



## Representation of women in politics : a need for national development.

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### Abstract

India is the largest democracy in the world. The successful execution of democracy demands on over all participation and representation of all sections of the people. The analysis of the democratic system and representation of various sections of population in our country reveals that the participation of women in political process has been far below their counterpart. The reasons for this are well known which include tradition, psychology, lack of encouragement and preoccupation with democratic affairs. Their representation and participation is a prerequisite for the success of our politico-social system. However, it is not true that women are not represent in our political system. But such representation is not the representation of all sections of women. India has yet to manage notably limited success reflecting this imbalances, with women currently holding 11.23 per cent in Lok Sabha. All though India was one of the 1<sup>st</sup> democratic nations to grant women to vote, women are neither represented in the legislative spaces nor contribution to towards the formation of national laws.

**Keywords:** Women, democracy, representation, participation, political system, legislative spaces, vote.

### 1. Introduction

The successful execution of democracy demands overall participation and representation of all sections of the people. Women represent more than half of the world's population but women constitute a marginal proportion of the representatives in the world's legislative Assemblies. Recently in Assam State Legislative Election eight women have been elected to new Assam Legislative Assembly which is six less than the 14 figured in the last House. Women representatives will thus comprise only 6.35 percent of the 126 member house, lower than the 11.1 percent in the last assembly.

Political participation of all sections of the society is essential for building a functioning and representative democracy. Women must therefore be present in new arenas of decision making with their experiences, perspectives and visions of the future informing public debate.

### 2. Women Political Participation and Empowerment

Participation in political process is key to women

empowerment and a means for realising the goal of gender equality. Women participation in politics may take place in various forms as a voter and campaigners, as party workers and as contestants in the electoral process. Participation becomes meaningful and effective when and elected women experience their political rights devoid any influence. Mere electoral victory of a woman may not mean real representation in the decision making bodies. She must actively be involved in the decision making processes equally with the rest of her colleagues, and importantly she must feel herself as part and parcel of the process.

Equitable representation of women in the decision making bodies is an urgently required measure to empower the women politically. No nation could stand proud if it discriminated against any of its citizens, and no society could claim to be a part of modern civilized world unless it treated it women at per with men.

In India, the issue of women's inadequate participation and unequal representation in politics had not been put o a systematic political deliberation till the "committee on the status of women in India (1974)

submitted its report titled “towards equality “in 1976.

The Committee was the first to mention a quota system for women it demanded a 35 percent quota for women in political institutions. However, the policy makers of the country did not consider the recommendations worthy one. Later the ‘National Perspective Plan for Women’ (1988-2000) suggested a 30 percent quota for women in the local Government institutions. Consensus on this suggestion could be built up around 1992 which resulted in the constitution 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74 amendment Acts.

By the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act 1992, which not only provided autonomy to the grass root but it also provided reservation of one third of seats for women in every panchayat and municipality, not less than one third seats shall be reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The main features of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act in brief are-

1. There will be a three tier system at the village intermediate and district levels.
2. The gram sabhas which will be a body comprising all the adult members registered as voter in the panchayat area will be the foundation of the panchayat raj.
3. Panchayats shall have a uniform five year term and elections to constitute new bodies shall be completed before expiry of the term. In the event of dissolution elections will be compulsorily held within six months.
4. In all panchayats seats shall be reserved for scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes in proportion to their population and one third of their total number of seats will be reserved for women.
5. One third of the offices of chairperson of panchayats at all levels shall be reserved for women office of the chairperson of the panchayats shall be reserved in favour of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes(STs) in proportion to their population in the state.

Impact of 73<sup>rd</sup>& 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts:

The impact of women reservation in local politics has been far reaching. The quota system has proved a great boon for the rural women. It has attracted a large number of women in rural India to contest elections, and assured their election to at least one third of the total membership and chairpersons positions. The mandatory provisions on women

reservation thereby have brought hundreds of women to enter the election fray, learn their task on hand sustain themselves in politics if they wish to, and move upward if they can. There were about one million women who entered in the first election of panchayats after the Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> amendment) Act, 1992. About 40 percent of the elected women represented the marginalised sections. The phenomenon of such a large number of women entering for the first time in politics and electoral fray would not have been possible without the quota system and reservation. Reservation of seats is a basic, consistent and logical step towards both women’s emancipation and inclusive development particularly for a Government which promised that the “equal access to participation and decision making of women in the social, political and economic life of the nation” would be at the heart of its agenda.

