

Globalisation and Political Participation of Women in Indian: An Analysis

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Abstract

An attempt is being made to analysis the women movement over the demand for political participation in India. The major policies, plans of the Indian government for the development and empowerment of women are being focused. The historical emergence of women movement over the right to political participation in colonial and post colonial India are also discussed in the paper.

The constitutional and legal provision has been duly focused upon along with constitutional amendments which are passed by the India government to ensure the political participation of women at the grass-roots level is done. The demand of quota or reservation of 33% of seats in the parliament and state legislative and attitude of the political parties over the political participation of women along with the data of actual participation of women in Indian politics are analysed in this paper.

Key Words: Politics, Political participation, Reservation, Gender, Government, Public policy etc.

Right to political participation of women includes their full access to the political and public life without any discrimination.¹ The political sphere includes the government, the parliament and local governing bodies such as municipalities and local councils. Three key actors can be defined as strongly affecting political rights and participation of women in the public and political life: first, decision makers such as governmental institutions and

senior staff, the actual political structure and lastly, the media.²

The political participation of women and their engagement in electoral process is an important marker of the maturity and efficacy of democracy in any country. It can be defined not only in terms of the equality and freedom under which they share political power with men, but also in terms of the liberty and space provided for women in the democratic framework of electoral politics.

The recognition of the equal citizenship and political participation of women in India at the time of Independence has not happened suddenly, but Indian women fought a long battle during the freedom struggle for equal rights and citizenship. The second important issue is that the providing of the equal rights has been accepted by Indian society or political elite in practice or not. The history of the women movements and women emancipation has revealed that Indian women have passed through the dark ages in late ancient, medieval and the early period of modern India. Although freedom and independence of India have brought many changes in the socio-political, economic and legal set-up of Indian society, it has remained relatively unchanged to women and to the other weaker classes of Indian society.³

The Constitution of India promulgated in 1950 promised, "to secure to all its citizens justice, social, economic and political" and "equality of status and of opportunity" through several provisions like documents on fundamental

¹ Rashmi Srivastva, "Empowerment of Women through Political Participation: With Special Reference to Madhya Pradesh", Niroj Sinha (ed), *Women in Indian Politics*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 2009, p.206.

² Niroj Sinha, *Women in Indian Politics, Empowerment of Women Through Political Participation*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000, pp.17-18.

³ Geraldin Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p.154.

rights and directive principles. The constitution of India is considered as one of the best constitutions in the world which has taken care of the underprivileged and the minorities. All the laws get their sanction from this constitution and any law which violates a provision of the constitution is declared unconstitutional.⁴ Several articles have been incorporated in the constitution in order to achieve the desired objective of equality and justice for women in India. Besides the preamble, the articles of the constitution, which impinge on our subject of enquiry are Articles 14,15,16 under part III, Articles 39, 42, 44 under part IV, Article 5 1- A (c) under part IV A and Article 246 under part XI of India's constitution are noteworthy.⁵

India proved its commitment to the political participation of women many times both at the national and international levels. It has signed many conventions of UNO and international declarations on the rights of women, irrespective of the signing of Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) with the other states and NGOs for the development and empowerment of women. In 2009 Indian government signed an MOU with the Norwegian Embassy and UNIFEM to initiate a three year programme entitled promoting women's political leadership and governance in India and South Asia. This programme aims at empowering elected women representatives in local governance to make public policy and resources allocation patterns responsive to women's human rights. The programme covers 5 countries of South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan). In India the programme is co-owned by UNIFEM and Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

The Common Wealth, likewise, has also been addressing the issue and has taken a number of initiatives for the purpose of enhancing women's representation in power. In 1995 in a meeting the Common Wealth Heads of Government endorsed the Plan of Action on

gender and development, which was to be utilised by the member countries to increase women participation in political decision making at all levels. At their 1996 meeting, Common Wealth Ministers of Women's affairs recommended that the member countries should try to achieve the target of 30% quota for women in political and public sector by the year 2005.⁶ The need to increase women's participation in political decision making and peace process in Common wealth was also a part of agenda of the Common Wealth ministers responsible for women's affairs, in their sixth meeting held in Delhi in 2000.⁷

The commitment of Indian leadership for the equal political rights of women has been reflected through the Indian commitment to human rights, conventions and declarations on women rights. As it is mentioned above that the development of women rights and status are subject to both the internal as well as external factors. Although India signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), Convention on the Nationality of Married women (1957) and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the political participation of women has remained the subject of internal factors and the socio-economic and political set-up of Indian society.⁸

A glance over the development perspective and the inclusion of women in nation-building can reveal India's commitment to women's development and empowerment. The planned development through the five year plans has been considered as the most emancipating strategy for the development and empowerment of the weaker sections. The study of socio-economic and political development of women has also remained a

⁴ Raj Bala, *The Legal and Political Status of Women in India*, Mohit Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p.39.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.43.

⁶ M.R. Biju, "Women Empowerment in India: Changing Socio-Political Equation", M.R. Biju (ed), *Women Empowerment Politics and Policies*, Mittal publication, New Delhi, 2005, p. 218.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 219.

⁸ V. S. Gupta, "Nation Building and Empowerment of Women", *Employment News*, 11-17 August, 2009, p.8.

subject of five-year plans of Indian government; so, the analysis of the five year plans becomes necessary to evaluate women empowerment in India.

