
From Modern Age to Digital Era: Women's Political Participation in the Context of Bihar's Alcohol Ban - A Micro-Sociological Study of Madhepura

Ashish Kumar Ranjan, Ph.D Research Scholar,

Department of Sociology, Bhupendra Narayan Mandal University

Abstract

Through a targeted micro-sociological analysis of the Madhepura area, this research explores the shifting trends of women's political participation in Bihar as the modern period gives way to the digital one. The study analyzes the effects of Bihar's 2016 alcohol ban on women's public and political roles, the ways in which digital literacy and access impact political participation, and the implications of local circumstances in Madhepura for both opportunity and limitation. The study places Madhepura within state trends while highlighting local specificities (higher rurality, lower female literacy) using a mixed-methods approach that combines secondary quantitative data (Census 2011; NFHS-5; Election Commission reporting and published studies) with a qualitative interpretive framework based on published field studies and local reporting.

The findings show three main trends: (1) prohibition has had quantifiable, however uneven, effects on domestic violence and household dynamics (research shows declines in some indicators); (2) digital access is still severely gendered and restricted in Bihar, which limits women's ability to use digital platforms for political participation; and (3) local political representation of women is still low, even though women's turnout in recent elections has increased. Though structural constraints including education, the digital gap, and conservative societal norms hinder deeper political leadership advances in Madhepura, the paper concludes that prohibition provides chances for some types of female political expression (policy support, vote behavior). Policy suggestions include

enhancing local women's political education, focusing on computer literacy programs for women, and measuring the gendered social effects of prohibition.

Keywords:- Women's Political Participation, Digital Divide, Alcohol Prohibition in Bihar, Madhepura District, Gender and Social Change.

Introduction

Women's political participation in India has evolved as a result of numerous social and technological shifts. From early 20th-century social reform movements to the post-independence era when women were granted official voting rights, women's involvement in local government and electoral politics has grown significantly. However, women's actual political power is still uneven notwithstanding quota systems and legal voting equality, which help to address the representation inequalities in governance institutions. Due to two concurrent changes during the past ten years, Bihar, a sizable and primarily rural state in eastern India, offers an intriguing case for exploring both tendencies. First, in April 2016, a comprehensive regulation prohibiting the sale and consumption of all alcoholic beverages was put into effect. Second, India's general transition to digital technology has had an uneven impact on public life, giving rise to new digital platforms for political mobilization and communication. However, in many parts of Bihar, women's access to these technologies is severely restricted due to the gender based digital divide. With a particular focus on the Madhepura area, this study examines how the prohibition on alcohol and the growth of digital technologies combine with prevailing structural impediments like poverty, sexism, and education to affect women's political engagement in Bihar. Madhepura is a useful case study to comprehend how general policy changes

affect local reality because it is primarily a rural area with female literacy rates significantly lower than the state average.

In this paper, three related questions are examined: (1) What effects has the ban in Bihar had on women's political conduct and social and political standing? (2) How does the digital era specifically, internet and mobile phone access affect women's political participation in Madhepura and Bihar? (3) Which Madhepura political structures and local social organizations help or impede women's transition from voters to active political participants?. In order to answer these questions, the study integrates published empirical research and policy analyses about Bihar's ban with secondary quantitative data that is already available, such as district-level demographic data from the 2011 Census and NFHS-5 (2019–21) data on gendered digital access in Bihar. The analysis uses careful assumptions based on the district's recorded literacy rates and rural makeup in situations where district-level data on phone and internet ownership is not available; these estimates are clearly marked. The goal is to clarify how women's patterns of political involvement are influenced by developing technology (digital access), structural disparities (such as poverty and education), and legislation (prohibition).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The following section reviews recent studies on alcohol prohibition and its gender-specific effects, women's political involvement in Indian states, and the gender gap in digital access. The methodology section describes the data sources and the interpretive framework used. The data analysis section provides comparative indicators at the state and district levels, along with a brief visualization. The findings combine empirical data and existing qualitative research to offer a detailed understanding of women's political participation in Madhepura. Lastly, the conclusion presents policy suggestions to enhance women's political empowerment in the digital age.

