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## Gender and Politics: Breaking down barriers and influencing policies

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### ABSTRACT:-

The topic of this article is gender and politics, with a focus on the advancement of women's political engagement and the impact of more diverse genders on policy-making. Women and gender minorities have historically been hard-pressed to gain political power. By utilizing mixed-methods methods, the study examines legal reforms, socio-cultural changes, and political party initiatives that have resulted in greater gender equality within political institutions. Theories such as Critical Mass Theory and Intersectionality are utilized to evaluate the impacts of gender diversity on policy priorities. Case studies from Nordic countries and Rwanda demonstrate that the presence of women has led to gender-sensitive policies in healthcare, education, and gender discrimination. Despite progress, findings reveal that socio-cultural norms and structural inequalities remain persistent. According to the study, greater gender diversity in political institutions results in more inclusive and effective governance, resulting in policies that better cater to all individuals. To create democratic systems that are truly representative and serve all citizens, the paper emphasizes the need to continue promoting gender equality in politics.

**Keywords:-** Gender and politics, Political participation, Gender diversity, Policy-making, Critical Mass Theory and Intersectionality

### Introduction:-

*“For me, a better democracy is a democracy where women do not only have the right to vote and to elect but to be elected.” - Michele Bachelet*

The intersection of gender and politics is a vital field of research that examines how gender affects political processes, participation, and policymakers. Women and gender minorities have historically experienced significant barriers to their participation in politics due to legal restrictions, societal norms, and biases. Due to these obstacles, there is a significant gap in political representation and decision-making circles, leading to inadequate policies that prioritize the needs of particular groups. However, there have been some notable advances in the last few decades. Feminist movements and international organizations have played a role in increasing female political representation, driven by the global push for gender equality. In several countries, gender quotas have been introduced as a means to guarantee fewer women in office. The initiatives have resulted in a steady surge of women in politics, with local councils, national parliaments and executive offices. But progress on gender equality in politics is far from over. Despite progress, women and gender minorities still face systemic barriers such as gender bias, discrimination, and inadequate support networks. These challenges, along with gender-based violence and economic inequality, make it more difficult to engage in politics. Also, when women enter the workforce, they are frequently subjected to more scrutiny and pressure than their male counterparts. More than just the fairness of politics, greater gender diversity has real benefits for policy-making. Women politicians are more likely to prioritize issues like healthcare, education, and social welfare, which directly impact their family and community. Additionally, different political factions are more liable to create policies that are inclusive and reflect the views of all individuals. The inclusion fosters trust and legitimacy in democratic institutions, thereby strengthening the political system as a whole. In summary, even though we have achieved significant levels of gender diversity in politics, it is imperative to keep working on resolving the remaining obstacles. To achieve effective and inclusive governance that caters to all citizens, gender equality must be promoted in political participation.

### Background of the Study:-

Throughout history, there has been significant gender inequality in political participation, with patriarchal systems historically placing more power on men and marginalizing women and gender minorities. In the past, men held significant formal political positions and women were relegated to the private domain. This exclusion was institutionalized by laws and cultural norms that restricted women's rights and opportunities. The suffrage movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s revolutionized this dynamic. The demand for the right to vote by women in various countries resulted, with significant milestones achieved throughout history. Nevertheless, significant variations in political participation persisted, emphasizing the persistent difficulties faced by women and gender minorities in politics.

Theories of political socialization offer explanations for how gender differences in political engagement form and endure. Political socialization involves the development of political attitudes, beliefs and behaviors in individuals. The process is highly influenced by gender, with men and women often receiving different messages about their roles in society. The desire for leadership positions and political participation is often centered around men, while women may face more demanding social roles that prioritize household chores. Women's political aspirations and participation rates are shaped by gendered expectations, leading to a lack of representation in politics.

