

# WOMEN ACCESS TO POLITICAL RIGHTS: CONTINUED ENDEAVOUR FOR GENDER EQUALITY

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## Abstract

*Gender equality embodies multiple domains in it such as healthcare, security, access to food, participation in politics and decision making, education, maternal well being etc, which innates politics, a significant realm to scrutinize gender equality. Political rights can be most aptly termed as the "Linchpin" of an accomplishing democracy, Hence, it is pivotal that humanity must possess an ample ingress to it, notwithstanding class, caste, creed, colour, sex, origin etc. As is illustrated in varying global, national acquittance and constitutional mandates fastened by the state machinery, women tend to be no exclusion to it. Indeed, state has enormous legal safeguards for the aegis of political rights of women, Nevertheless, the jeopardy is despite, numerical upsurge, in universal adult Franchise, behavioural representation of women in multiple political institutions as a candidature and her partaking in other political pursuit pertaining to politics is quite trivial and humanity has been unable to achieve gender equality hitherto is a tremendously lamenting precarious for the egalitarian blossoming of the motherland.*

**Keywords:** Gender equality, politics, access, political rights, women.

## Gender Equality

The concept that women and men have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realising their ultimate worth, human rights and dignity and for partaking to and benefitting from economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is hence termed as " the equal valuing by society of the pros and cons of both the human species and their gender roles. It is related with the two counterparts become partner in the home, community and society. Equality does not refer that the two sexes become similar but the rights, responsibilities and opportunities are not hierarchically determined by their gender. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both the sexes are taken into consideration, identifying the diversity in various groups and that all human beings are free to develop their personal attributes and make their choices without any distinction set by societal stereotypes based on gender roles. Gender equality is a pre-requisite for identifying one's human right and indicator of sustainable development of whole human race.

Gender equality is the third significant goal of M.D.Gs. It is innate inspite of instrumental and significant for balanced and equitable development of the nation and progress of this goal is measured by the involvement of women candidates in the political arena. Globally New Zealand was the first country which granted right to universal Adult Franchise to women. Not withstanding , the state has made a lot of efforts to ensure that women contribute in the political decision making process both globally and nationally but her proportion both in numerical strength and behavioural field is still quite less. However, the nation had attained momentum independence in 19477 but the Indian women rights received true assent only after the Constitution was wholly drafted and came into force i.e. 26 January 1950.

State efforts for gender equality at global level: Equality of women rights has been the fundamental aim of United Nations. Hence, Its preamble proclaimed " to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights . U.N. formed a specialised body called" Commission on the Status of Women" to reaffirm the goal of securing women's equality and mainstreaming women issues. The focal point of the commission is to draft remedies on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and education fields and to suggest redressals for significant problems in the women rights domain for the purpose of actual implementation of the principle of equality. Initiating , from the U.N.Charter , the mandate of non discrimination on the basis of sex and many other women issues has been the mainstream of numerous international conventions and treaties. The U.N. Commission on Human Rights for the first time adopted a resolution focussing on the amalgamation of women rights into human rights. Succeeding to this, the Vienna Convention acknowledged the significance of women rights worldwide. Certain Declarations and International conventions that played pivotal role in safeguarding women rights are as follows:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: The U.N. adopted this declaration on 10 december 1948.However, it is not legally binding but it serves as a cornerstone for the original legally binding conventions on civil and political rights and convention on Economic, Social and Cultural right. The Human Rights Charter proclaimed, "The entitlement of everyone to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms with equal dignity notwithstanding race, colour, sex, language, region, political or other opinion, social origin , property, birth or other status." It embody within themselves, two dimensions of rights, first generation rights, civil and political

rights (right to a free trial, freedom of opinion and expression, association, freedom of peaceful assembly, free elections, equal opportunities for access to public positions etc and second generation rights i.e. Social, Economic and Cultural rights, (right to social security, to full employment, just and humane situations of work, to education to health etc).

**Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:** The international Covenant on Civil and Political rights was adopted in 1966 and enforced in 1976. The covenant elaborates the civil and political rights of individuals and nations. It established a specialised body the human rights Committee with the power of reviewing reports from state parties. As of 2022, the Convention has parties and has a preamble and 53 Articles inculcating various rights such as right to a free trial, freedom of opinion and expression, right to association, freedom of peaceful assembly, free elections, equal opportunities for access to public positions.

**Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women:** It is also known as international bill of rights for women was adopted in 1979 and was implemented in 1981, to reinterpret the contemporary international conventions which have been operationalised to eliminate the violence against women. It brought into limelight the significant unique domains inhibiting the prejudice against women, its one of the pivotal dimension is political rights of women which requires to be dealt with essential concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century millennium. It defines prejudice against women as “ any distinction , exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, social, cultural civil or any other field.”

The convention urges the state to take essential prerequisites to combat prejudice against women in political and public arena, At national level it urges to ensure that women participate at par with men in universal Adult Franchise in all elections. to partake in the formation of government, policy and its enforcement, to involve in non governmental organisations related with the public and political life of the nation. Also, it recognises the women’s right at par with men to represent the government and engagement in the international organisations related issues.

Article 17 of the convention establishes a Committee on the status of women to monitor the adequate enforcement or obligates that each member state fulfils its obligations to the convention, by analysing the reports submitted by member states and also later its optional protocol was also adopted recognising the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and admits the complaints concerning heinous women rights violations of solitary or a group of women through its communication process and also sets up an enquiry procedure to look into such complaints concerning heinous crimes seriously.

**Convention on the Political rights of Women:** It was enforced on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1954, It inherits within itself the women’s equal right with men to access the political rights i.e. Universal adult Franchise, right to be elected to all publicly elected bodies established by national law, right to hold public offices, to exercise the public functions established by national law, in any possible way through their chosen representatives,, notwithstanding the gender attributes.

**Political Rights of Women: Ilusion or Congruity:** In spite of tremendous efforts made by state to safeguard the political rights of women, Women have been continuously striving for their political rights as although their participation in universal adult Franchise is rapidly rising ,they are still quite faraway from their adequate proportionate representation in Global as well as National politics. Also, their participation at local level in congruity is quite dismal as depicted below:

Table 1.1 Global average of Women Participation in Parliament:

	Global Averages		
	Lower Chamber and unicameral	Upper Chamber	All Chambers
Total number of M.P.s	37248	7062	44310
Men	27425	5255	32680
Women	9823	1807	11630
Gap	17602	3448	21050
Percentage of Women	26.4	25.6	26.2

Source: Ghosh Ambar Kuman(2022). Women’s Representation in India’s Parliament: Measuring Progress, Analysing Obstacles. ORF Occasional Paper No.382, Observer Research Foundation.

Table 1.2: Women Representation in Parliament by Geographical Region:

Region	Parliamentary Representation of Women(%)
American Continent	34.6
Caribbean	39.7
North America	38.2
South America	30.1

Central America	29.5
Sub Saharan Africa	26
East Africa	32
Southern Africa	31.8
Central Africa	22.5
West Africa	16.9
Middle East and North Africa	16.8
Middle East	17.1
North Africa	16.4
Europe	31.1
Nordic countries	44.7
Western Europe	35.2
Southern Europe	31.1
Central and Eastern Europe	24.3
Asia	20.9
Central Asia	26.1
South East Asia	21.8
East Asia	21.8
South Asia	16.7
Pacific	20.9
Australia and New Zealand	42.2
Pacific islands	6.0

Source: Ghosh Ambar Kumar(2022).Women’s Representation in India’s Parliament: Measuring progress Analysing Obstacles”, ORF Occasional Paper No.382, Observer Research Foundation.

As of May 2022, the global average of female representation in national parliament is only 26.2% as depicted in table 1.1, which itself shows the dismal representation of women at global level as depicted in table 1.1, The American, Europe and Sub Saharan Africa constitute women representation above the global average, and Asia, Pacific Region, Middle East and Northern Africa regions have women strength below average as depicted in Table 1.2. Women’s numerical strength within Asia also differs with South Asian countries performing worse than other countries, viz. As per the Indian Parliamentary Union Data May 2022, women’s proportion in Nepal was 34%,Bangladesh 21%, Pakistan 20%, Bhutan 17%, Sri Lanka 5%. India 14%, According to World Bank Data of 2021, Afghanistan (27%).

