

# RISING BEYOND PATRIARCHY: THE LEH LEAP - UNVEILING THE FEMALE VOTER REVOLUTION

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## ABSTRACT

*Rising Beyond Patriarchy: The Leh Leap Unveiling the Female Voter Revolution* investigates the significant impact of rising participation of women in the Leh region of Ladakh's electoral processes. The study explores profound societal changes challenging patriarchal norms. Focusing on Ladakhi women, the research addresses obstacles like restricted mobility and societal expectations while documenting the evolution of power dynamics. The narrative highlights empowered women leaders breaking stereotypes and emphasizes their crucial role in policy impact, community influence and legal equality. A comprehensive historical analysis reveals a positive trend in female voter participation, indicating a deeper societal shift and encompass a comparative examination, qualitative exploration of Ladakhi female voters' motivations and impact of legal reforms. Ultimately, "The Leh Leap" serves as a source of inspiration, fostering a global conversation on gender equality and inclusive democracy.

**KEYWORDS:** *Leh, Women, Patriarchy, Political Empowerment, Electoral Data*

## INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy, an enduring social construct, exerts a widespread influence in societies globally. Leh, cradled in the splendor of the Himalayas, is no exception. Despite its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage, Ladakh's society is marked by the prevalence of patriarchal norms and practices. This embarks on an exploration of the intricate ways patriarchy influences various facets of Ladakh's society, with a particular emphasis on the lives of Ladakhi women. Set against the backdrop of Leh Ladakh's awe-inspiring landscapes, our study, "Rising Beyond Patriarchy: The Leh Leap - Unveiling the Female Voter Revolution," delves into the profound impact of the rising participation of women in the region's electoral processes.

At the heart of our inquiry lies a crucial research question: how does the growing engagement of women in electoral processes reshape the traditional power structures and influence Leh Ladakh's political landscape? This question goes beyond academia; it carries real-world significance. As women across the globe continue to advocate for equitable representation in politics, comprehending the consequences of their participation in complex contexts like Leh becomes paramount. Our research is driven by the necessity to comprehend the tangible transformations that follow as women make their voices heard through the ballot. We aim to navigate the evolution of power dynamics within this unique region and derive insights applicable to similar contexts worldwide.

Patriarchy is deeply ingrained in Ladakh's societal fabric, influencing family structures, gender roles, political representation, property rights and access to education. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that Leh district of Ladakh is not static; it is in a state of transition, with a growing awareness of the need for gender equality. Efforts are underway to challenge and reshape patriarchal norms, with both organizations and individuals actively working to promote gender equality and empower women in Ladakh. As Leh continues to evolve, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of patriarchy and work towards a more inclusive and equitable society that benefits all its residents, with a special emphasis on the empowerment of women. Our methodology, characterized by thorough data analysis and the visual representation of findings, serves as a lens through which we aim to illuminate the dynamics of this female voter revolution. In this pursuit, we unveil the untold narrative of women in Leh district of Ladakh transcending the constraints of patriarchy, reshaping the political landscape and advancing towards equity.

## CHALLENGES IMPOSED BY PATRIARCHY ON WOMEN'S ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

The patriarchal system in Ladakh, akin to many conventional societies, presented a substantial obstacle to women's exercise of their voting rights. Several factors contributed to hindering women's participation in the electoral process such as restricted mobility where women often faced constraints on their movement, being confined to their homes or

local communities. Thus, restricting their accessibility to polling stations, which are generally situated far from their residences. Also, the limited access to education, in patriarchal societies, women frequently and very commonly encountered resistance and void of opportunities to obtain education which resulted in women finding themselves unaware about the benefits of participating in the political process.

While social expectations are deep-seated patriarchal norms prescribed that a woman's primary role was within the household, leading to societal expectations that discouraged women from engaging in most of the public activities such as voting. Family and community pressure upheld male authority and control over decision-making. As a result, women have experienced pressure from their families or communities to not to vote. Patriarchy in Ladakh tended to exclude women from participation in decision-making processes and this lack of representation pushed women away from involvement in political activities such as voting.

