



## Representation of Women in Indian Politics – It's a Continuity or Empowerment

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### Abstract:

Women's participation in politics in India reveals that there has been a marked increase in their voting turnout in general elections. Women are under-represented in Indian parliament. A glance at women's participation, since 1952 in General Elections shows steady growth in participation in voting and reduction of gender gap at voter level in electoral process. The current article is based on the election commission's report on electoral participation and representation in the recently held general elections in 2014. It offers an analysis of women's political participation and representation from being women electorate to voters, from women as candidates to women as political representatives in Lok Sabha. It argues that, due to various social and political factors women face a democratic deficit in government. The descriptive representation of women is missing. Despite an increase in voting percentage in the recently held assembly and general elections, there are few women as candidates in electoral process and even fewer women legislators.

**Key words:** Women's participation, political process, mainstream

Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. This limited nature of women participation and representation in national decision making institutions has important consequences for women and for the legitimacy of the institutions. Where women constitute half the population in a political system which supports equality and where both women and men are legally eligible for political office, women's participation should be equal to that of men. If this is not the case, it signifies deep flaws within the political system. Representation is not only a means of ensuring individual participation, it is also the responsibility of the representatives to act on behalf of

the constituents, including women, who elected them and reflect their ideas and aspirations. Women's disproportionate absence from the political process would mean that the concerns of half of the population cannot be sufficiently attended to or acted upon as it denies their viewpoints sufficient opportunity to be integrated in the political system.

While the Indian democratic state is committed to the protection of individual rights within the context of citizenship, a closer look at how it operates for the women reveals that these rights are not accessible in the public and private spheres in their full potential to all the women in India. There are historical, social and cultural factors that have limited women's capacity and



chances to exercise their freedom to participate in the political processes. The evolution of Indian democracy through the 16 General Elections so far has reflected a low representation of women in Parliament, State Legislatures, in political parties and other decision-making bodies.

The under representation of women in the political sphere is inextricably linked with the low and inferior status of women in society in India especially in the context of the declining sex ratio, increasing violence and crimes against women and their marginalized status in employment, education and health sectors.<sup>1</sup>

An average Indian woman has little control over her own fertility and reproductive health. More women are illiterates (58%) and dropped out of school when compared to men. There are fewer women (26%) in the paid workforce than men. Women's work is undervalued and unrecognized. Women work longer hours than men and carry the major share of household and community work which is unpaid and invisible. Women are legally discriminated against in land and property rights. Women face violence inside and outside the family throughout their lives. Most women in India have very little say in decisions affecting their own lives. The cumulative effect of all this is that women tend to lack the self-confidence and skills needed to function effectively in the public sphere.<sup>2</sup> The under representation of women and absence of women from positions of power and decision-making reinforces their exploitation and deprivation. It is in this context that women's greater political representation becomes all the more necessary.

### **Political Participation and Representation of Women in India:**

Women in India raised the issue of representation in politics first time in 1917. At that time it was basically a demand for universal adult franchise and political participation. By 1930 women had gained the Right to Vote, which initially benefited women from elite families. Women's involvement in struggles for political and civil rights in India were, however, sought to be linked to nationalist movements in alliance with males against the common foreign enemy. In any case women's involvement in nationalist struggles changed their lives in that even though they were denied equal opportunities to shape the new state, they gained constitutional and legal rights. But even after the right to vote became a reality for all women, their representation in the parliament, political parties and other decision making bodies remained low even after independence, and after the Indian Constitution came into force in 1950.<sup>3</sup> A few women, no doubt, attained positions as members of parliament and state legislatures and as leaders of opposition etc., mostly through family dynasties or through male political patronage. However, the percentage of women in legislatures and decision making positions always remained low. Women do not share the power of decision-making and are not involved in policy making in Indian democracy in proportion to their numerical strength. Thus, there is a gap between the formal idea of women's participation and their meaningful use of power.<sup>4</sup> The quest for greater political representation of women is, therefore, still relevant.<sup>5</sup>



Women in India have lesser opportunities of public influence or for entering politics. Women also lack opportunities to move within the hierarchies without patronage of male leaders or mentors. The women's wings of political parties may have given visibility to women in the form of a platform for participation rather than integrating them into central power structures. Women do not have necessary resources to enter and compete in contemporary political arena. Thus, improved social indicators in development graphs may not automatically ease women's access to political power or improve political participation and representation. They do not necessarily translate into collective gains nor sustained political power. Of course the scope for women's public activism varies across class, caste and region in India. The effectiveness of women's participation also depends on the local configuration of power and cultural environment apart from problems of poverty, illiteracy, lack of economic resources, negative social and legal environments, family and household pressures, male dominated bureaucracy and politicians that the women face.

