



# INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

( Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal )

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 7.560 (SJIF 2024)

## Empowering Women: Enhancing Leadership and Political Participation Across All Sectors

**Namrata Lotankar**

Assistant Professor,  
Seth Hirachand Mutha College of Arts, Commerce & Science,  
Kalyan (W.), (Maharashtra, India)

DOI No. **03.2021-11278686** DOI Link :: <https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2024-69843234/IRJHISIC2404010>

### Abstract:

*"Empowering women in leadership and political participation is essential for achieving gender equality and fostering inclusive decision-making processes across all sectors. The importance of empowering women in leadership roles, examining the benefits it brings to organizations, communities, and nations at large. By addressing barriers and promoting initiatives that support women's participation in politics and leadership positions, we can unlock untapped potential, drive innovation, and create more equitable societies. Through case studies and analysis, this paper aims to provide actionable insights and strategies for enhancing women's leadership and political engagement in diverse sectors, ultimately contributing to the advancement of gender equality and social progress."*

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, political participation, gender equality, community development, barriers,

### Introduction:

In today's rapidly evolving world, the imperative to empower women in leadership and political participation stands as a cornerstone for achieving true gender equality and fostering inclusive decision-making processes across all sectors. It is impossible to overstate the significance of this endeavor, as it not only addresses historical injustices but also unlocks the full potential of societies by harnessing the talents and perspectives of half of their populations. Women in leadership roles, examining the myriad benefits it brings to organizations, communities, and nations at large. Participation in democratic processes serves as a hallmark of a robustly functioning system. Beyond traditional political engagements, the assessment of its effectiveness encompasses novel dimensions, unbound by institutionalization, yet wielding considerable influence on both politics and society. Politics, encompassing governance, representation, policy formulation, authority, and societal status, is intrinsically intertwined with government affairs. Individuals actively involved in these processes

are commonly referred to as political participants. Their involvement ensures the populace's ability to contribute to shaping society's collective goals and determining the most effective strategies to achieve them. Political engagement transcends mere voting rights; it encompasses sharing authority and navigating the tension between women's growing democratic aspirations and the constrained avenues available to them within the nation's democratic framework, operations, and political decision-making mechanisms. The persistence of the gender gap despite heightened awareness underscores the conflict at hand. Strengthening the democratic framework necessitates advocating for women to occupy at least 33% of seats in both state and national governance, coupled with a resolute stance against all forms of violence targeting women. Institutional barriers must be dismantled to ensure unhindered access for women to political opportunities, thereby closing the gender gap in decision-making and policy formulation across all levels of government. True political engagement lies in actively participating in these voluntary efforts, whereby the public, whether directly or indirectly, contributes to lawmaking and shaping public policy.

Active political engagement entails genuine involvement in voluntary endeavors where members of the public, whether directly or indirectly, participate in shaping laws and crafting public policy. When women's participation in governance systems is insufficient, it results in state initiatives that lack inclusivity and democratic principles. Integration of women into local government is essential for advancing gender equality and fostering responsive policymaking. Their inclusion brings diverse perspectives and addresses varied needs within policy and decision-making processes. Women's firsthand experiences in household and community responsibilities equip them with valuable insights crucial for long-term development. Their active participation in political spheres serves as a reliable gauge of global democratic progress, signaling the removal of barriers imposed by gender disparity and the nation's advancement toward prosperity and well-being.

### **Historical Background:**

The reform movements played a role in the history of Indian women's political participation. The nineteenth century was marked by the conflicts between Indian nationalists and the colonial powers. This class made attempts to reform the Indian society through campaigns against the caste system, polytheism, idol worship, animism, purdah, child marriage, and sati etc., Raja Ram Mohan Roy focused his efforts on women's education and abolition of sati. In the early 1850s, a campaign by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar resulted in the passage of the Widow Remarriage Act, 1856. Several eminent women reformers participated in these movements both on an all-India Basis and from the Maharashtra region with the help of organizations like the Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Ramabai Ranade, and Serennai Cursetji established the Bharat Mahila Parishad, Arya Mahila Samaj, and Stri Zarhosti Mandal for philanthropic and

