

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BIHAR: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES.

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Abstract

One of the most important indicators of democratic inclusion and gender justice is the level of political involvement among women. In the Indian state of Bihar, where traditional socio-cultural norms and political dynamics frequently impact the public sphere, women's participation in politics has seen both progress and continuing problems. This is because the public sphere is often shaped by these factors. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the landscape of women's political involvement in Bihar. Specifically, the research will investigate the effects of reservation legislation, the historical development of women's political engagement, and the role that women play in local administration through Panchayati Raj Institutions. This underlines the opportunities that have been created as a result of legislative changes and affirmative action policies, such as the reserving of fifty percent of the seats in panchayat elections for women, which has resulted in a large rise in the numerical representation of women. On the other hand, it also provides an in-depth analysis of the persistent problems that women face, such as patriarchal views, political tokenism, restricted decision-making authority, and a lack of education and financial independence among women. The research makes use of a mixed-method approach, which combines qualitative insights gleaned from field interviews and policy analysis with quantitative data. At the end of the day, it is said that although Bihar has achieved significant progress in advancing women's political empowerment, further efforts in capacity-building, gender-sensitive governance, and social reform are necessary in order to translate representation into actual involvement and impact.

Keywords: *Women's, Political, Participation, Challenges*

Introduction

One of the most fundamental rights and an essential component of democratic government is the ability to participate in political processes. Not only does it indicate the power of democratic institutions, but it also shows the extent to which a society is socially inclusive and equitable across its whole. The engagement of women in politics has been a subject of increased concern in India, particularly in the context of local governance and grassroots democracy. This is particularly the case in the context of the Indian government. Taking into consideration its one-of-a-kind sociopolitical setting, historical backwardness, and current attempts at decentralisation and empowerment through reservation legislation, the state of Bihar makes a compelling case in this respect. The state of Bihar has historically been characterised by strongly ingrained patriarchy, low literacy rates among women, and social hierarchies, all of which have combined limited the extent of women's participation in public life. Nevertheless, important policy interventions in the past several decades, particularly the implementation of a reservation of fifty percent of the seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for women, have resulted in the transformation of the political arena by establishing a structured space for the representation of women. The implementation of these changes has made it possible for thousands of women, many of whom come from under-represented populations, to be elected

to political positions such as sarpanches, ward members, and other municipal officials. The path towards meaningful political involvement is nevertheless plagued with obstacles, despite the fact that these accomplishments have been celebrated. In addition to facing opposition from society and a lack of political expertise, many women who hold positions of authority are sometimes eclipsed by male relatives who function as proxies. Furthermore, the disparity between de jure representation and de facto involvement continues to exist, which raises issues regarding the degree to which women are actually empowered in the realm of politics. The purpose of this study is to investigate the opportunities and problems that are associated with the political engagement of women in the state of Bihar. It explores the socio-economic and political elements that influence women's involvement, evaluates the efficiency of the policies that are now in place, and identifies the obstacles that prevent women from achieving actual political empowerment. The purpose of this study is to provide a complete knowledge of the changing role of women in Bihar's political landscape and the steps that are required to increase their involvement. This will be accomplished by evaluating these elements via the use of statistical data as well as narratives from the ground level.

