

## Role of Women Elite in Indian Politics

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### ABSTRACT

The political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women. The recognition of women's political equality in the Indian constitution was a radical departure, not only from the inherited norms of most advanced countries. The two major forces which acted as catalysts in the achievements of political equality of women were the national movement and the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Women leaders in the period immediately after independence were mostly veterans from the freedom struggle. The absence of an active women's movement and the failure of political organizations to mobilize women for the solution of their problems have prevented women from exerting adequate pressure on political institutions. The small number of women in the legislatures and their lack of position in the decision-making bodies within the parties have limited their capacity to voice women's problems in these institutions. Though only a few women reached the highest level of power and authority, those who did so have been recognized for their administrative skills and capacity to manage their own affairs. Since 1952, sixteen women have served the Union Government as Ministers and several have served as Chairmen of both Houses of Parliament. In spite of special powers provided by Article 15(3) of the Constitution, almost no efforts have been made to redress the unequal status of women in different spheres.

**Keywords:** *Women Elite, Indian Politics*

Level of political awareness of women vary from region to region, class to class and community to community. They are conditioned greatly by the political culture of the area, the approach of political parties to women and the quality of the leadership. We found that the influence of education urbanization and exposure to mass media is not always uniform. Though literacy seems to have a direct influence on both awareness and participation, in spite of all the expansion that has taken place in the formal education system, the vast majority of Indian women have remained outside the reach of all education and are still illiterate.

The political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women. The recognition of women's political equality in the Indian constitution was a radical departure, not only from the inherited norms of most advanced countries. The two major forces which acted as catalysts in the achievements of political equality of women

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were the national movement and the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi as he had declared himself to be 'uncompromising' in the matter of women's rights. He believed that women had a positive role to play in the reconstruction of society and that the recognition of their equality was an essential step to bring about social justice. His efforts resulted to the massive participation by the women in the Freedom Movement, had a direct impact on the political and social elite.

Election statistics indicate a general trend of increase in the turnout of women voters. The data shows that the proportion of women voters who turned out to vote (70.42%) was higher than that of the men (68.78%). According to election data the steady increase of women voters at each election shows that the response of women to the political rights conferred on them by the constitution is improving. But there are some factors which deter women from active participation in politics such as:

- the increasing expense of elections (this constitutes the biggest handicap, as the majority of women do not command any independent means).
- threats of violence.
- character assassination.

The two latter factors have increased recently and have also prevented many women from contesting elections.

There is some evidence of disillusionment among women with the political process partly because of the prevalence of corruption and inefficiency in political circles, and also because women feel that politics has not solved the problems which affect their daily lives. Some surveys in different states indicates one common trend, that women are more concerned with problems that affect their day to day lives. The majority felt that the greatest problems before the country were unemployment and poverty, rising prices, corruption and breakdown of law and order. They have shown themselves ready to protest against rising prices, adulteration of food unemployment and poverty.

Women leaders in the period immediately after independence were mostly veterans from the freedom struggle. They had also worked in the movement for women's welfare and development, were spokesmen of the women's cause in the representative bodies, and played an important role in mobilizing public opinion in support of the social legislation that changed the legal status of women within the first few years after independence. Some of them also helped to shape the policies and the programmes for women's development that were taken up by Government at that time. Most of these leaders, who had attained a national stature during the freedom struggle, became members of the Central Government or Parliament. In States, a new generation entered politics. Reviews suggest that while experience of social work among women is still considered a qualification for candidates to local bodies, it has ceased to be so for entry to the legislature. We were informed by political workers that politics at the State level seldom reflects social differences at present. The women involved in State politics mostly come from the economic and political elite of States and enter the representative process, more because of support within a party, rather than through work among the people.

Women form the minority among the party workers. When elected to the legislature, they see their role as representatives of the people with no special responsibility to women. In earlier years, their championship of women's causes was concerted, cutting across party

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lines, in recent years, however, women legislators have not shown such concern or interest in problems that effect women specifically. This criticism was voiced by many women outside the circle of active politicians. Debates and discussions in the legislative bodies have given very meager attention to women's problems.