charitable work for the upliftment and enlightenment women. Begum Shah Nawaz's mother, Amir-un-Nisa, became Founder-member of Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam in Punjab. However, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani started the first independent women's organization, the Bharat Stree Mahamandal, which had its first meeting in Allahabad in 1910. The Bharat Stree Mahamandal planned to open branches in all parts of India to promote female education. It established branches in Lahore, Allahabad, Delhi, Karachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Midnapur and Kolkata to bring together women, irrespective of their caste, creed, class and party affiliation.

### **Women's political representation in India:**

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment, passed in 1992, stipulated that women shall hold one-third of the posts as head of village governments nationwide. The goal of the policy's introduction was to boost women's political representation locally. Since then, a substantial amount of research has been conducted to evaluate the policy's effects, showing a notable rise in the proportion of women elected to the position of village sarpanch (Duflo 2005). Additionally, an empirical analysis by O'Connell (2020) demonstrates that a significant amount of the rise of female candidates running for state and federal legislature seats during the mid-1990s can be attributed to the mandate. Still, there aren't enough women in higher positions. Specifically, women's representation at the state level has fallen well short of expectations, with women excluded. As of March 30, 2021, information about the makeup of state government leadership was gathered by the IGC from their websites. There are no female ministers in six Indian states, including Manipur, Sikkim, and Nagaland. Not a single state has nearly one-third female ministers; Tamil Nadu has the highest percentage at 13%, while 68% of states have less than 10% of women in state leadership positions.

The Rajya Sabha, the upper house of parliament, enacted the Women's Reservation Bill in 2010, which aims to change the Indian Constitution to reserve a third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, and all state legislative assemblies. To become a law, the bill must still be placed to a vote in the Lok Sabha, the lower chamber. The bill has gained attention once more in the public conversation as more women are acknowledged as needed for political representation at all governmental levels.

### **Women as political leaders:**

However, there are other advantageous social consequences associated with the presence of female political leaders. Iyer and Mani (2012) analyze data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and find that, following the 1993 amendment, which boosted women's political participation, there was a significant 26% rise in recorded crimes against women. After more investigation, the researchers discover that this is more due to the increased reporting of these crimes than it is to a rise in the actual crimes against women.



Women's political representatives have seen an improvement in police responsiveness, which encourages women to voice their concerns. The mechanism does not appear to work for political candidatures, despite the widespread belief that female political leaders can act as role models for girls and women in society. Bhalotra and Clots Iyer (2018) conducted an analysis of constituency-level data pertaining to all state elections held in India between 1980 and 2007. Their findings indicate a decrease in the number of new female candidates that emerge after a woman wins an election

### **Women as active citizens:**

Despite the remarkable increase in the sex ratio of voters in India over the decades, with women outnumbering men in the 2019 general election for the first time, there remains a noticeable disparity in women's participation in politically oriented public activities. While women are less likely to engage in activities like election campaigns or protests, the gender gap is particularly evident in non-electoral participation, such as attending village meetings. Factors contributing to this gap include lower political knowledge, self-assessed leadership skills, and societal constraints like needing permission to go outside.

### **Challenges faced by women as a political leader:**

- 1. Gender Bias and Discrimination:** Women in political leadership encounter pervasive gender bias and discrimination, which undermine their authority and diminish their contributions. This bias can manifest in subtle ways, such as being interrupted more frequently or having their ideas dismissed, to more overt forms of discrimination, such as unequal pay or fewer opportunities for advancement.
- 2. Stereotypes:** Stereotypes about gender roles and leadership abilities create additional hurdles for women in politics. Women may be pigeonholed into certain roles or discouraged from pursuing leadership positions altogether based on outdated assumptions about their capabilities.
- 3. Lack of Support Networks:** Women often face a lack of support networks within political institutions and parties. Without strong networks to provide mentorship, guidance, and advocacy, women may struggle to navigate the complexities of politics and advance their careers.
- 4. Unequal Access to Resources and Opportunities:** Structural inequalities in access to resources, including campaign funding, media coverage, and political endorsements, disproportionately disadvantage women in politics. This lack of access can hinder their ability to compete effectively and amplify the barriers they face in breaking through traditional male-dominated power structures.
- 5. Double Standards in Behavior and Appearance:** Women in political leadership are held to higher standards than their male counterparts when it comes to behavior, appearance, and communication style. They may face criticism for being too assertive or too passive, too ambitious or too emotional, further constraining their ability to lead authentically.

