



PARTICIPATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN AS MEMBERS OF THE LOK SABHA IN INDIA

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Abstract:

The representation of Muslim members in Parliament has encountered persistent challenges, particularly regarding the participation of Muslim women in the Lok Sabha. This issue is concerning, as only 18 Muslim women have been elected from 1951 to 2024. Unfortunately, in the recent 18th Lok Sabha elections, 24 Muslim Members of Parliament were elected, comprising 22 men and only 02 women. This situation underscores the critical need for greater gender balance and more opportunities for women in political leadership. The significant underrepresentation of Muslim women highlights the necessity for greater inclusion and support, ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives are adequately represented in our political landscape.

Keywords: Members in Parliament, Muslim women, Gender balance, Political landscape.

Introduction:

In pre-independence Indian history, there were profound social, political, and cultural changes, during which Muslim women encountered a variety of challenges, including patriarchal norms, colonial oppression, and the constraints of the purdah system. These barriers often hindered their educational opportunities, limited their public engagement, and reinforced gender-based roles. Despite such limitations, Muslim women played crucial roles in shaping the political and social climate of the era. This study vividly highlights the lives, struggles, and significant contributions of these women, shedding ample light on how they navigated and resisted societal constraints. It discusses influential figures like Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Fatima Jinnah, Abadi Banu Begum, Rashid Jahan, and Ismat Chughtai, whose efforts in education, social reform, literature, and nationalist movements challenged the oppressive frameworks of their time. Through their work, these figures not only propelled the cause of Indian independence forward but also championed the rights of Muslim women and broader social reforms. This paper seeks to illuminate Muslim women's determination, agency, and impact, showcasing how they were integral to both the fight for national liberation and the pursuit of gender equality. Muslim women were pivotal in India's freedom struggle (1857–1947), overcoming purdah and patriarchal constraints to lead protests, promote education, and join Gandhian movements. Key leaders like Bi Amma (Abadi Banu Begum, who actively participated in the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements), Begum Hazrat Mahal (who led the 1857 revolt in Awadh), and Surayya Tyabji (who designed the national flag) defied British rule through activism, fundraising, and literature.

Other key figures include Nishat-Un-Nisa Begum (who broke purdah to speak at Congress sessions), Amjadi Begum, Bibi Amtus Salam, and Sultana Saleem. These women fought not only for national liberation from British rule but also for gender equality and social reform within their communities. By examining their

contributions and the socio-political context in which they acted, this study underscores their essential role in India's independence movement and in the progress of women's rights in the subcontinent. In post-independence, Indian Muslim women politicians have never been mere symbols — they have been leaders, strategists, administrators, and power brokers. They have served as Chief Ministers, managed complex constituencies with grit, remained steadfast party loyalists, shifted allegiances when strategy demanded it, and handled some of the most critical ministries in government. From Syeda Anwara Taimur, who made history as a Chief Minister, to formidable parliamentarians like Mohsina Kidwai, Najma Heptulla, and Mehbooba Mufti, they have demonstrated every quality long celebrated in male “go-getters” of Indian politics — resilience, negotiation skills, administrative acumen, and political courage.

Muslim Women in Lok Sabha:

Regrettably, from the inaugural General Elections of 1951/52 to the 18th Lok Sabha Election in 2024, India has seen only 690 women Members of Parliament elected. Among these, a modest 18 are Muslim women, highlighting a significant underrepresentation within this demographic since independence. This information is documented in the newly released book titled "Missing from the House: Muslim Women in Lok Sabha." Notably, 13 of these women made their mark through active political engagement, while the remaining 5 were affiliated with political families. The diverse backgrounds of these 18 trailblazers included members of royal families and individuals who rose from humble beginnings, such as tea sellers, to prominence as political figures. Among them were also the wife of a former President and a renowned Bengali actress. Despite their varied journeys, each of these Muslim women faced considerable challenges in their pursuits to serve in Parliament. Given India's population of approximately 1.46 billion, the proportion of Muslim women who have achieved this distinction stands at a mere 7.1 percent, underscoring an area for potential improvement and reflection.

As of 2025, 18 Lok Sabhas have been formed. Notably, on five occasions, there has not been any Muslim woman serving as an MP in the Lok Sabha. Additionally, since independence, the representation of Muslim MPs has not exceeded 4 of the total 543. It is worth mentioning that states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana are recognized for their higher education levels compared to North India. Despite this, there has yet to be a Muslim woman from these five states who has had the opportunity to represent their constituents in Parliament.