The approach in the First Five Year plan (1951-56) was to provide adequate services to promote the welfare of women so that they can play their legitimate role in the family and the community. It was noted that the position and functions of women differ to a great extent in different communities and, therefore, community welfare agencies will have to work their programme and activities according to the specific requirements of the different communities across India.⁹

The Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Plans continued the same approach for the welfare of women. The concept of Women's development was mainly welfare oriented and was clubbed with other categories of welfare schemes such as schemes meant for children, old people and the disabled.¹⁰ The end of the Fourth Plan has seen the release of the monumental report of Committee on Status of Women in India entitled "Towards Equality", which revealed that the dynamics of development has adversely affected a large section of women and created new imbalances and disparities. The Report led to a debate in Parliament and the emergence of new consciousness of women as critical inputs for national development rather than as targets for welfare policies.¹¹

CSWI report and its discussion in the parliament on the impact of five years plans on women's development has definitely led to the transformation of the concept of women's development in India from family welfare to the women's development in the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85), which recognised women

as participants in development and not merely as objects of welfare. The Plan adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with a special thrust on the three core sectors of health, education and employment.¹² In the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90), the basic approach was to inculcate confidence among women and bring about an awareness of their own potential for development; special measures were initiated for strict enforcement of the Dowry Prohibition Act and also to prevent harassment and atrocities on women.¹³ The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) saw the setting up of National Commission for Women (1992), Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (1993), Mahila Samridhhi Yojana (1993) and Indira Mahila Yojana (1995) for the upliftment and empowerment of women in India. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was also drafted, during the eighth five year plan.¹⁴

Empowerment of Women being one of the primary objectives of the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002), efforts were made to create an enabling environment where women can freely exercise their rights both within and outside the home as equal partners to their male counterparts. This was realised through early finalisation and adoption of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women, which laid down definite goals, targets and policy prescriptions along with a well defined Gender Development Index to monitor the impact of its implementation in raising the status of women from time to time.¹⁵

⁹ Government of India, "National Perspective Plan for women 1988 - 2000 AD", *Report of the Core Group*, Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1986, p. 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 13.

¹¹ Government of India, "Towards Equality", *Report of the Committee on Status of Women in India*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1975, pp. 357-357.

¹² Neera Desai and Amit Kumar Gupta, *Women and Society in India*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1987, p. 333.

¹³ Kalbagh Chetana, "A Better Deal for Women by 2000 AD", Kalbagh Chetana (ed), *Social and Economic Dimensions of Women's Development*, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 1992, p. 124, also see, National Perspective Plan for Women 1988 - 2000 AD, n.35, p.

14. also see, Government of India, *Seventh Five Year Plan (1985 - 90)*, Planning Commissioner, New Delhi, 1985, p. 123.

¹⁴ Government of India, *Eighth Five Year Plan (1992 - 97)*, Planning Commission, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 291 - 292.

¹⁵ Anitha Anand, "Engendering the Plan", *The Hindu*, April 6, 1997, p.4, also see, Government of India, *Country*

Empowerment of Women as Agents of Social Change and Development was continued in the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007). Towards this a Sector-specific 3-fold strategy was adopted based on the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001). They were as follows: Social Empowerment, Economic Empowerment and Gender Justice.¹⁶ The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12) was aimed at inclusive growth and development. Its vision was that every woman in the country should be able to develop to her full potential and share the benefits of economic growth and prosperity. Towards this end the approach adopted was to empower women and recognise their agency thereby seeking to make them partners in their own development. It sought to do this by mainstreaming gender in all sectors as well as by undertaking targeted interventions. The Government's National Common Minimum Programme has laid down six basic principles of governance, one of which is to empower women politically, educationally, economically and legally. Gender equality is also at the core of the achievement of Millennium Development Goals, which relate substantially to progress in the life conditions of women and children.¹⁷

The most notable for the women's empowerment is that it could not be featured in the first five 'Five Year Plans' and the issue of women development was merged with the family welfare measures up to the fifth five year plan. A shift from welfare to development was recognised in the sixth five year plan and it took one decade more to recognise the empowerment of women as the constituent of government plans.

Report Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995,
Department of Women and Child Development Ministry
of Human Resource Development, New Delhi, p. 27.

¹⁶ Sayed Afzal Peerzade and Prema Parnade, "Economic Empowerment of Women, Theory and Practice", *Southern Economist*, 1 March, 2005 pp. 9 -10.

¹⁷ Government of India, *Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012)*, Planning Commission, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 221-222.

The CSWI report "Toward equality" (1974) reveals that political parties have tended to see women voters as the appendages of the males. It also refers to the tokenism involved in having a few women's rights on account of their dependent and minority status. Recognising the 'tokenism' inherent in associating women representatives through election and nomination in local bodies, the report suggests a more meaningful role of women in the structure of local administration. The question of reservation of seats was left to the government to be included in the national perspective plan for women. It recognised that political participation of women is severely restricted and suggested that a 30 % quota for women be introduced at all levels of electoral bodies.¹⁸

After much political pressure and many campaigns by the women organisations, the process for reservation of seats in the local self-government was initiated by the Congress government headed by Rajiv Gandhi. The entire issue took a political hue as it became a moot point whether the introduction or reservation at the level of panchayats and urban local bodies was really meant to give increased representation to women or was a populist measure aiming to create a women's constituency at a time when the congress party needed to reconstruct its image.

