

Gender Equality and Politics

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Abstract

Women's representation in politics could be an important parameter to evaluate the overall development of any nation. Without including the 'adhi-abadi in the decision-making process, any kind of inclusive development or sustainable development goals cannot be achieved. In this reference, this paper deals with women's participation in politics both at national and international levels. Although the ratio has increased in the last few decades yet it is unsatisfactory. Some major challenges have also been discussed with their possible suggestions.

Keywords: *Gender Equality; Political Representation; Patriarchy; Sustainable Development Goals*

"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 good governance." - Kofi Annan

1. Introduction

It is now widely acknowledged that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for a country's social and economic development and overall health. More is needed to achieve gender equality in politics than just having an equal distribution of men and women in parliamentary and cabinet offices. It calls for equitable access to these roles for men and women from all backgrounds so that they can then take part in decision-making on an equal footing. To do this, inclusive work environments must be established, equal access to leadership positions must be made possible, and socioeconomic restrictions on political engagement must be lifted.

The subject of whether women's political inclusion has given them the ability to influence the institutions and policies that help shape gender equity outcomes has attracted a lot of interest, in part because of the rise of women's engagement in political institutions.

The question of whether descriptive representation results in substantive representation has received a lot of attention lately, and this has led to fresh insights into the challenges and opportunities that women have when they are in positions of authority. Women globally face barriers to political involvement in the twenty-first century.

The socioeconomic variables show up as a barrier to women's success. According to statistics collected by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, of which India is a member nation, women make up 14.44% of all Lok Sabha members. According to the most recent figures from the Election Commission of India (ECI), women made up 10.5% of all parliamentarians as of October 2021. With a national average of a pitiful 9%, the situation for women Members of the Legislative assembly (MLAs) in all state assemblies in India is much worse. The representation of women in Lok Sabha has not even risen 10% in the past 75 years of independence.

2. Gender Mainstreaming

Broadly speaking, gender mainstreaming is the idea that traditional institutions like governments must change their own norms, rules, procedures, and ways of thinking to develop more gender-responsive policies in the quest for gender equality. Gender mainstreaming calls on all institutional actors to take into account the gendered impact of their policies and practices rather than hoping for national machinery for women or women's policy agencies isolated, overworked, under-resourced, or elite-captured agencies-to act as the only champions of equality in government. In a scale and scope that is greater than what the national machinery alone could handle, gender-insensitive state agencies produce gender-blind policies. Therefore, institutions themselves must change in order to develop more gender-equitable policies. Such change would, at least for now, aid in slowing down the rise of gender inequality and, ideally, create opportunities for a more gender-equitable future.

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3. Feminist Perspective

The majority of feminist movements agree that there should be more women in political institutions, despite different feminist movements emphasizing various arguments. Those who are skeptical of this emphasis on increasing the representation of women in legislative institutions also adopt various strategies: The Maternal Gatekeepers, according to Marxist feminists, who contend that what is necessary is a transformation in the institutions themselves. Liberal feminists had previously been concerned about moving away from the principle of meritocracy, but Kymlicka expanded the discussion on group representation to account for historical injustices. Marxist feminists sought to change people's perceptions of the sexual division of labor, which they believed to be the root cause of gender inequity, in addition to mobilizing women. A consensus has started to form recently in intellectual and policy circles that affirmative action or quotas are a quick route to equality.

4. National Scenario

In order to achieve this, Articles 14 and 15 call for the equality of women, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments allowed a 33% reservation for women in Panchayati elections, and the government-sponsored numerous programs and initiatives. Legal provisions like Section 14 of the Hindu Succession Act 1956, the Equal Remuneration Act 1973, and the Equal Remuneration Act 1973, as well as the Maternity Benefit Act 1961 and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act 2013, are steps in the right direction.

