

Empowering The Nation Through Gender Inclusive Politics

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ABSTRACT

According to Harold Laswell “**politics is who gets what, when and how**”. The issue of distributing resources among individuals has been a longstanding and crucial challenge. Politics at the seat of decision making is crucial for the equitable and optimal utilization of resources (*Politics*, n.d.). Given the interdependence of politics, the economy and society, women's political representation is essential to inclusive development. However, when viewed from a gender perspective, we need to make significant changes to our human resource approach and distribute the benefits fairly. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), women in India make up to 14.44% of the 17th Lok Sabha. As per the Election Commission (ECI) of India female representation stands at an average of 9% for all the state assemblies (*New IPU Report Shows That Women MPs Have Never Been so Diverse*, 2024). Despite a recent increase in female voter turnout, this has not led to the rise in women contesting elections, getting elected, holding ministerial and other prominent positions. With all the insights, through this article I intend to write upon, an overview of women's status in Indian and international politics, constitutional safeguards and legal provisions and initiatives for the representation and political empowerment of women. General view on the status of other genders in Indian politics and recent developments. Inter-linkages between gender inclusive politics on economy, society, social justice, law and order and the way forward for a gender inclusive democratic India.

KEYWORDS: Politics, Gender Equity, Transgender, Political empowerment, Gender Inclusive Politics.

INTRODUCTION

The voice is an imminent and powerful aspect of a democracy. The voice represents a strength, support and sustainability of democratic values in a society. It is the oxygen of the Democratic politics. Going by the words of Melinda Gates ‘*A woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman*’. It is the duty of every individual to enable an environment where every voice, irrespective of their differences in all capabilities, are heard and expressed freely. Gender may be differentiated in terms of Biology, but it cannot be limited only to it as it is an important socio-cultural entity and women form an important social category. The society is stratified on norms, values, beliefs, traditions, customs, status, roles, class, race, cast, etc. Women have to cut across all these units in order to overcome the oppression. The issues are linked and they are economically exploited and discriminated, socially subjugated and politically rendered powerless group in the society (*pdf*) *caste-wise socio-economic status of women in Ahmednagar district (Maharashtra) K.C. Ramotra p. v. Patil s. n. Pawar*, n.d.).

Politics in true sense can act as a medium to amplify the voice and gender inclusive politics can magnify it and enable women and the other genders in equal access to productive resources, decision making bodies, political participation, political consciousness, political activism, welfare, education, health, employment, law and order, social justice etc.

BASIC CONCEPTS

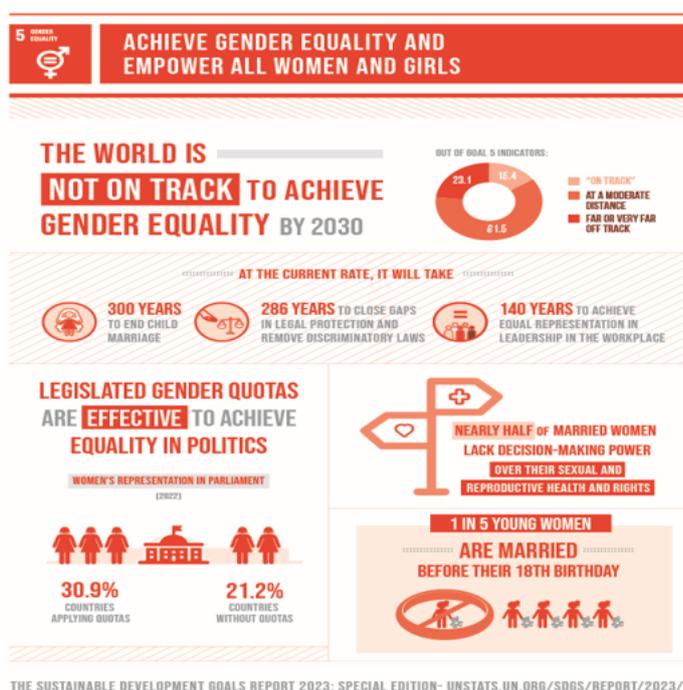
- 1) **POLITICS** - originates from Ancient Greek (*politiká*) 'affairs of the cities' is the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations among individuals, such as the distribution of resources or status (*Politics*, 2023).
- 2) **INCLUSION** - the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights (*Gender Equality, n.d.*) (UNO).
- 3) **GENDER EQUALITY** - Gender equality is when people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities (*Gender Equality, n.d.*).
- 4) **GENDER EQUITY** - Process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Equity is a mean. Equality is the result (*Gender Equity, 2020*).
- 5) **GENDER INCLUSIVE POLITICS** – It refers to a phenomenon where every individual, irrespective of their gender identities, can take part and harness their potential fully and exercise their autonomy without any hindrance in the political sphere.