#### **Women's wider Participation and Representation:**

Women in India constitute nearly half the population of the country, but they are poorly represented in the various governance and decision making bodies. The position depicted through the 16 General Elections so far reflects a low representation of women in Parliament, State legislatures, in political parties and other decision-making bodies. Less than 8% of Parliamentary seats, less than 6% Cabinet positions, less than 4% of seats in High Courts and the Supreme Court,

have been occupied by women. Less than 3% of the administrators and managers are women. The average percentage of women's representation in the Parliament, Assemblies and Council of Ministers taken together has been around 10%.<sup>6</sup>

The Indian Constitution guarantees to all women the fundamental right to equality (Article 14) and equal voting rights and political participation to both men and women. As reflected in the Preamble, the Indian Constitution is firmly grounded in the principles of liberty, fraternity, equality and justice and contains a number of provisions for the empowerment of women. Women's right to equality and non-discrimination are defined as justifiable fundamental rights (Article 15) and there is enough room for affirmative action programmes for women. Equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State is a fundamental right (Article 16). The Directive Principles of State Policy stress on the right to an adequate means of livelihood for both men and women equally (Article 39a), equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39d), provision for just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 39e). Directives for promoting harmony and renouncing practices derogatory to the dignity of women are also provided for in the Indian Constitution. The political rights of women are recognized without any discrimination, or distinction and they have the right to participate in decision making at all levels equally with men. The right to constitutional equality has been supplemented by legal equality by the passage of a number of acts through which the traditional inequalities in



respect of marriage, divorce and property rights are sought to be eliminated. However, in spite of these constitutional and legal provisions, the ground reality is that women have not obtained adequate and proportionate representation in the legislative and other decision-making bodies.

There is certainly a need for women's more effective role in decision-making processes for the democratic and constitutional assurances of equal citizenship and rights in the Indian Constitution to become a reality at the operational level. Citizenship is linked to political participation and representation. Lack of ability and opportunity to participate in the political system implies a lack of full membership in the system. For true equality to become a reality for women, the sharing of power on equal terms with men is essential. But the reality is that women continue to be marginally represented even in areas where the various policies have a direct impact on them. There is still a great gap between constitutional guarantees and the actual representation of women in the political system in India.

#### **Political Mobilization and Participation:**

Historically many women have been active in the informal political sphere in terms of political mobilization and they have participated in large numbers in political demonstrations and mass agitations as well as in the activities of nationalist and political bodies and organizations. The political mobilization and participation of women has been impressive in the Indian National Movement, in revolutionary Left Movements, anti-price rise stirs, on legislation on rape, against the practice of widow immolation, in the anti-liquor

movements and movements against deforestation etc. During the National Movement against colonialism women were mobilized actively particularly under Gandhi's leadership and women's organizations within the political parties participated actively in the cause against colonialism for instance in the Civil Disobedience Movements and Salt Satyagraha etc. But once freedom was won, the women's wings were more or less marginalized and assigned areas that primarily dealt with women and children or other 'welfare' activities and women's organizations ended up playing a secondary and supportive role to the male leadership in power. The leaders of such organizations were seldom women with independent political careers unless they were from political families with the backing of male political activists.

It is worth noting that the political mobilization of women and their participation in elections has steadily increased since the first General Elections of 1952. During 1952-1980 for instance, women's participation increased by 12% against the turnout of men which increased by only 6%. In the General Elections of 2004 & 2009, the all India percentage of women voter turnout was 48%. As regards women voters' turnout, from 37.1 per cent in the first General Elections in 1952 it increased gradually over the years to 55.6 by 1999. Notably, the gap between female and male voters was 15.9 per cent in 1952, but it decreased slowly over successive elections and came down to 8.4 per cent in 1996. It has remained at 8.3 per cent in 2004 general elections.<sup>7</sup>

