor Jehan effectively wielded the imperial power and was recognised as the real force behind the Mughal throne. Shivaji's Mother, Jijabai was deputed as queen regent, because of her ability as a warrior and administrator. The status of women in India stroked its nadir on the eve of British rule in India. The period of colonial rule and the freedom struggle marked the beginning of a political awakening among women. Lakshmi Bai, The Rani of Jhansi, was a hero of 1857 revolt who inspired the Indian women. The reformist wind blew in the course of emancipation of women during 19th century. The Christian Missionaries and social reformers started educational institutions for providing education for women. It was primarily the reform movements undertaken by the enlightened thinkers and leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Viveka Nand and Mahatma Gandhi who implicated the essence of women's participation and strived for the uplifting of women. It was the consequence of the efforts of reformist that British government made law against Sati and Female infanticide and established some administrative changes. It conceded an innovative message and hope for women. Mahatma Gandhi, father of the nation played a major role in promoting participation of women in the political process and mobilized women in to the national movement, apart from working for their emancipation. The freedom struggle evidenced active participation of women, who fought shoulder to shoulder with men from all over the country and all the sections of society. The Indian National movements under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi inspired Indian women to enter the open field of politics. He recognized the importance of women's participation in the freedom struggle. The independence movement brought the two streams of politically involved womenfolk together, the elite and the masses, both participated in the struggles for independence. Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Sucheta Kriplani are the names among few of them. Thus, through the national movement women came out of their suppressed existence and entered the arena of public life. Now Indian women began to claim for the social and political rights.

#### **Status of Women in Indian Politics after Independence**

After Independence to accomplish the goal of women development, the government adopted several strategies. Initially, to protect the rights of women and to certify them equality with men in all spheres, the government passed a number of legislations. Indian constitution provides equal rights and opportunities of social-economic and political development and betterment of living for women. Indian women were guaranteed political equality with men. The fundamental Rights enshrined in Article 14, 15 and 16 guarantees the principle of equality before law, equality of sexes and equal opportunities to all citizens of India in all walks of life. Article 325 makes no special electoral rolls on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex. Article 326 emphasises that election to the legislative assemblies of state were to be held on the basis of adult franchise. These provisions and Fundamental Rights envision a new socio-political order on the principles of equality and equity of women in India. India the world largest democracy has successfully completed more than seven decades of independence but the basic principles of democracy especially for women are yet far from being realised. Women in India are still waiting for equal participation in every sphere including the politics. India got its first women Prime Minister in 1966 and first women President, Pratibha Devi Singh Patil in 2007. No doubt in this respect, we are atleast ahead of America where till date, there has been no women president. In India, many women have held berths in the Union council of ministers and also have position of Governors and Chief Ministers of states and president of political parties also. It is clear that Indian society has accept women leaders but in realities this is not the tale of common women.

**Table 1:** Representation of Women in Lok Sabha (1952-2019)

<b>Lok Sabha</b>	<b>No. of Total Seats</b>	<b>No. of Women Contestants</b>	<b>Women Elected</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
First (1952-57)	499	51	22	4.4
Second (1957-62)	500	45	27	5.4
Third (1962-67)	503	70	34	6.7
Fourth (1967-70)	523	67	31	5.9
Fifth (1971-77)	521	86	22	4.2
Sixth (1977-79)	544	70	19	3.4
Seventh (1980-84)	544	142	28	5.1
Eighth (1984-89)	544	164	44	8.1
Ninth (1989-91)	517	198	27	5.2
Tenth (1991-96)	544	325	39	7.1
Eleventh(1996-97)	544	599	40	7.4
Twelfth (1998)	544	274	43	7.9
Thirteenth (1999)	543	284	49	9.0
Fourteenth (2004)	543	355	45	8.3
Fifteenth (2009)	543	556	59	10.9
Sixteenth (2014)	543	668	62	11.4
Seventeen (2019)	543	--	78	14.3

**Source)** Electoral Statistics, Election Commission of India.

The above table shows that the representation of women in Lok Sabha has basically remained stagnant. Although there is marginal improvement in the number of women in Lok Sabha election. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, there were 59 (10.9%) women reached in Lok Sabha and in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha election 62 (11.4%) & in 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha election 78(14.3%) women won the election. This is their highest ever number of seats won by women ever. The numbers of women contestants have always been also low. The highest numbers of women contestants have merely 716 in 2019 but it is surprise to note that the percentage of winners among women have constantly been more than that of men. Despite the fact that all major national political parties announced through their election manifesto that they would implement 33 percent reservation for women in all legislatures but in realty political parties have no unanimous stand on this.

#### **Representation of women in the union of council of ministers**

Similarly, the representation of women in the decision-making position has been also not satisfactory from 1952 to till date as very few women have reached highest level of authority. Nehru first cabinet had only one women Raj Kumari Amritkaur. She was the given the charge of health ministry. In 2014 Narendra Modi Government had six women ministers as Sushma Swaraj, Uma Bharti, Samrit Irani, Menka Gandhi, Najma Heptulla, Nirmla Sitaraman, Harsimrat Kaur. Narendra Modi Government was sworn in second term on 30th 2019 with 58 ministers including six women.

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is definite that women are part and parcel of society though they suffer much harassment in day-to-day life in society. Although constitutionally women enjoy equal political status with men, in ground reality women have not had given significant identity in politics. No doubt, at the present time, due to reservation there is a lot of women empowerments in social and political life at the grassroots level but variables like patriarchy, economic dependence, overburdened household work obstruct women to take active part in state politics. Therefore, to improve women's status in politics there is dire need of change in social attitude, awareness and campaigning programme related to women issues may help women to be progressive and prosperous in their general life and especially field of politics.

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