

# Women's Political Representation and Exclusion in India: An Overview

N. Mubeen Sultana

Ph.D Research Scholar (Fulltime),  
Department of Sociology, Queen Mary's College  
(Autonomous), Chennai 600005

Dr. K. Sakthi

Associate Professor and Research Supervisor,  
Department of Sociology, Queen Mary's College  
(Autonomous), Chennai 600005

Dr. A. Abdulraheem

Associate Professor and Research Supervisor,  
PG and Research Department of Economics,  
The New College (autonomous), Chennai-14

**Abstract:-** In the Indian context, quotas for women's reservation have resulted in more women being included in local self-governing organisations, but they are still excluded by the male-dominated political power structure. In the socio-political order, even elected women MPs remain mute bystanders. Women's reservation, it should be noted, has failed to remove certain important barriers, such as local electoral campaign finance, numerous imbalances between family life and politics, difficulty attending meetings, and so on. Women's reservations, on the other hand, have the ability to kick-start other processes of female empowerment. In other words, political representation for women might be viewed as a prerequisite for their empowerment. More women in politics is also seen to improve the quality of politics. In the Indian socio-political context, politics was formerly thought to be a male-dominated realm. Women's political engagement is now expected to be accompanied with less dirty and corrupt politics, particularly in democratic countries like India.

**Keywords:-** political empowerment, constitutional rights, discrimination, exclusion, women reservation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The word "political representation" has a wide range of meanings; it refers not just to the "Right to Vote," but also to involvement in decision-making, political activism, and political awareness, among other things. In India, women are less likely than men to vote, seek for public office, or join political parties. Women are most active in politics when it comes to activism and voting. The Indian government has implemented seat reservations in local governments to address gender inequities in politics. Women voted 65.63 percent of the time in India's 2014 parliamentary general elections, compared to 67.09 percent of men. Women have served as India's president and prime minister have both been women, as have the chief ministers of various states, and the country ranks 20th from the bottom in terms of female representation in Parliament. Women have been elected to various state legislatures and the national parliament in India for decades.

## II. CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

The Indian Constitution establishes a parliamentary system of governance and ensures citizens' rights to vote, be elected, speak freely, form and join associations, and congregate and organise them. The Indian Constitution attempts to minimise gender inequity by forbidding sex and class discrimination, as well as human trafficking and forced labour. It also reserves elected seats for women. Moreover, the state and municipal governments in India have been required to promote gender and class equality, including equal pay and free legal assistance, humane working conditions and maternity leave, employment and education rights, and improved living standards. Women were pivotal in the early twentieth-century Indian independence movement, which fought for independence from Britain. Women's political participation has always been limited, despite the fact that independence delivered gender equality in the form of constitutional rights.

## III. POLITICAL RESERVATIONS OF WOMEN

Women's political reservations offer a 'prospect of presence,' as well as diversity and other governance benefits. Women legislators are less likely to have political or administrative experience in settings where gender prejudice may affect the attributes and attitudes of candidates for political office. Even if women political leaders are naturally more development-oriented than their male counterparts, early distinctions may blur, delaying the implementation of governance improvements. While there is limited data on the quality of public service delivery in India's women-led gram panchayats (GPs), there is almost no research on how female leadership affects government corruption. Given the growing global commitment to boosting women's participation in politics and India's intense discussion over whether or not to reserve state and national legislature seats for women, this basic indifference is of present policy relevance.

#### IV. POLITICAL PREJUDICE AND CORRUPTION TOWARDS WOMEN

According to a recent study, women political leaders have a positive impact on corruption and other aspects of India's most ambitious public endeavour, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). By analysing data from numerous GPs and across time in the same GPs, we may be able to determine whether and how governance outcomes are affected when female leaders gain knowledge and experience. We use data from a household survey, GPs, and mandal level (sub-district) development officers, as well as audit reports on MGNREGA project implementation in Andhra Pradesh from 2006 to 2010. We find that inefficiencies and leakages in these projects are more likely in village councils allocated for women sarpanches, based on a state-wide policy of reserving one-third of village council headships for women at random. These findings apply to processes in which the GP is alone accountable as well as those in which it interacts with other programme officials. Female-reserved GPs, for example, were more than 6 percentage points more likely than unreserved GPs to be approached for a bribe to obtain an employment card. Wage payment delays are more common in female-reserved GPs, indicating administrative inefficiencies. When asked to verify labour records, households with female-only GPs are around 6 percentage points more likely to find disparities between actual and official wage payments.

#### V. DISCRIMINATION

Despite the fact that the Indian Constitution banned caste and gender discrimination, prejudice against women remains a significant barrier to their political participation. Illiteracy, family job duties, and discriminatory attitudes toward women as leaders were cited as barriers to involvement, notably in running for political office, in a 2012 study of 3,000 Indian women. The barriers that Indian women encounter, such as limited access to information and services, reflect discriminatory attitudes. Women rely on male family members or village members for information. As a result of their domestic commitments, women also lack leadership experience. Because of their home commitments, many Indian women do not engage. Compared to men, women have fewer opportunities to participate in organisations and develop leadership skills. For many years, men have controlled India's political arena, and as a result, they have a limited amount of public space. Social class exacerbates discrimination. When it comes to running for public office, Dalit women, who belong to India's lowest caste, confront ongoing discrimination. Despite the fact that the Indian government requires Dalits and Scheduled Castes to have seats reserved, women who serve as elected officials risk harassment and prejudice. Information is withheld from Dalit women, they are ignored or silenced at meetings, and in some cases, and their elected positions are petitioned to be abolished.

