Women in Politics: A Case Study of Pokhara Metropolitan City, Nepal

Dil Kumari Poudel[1]; Dr. Ganesh Man Gurung[2]

[1]Singhania University, School of Humanities, Rajasthan, INDIA

[2]Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Corresponding Author Email: dilupoudel123@gmail.com

Abstract—This study delves into the heart of Pokhara Metropolitan City, Nepal, unfolding the intricate dynamics of women's political participation, a realm traditionally dominated by a patriarchal system. It probes deeply into how societal norms, education levels, and the mechanisms of political empowerment intersect to shape the experiences of women in politics. The study reflects an intense picture of the barriers that women face, such as entrenched patriarchal attitudes and systemic biases, while also spotlighting the transformative power of education and self-motivation in navigating these hurdles. Through a blend of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the study meticulously examines the demographic diversity, political involvements, and societal perceptions surrounding female politicians in Pokhara. It unveils a complex embroidery where factors like education, self-employment, and party affiliation intertwine, influencing women's political journeys. The findings highlight a disconnect between legal mandates for gender representation and the actual empowerment of women in political spheres, exposing the shortcomings in current approaches to achieving genuine gender parity in governance. This study is pivotal in enriching the discourse on gender equality in political representation. It underscores the need for strategies that go beyond mere numerical inclusion, advocating for an environment where women's voices are not just heard but are influential in shaping policies. The insights gleaned from Pokhara's experience provide valuable lessons for other regions and nations striving towards more inclusive and equitable political systems, where the presence of women in politics is both normative and transformative.

Keywords: Women in Politics, Gender Equality, Societal norms and Empowerment, Barriers to female politicians

I. INTRODUCTION

The tapestry of global governance is no longer woven solely with the threads of male power. Today, vibrant strands of women's political participation are being carefully interlaced, recognizing the crucial role they play in fostering inclusive development and bringing diverse perspectives to decision-making tables. This push for equitable representation isn't simply a box to tick; it's a fundamental step towards rectifying historical imbalances and harnessing the vast potential of women's leadership (World Bank, 2020).

Despite advancements in women's rights and advocacy efforts, a stubborn gender gap continues to mar the political landscape. Like a chasm carved by centuries of ingrained societal norms and institutional barriers, it impedes genuine progress, with only 23% of global parliamentarians being women in 2017 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). This imbalance isn't just a matter of statistics; it silences diverse voices, undermines the principles of equality, and hampers the effectiveness of governance by limiting the richness of perspectives at the helm.

But simply plugging in numerical quotas is akin to mending a tear with glue. True participation requires a transformation of the fabric itself, a fundamental shift in societal attitudes and power dynamics. Deep-seated patriarchal norms, cultural biases, and historical prejudices pose formidable obstacles, acting as invisible walls that hinder women's entry and influence in political arenas around the world (Acharya, 2023). Addressing these underlying factors is crucial, for without dismantling the scaffolding of inequality, true progress remains elusive.

Nepal embodies the global struggle for women's political participation in miniature. Over half the population are women, yet their voices often echo faintly off the entrenched walls of patriarchy. This legacy relegates them to the periphery of power, their potential muffled by societal norms and historical biases (Tharu, 2014). Flickers of hope illuminate the path forward. The 2015 Constitution, a monument to Nepal's evolving understanding of gender equality, mandates a minimum of 33% female representation in legislative bodies. The government, too, has championed initiatives like reserved seats in village councils and leadership training programs (World Bank, 2020). Yet, bureaucratic hurdles and entrenched practices like "money and muscle" politics remain stubborn gatekeepers, privileging connections over merit and inclusivity (Kumar, 2017). The Nepalese journey requires a two-pronged approach: effectively implementing legal frameworks while simultaneously dismantling the scaffolding of cultural constraints. Only then can women's voices truly resonate within the halls of power in Nepal and beyond.