VIEWS OF PROMINENT PERSONALITIES

- 1) **Dr B. R. AMBEDKAR** - *“I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which the women have achieved.”*
- 2) **NELSON MANDELA** - *“Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all kinds of oppression” (Rajashree, 2016).*
- 3) **KOFI ANNAN** - *“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” (Rajashree, 2016).*
- 4) **MICHELLE OBAMA** - *“No country can every truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contribution of half its citizens” (Rajashree, 2016).*

GENERAL VIEW ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN GLOBAL POLITICS AND RECENT TRENDS

Gender in politics or gender and politics, is an area of study in political science and gender studies. It aims to understand the relationship between people’s gender and phenomena in politics (“Gender and Politics,” 2023). Women are spearheading to top positions globally in different domains. Their gender specific impact is been observed through their work, speech, statements and policies as it has shaped the decision making and augmented the political institutions. They have made their way through and inspired the billions as well.



- When it comes to the political sphere remarkable changes have taken place recently. But when the equal half is compared in terms of equal share in the arena it is a long way to go. To achieve the SDGs by 2030, we must accelerate efforts to empower women and ensure their equal voice and leadership in political and public spheres, echoing the call of SDG 5.

Source: (Goal 5 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.)

According to **UN Women**,

1. Women in executive government positions

- Despite having 34 women leaders in 31 countries (as of January 2023), gender parity at the highest levels of power could take another 130 years.
- UN Women reports 22.8% female ministers leading policy areas.
- In just 13 nations, women hold half or more of Cabinet seats influencing key policy decisions.

2. Women in national parliaments

- Despite progress, women remain underrepresented in parliament, holding only 26.5% of seats, up from 11% in 1995.
- Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates are the frontrunners, boasting at least 50% female representation in their single or lower houses.
- At the current rate of change, it is estimated that gender equality in national legislative bodies will not be reached before 2063.

3. Women in local government

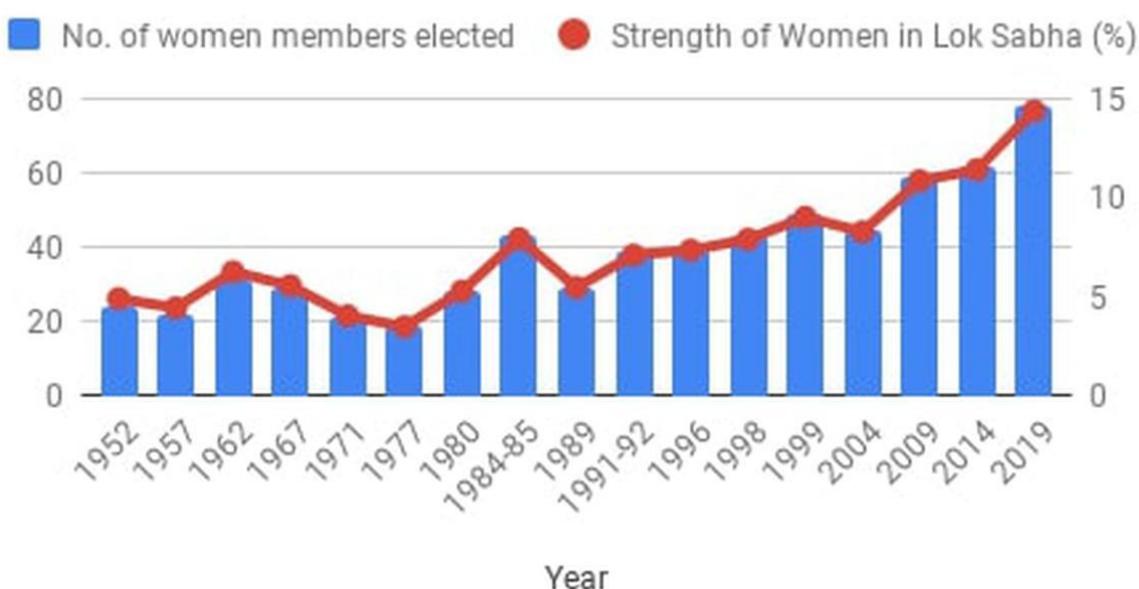
- Globally, 3 million women, representing 34% of elected members, serve in local councils across 136 nations.
- Among 141 countries, only two have achieved 50% female representation in local government, while 22 others exceed the 40% mark.