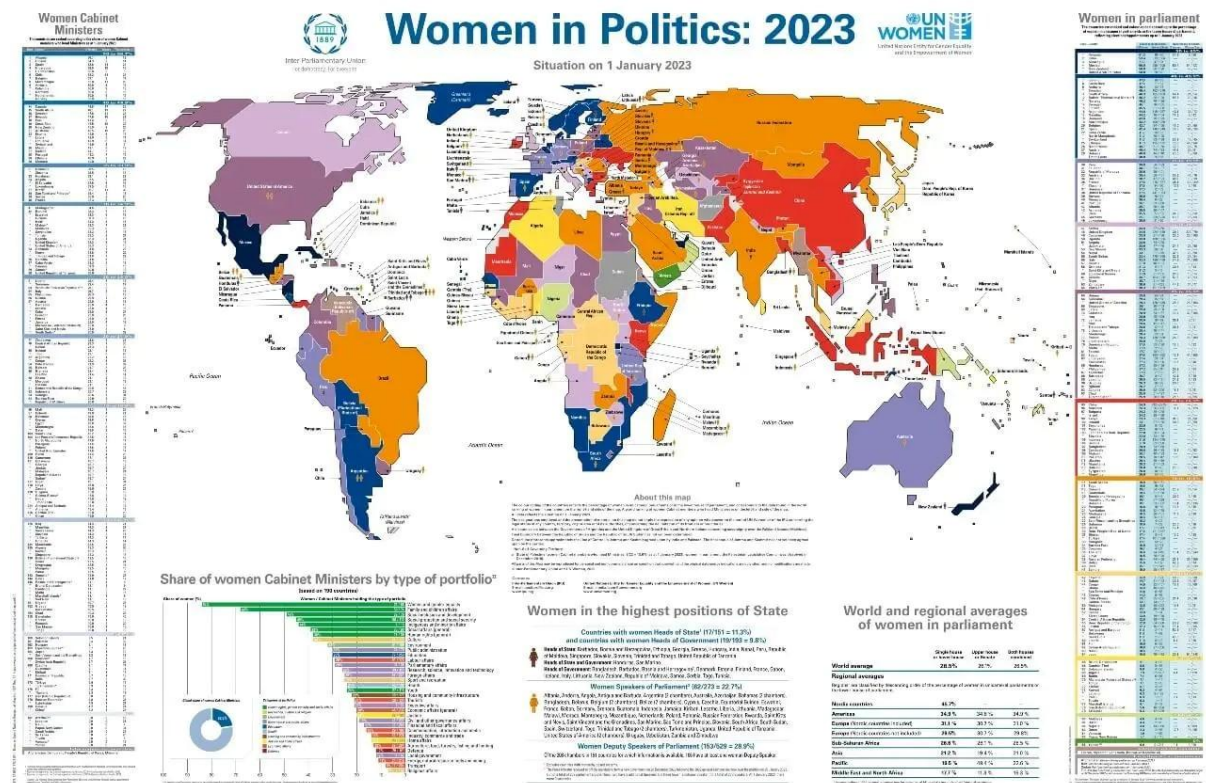
Although India has gender equality at the basic school level and is on track to do so at all stages of education, as of August 2015, women held only 12% of the seats in Parliament, falling short of the desired 50%. In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals on gender equality, the Indian government has made reducing crime against women a top national goal. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative of the prime minister seeks to provide females in India with equal opportunities and access to education. India's commitment to gender equality is also advanced through specific measures on female employment, programs for teenage girls' empowerment, the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana on girl child development, and the Janani Suraksha Yojana for mothers.

5. International Scenario

On December 10, 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which included gender equality as a fundamental human right. 1975 was designated by United Nations General Assembly as the International Women's Year, and the first World Conference on Women was held there. It subsequently proclaimed 1976-1985 as the UN Decade for Women at the Conference's insistence.

The General Assembly ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), commonly known as the International Bill of Rights for Women, in 1979. The Convention expressly identifies gender discrimination in its 30 sections and lays out a plan for national action to abolish it."