This percentage increase in the turnout of women in elections has however not translated into a larger



number of women being represented in the legislative bodies. Competitive elections and democracy has not necessarily led to better political representation of women in Indian politics. The candidates fielded by the various political parties are still predominantly male and women account for only five to ten percent of all candidates across parties and regions. The percentage of representation of women in the Lok Sabha varies from 4.4 in 1952 to 8.1 in 1984, declining to 5.2 in 1989, rising to 7.9 in 1998 and 9.02 in 1999 and again declining to 8.1 in 2004. In Rajya Sabha, proportion of female members started with 7.3 per cent in 1952 and rose to 15.5 per cent in 1991, but again declined to 6 per cent in 1998 and rose to 10.3 per cent in 2005, again slightly declining to 9.9 per cent in 2006. When women reach the few ministerial positions, they are generally assigned portfolios in the social service sectors of Health Education, Social Welfare, Women and Child Development etc.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Electorate Percentage by Gender in Lok Sabha Elections (1962 – 2014):**

Since independence women across social groups, religious communities and adivasi identity have been denied the opportunity to represent themselves in the Lok Sabha. The elections for the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha concluded with a voter turnout of 66 percent which is highest recorded after 1984 across the country by men and women electorate. With the increased voting percentage of women, there were expectations running parallel for an increased women's representation in the Lok Sabha. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, there were only 10.9 percent women representatives and it has marginally

increased to 11.2 in 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha in 2014.<sup>9</sup>

Election Commission reports from 1962 to 2014 general elections indicate the domination of men in the total electorate compared to women. The following table shows that men electorate has increased from 6.7 crore in 1962 to 43.6 crore in 2014 and have been constant between 52 to 52.7 percent of total electorate across the country. On the other hand, women electorate also has been increased from 6 crore in 1962 to 39.6 crore in 2014.

The Electorate Gender Gap between men and women has been reduced from 5.4 percent in 1962 to 4.9 percent in the 2014 elections. It also highlights the increase in the women electorate over a period of time. Gap in the electorate between men and women was the lowest in the 1984 elections. In 2014, the women electorate has reduced when compared to the 2009 elections. The electorate gender gap has increased from 4.4 to 4.9 percent between the last and recently held election.<sup>10</sup> The average electorate gap between men and women since 1962 to 2014 has been 4.5 percent.

#### **Women Voting Percentage in Different Lok Sabha Elections: (1957 – 2014)**

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. Female 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 gender exclusion from electoral the 20% mark reflecting a pan-Indian participation and quality representation.

Table 1. Electorate Percentage by Gender across Different LS

| Year    | Total Electorate | Men              | Women            | Electorate Difference |
|---------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1962    | 127719470        | 67388166 (52.7)  | 60331304 (47.3)  | 5.4                   |
| 1967    | 216102215        | 113944234 (52.7) | 113944234 (52.7) | 5.5                   |
| 1971    | 274189132        | 143564829 (52.3) | 130624303 (47.7) | 4.6                   |
| 1977    | 321174327        | 167019151 (52.0) | 154155176 (48.0) | 4.0                   |
| 1980    | 356205329        | 185539439 (52.0) | 170665890 (48.0) | 4.0                   |
| 1984    | 379540608        | 196730499 (51.8) | 182810109 (48.2) | 3.6                   |
| 1989    | 498906129        | 262045412 (52.5) | 236860987 (47.5) | 5.0                   |
| 1991    | 498363801        | 261832499 (52.5) | 236531302 (47.5) | 5.0                   |
| 1996    | 592572288        | 309815776 (52.2) | 282756512 (47.8) | 4.4                   |
| 1998    | 605880192        | 316692789 (52.2) | 289187403 (47.8) | 4.4                   |
| 1999    | 619536847        | 323813667 (52.2) | 295723180 (47.8) | 4.4                   |
| 2004    | 671487930        | 349490864 (52.0) | 321997066 (48.0) | 4.0                   |
| 2009    | 716985101        | 374758801 (52.2) | 342226300 (47.8) | 4.4                   |
| 2014    | 833062877        | 436538842 (52.4) | 396524035 (47.5) | 4.9                   |
| Average | 479409017        | 250655354 (52.2) | 228753682 (47.7) | 4.5                   |

Source: Election Commission of India 1962-2014, Government of India

The Indian female marginalisation from electoral participation stems mainly from political 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 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. The electoral participation of women in India is a much discussed issue with a wide range of opinions and differing views. 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 exclusions on gender basis.<sup>11</sup>