GENERAL VIEW ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIAN POLITICS AND RECENT TRENDS

Politics is an integral part in the life of people. It is often projected that it is something to be avoided or to be far off but knowingly or unknowingly, politics has an impact on the daily life of the people. The politics of our country is a unique case study for the Globe. The land has seen tremendous political changes permeating through the life of people and their way of life. The journey for women in politics in our country is not an easy one. It had to cut across the various intersections of the society such as caste, creed, race, gender religion etc. The land is referred to as Motherland (feminine) and is mostly ruled by men (masculine) at times. The voice for the representation of women in politics was heard for the first time in the freedom movement. Annie Mascarene was the first woman member of parliament. The path from then to this day has witnessed significant changes but when seen in numbers and stats, we have not reached the half milestone too.

1) WOMEN IN LOK SABHA

Women in Lok Sabha



Source: (Sen, 2019)

- The recent Lok Sabha general elections of 2019 saw the highest number of women members at 14.39%. The global average share stood at 24.6%.
- It is still a great challenge for female candidates to win without the support of major political parties.
- As of 2021, Election Commission of India (ECI), there are 10.5% women representation of all Members of Parliament.

2) WOMEN IN RAJYA SABHA

- Presently there are 25 women in Rajya Sabha, crossing the 10 percent mark in total strength of the house.
- The average percentage of women in Rajya Sabha stands at 9.5%.
- The highest representation of women in Rajya Sabha was 12.7% in 2014

3) WOMEN IN MINISTERIAL POSTS

- Currently there are 11 women ministers making up to 14% in the council and 7% in the cabinet.
- In the last three decades average of women in ministerial posts stood at 11% and in cabinet they stood at a mere 7%.

4) WOMEN IN STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES

- At present the average representation of women in India stands at 14% which is lesser than the parliament average of 14.3%.
- Recently Hekani Jakhalu became the first women to be elected from Nagaland.
- The average percentage of women in ministerial positions in states are at 9.1%.

5) WOMEN IN LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENTS

- It is estimated that there are approximately 14.5 lakhs women in local self-governments.
- Government data, September 2021: Over 18 states recorded more than 50% women elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Uttarakhand leads with 56.02% women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions, while Uttar Pradesh lags with the lowest at 33.34%, reflecting significant regional disparities in gender representation.

6) WOMEN IN BUEARACRACY

- According to the records of IAS, in 2022 women in the secretarial posts constituted to mere 14%.
- The central government employment census states that there only 13% women employees as of 2022.
- It is yet to see a women cabinet secretary at the highest decision-making chair.

7) ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

According to the Election commission statistics,

- The recent state elections across country in 2022 saw a jump in female voter turnouts indicating more awareness and interest.
- The NTK party of Tamil Nadu allotted 50% of its seats in Lok Sabha elections 2019 to women candidates.

GENERAL VIEW ON THE STATUS OF TRANSGENDERS IN INDIAN POLITICS AND RECENT TRENDS

The Transgender Persons Act 2019 says that a transgender person is someone whose inner sense of being male or female (their gender) doesn't match the sex they were given at birth. This includes:

- Trans men: Individuals designated female at birth but who identify as men.
- Trans women: Individuals designated male at birth but who identify as women.
- Intersex individuals: Those whose bodies possess characteristics of both sexes, or neither.
- Genderqueer: Individuals who do not strictly identify as male or female.

This law recognizes that being transgender is about who you feel you are inside, not just physical changes (naturally or surgically). People with specific cultural identities related to gender are Hijra, Kinnar, Aravani, and Jogta etc; in India.