It was in 1992 that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment was enacted by the Congress government of Narshima Rao for the 33% of reservation of women in the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj and the 74th constitutional amendment was enacted in 1993, which provided for 33% reservation for women in urban local bodies.¹⁹

The 73rd constitutional amendment added the following articles to the constitution providing reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institution.

¹⁸ "Towards Equality", *Report of the Committee on Status of Women in India*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1975, p. 308.

¹⁹ V. S. Gupta, "Nation Building and Empowerment of Women", *Employment News*, 11-17 August, 2009, p.8.

Article 243-(D) (2) states that not less than 1/3 of the seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to S.C or S.T as the case may be.

Article 243 (D) (3) extends political reservation to women stating that not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat.

Article 243 (D) (4) extends reservation to the elected offices as well. The office of chairperson in the panchayats or any other level shall be reserved for S.C. or S.T woman in such a manner as legislature of a state.²⁰

Detailed set of recommendations were issued to all governmental and non-governmental organisation to enhance women's political participation and their decision making power. The issue has also repeatedly come up in the non-governmental organisational-meetings of South Asia Watch (SAW) Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW) as a priority issue. The women's Political Participation in 21st Century and Challenges was the theme for a meeting organised by UNDP in New Delhi from March 24-26, 1999. The meeting engaged women politician and representatives of civil society from all regions, in a dialogue to promote the sharing of experience and building alliances. It concluded that until gender parity is reached in governance, women cannot reach full equality with men in any sphere.²¹

Thus, women are making significant gains in the political sphere and increased participation is rapidly empowering them, boosting their confidence, changing perceptions regarding their contribution, and

improving their status and position in society. For example, political participation and grassroot democracy have been strengthened considerably by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments that have created new democratic institutions for local governance. In the last 23 years of Panchayati Raj India has witnessed a dramatic change as the women members and heads have been trained in politics and policy-making strengthens their political participation. The day to day experiences to which women have gained at the grass-root level in spite of resistance from the established patriarchal politics has enriched their experiences and their movements across India.

Women are now accepted by the male-dominated politics of village community and they are participating in the decision making equally with their counterparts; the numbers of women members has increased now. As per latest data of grass-root democracy, there are 28 lac elected panchayat representatives, of which around 10 lac are estimated to be women. The average of women representation in panchayats across the country is 36.94%. However, few states have gone beyond the mandated of 33% and provided more reservation for women. For instance Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarkhand and Rajasthan have reserved 50% seats for women and Sikkim has reserved 40% of seats for women in Panchayats. Roughly 55% of elected representatives in Bihar are women.²² The 110th Constitutional Amendment Bill 2009 provides an increase in reservation for women from 33% to 50% in the Panchayat Raj Institutions. The bill seeks to amend the Article 243 D to enhance the quantum of reservation for women from 1/3 to one-half of the total seats in the Panchayats. Similar reservation shall be provided among the total number of officers or chairpersons.²³

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 9-10.

²¹ Pam Rajput, "Women's Political Participation in India: An Agenda for Empowerment", Pramila Kapur (ed), *Empowering the Indian Women*, Ministry of Information and Broad Casting, Government of India, 2000, pp. 227-228.

²² Biduyat Mohanty, "Panchayati Raj, 73rd Constitutional Amendment and Women", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XXXIX, no. 49, 30 December, 1995, p.3346, also see, Seema Singh, *Panchayati Raj and Women Empowerment*, Ocean Book Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 74-78.

²³ *Ibid*.

After the national consensus around this demand resulted in the adoption of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution in 1993, in central government introduced 33% reservation for women in institutions of local governance. In 1995 the question of affirmative action for women was raised again, but this time the focus was on Parliament and State Legislatives. Initially, most political parties agreed to introduce 33 % reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures in order to attract women voters. The 1996 election manifestoes of almost all the political parties echoed this demand, but soon discord and dissensions surfaced.

When the bill addressing this issue was introduced in the Eleventh Lok Sabha in 1996, several parties and groups raised objections. The objections focused around two main issues: first, the issue of overlapping quotas for women in general and those for women of the lower castes; second, the issue of elitism.

The bill was first introduced by Dev Gowda led United Front Government. But persistent demands for a sub-quota for other backward classes and minorities resulted in its being referred to a Parliamentary Committee headed by Gita Mukherjee, which recommended its passage, rejecting the demand for sub-quotas, despite differences among members on the various issues involved.

The demand for sub-quotas for OBCs and minorities is seen, again to be merely a way of stalling reservation for women; there are no instances of political parties having such quotas in their own cadres. The bill has already been introduced five times, but has been stalled each time. The ugly scenes witnessed in Parliament at the time seem to indicate a devaluation of the agenda of women's empowerment. Sex as the basis of reservations and the electoral strategies which are perceived to be behind the bill, continues to be a contentious issue even among those strongly committed to the cause of women's empowerment.