Overcoming these challenges necessitated a substantial cultural and social transformation, as well as initiatives aimed at empowering women and advancing gender equality. The documented evolution in "The Leh Leap" indicates that women in Ladakh successfully confronted and altered these patriarchal norms, granting them greater freedom to exercise their right to vote.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

What are the underlying factors propelling the heightened engagement of women in electoral processes in Leh district of Ladakh and how do these factors bolster women's empowerment within a traditionally patriarchal society?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The surge in female voter participation in Leh has garnered attention as a significant societal shift. To understand this phenomenon, it is essential to review existing literature that sheds light on the multifaceted aspects of gender dynamics, patriarchy and political participation in Leh Ladakh. Such as Pasha (2023) examined Ladakh's distinctive cultural landscape sheds light on the issue of women's empowerment. Despite its rich cultural heritage, Ladakh has grappled with historical gender disparities, which have traditionally confined women to domestic roles with limited opportunities. Various initiatives have emerged to challenge these norms, focusing on education, vocational training and promoting gender equality awareness. It underscores the vital importance of healthcare accessibility, particularly in reproductive and maternal health, to address gender-based health disparities. It highlights the necessity of a

comprehensive, collaborative approach to advance women's empowerment and promote gender equity in Ladakh.

Dorjay (2018) offers a comprehensive exploration of Ladakh's local governance, underscoring its historical and contemporary importance. It delves into Ladakh's cultural diversity, geographical obstacles and its evolution toward demanding autonomous status. The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) plays a pivotal role in local governance, yet challenges such as deficient infrastructure, education and healthcare endure. Socially, there exist problems related to caste-based discrimination and gender disparities. To surmount these issues, he underscores the necessity for collaborative and synchronized endeavors involving diverse stakeholders, comprising governmental and non-governmental organizations, to fortify participatory governance and encourage comprehensive development in Ladakh. While Chadha (2014) presents the universal principle of gender equality and the historical subjugation of women in India. It recognizes constitutional provisions and legislative initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality, with a specific emphasis on political engagement. The Women's Reservation Bill, seeking to allocate one-third of legislative seats to women, encounters political hurdles. He stresses the significance of empowering women in politics, combating corruption and criminalization and fostering gender equality through awareness and legal measures.

Ladol (2013) provides an insightful examination of the patriarchal dynamics in Ladakh. While the status of women in Ladakh may be relatively better compared to other regions of India, it is essential to acknowledge that patriarchy still exists in Ladakh. He delves into the intricate socio-cultural framework that perpetuates the subordination of women, trapping them within societal norms that uphold male dominance as a natural order, mirroring female submissiveness as ingrained in Ladakhi culture. Furthermore, the research explores the significant role of religion in shaping and reinforcing patriarchal norms. It discusses various forms of marriages prevalent in Ladakh, highlighting how some types grant more authority to males. The preference for male children, the limited presence of women in Ladakh's political arena and several other pertinent issues are addressed. It is imperative to shed light on these matters to challenge the perception that gender bias does not exist in Ladakh or that women are treated equally as men. The reality beneath this façade deserves attention. Rai (2011) focuses on the engagement of women in Indian politics shows a noticeable rise in voting and participation in election campaigns. However, they still lack proportional representation in legislative bodies and political parties. The factors affecting women's involvement differ between voting and campaigning. Implementing affirmative actions, like reservations and

enhancing their roles in decision-making, is crucial to rectify this imbalance. Aggarwal (2004) provides a comprehensive examination of the intricate Kashmir conflict. It goes beyond traditional geopolitical and religious perspectives and centers its focus on Ladakh. The study investigates the repercussions of the conflict on Buddhist and Muslim communities in the region. Aggarwal's research highlights the significance of cultural history and performance in comprehending the influence of the border on political dynamics and identity.

The following statements highlight gaps in the mentioned literature review above:

- There is a gap in research concerning the obstacles women confront when engaging in local governance in Ladakh as well as the exploration of potential strategies to mitigate gender disparities at the grassroots level.
- A research void exists when it comes to conducting a comprehensive analysis of the underlying causes of patriarchal norms in Ladakh, along with offering recommendations to challenge and transform these traditional practices in the region.
- There is a necessity for a study that delves into the specific hardships faced by women in Ladakh regarding their access to healthcare services and the potential impact of improved healthcare accessibility on their participation in various domains, including politics.
- There is a dearth of literature reflecting the current electoral context of Leh Ladakh, as outdated studies impede a thorough understanding of the evolving landscape.

Addressing these gaps in research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the ongoing transformation in Ladakh's gender dynamics and the intricate factors influencing women's participation in politics.