The 18 Muslim women who have held the position of Member of Parliament (MP) include: Mafida Ahmed (Congress, 1957-1962), Zohrabai Akbarbai Chawra (Congress, 1962-1967), Maymuna Sultan (Congress, 1957-1967), Begum Akbar Jahan Abdullah (National Conference, 1977-1979, 1984-1989), Rashida Haque (Congress, 1977-1979), Mohsina Kidwai (Congress, 1978-1989), Abida Ahmed (Congress, 1981-1989), Noor Banu (Congress, 1996, 1999-2004), Rubab Saeeda (Samajwadi Party, 2004-2009), Mehbooba Mufti (PDP, 2004-2009, 2014-2019), Tabassum Hasan (Samajwadi Party, Lok Dal, Bahujan Samaj Party, 2009-2014), Mausam Noor (Trinamool Congress, 2009-2019), Kaiser Jahan (BSP, 2009-2014), Mumtaz Sanghamita (Trinamool Congress, 2014-2019), Sajda Ahmed (Trinamool Congress, 2014-2024, currently serving), Raneen Narah (Congress, 1998-2004, 2009-2014), Nusrat Jahan Ruhi (Trinamool Congress, 2019-2024), and Iqra Hasan (Samajwadi Party, 2024-till date).

Among these distinguished individuals, Mohsina Kidwai stands out as the longest-serving MP and has also held the esteemed position of Union Minister, overseeing various ministries including Labour, Health, Family Welfare, Rural Development, Transport, and Urban Development at different points in her career.

Kaiser Jahan presents a remarkable story; she is the spouse of Muhammad Jasmir Ansari, who supported their family through the tea trade. Kaiser Jahan achieved a notable victory in the 2009 elections amidst a competitive four-way contest.

Additionally, Abida Ahmed, hailing from a prominent family in Assam, is the only woman MP who is also the wife of a President. Having succeeded her late husband, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the country's fifth President, she won a by-election from Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh four years after his passing and notably secured consecutive victories from the same constituency.

Begum Noor Banu, originally known as Mahtab Zamani, is recognized for her lineage as the wife of the former Raja of Rampur. Although she faced challenges in her campaigns against prominent figures such as Azam Khan and Bollywood actress Jaya Prada in 2004 and 2009, she remains a notable figure in the political narrative. Her late husband, Nawab Syed Zulfikar Ali Khan, was a descendant of the Rohilla dynasty, and she was affectionately called Mickey Miah.

Currently serving in the Lok Sabha, Iqra Hasan Chowdhury of the Samajwadi Party represents Kairana. Iqra Hasan is recognized as one of the youngest Members of Parliament in the 18th Lok Sabha. As a third-generation politician and a law graduate from London, she has demonstrated significant dedication to her political career. In a notable electoral contest, she defeated her BJP opponent.

Trinamool Congress MP Sajda Ahmed, who recently won from the Uluberia constituency in West Bengal, also contributes to the current legislative assembly. This individual is currently serving her third consecutive term in the Lok Sabha, having been elected in 2014, 2019, and 2024.

Political Party-wise Muslim Women Members in the Lok Sabha in India:

On the midnight of August 15, 1947, India witnessed the inspiring vision of our first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who recognized the profound relationship between destiny and independence. As we reflect on the 79 years that have since passed, we must humbly acknowledge the challenges that remain in realizing the full promise of our democracy. While India is celebrated as the world's largest democracy and is often regarded as the birthplace of democratic ideals, it is essential to recognize that our journey has, at times, neglected to engage with and empower women. This reality underscores the need for ongoing efforts to ensure women are adequately represented and able to assume leadership roles across all spheres of our society. We are committed to addressing these disparities as we continue to strive for a more inclusive and equitable democratic framework.