On March 9, 2010, Rajya Sabha took a 'historic' resolution by voting (191 for and 1 against) to amend the Constitution, providing one-third reservation in Parliament and State

Assemblies for women.²⁴ Till today, the bill has not been passed by the Lok Sabha. It also requires the ratification of one-half of the states before it comes into effect. Assuming that the Women's Reservation Bill gets signed into law, how will it work on the ground? If women gain control of one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies, what will be its effect on their male counterparts? How will rotation of seats work in practice? Who decides which seat goes to women? First, the key features of the bill: one-third of all seats in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will be reserved for women.

In case of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the reservation will work as a quota within quota; a third of the seats currently reserved for the two categories will be sub-reserved for SC / ST women. Reservation of seats for women will be in rotation and will cease 15 years after the commencement of the act. Seat allocation will be done in a manner determined by Parliament through enactment of a law.

The following are the implications of the legislation: Since one-third of the seats will be reserved during each general election, each seat in the Lok Sabha and each seat in each of the Assembly will have one reserved and two free terms in the course of three elections. In a 15 year time limit, this will translate as each seat getting reserved for women just once provided, of course, that governments complete their terms and elections are held once every five years. If there are six instead of three elections during this period, each seat will get reserved twice, after 15 years, each seat will have been reserved at least once, the idea being that women representatives should have the reach and spread across the country.

The first measurement of the political rights and political participation is the right to be elected for political and public office. Regarding the constitutional and legal provisions there is no barrier upon women to

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Kuldeep Fadia, "Women's Empowerment Through Political Participation in India", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. LX, no. 3, July to September 2014, pp. 548-549

participate in the political and public life, many special provisions have been enacted by the Indian government to enhance the political participation of women. A glance at the issue of women's participation in elections as voters and as contestants for political power and the elections to the Parliament can reveal the wide gap between theory and practice of women's political participation in India.

Despite the constitutional promulgation, women in the Indian subcontinent continue to be grossly under-represented in the legislatures, both at the national and the state levels. Women's representation in the lower house (Lok Sabha) of the Indian Parliament is still much less than the world average of 20%, lower than the "critical mass" required introducing gender parity in political decision-making and legislation. Similarly, the number of female representatives in legislative bodies in most of the states in India is also below the 20% mark reflecting a pan-Indian gender exclusion from electoral participation and quality representation.

The marginalisation of Indian women in electoral participation stems mainly from inter-party competition, as national political parties and regional parties in the states discriminate not only in terms of seat allotments in the electoral fray, but also in the party rank and file and chain of command. This could be attributed to a large extent to the party competition structure in the Indian subcontinent that is encumbered by inherent male dominance and a patriarchal mindset that excludes women from the electoral process. In contrast to the poor allotment rates of seats to women by political parties in the electoral process and their marginalisation within the party structure, female electoral participation as voters has seen a notable upsurge in the late 1990s as voter turnout figures of three general elections held in the last decade indicate.²⁵

The electoral participation of women in India is a much discussed issue with a wide range of

²⁵ Vibhuti Patel, "Getting a Foot Hold in Politics, Women in Political Decision Making Process", *Social Action*, vol. XXXXXV, no.1, January- March 2005, p. 40.

opinions and differences. On the one hand, some theorists argue that the electoral process in India is fraught with male patriarchy and dominance that act as impediments to women participation. The lack of political voice and poor representation of women in Parliament is a result of their exclusions on gender basis. On the other, there are theorists who, dispute this argument, feel that the increased participation of women in electoral competition in the 1990s as voters and sharing of political power at the grassroots level reveal that electoral politics in India is no more gender exclusive but is quite inclusive. They feel that due to the strength and determination of women's movements in different parts of India, as well as government regulated quotas, female presence in the political arena is increasing, particularly in terms of voting patterns and decision-making power, as well as in access to positions in public office.²⁶

The number of women contesting elections has always been low, as may be seen from the table below. The highest number of women contestants has been merely 6.39% in 2014, while the number of male contestants has always been in thousands, the highest being 13353 in 1996. It is important to note that the percentage of winners among women has consistently been more than that of men. Although electoral studies holds that political parties discriminate against women while distributing the party tickets for elections and the women candidates are given the tickets of those constituencies where party position is weak and the chances of winning the seats are low. For example in 1996 only 3.8% of male candidates won, in comparison to 6.7 % of female candidates. Likewise, the percentage of winners was 11.2 % for men and 15.7% for women in 1998, 12.3% and 17.3 % in 1999, 6.44% and 10.61% in 2009 and 6.39% and 9.74%, respectively in 2014 (16th Lok Sabha).

²⁶ Sikata Banerjee, "Gender and Nationalism: The Masculinisation of Hinduism and Female Political Participation in India", *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. XXVI, no.2, 2003, pp.167-79.

Table- D (4)

Women Contestants in the Various Lok Sabha Elections

Year	Males	Females	Total	% of Males Winning	% of Females Winning
1952	1831	43	1874	26.05	51.16
1957	1473	45	1518	31.7	60.00
1962	1915	70	1985	24.0	50.00
1967	2302	67	2369	21.3	44.80
1971	2698	86	2784	18.5	24.40
1977	2369	70	2439	22.1	27.10
1980	4478	142	4620	11.5	19.7
1984	5406	164	5574	9.2	25.60
1989	5962	198	6160	8.5	13.60
1991	8374	325	8699	5.9	12.00
1996	13353	599	13952	3.8	6.70
1998	4476	274	4750	11.2	15.70
1999	3976	278	4254	12.3	17.30
2004	5080	355	5435	9.8	12.30
2009	2514	556	8070	6.44	10.61
2014	7527	636	8163	6.39	9.74

Source: Government of India, Statistical Reports of Lok Sabha Elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

The analysis of the women voters and the seats won by them in various elections to the parliament since independence can give a lead to understand the theory and practice of women empowerment in Indian democracy.