We are of the view that the political elite of the country, of both sex, has perhaps come to believe that the problems of women had practically been solved with the legal and administrative measures adopted in the first few years after independence. The very articulate debates of earlier years on women's problems, in which women members played a major role, have not been repeated since. The absence of an active women's movement and the failure of political organizations to mobilize women for the solution of their problems have prevented women from exerting adequate pressure on political institutions. The small number of women in the legislatures and their lack of position in the decision-making bodies within the parties have limited their capacity to voice women's problems in these institutions. Though only a few women reached the highest level of power and authority, those who did so have been recognized for their administrative skills and capacity to manage their own affairs. Since 1952, sixteen women have served the Union Government as Ministers and several have served as Chairmen of both Houses of Parliament. As we see Indian Politics has only one female Indian Prime Minister since Independence –Smt. Indira Gandhi (1966-1977, 1980-1984) tenure eleven years fifty nine days.

### *List of female C.M.'s of India*

Term in Office						
No.	Name (Birth-Death)	Assumed Office	Left Office	Time in Office	State/Union	Political Party
1	Sucheta Kriplani (1908-1974)	2 Oct. 1963	13 March 1967	3 years 162 days	Uttar Pradesh	Indian National Congress
2	Nandini Satpathy (1931-2006)	14 June 1972,	3 March 1973	3 years 182 days	Odisha	Indian National Congress
		6 March 1974	16 Dec. 1976			
3	Shashikal Kadodkar (1935-2016)	12 Aug 1973	27 April 1979	5 years 258 days	Goa	Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party
4	Anwara Taimur (1936-2020)	6 Dec.1980	30 June 1981	206 days	Assam	Indian National Congress
5	V.N.Janaki Ramachndran (1923-1996)	7 Jan 1988	30 Jan 1988	23 days	Tamil Nadu	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
6	J.Jayalalithaa (1948-2016)	24 Junr 1991	18 Oct. 1995	14 years 124 days	Tamil Nadu	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
7	Mayawati (1956-)	21 March 1997	15 March 2012	7 years 5 days	Uttar Pradesh	Bahujan Samaj Party.
8	Rajinder Kaur Bhattal (1945-)	21 Nov. 1996	12 Feb. 1997	83 days	Punjab	Indian National Congress
9	Rabri Devi (1955- )	25 July 1997	6 March 2005	7 years 190 days	Bihar	Rashtriya Janata Dal

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Term in Office						
No.	Name (Birth-Death)	Assumed Office	Left Office	Time in Office	State/Union	Political Party
10	Sushma Swaraj (1952-2019)	12 Oct. 1998	3 Dec. 1998	52 days	National Capital Territory of Delhi.	Bhartiya Janta Party
11	Sheila Dikshit (1938-2019)	3 Dec. 1998	28 Dec.2013	15 years 25 days	National Capital Territory of Delhi.	Indian National Congress
12	Uma Bharti (1959 )	8 Dec. 2003	23 Aug.2004	259 days	Madhya Pradesh	Bhartiya Janta Party
13	Vasundhara Raje (1953- )	8 Dec. 2003	17 Dec 2018	10 years 9 days	Rajasthan	Bhartiya Janta Party
14	Mamta Banerjee (1955- )	20 May 2011	Incumbent	11 years 340 days	West Bengal	All India Trinamool Congress
15	Anandiben Patel (1941- )	22 May 2014	7 Aug 2016	2 years 77 days	Gujajrat	Bhartiya Janta Party
16	Mehbooba Murfti (1959- )	4 April 2016	19 June 2018	2 years 76 days	Jammu & Kashmir	Jammu & Kashmir People Democratic Party

In spite of increase in participation, women's ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible. Parties have tended to see women as appendages of the males. Among women, the leadership has become diffused and diverse, with sharp contradictions in their regard and concern for the inequalities that affect the status of women in every sphere-social, economic, and political. The revolution in status of women for which constitutional equality was to be only the instrument, still remains a very distant objective.

In spite of special powers provided by Article 15(3) of the Constitution, almost no efforts have been made to redress the unequal status of women in different spheres. Through men recognize and advocate the desirability of giving equal opportunities to women in economic and political spheres, the norms and attitudes regarding a woman's role in society remain traditional. In this sense, the new rights provided to them seem to be only concessional.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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