Sl.No.	Name of MPs	Party	Year	Constituency	State
1.	Mafida Ahmed	INC	1957-1962	Jorhat	Assam
2.	J.Akbarbhai Chowra	INC	1962-1967	Banaskantha	Gujarat
3.	Maimoona Sultan	INC	1957-1967	Bhopal	M.P
4.	B. A. J. Abdullah	NC	1977-79, 1984 -1989	Srinagar, Anantnag	J&K
5.	Rashida Hoque	INC	1977-1979	Silchar	Assam
6.	Mahsina Kidwai	INC	1978-1989	Meerut	U.P
7.	Abida Ahmed	INC	1981-1989	Bareilly	U.P
8.	Noor Banu	INC	1996, 1999-2004	Rampur	U.P
9.	Rubab Sayda	SP	2004-2009	Bahraich	U.P
10.	Mahebooba Mufti	PDP	2004-2009, 2014-19	Anantnag	J&K
11.	Tabasoom Hasan	SP+BSP+R LD	2009-2014	Kairana	U.P
12.	Mousam Noor	AITMC	2009-2019	Malda-Uttar	W.B
13.	Kaisar Jahan	BSP	2009-2014	Sitapur	U.P
14.	M. Sanghamita	AITMC	2014-2019	Bardhaman- Durgapur	W.B
15.	Sajda Ahmed	AITMC	2014- till date	Uluberia	W.B
16.	Ranee Narah	INC	1998-2004, 2009- 2014	Lakhimpur	Assam
17.	Nusrat Jahan Ruhi	AITMC	2019-2024	Basirhat	W.B
18.	Iqra Hasan	SP	2024 – till date	Kairana	U.P

Source: Govt. of India, Election Commission, Statistical Reports for the Concerned Years.

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In addition to the 18 Muslim women elected to the Lok Sabha, two other individuals have been elected who have explicitly stated that they do not identify as followers of Islam. These individuals are Subhashini Ali and Afrin Ali.

Subhashini Ali was elected from the Kanpur Constituency in Uttar Pradesh as a candidate of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). She has been a member of the Polit Bureau of CPI(M) and previously served as a Member of Parliament from 1989 to 1991.

Afrin Ali, also known as Aparupa Poddar, represents the Arambagh constituency in West Bengal and has been elected to the 16th and 17th Lok Sabha. She successfully contested the 2014 and 2019 Indian general elections as a candidate for the All India Trinamool Congress.

Why Are Muslim Women Underrepresented in Politics?

Many Muslim communities hold the perspective that women's primary role is traditionally situated within the home. While the teachings of Islam emphasize the importance of equality, societal norms can sometimes uphold a framework that positions men as the primary figures in public life. This dynamic may lead to the perception that women are less suited for political engagement, fostering the belief that political matters are overly complex for them. As a result, women may find themselves encouraged to prioritize domestic responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing.

For women aspiring to build their careers, the available options are often limited to professions traditionally deemed acceptable, such as nursing or teaching. These roles are frequently perceived as more aligned with conventional expectations. This situation underscores the importance of expanding support and creating opportunities for women across diverse fields, including political engagement and career advancement, to cultivate a more equitable society. The underrepresentation of women in politics can be significantly influenced by the prevailing patriarchal structures within society. Traditional norms and cultural expectations often perceive women's participation in politics and public life as incompatible with established gender roles. These longstanding values may contribute to challenges that women face in becoming engaged in political processes. Additionally, political parties at both national and regional levels often have limited initiatives to enhance the representation of Muslim women, which could benefit from more focused efforts to empower this group within the political landscape. Addressing this lack of support could play a vital role in alleviating the marginalization of Muslim women, who may already encounter various educational and economic challenges compared to their Hindu peers.

The representation of Muslim women in parliament is notably low, currently accounting for less than 1% of total seats. This situation underscores the decision by many Muslim women to run as independent candidates in the Lok Sabha elections, a trend that has become more visible since the seventh Lok Sabha elections. For instance, during those elections, nine Muslim women participated in the electoral process, with six running as independents, two representing the Indian National Congress, and one affiliated with the Janata Party. Regrettably, none of these candidates secured a seat.

Conclusion:

For Indian Muslims to prosper in the contemporary world, it is crucial to foster an environment that encourages both boys and girls to embrace secular education in conjunction with their religious studies. Merely lamenting the community's challenges while rejecting secular education will not lead to meaningful progress.

Moreover, Muslim men need to embody and uphold the principles outlined in the Quran, actively supporting the roles of women within society. At present, Muslim women in India encounter significant obstacles,

including limited political aspirations and various societal constraints that hinder their opportunities for advancement.

It is imperative that Muslim men, including influential religious leaders, demonstrate confidence in their women by endorsing their participation in electoral processes. Allowing women to run for elected office is vital, as is advocating for the education of all girls in the community. Education is a powerful catalyst for transformative change, ultimately enhancing individuals' lives and fostering growth across the Muslim community.

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