Table- D (1)

The Voting Percentage in Various Lok Sabha Elections

General Election	Year	Male	Female	Total
1 st	1952	53.00	37.10	61.2
2 nd	1957	56.00	38.77	62.2
3 rd	1962	53.31	46.63	55.42
4 th	1967	66.90	55.48	61.33
5 th	1971	60.90	49.11	55.29
6 th	1977	65.63	54.91	60.49
7 th	1980	62.16	51.22	56.92
8 th	1984	68.18	58.60	63.56
9 th	1989	66.13	57.32	61.95
10 th	1991	61.58	51.35	56.93
11 th	1996	62.06	53.41	57.94
12 th	1998	65.72	57.88	61.97
13 th	1999	63.97	55.64	59.99
14 th	2004	61.65	53.35	58.24
15 th	2009	60.2	55.8	58.2
16 th	2014	67.69	65.63	66.72

Source: Government of India, Statistical Reports of Lok Sabha Elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

The above Table shows that from the first general election onwards, women's participation by way of voting has been growing but not steadily. It has shown that there was a constant rise from 37.10% in 1952 to 38.77% in 1957 and 46.63% and 55.48% in 1962 and 1967 general elections respectively. In the following elections the women's percentage of voting kept on fluctuating. In

1984 there was a greater turnout of women voters i.e. 58.60% but it remained 10% lower in comparison to the male voting percentage (68.18). But again it declined to 57.32% in 1989 and 51.35% in 1991. Women voting percentage increased 1996 to 1999 and again it declined to 53.35% in 2004 and 55.8% in 2009. Women voter percentage increased in 2014 to 65.63%. But if compare the rise of voting percentage with the

elected women members of Lok Sabha, then the data show that the growing participation of women in voting could not translate into corresponding increase in the number of women members in Lok Sabha.

The percent of elected women in Lok Sabha members has never exceeded 12%. The following table reveals the percentage of women representation in Lok Sabha elections since the first general elections in 1952.

Table-D (2)

Women Presence in Lok Sabha

Year	Seats	Women MPs	%
1952	499	22	4.41
1957	500	27	5.40
1962	503	34	6.76
1967	523	31	5.93
1971	521	22	4.22
1977	544	19	3.29
1980	544	28	5.15
1984	544	44	8.9
1989	517	27	5.22
1991	544	39	7.17
1996	543	39	7.18
1998	543	43	7.92
1999	543	49	9.02
2004	543	45	8.03
2009	543	59	10.86
2014	543	61	11.23
Average	531.06	36.89	6.91

Source: Government of India, Statistical Reports of Lok Sabha Elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

The above table shows that in the first Lok Sabha, out of 499 seats there were 22 (4.41%) women members elected to the lower house of parliament in 1952. In the subsequent elections, the number of women members has been fluctuating with some variation. It was in 1984 that the highest number of women members, i.e. 44 (8.9%) out of 544 members entered the Lok Sabha. But this trend was not seen in the following elections. Their number was only 27(5.22%) in 1989 which increased to 39 (7.17%) in 1991. The number of women members i.e., 61 (11.23%) in 2014 was the highest.

The presence of women in the upper house has been slightly higher than in the lower house probably due to indirect elections and nominations of some women members. It was

in 1990 when 38 women were elected to the Rajya Sabha i.e., the upper house of Indian Parliament and it achieved the highest-ever target of 15.5% in the history of Indian politics. Nonetheless, this representation does not even come close to 20%. Although India's commitment to the various international declarations and agreements for women's political participation is 30%, till date no house of parliament could cross the 50% of the desired political participation of women in India. It is significant to note that the deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha for at least more than 25 years has been a woman, yet women in Indian political set-up face a tough competition from male politicians for nomination.

Table-D (3)

Women Presence in the Rajya Sabha

Year	Total Seats	No of Women	% of Women
1952	219	16	7.3
1957	237	18	7.6
1962	238	18	7.6
1967	240	20	8.3
1971	243	17	7.0

1977	244	25	10.2
1980	244	24	9.8
1985	244	28	11.4
1990	245	38	15.5
1996	223	20	9.0
1998	223	19	8.6
2004	245	27	11.1
2009	245	22	8.97
2014	245	29	11.83
Average	238.21	22.92	9.62

Source: Government of India, Statistical Reports of Rajya Sabha, Elections Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

The above table shows that the share of women’s representation in the Rajya Sabha is marginal in comparison to men. It can also be observed that the political parties in India are not in favour of increasing women’s share in the parliament because it symbolises an increase in their political power. As the nomination and the election of the members of upper- house is through indirect method and the election of the members of the upper

house is also a subject matters of political parties rather than that of voters as happens in the direct elections.

The scenario of power sharing by the women in the Union Council of Ministers between 1985 and 2014 has also been low. The data shown in table-D (5) presents the figures of women ministers in centre from 1985 to 2014.