#### VI. SOME EXPERIENCES

While the number of abnormalities in MGNREGS implementation both the labour and materials-related components of the program—were much greater in female-reserved village councils at the beginning of the programme, they decreased as the head and sarpanch's term grew longer. Reporting biases, gender preconceptions, or variations in the likelihood of male and female sarpanches being re-elected as logical explanations for these results were found to be unfounded. However, according to the audit figures, which also include information about functionaries suspected of wrongdoing in programme implementation, discrepancies in the MGNREGS programme in female-reserved village councils are more likely to be placed on sub-district level bureaucrats.

The latter shows that women-led village councils are more vulnerable to bureaucratic capture, a vulnerability exacerbated by female sarpanches' lack of political and administrative expertise. Indeed, when female sarpanches have prior political experience, the program's governance is significantly improved, and they are less likely to request assistance in carrying out their day-to-day responsibilities. It's worth noting that Andhra Pradesh has a higher rate of female education and gender parity than the rest of the country. As a result, our estimates of the impact of women leaders on the implementation of public programmes in India and elsewhere are likely to be lower bounds.

Thus, the impact of political reservations for women on the implementation of public programmes may be considerably worse in states with greater levels of gender discrimination, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. However, the long-term benefits of learning by doing may be significantly larger. We also discovered that in female-reserved village councils, the chances of a woman filing a program-related grievance and the number of complaints filed by women during an official audit are both higher. This demonstrates how having a female leader boosts women's voices.

#### VII. CONCLUSION

The findings reported here have immediate policy implications: political and administrative competence can help women-led constituencies not only reduce corruption in the implementation of public programmes, but also accelerate the onset of governance gains. This emphasises the importance of institutional support and capacity building when it comes to increasing women's political involvement and affirmative action measures. A lack of competent administrative help and training in the utilisation of financial resources by grassroots institutions in India and other developing countries may significantly reduce the effectiveness of public programmes and affirmative action laws.

## REFERENCES

- [1.] Dahlerup, D. (2013). *Women, quotas and politics*. Routledge.
- [2.] Krook, M. L. (2010). *Quotas for women in politics: Gender and candidate selection reform worldwide*. Oxford University Press.
- [3.] Franceschet, S., Krook, M. L., & Piscopo, J. M. (2012). Conceptualizing the impact of gender quotas. *The impact of gender quotas*, 3-26.
- [4.] John, M. E. (2000). Alternate Modernities? Reservations and Women's Movement in 20th Century India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3822-3829.
- [5.] Menon, N. (2000). Elusive 'Woman': Feminism and Women's Reservation Bill. *Economic and political weekly*, 3835-3844.
- [6.] John, M. E. (2018). Women in politics and the subject of reservations. In *Discourse on Rights in India* (pp. 247-272). Routledge India.
- [7.] Jensenius, F. R. (2015). Mired in reservations: The path-dependent history of electoral quotas in India. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 74(1), 85-105.
- [8.] Hassim, S. (2003). Representation, participation and democratic effectiveness: Feminist challenges to representative democracy in South Africa.
- [9.] Meintjies, S. (2003). The politics of engagement: Women transforming the policy process—domestic violence legislation in South Africa. *No shortcuts to power: African women in politics and policy making*, 140-159.
- [10.] Mbatha, L. (2003). Democratising Local Government: Problems and Opportunities in the Advancement of Gender Equality. *No shortcuts to power: African women in politics and policy making*, 3, 188.
- [11.] Goetz, A. M. (2003). Women's political effectiveness: A conceptual framework. *No shortcuts to power: African women in politics and policy making*, 3, 29-41.
- [12.] Luckham, R. (2003). *No shortcuts to power: African women in politics and policy making* (Vol. 3). Zed Books.
- [13.] Hernes, H. M., & Hernes, H. (1987). *Welfare state and woman power: Essays in state feminism*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- [14.] Orloff, A. S. (1993). Gender and the social rights of citizenship: The comparative analysis of gender relations and welfare states. *American sociological review*, 303-328.
- [15.] Lewis, J. (1992). Gender and the development of welfare regimes. *Journal of European social policy*, 2(3), 159-173.
- [16.] Borchorst, A., & Siim, B. (2008). Woman-friendly policies and state feminism: Theorizing Scandinavian gender equality. *Feminist theory*, 9(2), 207-224.
- [17.] Pal, S. (2014). Politics of Women's Reservation in India. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 118-122.
- [18.] Basu, A., & Bhaduri, S. (2015). Role of Women Elected Representatives in Local Area Development: A Case Study of Kolkata Municipal Corporation. *International Journal of Research*, 53.