Chapter-II

A Democratic Theory of Women’s Representation
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Empowerment: A Perspective

The word empowerment is widely used in relation to women. Very often it is used as a substitute for women’s welfare, development of women, their political participation in the decision-making process. But the concept of empowerment is not synonymous to these words. It is something of a broader concept.

The terminology of empowerment has arisen from the theoretical debates as well as practical debates especially from the experience of women working at the grassroots level in many parts of the world. In 1990s when term like ‘participation’, ‘consultation’, and ‘partnership’ began to enter development thinking, importance of development agencies was shifted to enabling approach i.e., enabling people to identify and express their needs and priorities. It is in this context the notion of empowerment has arisen.

Empowerment is process which enables an individual to know about herself/himself, try to get what she/he wants, have confidence, awareness, mobility, choices, control over resources and decision-making power. Empowerment helps people to “take more control over their jobs and work environment; enhance the contribution they make as individuals and members of a

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team; and seize opportunities for personal growth and self-fulfillment.”

As Kate Young said, “empowerment is about people taking control over their own lives, gaining ability to do things, to set their own agendas to change events in a way previously lacking.”

According to Kumud Sharma, the term empowerment refers to “a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relations. For individual and groups where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access to resources and power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognize the systematic forces that oppress them, but act to change existing power relationships. Empowerment therefore, is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces, which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context.”

The literary meaning of empowerment indicates that it is centered on the root concept of power. Power is the ability of one person or group to get another person or group to do something against their will. Power in relation to social, economic and political aspects indicates control over resources and decision-making. According to Srilatha Batliwala “power can be defined as control over resources, ideology and self, exercised in social, economic and political contest among individuals and groups.”

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3 H. M Hemalatha, op. cit., p. 4.
5 H. M. Hemalatha, op.cit., p. 2.
Empowerment and Women

In recent years, empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining the status of women. Empowerment covers aspects such as women’s control over material and intellectual resources. Empowerment is a process, not an event, which challenges traditional power equations and relations. Abolition of gender-based discrimination in all institutions and structures of the society and participation of women in policy and decision-making processes at domestic and public levels are few dimensions of women empowerment⁶.

The feminist interpretation of power has led to a broader understanding of empowerment, since they go beyond formal and institutional definitions of power and incorporate the idea of ‘the personal as political’. From a feminist perspective, ‘power over’ entails understanding the dynamics of operation and internalized operation. Empowerment is thus more than participation in decision-making; it must also include processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions. The feminist understanding of empowerment includes ‘power to’ and ‘power from within’.

Empowerment in the context of gender and development is most usually defined as a process rather than end product; it is dynamic and changing and varies widely according to circumstances. The empowerment process will take a form which arises out of a particular cultural, ethnic, historical, economical, geographical, political and social location; out of an individual’s place in the life

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cycle, specific life experience and out of the interaction of all the above with gender relations prevailing in society.

As far as women’s empowerment is concerned, according to the National Policy of Education, Government of India (1986) women become empowered through collective reflection and decision-making. Its parameters are building a positive self image and self-confidence, developing the ability to think critically, building up group cohesion and fostering decision-making and action, ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change, encouraging group action in order to bring about change in society, providing the wherewithal for economic independence.

The issues taken up by the Human Development Report have vividly pointed to gender-based inequalities. In this connection, Human Development Report 2003 is of immense significance, which speaks of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that prominently includes empowerment of women. In our own country, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution, in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and in Directive Principles. The constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.7

Empowerment of women also means extension of choices in personal life regarding education, employment and marriage. Increasing choices in women’s lives depends on the support given by family members, institutional agencies and community. According to J. K. Pillai, “empowerment is an active

7 Peerzade and Parande, op.cit., p.7.
multidimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life".\(^8\)

The significance of women's empowerment is that once they are empowered, they can have control over their labour, income, sexuality, reproduction and mobility. They will not accept the stereotyped roles, gender division of labour, and any other beliefs or systems, which are oppressive. Empowered women instead of remaining silent and unquestioning become articulate and assertive; they become educated from uneducated, they got more opportunities to explore different spheres of life.

**Indicators of Women's Empowerment**

If we say a woman is empowered, how could we recognize or identify her as an empowered person? We need to have some indicators to identify her as empowered woman. Those indicators have been classified into qualitative and quantitative indicators.