Table- D (5)

Representation of Women in the Union Council of Ministers (1985-2014)

Years	No. of Minister			No. of Women Minister		
	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Deputy Minister	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Deputy Minister
1985	15	25	0	1	3	0
1990	17	17	5	0	1	1
1995	12	37	3	1	4	1
1996	18	21	0	0	1	0
1997	20	24	0	0	5	0
1998	21	21	0	0	3	0
2001	30	7	35	3	2	4
2002	31	45	0	2	5	0
2004	28	38	0	1	6	0
2009	34	45	0	3	5	0
2014	23	23	0	6	1	0

Source: Government of India, Statistical Reports of Lok Sabha Elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi, first phase of Narendra Modi’s council of Ministers which took 9th on May 26, 2014.

The above table shows the share of women in the Union Council of Ministers and Cabinet from 1985 to 2014. The scenario of women’s representation is so grim that there was only one Woman Cabinet Ministers and just 3 women were ministers of State in the Union Council of Ministers in 1985. The number of women cabinet ministers has never crossed the figure of 1 from 1985 to 1998, in fact, the

number of women cabinet minister remained zero in the governments of 1990, 1995, 1996, 1997 & 1998. Although there were a few women members who remained the Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers, no women was holding an independent portfolio. It is to mention that the period from 1990 to 1998 is also presented as the initial period of globalisation, political instability and coalition governments in the country.

The scenario changed in 2001, when 3 women were designated Cabinet Ministries, 2 were designated Ministers of State and 4 were designated Deputy Ministers in the Council of

Ministers at the Union level. There were only 7 women in the council of 76 ministers in 2002. The scenario remained almost the same in 2004 as again 7 women were included in the Council of 66 ministers. Just one number increased in 2008 when 8 women ministers in a Cabinet having 83 Ministers. Again in 2014, 6 Cabinet Ministers and 1 Minister of State were included in the Cabinet having 46 members of the Council of Ministers at the centre. The most shocking is the fact that the members of women in the Council of Ministers at union has never crossed the 4% mark, it means that the 50% of the population have had less than 4% share in power -sharing in the central government.

The scenario is also typical at the state level; there are only a few instances of women holding portfolios of finance, industry etc., which are mainly considered the domain of their male counterparts. The source reveals that the highest percentage of women in the state legislative assemblies has been 10.8% since independence. Haryana has had the highest average of women in the Assembly at 6.1% and Manipur, the lowest at 0.3%. The period average varies between a mere two percent and six percent. Significantly, there seems to be a slight correlation between literacy and female representation. Kerala, with its high literacy rate, has a low state average of 3.6%. Even Rajasthan and Bihar have higher averages at 4.7 % and 4.5% respectively.

Since Independence, India has had few women Chief Ministers and 23 women governors. Only one woman so far served as President of India but till date no women could become Vice-President and Chief Justice of India. Only one woman got the opportunity to serve as Chief Election Commissioner and one as Chairperson of Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) but not as Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India.²⁷

India as country claimed to be a mature democracy and the political participation of women and their engagement in electoral

process is an important marker of the maturity and efficiency of democracy in any country. It can be defined not only in terms of the equality and freedom with which they share political power with men, but also in terms of the liberty and space provided for women in the democratic framework of electoral politics. The Constitution of India promulgated in 1952 promised, "To secure to all its citizens justice, social, economic and political" and "equality of status and of opportunity". Despite the constitutional promulgation, women in the Indian subcontinent continue to be grossly under-represented in the legislatures, both at the national and the state levels.

Women continue to remain invisible and marginalised in decision making bodies, leading to a lack of a feminist perspective in political decision making. It was only with the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in September 1974 that the demand for more representation of women in political institutions in India was taken up in a systematic way. Earlier, the focus of the growing women's movement had been on improving women's socio-economic position.²⁸

Women Reservation Bill or the constitution 108th Amendment Bill has not only been pending in the Parliament of India for about 20 years. It became a matter of controversy during the elections. Even the approval and due consideration of Standing Committee of Parliament headed by Geeta Mukherji could not convince the members of Parliament for the approval of women reservation bill in parliament, which has never, happened to any other bill. The bill was introduced in the parliament in 1996, and subsequently in 1999, 2003, 2005 and 2010. It was finally passed by the Rajya Sabha in 2010, but it is still pending in the Lok Sabha and it was lapsed due to the dissolution of the current Lok Sabha.²⁹

²⁸ Praveen Rai, "Electoral Participation of Women in India: Key Determinants and Barriers", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLVI, no.3, January, 2011, p. 48.

²⁹ "Women's Reservation Bill-Wikipedia, free encyclopedia", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_Reservation_Bill, Accessed: 13-8-2015, 4:00pm.

²⁷ Niroj Sinha, *Women in Indian Politics*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 17-18.

