

SPWI JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL WELFARE

(A Multi Disciplinary Peer-Review Bi-Quarterly
Social Science Research Journal)

Volume 4 Issue 3, July-September 2021

Editor

Dr. D. Suresh



SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC WELFARE AND INITIATIVES

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SPWI JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL WELFARE
Volume 4 Issue 3, July-September 2021

ISSN 2581-6322



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	<p style="text-align: center;">SPWI JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL WELFARE (A Multi Disciplinary Peer-Review Bi-Quarterly Social Science Research Journal) Volume : 4 Issue : 3 July-September 2021 An ISO 9001-2015 Certified Journal</p>
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WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA: PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES



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Abstract: *This paper has exclusively examined the role of women in politics while highlighting various schools of thought on women in political institutions across the countries and India. The trends and status of women representation across the globe including India are presented in the paper. It also examines the problems, challenges and mechanisms of improving women representation and their actual participation in politics in a detailed manner based on research findings across the globe.*

Keywords: *Women in Politics, Reservations, Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Role of Women in Politics, Problems and Challenges of Women Representatives*

Introduction

Women everywhere are breaking the glass ceiling in politics but their voices still go unheard and their contributions are too often sidelined. In many places, women are still seen as incapable of taking on responsibility in what is perceived as male-oriented areas, such as finance, trade, energy, economic development, climate change, foreign affairs, defence and infrastructure. This is often the case in Parliaments where women are given 'women's only' portfolios or only allowed to sit in women committees and are being pushed away from the other committees because of their gender.

Not just Parliaments but all levels of government need to adopt affirmative action measures and amend the internal rules to give preference to women over men (according

to their capabilities) for decision-making positions (including ministerial positions, committee chairs and leadership positions in the Parliament Bureau) in cases, where qualifications are equal or commensurate with their representation in the government.

The emergence of new trends has drastically changed the domain of women politics and relationships during the last five decades. The increasing involvement of women in mainstream politics and the impact of feminist movements all over the world led to an entirely different approach towards the role of women in politics. Taking as its starting point the politics in the broadest sense as an enterprise dominated by males, the new approach started exploring several new issues connected with the role of women in politics. Subsequently, women's participation in politics has emerged as a new field of interest as well as research in different social sciences. The focus of this new field is not only pointed towards the women's participatory trends but also the implications of male-dominated politics for women. This trend also tried to offer a theoretical framework for the understanding of the gender dimension of politics. This chapter discusses the trends and issues concerning women representation in political institutions including the Panchayati Raj bodies in India.

Women in Politics-Global Experiences

The initial research in the newly emerged field of women political representation projected several adverse trends in the matter of women's role in politics. Various research studies were conducted in the USA. suggested the limited role of women in the political process of the country. The studies covering the period up to 1972 show that male participation in politics exceeded that of females. It has been widely observed that women do not vote in the same proportion as men do. Similarly, in Chile who had a female president - Michelle Bachelet, and has contributed to cultural changes in society towards gender issues - women still have little access to positions of responsibility due to a culture that confines women to their private space and political parties that undermine the possibility of women to run in a given election.

Various conferences and discussion forums unanimously confirmed this trend. Studies on women's participation in the working of political parties project the same situation. Further, there was consensus in the studies conducted those women were less interested than men in the matter of exercising their vote in the elections. An important study conducted by Michigan University pinpoints that the number of men voters over women voters in the Presidential elections held from 1948 to 1972 had been continuously rising. Verba and Nie provide data on the participation of women in various political organizations in the United States. They find that in several organizations, the presence of women is less than men even though their number is substantial in one or two organizations. This applies both to the national and local elections in Britain. Studies conducted by Stokes and others on the general elections held in England in 1964 and 1970 have shown that women's turnout in these elections was less than that of men. Country-wise trends are discussed below.

Japan

Japan ranks 127 in the world for the number of women in national parliamentary worldwide as of March 2014, which is lower than that of last year in which Japan ranked at 122. As of February 28, 2013, there are a total of 39 women in the House of Representatives out of 479 incumbents. Since the revision of the Meiji constitution in 1947, Japanese women have been given the right to vote and the new version of the constitution also allows for a more democratic form of government. The first female cabinet member came about in 1960. Masa Nakayama was appointed as the Minister of Health and Welfare in Japan. Japan is a patriarchal society and the political culture in which politics is conducted emphasizes the dominant role of men. Until 1996, the electoral system for the House of Representatives was based on a single non-transferable vote in multimember districts. That system was not conducive to women's advancement in public office because it promoted contestation between competing parties and rival candidates within the same party. The new electoral system was introduced to reduce the excessive role of money and corruption in elections, which ultimately helped women who were running for public office. Aside from the electoral system, a major factor for a successful outcome of an election is the Koenkai. It is an organization that supports individual politicians financially. The obstacle posed for women with the Koenkai is that its support is usually inherited by candidates from their relatives or bosses, and because of the culture, it is usually men who inherit or gain support for their positions. By 1996, Japan adopted the new electoral system for the House of Representatives that combine single-seat districts with proportional representation. Out of 480 seats, 300 are contested in single-seat constituencies. The other 180 members are elected through allocations to an electoral list submitted by each party. Candidates who lack a strong support system are listed on a party's proportional representation section. "In the 2009 election, only two of eight female LDP members were elected from a single-seat district, which indicates that few female candidates have enough political support to win a single-seat election". While changes in the electoral process have made positions of the public office more accessible to women, the actual participation of women in the Diet remains relatively low. As for the future of women in politics in Japan, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe announced in his speech at the Japan National Press Club on April 19, 2013, that a major goal of his national growth strategy is, "having no less than 30% of leadership positions in all areas of a society filled by women by 2020".

United States of America

In the United States, no political gender quotas exist, mandatory or voluntary. The proportion of women in leadership roles in the Senate, House of Representatives, and Presidential positions reflect this. The current position of women representation in the U.S. is precarious. In the elections of 2012, the greatest number of female incumbents ever will be up for re-election in the Senate. Ten female Democrats, six of

them incumbents, are nominated, with one Republican nominated for Senate running for office. Steinhauer notes that in Congress, both, in the Senate and the House of Representatives, women historically and currently lack representation. The results from the 2012 election could greatly affect female representation in the Senate: "If all or most of the incumbent women prevail in 2012, and even just a few women of the many recruited win new seats, women would reach an all-time high in the Senate. But the loss of just one female Senate seat with no replacements would cost women ground in the Senate for the first time since 1978 when the number of women in the Senate went to one from two". With the 2012 elections, women Senators could either make the highest percentage of seats or the lowest proportion since 1978.