OBSTACLES IN THE PATH OF THIRD GENDERS' EMPOWERMENT

Some of the problems faced by the third gender can be discussed as follows:

A) Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Third Gender Communities in India:

1. **Marginalization and Social Exclusion:** most often the society views their very existence as wrong or unacceptable. Due to the stigma attached to their sexual orientation and gender identity, they are often pushed to the fringes of society, facing discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion. These experiences can have a profound impact on the mental and emotional well-being of third gender individuals, often leading to anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts.
2. **Discrimination at the Workplace:** According to research conducted in 2018 by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), an astonishing 96% of transgender individuals face employment discrimination, depriving them of job opportunities. They are often forced to take on low-paying, exploitative jobs in the informal sector, such as begging, sex work, or domestic labour. These jobs not only offer little financial security but also expose them to further risks of violence and abuse.
3. **Education System and illiteracy:** There is a lack of special provisions for third gender students, such as gender-neutral uniforms, toilets, and safe spaces. Additionally, the existing policies for inclusion are poorly implemented, leading to discrimination and harassment within schools. As a result, many third gender children drop out of school early, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and marginalization. shadowed by stigma and hardship, many transgender individuals in India are trapped in illiteracy. Cast out families, poverty's grip, and abuse in schools fuel fear and high dropout rates. The 2011 census paints a stark picture: with only 46% literacy, compared to the national average of 74%, their voices struggle to be heard.
4. **Homelessness:** They don't have access to housing programs that cater to their individual requirements. They either moved away from a violent home environment or were abandoned by their family because they are queer, leaving them to live on the streets of the city.

B) Challenges in Political representation and empowerment:

1. **Deprived of Human Rights:** beyond the core freedoms, the third gender community faces daily hurdles in accessing basic human rights, including:
 - a) Obtaining essential documents: Passports, driving licenses, ration cards, and identity cards are often denied due to the lack of a legal category for third genders, creating obstacles to everyday life and mobility.
 - b) Access to healthcare: Discrimination and prejudice within healthcare settings further marginalizes them and restricts their access to proper medical care.
 - c) Security and protection: The community is disproportionately vulnerable to violence, harassment, and exploitation due to a lack of legal safeguards and societal acceptance.
2. **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** the absence of widespread recognition as a distinct third gender leaves them vulnerable to the denial of fundamental rights like:
 - a) Personal liberty: Fear of discrimination and prejudice often forces them to conceal their true selves, infringing upon their right to express their identity freely.

- b) Freedom of expression: This fundamental right is compromised when they are ostracized or silenced for simply being who they are.
- c) Right to education: Exclusion from mainstream educational institutions due to societal stigma and inadequate policies hinders their access to knowledge and empowerment.

3. Under-Representation in Political Spaces: social stigma and systemic injustices discourage participation in the political process, leading to:

Low voter turnout: Only a small percentage of the community registers to vote, resulting in their voices being unheard and their needs neglected.

Minimal representation in decision-making bodies: Their absence from legislative bodies like assemblies, Parliament, and urban local bodies ensures that their concerns remain unaddressed at the policy level.

a glimmer of hope shines through. **The 2019 elections saw a significant increase of 73% in the "Others" vote count**, indicating a growing awareness and willingness to participate. However, only 14.6% of registered voters of third gender voted.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF TRANSGENDERS IN INDIA AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In 1998, Shabnam 'Mausi' made history as India's first trans-woman MLA in Madhya Pradesh. However, the struggle for transgender political representation persists. Ananyah Kumari Alex, initially hailed as the first transgender candidate in the March 2021 Kerala Assembly polls, withdrew, citing gender discrimination and harassment within her party, tragically leading to her demise in July 2021. Despite the legal strides made, such as the NALSA Judgment of 2014 and the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2019, discrimination persists, impeding the progress of the LGBTQ+ community.

The 2019 parliamentary elections saw a 45% increase in "third-gender" voters since 2014, but their representation remains disproportionately low. Madhu Kinnar's 2015 victory as the first transgender Mayor in Chattisgarh marked a milestone, overcoming challenges after two earlier transgender wins were invalidated due to reserved seats for women.