**6. Balancing Family and Career Responsibilities:** The expectation for women to balance family and career responsibilities adds another layer of complexity to their political careers. Juggling the demands of public office with caregiving duties can be challenging and may require women to make difficult choices about their priorities and commitments.

**7. Resistance and Skepticism:** Women often encounter resistance and skepticism from male colleagues and constituents who question their competence and legitimacy as leaders. This skepticism can undermine women's confidence and credibility, making it harder for them to garner support and advance their policy agendas.

**8. Perseverance and Resilience:** Despite these formidable challenges, many women continue to persevere and make significant contributions to political leadership. Their resilience in the face of adversity serves as a testament to their commitment to public service and their determination to create a more inclusive and equitable political system.

**9. Trailblazing and Breaking Barriers:** Women who succeed in political leadership roles often become trailblazers and role models for future generations. By breaking through barriers and challenging the status quo, they pave the way for other women to follow in their footsteps and make their mark on the political landscape.

**10. Collective Action and Advocacy:** Addressing the challenges faced by women in political leadership requires collective action and advocacy efforts. By mobilizing support, raising awareness about gender inequalities, and pushing for policy reforms, individuals and organizations can help create a more level playing field for women in politics.

#### **Enhancing Women's Political Engagement Initiative:**

Strengthening women's political participation in India requires targeted efforts. Civil society organizations should actively engage in educating women about their rights and providing training programs at both local and national levels. These programs should cover various aspects of governance, including the provisions of the 73rd amendment, conducting meetings, and understanding government schemes. Additionally, women should be encouraged to form self-help groups and women's organizations, with financial support from the government for those promoting women's representation in politics.

The media can significantly contribute by showcasing women's positive impacts in politics while avoiding negative gender-based remarks. Governments should prioritize gender equality in decision-making bodies by not only boosting female representation in ministerial and elected roles but also fostering gender-equitable work environments. This can be achieved through gender-responsive policies like parental leave, childcare services, and fixed hours for voting and debates, ensuring female leaders operate in inclusive settings. Implementing well-designed quotas for women

can serve as effective, temporary measures to enhance their access to decision-making positions, as evidenced by countries with higher female legislators, such as Rwanda, where quotas have had a remarkable impact.

### **Case Study - Political leader - Smriti Irani:**

The landscape of Indian politics has witnessed the emergence of notable women leaders who have made significant contributions to the empowerment of women and the advancement of society. Among them, Smriti Irani stands out as a compelling case study, transitioning from a career in modeling and acting to becoming a prominent political figure. Her journey reflects the complexities and challenges faced by women in entering and excelling in the political arena, while also showcasing the potential for driving meaningful change through leadership roles. This paper aims to explore the multifaceted aspects of Smriti Irani's career, highlighting her achievements, challenges, and the broader implications for women's empowerment in India.

### **Formative Years and Career Path:**

Born into a middle-class family, Smriti Irani's early life was marked by determination and resilience. Despite facing financial constraints, she pursued her education and later ventured into the entertainment industry, where she gained recognition as a television actress. However, her foray into politics marked a significant turning point in her career trajectory. The decision to enter politics was driven by a desire to effect positive change and address pressing societal issues, particularly concerning women and children.