The importance of governments implementing UNGA Resolutions 66/130 (2011) and 58/142 (2003), which address women's political engagement, should also be reaffirmed by the international community. These resolutions emphasize how important it is for women to actively participate in politics and be treated equally to men in order to improve democracy, achieve gender equality, and promote sustainable development. States continue to fall short of internationally mandated standards, despite the fact that there has been some progress toward gender parity in politics.⁸



Source: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/women-in-politics-map-2023>

Globally, there are more women than ever in positions of political decision-making, but gender parity is still a long way off, according to the IPU-UN Women Map of Women in Politics 2023 edition. As of January 1, 2023, the Map shows the most recent ranks and geographical distribution of women in national legislatures and executive posts. By 1 January 2023, 11.3% of countries have women Heads of State (17 out of 151 countries, monarchy-based systems excluded), and 9.8% have women Heads of Government (19 out of 193). When compared to ten years ago, when the figures were 5.3% and 7.3%, respectively, there has been an increase. Europe continues to have the greatest proportion (16) of nations with female leaders. Nine nations, the majority in Oceania and Western Asia, do not have any female cabinet members in positions of leadership. Notably, the data also reveals that women are in charge of other significant policy portfolios, including the environment (32%), public administration (30%), and education (30%), despite their underrepresentation. However, men still hold a disproportionate amount of power in the economy, justice, defense, and home affairs portfolios. Only 12% of Cabinet Ministers who oversee the defense and local government portfolios, 11% of the energy, mining, and natural resource fuels portfolios, and 8% of the transport portfolios are women."9

The new data also shows that there are 22.7% more female Speakers of Parliament today than there were in 2021 (20.9%). The Map was released in response to the annual Women in Parliament report from the IPU, which shows that the percentage of female MPs around the world has increased slightly to 26.5% from 25.5% in 2021. The IPU statistics on women in parliament also reveal significant global disparities: the Middle East and North Africa region continues to rank last (17.7% of MPs are women), in contrast, the Nordic regions of Europe rank highest (45.7% of MPs are female).

6. Why Women are Underrepresented in Politics

Patriarchal mindsets, social norms & stereotypes, lack of access to education, limited representation to political parties, violence, and harassment, unequal opportunities, structural impediments, etc. are the main cause behind the low representation of women in politics. Digital Gender Divide" is also another reason behind this. For economies and society, the digital transition presents enormous prospects. However, access to, use of, and ownership of digital tools are not gender-neutral, and the benefits of digital transformation are currently not evenly distributed among societal groups and genders. These types of gender disparities in resources and ability to access and effectively use ICTs within and between countries, regions, industries, and socioeconomic levels are sometimes referred to as the "digital gender divide". Inherent biases and socio-cultural conventions that result in gender-based digital exclusion and safety-related difficulties are some of the core reasons for the digital gender divide, as are affordability, barriers to access, technology literacy, and education (or lack thereof).

7. Suggestions and Conclusion

Not only is gender equality a fundamental human right, but it is also necessary for a wealthy, stable, and sustainable world. Despite recent advancements, gender equality will not be attained by the projected year 2030. The social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic have significantly worsened the situation. The already impoverished women's health services have been significantly impacted. Violence against women is still prevalent. And even though women took the lead in response to COVID-19, they still lag behind men in obtaining the positions of power that are rightfully theirs."

States should implement measures to guarantee that all women have an equal chance to serve in national legislatures, including giving female candidates preferences in order to correct imbalances and offering targeted support and protection for female candidates and politicians, particularly in nations where women have a low representation in political parties. In order to ensure political participation chances and resilience against gender-based violence, the financial independence of women is essential. Therefore, states should vigorously support measures aimed at reducing the wage gap with men, such as paid parental leave and services. The adoption of particular measures to safeguard vulnerable women and the adoption and enactment of international treaties against all forms of discrimination should be prioritized by states. The government should encourage and support the free press's and the intelligence community's initiatives to study, clarify, and denounce discrimination and violence based on gender against women. The Community of Democracies should encourage women leaders to play a more active diplomatic role and assure their participation in discussions of foreign policy and national security at the highest levels of decision-making. Policy proposals that incorporate gender in the activities of the defense, foreign policy, and security ministries should have our support. 12

Women should be recast as the architects of India's development, not just the passive recipients of its advantages. An educated and powerful woman will assure education and empowerment for future generations; hence the effects of Women-Led Development are indisputable.

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