Public perception often confines transgenders to stereotypical labels, hindering their acceptance in positions of power. Political discrimination persists, though some candidates have succeeded. Shabnam faced hurdles, being twice denied Congress membership and experiencing gender-based disrespect. Apsara Reddy's appointment as the National General Secretary of All India Mahila Congress in 2019 marked progress, but she emphasizes the lack of political vision for transgender candidates.

Independent candidate M Radha faced financial challenges during campaigns and highlighted the dormancy of the Transgender Welfare Board in Tamil Nadu. Despite crowdfunding support, Radha's experiences underscore the need for political backing and resources.

While some transgender candidates have entered politics, they often face insurmountable challenges. Chirpi Bhawani and Kajal contested polls in 2019, but many others, working as activists within political parties, haven't pursued full-fledged political careers.

Political parties often hesitate to support queer candidates due to perceived vote-bank risks. Social acceptance and inclusion remain vital, with urgent activation of Transgender Welfare Boards, legal and financial assistance for candidates, and workplace reforms. Sensitization efforts, exemplified by the Election Commission's engagement of trans activists in 2019, must extend to substantial reforms, ensuring gender-receptive spaces in government offices and buildings (Asia, 2021).

IMPEDIMENTS FOR THE UNDER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Though the recent trends have shown increasing interest of women towards politics, it has not completely translated into representation in legislature, power and apex decision making possibilities. Women who are contributing greatly in their own way to the ecology and the social system, who also are turning out to be an unexpected asset in economy should be provided an equal space in harnessing their potential and exercising their freedom and to live a life with dignity. Let us see some of the causes that act as barriers to the political empowerment of women:

1) PATRIARCHY –Patriarchy encompasses a network of relationships, ideologies, and norms woven into the fabric of political, social, and economic frameworks, shaping the unequal power dynamics between men and women (Patriarchy - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics, n.d.). The male domination in the family structure and the society has passed on to politics and its sub fields also. The idea of opinion of the alternate gender itself is looked down upon. It has been transmitted to the minds and they doubt the capabilities of women in decision making and their ability to manage and control the institution and its resources. Males masquerade in controlling the power and autonomy of such women in politics giving rise to terms such as **Pati panchayat, Pati raj etc.**

2) SOCIAL NORMS, PERCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES – The norms beliefs in the society across the globe have placed feminine gender secluded to certain roles and responsibilities. They are preferred most often for domestic work and taking care of the family, but here the decision-making power lies with the men. This has led to men controlling

the livelihood choices of women and sexuality. This has impacted in politics too. Their opinions are most often not welcome, even if said they are judged stereotypically, this can be seen in the mainframe of national level politics too.

3) DIFFERENTIAL ENTITLEMENT – The major hold on entitlements were always with men. Though the modern reforms have led to the mobility of women towards entitlements, the feminists criticize them that it is still dictated by patriarchy and gender perceptions. In India we can see differentiation in entitlements over –

Sexuality - subjected to patriarchal construct and masculine controlled.

Household - ownership and decision making subjected to male domination.

Labour - majorly towards domestic work and related.

Work - Inequality in all the spheres.

Politics - the autonomy and capability are always judged.

4) SOCIAL STRUCTURAL IMPEDIMENTS – (cast, religion, ethnicity etc) - it is true even today that people belonging to the minority or lower strata of the society to rise and attain prosperity is a challenge. The inadequate representation across all sections of the society is clearly visible. Women have to cut across all these intersections of the society and stand at par with the men. They act puppets in the hands of their superior party leaders and often such candidates are selected from these community who abide by their decisions and process their work, rendering as caged birds to their masters.

5) UNDER ESTIMATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES ON WOMEN'S CAPABILITIES – as we have observed there is a clear gender bias in the parties and their representation of women. There has been a strong notion that women are incapable to handle the hard tasks involved and they are less likely to win against the men candidates. Though it has been disproved several times, it has remained as an obstacle in the minds of the party members. This makes it internally difficult for the women to rise through the ranks and appeal for nominations itself.

6) RESERVATIONS IN STATE AND CENTRAL LEGISLATURE – The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act of 2023 now requires one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha, State legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, encompassing SC and ST seats. This provision comes into effect following the publication of the post-Act census and remains valid for 15 years, with the possibility of extension through parliamentary approval. Women's seat allocation will adhere to parliamentary regulations following each delimitation process.