Particularly after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, which institutionalised Panchayati Raj in rural India and enforced reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, the movement to include women in Bihar's political processes gained speed. This was especially the case when the act was passed. This reservation was increased to fifty percent for women in Bihar in 2006, making it one of the first states to do so. Bihar is a progressive state. In addition to increasing the number of women who are represented in government, the purpose of this courageous endeavour was to democratise governance by including the viewpoints of women into the decision-making process at the grassroots level. There have been a number of beneficial consequences that have resulted from the growth in the political representation of women. Based on studies and reports from the field, it has been shown that elected women representatives (EWRs) have been actively involved in tackling local concerns such as water supply, sanitation, education, and health services. It has been observed that women in positions of authority, particularly in rural regions, have a propensity to prioritise the welfare of the community, frequently bringing greater openness and responsibility to the government of local communities. In many instances, their presence has prompted additional women to join in public life and has challenged gender conventions that have been in place for a very long time. On the other hand, these advancements are accompanied with major impediments that are both structural and attitude-based. The capacity of many women to act autonomously within political responsibilities is nevertheless hindered by factors such as social conditioning, poorer educational attainment, a lack of information of political processes, and economic reliance. In several instances, male relatives, who are sometimes referred to as "proxy leaders," wield control over the decisions that are made by female delegates. This undermines the sense of empowerment that the reservation system strives to accomplish. It is also important to note that political parties play a significant impact in determining the course of women's engagement. In spite of the fact that political parties are increasingly fielding female candidates in municipal elections as a result of obligatory quotas, their commitment to women's leadership outside the reservation framework continues to be lacking. There is a striking disparity between the involvement of women at the grassroots level and the exclusion of women at higher levels, as seen by the fact that very few women from Bihar have achieved major positions in state-level or national politics. Furthermore, the intersection of gender and caste dynamics, which are firmly ingrained in the sociopolitical fabric of Bihar, results in the creation of many layers of disadvantage. Dual discrimination is something that Dalit and marginalised women frequently experience, which makes

it even more challenging for them to exercise their authority or get access to resources. A further reinforcement of these barriers is provided by acts of violence, intimidation, and systematic bias, which in turn limits the transformational potential of their political activity.

Theoretical Foundations of Women's Political Participation

knowledge women's political inclusion and the structural obstacles they encounter has been made possible by feminist political theory, which has offered a framework for this knowledge. It has been argued by academics such as Nancy Fraser (1990) and Iris Marion Young (2000) that in order to achieve gender parity in political arenas, it is necessary to both redistribute resources and acknowledge the marginalisation that is based on identity. As a result, participation has to be both quantitative and substantial.

Gender Quotas and Political Reservation in India

During the course of several research, the influence of gender quotas on political empowerment has been investigated. Researchers Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) conducted a significant randomised field experiment in the states of West Bengal and Rajasthan. They discovered that female leaders invested more money on public goods that were relevant to the need of women. When it came to formulating following policies in places such as Bihar, this data was absolutely essential. The research conducted by Bhavnani (2009) provided more evidence that quotas have the potential to generate a pipeline effect, which would encourage a greater number of women to run for office, even beyond protected posts. According to Jha (2013), the reservation of fifty percent of the positions in Panchayati Raj Institutions for women has resulted in a considerable rise in the number of women elected to local governments in the state of Bihar. A large percentage of these women come from groups that are considered to be disadvantaged and marginalised. The implementation of this policy change has been lauded as revolutionary; yet, it also puts to light difficulties about the effectiveness of participation.

Challenges to Substantive Participation

Despite the fact that the number of women participating in decision-making processes is increasing, academics claim that their real engagement is still limited. Buch's (2000) article draws attention to the problem of "proxy representation," which describes the situation in which elected women operate under the influence of their male relatives. In a similar vein, research conducted by Sharma and Sudarshan (2010) reveals that women in politics frequently lack training, political understanding, and confidence, which leads to a restricted degree of autonomy and effectiveness. In their 2010 study, Deshpande and Sethi investigate the socio-cultural barriers that prevent elected women from achieving their full personal potential. It is their contention that women's political agency is severely constrained by patriarchal norms, gender-based violence, and uneven access to education and resources, particularly in rural places such as Bihar.

The Role of Caste and Intersectionality

The concept of intersectional analysis, which was introduced by Crenshaw (1991), is very pertinent while considering the state of Bihar. Women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are subjected to many forms of discrimination, which further contributes to their marginalisation in the political sphere. When it comes to seeking to establish themselves in political arenas, Kumar (2016) discovers that Dalit women sarpanches frequently face antagonism, marginalisation, and even threats. As a result of caste hierarchy and gender norms, Ghosh (2014) records various case studies from the state of Bihar in which

women leaders were either co-opted or suppressed, despite the fact that they were democratically elected. These findings highlight the necessity of addressing caste-based exclusions in the discussion on the political engagement of women.