The introduction of the bill will increase women's participation and lead to women's empowerment. However, the bill has still not been passed. Opposition to the bill includes fears of marginalisation of men by elite women of socially and economically backward classes.³⁰

In the case of representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, there are few arguments against reservation itself, but rather in the way it is implemented. Some critics suggest that women are mere proxies for men who still make the actual decisions. Despite these concerns, studies from different states have shown that women in panchayats help to address concerns that impact women directly, such as education or those related to public goods like water, especially in areas with higher gender differentials. They also have an empowerment effect such as lesser house-work hours, controls over reproductive choices and an increase in women's overall participation in politics. However, the move to increase reservation in the Panchayats from 33% to 50% has been regarded as an inadequate compensation for failure to pass the Women's Reservation Bill.³¹

The political participation of any group in any country shows the socio-economic and political status of that group in the socio-economic and political set-up of a country. The marginalised groups have been excluded from political participation throughout the history of mankind; even the historical analysis of the liberal democracy proves that such democracies served the men better than women. The history of political thought including Greece, Rome and Ancient India reveals that public and political domain have always remained the privilege of men and women were excluded from political power.

³⁰ Rai, n. 54, p.49.

³¹ "Tokenism or Agency: The Impact of Women's Reservations on Panchayats in South India" http://www.econ.ot.edu/seminars/seminarpapers/2006/rao_reservations_0313_wtables.pdf, Accessed: 21-4-2015, 10:30am.

The development of human civilisation and interaction of the different civilisations during the Renaissance and Industrial revolution in Europe have resulted into new developments in the socio-political and economic set-up of the world and particularly of Europe. The rationality and scientific temper which have been developed during and after the Renaissance in Europe have impacted the people of different countries differently. On the one hand, the development of modern industry and transportation have resulted in the expansion of the European powers as imperial powers and on the other, they added to the poverty, hunger and starvation in the colonies. Simultaneously, they led to development of modern education, transportation and political administration in the colonies.

The interaction of the Indian Civilisation with English Civilisation and the other European civilisations and the establishment of the British rule in India have had the longlasting effects on the socio-political and economic set-up of the Indian society in general and marginalised groups in particular. The colonial initiatives against the evil practices of the Indian society and expansion of modern education to Indian elite had not only impacted the long established Varna system, but it had also helped Indian women by ending the age old social conservatism and evil practices against them.

Indian renaissance and social reforms including the women education have had their own implication not only on Indian women but also on psyche of the Indian people at large. The socio-religious reforms lead by Hindu; Muslim and Sikh institutions have challenged the age old social conservatism and encouraged women education, which led to the development of new thinking and the acceptance of the new role of women in the India society. The mass mobilisations against the imperial policies and British rule by Gandhi during the first and second decade of 20th century have also contributed to the politicisation of the Indian women along with the other marginalised groups.

Thus the movement for female suffrage in India in the early 20th century was initiated on

the model followed in Britain and the work of British women reformers living in India has also contributed to the political participation of women in colonial India. But eventually the suffrage movement came to terms with nationalist concerns and suffragist ideals had to be justified in Indian terms and linked to the nationalist issues of political rights and colonial status that dominated public discourse in the 1920s and 1930s in India rather than the demand for the political rights of women in India.³² As a result of the movement, limited suffrage rights were extended to women in different provinces of India between 1920 and 1930. However, the suffrage rights granted to a very narrow section of Indian women and it was based on property qualifications.

The Government of India Act 1935 increased women suffrage rights and more women were provided with the right to vote but it was still limited and encumbered by qualifications like literacy, property ownership or marriage to propertied men. The Act enfranchised one woman for every five men enfranchised³³. In spite of the opposition to reservation of seats on gender basis, the 1935 Act granted 41 reserved seats for women in the provincial legislatures as well as limited reservation for them in the central legislature, leading to cleavages in the movement on gender and religious lines. However, women took advantage of the seats reserved for them in the elections held in 1937, as 80 women won the elections to become legislators. Thus, India had the third highest number of female legislators in the world in 1937, after the United States and Soviet Union³⁴.

³² Southard Barbara, "Colonial Politics and Women's Rights: Woman Suffrage Campaigns in Bengal, British India in the 1920s", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. XXVII, no.2, 1993, pp. 397-439.

³³ Rozina Visram, *Women in India and Pakistan: The Struggle for Independence from British Rule*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp.192-197.

³⁴ Niroj Sinha, "Women's Participation in National Freedom Struggle", Niroj Sinha(ed), *Women in Indian Politics*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2006, p. 76,

The Constitution of Independent India did not reserve seats for women in the legislature. Though reservation of seats for women in the legislature in the waning days of the colonial era was quite short-lived and subdivided on socio-economic, religious and political lines, it gave women a foothold in legislative structure and set a precedent which women could draw on decades later.³⁵

Though the foundation for electoral participation of women was laid down during the freedom movement, the post-Independence period did not witness any concerted or united effort to create inclusive electoral spaces for women. By and large, participation after Independence was constrained by social norms shaping not only opportunities but also perceptions of women involvement in politics—perceptions that were sometimes unique to men, at times shared by women.³⁶

Overall, the mass participation of women in the political field during the freedom struggle seemed to decline after Independence. Their involvement in politics and electoral competition was confined to familial connections rather than based on interest and societal encouragement to actively participate in politics. Also, political parties that reflected the prevailing societal ethos systematically excluded women from electoral participation.³⁷ However, as a token of appreciation for their contribution in the struggle for India's independence, political parties allotted them a few seats in the general elections. This becomes evident from the first Lok Sabha Elections held in 1952 where

also see, S. Akerkar, "Theory and Practice of Women's Movement in India: A Discourse Analysis", *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol XXX, no 27, 1995, pp. 2-22.