Although enjoying widespread support, the Women's Reservation Bill is met with apprehension. The legislation mandates a 33% reservation, contingent upon the post-2026 census delimitation, which could postpone its enactment until 2029, causing it to miss the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Experts warn of potential tokenization of women in reserved seats, speculating parties may assign them tickets in losing constituencies. This practice could lead to proxy candidates, with male relatives substituting for female contenders. The Women's Reservation Bill lacks sub-quotas for OBC, minority, Dalit, or Adivasi women within the 33% quota. Calls for compartmentalized reservations arise to ensure diverse representation. The Act discusses seat rotation after delimitation without a specified formula. Experts suggest a rotation aligned with proportional representation of social groups in constituencies for clarity and fairness. The 33% reservation excludes Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils. Currently, women hold only 13% representation in the Rajya Sabha.

7) LACK OF EDUCATION, AWARENESS AND SOCIAL UPLIFTMENT – the literacy rate of females stands at the rate of 77% against 84% among males. Women who are historically confined to family and household activities and are deprived of education find it still challenging penetrating through the political domain. Politics require many skills and thought process to rise and remain in the sphere. It requires lot of strategical thinking and resource mobilisation in contesting and to win elections. When in power irrespective of the positions it requires knowledge about the domain and good analytical skills to understand the problems and need good communication skills to efficiently run the institution. Society through their beliefs, notions and practises sometimes act as a hindrance to the upliftment of women.

8) VIOLENCE, VULNERABILITY AND DEMORALIZATION – generally females are vulnerable to violence and demoralization in all areas. When it comes to politics which inherently has the characteristics to question the realities in practice, women who question or voice their opinion are subjected to humiliation, abuse, harassment, violence etc. This can be seen in online too. These instances demoralize them and others also to speak on these issues. This makes them vulnerable to make their way in politics and also for the political parties to bank on them.

9) CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING AND MOBILISING RESOURCES – elections generally are a popular activity which involves populous participation. India with its huge population requires its own time, money and resources. Women are vulnerable to all these. They have to bank upon others for the above. This makes them submissive to other's exigencies, which impacts their decision making and affects their work.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS IN INDIA FOR THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

➤ **The Preamble** of our constitution states clearly in its line that **JUSTICE** should be provided in social, economic and political spheres so that every individual can exercise their rights and be guaranteed if violated. It also states that **EQUALITY** of status and opportunity should be provided to all the people irrespective of their advantages and disadvantages.

- The Part III of the constitution that is fundamental rights guarantees us **RIGHT TO EQUALITY** by providing equal rights based on gender and also provides affirmative action in the places where upliftment of women is needed. Article 15(3) of the Constitution grants powers to create special provisions for women and children by the legislature. It ensures freedom of speech, assemble, to form associations through **RIGHT TO FREEDOM**. It aims to address gender disparities by forbidding discrimination on the basis of sex.
- The constitution through **A.325 and A.326** provides right to vote through universal adult suffrage and also the right to get elected irrespective of caste, race, religion or sex.
- Individuals who are Indian citizens and are 25 years or older are eligible to run for elections to the Lok Sabha or state legislative assemblies. Those above 30 years of age can contest for the Rajya Sabha and state legislative councils.
- Through the 73rd and 74th amendment in 1991, reservation for 1/3rd of seats to women contesting in elections and also in offices after getting elected in panchayats and urban local bodies.

MEASURES AND INITIATIVES TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT TO INCREASE THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

- In 1997, a Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women was established with the aim of recommending strategies to enhance the status of women.
- In 2014, Meira Kumar, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, implemented changes to make the rules of the Lok Sabha fully gender-neutral. Consequently, every parliamentary document since then refers to the head of the Lok Sabha Committee as the Chairperson.
- Several states, including Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tripura, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, have raised reservation quotas from 33% to 50%. As a result, following this legislative change, female political participation has surged from 4.5% to approximately 25-40%. Moreover, the central government has proposed raising reservations in PRIs to 50%.
- There are provisions in Representation of People Act, 1951 to reserve seats for women in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha as well as the state legislative assemblies.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) aims to boost voter turnout by enhancing the integrity of electoral rolls, eliminating discrepancies like missing or deceased members. They're actively engaging in voter outreach through initiatives such as door-to-door registration. Additionally, for the 2014 elections, voters will receive photo IDs containing polling station details to further encourage participation.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS IN THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Civil society groups have been trailblazers in pushing for women's rightful place in India's legislative corridors. Their persistent advocacy, impactful campaigns, and targeted interventions have built a fertile ground for women's political engagement to flourish. Some of the initiatives are:

- 1) **Policy oriented:** From raising awareness about gender equality in politics to lobbying for legislative reforms like the Women's Reservation Bill (advocated by groups like National Alliance for Women's Reservation Bill and Bharat Jagruthi), these organizations hold policymakers accountable.
- 2) **Capacity-building:** programs like LEAD by Women's Political Empowerment Initiative (WPEI) empower women from marginalized communities to become not just voters, but active participants in the political landscape.
- 3) **Awareness:** Initiatives like the "She Leads" collaboration by Stree Shakti, Indian School for Democracy, Chevening, Shakti, and Netri provide training and support for aspiring women leaders, igniting the spark of political ambition.
- 4) **Grassroots Mobilization:** From mobilizing women in local governance through organizations like Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) to advocating for increased ticket allocation to women candidates by engaging with political parties, these groups ensure women's voices are heard loud and clear.
- 5) **Data-Driven Advocacy:** Armed with research and reports from organisations like Centre for Social Research, Association for Democratic Reforms, and National Election Watch, they present irrefutable evidence of gender disparity, propelling policy changes.
- 6) **Legal Aid:** When rights are compromised, civil society groups like Mahila Samarthy Nidhi take legal routes, like Public Interest Litigation (PILs), to secure justice for women in politics.
- 7) **Creating Platforms:** Platforms like the Women Leaders Forum foster a spirit of collaboration and provide women leaders from diverse backgrounds a space to share experiences, strategies, and empower each other.
- 8) **Initiating the young minds:** Yuva Bengaluru (NGO), organises events and awareness programs to ignite the minds of teenage children especially in rural areas about the importance of the political participation of women to the society and nation building.

Civil society groups are not just watchdogs; they are the architects, builders, and cheerleaders of women's political journey in India. Their relentless efforts pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable democracy.

INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN GENDER INCLUSIVE POLITICS ON ECONOMY, SOCIETY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, LAW AND ORDER AND OTHER VULNERABILITIES

The fabric of Indian society is intricately woven with threads of gender, impacting every aspect of life - from the economy to social justice, and from law and order to individual vulnerabilities. Gender-inclusive politics, therefore, cannot be viewed in isolation; it is a catalyst for positive change across these interconnected spheres.

Economy: When women participate equally in the workforce, it contributes significantly to GDP growth. Studies suggest India could gain an additional \$770 billion by 2030 with higher female labor force participation. Gender-inclusive policies like affordable childcare, flexible work arrangements, and skill development programs for women can unlock this potential, leading to a more robust and inclusive economy.

Society: Gender equality forms the bedrock of a cohesive and just society. By dismantling patriarchal structures and addressing discrimination against women and girls, we can create a safer environment for all. Policies promoting education for girls, combating sexual violence, and ensuring equal inheritance rights contribute to a healthier and more equitable social fabric.

Social Justice: Gender-inclusive politics recognizes the intersectionality of gender with other marginalized identities, such as caste, religion, and disability. When women from such communities are included in decision-making processes, policy solutions become more nuanced and effective. Addressing issues like caste-based violence against women, ensuring access to justice for marginalized communities, and promoting affirmative action programs are crucial steps towards achieving social justice.

Law and Order: Enhancing the presence of women in law enforcement bolsters community policing efforts and fosters greater confidence in the justice system. Moreover, a higher proportion of women in the judiciary facilitates the delivery of judgments that are more attuned to gender sensitivity. Addressing fundamental factors underlying violence against women, like economic reliance and power imbalances, paves the way for a safer society characterized by diminished crime rates.

Vulnerabilities: Gender roles and stereotypes often exacerbate vulnerabilities like poverty, health risks, and environmental disasters. Gender-inclusive policies can address these vulnerabilities by focusing on women's economic empowerment, access to healthcare, and disaster preparedness strategies tailored to their needs.