Institutional and Civil Society Support

When it comes to boosting women's political efficacy, a number of academics emphasise the need of training, mentorship, and institutional support. According to Beaman et al. (2012), young girls with exposure to female leaders have the potential to increase their goals and affect the views of their communities. It has been suggested by Nirantar Trust (2015) that capacity-building workshops and ongoing mentoring for elected women representatives (EWRs) can help bridge the gap between formal authority and genuine empowerment. NGOs and other organisations that are part of civil society have also been quite important. A number of organisations in the state of Bihar, including Jagori, PRIA, and Mahila Samakhya, have established forums in which women may discuss their experiences, acquire new information, and cultivate their leadership abilities. On the other hand, the scope and reach of such help continue to be restricted.

Political Parties and Women's Leadership

Although there has been an increase in the number of women participating in local administration as a result of quotas, the percentage of women who are represented at the state and national levels is still alarmingly low. Rai (2011) highlights the fact that political parties frequently lack internal democracy and do not aggressively develop women leaders beyond the mandates of quotas. A systematic disregard for the advancement of women's leadership is demonstrated by the fact that only a small number of women hold decision-making positions within major political parties in the state of Bihar.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To Determine the most significant obstacles that women politicians in Bihar must overcome.
2. To Conduct research into the influence that reservation rules have on the political engagement of women.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: The effective involvement and representation of women politicians in Bihar is hindered by severe hurdles like as gender-based discrimination, a lack of resources, and cultural pressures.

H2: By boosting their representation in political institutions, reservation policies positively affect women's political engagement.

H3: Women politicians have more success and are more accepted when they have supportive political parties and progressive society values.

Research Methodology

The research project titled "Women's Political Representation in Bihar: Challenges and Prospects" relies on both primary and secondary sources of information to get its findings. The primary data is collected through the use of a structured questionnaire, with purposeful sampling being utilised to ensure that certain persons are included in the examination. Data from secondary sources, which include journal articles, books, websites, and magazines, have been collected from a wide variety of sources. There will be research conducted in the state of Bihar. In addition to the variables of the study, which include reservation policies, women's political participation, societal attitudes towards women politicians, and the role of political parties, the questionnaire has been designed with demographic factors such as age, income, educational background, and other similar factors in mind. In light of the fact that there was no clearly defined target group, the sample size was determined by applying Cochran's method, which resulted in a total of 385 individuals. As a result, a total of 385 questionnaires were distributed to women who were involved in politics, and about 295 of those surveys were filled out and returned. In conclusion, the research analysed data collected from 210 individuals who had completed the questionnaire in its entirety. An approach to research known as mixed methods was utilised for the study. Both SPSS and Excel were utilised in order to do the analysis on the data. For the purpose of evaluating the notion, correlation approaches were utilised.

RESULTS

Table 1 - The respondents' demographic profiles are as follows:

Sr. no.	Demographic characteristics	category	N	%
1	Age	Below26 years	52	24.8
		26-35years	63	30
		36-45years	42	20
		46-55years	31	14.8
		Above55years	22	10.5
2	Location	Urban	141	67.1
		Rural	69	32.9
3	Educational level	Graduate	85	40.5
		Postgraduate	41	19.5
		Professional Degree	84	40
4	Income Level	LessthanRs.20000	63	30
		Rs20000-Rs35000	84	40

		Rs35000-Rs50000	42	20
		MorethanRs50000	21	10
5	Marital Status	Married	147	70
		Unmarried	63	30

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including their age, marital status, income level, educational level, and location. These characteristics are displayed in the table. In accordance with the data shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35 years old, which accounted for thirty percent of the total. 70.0% of the total respondents were married, making up the bulk of those who participated in the survey. For example, forty-five percent of the responders had a doctorate degree. The bulk of responders, which accounted for 67.1% of the total, had been from metropolitan areas. The chart also discloses that forty percent of the respondents had earned between two thousand and three thousand rupees, which is the earnings range of the bulk of the respondents.

