



# Towards Sustainable Transition

Holistic Development and Inclusive  
Transformation of Indian Society

Prof. Zeba Aqil | Dr. Khurshed Alam



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# The Politics of Gender & Good Governance in India: A Critical Discourse

Dr. Faizan Haque\*

## Introduction

The politics of gender and good governance in India are closely related to each other and constitute an on-going attempt to find an appropriate balance between contemporary legal reforms and traditional societal structures. A number of significant variables are involved in this conversation, including legal frameworks, social processes, representation in politics, establishing policies, socioeconomic participation, and educational institutions. The politics of gender and good governance are intimately interlinked in India, where gender norms and practices have a significant impact on all aspects of the economic, social, and political spheres. This paper examines the relationship between gender politics and good governance in India by highlighting the obstacles and challenges that still need to be overcome in order to improve the effectiveness of governance (Sharma, 2016).

**Gender Politics in India:** The country strives to address gender disparities and guarantee equitable representation for all genders within the political system. Throughout history, cultural restrictions, inadequate schooling, and economic reliance have posed major obstacles for Indian women desiring political inclusion. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments provided reservations for women in local governing bodies, and

these legislative actions have played a crucial role in raising the representation of women in Indian politics (Kumar, 2020).

**The Gender Dimension of Good Governance:** The efficient, fair, and effective governance of a country's properties, resources, and affairs is referred to as good governance. The concepts of transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and participation constitute key principles in Indian good governance. Gender perspectives must be incorporated into these concepts for equitable government. In addition, women and other marginalised groups are guaranteed and ensured participation in decision-making processes through participatory democratic government (Vedantham&Kamruddin, 2017).

### **Gender Representation in Politics: A Historical Context**

**Historical Context and Progress:** it is well said that, the roots of the present always lie in the past. So, the justification of the law which are relating to the political representation and participation of the Indian women can be appropriately analyzed only by looking into the past history of any system. There is need to shed some light on the women's right of political participation and to look at its historical background at the national as well as global level. If we try to look the Indian history, women have a record of harassment and exploitation. The women have continued victims of violence and also, they have faced various types of discrimination, exploitation and physical and mental torture not only in the men's society but also within their own household by their family, thus these issues disturbing the balance and stability in the society (Latha, 2010).

In pre-independence India, under the guidance and leadership of Annie Besant, the Irish theosophist, several women in India had joined in the Home Rule League movement. Margaret E. Causins, a suffragette-cum-theosophist had established the first franchise delegation to meet E.S. Montague and Lord Chelmsford on constitutional reform in 1917 (Devi, 1994). In 1917, they have expressed concerns and raised the major issue related to universal adult franchise. Majority of Indian women were excluded from voting rights due to the implementation of strict rules by the colonial administration. As a result, the struggle and fight for voting rights led by Indian women continued till the Government of India Act 1935. Finally, a few reforms initiated with certain modifications and changes, the

voting rights has been provided to every Indian woman over 21 years of age by the Government of India Act 1935 but it was still inadequate and Impartial. The criteria for voters are based on property ownership or marriage to landowning men. In other words, well-educated and married women of 21 years and above were eligible for voting right, if they fulfill the same property criteria and taxation norms as Indian men (Khera, 1941). Finally in 1950 the Constitution of India was came into existence and it approved and granted voting rights to all its Indian citizens irrespective of, caste, sex, nativity, religion, color and race. Although women now make up a higher percentage of voters, but they still do not participate and represent themselves in Indian politics to the same level as men (Shireesh, 2021).

India's path towards gender-inclusive governance began in 1992–1993, with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which established a minimum of one-third reservation for women in local government organisations (Panchayats and Municipalities). These changes, which strengthened administration and governance in many fields, have given thousands of women more fundamental impact. Based on earlier research, women-led panchayats usually prioritise issues like health, water, and education—all of which are critical for prosperity and sustainable development. Women remain marginalised in higher positions in politics, even with increased representation at the local level. Recently released data shows that women from India account for 11% of Rajya Sabha seats and almost 14% of Lok Sabha seats. The Women's Reservation Bill, which aims to give women 33% of the seats in state and national legislatures, has run into significant political challenges and is still in progress, and showing continued resistance to gender equality at the highest levels of government (Sharma, 2016).