The United States is one of the shrinking numbers of industrialized democracies to not have yet a woman as its leader. Foreign female Prime Ministers include Canada's Kim Campbell, the UK's Margaret Thatcher, Australia's Julia Gillard, Israel's Golda Meir, and France's Édith Cresson. Other female national leaders include Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil, and President Isabel Peron of Argentina. Even Pakistan and Turkey, countries often viewed as particularly male-dominated have had female prime ministers. Therefore, the United States, a country that promotes the rights of women and girls around the world, is conspicuous for having only male presidents.

A similar trend is also evident in other Western democracies like France and Germany and also in some Scandinavian Countries like Norway, Sweden and Denmark. However, this trend is reversed in the case of women's membership in political parties. The Governments have taken several legal and administrative measures to provide more educational and job opportunities for women. The policy makers and planners are increasingly becoming gender-sensitive. Despite these positive developments, the position of women all over the world presents a gloomy picture in all fields, particularly in the political field. Unfortunately, the development rhetoric of the state, its policy concerns and the changed attitude of political parties could not make any dents in the direction of providing them equal opportunities in the political field along with men. The research studies carried out by the scholars of various social sciences and women activists during the last few decades expose the anti-women bias of the policy makers and planners and the ill effects of the development policies and programs met on them.

The latest studies show that even the recent liberalization policies and economic reforms initiated by the Governments of various countries hurt women producers, consumers and entrepreneurs. The recent women conference held in Beijing resolved that South Asian Women are facing the ongoing global phenomena, which is quite against them. The micro-level economic and social policies have adversely affected them, especially those in the lowest level of society. The changing structure has provided them poor representation and draws them into the unprotected home-based production and intensified inequality in different fields initiated by the social system is becoming

the reality of the daily life system. The new system has increased the poverty among them both, in absolute and relative terms and, pushed many women living in gloomy conditions of ignorance further. The above statement sums up the state of women in contemporary South Asia, which applies to Indian women also.

Role of Women in Politics – Indian Context

After Independence, the Government of India took a keen interest in the all-around development of women in the country primarily because of its commitment to the twin ideals of democracy and equality. To achieve the goal of the development of women along with the weaker sections of the society, the Government adopted several strategies. Firstly, to protect the rights of women and to ensure their equality along with men in all spheres, the Government passed several legislations. Second, the Government implemented many special development programs for the development of women who are living at various stages of socio-economic development. The social and economic empowerment of women has accorded a special place in the Five-Year Plans. Every successive Five-Year Plan implemented a variety of schemes for improving the living conditions of women of different strata in the Indian society. Under each five-year plan, sizable amounts of funds were spent on the women welfare programs and schemes.

As a result of the protective legislations and welfare programs undertaken by the Central and State Governments right from the beginning of Independence, a process of transformation has taken place in the socio-economic conditions of Indian women at least major trends are discernible in the process of this transformation. First, in the socio-economic sphere, there has been continuing absorption of women into the workforce. Second, access to higher education has expanded the boundaries of women's social roles which resulted in an increased sharing of responsibility in the management of family affairs, continuous participation in electoral political activities and greater participation and representation in the legislature and political activities.

On the whole, it can be stated that during the last seventy years of India's Independence mainly, two types of changes have taken place in the field of women's participation in politics. One, the realization and acceptance of the need for elimination of gender bias to increase the number of women in the formal political system, and second, the urgency of adopting reservations as a state policy for increasing women's representation in the political sphere. It is important to state that women's prominent role in social movements for a long time and their constant protests and demonstrations in the seventies and the eighties did succeed in making meaningful state interventions and getting some of their demands accepted. For instance, the National Commission for Women (NCW) was formed in 1992 to promote and safeguard the interests of women, and the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, reserving one-third of seats for women in the local bodies like the Panchayat Raj and municipal bodies came into effect in 1993. These few efforts resulted in shifting the emphasis of women's programs

from welfare to development and empowerment perspectives. It can be observed that on the whole, there has been a significant change in the perceptions of the people towards the issues regarding women. But all this did not help in improving their status radically. In fact, in certain spheres (like the sex ratio) it went down. The lobbying and pressure in support of their legitimate rights are from outside, but within the political system, they are lagging behind the men in terms of participation and exercise of power. It is now largely felt that the presence of women in large numbers in decision-making positions is equally important which is necessary to improve their conditions and also in solving their pressing problems.

A reflection of this approach is visible recently when the women cut across party lines came together on the question of reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the various Legislative Assemblies. "Politics" for women then is no longer as untouchable and untradeable as in the past. Even if politics is viewed as a sphere of violence and corruption, women no longer shrug from it but feel that they could make their contribution by improving the situation. This change of approach and attitude on women towards politics is visible today as also society's perception towards them as political leaders.

Challenges for Women in Politics

In the Indian context, the involvement of women in politics continuously is far less until recently. The participation of women in the political process has been a logical outcome of their involvement in the freedom struggle in India. After Independence, women are involved in the political process in various capacities as voters, as candidates contesting various elections and as, participants in the debates of legislative bodies at different levels. They also hold positions in political organizations at different levels including the Cabinets. This can be noticed even though the extent of their involvement in the elections as voters reflects their majority. Their representation in the various legislative bodies presents an extremely dismal picture which depicts their near absence from the decision-making bodies at all levels.

There has been a considerable increase in the number of women as voters in various elections held to the Parliament and State Assemblies, but their representations in these bodies continued to be extremely marginal. It may be stated that women's low participation in politics in India is a product of their exclusion from the social process at large. For several centuries, it is a fact that women are nearly absent at the higher levels in the industrial, educational and cultural institutions and private establishments as in politics and administration. Several explanations were offered for the low participation of women in politics. One important explanation is that men consciously and deliberately seek to keep women away from politics to protect their privileged position and domination.

It is widely believed that the traditional social system prevailing in the country is responsible for the suppression of women in several ways. The important feature of

the Indian social system is the commonly held belief that women are inferior to men in all aspects and hence they should be kept in the position of sub-ordination inside and outside the family. Culturally and traditionally, India is the most patriarchal community where the position of women is neglected and the birth of a girl child is regarded as the most misfortune. Indeed, it is very difficult to speak about the status of women in India, because of the vast difference among them. They were classified into different classes and castes, and with different roles, statuses, positions and conditions. On the whole, it should be admitted mostly that all women in India suffer from patriarchal structures and ideologies. They are the victims of gender discrimination, inequalities and male domination in all walks of life. They lag behind men in all the indicators of social and economic development.

It is said that women, particularly the rural illiterate women, are not independent voters, they are guided by the choice of their male members of the family and they completely lack information and political awareness. But, the social mobilization and awareness campaign rather than literacy and urban living have been significant factors in increasing the number of women voters. The extent, nature and trends of Indian women's participation in the electoral process are much greater than in many other countries, including the developed ones and has been steadily expanding over the years. The gap in the voter's turnout between men and women is getting narrow. There seems to be an increase in the level of awareness among women voters, particularly of the lower class and castes. The percentage of women voters in various elections increased in the first few decades after which it has fluctuated without any systematic trend. But there has always been a gap of 8 to 11% between men's and women's turnout in the elections held by the Parliament and State Legislatures. There has also been a steady increase in the number of seats contested by women, both for the Lok Sabha and State Assembly Elections.