H1: The effective involvement and representation of women politicians in Bihar is hindered by severe hurdles like as gender-based discrimination, a lack of resources, and cultural pressures.

Table 2 – Analysing Data Using Regression

Objective s	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R	R ²	F	t- value	p- value	Hypotheses Result
Objective	Challenges Faced	0.58	0.14	0.02	4.46	2.11	.036	Support ed
1	By Women		5	1	7	4		
	Politicians							
	>Participation and							
	representation in							
	politics							

The results of the regression analysis for the hypothesis are presented in Table 2. These results demonstrate the considerable influence that the difficulties that women now experience have on the involvement and representation of politicians in politics. The involvement and representation of women in politics will serve as the dependent variable in the experiment that will test the hypothesis. This demonstrates that the difficulties that women experience have an effect on the involvement and representation of women in politics, as seen by the value of $F = 4.467$. The beta coefficient, which is standardised to 0.145, indicates that there is a moderately favourable link. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) on the involvement and representation of women in politics is 0.021, and the p-value is 0.036 ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, an alternate hypothesis is accepted.

H2: There is a beneficial influence that reservation rules have on women's political involvement since they increase the number of women who are represented in political institutions.

Table 3 – The Analysis of Regression

Objectives	Hypotheses Result	R	t- value	Regression Weights	F	R2	p- value	Beta Coefficient	Hypotheses Result
Objective 2	Supported	0.226	3.342	Reservation policies>Participation and representation in politics	11.167	0.051	.001	0.195	supported

H3: Greater success and acceptability of women in political positions is a direct result of the existence of political parties that are supportive and progressive views in society.

Table 4 – The Analysis of Regression

Objectives	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	Hypotheses Result	R2	R	T- Value	F	P-Value
Objective 3	When progressive social views and political parties are present, women are more likely to succeed and be accepted in positions of political power.	0.149	Supported	0.055	0.235	7.778	6.041	.003

The results of the regression analysis for the hypothesis are presented in Table 4. These results demonstrate the considerable influence that supportive political parties and progressive cultural views have on the advancement and acceptance of women in political positions. As a means of putting the hypothesis to the test, the dependent variable is the level of success and acceptance of female politicians. This demonstrates that supportive political parties and progressive cultural views have an influence on the success of women politicians and their acceptability by the public. The value of F is 6.041. The beta coefficient, which is standardised to 0.149, indicates that there is a moderately favourable link. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R2) is 0.055, and the p-value is 0.003 ($p < 0.05$) for the success and acceptability of women in political positions. Therefore, an alternate hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSION AND FINDING