However, as with any nascent endeavor, challenges abound. The gap between legal mandates and tangible impact remains wide, often choked by the weeds of bureaucracy and ineffective implementation (Pradhan, 2004). Entrenched practices like "money and

muscle" politics and pervasive patronage networks further muddy the waters, prioritizing connections and financial clout over merit and inclusivity (Kumar, 2017). These deeply ingrained systems operate like invisible gatekeepers, effectively shutting out many otherwise qualified women from political engagement.

The journey towards a future where women's voices resonate with equal strength within the chambers of power remains long and winding. Nepal, like many other nations, faces formidable challenges in dismantling deeply entrenched social structures and transforming political cultures. But by acknowledging the multifaceted nature of this issue – encompassing both numerical quotas and societal empowerment – and by critically examining the effectiveness of existing initiatives, a path forward can be forged.

This path requires unwavering commitment and a multi-pronged approach. On the one hand, strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring their effective implementation is crucial. Quotas, though imperfect tools, can serve as stepping stones, forcing open doors that were previously shut tight. On the other hand, dismantling the scaffolding of inequality demands a societal shift. Education, awareness campaigns, and challenging long-held cultural norms are critical weapons in this battle. Only by fostering an environment where merit and inclusivity truly reign supreme can women step fully into their rightful roles as leaders and decision-makers.

Ultimately, the struggle for equitable political representation for women isn't just about numbers; it's about harnessing the collective wisdom and diverse perspectives that they bring to the table. It's about enriching the tapestry of global governance with threads of inclusivity, justice, and progress. And within this grand endeavor, Nepal, with its burgeoning female population and nascent initiatives, can play a vital role, weaving a model for other nations to follow. As we dismantle the barriers and empower women to claim their rightful place in the halls of power, we pave the way for a future where governance is truly representative, diverse, and responsive to the needs of all.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's political participation has become a global focal point, with scholars dissecting its challenges, opportunities, and policy implications. Despite gradual progress, women still face significant variations in representation across countries, with Nordic nations leading the way and regions like the Middle East lagging. Researchers like Krook (2014) point to multifaceted factors influencing women's engagement, including cultural norms, institutional structures, and socio-economic conditions. Studies by the World Bank highlight that increased female political representation correlates with improved governance and policy outcomes, emphasizing the importance of closing the gender gap.

Scholars like Norris and Krook (2011) underscore the crucial role of political parties in supporting women's representation. Schwindt-Bayer (2011) investigates the impact of quotas in Argentina, demonstrating their potential to go beyond numerical representation and influence substantive policy changes. Krook (2014) further expands the discourse by exploring the qualitative dimensions of women's presence in parliament, looking beyond numbers to their roles and influence. Comparative studies like Alexander's (2012) and Lero's (2013) offer insights into diverse global experiences, with Adida et al. (2018) and Sabharwal (2017) focusing specifically on the implementation and effectiveness of quotas in Sub-Saharan Africa and India, respectively.

Empowerment is a key element in fostering women's political participation. Awan (2012) and Roy (2008) define it as the ability to control one's life, make decisions, and participate in social and economic development. Parpart and Stichter (2016) identify awareness of rights and involvement in development processes as crucial components. Education plays a vital role in this process, empowering women through knowledge, skills, and confidence, as noted by Huyer and Sikoska (2003). Kreisberg (1991) and Lord and Hutchinson (1993) emphasize education's potential to challenge discrimination and promote social change.

The Nepalese context presents a complex picture. While patriarchal structures remain a formidable barrier, marginalizing women from political spaces (Thapa, 2016), significant progress has been made. The Constitution guarantees 33% reservation for women in all political sectors, promoting inclusivity and reducing vulnerability (Gurung & Bisht, 2014). However, challenges like lack of resources and limited decision-making power persist (Falch, 2010). Affirmative actions like reserved seats have increased visibility, but concerns about tokenism and ineffective implementation remain (Gurung, 2019). Rai and Subedi (2022) emphasize the need to critically evaluate the practical implications of government policies to ensure they translate into meaningful empowerment for women in political spheres.