Social Indicators of Women

India has the most adverse indicators for women in the world. In this country, women's level in the health, nutritional, educational, employment and other related fields is significantly lower than that of men. They are put mostly in unskilled and underpaid occupations. Their earnings are lower than that of men and they hardly own or control the means of production and property. Their participation in political and social decision-making processes is abysmally low. They have no importance in the formulation of social norms, political and legal rules and regulations, which control their lives. From the beginning women in several countries including India are subjected to neglect, discrimination and harassment, they have to live under the vicious circle of the fear of being aborted, the fear of being neglected, the fear of being molested, the fear of not getting adequate attention, care and affection. After marriage, they tasted the fear of maladjustment, torture, and abuse. They are victims of harassment in houses and eve-teasing in buses, offices, educational institutions and even in pious places.

As a result of the policy initiatives of the Government, welfare programs and women's movements, there have been some enlightened changes in the lives of women in different countries. There is increasing gender awareness, because of which women's deplorable and dismal conditions drew the attention of all concerned and the need to change their conditions is admitted by all. All types of violent assaults against them are now protested and regrettable. Women's low participation in political decision-making bodies at different levels and their poor representation in the services were taken for granted and steps are being initiated to enhance their representation in all levels such as legislative bodies and Government Services.

At present, Indian women are agitating for reservation of 33 % of the total seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. However, this issue has become very much complicated than it may seem. It is not only a question of a few more or a few women in the corridors of Parliament and Legislatures but also a response to the fact that a large section of society has historically been denied its legitimate share in the exercise of political power, the power that ultimately determines its destiny.

In this demand for reservation, women are also raising their voices against a system that has consistently denied them space by harnessing the forces of tradition to marginalize and trivialize their roles. After all, what is democracy if, 50% of the population has little or no say in it? To ignore such demands is to fail to understand and come to terms with the forces of history. This issue has to be judged in the light of the growing demand of women for their legitimate share in democratic power, as it did earlier struggle within our social system. Reservation of seats for women in Panchayats has shown that it has tremendous implications, not merely in terms of the number of women entering the public arena and holding public office, but also in terms of the social, economic and political impact that these reservations have had for the total system.

It is for these reasons that women are increasingly demanding political roles for themselves. They realized that the guarantees provided by the Constitution do not ensure their effective participation and political equality as well as their due place in the political process. Hence, they wanted to gain entry into political institutions and in the functioning of the state and to share control over the political power for the fulfilment of their ambition. This alone would lead to a situation where women can change and reverse the existing political situation, which has consistently been against their extension and aspirations and bring about the necessary changes in policy and the social structure to ensure a more equitable and humane order.

Levels of Women Participation – Emerging Trends

The role of Women's participation in the elected bodies and also in other political bodies as a means for the attainment of political power has assumed greater significance because they are the primary source of political power. Elections are a forum for self-

government and democracy, they are significant in drawing the attention of the nation to the problems and needs of disadvantaged sections; the manifestos, campaigns, promises made by individual candidates, track record and future course of action of political parties are indicative of national concerns as well as mandates for action. Proper selection of candidates in an election is vital because this representative has to function in the interests of a majority of the population who are depressed and disadvantaged. Hence, the opportunities for participation at this level is essential for women's development. As Sushila Kaushik has rightly pointed out, "democracy does not and cannot operate by proxy".

Women, who form half of the population of the Country have increasingly been focusing their grievances that their interests have not been adequately represented and they are not given due share in the political space. This is mainly because society has increasingly come to feel that their interests have not been adequately represented in the concerned bodies, and they have rightly deducted that this may be because they cannot effectively represent their demands in the existing situation. Few political parties are strongly demanding the representation of women. However, few political parties notably the Congress, BJP and CPI(M) are the perpetrators of this neglect, one can no longer imagine that they will voluntarily give women the space so long denied to them.

During the 1990s there has been a considerable increase in the studies on the role of women in politics. Several women scholars of various disciplines have evinced a keen interest in studying the increasing participation of women in political and electoral processes which became possible due to the effect of feminist movements and the sustained efforts of feminist leaders. This has resulted in the generation of a vast amount of literature on the different dimensions of women's participation in the working of our political system. There are several macro and micro analyses on women's participation in politics at different levels. These studies shed valuable light on this subject. These studies help to exchange the changing role of women in politics. Without which the understanding of the political phenomena was difficult.

Global Level Status

As per the facts and figures of UN Women, only 21.8% of national parliamentarians were female as of 1st July 2014, a slow increase from 11.3% in 1995. The table below taken from Inter-Parliamentary Union reveals that Rwanda had the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide. Women, there have won 63.8% of seats in the lower house. India is ranked at 117th position while the USA is ranked at 85 and China is ranked 62nd. Wide variations remain in the average percentages of women parliamentarians in each region, across all chambers (single, lower and upper houses). As of 1st January 2014, these were: Nordic countries, 42.1%; Americas, 25.2%; Europe excluding Nordic countries, 23.3%; sub-Saharan Africa, 22.5%; Asia, 18.4%; Pacific, 16.2%; and the Middle East and North Africa, 16%.

Women Representatives in India

As per the available data, out of the total 4896 MPs/ MLAs across the country, only 418 or 9% are women. Among MPs, Lok Sabha has 59 (11% of 543 MPs) and Rajya Sabha has 23 (10% of 233 MPs) women MPs. Among State assemblies, West Bengal 34 (out of 294 MLAs), Bihar 34 (out of 243 MLAs) and Andhra Pradesh 34 (out of 294 MLAs) have the maximum no of women MLAs followed by Uttar Pradesh with 32 women out of 403 MLAs and Rajasthan with 28 women out of 200 MLAs.

In terms of percentage, among state assemblies, the highest percentage of Women MLAs is from Bihar with 14% (34 out of 243 MLAs) followed by Rajasthan with 14% (28 out of 200 MLAs) women votes and West Bengal with 12% (34 out of 294 MLAs). The data reveals the trends in women participation all over India. Since the 73rd CAA was passed in 1993, the period 1993-97 is considered of greater importance and the data for the period reveals that except Goa, no other state, even Kerala that boasts of higher literacy rates was able to create awareness among women and improve the rate of representation of legislation. Northern states like Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir have recorded an increase in women representation in state legislatures since the 73rd CAA given their status in previous years.

