

ANALYSING THE INCREASING PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIETY

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Abstract

This study delves into the experiences of 25 female Panchayat Presidents from Madhya Pradesh to uncover the obstacles they confront and their involvement in local administration within India's Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). Findings show that gender stereotypes, a lack of resources, and social and cultural limitations are major obstacles to women's political participation. According to data gathered from semi-structured interviews, women's political participation can boost their self-esteem and decision-making abilities, but they still face significant challenges such as financial limits and familial obligations. Although patriarchal norms and gender-based violence still limit women's leadership potential, the study also finds that political party identification is essential to their political success. The findings highlight the importance of targeted changes to establish conditions that are supportive of women in politics, since cultural and economic constraints continue to hinder their effective involvement in governance, even if there are legal provisions for women's political participation.

Keywords:

Women Leadership, Panchayati Raj Institutions etc.

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Introduction

India, the biggest democracy in the world, has made great gains in political leadership throughout the last several decades. Women have always played a secondary position within the Indian political system, despite the fact that democratic rule, inclusive participation, and political representation are fundamental principles of this system. Problems with women's political leadership and involvement remain in India, despite many social, legal, and political changes meant to improve women's involvement. These obstacles hinder women from actively participating in political processes at all governmental levels and are influenced by a myriad of historical, cultural, economic, and sociopolitical reasons. For a more inclusive and representative democracy to flourish and for gender equality to be realized, it is essential that women take part in politics. When more women hold positions of political power, it creates a more inclusive and fair system of decision-making that can better meet the interests of all people, especially those from historically oppressed groups. More and more women are holding political office, particularly at the local level, which may indicate a trend toward more inclusive leadership. Nevertheless, women still have a far lower representation in positions of political power at the federal and state levels, even if there have been some improvements. There are still many cultural and institutional obstacles that women in India must overcome before they can attain the same level of political influence and power as males.

Obstacles Facing Women's Political Engagement in Society and Culture

Perhaps the most entrenched of the many obstacles that prevent women from holding political office in India are those that stem from societal and cultural norms. There is a strong emphasis on conventional gender roles in Indian society, with women often expected to stay at home and take care of the house rather than participate in politics or the public sphere. Most of India's social and cultural norms are patriarchal, which keeps women in their traditional inferior positions within the home and the larger community. Women face substantial obstacles when trying to get into politics due to these long-established gender conventions. In many regions of India, particularly in rural areas, women are still expected to stay at home and take care of the children. Any attempt to change this perception is sometimes greeted with opposition. Many women experience social exclusion, public scorn, and ridicule when they seek political office. Another factor that makes things worse is the fact that women are already excluded or sidelined inside political arenas and parties that are controlled by males. Another issue that contradicts the concept of genuine female leadership is the practice of women being used as political proxies, when male relatives run for office on their behalf. In these contexts, women are less powerful

political actors and more emblematic characters. Many women are reluctant to run for office because of cultural norms that emphasize women's submissiveness, their place in the home, and the need to uphold an image of propriety. In rural and conservative areas, women are more likely to stay out of politics out of fear of violence, public scorn, and family disapproval.

Challenges from the Law and Institutions

Institutional hurdles still prevent women from fully participating in politics, notwithstanding India's great achievements in this area. An essential step forward has been the implementation of legislative changes that seek to increase women's political engagement. One such reform is the allocation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of these changes has frequently been diminished due to ineffective procedures for implementation and enforcement. One example is the fact that many women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, although there are a lot of reserved seats for women, yet face obstacles when it comes to exercising actual political power. This is sometimes because male family members or political leaders intervene. The failure of legislative measures to tackle the underlying cultural and structural obstacles that women encounter in politics is exemplified by the practice known as "sarpanch pati," in which male relatives take over the political responsibilities of elected female representatives. Furthermore, despite several attempts, the Women's Reserve Bill, which sought a 33% reserve for women in Parliament, has not been passed. The inability to enact this law is indicative of the pervasive patriarchal structures in India's political system, where male politicians' interests are frequently given more weight than gender equality. Furthermore, women frequently encounter substantial obstacles while attempting to maneuver within the political party structure. In India's political parties, men predominate and women are noticeably absent from positions of power and influence. Getting forward in the political party structure is no easy feat; it takes a lot of connections, money, and backing from the top brass. Women have obstacles in rising to positions of power and influence within their political parties due to their exclusion from these networks.

Media Influence and Public Viewing

How the public views political leaders and their level of engagement in politics is heavily influenced by the media. Gender stereotypes and negative media depictions of women in politics in India contribute to the perpetuation of these problems. Negative portrayals of female politicians are common, with media attention directed more toward the politicians' private lives and physical attractiveness than their political beliefs and achievements. This stereotypical depiction of women in

political leadership positions reinforces the public's view that they are unqualified for such positions. The media's fixation with female politicians' private lives—their marital status, family dynamics, and physical appearance—only serves to further devalue the impact they have on politics. The emphasis on women's private lives diminishes their political ambitions and power, while sustaining the cultural norm that women need to put family and housework ahead of public service.

