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POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

The 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation reiterated that "women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care, and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women." Therefore, to eliminate the multi-faceted problem like gender inequality, a multi-pronged approach must be adopted; and among the various initiatives, political empowerment of women could act as a catalyst. Political empowerment could lead to opening more opportunities for women and as a result, create a level playing field for them.

Globally, several international commitments have been made, for achieving gender equality and these have emphasized on enhancing women's representation in political sphere. While the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)** upheld women's right to participate in public life, the **Beijing Platform for Action (1995)** called for removing barriers to equal participation. The **Millennium Development Goals (2000)** also took into account women's representation in parliament to measure progress towards gender equality.

Over the past two decades, gender gaps have narrowed in various areas, viz., education, health, employment, legal rights of women, participation in governance, and so on. But, despite the improvement, substantial inequalities, with varying degrees, still persist across all the areas across countries. It would be noteworthy to mention that India is a signatory to all the international commitments mentioned above. However, India is far behind in achieving gender equality, especially in terms of representation of women in political decision making, among others.

Representation of women in executive government and parliament is extremely low in India, both in absolute numbers as well as globally. Only a miniscule progress is observed in the entire post-independence era. In the cabinet, formed after the general election in 2014, there were **only 5 women ministers out of total 27 ministers.**

Between the First Lok Sabha (1952) and the Sixteenth Lok Sabha (2014) women's representation has increased from 4.4 per cent to 11.9 per cent. Similar trend of low representation of women is also observed in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) during the entire period of post-independence era. Women's representation in Rajya Sabha has increased from 6.9 per cent in 1952 to 11.4 per cent in 2014 . Again, these figures are substantially lower compared to the global average of **22.9 per cent and Asian average of 16.3 per cent of women representatives in Upper House.** Considering the share of women (**49.5%**) in the total population of India, their representation in Parliament represents a skewed statistic, which does not befit the world's largest democracy.

Women's equal political participation : UNDP supports gender responsiveness of political institutions and facilitates women's access to opportunities and skills to exercise their political rights, participate in decision-making, exercise leadership, and contribute to development processes. UNDP does this by:

- Promoting women's participation as voters and candidates in electoral processes through training of women candidates, awareness campaigns, and promoting gender parity in electoral management bodies (EMB).
- Promoting the use of Temporary Special Measures, including gender quotas.
- Facilitating the inclusion of women and women's organizations and networks in constitution-making processes, and helping to address gender discriminatory clauses in constitutions.
- Supporting women's coalitions in political parties and representative bodies.
- Encouraging political parties to: (i) remove all barriers to the participation of women, (ii) develop their capacity to analyse issues from a gender perspective, and (iii) adopt policies and/or quotas to promote women's participation at all levels of decision-making.

- Promoting coalition building and networking among women representatives and decision-makers.
- Supporting gender mainstreaming in parliaments through induction training for MPs on gender issues, mainstreaming gender impact reviews into parliamentary committee work, gender analysis of Proposed laws, gender-sensitive budgeting, support for cross-party women's caucuses and women's mentoring programmers.

IMPACT OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION :

The concept of 'critical mass' has a central place in women's political representation research, the significant minority of women in parliament. Gender and politics scholars argue that women will most probably not have a major impact on legislative outcomes if they do not evolve from a few token individuals to a considerable minority. Only when this number increases will women be able to promote women-friendly policy change. Another necessary discussion while speaking of women's participation in the political sphere is how they can dominate the male-dominated environment once they are elected in Parliament. Representing women is to make women's viewpoints visible in political decision-making. Therefore, an evolution needs to take place in the minds of the dominant group rather than the mere implementation of policies which establish the marginalized group in political decision-making bodies. The actual influence

women can make differs from country to country and depends on the political context, the number of female parliamentarians etc.

A first step should be to broaden the political agenda with women's issues. This can be done in various ways such as: submitting legislation that is favorable for women and introducing women's issues in parliamentary debates. Women's perspective in these debates are important while making certain topics or standpoints politically acceptable. A strategy has been suggested in order to make a change and maximize women's impact in parliament. The strategy consists of learning rules, using rules and eventually changing rules to pave the way for the next generation of women politicians.

CONCLUSION

Progress in women's empowerment and gender equality has proven to be most difficult in the inclusion of women's voices in politics and government. Therefore, it is important to keep enhancing the tools that are available to women and to keep the debate on women's political participation alive. This implies not only a larger number of elected women at all governance levels, but ensuring a larger impact of women elected to those positions as well.

[Source- internet.](#)
[Women & Political Representation](#)
[Handbook on Increasing Women's Political Participation in Georgia.](#)