**Qualitative Indicators:**
- "Self confidence--understand what she wants, express it and try to get it, feel proud of herself, having positive self-image, articulation.
- Awareness about health, nutrition, legal rights, political activities, government policies, and programmes.
- Less burden of work and more leisure time.
- Changing role and responsibilities within the family.
- Decrease in violence within the family.

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\(^8\) H. M. Hemalatha, op.cit., p.7.
• Changing attitudes towards tradition and customs like child marriage and dowry.

• Physical mobility—walk freely within village, go to city or town, to banks, post office, go for shopping, cinema, and exhibition and visit relatives.

• Become member of a women’s group or any other people’s organization.

• Self-identity—positively.

• Having decision-making power within the family, regarding number of children, education of children, marriage of children, budgeting of the family, income and purchase or sale of family’s property.

• Changing attitude towards women’s participation in politics, and wished to and willingness to participate in the politics themselves.

• Control over individual and family income.

• Access to resources like land, house, jewellery, etc.

• Access to and have information, knowledge, and skill.

Quantitative Indicators:

• Increase in age at marriage.

• Reduction in fertility rate or number of children.

• Becoming beneficiaries of developmental programmes.

• Visible changes in physical status/nutritional status.

• Improvement in literacy level.

• Becoming members of a political party or local self-government.”

Women of the world should be empowered to take control of all spheres of their lives—educationally, economically, socially and politically. Illiteracy among

9 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
women has been an obstacle for the development and empowerment of women and to achieve gender equality. Therefore, education is the primary mean for them to acquire knowledge and information, ability to analyze and assess their situation, improve their health and nutritional status, to take decision regarding their marriage, number of children, education of their children and to acquire economic independence. In the economic sphere, lack of control over material resources, lack of education, skills and training has made women economically insecure; therefore, there is a greater need for them to have access and control over resources, skill development through training, savings and credit facilities to bring economic empowerment of women. In the social sphere, women must be made aware of their rights relating to rape, dowry, female infanticide, wife beating and other forms of violence against women. This awareness can be created through the media and Non Government Organizations (NGO’s).

Thus, women’s empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par with men, to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity\textsuperscript{10}. Empowerment of women in the lowest level political institutions aims at enhancing their ability in the decision-making process. It implies their participation beginning from voting to holding office and thereby share power to effectively influence policy formation\textsuperscript{11}.


Empowerment and Political Participation

Political participation is regarded as one of the prerequisites of empowerment of women. Political Participation has long been acknowledged as a central theme of democratic governance, where the citizens enjoy the right to participate in governance. In a political structure where freedom and equality are granted to the people, citizens can engage in political activities, at least to the extent of voting in elections and even further, they have the option to participate in political party organization. In other words, political participation in a democracy has got a wide connotation, which ranges from popular participation in electing representatives to the actual participation of representatives in the process of governance.

The right to participation is an essential element of democratic government, inseparable from such others attributes of democracy as consent, accountability, majority rule, equality, and popular sovereignty. Indeed, the growth of democratic government is in part measured by the extension of the suffrage and the correlative rights to hold office and so associate for political purposes. Whereas, traditional monarchies restrict power and participation largely to the nobility and their agents, democracies have in principle transformed these prerogatives into rights enjoyed by everyone.

The over all development of a nation requires maximum utilisation of human resources without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, religion or sex. But the bitter reality is that women, who constitute about half of the population of the world have been discriminated against socially, psychologically, economically and politically with respect to their male counterparts. How can any nation stake a claim of development if fifty per cent of its population is lagging
behind in every sphere of life? Abraham Lincoln believed that "No nation can move forward if it is half free and half slave".  

'Political participation' refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rules and, directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy. The active forms of participation include formal enrollment in a party, canvassing and registering voters, speech writing and speech making, working in campaigns, and competing for public and party office. The term political participation is generally taken to mean electoral participation either by voting or by contesting elections.

The participation of women in political life is today on the agendas of most of the political parties in India. However, the transition of this goal to reality has had limited success. For any such endeavour to be successful, it must be recognized that the equal participation of women and men in decision-making is a prerequisite for effective democracy.