Gram Pradhan (Village President)

The elected leader of the Gram Panchayat, the principal unit of local self-government at the village level under the Panchayati Raj system in India, is called the Gram Pradhan. Other names for this position include Village President and Sarpanch in some regions. The Gram Pradhan is an important figure in village administration; he or she is in charge of carrying out government programs, keeping public facilities in good repair, mediating conflicts at the local level, and representing the village at the block or district level. The Gram Pradhan is an important intermediary between the rural populace and the government; as an elected official, he or she relays the concerns and opinions of the people to the latter. The Gram Pradhan is a key figure in the village's administration and development, and his or her leadership and dedication determine how well rural governance works.

Institution for Panchayati Raj (PRI)

The acronym PRI stands for the Panchayati Raj Institution, which is the name of India's system of decentralized local governance in rural areas. In an effort to decentralize authority and give voice to local communities, particularly those in more remote places, it was formally constituted by the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992. There are three levels to the PRI system: the Gram Panchayat in villages, the Panchayat Samiti in intermediate or block levels, and the Zila Parishad in districts. Elected bodies oversee local resources, solve challenges unique to their communities, and plan and execute development plans. Through their advocacy of grassroots democracy, PRIs strive to guarantee that individuals are actively involved in decision-making, to promote the openness and accountability of government, and to strengthen the provision of public services. Because they bring government closer to the people and make it possible to address social, economic, and infrastructure issues on a local level, they are crucial to rural development.

Review of Literature

Jalalzai and Krook (2024), "Gender, Institutions and Executive Power" examines the increasing number of women holding prominent political positions across the world. They point out that there may be more female presidents and prime ministers in symbolism, but that institutional obstacles frequently limit their

actual power. Despite this, they draw the conclusion that high-level involvement has a domino effect, influencing cultural expectations, creating a more gender-inclusive political environment, and inspiring young and women to get involved.

Campbell and Childs (2023) This article delves at the ways in which female lawmakers are changing the face of democracy in the United Kingdom's legislature. According to their research, female members of parliament not only diversify political discourse by bringing new perspectives, but they also combat the stereotypically male-dominated nature of political discourse. Institutional transformations and societal norms about gender roles and equality are impacted, they say, by policy reforms toward health, education, and welfare brought about by women's participation.

Sundström and Wängnerud (2022) Delve into the connection between corruption and women's political involvement in their paper titled "Corruption and Gender in Politics: Understanding the Link." A lower degree of perceived corruption and more institutional trust are connected with increased female presence in politics, according to their cross-national research. They contend that women contribute a more open and welfare-oriented style of leadership to political institutions, which in turn enhances such systems and encourages social change by increasing trust and responsibility among the general populace.

Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer (2021), "Women's Political Participation and Crime Against Women: Evidence from India" analyzes how female lawmakers affect incidents of violence against women. A greater reporting rate of crimes against women and better judicial responses are observed in areas with a larger representation of women in political office, according to their research. In particular, this research highlights the ways in which women's political engagement promotes justice, gender-sensitive policymaking, and the elevated profile of women's problems in society.

Piscopo (2021) During the COVID-19 epidemic, her work "Women Leaders and the Politics of Crisis" examines the leadership styles shown by female presidents of state. She emphasizes the ways in which female leaders challenged stereotypically male political roles by empathic communication and by placing health and welfare at the forefront of their agendas. This prominence, according to her research, has altered public perceptions of good leadership and led to more women holding executive political positions, which in turn has altered cultural views on gender and leadership.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the main objectives of this study: -

1. To examine socio-cultural barriers hindering women's political participation in India.

2. To analyze the role of media in shaping public perception of women’s political participation in India.

HYPOTHESIS

Following are the main Hypothesis of this study: -

H1: There is a significant relationship between socio-cultural barriers and the hindrance of women’s political participation in India.

H2: There is a significant influence of the media on shaping public perception of women’s political participation in India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study examines the challenges faced by female leaders in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) with a focus on 25 female Panchayat Presidents from Madhya Pradesh. Using original data collected from semi-structured interviews, significant challenges including lack of funding, gender bias, and political party influence are brought to light. The findings emphasize the value of training programs, support from family and friends, and political endorsement in increasing women’s involvement in local decision-making and governance in Madhya Pradesh.

