

Gender and Governance in India

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Abstract:

Gender is a crucial yet underexplored perspective for understanding public administration and policy. The unequal representation of women across different sectors, including the All-India Services, has been extensively acknowledged. While women have made significant strides in various professions, including education, healthcare, and corporate sectors, their representation in high-ranking government positions, particularly in the All-India Services, remains disproportionately low. They often face barriers such as biases, stereotypes, and limited access to resources and constant networks, making it more difficult for them to aspire to political leadership roles. This paper aims to study the importance of women in administration and highlights the challenges and biases faced by women in governance. The paper also attempts to provide measures to promote the representation of women in Administration. The study is descriptive in nature. The data used is purely from secondary sources and are collected from various reports, websites, and e-content related to Women in Governance.

Keywords: Gender and Governance, Women in Administration, Gender Bias in All India Services, Challenges of Women Administrators.

WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE

Women constitute about 48% of the population and a genuine address of their grievances and problems is possible only when there would be more women in the services with the power and authority to bring about change using the system. The field of gender and public administration has evolved from focusing primarily on the integration of women to addressing broader equity concerns, including gender identity, orientation, non-binary experiences, and intersectionality.

The 2021 report from the United Nations Development Program, 'Gender Equality in Public Administration', emphasized the pivotal role of gender equality in fostering an inclusive and transparent public administration. It highlighted that achieving parity in the representation of women within bureaucracy and public administration not only enhances governmental efficiency but also fosters responsiveness and accountability to a wide array of public interests. Additionally, it improves the quality of services provided and strengthens trust and confidence in public institutions.

Equity has always been a central concern in public administration, fundamental to a democratic system of governance. Based on John Rawls' theory of justice, social equity encompasses fairness, rightness, and justice, all vital components of public administration. The main obstacles to women's empowerment are structural barriers that hinder their participation in various services. Women often choose to leave the civil services due to social factors such as being assigned to distant locations, traditional gender roles, and the challenge of balancing family responsibilities with job requirements. Moreover, there is a prevailing notion that women should be prioritized for "soft" ministries such as Social Welfare, Culture, Women and Child Development.

Despite historical milestones such as gaining the right to vote, patriarchal systems have persisted, limiting women's authority and professional opportunities. For example, during the early 2000s, women occupied

35% of high-ranking executive positions, and their representation in federal employment increased from 25% to 34% over the decade. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda underscores the crucial role of gender equality and inclusive public administration in fostering sustainable and equitable societies.

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION

Women's participation in decision-making processes is essential for a variety of reasons, and it has far-reaching benefits for societies, economies, and governance systems. Indian women have been playing a crucial role in the administration of the country, and breaking barriers by occupying prominent positions and making substantial contributions to the successful execution of policies, maintenance of law and order, and participating in functioning of the government.

D'Agostino (2019) also examines the performance and perception of women in Indian administrative roles, highlighting that women excel and are less likely to engage in corruption. Their management style, focusing on emotional labour and social justice, positively impacts organizational performance. However, implicit biases and societal expectations often hinder their career growth and effectiveness. These findings reveal the complex dynamics of gender perceptions and performance in Indian leadership roles.

Women in the Indian Civil Service have consistently demonstrated outstanding performance, embodying dedication, resilience, and a commitment to public service that is truly commendable. They have excelled in various sectors such as administration, law enforcement, health, education, and social welfare. They have not only demolished stereotypes but also established new standards for excellence. Women's representation in All India Services is a multifaceted challenge that requires a long-term commitment from government agencies, civil societies and society as a whole.

GENDER BIAS IN GOVERNANCE

Women in India have historically faced significant challenges in their status as 'secondary citizens'. Despite some improvements in recent years, women continue to experience discrimination and marginalization, reflecting the ongoing struggle for gender equality and empowerment in the country. Gender inequality within the higher echelons of civil service is one of the pressing issues in India which demands urgent attention.

1. ***Discriminatory Bureaucratic Rules:*** As stated in Article 16, the constitution provides equal opportunities for all citizens, including women, in matters related to employment or appointment to any office under the state, However, the assumption that a married woman would not be able to manage both familial and service responsibilities led to violations of Article 16, exemplified by rule 5(3) of the 1954 IAS Recruitment Rules. This contributed to the low representation of women in civil services and reflected initial doubts about their suitability for All India Services.

For example, Muthamma, the first Indian woman to clear the UPSC examinations in 1948, faced significant barriers. During her UPSC interview, the chairman tried to dissuade her from joining the IFS, and she had to sign an undertaking that she might have to resign if she got married, as per the "marriage rule" in the Indian Foreign Service Rules 1961. Such discriminatory bureaucratic rules and regulations, particularly those restricting the appointment and career progression of married women until the 1970s, further hindered women's participation in civil services.

