

# THE INCREASING ROLE OF WOMEN VOTERS IN CHOOSING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS

*(DEMOCRACY IS GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, AND FOR THE PEOPLE)*

**Dr. SEEMA RANAWAT**

Principal, Keshav Mahavidyalaya, Atru, Baran

## **Abraham Lincoln**

The definition used by Abraham Lincoln applies to the world's population at large. However, women have always been marginalized throughout history. Compared to men, women have been in a disadvantaged and inferior position. Since ancient times, women have not been given appropriate recognition in social life; they have been relegated to secondary roles. The feminist movement began during the French Revolution, when women openly participated in political and public affairs. Initially, women did not have the right to vote. In 1869, a national association was formed to advocate for women's voting rights. Such organizations gradually started to emerge in Europe as well, with demands rising from all developed countries for women to have the right to vote. Women were first granted voting rights in New Zealand in 1893. In the United States, this happened in 1920, in the United Kingdom in 1928, in France in 1944, in Switzerland in 1971, and in India, when the Constitution was enacted in 1950, women and men were granted equal voting rights.

Indian society is patriarchal, where all religious texts honor women, yet in reality, women remain powerless. Socially, culturally, educationally, and politically, women are lagging behind men. During the first general elections in 1952, the Election Commission faced several challenges while preparing the voter list. For instance, female voters registered their names based on their relationships with male family members rather than providing their actual names. Out of 80 million female voters, approximately 2.8 million were unable to provide their real names in the first general elections.

The Election Commission of India made it mandatory for every woman to register her own identity and name. As a result of this decision, the number of female voters has been increasing in each election compared to male voters. During the first assembly elections in Rajasthan, elections were held in 140 assembly constituencies, of which 139 were general and one was reserved. The total number of voters in the first assembly was 7,070,419, out of which 3,261,442 voted, resulting in a voter turnout of 35.19%. The voter turnout among female voters was not published for the first assembly election.

On November 1, 1956, under the State Reorganization Act, Ajmer State and parts of the Bombay State were merged into Rajasthan, while the Sironj sub-division of Kota district in Rajasthan was transferred to Madhya Pradesh. Consequently, the assembly elections in 1957 saw a change in the assembly constituencies, increasing from 140 to 176. In the second assembly elections, the total number of voters was 8,736,129, with 4,746,458 casting their votes, resulting in a voter turnout of 38.16%. The low turnout was attributed to a lack of education and awareness among voters. Data on female voter turnout was also not published for the second election.

**Increasing Female Voter Turnout in Rajasthan Assembly Elections from 1962 to 2018**

Sr. No.	Year	Female voter	Voting	Percentage
1	1962	4953738	2034099	41-06%
2	1967	5897772	3000098	50-87%
3	1972	6738183	3383173	50-21%
4	1977	7488800	3648773	48-72%
5	1980	8743330	4018420	45-96%
6	1985	10145274	4909822	48-40%
7	1990	12412700	6398081	51-54%
8	1993	13382056	7397204	55-28%
9	1998	14272522	8403399	58-88%
10	2003	16216717	10412763	64-21%
11	2008	17227702	11251407	65-31%
12	2013	19307320	14566391	75-44%
13	2018	22827740	17046450	74-67%

The data from the elections in India narrates a compelling story of the development of democracy and the liberation of women voters from the shadows of men. It highlights how women have established their own identity in the electoral process over the years.

Starting from the third assembly election, statistics regarding female voters began to be published. In the 1962 elections, there were 4,953,738 registered female voters, of which 2,034,099 cast their votes, marking a turnout of 41.06%. By the fourth assembly election in 1967, the number of female voters rose to 5,897,772, with 3,000,098 participating, resulting in a voting percentage of 50.87%.

The fifth assembly election in 1972 was significant, as it occurred during a time of heightened female leadership under Indira Gandhi, following India's victory in the Bangladesh Liberation War. This inspired confidence among women, with 6,738,183 registered female voters, of whom 3,383,173 voted, achieving a turnout of 50.21%.

The sixth assembly election in 1977 followed a period of national emergency. While there were 7,488,800 registered female voters, only 3,648,773 voted, indicating a climate of fear among women regarding the voting process. In the subsequent 1980 elections, there were 8,743,330 registered female voters, but participation dropped to 4,018,420, resulting in a turnout of 45.96%.

From 1985 onwards, the trend began to shift positively again. In the 1985 elections, 10,145,274 women were registered, with 4,909,822 casting their votes, achieving a voting percentage of 48.40%. This upward trajectory continued in the 1993 elections, with 12,412,700 registered female voters and a participation rate of 51.54%. The 1991 elections post-liberalization also saw a significant impact, with 13,382,056 registered female voters and 7,397,207 voting, resulting in a turnout of 55.28%.

The elections of 1998 marked an important milestone as well, with 14,272,522 registered female voters and a participation rate of 58.88%. The historic 2003 elections saw the BJP, under Vasundhara Raje, achieve a clear majority for the first time in Rajasthan. Here, the registered female voters numbered 16,216,717, with a turnout of 64.21%, the highest recorded to date.

By 2008, despite a slight dip in the turnout, the numbers of registered female voters and their participation reflected a growing trend of engagement. The 2013 elections saw 22,827,740 registered female voters, with 40,046,450 voting, resulting in a turnout of 74.67%.

These statistics illustrate the significant strides made by women in terms of education, employment, and social awareness, coupled with the enthusiasm generated by political empowerment initiatives like women's reservations. The journey reflects a progressive shift in the political landscape, where women are not only participating in elections but are also becoming influential players in shaping democratic processes in India.

**REFERENCE BOOKS:**

1. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1951-52
2. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1957
3. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1962
4. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1967
5. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1972
6. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1977
7. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1980
8. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1985
9. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1993
10. Election Commission of India – State Elections 1998
11. Election Commission of India – State Elections 2003
12. Election Commission of India – State Elections 2008
13. Election Commission of India – State Elections 2013