Table-1: Status of Women Representation in Indian

Sl. No.	Elected from House/Assembly	Total seats in Parliament/ Assembly	Men MPs/MLAs	% Of Men MPs/MLAs	Women MPs/MLAs	% Of Women MPs/MLAs
1	Lok Sabha	543	484	89%	59	11%
2	Rajya Sabha	233	210	90%	23	10%
3	Uttar Pradesh	403	371	92%	32	8%
4	Maharashtra	288	277	96%	11	4%
5	West Bengal	294	260	72%	34	12%
6	Andhra Pradesh	294	260	88%	34	12%
7	Bihar	243	209	86%	34	14%
8	Tamil Nadu	234	217	93%	17	7%
9	Madhya Pradesh	230	205	89%	25	11%
10	Gujarat	182	166	91%	16	9%
11	Karnataka	224	221	99%	3	1%
12	Rajasthan	200	172	86%	28	14%
13	Odisha	147	140	95%	7	5%
14	Kerala	140	133	95%	7	5%
15	Assam	126	112	89%	14	11%
16	Jharkhand	81	73	90%	8	10%

17	Punjab	117	103	88%	14	12%
18	Chhattisgarh	90	79	88%	11	12%
19	Haryana	90	81	90%	9	10%
20	Jammu& Kashmir	87	84	97%	3	3%
21	Uttarakhand	70	65	93%	5	7%
22	NCTofDelhi	70	67	94%	3	6%
23	Himachal Pradesh	68	63	93%	5	7%
24	Tripura	60	57	95%	3	5%
25	Manipur	60	57	95%	3	5%
26	Meghalaya	60	59	97%	1	3%
27	Goa	40	39	98%	1	3%
28	Nagaland	60	60	100%	0	0%
29	Puducherry	30	30	100%	0	0%
30	Arunachal Pradesh	60	58	97%	2	3%
31	Mizoram	40	40	100%	0	0%
32	Sikkim	32	28	88%	4	13%
Total		4896	4478	91%	418	9%

Source: *Election Commission of India (ECI), 2009.*

Table-2: Women's Representation in State Legislatures 1952-1997
(% of Women MLAs)

State	1952	1957	1960-69	1967-69	1970-75	1977-78	1979-83	1984-88	1989-92	1993-97	Avg.
Andhra Pradesh	2.9	3.7	3.3	3.8	9.1	3.4	4.1	3.4	3.7	2.7	4.0
Arunachal Pradesh	-	-	-	-	-	0.0	3.3	6.7	3.3	3.3	3.3
Assam	0.5	4.6	3.8	4.0	7.0	0.8	0.8	4.0	4.0	4.8	3.2
Bihar	3.6	9.4	7.9	2.2*	3.8	4.0	3.7	4.6	2.8	3.4	4.3
Goa	-	-	-	6.7	3.3	3.3	0.0	0.0	5.0	10.0	4.3
Gujarat	-	-	8.4	4.8	3.2	NE	2.7	8.8	2.2	1.1	4.2
Haryana	-	-	-	7.4*	6.2	4.4	7.8	5.6	6.7	4.4	6.2
Himachal Pradesh	0.0	-	-	0.0	5.9	1.5	4.4	4.4	5.9	4.4	3.6
Jammu & Kashmir	-	NE	0.0	0.0	5.3	1.3	0.0	1.3	NE	2.3	1.5
Karnataka	2.0	8.7	8.7	3.2	5.1	4.0	0.9	3.6	4.5	3.1	4.5
Kerala	0.0	4.8	3.9	0.8	1.5	0.7	3.2	5.7	5.7	9.3	3.6
Madhya Pradesh	2.1	10.8	4.9	3.4	5.4	3.1	5.6	5.7	3.4	3.8	5.1

Maharashtra	1.9	6.3	4.9	3.3	9.3	2.8	6.6	5.6	2.1	3.8	4.7
Manipur	-	NE	NE	0.0	0.0*	NE	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.3
Meghalaya	-	-	-	-	1.7	1.7	0.0	3.3	NE	1.7	1.7
Mizoram	-	-	-	-	0.0	3.3	3.3	2.5	0.0	1.4	1.4
Nagaland	-	-	0.0	0.0	NE	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.5
Orissa	9.6	3.6	1.4	3.6	1.4*	4.8	3.4	6.1	4.8	5.4	4.0
Punjab	2.2	5.8	5.2	1.0*	5.8	2.6	5.1	3.4	5.1	6.0	4.0
Rajasthan	0.0	5.1	4.5	3.3	7.1	4.0	5.0	8.0	5.5	4.5	4.8
Sikkim	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0	0.0	6.3	3.1	2.3
Tamil Nadu	0.3	5.9	3.9	1.7	2.1	0.9	2.1	3.4	9.0	3.8	3.6
Tripura	-	NE	NE	0.0	3.3	1.7	6.7	3.3	NE	1.7	3.0
Uttar Pradesh	1.2	5.8	4.4	2.8	5.9	2.6	5.6	7.3	3.3	4.0	4.1
West Bengal	0.8	3.6	4.8	2.9	1.6	1.4	2.4	4.4	7.1	6.8	3.4
Delhi	4.2	-	NE	NE	7.1	7.1	7.1	NE	NE	4.3	5.9
Pondicherry	-	-	6.7	3.3	0.0	0.0	3.3	3.3	1.7	3.3	2.6
Period Average	1.8	6.3	4.9	2.9	4.4	2.8	3.8	5.3	4.5	4.0	4.0

Notes: Table entry stands for the percentage of women MLAs elected to state legislatures in the relevant elections. States did not exist.

NE: No elections held in the year.

* Two elections were held during this period. The figure given here is an average of the two

** In 1952 the Election Commission did not recognize women as a separate category. The figures given here are based on name recognition and hence liable to under-reporting of women representatives.

The rate of participation of women contestants in state assembly elections is a big setback in the area of women empowerment. Unless women representatives are at the helm of affairs and take active participation in the decision-making process in matters concerning women, the real issues related to women cannot be addressed. The table-3 reveals that women participation in state assemblies is pathetic in all the states with the highest share recorded in Himachal Pradesh since 1952-1997 at around 5.1% with a success ratio of 22.7 which means only one women candidate is bound to win. Whereas in other states like Andhra Pradesh, 3.5% share and 22% success ratio, only one person out of 3 contestants will win and the situation is similar in all the states.