2. ***Sexual Harassment:*** In bureaucracy, sexual harassment is a type of 'power play' in which powerful people utilize harassment as a tool to establish their dominance over women because they perceive women as inferior. Women often face mental harassment in addition to the physical harassment. This mental harassment includes the use of inappropriate language and communication styles, derogatory

remarks, gossip, and insensitive discussions about female colleagues. It perpetuates female subordination and reinforces patriarchal structures. It is an insult to the dignity of women in the workplace and can be used to maintain a competitive advantage for men by weakening the ability of women to perform. The landmark judgments, such as the KPS Gill case and the Vishakha vs State of Rajasthan case, which have raised awareness about sexual harassment and led to the establishment of complaint cells in government departments.

3. Gender Stereotyping of Posts: Women in All India Service were generally given 'soft power' portfolios often referred as 'soft ministries' such as ministries dealing with social welfare, education, health, and family affairs whereas men are given authoritative departments of law & order, urban and rural development, general administration and planning. Therefore, women are not necessarily involved in decision-making process rather, this is just done to increase their representation. The presence of gender stereotyping and bias in the allocation of cadre and field duties reflects the prevalence of a male dominated culture within these services.

4. Gender Bias in Recruitment and Promotion: The bias in recruitment and promotion has a significant impact on women's career, often limiting their chances of advancement. Gender stereotypes are still prevalent in the organization frequently resulting in women receiving less favourable performance evaluations and questioning their leadership capabilities. Generally, men tend to receive more opportunities for challenging tasks crucial for their career growth, as compared to women who are often overlooked due to the assumption that women lack the toughness required for certain roles. Recruitment panel's implicit biases can also lead to fewer women being selected, especially in male-dominated fields. In some cases, certain postings within the All-India Services are implicitly considered unsuitable for women. The perception that women are less competent or authoritative in handling the political aspects of administrative roles greatly hinders their promotion.

MEASURES TO PROMOTE WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION

Women in India have gradually overcome gender barriers and have established their influence in nearly every aspect of society. Women have shown incredible bravery and are providing the country with excellent service. The government accepted several measures proposed by the Fifth Pay Commission to promote greater female participation in the civil service these were the provision of common rooms and toilets for women, Quality crèches and day care facilities for children, preferably in the office campus, flexible working hours and part-time employment for women employees when their children are very small, raising the age of recruitment for women for up to 35 years, Increase working women's hostels, priority allotment of accommodation for women and assured housing for married women employees and to grant paternity leave for 15 days.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has also implemented various initiatives to develop women's interest in the civil service. establishing guidelines for husband and wife postings to the same station, granting permission for AIS members to change cadre on the grounds of marriage, attempting to create harassment free work environment by issuing guidelines for handling cases of sexual harassment, implementing policies targeted at educating women about job opportunities in the civil service; expanding the number of schools and counseling centers in rural areas. Many states, including Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, have already made provisions for 33% reservation for women in state civil services, despite a slow increase in women's representation. Increasing women's representation in All India Services is not only a matter of gender equality but also contributes to the diversity and effectiveness of the civil services. These measures can help create a more inclusive and representative bureaucracy in India

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Gender discrimination in civil services refers to the biased treatment and structural disparities that women encounter due to their gender. Despite formal legal provisions for equality, women in civil services are underrepresented, especially in leadership and decision-making roles. The discrimination against women in India is deeply embedded in cultural norms and laws, resulting in a systemic issue. The study has identified several measures to address the issue, which includes, raising awareness and removing misconceptions about the services, providing high-quality education and developing curriculum designed exclusively for civil service exams.

Female leadership in India contributes to the benefits of diversity, as it allows women to deal with difficult personal relationships, pay closer attention to people's needs, and prevent and solve conflicts. They are more likely to share views and make efforts to reach agreements and provide intensive feedback. Women leaders tend to pay more attention to social issues, welfare, health, and education than men do. This results in higher quality institutions and organizations, positively affecting outcomes and performance.

CONCLUSION

India's economy is among the fastest-growing in the world and is predicted to become the third-largest economy globally by 2030, ranking below the United States and China. Despite the country's economic growth, women's participation in the economy, politics, and society has not advanced proportionally. In the past, Indian women's voices were hardly recognized in public. They were denied the right to participate in employment and were subjected to social discrimination.

The situational reality of women's status in India differs greatly from the constitutional, laws, policies, plans, programs, and associated mechanisms. Women continue to endure miserable living conditions characterized by poverty, lack of education, having faith in superstitions, and exploitation. Nevertheless, while urban women have experienced and derived some level of satisfaction and relief, the population residing in rural areas remains unaffected by the wind of changes.

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