RESULTS

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypothesis	Null Hypothesis (H0)	Alternative Hypothesis (H1)	Test Method	Expected Outcome
H1: There is a significant relationship between socio-cultural barriers and the hindrance of women’s political participation in India.	H0: There is no significant relationship between socio-cultural barriers and women’s political participation in India.	H1: There is a significant relationship between socio-cultural barriers and women’s political participation in India.	Regression Analysis or Correlation Test	If p-value < 0.05, reject H0 (evidence of a relationship)
H2: There is a significant influence of the media on shaping public perception of women’s political participation in India.	H0: Media does not significantly influence public perception of women’s political participation in India.	H1: Media significantly influences public perception of women’s political participation in India.	Regression Analysis or Chi-square Test	If p-value < 0.05, reject H0 (evidence of media influence)

The interviews with female parliamentarians revealed many clear barriers to women’s participation in the political processes of the emerging nation. Details on the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' Gender Ratios

Gender	Sum of All Respondents	%
Female	25	100%
Male	0	0%
Total	25	100%

All of the responses are female, according to the statistics. There are zero males. As a result, it's important to look at women's leadership and political participation on a regional level so that their voices may be heard while policies are being made. The absence of male respondents highlights the study's emphasis on the viewpoints of female political and social leaders.

Table 2: The Respondents' Age Distribution

Age Group	Sum of All Respondents	%
Under 30 years	2	8%
30-39 years old	2	8%
40-49 years old	10	40%
50-59 years old	10	40%
60 years old or more	1	4%
Total	25	100%

It is evident from the statistics that 40% of the participants fall into the age brackets of 40–49 and 50–59. These are the age groups that are most represented among women in positions of local political leadership. Only 8% are between the ages of 30 and 39, 8% are younger than 30, and 4% are 60 and over. Possible explanations for the gender gap in leadership positions include more stability, opportunity, or experience among middle-aged women compared to younger or older women.

Table 3: Education Level of Respondents

Education Level	Sum of All Respondents	%
Up to high school	7	28%
Secondary school	10	40%
Diploma	5	20%
University education	3	12%
Professional training	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Statistical analysis shows that forty percent of respondents have completed secondary education and twenty-eight percent have ended high school. While 12% hold a bachelor's degree or more, just 20% have a high school diploma. The lack of any education or qualification held by every single reply is particularly striking.

Table 4: Monthly Income Distribution of Respondents

Income (Monthly)	Sum of All Respondents	%
Under ₹20,000	3	12%
From ₹20,000 to ₹40,000	20	80%
From ₹40,000 to ₹80,000	2	8%
Over ₹80,000	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Eighty percent of respondents, according to the table, have a monthly income of ₹ 20,000 to ₹ 40,000, while twelve percent have an income below ₹ 20,000 and eight percent have an income between ₹ 40,000 and ₹ 80,000. They are all in the moderate-income bracket, since none of them reported earnings over ₹ 80,000.

Table 5: Members of the Respondents' Families

Family Status	Sum of All Respondents	%
Married with children	24	96%
Married without children	0	0%
Unmarried	1	4%
Widow	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Statistics on marital and parental status show that an overwhelming 96% of respondents are in committed relationships. Not a single reply is childless or a widow, and just 4% of the population is without a spouse. Here we see a demographic in which women are politically powerful, and we can see how these women walk a fine line between being public leaders and taking care of their families. Since there are no widows or childless married women in the local self-government system, it seems that family factors influence the % of women in leadership roles.

Table 6: Employment Status of Respondents

Employment Status	Sum of All Respondents	%
Employed	12	48%
Unemployed	13	52%
Pensioners	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Half of the people who filled out the survey are unemployed, while the other half have jobs. Nobody is identified as being on a pension or having any other type of employment status. It is possible that the high unemployment rate among women is due to the socioeconomic barriers that many women face, especially in less economically developed areas or in rural areas. Some women are working, while others are doing unpaid domestic work or don't have access to formal employment opportunities. This might explain why the two categories are so evenly split when it comes to women's labor force participation.

Table 7: Political Party Affiliation of Respondents

Political Party Affiliation	Sum of All Respondents	%
Yes	25	100%
No	0	0%
Total	25	100%

No one who took the time to react is politically neutral; in reality, each and every one of them belongs to a political party. This demonstrates that women are getting involved in the local self-government system's formal political institutions, which is a good sign because it means they are using established political channels. This may bring attention to the role of party structures in empowering women, as women's political affiliations open doors for them to leadership roles and have a greater influence on their communities.

