

## **Marginalization Of Women In Political Participation.**

**Ms.A.Uma Maheswari**

**Associate professor**

**Department of Sociology**

**M.O.P. Vaishnav College for Women**

**Chennai-600034.**

**&**

**Dr. S.SAKTHI**

**Associate Professor and Research Supervisor,**

**Department of Sociology,**

**Queen Mary's College, Chennai 600 004.**

### **Abstract**

Indian history glorified women as Goddesses and refers to the country as Bharat Mata or Mother India. The constitution of India has made provisions for equality between men and women in almost all walks of life. But throughout history and globally women have been denied political rights and India is not an exception. Like any other woman of the west, they have been denied social, economic, and political rights. At the initial stages of nation-building, a lot of affirmative philosophy of treating all citizens in equal footings was envisaged. Apart from universal adult franchise all the other gender-based equalities are yet to come into effect, including and the role of women in politics.

The U.N. also observes that women constitute the 'World's largest excluded category'. CEDAW defines discrimination against women as follows "discrimination against women and girls means differential treatment from men and boys in political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other fields that prevent them from fully accessing their human rights"( [un.org/womenwatch /cedaw](http://un.org/womenwatch/cedaw)).To overcome these challenges women need to be empowered.

To overcome these challenges women need to be empowered. Empowerment may be described as a process that helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and can make intelligent discussions in matters that affect them (Mamta Mokta 2014). This paper tries to through light on the various ways in which women have been sidelined and marginalized in participating in politics and also even after taking up leadership positions how women are treated.

## **Marginalization Of Women In Political Participation.**

### **Introduction**

According to Almond and Powell (1975), "Political participation is the involvement of the members of the society in the decision-making process of the political system". According to him, members means 'all the adults of the society including women who are eligible to vote and to be contested in elections'. In this way, his definition has been inclusive. Indian Constitution is firmly grounded with the principles of securing to all its citizen, justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, and accordingly contains several provisions for the welfare and development of women. Political empowerment of women means the role guaranteed to the women on equivalence with men in the political affairs of the state. According to William R. Schonfeld (1975) participating in the democracy of the country includes many aspects, among which he has identified ten types of activities, which are as follows: Running for or holding public or party offices, Belonging to a party or other political organizations, Working in election, Attending political meetings or rallies, Making financial contribution to a party or a candidate, Contacting a public official, Publicly expressing a political opinion to convince others, Partaking in political discussions, Voting and Exposing oneself to political stimuli. Thus political participation could be one activity or else encapsulating all the above-said activities.

Many studies have shown that there exists a difference in the political participation of men and women. This gender difference can be attributed to many factors. It can be observed that only in the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Saha elections held in May 2019, in India that the gender gap has narrowed concerning the voting percentage of men and women. Whereas the gender gap is very wide when it comes to the number of women who are offered a ticket and who contest in the elections at the state and national elections. The political participation level also varies with the form of political activities, like campaigning, attending meetings, distributing the pamphlet, canvassing for candidates and enrolling as members of a political party. Hence it is visible that over the years the differences in participation is becoming narrow with respect to voting behaviour or pattern and

widening concerning women's participation at the decision making level or policy framing level.

With this background this article tries to probe into questions like, Why is there a difference in political participation by men and women? What factors have been responsible for these gender differences? What are the causes, what are the impacts, and what are the consequences and such other questions which have been analyzed in this article? To put it in other words, Why gender differences have to lead to gender inequality? Why gender inequalities have led to gender discrimination and finally why discrimination has led to the marginalization of women in many fields and more so in the political field.

**Women and Marginalization:** Firstly let's look into what is marginalization. A marginalized group is a group of people who do not enjoy the same privileges as that of the rest of society. The marginalized group suffers multiple deprivations. The access of the marginalized groups to various resources of the society such as social, cultural, economic, and political aspects is very limited when compared to the people who are in the mainstream of society. The factors responsible for marginalization could be numerous. Talking about the level of marginalization, it could be at the individual level, community level, national or global level. Concerning women's political participation the reasons or justification given for discrimination and marginalization are varied. Discrimination starts from the family by its members and reiterates by the patriarchal system, followed by the community and cultural practices and also by the national and legislative policies and programs which are framed. Thus at micro-level discrimination starts and gets transformed into marginalization and social exclusion. This exclusion sometimes extends to even denying the basic human right to live by women as equal citizens in this country.