When it comes to regions where women are denied their fundamental rights, the question of female representation in elected office becomes much more contentious. Women in Bangladesh and India were unable to attain political empowerment in reserved seats due to cultural obstacles such as patriarchal traditions, proxy representation, and male involvement (Rai, P., 2013; Heller, P., 2011). It advocated for more women to hold positions of power and for efforts to eliminate such barriers. Do Kadam Barabari Ki Ore was an effort in Bihar, India, that aimed to combat gender stereotypes and violence against women and girls (Bryld, E., 2001). Still, there were executional issues, particularly in settings where literacy rates were low. The paper suggests having an evidence-based discussion to address these issues. A research that "offers substantial insights into the dynamics of women's political participation in a region with complex sociopolitical challenges" stands out due to its thorough analysis and meticulous approach. This study guarantees its results are reliable and comprehensive since it uses a mixed-method approach and a structured questionnaire. Although there are many changes happening to help women feel more empowered and equal. The Women's Reservation Bill, which sought to allocate quotas for female lawmakers at the federal and state levels, was first submitted in 1996 (Tiwari, N., 2008; Ali, M., 2010). Despite more women than ever before casting ballots, they continue to confront obstacles in political campaigns and legislative processes as a result of party neglect. The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act has made significant strides in promoting gender equality in politics in India, the largest democracy in the world, according to Jackson and Chattopadhyay (2000). Despite the vital role women play in society, less than 10% of government personnel are women. This is crucial to the progress of democracy in India. Critical insights into the dynamics impacting women politicians in the region are revealed by the study's findings. Although the link is small ($\text{Beta} = 0.145$, $p = 0.036$), the regression analysis lends credence to Hypothesis 1, suggesting that women's political engagement and representation are negatively affected by substantial obstacles such as gender-based discrimination, a lack of resources, and cultural pressure. We also find support for Hypothesis 2 that reservation measures increase the number of women serving in political office, since these policies have a positive influence on women's political representation ($\text{Beta} = 0.195$, $p = 0.001$). On top of that, there is evidence to support Hypothesis 3 that progressive social views and political parties help women politicians succeed and get accepted ($\text{Beta} = 0.149$, $p = 0.003$). Improving women's political involvement and representation in Bihar requires tackling structural difficulties, making the most of reservation rules, and creating enabling circumstances. Despite the fact that gender bias in elections is necessary. The cultural idea of gender, which describes the relative significance of men and women, was pointed out by Kapoor and Ravi (2013) and Louis, P. (2002). In India, men predominated in politics, which led to a dearth of female politicians. Politics was the only way for women to rise in the social hierarchy. The political participation of women has not progressed in the 75 years since their emancipation. Issues such as women's equal participation in decision-making, gaps in the law, and the formation of support coalitions were the focus of the research. Its purpose was to find loopholes in the legislation and make women's empowerment better. Politics, according to Pandit, L. A. (2010), empowers citizens, particularly women, to influence government policy and decision-making. Even if more women are voting, inclusive politics will fail until there is a change in the amount and quality of women's participation in power corridors. Highlighting the varied experiences of women in politics, the study's comprehensive demographic analysis provides contextual significance. In sum, it is an excellent addition to our knowledge of and ability to improve "women's political representation in Bihar" due to its systematic approach and concentrated analysis of both obstacles and enabling variables.

Conclusion

When it comes to the fight for gender equality within India's democratic framework, the journey that women have taken to become politically active in Bihar is representative of the larger battle. The political landscape at the grassroots level has been undoubtedly affected as a result of the implementation of reservation laws, in particular the quota of fifty percent for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. There have been thousands of women, many of whom come from under-represented areas, who have entered local administration and made significant contributions to the development agenda of their respective towns and villages. The creation of new places for women's visibility, leadership, and voice in public affairs has been made possible as a result of these policy actions. On the other hand, as the findings of this study have shown, merely being represented does not necessarily result in empowerment. Women continue to face obstacles that prevent them from fully realising their political agency. These obstacles include the twin weight of patriarchal norms and structural restraints. A significant number of elected female representatives continue to be subject to the influence of male relatives, encounter opposition from well ingrained societal structures, and do not possess the resources and training necessary to act freely and assertively in political posts. Inequalities based on caste further aggravate the situation, since Dalit and Adivasi women frequently face many layers of prejudice that restricts their ability to participate in decision-making processes. Because of these systemic constraints, there is a pressing requirement for a more nuanced and intersectional approach to the empowering of political actors. In addition, although there has been an increase in the number of women in positions of political power, such as state legislatures and Parliament, there is a distinct mismatch between the grassroots level of representation and the higher levels of political power. To this day, political parties have not yet established institutionalised support mechanisms that go beyond quota mandates to encourage women to take leadership roles. The pipeline of women who are in positions of authority will continue to be unstable and undeveloped unless these structures undergo a transformation that makes them more inclusive and responsive.

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