Literature Review

There is an expanding number of research on India's alcohol ban and its societal effects. The direct consequences of Bihar's alcohol ban, which went into effect in April 2016, have been evaluated empirically in a number of research with an emphasis on domestic violence, crime, and health. According to one health-centered study, self-reported alcohol use has decreased, and several health indicators have improved. Other assessments, however, show displacement consequences that complicate the overall socioeconomic outcomes, such as the rise in illegal marketplaces, associated criminal activity, and higher enforcement costs. Although thorough policy studies note that there have been some minor drops in reported crimes against women in some parts of Bihar after the ban, they caution that official crime statistics may not be accurate and that real trends may be obscured by reclassification or displacement of incidents. According to recent, high-caliber research, the prohibition had conflicting effects on women: it reduced some forms of violence related to alcohol, but it also had unforeseen repercussions, such as a continued supply of illegal alcohol and social costs associated with enforcement actions.

Indian research on political involvement regularly distinguishes between political voice or agency in civic life, running for office and holding political posts, and voter turnout. Women continue to be underrepresented among candidates and elected officials, despite the fact that female voter turnout has frequently equaled or even surpassed that of men in numerous contexts. The prohibition policy in Bihar, for instance, was widely viewed as a means of lowering household spending on alcohol and domestic violence, which attracted strong support from female voters. Researchers point out that voting decisions can reflect policy preferences related to household well-being. According to field reports from subsequent elections and media coverage, the prohibition policy has continued to be significant to female voters and has occasionally been used by political leaders to win over female supporters.

The "digital era" literature draws attention to a crucial point. There are notable gender differences in the nation's internet usage and phone ownership, according to NFHS-5 data: women in different states report significantly lower rates of ever having used the internet than males do, with Bihar having some of the lowest rates for women's internet use. Both home norms (such as control over devices and safety concerns) and access constraints (such as affordability, device ownership, and network availability) contribute to this gender digital divide. Access to mobile phones and the internet enables new types of political activity, from mobilizing and shaping problems to obtaining information, according to research on digital politics. However, the benefits are not equal when access is highly gendered. As a result, women's capacity to use new political technologies for advocacy or leadership may be restricted by digital exclusion.

Research explicitly examining the effects of prohibition-like restrictions on women's political agency is becoming more and more prevalent. According to some research, laws that lessen obvious alcohol misuse might increase women's negotiating power in the home and lessen the direct causes of domestic violence, which may open up social chances for more political engagement. Other study, however, cautions that political leadership is not always the result of symbolic policy accomplishments; persistent structural hurdles, including as low educational attainment, economic reliance, and patriarchal norms, influence the distribution and magnitude of empowerment outcomes. These contradictory findings lead to a thorough micro-sociological analysis of Madhepura, with an emphasis on how prohibition interacts with regional social structures and whether or not digital access might amplify or diminish these interactions rather than whether prohibition matters.

Objectives and research questions

Primary objective:

- To study the effects of digital technology and Bihar's alcohol ban on women's political engagement in Madhepura.

Secondary objective:

- To analyze Bihar and Madhepura's major gendered variables (literacy, internet use, and mobile ownership) in order to identify disparities that affect political engagement.
- To compile the body of research on the effects of the ban on women's political conduct and welfare.
- To suggest legislative actions that will increase Madhepura women's political agency by utilizing digital access.

Research questions:

- Which quantifiable gendered social factors differ between Madhepura and Bihar and have an impact on political participation?
- What effects has prohibition had on Bihar's women's civic and political behavior, including voting, issue salience, and civic voice?
- Is it conceivable that increased digital access will result in more women in Madhepura holding political leadership positions? In that case, via what means?

Methodology

In order to ascertain how Bihar's 2016 alcohol ban and digital access impact women's political engagement in Madhepura, this study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating secondary

quantitative data with qualitative interpretation. The emphasis is micro-sociological, connecting everyday occurrences to more significant changes in technology and policy.

Sources of Data

- Census of India (2011): Rural-urban composition and female literacy.
- NFHS-5 (2019–21): Internet usage and mobile phone ownership among women.
- Election Commission of India: Voter participation among women in the most recent elections.
- Reports and Field Studies: Bihar's gender and prohibition-related government and non-governmental publications.