Indian Women Politicians: Successes and Failures

Many believe women's political empowerment is necessary for economic, cultural, and social advancement. Industrialized nations provide women more political participation opportunities. Due to cultural, religious, and societal conceptions of women's social obligations, women in developing nations like India confront significant barriers to decision-making. Although legislation and measures are in place to address this, women in India still have little political influence. Cultural norms, gender preconceptions, and social and political constraints prevent women from fully participating. Women in politics have increased, although their influence in policymaking and administration is still minimal. To improve women's political agency, state, federal, and community programs are needed. These measures should reduce social and cultural barriers, promote education, and create more inclusive communities to assist women in politics. In addition, legislative reforms, awareness campaigns, and community-level activities can help boost women in political leadership posts, which improves their policymaking impact.

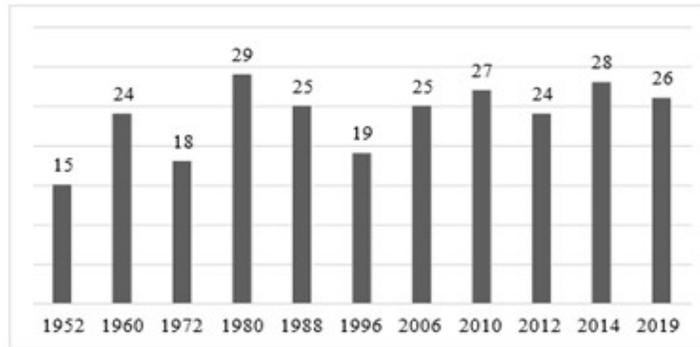


Figure: 1 Female representation in the Rajya Sabha (State Council)

Indian women in Parliament have made little headway despite the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) (Figure 1). As in many northern states, patriarchal practices hinder women’s political representation in Madhya Pradesh. Even though women make up over half the population, patriarchal party structures, cultural norms, religious beliefs, and caste prevent them from entering politics. Women face abuse, leadership gaps, and psychological and structural barriers (Nanda, 1999; Hughes & Dubrow, 2018).

MP The Politics of Women

The 1992 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act sought decentralization and grassroots empowerment of women, but MP had mixed outcomes. Even if municipal election reservations for women have improved, the state is not empowering women politically. The PRI model in Kerala has enhanced power devolution, while women in Madhya Pradesh are still underprivileged.

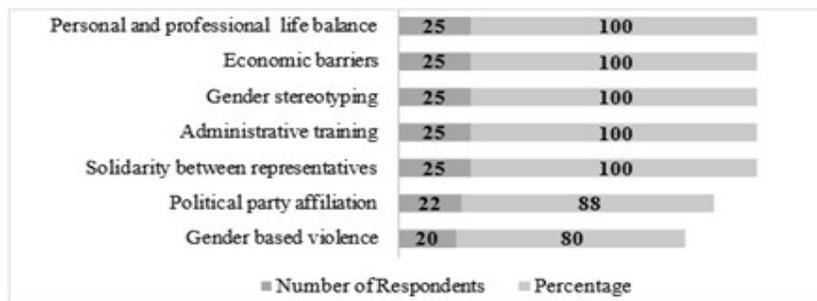


Figure: 2 Obstacles faced by female politicians

Both men and women have family-work conflicts, but women have more due to their various responsibilities. Despite wanting to work more and spend less time with children, women tend to take care of their families while men develop

professionally (Hochschild, 1997). Political equality for Indian women remains elusive despite many efforts.

Discussion

Research on Madhya Pradesh women's political involvement in local government, notably the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), shows several challenges. The research shows that women leaders suffer economic restraints, gender-based violence, patriarchal societal norms, and family duties. Many responders were married with children, demonstrating that women in political leadership often juggle domestic duties. Political demands, including travel and time management, are difficult to balance with home duties. Family support makes politics easier, but financial insecurity, especially low pay and campaign finance, makes it harder to prolong political careers. Political engagement is expensive, and many respondents noted its difficulty as a full-time job. Sexism and gender stereotyping are major issues, according to the study. Traditional gender standards hinder women's leadership and promote sexism. Despite PRI policies promoting gender equality, male-dominated political structures and male coworkers' reluctance to participate hamper government program execution. Gender-based violence, including threats to bodily dignity and verbal abuse, prevents women leaders from becoming politically active. Despite these challenges, the report stresses women's political empowerment. Many respondents said their political careers boosted their self-esteem, confidence, and competence to make household and community decisions. The report emphasizes social transformation, party cooperation, and financial support as structural improvements women may use to boost their political involvement.

Conclusion

Following this, the study will demonstrate how the representation of women in leadership roles within India's Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) has evolved over time in reaction to societal norms. It will highlight the importance of continuing legislative reforms and gender-sensitive policies in empowering women in local politics. Looking into innovative solutions to the issues of financial constraints, cultural norms, and family responsibilities might help build a more inclusive and inviting political environment for women, which is the ultimate objective of future research. Women can have a better future in leadership positions within PRI and more equality in grassroots decision-making through education, awareness campaigns, and the fortification of party structures.

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