³⁵Madhu Kishwar, "Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas", *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol.XXXI, no. 43, 1996, p 2871.

³⁶ Banarsi Arora, "Women in Politics: Governance in Patriarchal and Non-participatory Culture", *Guru Nanak Journal of Sociology*, vol. XX, no. 2, 1999, pp. 111-18.

³⁷ Rajeshwari Deshpande, "How Gendered Was Women's Participation Women in Election 2004", *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol XXXIX, no. 51, 2004, pp. 5431-36.

women could win only 4.4% of the seats in the lower house of Parliament.

The social conservatism of Indian society again forced women to go back to traditional sphere of house hold and successfully excluded women from political participation and decision making. The five year plans upto 1980's evaded the development and empowerment of women as an independent issue and merged women's development with family welfare measures and community development programmes.

Despite the constitutional provisions of guaranteeing equality of sexes, electoral participation of women in terms of legislative or decision-making bodies was quite low and they continue to remain marginalised and under-represented. The demand for greater representation of women in political institutions in India was taken up seriously after the publication of the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) 1976. The CSWI report suggested that female representation in political institutions especially at the grass-roots level needed to be increased through a policy of reservation of seats for women.³⁸

In 1988, the National Perspective Plan for Women also suggested that a 30% quota for women should be introduced at all levels of elective bodies. Women's groups and gender politics strictly insisted that reservation be restricted to the panchayat level to encourage grass-root participation of women in electoral politics.³⁹

The advent of globalisation and India's commitment to the international frame-work to enhance political participation could not be fulfilled in the liberalised, privatised and

globalised India. Although Indian government took the drastic steps to amend the labour laws and disinvestment from public sector to invite foreign investors, it could not get the approval of the Parliament for 33% reservation in the state legislature and in parliament. The social conservatism and the male domination in political power from bottom to top is yet not ready to accept the 33% share of women in political power, although they constitute 50% of India's population.

The lukewarm attitude of the national and regional political parties towards women reservation has contributed to their marginalisation from Indian politics. Moreover, the violence and money laundering during the elections have also restrained women's active participation in politics and the assuming the role of political leadership. As women are living on the socio-economic and political margin of the Indian society, they can't compete with the established male politicians. The lack of economic resources and muscle power and the conservatism of Indian society do not allow women to perform their proper role in political decision making in India.

However, political parties cannot remain indifferent towards women who constitute 586.5 million population and nearly 48.46% of the electorate (2011 Census). Although almost all parties have attempted to build women organisations to secure their support and make their organisations more broad based, in practice they have fielded much less proportion of women candidates in the elections giving them proportionately much less representation in the legislative bodies than their actual population strength.

Former Chief Election Commission (CEC) M.S. Gill proposed to make it mandatory for all political parties to nominate at least a-third of women candidates for the seats deserves to be commended. If they are not prepared to accept the principle of representation within their own parties, what moral right do they have to

³⁸ Rajeshwari Deshpande, "How Did Women Vote in Lok Sabha Elections

2009?" *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. XXXIV, no.39, 2009, pp 83-87..

³⁹ Madhu Kishwar, "Women and Politics: Beyond Quotas", *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol.XXXI, no. 43, 1996, p 2871.

advocate reserving parliamentary constituencies for women?⁴⁰

Increasing women's political participation and representation in Indian politics requires electoral and parliamentary reforms. While engaging more Indian women voters, the numbers of women contesting elections also need to be increased. For the moment, reservation seems to be the fastest way of increasing the number of women contestants in the elections. Despite the argument that reservation will favour elite women as has happened in Pakistan, the quota system has proven to be the fastest and most effective way of ensuring women's adequate representation in parliaments all over the world. Women's Reservation Bill, therefore, is a crucial step towards both electoral and parliamentary reforms.

In addition, the role played by political parties is also very important to ensure that women are adequately represented and policies favouring women are framed. Women groups have suggested for the recent election of Parliament that parties take women's demands on board in their manifestos and campaigns, endorse women candidates and ensure that they do not give tickets to candidates who have charges of gender-based violence, or have made remarks reflecting gender discrimination. The structure and organisation of political parties must also be considered. Evidence from developed countries, for instance, shows that women party activists, including their networks and links, and gender-related rules are the most important party-level factors affecting women's Parliamentary representation.

A few of these suggestions were adopted by political parties in 2014 Parliament elections, it is clear that simultaneous and sustained effort are required for improving the status of women in Parliament. Political parties can ensure a better representation in the Rajya Sabha, which is by nomination. Thus Indian women will have to come out in public places and should voice their right to political participation, overseas help and the global

campaign for the political participation of women.

Suggestions

Political participation of any group or community is one of the important instruments of empowering them in the democratic set-up of the today world. There examples of the political empowerment weaker section of and breaking of age old impediments and social obstacles through the political participation across the world. Fair and democratic governance in India can't be ensured with the equal political participation of women. The rise in the literacy rate of women and their participation in the economic development of the nation have proved that the new generation of Indian women has left behind their male counterpart in the battle field life. But the male monopoly over the politics and political participation and Indian political culture has forcibly exiled from politics and political participation. A 50% reservation in the state legislatures and the parliament can be proved as an important tool to end an age old exile of India women from politics.

⁴⁰ Fadia, n.24, pp. 547-548.