The interlinkages between gender-inclusive politics and these diverse areas are undeniable. By actively promoting and implementing progressive policies, India can unlock a transformative potential in every sphere. This requires not just legal frameworks, but also a shift in societal attitudes and mindsets. Engaging men and boys as allies, promoting gender sensitization campaigns, and celebrating diversity are crucial steps in this journey.

Weaving the threads of gender equality into the fabric of Indian society is a complex task, but one that promises a brighter future for all. By recognizing the interconnectedness of these issues and working towards gender-inclusive solutions, we can build an India where women's voices are heard, their talents are nurtured, and their vulnerabilities are addressed, leading to a truly equitable and prosperous nation.

WAY FORWARD FOR A GENDER INCLUSIVE DEMOCRATIC INDIA

The 5 P's - patriarchy, property, power, propensity, and physiology - constitute significant obstacles contributing to the growing criminalization of politics and violence against women. They distinctly hinder women's participation in the political process and governance despite India's democracy thriving on diverse voices. Consequently, women and transgender individuals continue to be underrepresented in politics. Here are some suggested solutions:

- 1) **Expedite Reservations:** Enact the Women's Reservation Bill, ensuring diverse representation within the 33% quota. Implement sub-quotas for marginalized groups and a clear seat rotation formula.
- 2) **Strengthen Safeguards:** Enhance legal protection against discrimination, harassment, and violence, particularly for transgenders. Secure essential documents like passports for their mobility and everyday needs.
- 3) **Educate and Empower:** Break down gender-based barriers through targeted awareness campaigns in schools, colleges, and communities. Highlight successes of women and transgender leaders to inspire future generations.
- 4) **Invest in Economics:** Skill development programs, entrepreneurial resources, and financial support must empower women and transgenders economically, leading to greater political participation.
- 5) **Train and Mentor:** Develop political training and mentorship programs for aspiring women and transgender politicians, covering policy analysis, public speaking, and campaign strategies.
- 6) **Increase Participation:** Voter education programs, door-to-door registration drives, and gender-sensitive polling stations can boost electoral participation of these communities. Encourage parties to allocate fair ticket shares.
- 7) **Formulate Inclusive Policies:** Advocate for policies addressing healthcare, education, employment, and social security needs of women and transgenders, considering the intersectionality of various identities.
- 8) **Engage Civil Society:** Collaborate with NGOs to hold policymakers accountable, conduct research, and mobilize public support for gender-inclusive policies.
- 9) **Promote Positive Media Representation:** Media platforms must feature diverse narratives of women and transgender politicians, breaking stereotypes and highlighting achievements.

10) **Learn from the World:** Collaborate with other nations through exchange programs, research projects, and international organizations to learn from successful initiatives promoting gender equality in politics.

11) **Gather Data and Research:** Invest in research and data collection to understand challenges and opportunities faced by women and transgenders in politics. This data will inform effective policy making.

12) **Celebrate Successes:** Recognize and celebrate achievements of women and transgender leaders, creating positive role models and shifting societal perceptions.

By embracing this comprehensive strategy, India can pave the way for a more inclusive political landscape where the voices of all are heard and valued. By ensuring equal representation for women and transgender individuals, we unlock a treasure trove of untapped talent and perspectives. Women bring unique strengths to the table, from collaborative leadership to a focus on social issues. Transgender individuals offer invaluable insights into the challenges faced by marginalized communities.

A gender-inclusive government wouldn't just be fairer, it would be smarter. Studies show that increased female representation in politics correlates with better economic performance, improved healthcare outcomes, and stronger international relations. When diverse voices are heard, policies become more nuanced and effective, addressing the needs of the entire population.

The road to achieving this isn't without hurdles. Societal biases, economic disparities, and a lack of political training for women and transgender individuals need to be tackled head-on. But the rewards are immense. A nation empowered by the full participation of its citizens is a nation poised for greatness.

So let us break down the barriers, invest in inclusivity, and embrace the transformative power of gender-inclusive politics. Let us build a future where leadership isn't defined by gender, but by merit and vision. In doing so, we build not just a stronger democracy, but a nation where every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

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