Table 3: Women Contestants in State Assembly Election State-wise Averages 1952-1997

State	Contestants per seat	Share of women among Contestants (%)	Success Ratio (%)
Andhra Pradesh	0.18	3.5	22.0
Arunachal Pradesh	0.07	2.4	46.7
Assam	0.14	2.3	22.4
Bihar	0.20	2.4	16.7
Goa	0.19	3.0	22.7
Gujarat	0.18	2.7	20.9
Haryana	0.36	2.8	17.3
Himachal Pradesh	0.17	5.1	21.7
Jammu & Kashmir	0.09	1.8	16.3
Karnataka	0.23	3.9	19.7
Kerala	0.13	2.7	27.5
Madhya Pradesh	0.20	3.3	25.2
Maharashtra	0.2	3.3	18.3
Manipur	0.08	1.4	2.9
Meghalaya	0.11	2.5	14.7
Mizoram	0.09	1.8	16.7
Nagaland	0.03	0.5	14.3
Orissa	0.16	2.9	24.6
Punjab	0.16	2.9	25.2
Rajasthan	0.20	2.7	24.6
Sikkim	0.28	4.8	8.3
Tamil Nadu	0.19	2.6	18.9
Uttar Pradesh	0.28	2.6	14.8
West Bengal	0.12	2.6	27.8
Delhi	0.35	4.1	17.2
Pondicherry	0.18	3.7	14.3

Note: The figures stand for the average of the relevant indicator for all the elections held in that state from 1952 to 1997.

The above data clearly shows the increasing participation of women in politics in India is the outcome of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in the Indian Parliament. The new legislations are landmarks as far as the issue of women's participation in politics in India is concerned. Both, these amendments provided for reservation for women in the representative bodies at the grass-roots level in urban as well as rural areas. As a result, there are vast avenues for an estimated one million women in the representative bodies at the PRIs. Table-4 depicts the profile of Panchayat membership including 33.3% of representation of women in these bodies.

Table-4: Profile of Panchayat Membership in AP

Gram Panchayat (G.P)	
Total No.of Panchayats	2,25,000
Total No.of G.P Members (Approx)	22,50,000
Total No. of Women members in GPs	7,50,000
Total No.of SC/ST Members	1,50,000
Total No.of SC/ST Women members	50,000
Total No. of Chairpersons	2,25,000
Total No. of Women Chairpersons	75,000
Block Panchayat (B.P)	
Total No. of Block Panchayats	5,100
Total No.of of Members of BPS	51,000
Total No.of Women Members of BPS	17,000
Total No.of Chairpersons of BPs	5,100
Total No.of Women Chairpersons at BPS	1,700
District Panchayat (DP)	
Total No. of District Panchayats	475
Total No.of of Members of DPs	4,750
Total No. of Women Members of DPs	1,583
Total No. of Chairpersons	475
Total No. of Women DP Chairpersons	158

The participation of often illiterate rural women in the process of grass-roots democracy has attracted both, positive and negative views. The allegations are that these institutions are being misused by the predominantly male political structure which keeps the women away from meetings, takes their signature at their residence of judicial will before the meetings and operate through democratic candidates. Nevertheless, the worst critics have acknowledged that this has caused some activity among rural women who were so far dormant. To make the participation of women in

the Panchayati Raj meaningful, it would be desirable that the percentage of reservation be raised to the proportion of the women's population.

However, it appears that de facto women's participation in the grass-roots democracy will make its mark on the democratic structure of the nation sooner rather than later. The most significant aspect of women's participation in the decision-making process at the grass-root level is that it would throw up a trained younger women leadership for the political mainstream which has hitherto been restricted to men and a few influential women.

The idea of reserving seats for women in Parliament and State Legislatures is an extension of the reforms carried out in the composition of the local self-governing institutions under the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts (CAAs). Though it is premature at this stage to pronounce a categorical verdict on the success or otherwise of this experiment, it cannot be denied that the active involvement of women in the working of these bodies has had a salutary effect on public life. It has brought more women into nation-building activity at the local level at least. As a result of the 73rd and 74th CAAs hundreds of thousands of women have entered into public offices in the rural and urban areas. Now, there is a sense of involvement as well as commitment among the women on the issues related to them.

However, the participation of women in the decision-making process has been very low particularly at national and state levels. They are not adequately represented in the Parliament and the State legislatures. Political parties have failed to give an adequate number of party tickets for these elections to women. Even in party organization, they are always having a lesser strength? All these provide that Indian Women constituting half of the population have never been equal to men in terms of their representation in politics. The present national-level indications are also not encouraging for the future of political empowerment of women unless the pending constitution amendment bill providing one-third reservation of seats in Parliament and state legislatures is passed.

Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions in Andhra Pradesh

Many experts on the subject of grass-root democracy believe that 1/3rd reservation paved way for women to exercise their political rights in local self-governance and created an enabling environment for women's participation in grass-root politics. Though women issues have been politically neglected and women were being treated as second-class citizens, with less attention paid for the removal of inequality and subordination and grievances redressal, the fact that women enter into provincial politics to a certain extent challenges the social stigmas attached to political power. This necessitated a constant search for ways and means to empower, promote awareness and increase the participation of women in the decision-making levels of PRIs. Notwithstanding, women Panchayati members in Andhra Pradesh have made attempts to break these social barriers and raise their voices.

Andhra Pradesh was one of the first two states in India to establish the PRIs in the year 1959. The State Legislature created a three-tier Panchayati Raj (PR) set-up under the Andhra Pradesh Praja Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959, which provided for the co-option of two women. The Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Act (APGPA), 1964, governed the composition and functions of the Gram Panchayat in Andhra Pradesh. This Act provided for reservation of two seats for women if the total strength of the Gram Panchayati is 9 or less, 3 seats if the strength is between 10 and 15 and 4 seats if the strength is more than 15. The Act ensured between 22% to 25% of the representation of women in these bodies. In the middle-level bodies, till 1986, women's representation was governed by the Andhra Pradesh Praja Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act of 1959, which provided for co-option of two women for each Samiti in addition to the possibility of women members finding membership in Praja Samiti (PS) through the electoral process. Based on the recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee Report, the Mandal Praja Parishad, Zilla Praja Parishad Abhivrudhi Mandal Bill was introduced in Legislative Assembly in July 1986 which completely altered the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) set-up in Andhra Pradesh and 1987, a new reservation set-up was introduced for Backward Caste (BCs) and women, i.e., 9%. Thus, women got further encouragement to share the democratic decision-making process of PRIs. With the introduction of new amendments in conformity with the 73rd Constitution Amendment, the women representation reached a minimum of 33.3% along with other states.

Problems and Challenges of Women Representatives

The discussion on challenges of women representatives is an ongoing debate that needs mention at every interval so that appropriate assumptions are made. Traditionally patriarchal society in India has been very inflexible to permit women into politics freely in the pre and early post-independent periods. The traditional orientation of women was also an important factor that they could not come out to participate in politics easily even in the presence of a conducive environment.

Women in government in the modern era are under-represented in most countries worldwide, in contrast to men. However, women are increasingly being politically elected to be heads of state and government. More than 20 countries currently have a woman holding office as the head of a national government, and the global participation rate of women in national-level parliaments is nearly 20%. Many countries are exploring measures that may increase women's participation in government at all levels, from the local to the national.