### **Challenges Faced in Politics:**

The transition from the glamor of the entertainment industry to the rigorous world of politics presented numerous challenges for Smriti Irani. As a woman entering a predominantly male-dominated domain, she encountered skepticism, criticism, and gender biases. However, her steadfast resolve and strategic approach enabled her to overcome these obstacles and carve a niche for herself in the political landscape.

### **Policies and Initiatives:**

As the Minister of Women and Child Development in India, Smriti Irani spearheaded various policies and initiatives aimed at empowering women across diverse sectors. From enhancing access to education and healthcare to promoting women's participation in decision-making processes, her tenure witnessed a comprehensive approach to address the multifaceted challenges faced by women in India. Additionally, Irani advocated for legislative reforms and institutional mechanisms to combat gender-based discrimination and violence, furthering the cause of women's empowerment.

The impact of Smriti Irani's initiatives on women's participation and empowerment in India is significant and far-reaching. By prioritizing gender-inclusive policies and challenging traditional

gender norms, Irani's leadership has paved the way for greater opportunities and representation for women in the political arena and beyond. Moreover, her experiences offer valuable insights for aspiring female leaders and policymakers, highlighting the importance of resilience, strategic planning, and unwavering commitment in driving transformative change.

Smriti Irani's journey presents a compelling case study, offering insights into the complex dynamics of women's empowerment and political leadership. Her remarkable career trajectory showcases women's capacity to enact positive change and catalyze societal transformation.

As India progresses on its path towards achieving gender equality and fostering inclusive governance, the insights gleaned from Smriti Irani's experiences hold significant value in shaping the trajectory of women's leadership and empowerment in the nation's future.

### **Conclusion:**

The research paper underscores the critical importance of empowering women in leadership and political participation to achieve gender equality and foster inclusive decision-making processes across all sectors. Through an examination of historical backgrounds, current challenges, and initiatives, the paper highlights the multifaceted nature of women's engagement in politics and leadership roles in India.

Despite significant strides, women continue to face numerous challenges, including gender bias, stereotypes, lack of support networks, and unequal access to resources. However, the paper also identifies promising initiatives and strategies to enhance women's political engagement, such as education, training programs, media representation, and gender-responsive policies.

The case study of Smriti Irani exemplifies the potential for women to overcome barriers and drive meaningful change in the political arena. Her journey underscores the importance of resilience, strategic planning, and unwavering commitment in advancing women's empowerment and fostering inclusive governance.

Moving forward, concerted efforts are needed from civil society, government, media, and political institutions to address the systemic barriers faced by women and create a more equitable and inclusive political landscape. By advocating for gender-inclusive policies, promoting women's representation, and challenging traditional gender norms, India can pave the way for greater opportunities and participation for women in leadership roles, ultimately contributing to the advancement of gender equality and social progress.

### **Reference:**

1. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/international-women-s-day-women-mps-push-for-33-reservation-in-parliament-bill-101615185297685.html>
2. <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/social-identity/the-power-of-womens-political-voice.html>

3. <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/social-identity/role-model-effects-women-s-political-participation-in-india.html>
4. <https://theprint.in/opinion/women-voters-in-indian-democracy-a-silent-revolution/233191/>
5. <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/social-identity/the-road-not-taken-gender-gaps-along-paths-to-political-power.html>
6. <https://economics.mit.edu/files/792>
7. [file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/25228-Article%20Text-85039-1-10-20200506%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/25228-Article%20Text-85039-1-10-20200506%20(3).pdf)
8. [file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/maharashtra%20ppp%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/maharashtra%20ppp%20(1).pdf)
9. [file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/16.-POLITICAL-PARTICIPATION-OF-WOMEN-IN-INDIA%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/16.-POLITICAL-PARTICIPATION-OF-WOMEN-IN-INDIA%20(1).pdf)
10. [file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/papper3%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/papper3%20(1).pdf)
11. [file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/Session%206%20India%20paper%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/Session%206%20India%20paper%20(1).pdf)
12. [file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/ppp2%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/ppp2%20(1).pdf)
13. <https://www.theigc.org/blogs/gender-equality/leaders-and-citizens-womens-political-participation-india>