**FEMALE VOTERS OF LEH DISTRICT OF LADAKH: ELECTORAL VS. ACTUAL REPRESENTATION (1962-2020)**

The Leh district is situated in the picturesque region of Ladakh in northern India and is a land of enchanting beauty and vibrant culture. However, beneath its serene face lie significant gender disparities that permeate various aspects of society, including political representation. Despite the immense contributions and potential of women, their voices have often been marginalized in the decision-making processes. In this section, we root about the electoral and actual representation of female voters in Leh district from 1962 to 2020 with the aim to examine the disparities, challenges and progress in bridging the

gender gap in political participation. By exploring historical data and examining political trends, we uncover a complex narrative that sheds light on the existing barriers to female empowerment and the urgent need for change. Through this analysis, we try to advocate for a more inclusive and representative political system which can amplify their voices and leads to a more equitable society for all while fostering for a deeper understanding of the struggles face by female voters in Leh district.

**Electoral and Actual Voter Statistics**

**Table No.1:**

**Female Voters in Leh: Year-Wise Electoral and Actual Voters Statistics**

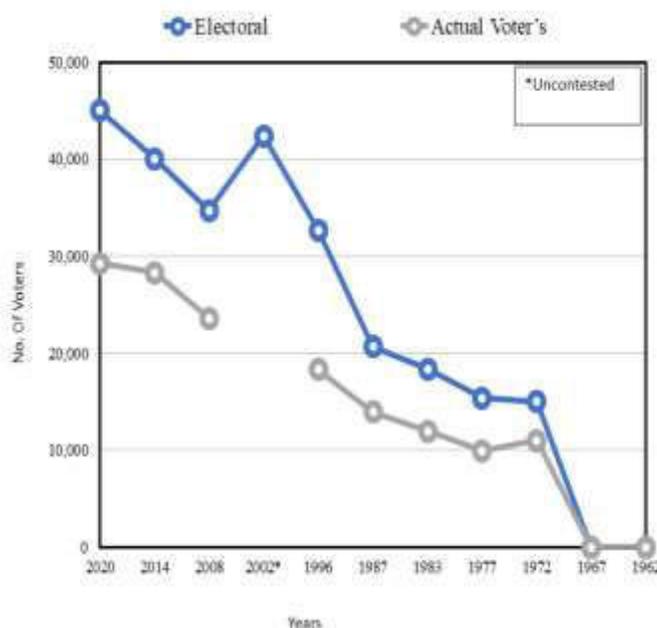
| Years | Electoral | Actual Voters |
|-------|-----------|---------------|
| 2020  | 45025     | 29267         |
| 2014  | 40074     | 28343         |
| 2008  | 34751     | 23602         |
| 2002  | 42457     | Uncontested*  |
| 1996  | 32725     | 18336         |
| 1987  | 20708     | 13952         |
| 1983  | 18431     | 12007         |
| 1977  | 15328     | 9983          |
| 1972  | 15032     | 11052         |
| 1967  | 0         | 0             |
| 1962  | 0         | 0             |

The table sheds light on the voter turnout in various years while providing a chronological overview of electoral data in Leh Ladakh. The gradual increase in the number of female electoral registrants and actual female voters over the years signifies a positive trend towards greater political participation of women in Leh. The significant surge in the 2020 and 2014 elections is particularly noteworthy, suggesting heightened interest and engagement of women in the electoral process during those years.

**FEMALE VOTER PARTICIPATION: CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL NORMS IN LEH**

The engagement of female voters plays a crucial role in challenging traditional patriarchal structures in Leh district of Ladakh as there active involvement of women in the electoral process elevates their prominence and influence in the public arena. Their votes make them active participants in governance as their votes directly contribute to political decisions thus challenging the conventional belief that women's roles are restricted to the private or domestic sphere only. As a result, female leaders are elected due to higher turnout of female

voters. This presence of women in influential political positions challenges the predominantly male-dominated political landscape and offers inspiring figures for other women. It further ensures that women's concerns are more likely to be acknowledged, understood and addressed because of this women's rights are getting more support result in more gender-sensitive policies and legislation that support this. It will ultimately challenge traditional gender roles and lead to changes in areas such as women's health, education and economic opportunities.