Ghana S. Gurung and Michael Kollmair(2005) writes, Marginality is generally used to describe and analyze socio-cultural, political and economic spheres, where disadvantaged people struggle to gain access (societal and spatial) to resources, and full participation in social life (Anderson and Larsen, 1998;

Brodwin, 2001; Davis, 2003b; Sommers et al., 1999). And according to them the two major conceptual frameworks of marginality are societal and spatial. Thus marginalized people might be socially, economically, politically and legally ignored, excluded, or neglected, and, therefore vulnerable to livelihood change. The nature of marginalization varies in different settings and periods. The religious ideological system, patriarchy, political economy of a country, and the overall social system have an impact on the marginalization of specific groups like that of a women's group. To be marginalized is to be distanced from power and resources that enable self-determination in economic, political, and social settings.

Marginality is an experience that affects millions of people throughout the world and in all the societies of the world women are one among the marginalized group. Women who are marginalized have relatively little control over their lives, and the resources available to them. This results in making them handicapped in contributing to society. This has a tremendous impact on the development of society at large.

In the case of Political marginalization the group is not allowed to participate democratically in decision making, and, hence, they lose their right to benefit out of it. We find that participation by women is minimized across the globe. It is men who hold power and lead politics around the world. This is true at all levels of power in politics, whether it is party leadership, elected offices, appointed offices, or at policy-making levels. UN General Assembly (2011) notes, "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."

Moosa - Mitha discusses the feminist movement as a direct reaction to the marginalization of white women in society. Women were excluded from the labor force, and their work in the home was not valued. Feminists argued that men and women should equally participate in the labor force, in the public and private sector, and the home.

Many studies have shown that despite constitutional provisions, welfare measures, developmental programs, educational and economic upliftment, the rate at which gender equality is achieved is insignificant. The only way is to have a sizable number of women representatives in the legislative bodies when it comes to political participation. Women cannot be at ease just by sending a representative and hoping for changes to come.

It is time that she goes to the next level of equal participation in politics at all levels. Women are marginalized in participating in politics is the truth that has to be accepted by the lawmakers. India has the second-largest population, approximately 1.37 billion people, of which 48% are females and 52% are male population. India is the world's largest democracy 900 million voters as per January 2019 election commission report (eci.gov.in). Hence the women's reservation bill needs to be passed.

Despite this Women's Reservation Bill or the Constitution Bill (108th Amendment), is a pending bill that proposes to reserve 33 percent of all seats in the Lower house of Parliament and all state legislative assemblies for women. Women's Reservation Bill was passed in Rajya Sabha on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010 but Lok Sabha could not clear the bill to date due to resistance from politicians, women activists and some regional parties on certain provisions of the bill (Richa Shanker 2014).

When viewed from this perspective what could be the real way in which women can equally participate like men in politics? The answer could be very simple, if only women have access to all the resources required to enter politics, she becomes eligible to enjoy the decision making power. The resources required for political empowerment are regarded as control over the material resources like financial resources, human resources like manpower and the charisma for mobilizing the vote bank, intellectual resources like information and knowledge of politics and above all the individual capabilities.

India became independent in the year 1947, in all the elections held since independence women had the voting rights. The details regarding the percentage

of men and women voters in the general elections are given below in the form of a table.

**Table 1**  
**Men and Women Voting Pattern –General Elections 1951 to 2019**

Election Year	Men Voting ( % )	Women Voting ( % )
1951	53.00	37.10
1957	56.00	38.77
1962	62.10	46.63
1967	66.70	55.48
1971	69.70	49.15
1977	65.62	54.96
1980	57.69	51.22
1984	63.61	68.17
1989	70.90	43.90
1991	52.56	47.42
1996	62.3	53.4
1998	66	58
1999	64	55.7
2004	61.7	53.3
2009	60.2	55.82
2014	67	65.63
2019		67.1

Source: eci.gov.in

The percentage of seats won against the seats contested is showing a declining trend only because the number of women contesting elections has increased. From the very 1<sup>st</sup> first general election from 1951 to the 17<sup>th</sup> general election held in 2019, there has been a steady increase in the number of women contestants, but in comparison to the women population, it is very small. According to the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections, as many as 78 women have been elected. This is the highest representation of women the Lower House has ever seen. The number is up from what was 62 women in 2014.

Thus one can understand despite all difficulties and deprivation there is a hand full of women who have reached the pinnacle. Many of those women have

reached also have been sidelined and marginalized and have been given portfolios of soft nature and again women-centric. Discrimination within the power structure is also a visible phenomenon.

### **Conclusion**

Though the difference in political participation by men and women can be attributed to the patriarchal system which is practiced in India over centuries the one most important factor which has been responsible for this gender difference getting internalized can be attributed to the socialization practices. Though the causes for non participation of women in politics over the years may be many but the outcome is that women are marginalized in participation. Thus after realising that women are not politically empowered ,it becomes imperative that the government take steps to imbibe inclusive approach to bring women into mainstream participation. Thus to conclude women are marginalized concerning political participation and one way of overcoming this is offering equality and making women reservation mandatory.

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