### 3. Representation of women in parliament

In the post-independence periods, with the beginning of parliamentary democracy, the era of participatory politics dawned in India. The Constitution of India is a progressive document that guarantees equal rights for both sexes, and entitles women to enjoy economic, social, cultural and political rights and equal footing with men (Article 325). It proceeds to consider the appropriate use of legislation to redress inequality and prevent the further infringement of women’s fundamental democratic freedom and human rights. Under Article 15(3), the State is thereby empowered to make “special Provision”, Legislative or otherwise to secure women’s socio-political advancement. Indian case law has already interpreted the equal protection provisions to allow for affirmative action for women. In addition, India is a signatory to a number of international agreements that support Proactive state measures for women’s political development. However in effect, women’s political participation and representation in the formal political bodies had been less due to various reasons that included dominance of male chauvinism and other patriarchal forces in politics. The post independent India does not see the representation of women in politics in proportion to their number. Women representation in the parliament and the state legislatures has been awfully poor. At the grassroots level also women participation and representation were not encouraged. In the years. Especially, prior to the 73<sup>rd</sup> (Constitutional Amendment) Act 1993 very few women were represented in

panchayat bodies as co-opted members. in the both houses of parliament (in the Lok Sabha and  
The following table show women representation Rajya Sabha).

**Table 1.1:** Women representation in Parliament – Lok Sabha.

Years of election	Total seats	Women members	% over total seats
1952	499	22	4.4
1957	500	27	5.4
1962	503	34	6.8
1967	523	31	5.9
1971	521	22	4.2
1977	544	19	3.5
1980	544	28	5.1
1984	544	44	8.08
1989	523	28	5.35
1991	536	36	6.71
1996	543	40	7.36
1998	543	44	8.10
1999	543	48	8.83
2004	543	45	8.28
2009	543	59	10.86

**Source :** Statistical Report on General Election, Election Commission of India.

**Table1.2:** When representation Parliament- Rajya Sabha.

Years of election	Strength of the House	Women members	% over total members
1952	219	16	7.3
1957	237	18	7.6
1962	238	18	7.6
1967	240	20	8.3
1971	243	17	7.0
1977	244	25	10.2
1980	244	24	9.8
1985	244	28	11.4
1990	245	38	9.7
1996	223	20	8.96
1998	245	19	7.75
2004	245	28	11.42
2006	245	25	10.20

**Source :** Election commission of India

The figure in different elections shows a low representation of women in political process. It is unfortunate that in India, women are still fighting for their empowerment. Women representation in decision making bodies though their number is increasing but the growth is very slow and it is also studied that most of the women contestants belong to political or rich families who were strong background.

#### **4. Reservation for women in Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies**

Equitable representation of women in the highest decision making bodies is an urgently required measure to empower the women politically. No nation stands proud if it discriminates against any of its citizens, and no society could claim to be a modern civilized world unless it treated its women at par with men.

Women reservation bill or the constitution (108<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Bill is a pending Bill in India which proposes to amend the constitution of India to reserve 33 percent of all seats in the lower house of Parliament of India, The Lok Sabha and in all states legislative Assemblies for women.

#### **5. A brief history of women reservation bill**

- 1996: Women Reservation Bill introduced as 81<sup>st</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill by Deve Gowda Government
- 1998: The Bill is re-introduced as the 84<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee headed national democratic alliance (NDA) Government.
- 1999: The NDA Government re-introduced the Bill.
- 2002: The Bill fails to get clearance in the House.
- 2003: Bill is introduced twice in Parliament.
- 2008: The UPA Government tables the Bill in the Rajya Sabha to save from getting lapsed.
- 2010: The Cabinet clears the Bill and the Bill is passed by the Rajya Sabha.

Though the Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on September 12, 1996 but till now the Bill could not be passed because of lack of political consensus.

#### **6. Main features of the women's reservation bill**

-Not less than one third of seats to be reserved in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies for women.

-One-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause 2 of Article 330 (the existing quota for Scheduled Castes and scheduled Tribes) to be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

-Reservation of seats to cease to exist or expiry after 15 years of the commencement of the Constitutional Amendment.

-To select women candidates through a system of rotation by which one third of the total number of constituencies to be reserved for women candidates will be determined through a draw of lots.

-To consider extending the reservation to Rajya Sabha and the Legislative Councils of States without making any definite provisions within the scope of the current Bill.

#### **7. Conclusion**

It is realised today that people's participation, especially the marginalized ones is inevitable for the success of overall development of a nation.

Women in the rural areas are still bound by their familial roles and under patriarchal influences. Their decisions are largely shaped by the male forces in form of husbands or male family members. Education remains the vital component of independent decision making capacity. Low level of education limits women's decision making capacity. Economic reliance of women on men has been another impediment on the way to develop autonomy of decision making.

Despite the several obstacles faced by women after 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act women have shown political activism by participating and representing in decision making at the grassroots and performing their assigned roles effectively. Many of the elected women have performed better than their male counterparts. For effective participation of women in highest decision making bodies Women Reservation Bill is to be passed urgently.

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