**Major Barriers to Political Participation:** Numerous barriers hamper women's political participation in India. These barriers include patriarchal attitudes towards women, a lack of financial resources, lower levels of education, and societal norms that discourage women from taking on public roles. Furthermore, women politicians often face gender-based violence and discrimination, which can prevent potential and eligible female candidates from entering politics in India (Nandigama, 2024).

## Previous Studies of Gender and Good Governance

Sharma (2016) examines the multifaceted relationship between cultural, sociological, and legal difficulties as shown in the historical evolution of gender representation in Indian politics. Kumari (2014) highlights that the problem is still complex and deeply rooted, despite recent legislative initiatives and constitutional reforms. Nandigama (2024) argues that historically, women have experienced institutionalised discrimination in the political arena. Gender stereotypes were reinforced by the patriarchal system of society, which prevented women from actively participating in politics. A notable scholar, A. Basu (1995) highlights the interrelated nature of gender, class, caste, and race and how these factors frequently increase the challenges experienced by women in Indian politics.

Menon (2002) points out the impact of socio-cultural norms on the public opinion of women in politics. Women's political ambitions are hampered by the persistence of gender misconceptions and prejudices, which also contributes to their inadequate representation at the higher level. Women experience more subjugation and deprivation in both the home and in society as a result of this illogical and immoral setup. The author claimed that we are working to eliminate the threat while simultaneously intensifying the harshness, violence, friendly market system, criminal activity, plundering, and unethical economic system under the pretext or name of globalisation, privatisation, and liberalisation (Bandyopadhyay, 2000).

Dar & Shaigojri (2022) examine that, the purpose of the study is to characterise and evaluate the importance of gender mainstreaming in good governance for the overall progress of the country and how women's empowerment is directly affected by gender participation in decision-making through representation and collaborative decision-making. Women are often strong advocates for change who inspire people to set up causes, speak up for what's right, protect their surroundings, and safeguard the environment and their participation is required for democracy to be effective. Within governmental cabinets and business executive offices, women are equally powerful but yet underrepresented in leadership roles (Mokta, 2014).

This paper indicates that gender-inclusive governance leads to better developmental results in India. Participation of women in politics has been linked and connected with social issues such

as health, education, and socio-economic welfare. For example, Indian states with higher female political representation incline to invest more in social infrastructure, leading to improved human development indicators. The politics of gender and good governance in India overlap in complicated and multifaceted ways, reflecting the country's diverse social, cultural, and political landscape.

**This paper covers a number of important topics and areas, including**

### **1- Policy Making and Implementation**

- a. **Gender-Sensitive:** Indian government has implemented several gender-sensitive policies aimed at addressing the certain needs of women. Slogan and Policies like; *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) focusing on improving and increasing female literacy and minimizing gender discrimination at local and national level. Likewise, the *Deendayal Antyodaya Yojna - National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM)* is the flagship leading program of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) for promoting poverty reduction through construction of strong and robust institutions for the poor and marginalized people, particularly women, and facilitating these institutions to access a range of livelihoods and financial services. It also promotes women's self-help groups for improving their socio-economic independency and social status (Ministry of Rural Development, 2023).
- b. **Implementation Challenges:** Although, these policies show notable steps and proposals, but their implementation is often uneven in Indian societies. Major factors such as regional disparities, bureaucratic inadequacies, and lack of awareness can hamper the effectiveness of these policies and programs. For example, the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* slogan and initiative has raised awareness about the significance of girls' education and empowerment. This initiative aims to educate Indian people against gender biasness and improve the effectiveness of welfare schemes and services for girls. It was launched with initial funding of Rs. 100 crore (US\$ 13.5 million) in India (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015).

## 2. Legal Framework and Gender Justice

- a. Protective Legislation:** India has a strong legal framework which aimed at protecting women's constitutional rights by promoting gender equality. A few core laws for the women's rights include; The Domestic Violence Act (2005), The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressed) Act (2013) and The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017) (Gender Equity Unit, 2023).
- b. Implementation and Judicial Challenges:** Even though these legal protections and safeguards, implementation remains a significant challenge in India. The Indian jurisdictional system, while progressive in many judgments, is often slow and unapproachable, mainly for marginalized and backward women. Major issues related to women such as lengthy trial procedures, lack of legal awareness, family and societal pressures can hinder women's access to justice. Additionally, sometimes the judiciary and police show gender biasness in a few cases, and this favoritism complicating the quest and access of justice for Indian women.