Traditionally the participation of women in the voting was less compared



to men due to different socio-cultural factors based on gender<sup>12</sup>. The below table suggests from the 1957 general elections there is a steady increase in the voting percentage of women. In 1957 general elections, women's voting percentage was 39 percentage compared to 56 percentage of men. The difference in the turnout was 17.2 percent. Due to the lesser voting percentage in the initial elections, the average voting percentage of women is 53 percent, while the men's average voting percentage is 63 percent. Only in half dozen out of fourteen general elections, women's voting percentage has crossed 55 percent, which highlights their potential participation in the voting level. In 1967, 1977, 1989, 1998, 1999 and 2009 elections women witnessed an increase in the voting percentage. The given table that 2014 elections have witnessed the record increase in the voting percentage of women compared to men. According to the Election Commission data (Statistical Report, 1957-2009), women's voting percentage has increased from 55.8 to 65.7 percent in the last two elections. There is an increase of nearly 10 percent. During the same period, the voting percentage of men have also increased but percentage of increase is lower compared to women. Therefore, is the common assumption that increase men's voting percentage also leads to the rise in the women's voting percentage true. The data clearly refute this assumption. Despite the decrease in voting percentage of men, in 1999, 2004 and 2009 election, there was an increase in women's voting percentage. Further, according to different National Election Study (CSDS Data Unit, 2009), Women's voting percentage has been higher in the assembly elections than general elections. Significantly, recent assembly elections

have witnessed more voting percentage of women than men. The average women's voting percentage in assembly and general elections has been 53 percent compared to 63 percent for men. There is narrowing of gender gap in voter turnout. In 2009, it was only 5 percent which is now just 1.4 percent. The graph below depicts the narrowing gap between men and women in the voting percentage. It has brought the gender gap to the historic low.

Women have successfully broken the barrier of gender marginalisation at least in exercising their voting rights. Increased women's voting percentage over different elections does indicate the growing enthusiasm and participation of women in the elections. Nevertheless, participation is limited to barely voting and not able to convert it into substantial numbers of women in Lok Sabha. Participation as contestants in the electoral arena is still a distant dream for the majority of women.

#### **Political Parties and Women Representation:**

By the 1980s, issues raised by the women's movements in India led to political parties realizing the importance of female voters and women's wings became active. Mainstream political parties became conscious of women as a constituency and this was reflected in their election manifestoes and their considering women as candidates with potential votes. By the ninth Lok Sabha elections in 1989, one could find a conscious focus on women's issues in the manifestoes of political parties. However, this did not translate into more seats for women in the political bodies and most parties resorted to tokenism and symbolism when it came to representation of women.



Table 2: Voting Percentage by Gender across different LS Elections

| Year    | Total | Men  | Women | Turnout Difference |
|---------|-------|------|-------|--------------------|
| 1957    | 45.4  | 56.0 | 38.8  | 17.2               |
| 1962    | 55.4  | 63.3 | 46.6  | 16.7               |
| 1967    | 61.0  | 66.7 | 55.5  | 11.2               |
| 1971    | 55.2  | 60.9 | 49.1  | 11.8               |
| 1977    | 60.4  | 65.6 | 54.9  | 10.7               |
| 1980    | 56.9  | 62.1 | 51.2  | 10.9               |
| 1984    | 63.6  | 68.1 | 58.6  | 9.5                |
| 1989    | 61.9  | 66.1 | 57.3  | 8.8                |
| 1991    | 56.7  | 61.5 | 51.3  | 10.2               |
| 1996    | 57.9  | 62.0 | 53.4  | 8.6                |
| 1998    | 61.9  | 65.7 | 57.6  | 8.1                |
| 1999    | 59.9  | 63.9 | 55.6  | 8.3                |
| 2004    | 58.0  | 61.6 | 53.6  | 8.0                |
| 2009    | 58.1  | 61.0 | 55.8  | 5.2                |
| 2014    | 66.4  | 67.1 | 65.7  | 1.4                |
| Average | 58.5  | 63.4 | 53.6  | 9.7                |

Source: Election Commission 1951-2014, Government of India

Women issues were not taken up by parties in a serious manner nor translated into programmes, policies and legislation nor were they mandated specifically to address issues of women. Almost all political parties set up a women's cell or wing but they worked as ancillary bodies. Very few women were able to capture seats of power. The number of women in the legislatures remained very small. Very few women reached the position of party president or leader of legislative party.<sup>13</sup>

More recently major political parties have indeed made a conscious effort to induct more women into the various levels of the party organization. The CPM has made an effort to induct

more women into its district committees and state level bodies. The membership of women in the party however remains below 10%. But the membership of women in mass organizations as the Kisan Sabha and the CITU has shown an improvement. The CPM changed its stance on gender-based reservation only after 1988. The BJP had the highest percentage of women in decision-making bodies from the Parliamentary Board and the Election Committee down to the ward level.<sup>14</sup> Traditionally, the Congress Party has fielded the largest number of women candidates and has had the largest number of women members in Parliament though the Congress working Committee has a rather low level of representation of women.