The Critical Mass Theory presents an alternative approach to analyzing gender inequality in political engagement. According to this theory, a significant number of women must be present in political institutions for policy implementation to be effective. Women who make up a critical mass, often 30% or more, are more inclined to champion issues that impact women and gender minorities, such as child care, reproductive rights, and other concerns. The presence of a critical mass within political institutions can lead to the challenge of masculinity and promote greater participation from diverse groups. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality emphasizes the significance of taking into account various social categories when analyzing gender inequality. According to intersectionality theory, gender cannot be studied independently as a social category, just like race or class or sexual orientation. This approach highlights the experiences and challenges encountered by various women and gender minorities in politics. Women of color, lesbians and gays or lesboise alike may encounter distinct challenges that are not encountered by white, middle-class women. Understanding these intricate dynamics and employing intersectional analysis is essential for identifying ways to facilitate political participation. Research has shown that an increase in gender diversity within political institutions results in more comprehensive, inclusive policy-making. Studies indicate that women voters are more inclined to support social issues, healthcare, education, and gender equality policies. Studies indicate that women are the dominant advocates of family leave, affordable childcare, and domestic violence in legislation that has significant impacts on women's lives and families. Furthermore, women in political institutions can encourage other women to participate in politics by creating a feedback loop that promotes gender equality in the political arena. Nevertheless, significant obstacles persist in preventing women and gender minorities from fully engaging in political affairs. Gender bias and discrimination persist, taking on various forms such as sexist media coverage, unequal campaign funding, and the underrepresentation of women's leadership potential. The challenges are exacerbated by structural inequalities, such as the lack of support networks and mentorship opportunities. In addition, gender violence and harassment in political settings can discourage women and gender minorities from pursuing political careers. Ultimately, while some notable progress in gender-based politics has been made, more work is needed to clear remaining hindrances. The historical context, key theories, and previous research on this topic can be utilized to develop strategies for promoting gender equality in politics. Addressing the complex issues faced by women and gender minorities will enable us to create more representative and inclusive political systems that cater to all citizens.

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### **Breaking Down Barriers:-**

Women's political participation has been boosted by legal and institutional reforms that address existing barriers and facilitate greater levels of representation. Among the most successful measures are gender quotas and reserved seats in parliament. The implementation of such policies can cause political transformations in countries like Rwanda and Sweden. Due to a constitutional provision that guarantees 30% of parliament seats go to women, Rwanda has one of the highest percentages of women in the world. In Sweden, political parties voluntarily adopt quotas to maintain gender parity and have a high proportion of women in parliament. The steps set a new standard for other countries seeking to promote gender equality in politics, not only increasing the number of women in elected positions. Gender representation is influenced by political parties, which act as intermediaries in elections. The way they select candidates and the criteria used determine the likelihood of women being nominated and elected. Female representation is more common in parties that have internal quotas or support systems for female candidates and promote gender diversity. Some political parties have implemented "zipper systems," which involve alternating male and female candidate lists to ensure equal representation. Furthermore, women's political entry barriers have been successfully surmounted by mentoring programs and networks. These programs offer women the tools, education and support they need to succeed in politics -- a terrain that's often dominated by men. Legal and institutional reforms alone may not ensure gender parity in politics. Socio-cultural attitudes towards gender roles remain a major hindrance for women's participation in politics. Women are often expected to prioritize their family and caregiving responsibilities over public life, as per traditional gender norms. The societal norms that are deeply rooted can discourage women from running for office or taking on political roles. These norms can only be changed through ongoing efforts in education, public awareness, and the promotion of positive role models. Educational programs can have a transformative effect on perceptions of gender from an early age. Including gender equality in school curricula promotes diversity and encourages acceptance. Moreover, campaigns to raise public awareness about the role of women in politics and diversity within political processes can help inform future policy choices. Such campaigns can also help to correct misunderstandings about women's capabilities and contributions to politics, thus making female leaders more widely accepted and supported. Another effective way to overcome socio-cultural barriers is by promoting positive role models. Successful women in politics and leadership positions can encourage other women to follow their lead. These role models serve as a clear indication that women can make valuable contributions to politics and government. It is important to ensure that the media portrays female politicians and leaders with appropriate consideration, avoiding any forms of discrimination or gender-based prejudice. Additionally, it is crucial to establish favorable conditions within political systems to maintain women's involvement. This involves implementing family-oriented policies like parental leave and flexible working hours to help balance the political demands on personal time. Safe spaces that allow women to express their experiences and concerns without fear of discrimination or harassment are also essential. The issue of gender-based violence and harassment in political settings must be addressed to ensure women's liberation and confidence. To sum up, removing obstacles to women's political involvement requires several approaches, including legal and institutional changes, modifications in political party structures, and efforts to alter socio-cultural beliefs. Although gender quotas and reserved seats have been effective in increasing female representation, the role of political parties and social norms is still paramount. Societies that provide a positive environment and encourage positive role models can create broader political structures that recognize and value women and gender minorities. To ensure that gender equality is truly achieved in politics and all perspectives are given equal weight, it is crucial to prioritize these areas.