Nepal's journey towards gender equality in political participation requires a multi-pronged approach. Dismantling deeply ingrained patriarchal structures is crucial, alongside efforts to address socio-economic disparities and improve educational opportunities for women (Thapa, 2016; Shrestha & Tamang, 2019). Analyzing not only policy frameworks but also their implementation and outcomes is essential for understanding the full picture and crafting effective strategies for progress. As Nepal navigates this path, its experiences can offer valuable lessons for other nations grappling with similar challenges, paving the way for a future where women's voices resonate with equal strength in the halls of power.

While policy interventions like quotas and reserved seats have undoubtedly pushed open doors, concerns linger about the quality of women's political participation. Studies by Tamang et al. (2022) suggest that tokenism can still prevail, with women often relegated to less powerful positions within political structures. This highlights the need to move beyond mere numbers and address issues of substantive representation, ensuring women occupy roles of influence and actively shape policy agendas (Krook & O'Neil, 2016).

The challenges persist beyond the formal political sphere. Societal attitudes and ingrained biases can limit women's ability to navigate political landscapes, even with formal representation effectively. Research by Thulung Rai and Shrestha (2022) highlights the significance of fostering community-level support and addressing everyday gendered power dynamics. Empowering women at the grassroots, through initiatives like capacity-building workshops and leadership training programs, can play a vital role in creating a more supportive environment for their political engagement.

Nepal's journey towards true gender equality in political participation is far from over. Addressing deeply ingrained structural inequalities, tackling tokenism, and fostering grassroots support are crucial next steps. As Nepal perseveres, its commitment to inclusivity and its exploration of diverse empowerment strategies can serve as a beacon for other nations striving to ensure women's voices are heard loud and clear within the halls of power.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

III.I. STUDY SITE

The field study conducted for this research took place in the Pokhara Metropolitan City of Gandaki Province, Nepal. Pokhara's economic activities can have a substantial impact on social structures and empowerment. This influence extends to shaping women's roles in both economic and political spheres. By focusing on Pokhara, this research aims to explore and understand the intricate interplay of these factors and their implications for the participation of women in politics in this unique urban setting.

III.II. SAMPLING

To identify the women's role in politics residing in Pokhara, 383 respondents were selected randomly using Kothari & Garg, 2019 sampling formulae from 33 different wards. The field survey was conducted in November 2023. Respondents on random selection and for focus group discussion along with key informant interviews were conducted with key personnel which was purposively selected.

III.III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND TOOLS

The study followed a quantitative research design complemented by a qualitative design. Structured questionnaires were constructed to survey randomly selected households. The questionnaires for the respondents were administered especially to females of the household regarding the objective of the study, in the few cases of their absence, other eligible female family members about the idea of politics were surveyed. The questionnaire and guidelines for FGD and KII were prepared prior to the survey but extended when required.

III.IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics including the frequency, percentages, and bar chart were used to summarize the participation and representation of women in politics and partly the relative roles of respondents to different political parties.

Similarly, ANOVA and bivariate correlation were used to determine the factors that influence the inclusion and participation of women by basic background information. Data collected during FGD and KII were transcribed and coded. The information elicited from FGD and KII was used to triangulate the survey tools and interpret results.

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

IV.I. DEMOGRAPHIC AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

During the survey, different socio-political information was collected to determine the women's political participation in Pokhara City.

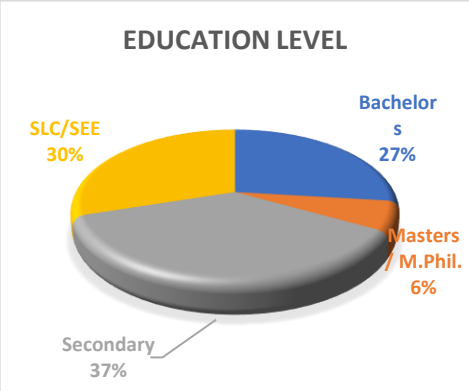
Table 1: Demographic Status of the Respondent

Category	***Frequency***	***Percent***
Gender		
Female	*381*	*99.50%*
Male	*2*	*0.50%*
Total	***383***	***100.00%***
Caste/Ethnicity		
Dalit	*52*	*13.60%*
Brahmin/Chettri	*257*	*67.10%*
Ethnic	*64*	*16.70%*
Madhesi	*1*	*0.30%*
Minorities	*7*	*1.80%*

