

## WOMEN IN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION: CONCERNS AND OBSTACLES

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### **Abstract**

*Women encounter numerous barriers when it comes to engaging in political activities. Discriminatory laws and organisations continue to impose structural impediments that restrict women's opportunities to pursue political office. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have significantly enhanced the political engagement of women and the functioning of grassroots democracy. These amendments have opened up fresh avenues for women to participate in local governance. The Indian government increased the quota for women in all levels of the Panchayati Raj system from 33 percent to 50 percent. Gender equality and equal opportunities for all genders are essential elements for the advancement of society and the maintenance of national and international security. Women's growing political involvement serves as a driving force for them to overcome conventional barriers to advancement, enabling them to attain greater leadership roles and develop the necessary skills and attributes to be effective political leaders. Research has demonstrated that women's engagement in politics yields numerous advantages for themselves, such as enhancing their personal and professional attributes and competencies. This, in turn, enables them to be more attentive and proactive in addressing public issues. Additionally, the inclusion of women in positions of power within local governance fosters positive relationships and outcomes. Thus, this study aimed to examine the perceived attributes and competencies of female political leaders in the context of their political engagement. Additionally, it sought to investigate the obstacles and gender-related encounters encountered by women in positions of political leadership.*

**Keywords:** Political participation, Gender Equality, Empowerment, Challenges, Gender Experience.

### **Introduction**

Political participation is viewed in terms of membership in a political party, standing for election, holding office, being involved in social issues, etc. This also assumes basic levels of confidence, skills, and resources. Although the Constitution of India removed gender inequalities based on caste and gender, discrimination continues to be a widespread barrier to women's political participation. Today, there is an urgent need to define women's political participation as more than just women serving public office. Discriminatory practices, social norms, and cultural perceptions suggest that women are not well-suited for leadership and decision-making positions. They are supposed to fulfil family and child-care responsibilities and discourage women's involvement in politics. Women's limited participation in political decision-making acts as a barrier to making policy and service delivery more responsive to women's needs and more accountable to women.

Women's participation in politics is not very impressive in India. The number of female politicians is very low compared to men. Participation in voting cannot be regarded as a real indicator of political empowerment. Still, women have very low representation in the higher cadres of political parties, especially in policy-making executive bodies. Deprivation of power due to gender inequality is a political reality in India. Without women's participation in politics, issues concerning women would remain neglected. It is a fact that the participation of women in political processes will reinforce their economic and social emancipation.

## **Review of Literature**

"Barriers to the Political Participation of Women: A Global Perspective." by Ara (2019), in this study, academics and researchers have identified several interrelated factors that give rise to multiple issues ranging from responsibilities for family and children, traditional gender division of labour, socialization processes, the role of political parties, religious and cultural doctrines, and financial barriers as major obstacles to women's political participation. The factors can be broadly categorized as socio-economic, political, and institutional, socio-cultural, and ideological.

Women leaders have higher and more difficult problems than men since they must also contend with perceptions. With more women taking on leadership roles, previously unrecognized concerns and obstacles associated with such a position are now becoming apparent. Life is becoming increasingly tough for them due to rising stress levels and multiple responsibilities at work and at home, as well as the continual need to prove themselves (Women and Leadership, n.d.). Women's political engagement is hampered or facilitated by a variety of circumstances, including socioeconomic status, geographical, cultural, and political system form (Shvedova, 2007).

A study on women's political participation and leadership in India: Examining the challenges faced by Titty Varghese (2020) in her study Nearly 17 women representatives acknowledge that such an inequality results in creating the stigma of women in society that they are weak or not tough enough to lead society. Hence, it is imperative to change the mindset of Kerala society to stigmatise women from in-capable to capable.

The perceptions of men and women vary in several respects, owing to their specific social positions and responsibilities. The traditional gender roles of men and women mean that women usually have multiple tasks at home and on the job in society. However, females are still left with less ability to engage economically throughout the competition of time and labour, together with pervasive societal limitations on the right of women to engage in public action. It renders women voiceless in their lives and, in general, in their capacity to play a significant role in sustained growth (Makhabane, 2002). Table 5 shows the importance of knowledge of administrative tasks for women's successful leadership and explains how it affects their careers. A panchayath leader should have skills for development activities and fulfilling responsibilities. As most of the female representatives did not have prior experience in administration tasks, the delegation must receive

specific training. In addition, 23 respondents agree that to gain the ability to provide services and reach out to people, they require technical skills along with administration.

## **Methodology**

The present study mainly focuses on the various challenges and gender stereotyping attitudes towards the political participation of women ward members. The specific objective is to study the socio-economic and demographic profile of the respondents, the perceived qualities and skills of women political leaders through political participation, and to study the challenges and gender experiences that women face in their political leadership. This study was conducted among women ward members in the Chalakudy Block panchayat. The researcher adopted a simple random sampling method. In this study, the data was collected through a questionnaire.

## **Result and Discussion**

The study reveals that, political participation enables women politicians to improve their personal skills and qualities, which are essential to accomplishing their political role in their political field. Political leaders with political skills and qualities can use their own skills to successfully meet their political leadership challenges and to improve the performance and productivity of their teams. Possessing political skills will enhance a leader's effectiveness at work, improve their team's performance, and improve their own chances of career advancement. Politicians who have these political skill practices will be more adept at maximizing and leveraging their relationships with others and society at work. If used properly, political skills and qualities can help them maintain a positive image in their political field and can help drive their individual, team, and community performance. Various forms of challenges met by the respondents, such as the favorable attitude of family, being active on social media, cooperation from officials, Security, Mental health well-being, restraint factors, Financial security, training programs, and personal and professional life balance. Various household responsibilities limit the woman's ability to spend more time on social development, especially as sometimes they are required to work at night. As women leaders in a panchayath, they must carry out government projects promptly. However, there are situations, regardless of their financial security, where leaders sometimes spend money from their own hands to engage in social development. That's why they may face financial insecurities. Through the double burden of household work and professional work, they might face low levels of mental health and well-being. At times, prejudicial acts from colleagues regarding the decisions of female representatives seem like an essential challenge for them to be in the political realm.

The study further reveals that inequality results in creating the stigma of women in society that they are weak or not tough enough to lead society. Hence, it is imperative to change the mindset of Kerala society to stigmatize women from in-capable to capable. The perceptions of men and women vary in several respects, owing to their specific social positions and responsibilities. The traditional gender roles of men and women mean that women usually have multiple tasks at home

and on the job in society. However, females are still left with less ability to engage economically throughout the competition of time and labour, together with pervasive societal limitations on the right of women to engage in public action. It renders women voiceless in their lives and, in general, in their capacity to play a significant role in sustained growth.

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