Participating in elections and contributing to the political decision-making empowers women. This challenges the conventional perception of women as passive observers in societal affairs while enhancing their confidence, self-esteem and sense of agency. Female voter participation can also serve as an inspiration for others in the community to engage in the political process. When women are seen as active voters, it contradicts stereotypes and encourages more women to participate, thus helping in undermining patriarchal norms that discourage women from public involvement. Political engagement may involve revisions to discriminatory laws and measures to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and thereby challenging patriarchal legal structures can lead to legal reforms that advance gender equality.

With women's increased involvement in politics, there is a gradual shift in power dynamics, both at the individual and societal levels. This can result in greater decision-making authority for women within their families and communities while challenging traditional patriarchal authority.

In summary, female voter participation serves as a potent instrument for challenging and reshaping traditional patriarchal structures in Leh district of Ladakh. It not only addresses gender disparities in politics but also triggers broader societal changes that promote gender equality.

### FACTORS HEIGHTENED ENGAGEMENT OF WOMEN IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN LEH

The increased involvement of women in electoral processes in Leh district of Ladakh leads to various legal reforms such as initiatives aimed to promote gender equality and women's participation in politics, such as reservations for women in local governance.

Women's active participation in electoral processes has been facilitated by increased awareness and access to education, which equips them with knowledge about their rights and the significance of political engagement. Gaining them to have economic independence contributing to their households have shown greater interest in politics and exercised their voting rights. Women leaders in politics such as Rinchen Lamo, Sayeeda Bano, Padma Angmo and many other serves as inspirational figures, motivating other women to become politically active. Witnessing women in positions of authority encourages more women to participate. Support and encouragement from local communities and families play a crucial role. When women have the backing of their communities, they are more likely to engage in electoral processes. Accessing to information and media coverage of political events has increased women's awareness and interest in politics, keeping them informed and engaged.

Evolving societal norms and values that embrace gender-inclusive perspectives have encouraged women's participation in politics. With the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups focused on women's empowerment and political participation has significantly increased women's engagement in electoral processes. Organizations and networks dedicated to supporting and providing information on political engagement have played a pivotal role in encouraging women's participation. A stable and secure political environment has given women the confidence to participate without fear of reprisals, thus boosting their engagement.

Collectively, these factors contribute to the increased engagement of women in electoral processes in Leh Ladakh, gradually challenging traditional gender norms and promoting greater gender equality in the political sphere.

### FUTURE SCOPE FOR RESEARCH

We can conduct a comparative study contrasting Ladakh's context with other Indian or international regions to distinguish factors that impact female voter engagement, whether region-specific or universally applicable. With undertaking in-depth qualitative research to explore the motivations and barriers experienced by Ladakhi female voters. Qualitative insights can also provide a nuanced understanding of their perspectives.

Investigate the consequences of increased female voter participation on policy outcomes and governance. Like how does greater gender diversity in politics lead to more gender-sensitive policies? Scrutinize the role of women in the election process, from candidacy to campaign strategies. How do women candidates influence voter turnout and choices?

Analyses the portrayal of women in political discourse and media. How does this portrayal influence their political involvement? Also, how factors such as age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status intersect with gender, impacting voter participation. Exploring the technological advancements such as online voting systems and digital political campaigns which are helpful in promoting women's participation. Examining how Ladakh's cultural norms and traditions influence female political participation and whether these dynamics are evolving over time.

Continued research in these domains will not only advance our understanding of female voter participation in Ladakh but also enrich the broader global dialogue on gender equality, political empowerment and inclusive democracy.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the ongoing transformation in Leh Ladakh's political landscape, characterized by the increasing participation of women in electoral processes, marks a significant departure from deeply entrenched patriarchal norms of society. The electoral data while highlighting the growing significance of women's influence in shaping political outcomes also reinforces their pivotal role in shaping a more equitable and participatory society. "The Leh Leap" stands as a symbol of the transformative potential of women in politics and lays the foundation for a more inclusive and gender-equal future in the region. It exemplifies the unwavering resilience, determination and passion of women leaders and voters who continue to push progress in Leh Ladakh.

As we contemplate this journey of transcending patriarchal norms, it becomes clear that women's empowerment extends beyond political participation; it encompasses the formidable task of challenging deeply ingrained gender norms and reshaping societies. Leh Ladakh's experience shines as a

beacon of hope, inspiring regions globally to break free from the constraints of patriarchy and fully embrace the boundless potential of women as dynamic agents of change. "The Leh Leap" propels us toward a more equitable, inclusive and progressive society, where women's voices are not only heard but recognized and celebrated as catalysts for transformation.

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