In spite of the efforts of political parties to induct more women, the extent of representation of women has not changed much. The number of women candidates in the 1998 parliamentary elections was not even half the number of women in the 1996 elections. In 1998 there were only 274 women candidates as against 599 in the 1996 elections. In the general elections in 1999, the same proportion of women were put up for elections by both the parties favoring the 84<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill on the reservation for women in Parliament and the parties which were opposed to it.<sup>15</sup> The Congress Party led by a woman had only 10% of women among the candidates. The BJP and the CPM had 7% of women among the candidates.<sup>16</sup> The idea of 33% reservation for women in parliament was actively endorsed by most of the major political parties and this had raised expectation that many more women would be nominated to contest the elections. The election manifestoes and the public pronouncements of parties as well as the print and electronic media highlighted the idea of women's representation by reservation or by nomination of more women for elections signifying a more conscious political stand on women's representation. However, these stances did not translate actually into more nomination of women candidates during elections. Many parties ended up allotting some seats to women candidates only as a token and to symbolize their pro women egalitarian policy.

In the inner party structures in the decision-making levels and the posts within the party, women are even less represented in most political parties. Women have a very low representation if

at all in the actual decision-making bodies and rarely influence the more significant party policies. Most often they are relegated to the 'women's wing' of the party where they are required to deal with what are considered to be "women's issues" such as dowry and rape cases and sometimes on more general concerns like price rise which are considered to affect 'housewives'. Issues like child and family welfare are largely seen as women issues, and falling in a realm which is not political. By and large a masculine view of political priorities is in operation. Most of the women's wings of political parties have very little power and have hardly any say in the decision making and important policy matters.

Political parties assert that it is difficult to get sufficiently qualified women candidates. Other arguments have also been advanced. It has been held that women are not independent voters; a majority of them are illiterate; a majority of them make their choice on the basis of suggestions from male members of their families-husbands or sons; women lack information and political awareness or that women are not politically conscious. On the other hand, in reality women have been active and vocal both in times of peace and crisis. They have been active in movements of peace, women and child welfare, trade unionism, food adulteration, price rise and deforestation and many other issues.

The real reason for the low political representation of women in the formal political structures and decision making levels, seems to lie in the compulsions of competitive elections and the quest for power by the political parties in a multiparty democracy. Increasingly the compulsions of the



political parties due to narrow majorities, precarious coalitions and hung parliaments have made the question of power rather than that of representation the determining factor. Women's issues and women's participation and representation are encouraged only within the parameters of power and are constrained by the basic objectives and interest of the parties either to capture power or survival, if in power. While women are mobilized to vote by all the parties, at the stage of distributing tickets for standing for elections, the number of women drops dramatically. At this stage, political parties are driven more by power considerations with an eye on the 'winnability' of the candidates from the angle of the prospect of government formation. Women lose out at this stage as the imperative of 'winnability' seems to compel political parties to deny tickets to women unless they are sure to win. Women are considered to have less chances of winning, which is not necessarily true.

#### **Women in power in Indian Politics:**

Political leadership by women is not dramatically different from that of men. Women leaders are no better or worse than men. Nor have women leaders been typically anxious to give greater representation to other women within their own organizations or in the political process generally. Representation of women has not necessarily increased greatly under the leadership of women. In fact interestingly the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts and the policy and implementation of 33% reservation for women in Local Bodies received strong support and impetus due to Rajiv Gandhi's interest and advocacy in the matter.

Thus, the Indian political system cannot be said to be non-receptive to the emergence and dominance of women leaders even though the political representation of women has not particularly registered a significant increase over the last 16 General Elections. While on the one hand most women politicians have found it difficult to rise within male dominated party hierarchies, on the other hand some women have managed to become leaders when they have set up parties of their own. Once they have established themselves as leaders, there has been an unquestioning acceptance of their leadership and decisions by the party rank and file, even if it is largely male.