The most annoying facts globally are Saudi Arabia and Vatican city are the two only countries where women still do not enjoy Universal Adult Franchise, It is also quite lamenting to know that only five countries possess 50% or more women in parliament in single or lower houses including Rawanda (61%), Cuba (53%), Nicaragua (51%), Mexico (50%) and U.A.E.(50%)., Only 27 countries have crossed 40%, inculcating 15 European Countries, five latin American countries and Caribbean, five in Africa, one in Asia and one in Pacific. Internationally 24 states possess less than 10% of parliamentarians in single or lower houses inculcating three single lower chambers with negligible women proportion.

According to the data retrieved from 136 countries, women possess 34% of elected members in local deliberative bodies, Only two countries have secured 50% women’s numerical strength and 20 countries have more than 40% women globally. As per January 2022,women constitute varied proportions in deliberative local bodies too, with Central and Southern Asia (41%), Oceania (32%), Eastern and South Eastern Asia (28%), Latin America and Caribbean (25%), Sub Saharan Africa (25%), Western Asia and Northern Africa (18%).

State Provisions at National level:

Women’s Political Participation in Flux at National Level: Despite, numerous state interventions and legal proclamations, , However, women’s participation in Universal Adult Franchise shows an increasing trend nationwide but her numerical strength to hold significant political positions and her proportion as an hournable parliamentarian is still less than 15%, however, it depicts an increasing trend.

Table 1.3: Voter Turnout in Lok Sabha Elections (1962-2019)

Year	Male	Female	Total turnout	Gap in turnout
1962	63.3	46.6	55.4	16.7
1967	66.7	55.5	61.3	11.2
1971	60.9	49.1	55.3	11.8
1977	66	54.9	60.5	11.1
1980	62.2	51.2	56.9	11
1984	68.4	59.2	64	9.2
1989	66.1	57.3	62	8.8
1991	61.6	51.4	57	10.2
1996	62.1	53.4	58	8.7

1998	66	58	62	8
1999	64	55.7	60	8.3
2004	61.7	53.3	58.8	8.4
2009	60.2	55.8	58.2	4.4
2014	67.1	65.6	66.4	1.5
2019	67.3	66.9	67.1	0.4

Source: Ghosh Amber Kumar, (2022) Women's Representation in Indian Parliament: Measuring Progress, Analysing Obstacles" ORF Occasional Paper No.382, Observer Research Foundation, (Data retrieved from Election Commission of India).

Similarly, the trend of women representatives in Lok Sabha, show a relatively less than 15% proportion as compared to their male counterparts as illustrated below.

Year	Number of women candidates	No. of winning candidates	Percentage of winning candidates
1951	-	22	5
1957	45	22	5
1962	66	31	6
1967	67	29	6
1971	86	28	5
1977	70	19	4
1980	143	28	5
1984	171	43	8
1989	198	29	6
1991	330	39	7
1996	599	40	7
1998	274	43	8
1999	284	49	9
2004	355	45	8
2009	556	59	11
2014	668	66	12
2019	716	78	14

Source: Ghosh Amber Kumar(2022), " Women Representation in Parliament: Measuring Progress: Analysing Obstacles, ORF Occasional Paper No.382, Observer Research Foundation.(Data retrieved from Election Commission of India).

Women Representation at State level: Women quantitative representation in political institutions at state level is also quite trivial as illustrated in the table below.

Year	No. of winning candidates	Percentage
1952	15	6
1954	17	7
1956	20	8
1958	22	9
1960	24	10
1962	18	7
1964	21	8
1966	23	9
1968	22	9
1970	14	6
1972	18	7
1974	18	7
1976	24	10
1978	25	10
1980	29	12
1982	24	10
1984	24	10
1986	28	11
1988	25	10
1990	24	10
1992	17	7
1994	20	8
1996	19	8
1998	19	8

2000	22	9
2002	25	10
2004	28	11
2006	25	10
2008	24	10
2010	27	11
2012	26	11
2014	31	13
2016	27	11
2018	28	11
2020	25	10

Source: Ghosh Amber Kumar, (2022) Women Representation in Parliament: Measuring and Analysing Obstacles, ORF Foundation, Occasional Paper No.382, ORF.( Data retrieved from Election Commission of India).