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### **Influencing Policies:-**

Research consistently indicates that women and gender minorities in politics tend to focus on policy issues at a higher rate than men. This difference in focus on policy is largely due to the experiences and challenges they have encountered. Women lawmakers are more inclined to champion policies related to healthcare, education, social welfare, and gender equality. These policy priorities stem from a more inclusive perception of the diverse needs of their constituents, including women and marginalized groups. The voices of women and gender minorities, such as those involved in reproductive health,

gender-based violence, and equal pay, contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive governance. Their presence allows the policymaking process to reflect a wider range of perspectives, which results in outcomes that benefit broader society. Case studies in gender-inclusive policymaking from the Nordic countries demonstrate the profound influence of a high proportion of women in office. Among the countries where gender equality is highly prevalent are Sweden, Norway, and Finland, many of which have implemented policies to incorporate gender dimensions in their policies. These countries have adopted comprehensive policies that promote gender equality, including extended parental leave, subsidies for childcare, and equal pay laws. In addition to improving the lives of women and families, these actions have also contributed to a better society overall. Such policies are driven by the large numbers of women who hold political office in these countries, and they demonstrate that gender diversity is critical to inclusive and effective governance. Rwanda is another impressive example of inclusive policy. Rwanda's gender quota, one of the highest proportions of women in parliament in the world, has helped spur innovation and promote gender sensitive legislation. This high proportion of females has resulted in significant changes to laws and policies that directly address gender gaps. Rwanda has implemented measures to combat gender-based violence, ensure women's inheritance rights, and promote economic empowerment for women. Rwandan women have experienced significant improvements in their social and economic well-being, resulting in the development of a more equal society. The use of institutional mechanisms, such as gender quotas, can help Rwandans gain access to political power and ensure women's participation in the legislative process. Women and gender minorities' increased political participation has a significant impact on broader gender equality. The promotion of women's health and education, as well as economic opportunities for women, are all important factors that contribute to gender equality. Policies promoting equal education and healthcare opportunities for women impact not only individual lives but also the economic and social well-being of societies. Equally, policies that promote women's employment and their labor-related rights help to overcome economic hindrances and reduce gender vacancies. Furthermore, the emergence of women leaders challenges traditional gender roles and provides role models for future generations. The sight of women holding important political positions and contributing to policy-making opens up new opportunities for young girls, inspiring them to explore similar opportunities. This representation can dispel stereotypes and promote a more equal distribution of power and duties between genders in all aspects of life. Also, the presence of women in leadership positions can alter organizational policies and practices to promote greater tolerance and consideration of both sexes. To sum up, women and gender minorities hold significant and varied power in policy-making. Their individual perspectives and priorities contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive governance, which in turn fosters greater gender equality. Case studies from the Nordic countries and Rwanda illustrate the importance of gender-inclusive policies and their impact on policy development. The more women and gender minorities enter the political arena, the more significant the positive effects will be on society and policy, leading to a more just and equitable world.

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### Conclusion:-

At the intersection of gender and politics, a key area of research highlights the importance of inclusive representation in promoting good governance and social change. The historical barriers to women and gender minorities' political participation have been overcome through successive steps. The progress made has not resolved all the challenges that exist in attaining full gender parity in political arenas across the globe. The political process of gender parity has been a long-term and successful endeavor. Women's political involvement has been positively impacted by legal and institutional reforms. Gender quotas, reserved seats in parliament and other such measures have greatly increased the number of women serving in office. Women are highly represented in countries like Rwanda, which has a constitutional obligation to have gender quotas, and the Nordic countries, where voluntarily selected party. These initiatives have not only diversified political leadership but also catalyzed policy agendas that focus on women and marginalized groups. Women in politics are frequently the driving force behind policies centered on healthcare, education, social welfare, and gender equality, reflecting their unique perspectives and experiences. Despite these advancements, women still face socio-cultural barriers that prevent them from fully engaging in politics. Gender norms that prioritize domestic roles over public engagement are often embedded in society, leading to unequal opportunities and expectations. These norms can be addressed through education, public awareness campaigns, and the promotion of positive role models in leadership positions. Societies can foster a culture of women empowerment by challenging stereotypes and broadening societal perceptions of their potential roles in government. Political institutions' gender diversity affects not only political representation but also policy outcomes that benefit society as a whole. Evidence suggests that disparate decision-making entities tend to adopt policies that are more inclusive and reflect a wider range of social needs. When women have a strong voice, policies that promote gender equality in areas such as healthcare access, reproductive rights and economic empowerment are more likely to be effective and will benefit. Also, the involvement of women and gender minorities in political leadership creates a sense of legitimacy that transcends traditional power structures. The diversity of the populations that political institutions serve is a key factor in building trust and participating in democratic processes. Young girls and boys look to women leaders as inspirations for building a society where leadership is inclusive and equitable. Ultimately, while much has been accomplished in terms of gender equality in politics, more work is still needed to overcome remaining obstacles and achieve inclusive representation. To achieve gender parity in political participation worldwide, we must persist in advocating for legal reforms, promoting institutional practices, and making cultural shifts. The establishment of a culture where women and gender minorities can thrive in political settings will allow democratic systems that represent and serve all citizens, ultimately leading to more just and equitable societies for generations to come.

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