Women in Parliament or Legislatures do not necessarily confine themselves to women issues only. In the absence of a specific mandate for representing women issues, most of them feel that they represent both men and women of their constituencies. Like men they are drawn into the game of power with all its ruthlessness even though women's approach to politics may not be identical to that of men. In fact even the women's wings or organizations of parties are not necessarily marked by kind of feminist perspective or sensitivity. Also the patriarchal articulations whether by male politicians and leaders or internalized by women candidates in presenting themselves as '*bahus*' (daughter-in-laws) and '*betis*' (daughters) relying on traditional patriarchal notions of femininity are not absent in Indian politics. Many times women public figures do adapt to and adopt male priorities predominating in public life in order to be acceptable. Many women internalize the norms and roles of patriarchal political structures and



merely replicate them instead of questioning them, resulting in reinforcing existing hierarchies of power. Questions have been raised as to whether an increase in numerical strength of women in the political process and decision making bodies automatically leads to a qualitative shift in power and whether women on balance pay greater attention to the concerns of women more than male politicians. Problems of tokenism, visibility, marginality etc. are often discussed in referring to women as a 'minority' operating in a male domain.

While it is considered important to bring women to positions of power, it is equally necessary to sensitize those in power whether men or women about gender. Along with this the importance of women's economic independence, education and awareness and their improvement in the socio economic sphere can hardly be stressed. The restructuring of gender relations within both the family and society is an equally important step towards freedom, equality and justice.

#### **Representation through Reservations:**

Various strategies have been proposed to further the political representation of women in India. From a reservation of 33% seats at various levels including the Parliament, it has also been suggested that political parties reserve 33% of their seats for women in the elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party recently announced such a reservation in its organization. However, it has been questioned whether women constitute an undifferentiated category and whether collective identification and mobilization of women as a 'disadvantaged' group in general on the basis of gender is a viable proposition in the politically accepted

sense of the term particularly in view of caste and class differences among them. Mere presence of women in Parliament even if greater in numbers will not mean much unless they are truly representative of women's concerns covering all categories. In the ongoing debate about reservation of seats for women in the Parliament it has been pointed out that an undifferentiated reservation for women will reinforce the existing inequalities in women's access to positions of power. It is the elite and politicized families from which there is a smooth entry for women in politics. Women playing supportive roles to males in the family and emerging from their shadows have also found easy entry. Another trend has been the entry of widows of prominent political figures into politics and positions of power. On the whole the important factors for women's active presence in politics in India as trends show are in general: family background, political influence, family financial position, existing involvement in politics, literacy, local conditions, campaign strategy, influence within the party and personality traits etc. rather than only competence, capability and merit.

#### **Women in local bodies:**

Prior to the passage of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendments, the participation of women in political affairs has been dismally poor mainly because of the male dominated set up of the Indian society. This is quite evident that despite the fact that about 48 % of the Indian population consists of women and the participation has been negligible.<sup>17</sup> The percentage of women MPs has never touched double figure mark in the Lok Sabha. In the case of State Legislatures situations is all the more discouraging as is clear from the fact that the average



women's representation in them is just four percent.<sup>18</sup> The position is rather more gloomy when one talks about their representation in the elections to the local self governing bodies. In view of this painful reality, various scholars, political leaders and social reformers felt the need to empower women politically initially at the grass-roots levels. This wide spread feeling ultimately culminated in the passage of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendments which provide one-third reservations to women in Panchayat Raj bodies and Municipalities respectively. By virtue of these provisions quite a large number of women contestants jumped into the election arena to try their luck.

#### **Conclusion:**

There has been a marked increase in voter turnout and election campaigning among women in India. While there have been significant gains among Indian women in these two areas of electoral participation, they continue to be under-represented in legislative bodies both at national and state level and within political parties. The under-representation of women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies and in crucial decision-making positions like important cabinet berths are clear pointers of their systematic exclusion from electoral competition on a gender basis. Though women head a significant number of national and state level political parties as party leaders, their representation within the rank and file of prominent political parties is not in significant numbers. Women who have made their presence felt in inner party structures are also relegated to the second rung leadership and have failed to break the "glass ceiling".<sup>19</sup> However, the silver lining over women's participation in

electoral politics in India is the participatory upsurge witnessed among women as voters in the 1990s. The difference in voting based on gender remains significant, but the participation of women as voters is clearly on the upswing at the national level as more and more women have started exercising their electoral rights and participating in electoral competition. Similarly, women's participation in formal politics has also increased in campaign activities during the election. Thus, the political participation of women in electoral politics and activities connected with it is witnessing a definite upswing as their increased participatory trends make it quite evident.

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