Others	*2*	*0.50%*
Total	***383***	***100.00%***
Education Status		
Literate	*380*	*99.20%*
Illiterate	*3*	*0.80%*
Total	***383***	***100.00%***
Marital Status		
Married	*359*	*93.73%*
Unmarried	*16*	*4.18%*
Widowed/Divorced/Separated	*8*	*2.09%*
Total	***383***	***100.00%***
Household Composition		
Joint Family	*55*	*14.36%*
Nuclear Family	*322*	*84.07%*
On your own	*6*	*1.57%*
Total	***383***	***100.00%***
Occupation		
Employed	*52*	*13.58%*
Housewife	*97*	*25.33%*
Self-employed	*213*	*55.61%*
Unemployed	*21*	*5.48%*
Total	***383***	***100.00%***
Major Income of Family		
Agriculture	*78*	*20.40%*
Business	*143*	*37.30%*
Others	*93*	*24.30%*
Service	*69*	*19.00%*
Total	***383***	***100***

Table 1 presents a holistic representation of the demographic and socio-economic features of the respondents, offering profound insights into the factors that mold their engagement in politics. The overwhelming high literacy rate of 99.20% underscores the pivotal role of education in this cohort. Caste and ethnicity reveal a tapestry of diversity, with Brahmin/Chettri being the most prominent at 67.10%, showcasing the varied backgrounds contributing to political engagement. In the socio-economic realm, the data reflects a significant number of married, often nuclear, families (93.73% and 84.07% respectively), highlighting the intertwined nature of personal and political spheres. Notably, the prevalence of self-employment (55.61%) and involvement in business (35.51%) and agriculture (20.63%) illustrates the diverse professional paths women pursue, reflecting the multifaceted roles they play. Major family income sources, primarily from business (37.30%) and agriculture (20.40%), unveil the economic underpinnings of their political involvement.

The narrative evolves further with insights into professional engagement and family income, providing a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between economic factors and political participation, shaping decisions and roles within the political sphere.



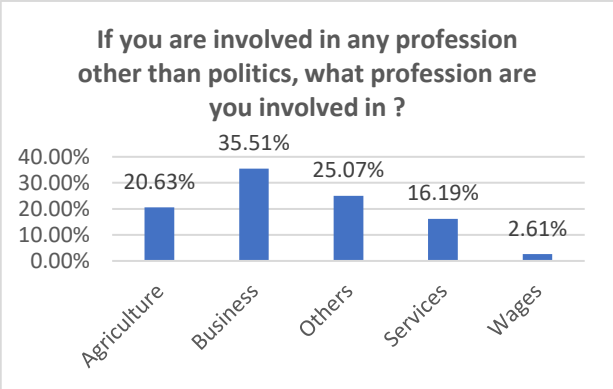
The pie diagram illustrates the educational distribution of the respondents (women in politics), categorizing them based on different levels of education. The data reveals that a significant portion of women in politics hold secondary education qualifications, with 36.80% falling into this category. The diagram highlights the varied educational backgrounds of women in political roles, providing insights into the diverse skill sets and academic qualifications that contribute to their participation in the political sphere.

The bar diagram delineates the alternative professions pursued by women involved in politics, excluding political roles. The data is categorized into various professional domains, revealing the diversity of occupations embraced by these women. The chart, in its entirety, offers insights into the multifaceted professional engagements of women in politics, showcasing their involvement across different sectors and fields beyond the political landscape.

IV.II. POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND VIEWS

Perceived Barriers and Facilitators

The majority of negative attitudes towards women significant societal bias or barrier to women's political to be involved in politics comes suggesting a self-motivated (29.2%) and literature (10.7%) factors can be facilitators or of support or encouragement involvement in politics (49.9%) satisfaction or personal



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respondents (75.7%) perceive in politics. This indicates a prejudice that may serve as a participation. The encouragement largely from oneself (49.9%), interest. However, family support also play significant roles. These barriers depending on the nature received. Self-motivated suggests a certain level of conviction.