Participation means more than female membership in political parties, female voter turn out in elections or a token female presence in political bodies. Participation must be meaningful and effective, and must include representation in the political arena. This includes not only formal or a high level decision-making forum, but also other political units: the family, community groups, associations,

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trade unions and local bodies. These are crucial areas for intervention within which women can easily understand the issues and play an effective role.\textsuperscript{15}

Politics has always remained under the male domination. Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose ideas inspired the French Revolution, advocated women's exclusion from politics in 1762. American Declaration of independence also denied right to equal participation of women in politics. After one century, thinkers like J.S Mill advocated gender equality in every field including politics. He observed in 1869, "That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes- the legal subordination of one sex to the other-is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other."\textsuperscript{16}

After World War II, sensitivity about equality of sexes gained ground. The U.N Charter and universal Declaration of Human rights highlighted equality between men and women. But women are still marginalized in political field and are victims of male prejudices towards their participation in politics. Not to talk of developing countries, women's participation in politics remained limited even in most developed and democratised countries. The average representation of women worldwide presently stands at 15 per cent. In Switzerland, known for its deep-rooted democratic traditions, women were given voting rights at the federal level only in 1971, after 123 years of male suffrage. While at the local level, women


were allowed to vote in every canton only by 1990. The first country where women were allowed to stand for election was the United States in the year 1788. Women were granted right to vote in U.S. only in 1920. The first three countries where women received the right to vote and right to stand for elections simultaneously were Finland (1906), Denmark and Iceland (both 1915). Very rarely did countries grant these rights at the same time and many countries when introduced either one or the other in the first half of the 20th century did so with some restrictions or conditions.

Thus women had to struggle hard to attain basic political rights. By contrast, many newly independent countries in latter half of the 20th century took the opportunity in the aftermath of de-colonisation to introduce suffrage simultaneously for women and women. But still in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, women are deprived of right to vote. Barring Scandinavian countries, which have more than 40 per cent representation of women in their legislature, in the rest of the world there is only 10 per cent representation in parliaments. Sweden in 1999 became the first country to have more female ministers than male ones in its government. In 2002, women constituted over 42 per cent of the Members of Parliament in Sweden, 38 per cent in Denmark and 36 per cent in Norway. Except these Nordic Countries, the slow pace of women’s participation in the larger arena of political life is a sad feature in the history of women’s empowerment. A careful study undertaken by the International Labour Organisation indicates that at this rate, women will take five centuries to have equality with men in political life17.

Representation and Democracy

Representation for women in political bodies through a quota system has been identified as one important means of achieving the empowerment of women in India as elsewhere. The most obvious link between the demand for empowerment and political representation is the dimension of bringing women into formal positions of power. Power is what politics is all about, the power to define what to decide upon, the power to influence decisions, the power over who gets what, how and when- the power over values, ideas and resources.

So what does the term 'representation' mean? The term 'representation' means, in every day language, to 'portray' or 'make present' as when a picture is said to represent a scene or a person. As a political principle, representation is a relationship through which an individual or group stands for, or acts on behalf of, a larger body of people. Representation differs from democracy in that, while the former acknowledges a distinction between government and the governed, the latter, at least in its classical form, aspires to abolish this distinction and establish popular self-government. Representative democracy may nevertheless constitute a limited and indirect form of democratic rule, provided that the principle of representation links government and the governed in such a way that the people's views are articulated or their interests are secured.18

According to Phillips (1995, 1999), the word representation may refer to the representatives of the nation, the elected officials, or to the office holders. Representation implies seeing democracy as a microcosm of society as well as a symbolic representation. In the former case, the parliament is a reproduction, on a

reduced scale, of society as a whole in proportion to its segments. In the latter case, the members of parliament embody and symbolize a cause. The idea of the representative mirroring the characteristics of the voter corresponds to the symbolic requirements, which prove important for those outside the political system. In deed the de facto minorities or the existential minorities can in this capacity claim representatives who not only defend the interests of these minorities but also enable, through their personal characteristics, the identification and development of the feeling of being present on the political scene.19

Representation is taken to mean “a relation between two persons, the representative and the represented or constituent, with the representative holding the authority to perform various actions that incorporate the agreements of the represented.”20 The role of the representation is multifaceted. Often it is described as the range of expectations that people possess regarding government and hence related to public officials and leaders. Edmund Burke (1774) considered the role of a representative as “one who ought to respect his constituents’ opinions, who ought to prefer their interest above his own, but who ought not to sacrifice his unbiased opinion in deciding for the good of the whole nation.”21