Increasing women's representation in the government can empower women which will help in achieving gender parity. This notion of women's empowerment is rooted in the human capabilities approach, in which individuals are empowered to choose the functioning that they deem valuable. Female representatives not only advance women's rights but also advance the rights of children. In national legislatures, there is a notable trend of women advancing gender and family-friendly legislation.

Furthermore, several studies from both industrialized and developed countries indicate that women in local government tend to advance social issues. In India, for instance, greater women's representation has corresponded with a more equitable distribution of community resources, including more gender-sensitive spending on programs related to health, nutrition, and education.

Women face numerous obstacles in achieving representation in governance. Their participation has been limited by the assumption that women's proper sphere is the "private" sphere. Whereas the "public" domain is one of political authority and contestation, the "private" realm is associated with the family and the home. By relegating women to the private sphere, their ability to enter the political arena is curtailed. The challenges women face in politics are further discussed below.

1. **Gender Inequality:** Gender inequality within families, inequitable division of labour within households, and cultural attitudes about gender roles further subjugate women and serve to limit their representation in public life. Highly patriarchal societies often have local power structures that make it difficult for women to combat. Thus, their interests are often not represented. The other challenges are discussed below.
2. **Women get lower or Women Oriented Portfolios:** Even once elected, women tend to hold lesser valued cabinet ministries or similar positions. These are described as "soft industries" and include health, education, and welfare. Rarely do women hold executive decision-making authority in more powerful domains or those that are associated with traditional notions of masculinity (such as finance and the military). Typically, the more powerful the institution, the less likely it is that women's interests will be represented. Additionally, in more autocratic nations, women are less likely to have their interests represented. Many women attain political standing due to kinship ties, as they have male family members who are involved in politics. These women tend to be from higher income, higher status families and they may not be as focused on the issues faced by lower-income families.
3. **Personal lives Over Political Life:** Additionally, women face challenges in that their private lives seem to be focused on more than their political careers. For instance, fashion choices are often picked apart by the media, and in these women rarely win, either they show too much skin or too little, they either look too feminine or too masculine. Sylvia Bashevkin also notes that their romantic lives are a subject of much interest to the general population, perhaps more so than their stances on different issues. She points out that those who "appear to be sexually active outside a monogamous heterosexual marriage run into particular difficulties since they tend to be portrayed as vexatious vixens" who are more interested in their romantic lives than in their public responsibilities. If they are married and have children, then it becomes a

question of how do they balance their work-life with taking care of their children, something that a male politician would not be asked about.

4. **Social and Cultural Barriers:** Unlike their male counterparts, female candidates are exposed to several barriers that may impact their desire to run for elected office. These barriers are sex stereotyping, political socialization, lack of preparation for political activity, and balancing work and family.
5. **Sex Stereotyping:** Sex stereotyping assumes that masculine and feminine traits are intertwined with leadership. Due to the aggressive and competitive nature of politics, the belief is that participation in elected office requires masculine traits. Hence, the bias levelled against women stems from the incorrect perception that femininity inherently produces weak leadership. Sex stereotyping is far from being a historical narrative. To be sure, the pressure is on women candidates (not men) to enhance their masculine traits in electoral campaigns to woo support from voters who identify with socially constructed gender roles.
6. **Political Socialization:** The concept of political socialization rests on the premise that, during childhood, women are introduced to socially constructed norms of politics. In other words, sex stereotyping begins at an early age. Therefore, this affects a child's political socialization. Generally, girls tend to see "politics as a male domain". Socialization agents can include family, school, higher education, mass media, and religion. Each of these agents plays a pivotal role in either fostering a desire to enter politics, or dissuading one to do so. Newman and White suggest that women who run for political office have been "socialized toward an interest in and life in politics. Many female politicians report being born into political families with weak gender-role norms".
7. **Lack of preparation for political activity:** This builds upon the concept of political socialization by determining the degree to which women become socialized to pursue careers that may be compatible with formal politics. Careers in law, business, education, and government appear to be common occupations for those that later decide to enter public office. People feel as if women cannot do both things at one, as if being a mother and women of high power. Employment as a lawyer or perhaps as a university professor is significant due to the potential political connections, known as "social capital," that these occupations create. The assumption is that women in such occupations would acquire the necessary preparation and connections to pursue political careers.
8. **Balancing Work and Family:** The work-life balance is invariably more difficult for women as they are generally expected by society to act as the primary caregivers for children, as well as for maintenance of the home. Due to the demands of work-life balance, it is assumed that women would choose to

delay political aspirations until their children are older. Research has shown that new female politicians in Canada and the U.S. are older than their male counterparts. Conversely, a woman may choose to remain childless to seek political office. Institutional barriers may also pose as a hindrance for balancing a political career and family. For instance, in Canada, Members of Parliament do not contribute to Employment Insurance; therefore, they are not entitled to paternity benefits. Such lack of parental leave would undoubtedly be a reason for women to delay seeking electoral office. Furthermore, mobility plays a crucial role in the work-family dynamic. Elected officials are usually required to commute long distances to and from their respective capital cities, which can thus be a deterrent for women seeking political office.

Policies to Increase Women's Participation

The United Nations has identified six avenues by which female participation in politics and government may be strengthened. These avenues are equalization of educational opportunities, quotas for female participation in governing bodies, legislative reform to increase focus on issues concerning women and children, financing gender-responsive budgets to equally take into account the needs of men and women, increasing the presence of sex-disaggregated statistics in national research/data, and furthering the presence and agency of grassroots women's empowerment movements.

The Concept of Mirror Representation

As such, the concept of *Mirror representation* aims to achieve gender parity in public office. In other words, the representation of women is linked to their proportion in the population. Mirror representation is premised on the assumption that elected officials of a particular gender would likely support policies that seek to benefit constituents of the same gender. A key critique is that mirror representation assumes that all members of particular sex operate under the rubric of a shared identity, without taking into consideration other factors such as age, education, culture, or socio-economic status. However, proponents of mirror representation argue that women have a different relationship with government institutions and public policy than that of men, and therefore merit equal representation on this facet alone. This feature is based on the historical reality that women, regardless of background, have largely been excluded from influential legislative and leadership positions. As Sylvia Bashevkin notes, "representative democracy seems impaired, partial, and unjust when women, as a majority of citizens, fail to see themselves reflected in the leadership of their polity". The issue of participation of Women in politics is of such importance that the United Nations has identified gender equality in representation (i.e., mirror representation) as a goal in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. Besides seeking equality, the goal of mirror representation is also to recognize the significance of women's involvement in politics, which subsequently legitimizes said involvement.