Table 2: Current Status of Political Involvement and their Views

Questions	Response Categories	Frequency	Percent (%)
1. Thought of Society Towards Women in Politics	Negative, Positive	290, 93	75.7%, 24.3%
2. Who Encouraged You to Involve in Politics?	Others, Family, Literature, Myself	39, 112, 41, 191	10.2%, 29.2%, 10.7%, 49.9%
3. Level of Family Support to Join in Politics	High, Low, Medium	54, 72, 257	14.1%, 18.8%, 67.1%
4. In Which Party Are You Involved Now?	CPN(Maoist), CPN(UML), NC, Other	47, 205, 130, 1	12.3%, 53.5%, 33.9%, 0.3%
5. Are There Any Other Political Members in Your Family?	No, Yes	203, 180	53.0%, 47.0%
6. First Organization Before Joining Parties	Labor, Other, Teacher, Woman, Youth	15, 66, 15, 158, 129	3.9%, 17.2%, 3.9%, 41.3%, 33.7%
7. Most Effective Way of Women Participation in Politics	Awareness, Education, Effective Implementation of Law and Policies, Equal Opportunity, Positive Thought	54, 55, 29, 199, 46	14.1%, 14.4%, 7.6%, 52.0%, 12.0%
8. Changes Brought About by Political Women Leaders	Change in Behaviour, Encouragement in Politics, Inclusion for Women in Public and Political Posts, Positive Thought Toward Women	13, 161, 107, 102	3.4%, 42.0%, 27.9%, 26.6%
9. Is There Internal Coaching and Training Provision in Your Party?	No, Sometimes, Yes	14, 282, 87	3.7%, 73.6%, 22.7%
10. Causes That Make Women Step Back in Politics	Family, Leader, State Policy	11, 126, 246	2.9%, 32.9%, 64.2%

Source: Field Survey Data

Impact of Existing Policies[1] and Practices on Women's Political Empowerment

The data collected explicitly reveals the consequential impact of existing policies. The respondents, comprising 64.2%, identify state policies as a prominent factor causing women to withdraw from politics. This signals a prevailing perception that the current policies may fall short of providing the requisite empowerment and support necessary to foster active female political engagement.

Perceived Discrimination and Its Sources

[1] The gathered data doesn't clearly state all the details about how existing policies are affecting things, but it's based on what the survey participants know.

The level of discrimination is indirectly measured in the provided data, but negative societal attitudes towards women in politics (75.7%) and the perception that state policies (64.2%) are a cause for women stepping back hint at potential sources of discrimination.

Effectiveness of Current Strategies and Necessary Changes for Inclusion and Empowerment

The data suggest that the most effective way for women's participation in politics, according to respondents, is through equal opportunities (52.0%) and education (14.4%). However, the need for effective implementation of laws and policies (7.6%) also points to the recognition that the existing strategies may not be fully effective.

"I am a member of the central committee of Nepal Communist Mahobadi, a former parliamentarian. Our focus is on women's empowerment, with achievements such as securing citizenship in the mother's name and property claims for daughters. We are actively promoting women's participation in politics, aiming for a 40% representation within our party. We're working on legislative measures to address women's issues. Despite challenges like lack of belief, economic issues, dependency, and costly elections, I am optimistic about the positive changes in women's involvement and societal perceptions."

Encouragement in politics (42.0%) and inclusion of women in public and political posts (27.9%) are perceived changes brought about by women leaders. This indicates a positive impact, but further training and motivation are required to understand the effectiveness of women's representation and participation in the political field comprehensively.

Internal coaching and training provisions in parties are reported to exist sometimes (73.6%) or yes (22.7%). This suggests that there are efforts in place, but the effectiveness may need to be evaluated.

The study focused on several key factors that impact the inclusion and participation of women, including political party affiliation, satisfaction with political participation, experiences of discrimination, age, and education level.