Table 6: Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions:

S.No.	State	Total PRI Representatives	Total EWRs	Percent
1.	Andaman and Nicobar	858	306	36
2.	Andhra Pradesh	156050	78025	50
3	Assam	9383	3658	39
4	Bihar	26754	14609	55
5	Chhattisgarh	136573	71046	53
6	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	170465	93392	55
7	Daman and Dui	147	47	32
8	Goa	192	92	48
9	Gujarat	1555	571	37
10	Haryana	144080	71988	50
11	Himachal Pradesh	70035	29499	42
12	Jammu and Kashmir	28723	14398	50
13	Jharkhand	39850	13224	33
14	Karnataka	59638	30757	51
15	Kerala	101954	51030	50
16	Ladakh	18372	9630	52
17	Lakshadweep	110	41	37
18	Madhya Pradesh	392981	196490	49
19	Maharashtra	240635	128677	53
20	Manipur	1736	880	51
21	Odisha	107487	56627	53
22	Puducherry	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
23	Punjab	100312	41922	42
24	Rajasthan	126271	64802	51
25	Sikkim	1153	580	50
26	Tamil Nadu	106450	56407	53
27	Telangana	103468	52096	50
28	Tripura	6646	3006	45
29	Uttar Pradesh	913417	304538	33
30	Uttarakhand	62796	35177	56
31	West Bengal	59229	30458	51
	Total	3187320	1453973	46

Andaman and Nicobar has the minimum number of women representatives and Uttarakhand has maximum number of women representatives, As is passed through legislations twenty states such as Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal have made 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions. Only Kerala, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Jammu Kashmir, Manipur, West Bengal have 50% or more percentage of women sarpanches in Panchayats, Other states such as Assam, Gujarat, Goa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh have less than 50% reservation of women in Panchayats, even after possessing 50% reservation for women, but it is mainly focussing on quantitative empowerment of women as they possess no mechanism or instrument to measure qualitative empowerment.

#### Impediments in Political Participation:

- 1) Financial Loopholes: Women are unable to access their political rights due to financial loopholes and become dependent on their husband for the fulfilment of their needs and aspirations.
- 2) Patriarchal limitations: Women always face patriarchal limitations in their lifetimes. They have developed a patriarchal hegemony on their mindset .
- 3) International Conventions are not binding: International Conventions including Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against women is not binding .
- 4) Lack of confidence: Women lack confidence to come in politics, they feel inferiority complex as compared as males to join politics.
- 5) Disinterestedness: Women do not feel interested to join politics due to its corrupt nomenclature and muscle power which make it hard for women to survive in politics.
- 6) Lack of commitment of nations to international Conventions: Nations are not bound to fulfil international commitments set forth by various international conventions etc.
- 7) International Conventions are not binding: Most of the international conventions are not binding on the nation states.
- 8) Political lust and lack of will power of Political parties: The political lust of political parties do not allow women to fulfil their aspirations as there are quite less chances of women winning elections as a candidates, therefore they do not prefer to give tickets to women candidates.
- 9) Quantitative not Qualitative Empowerment: There persist not the quantitative empowerment but only the quantitative empowerment of women.
- 10) Lack of institutional support: Women do not get institutional support at the national level so that they could join politics. They are not provided with adequate reservation at national level.
- 11) Faulty political socialisation: Faulty political socialisation leads to decrease in political participation of women as most of the people assume politics as a dirty game.

#### Suggestions:

- 1) Conception of public private divide and male oriented perception in politics needs to be redefined by eliminating violent conduct and muscle power.
- 2) Despite adequate representation, qualitative and actual participation of women should be adequately measured by developing such type of mechanisms at all levels such as biometric machines.
- 3) It should be made compulsory for the political parties to allot one third of party seats to women candidates in all levels of election.
- 4) Proper policy monitoring and evaluation at ground level should be done through various bureaucrats before formatting or implementing any policy related to women.
- 5) Self consciousness should be developed among women to participate in politics.
- 6) All international conferences should be made binding for all nations to ensure their commitment towards it.
- 7) Use technology to gauge women participation at ground level.
- 8) The digital communication advancement can be used to capture the actual participation and percentage of their vote share in passing the decision of panchayat.
- 9) Biometric machines for attendance of sarpanches and other political representatives should be used at all levels of government.
- 10) Women themselves know the issues and grievances faced by women as a whole , therefore these problems can be better put at the floor of Parliament only by the women candidates effectively.
- 11) Online portals and applications should be devised to give a voice to women issues by calling response from general public.
- 12) Cooperative efforts are needed from the thrice institutions i.e.government institutions, society and women as a whole.

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