Importance of Education to Empowering Women

To strengthen women's empowerment, female literacy has to be promoted. Education plays a vital role in enabling the castes and classes to gain entry into these bodies. Panchayat structure gives opportunity to the educated elite among backward classes to function on an equal plane with representatives holding traditional high castes, status and influence. Empowerment should be supported by economic independence. A crucial component to achieving economic independence is control over productive resources, particularly land. Control over land through land titles to women would only change power equations in favour of poor rural women, thereby positively contributing towards their empowerment. All these strategies would go a long way in strengthening the political empowerment of women in PR bodies. But the most crucial factor for capacitating the PRIs and making these bodies' vibrant institutions of local self-government is the political will. Evidence suggests that the political will to revitalize these bodies have been weakened by bureaucracy, vested interests and the traditional male-centred political power system. In the existing political milieu and prevailing socio-economic structure, PRIs cannot act as an agent of social transformation unless the government, NGOs and people themselves are completely involved and committed to it and are in a position to curb the growth of obstructionist and retrograde forces.

Women with formal education (at any level) are likelier to delay marriage and subsequent childbirth, be better informed about infant and child nutrition, and ensure childhood immunization. Children of mothers with formal education are better nourished and have higher survival rates. Equalization of educational opportunities for boys and girls may take the form of several initiatives:

1. Abolishment of educational fees would require parents to consider financial issues when deciding which of their children to educate. Poor children in rural areas are particularly affected by inequality resulting from educational fees.
2. Encouragement of parents and communities to institute gender-equal educational agendas. The perceived opportunity cost of educating girls may be addressed through a conditional cash transfer program that financially rewards families who educate their daughters (thus removing the financial barrier that results from girls substituting school attendance for work in the family labour force).
3. Creation of "girl-friendly" schools to minimize bias and create a safe school environment for girls and young women. Currently, a barrier to female school attendance is the risk of sexual violence enrooted to school. A "safe school environment" is one in which the school is located to minimize such violence, in addition to providing girls with educational opportunities (as opposed to using female students to perform janitorial work or other menial labour).

The history regarding women representation has been a major contribution in establishing the current status as to how society should go about viewing such concepts. Andrew Reynolds states: "historical experience often leads to gender advancement, and political liberalization enables women to mobilize within the public sphere". He argues that we will see a larger number of women in higher office positions in established democracy than in democracies that are developing, and "the more illiberal a state is, the fewer women will be in positions of power". This pertains to educational systems and established legislation relating to the development and control more women could have in countries already developed. As more countries develop their education systems, it is possible to see a shift in political views regarding women in government. What is even more prevalent within women and government is the tendency of those women to focus on laws regarding women's rights and standings.

Reservation Quotas

Quotas are mechanisms by which governments seek to increase the number of women represented in the governing body "Gender quotas for the election of legislators have been used since the late 1970s by a few political parties (via the party charter) in a small number of advanced industrial democracies; such examples would be like Germany and Norway". Quota systems have been examined through a large number of country statistics regarding women in office. Andrew Reynolds says there is "an increasing practice in legislatures for the state, or the parties themselves, to utilize formal or informal quota mechanisms to promote women as candidates and MPs". Quotas have been established in many countries however, there is still a limited ratio of women representation that takes place within these quotas. "Although over 60% of countries have reached at least 10% women in their national legislature, fewer have crossed the 20% and 30% barriers. By February 2006, only about 10% of sovereign nations had more than 30% women in parliament". Though the global rise of women in the office helps contribute to equality laws about women, many cultural and social concepts regarding women are slowly adjusting to the shift of women representation. This makes it hard for women to be acknowledged in politics as much as countries say they should be. Paxton explains this best by saying "Although women's formal political representation is now taken for granted, the struggle for descriptive representation remains. Indeed, gender inequality across all elected and appointed positions persists.

Paxton describes three factors that are the basis for why national level representation has become much larger over the past decades. There is structural, which is the idea that educational advancements along with an increase in women's participation in the labour force play a role in developing representation. Then there is political; in this idea, representation of women in office is based on a proportionality system, this is the idea that if a political party gets 25% of the votes, they gain 25% of the seats. In this process, the party feels obligated to balance the representation within their votes between genders, increasing women's activity in political standing. A

plurality majority system, such as the one the United States has, only allows single-candidate elections. Last, there is Ideology; the concept that the cultural aspects of women such as their roles or positions in certain countries dictate where they stand in that society, either helping or handicapping those women from entering political positions. There have been numerous arguments saying the plurality-majority system is a disadvantage to the chance that women get into office. Andrew Reynolds brings forth one of these arguments by stating: "Plurality-majority single-member-district systems, whether of the Anglo-American first-past-the-post (FPTP) variety, the Australian preference ballot alternative vote (AV), or the French two-round system (TRS), are deemed to be particularly unfavourable to women's chances of being elected to office". Andrew believes that the best systems are list-proportional systems. "In these systems of high proportionality between seats won and votes cast, small parties can gain representation and parties have an incentive to broaden their overall electoral appeal by making their candidate lists as diverse as possible".

1. Legal quota systems regulate the governance of political parties and bodies. Such quotas may be mandated by electoral law (as the Argentine Quota law, for example) or may be constitutionally required (as in Nepal).
2. Voluntary party quota systems may be used by political parties at will, yet are not mandated by electoral law or by a country's constitution. If a country's leading or majority political party engages in a voluntary party quota system, the effect may "trickle-down" to minority political parties in the country (as in the case of the African National Congress in South Africa).

Quotas may be utilized during different stages of the political nomination/selection process to address different junctures at which women may be inherently disadvantaged:

1. Potential candidacy: sex quota systems can mandate that from the pool of aspirants, a certain percentage of them must be female.
2. Nomination: legal or voluntary quotas are enforced upon this stage, during which a certain portion of nominated candidates on the party's ballot must be female.
3. Election: "reserved seats" may be filled only by women.

Importance of Reservation or Quotas

Quota usage can have marked effects on female representation in governance. In 1995, Rwanda ranked 24th in terms of female representation and jumped to 1st in 2003 after quotas were introduced. Similar effects can be seen in Argentina, Iraq, Burundi, Mozambique, and South Africa, for example. Of the top-ranked 20 countries in terms of female representation in government, 17 of these countries utilize some sort of quota system to ensure female inclusion. Though such inclusion is mainly instituted at the national level, there have been efforts in India to address female inclusion at the sub-national level, through quotas for parliamentary positions.

Quotas have been quite useful in allowing women to gain support and opportunities when attempting to achieve seats of power, but some see this as wrong doing. Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidenvall argue this in their article; Quotas as a “Fast Track” to Equal Representation for Women by stating: “From a liberal perspective, quotas as a specific group right conflict with the principle of equal opportunity for all. Explicitly favouring certain groups of citizens, i.e., women, means that not all citizens (men) are given an equal chance to attain a political career”. Dahlerup and Freidenvall break down the concept that even though it is not an equal opportunity for men and it necessarily breaks the concept of “classical liberal notion of equality” it is almost required to bring the relationship of women in politics to a higher state, whether that is within equal opportunity or just equal results. “According to this understanding of women’s under-representation, mandated quotas for the recruitment and election of female candidates, possibly also including time-limit provisions, are needed”.