Table 3: ANOVA for Factors influencing inclusion and participation of women in Politics

Source of Variation	**SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**	**p-value**
Party Affiliation	2.45	2	1.23	4.28	0.014
Education Level	1.67	3	0.56	1.94	0.123
Age	0.42	3	0.14	0.697	
Error	110.25	378	0.29		
Total	114.79	376			

Source: Field Data, SPSS

Here,

SS - Sum of Squares, df - degrees of freedom MS - Mean Square, F - F statistic, p-value - significance value

The ANOVA results reveal notable associations between certain variables and outcomes. Political party affiliation emerges as a significant determinant of satisfaction levels, with women affiliated with CPN(UML) and NC expressing higher satisfaction compared to those affiliated with CPN(Maoist) ($p<0.05$). Additionally, education level proves to be a significant factor influencing experiences of discrimination, as women with higher education report less discrimination than their counterparts with lower education levels ($p<0.05$).

In contrast, age does not demonstrate a significant effect on any of the outcomes assessed in the study ($p>0.05$). These findings shed light on the intricate relationships between political party affiliation, education level, and the experiences of women in terms of satisfaction and discrimination, providing valuable insights for understanding and addressing disparities in political contexts.

Table 4: Bivariate Correlations of the factors that influence women's inclusion and participation in Politics

Variables	**r**	**p-value**
Satisfaction & Discrimination Experiences	-0.621	<0.001
Education Level & Satisfaction	0.432	<0.001
Party Affiliation & Satisfaction	0.281	<0.001
Party Affiliation & Discrimination	-0.192	<0.001

Source: Field Data, SPSS

Here,

r – correlation coefficient, p-value - significance value

The Bivariate Correlations in Table 4 illustrate the relationships among key factors influencing women's inclusion and participation in politics. A strong negative correlation is observed between satisfaction levels and experiences of discrimination ($r = -0.621$, $p<0.001$), indicating that women reporting higher satisfaction tend to report lower instances of discrimination. There is a moderate positive correlation between education level and satisfaction ($r = 0.432$, $p<0.001$), suggesting that women with higher education levels tend to report higher satisfaction. Additionally, political party affiliation shows weak correlations with both satisfaction ($r = 0.281$, $p<0.001$) and discrimination experiences ($r = -0.192$, $p<0.001$).

The negative correlation with party affiliation implies that women affiliated with certain parties may experience lower levels of discrimination. These findings provide valuable insights into the interplay of these factors and their impact on women's engagement in political processes, as derived from the field data analyzed using SPSS[2].

V. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the variance undercurrents surrounding women's political participation. Exploring demographics, political engagement, and societal perceptions, the findings illuminate the challenges and successes in achieving gender equity in politics. The demographic profile, primarily comprising educated females, underscores the pivotal role of education in political engagement.

This diverse demographic, encompassing various castes and socioeconomic backgrounds, reflects the intricate factors influencing women's political roles. Notably, a significant number of women engaged in self-employment and business activities highlight the intersection of economic independence and political participation.

Analysis of political involvement reveals a nuanced picture, with societal attitudes presenting a substantial barrier despite legal mandates for representation. Negative perceptions towards women in politics underscore the persistent challenge of changing traditional norms. Encouragingly, a considerable proportion of women cited self-motivation as a key driver, signaling a shift towards individual empowerment. However, insufficient family support and systemic encouragement underscore the need for a more nurturing environment. Party affiliation and political engagement show varying satisfaction levels and discrimination experiences across different political parties. Women affiliated with specific parties reported higher satisfaction, emphasizing the impact of party culture and policies on their political experiences.

The study advocates for more than just legal and numerical representation, emphasizing the importance of substantive participation. Education and equal opportunities emerge as effective means to enhance women's political involvement, but the study highlights the need for improved implementation of laws and policies.

While acknowledging gradual progress, the study calls for a holistic approach combining legal measures with cultural and educational interventions. The aim is not only to ensure women's presence in political spaces but also to empower them to influence policy and decision-making. This approach should address entrenched patriarchal norms, strengthen support systems, and ensure effective policy implementation to create a political environment where women's voices are heard and valued equally in Pokhara and, by extension, Nepal.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The authors declare no competing interests.

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[2] SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), also known as IBM SPSS Statistics, is a software package used for the analysis of statistical data.

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