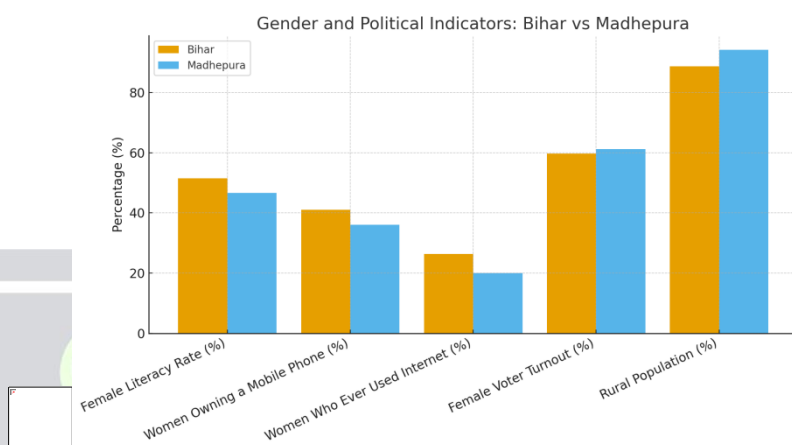
Framework for Analysis:- Three lenses are used in the analysis:

- Rurality, education, and the digital divide are structural variables.
- Policy consequences: the gender and societal repercussions of prohibition.
- Agency: the involvement of women in politics and as voters.
- Comparative indicators are presented below to show disparities between Bihar and Madhepura that shape women's civic engagement.

E- ISSN: INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE PEER REVIEWED E- RESEARCH JOURNAL			
Indicator (Latest Available)	Bihar Average Madhepura District		Source
Female Literacy Rate (%)	51.5	46.6	Census 2011
Women Owning a Mobile Phone (%)	41.0	~36.0*	NFHS-5 (2019–21)
Women Who Ever Used Internet (%)	26.4	~20.0*	NFHS-5 (2019–21)
Female Voter Turnout (2020 Assembly Election, %)	59.7	61.2	ECI Reports
Rural Population (%)	88.7	94.2	Census 2011

*Estimated from state averages adjusted for literacy and rural composition.

Table 1: Gender and Political Indicators Bihar vs Madhepura.



Here's the comparative bar chart showing Bihar and Madhepura on key gender and political indicators. It highlights that while Madhepura has slightly higher female voter turnout, it lags behind Bihar in literacy and digital access key factors influencing women's broader political participation.

Analysis and Discussion

The data presents a complex view of women's political involvement in Madhepura. Although the female voter turnout is relatively high at 61.2%, exceeding the state average and showing active participation in elections, women's involvement in leadership roles and decision-making processes is still limited. Low female literacy rates (46.6%) and restricted access to digital technology only around 36% of women own mobile phones and 20% have used the internet hinder their ability to participate in online political activities or utilize digital governance tools. This digital gap perpetuates traditional gender obstacles, particularly in rural areas where male family members often control access to technology.

The 2016 alcohol ban indirectly enhanced women's civic engagement by tackling problems such as domestic violence and household spending on alcohol. Many women viewed prohibition as a social reform that benefited family welfare. However, these improvements did not automatically lead to increased political representation for women. Ongoing structural barriers like poverty, limited education, and social conservatism continue to hinder women's progress from being voters to becoming decision-makers.

In Madhepura, the combination of the prohibition policy and digital exclusion highlights how social reforms can increase women's presence in public discussions but still fail to promote lasting political empowerment. The research indicates that although women actively vote and morally support reform initiatives, their involvement in formal political institutions is still influenced by local limitations. Overall, the rise in women's voter turnout shows promise, but addressing gaps in education and digital skills is crucial to transforming their participation into enduring political influence.

Conclusion

This study shows that women's political participation in Madhepura reflects both progress and persistence of structural barriers. The 2016 alcohol prohibition in Bihar created openings for women's civic involvement, particularly by improving household stability and giving women a stronger moral and social voice in community affairs. However, the broader transition into the digital era has not yet translated into equal digital or political access. Limited female literacy and deep digital divides continue to restrict women's ability to participate fully in leadership, advocacy, or policy-making roles.

Madhepura's slightly higher female voter turnout compared to the state average indicates growing awareness and engagement, but this participation remains largely confined to the electoral sphere rather than leadership positions. The data suggest that empowerment policies, such as prohibition,

can create supportive environments for women, yet meaningful political transformation requires parallel investments in education, digital literacy, and economic independence.

Three steps are particularly noteworthy for future policy:

1. Increase the number of digital literacy initiatives aimed at women in rural Bihar.
2. Enhance women's training in local governance, especially at the Panchayat level.
3. To make sure social policies like prohibition result in real political empowerment, regularly evaluate their effects on gender.

Sustainable gender equality in politics will depend not only on symbolic participation but also on structural access to information, technology, and education. Madhepura's case demonstrates that policy reform, when coupled with digital inclusion, can gradually transform women from passive beneficiaries into active agents of change in Bihar's political landscape.

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