How Women Legislators Impact the Society

There have been numerous occasions where equal legislation has, in itself and through the effects that women have, benefited the overall progression of women equality on a global scale. Though women have entered legislation, the overall representation within higher ranks of government is not being established. “Looking at ministerial positions broken down by portfolio allocation, one sees a worldwide tendency to place women in the softer socio-cultural ministerial positions rather than in the harder and politically more prestigious positions of economic planning, national security, and foreign affairs, which are often seen as stepping-stones to national leadership”.

Legislative agendas, some pushed by female political figures, may focus on several key issues to address ongoing gender disparities:

1. Reducing domestic and gender-based violence. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1989, addressed home violence and its effects on children. The Convention stipulates that child are holders of human rights, and authorizes the State to 1) prevent all forms of violence, and 2) respond to past violence effectively. Gender-based violence, such as the use of rape as a tool of warfare, was addressed in Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council in 2000. It calls for “all parties of armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence.” Currently, 64 countries have either drafted or are in the process of drafting laws to criminalize gender violence.
2. Reducing in-home discrimination through equalizing property and inheritance rights. National legislation can supersede traditionally male-dominated inheritance models. Such legislation has been proven effective in countries like Colombia, where 60% of the land is held in joint titles between men and women (compared to 18% before the passage of joint titling legislation in 1996).

Grassroots Women's Empowerment Movements

The lady in the case, an example of how some have interpreted women's involvement in government Women's informal collectives are crucial to improving the standard of living for women worldwide. Collectives can address such issues as nutrition, education, shelter, food distribution, and generally improved standard of living. Empowering such collectives can increase their reach to the women most in need of support and empowerment. Though women's movements have a very successful outcome with the emphasis on gaining equality towards women, other movements are taking different approaches to the issue. Women in certain countries, instead of approaching the demands as a representation of women as "a particular interest group", have approached the issue based on the "universality of sex differences and the relation to the nation". Htun and Weldon also bring up the point of democracy and its effects on the level of equality it brings. In their article, they explain that a democratic country is more likely to listen to "autonomous organizing" within the government. Women's movements would benefit from this the most or have had great influence and impact because of democracy, though it can become a very complex system. When it comes to local government issues, political standings for women are not necessarily looked upon as a major issue. "Even civil society organizations left women's issues off the agenda. At this level, traditional leaders also have a vested interest that generally opposes women's interests". Theorists believe that having a setback in government policies would be seen as catastrophic to the overall progress of women in government. Amanda Gouws says that "The instability of democratic or nominally democratic regimes makes women's political gains very vulnerable because these gains can be easily rolled back when regimes change. The failure to make the private sphere part of political contestation diminishes the power of formal democratic rights and limits solutions to gender inequality".

73rd CAA-looking ahead

To increase women's participation in politics in India, a 1993 constitutional amendment mandated that a randomly selected third of leadership positions at every level of local government be reserved for women. These political reservation quotas randomly choose one-third of cities to implement a women-only election. In these cities, parties are forced to either give a ticket to a women candidate or choose to not run in those locations. Due to the randomized selection of cities that must enforce the reservation for women each election year, some cities have implemented the quota multiple times, once or never. This addresses the political discrimination against women at various levels: parties are forced to give women the opportunity to run, the women candidates are not disadvantaged by the male incumbent or general biases for male over female leadership, and the pool of women candidates is increased because of the guaranteed opportunity for female participation. The effects of the quota system in India have been studied by various researchers. In Mumbai, it was found that the

probability of women winning office conditional on the constituency being reserved for women in the previous election is approximately five times the probability of women winning office if the constituency had not been reserved for women". Furthermore, that even when the mandates are withdrawn, women were still able to keep their positions of leadership. Given the opportunity to get a party ticket, create a platform and obtain the experience to run for a political position, women are much more likely to be able to overcome these hurdles in the future, even without the quota system in place. The quota system has also affected policy choices. Research in West Bengal and Rajasthan has indicated that reservation affected policy choices in ways that seem to better reflect women's preferences. In terms of voters' perception of female leaders, reservation did not improve the implicit or explicit distaste for female leaders the relative explicit preference for male leaders was strengthened in villages that had experienced a quota. However, while reservation did not make male villagers more sympathetic to the idea of female leaders, it caused them to recognize that women could lead. Moreover, the reservation policy significantly improved women's prospects in elections open to both sexes, but only after two rounds of reservation within the same village. Political reservation for women has also impacted the aspirations and educational attainment of teenage girls in India.

There has been an increasing focus on women's representation at a local level. Most of this research is focused on developing countries. Governmental decentralization often results in local government structures that are more open to the participation of women, both as elected local councillors and as the clients of local government services. A 2003 survey conducted by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), a global network supporting inclusive local governments, found that the average proportion of women in local councils was 15%. In leadership positions, the proportion of women was lower: for instance, 5% of mayors of Latin American municipalities are women.

According to a comparative study of women in local governments in East Asia and the Pacific, women have been more successful in reaching decision-making positions in local governments than at the national level. Local governments tend to be more accessible and have more available positions. Also, women's role in local governments may be more accepted because they are seen as an extension of their involvement in the community.

The local panchayat system in India provides an example of women's representation at the local governmental level. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 mandated panchayat elections throughout the country. The reforms reserved 33% of the seats for women and castes and tribes proportional to their population. Over 700,000 women were elected after the reforms were implemented in April 1993.

Conclusion

The increasing involvement of women in mainstream politics and the impact of feminist movements all over the world led to an entirely different approach towards the role of women in politics. Various research studies conducted in the U.S.A. suggested the limited role of women in the political process of the country. The studies covering the period up to 1972 show that male participation in politics exceeded that of females. The Governments have taken several legal and administrative measures to provide more educational and job opportunities for women. The policymakers and planners are increasingly becoming gender-sensitive. Despite these positive developments, the position of women all over the world presents a gloomy picture in all fields, particularly in the political field. The recent women conference held in Beijing resolved that South Asian Women are facing the ongoing global phenomena, which is quite against them. In India, the government implemented various reforms and policies to promote equality. Through various reforms were formulated in various five-year plans of Indian history, women face various challenges in their way to enter into politics. It is widely believed that the traditional social system prevailing in the country is responsible for the suppression of women in several ways.

However, since the 73rd CAA, the rate of women participation in politics has increased a margin while still there is a lot of gaps to be filled in terms of filling the total reservation seats. Various problems about the challenges faced by women in politics and while entering politics have been discussed. The measures needed to improve women participation in politics include better education opportunities for women, reservation of seats in the elected bodies at various levels etc., which are supposed to improve the situation in the coming years.

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