## 3. Economic Participation and Empowerment

- a. Government Initiatives:** The government of India has taken several initiatives to increase women's participation in economic activities. Several movements such as, The Self Help Group (SHG) movement, supported by the NRLM, has magnificently mobilized millions of women, by providing them small businesses, investments and entrepreneurial opportunities. The Startup India scheme, launched in 2016, aims to provide bank loans especially for women entrepreneurs across the nation (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2021).
- b. Persistent Barriers:** Despite these initiatives, women in India face significant barriers to participate in economic activities, including inadequate access to investment, training, and placement. Socio-cultural norms and family responsibilities often limit women's ability to work in full-time or part time employment. Addressing these persistent hurdles requires not only policy interferences but also changes in societal and patriarchal attitudes by providing support for stability in work-life approaches, such as affordable childcare.

#### 4. Societal and Cultural Dynamics

a. **Deep-Rooted Patriarchy:** Patriarchal values and socio-cultural norms are deeply influence the gender politics and good governance in India. Societal practices such as dowry system, child marriage, domestic and gender-based violence are deeply rooted in many Indian communities. These practices and rituals not only disrupt women's rights and liberties but also hamper their involvement and contribution in public life and governance.

b. **Grassroots Movements and Social Change:** Addressing these established patriarchal issues and difficulties needs grassroots-level activities and movements for societal change. NGOs and social activists across India are trying hard to challenge patriarchal practices by promoting gender equality in India. Campaigns like "Pink Chaddi" and movements like "Me Too" have brought substantial attention to gender-based violence and harassment at the work place, urging people and policy makers for public discussion and responses (Pan, 2023).

#### 5. Gender and Education

a. **Governmental Initiatives for Girls' Education:** Education is a vital for everyone and is a keystone of gender equality and good governance. The government of Indian has taken several steps to promote girls' education and tried to increase enrollment ratio by introducing the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All). These initiatives are very helpful and have significantly enhanced enrollment and retention ratio for girls in schools and colleges.

b. **Challenges and Opportunities:** Despite these positive steps, challenges still remain. Good quality of education, mainly in rural areas, remains a major concern for government. Girls are often and partially the first to drop out of school due to economic reason or safety concerns. Higher education opportunities for females are also limited, with societal expectations and financial and economic burden often hindering their quest for higher degrees (Kaur, 2023).

**Despite the initiatives and progress, significant challenges still persist in India**

- 1. Patriarchal Norms and Attitudes:** Deep-rooted patriarchal and societal norms continue to limit women's participation in politics and governance. Social stigma, gender-based discrimination, domestic violence, and discriminatory practices deter women's political participation.
- 2. Economic Obstacles:** Economic dependency on male family members bounds women's ability and power to participate fully in governance. Ensuring economic welfare through governmental policies such as education and employment opportunities is essential.
- 3. Policy Gaps:** While there are various policies promoting gender equality, but implementation gaps still remain. Effectiveness of these policies is undermined by Lack of political will, insufficient funding, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms.
- 4. Representation beyond Quotas:** While political quotas have improved women's numerical presence, but a healthy participation remains a challenge. Indian women often face social stigma and are not given significant roles or decision-making power in family or society (Gupta, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

The politics of gender and good governance in India reveal a complex relationship of progress and challenges. While legislative and policy measures have paved the way for greater gender equality, the effective implementation of these methods requires overcoming deep-rooted socio-cultural obstacles and ensuring healthy institutional support. Achieving gender equality and good governance in India requires a multidimensional approach that includes increasing women's political representation, ensuring gender based policy implementation, strengthening legal frameworks, promoting and increasing women's economic participation, and accepting social change.

The present study highlights the need for a multifaceted approach to promote gender equality and enhance governance. Strengthening legal frameworks, ensuring economic empowerment, challenging patriarchal norms, and fostering a culture of inclusivity are essential steps towards achieving this

goal. As India continues to evolve, the integration of gender perspectives into governance practices will be crucial for sustainable and equitable development.

The relationship between gender politics and good governance in India highlights both achievements and ongoing challenges, while legislative and policy measures are crucial, the broader societal transformation towards gender equality requires continued efforts across multiple fronts, including education, economic empowerment, legal reform, and socio-cultural change. Effective and good governance (for smooth functioning) must therefore integrate gender perspectives at all levels to ensure equitable development and social justice. Only through sustained efforts across these domains can India realize the vision of an inclusive and equitable society.

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