Theories of Representation:

There is not a single, agreed theory of representation. Rather, there are a number of competing theories, each of which is based on particular ideological and political assumptions. "The term may have one of four sets of implications. First, a representative may be a trustee, a person, who is vested with formal responsibility for another's property or affairs. This was classically expressed by Edmund Burke (1729-1797), who argued that representatives serve their constituents by thinking for themselves and using their own, matured judgment. Second, a representative may be a delegate, a person who is chosen to act for another on the basis of clear guidance or instructions. Delegation implies acting as a conduit conveying the views of others without expressing one's own views or opinions; examples include sales representatives and ambassadors. Third, a representative may be a person who carries out a mandate, in the sense that such people are obliged to carry out the promises upon which they fought an election. This theory implies that political parties rather than individual politicians are the principal agents of representation. Fourth, a representative may typify or resemble the group he or she claims to represent, usually coming from the group itself. This notion is embodied in the idea of a 'representative cross-section', and implies that a representative government or Parliament would constitute a microcosm of the larger society, containing members drawn from all groups and sections in society, and in numbers that are proportional to the size of the groups in society at large."

The political scientist Hannah Pitkin formulated what has become the classical theory of political representation in the late 1960s. She points out that the notion of representation in German has different meaning: vetreten, darstellen and

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22 Andrew Heywood, op.cit., p. 224.
In the first case, the representative is authorized to act ‘on behalf of’ as an agent or a trustee who exercises independent judgment (vertreten). In the second case, the legitimate representative stands for and must be accountable to those represented (darstellen). The link between these two dimensions is clear in the case of the representative who is representative of or reproducing the characteristics of the body politic. The German term ‘repräsentieren’ is close to the first but not to the second.

Representation is a concept of social interest largely in the context of power relations among leaders or representatives and their followers or constituents. Mansbridge distinguishes between four types of representation, i.e., representation by promising, anticipatory representation, introspective representation and surrogate representation; and locates the first two of these in the context of power relations. "Representation by promising" entails that the representative should be bound to further the interests of the constituents and promises to follow their instructions. In "anticipatory representation" the constituent looks back to the past behaviour of a representative in deciding how to vote in the next election. In "introspective representation" constituents select representatives who can be relatively accurately assumed to act in ways the constituents approve of without any external incentives. In this model, representatives are not accountable to their constituents, but to their own beliefs and principles. Finally, in "surrogate representation" the representative and the constituents do not have any electoral relationship. This type of representation

23 Marques, Pereira and Siim, op.cit., p. 173.
occurs when the representatives represent constituents outside their own districts.\textsuperscript{24}

Political Representation and Women

Since the French Revolution the women’s movement has demanded the right to vote and to be present in political assemblies as women citizens in order to influence political decisions and place women’s interests, issues and concerns on the political agenda. Second wave feminism has contributed to politicise women’s interests and to institutionalise gender equality, and the political meaning of gender has changed during the last 30 years. Women have in all western democracies moved from the right to the left, changing their voting behaviour from support for Conservative parties to Socialist and Social Democratic parties, and women’s issues like abortion, child care institutions, equal pay and sexual harassment have been included in politics in Western democracies, except for Scandinavia.

The issue of women’s minority position in politics has since the early 1990s appeared in public and political debate as an illustration of the ‘democratic deficit’ of political representation. This democratic deficit refers to the systematically under-representation of specific groups, for example women and minority groups, that exclude them from effective participation and control over the political agenda. Parity and quotas are sustained by the discourse on the crisis of representation. They both express a challenge to the republican model of representation, a perception of representation in terms of representatives (which is congruent with the consociative model). Parity and quotas appear as two

\textsuperscript{24} Jane Mansbridge, “Rethinking Representation,” \textit{American Political Science Review}, vol. 97, no. 4, November 2003, p.515.
strategies, which might solve the political under-representation of women, and at the same time be an answer to the 'democratic deficit' of representation. With the exception of the Nordic countries, the legislative assemblies and executives remain the monopoly of men, to varying degrees, depending on the country. However, this monopolization does not mean that women are under-represented, unless it is considered that, in politics, only women can represent women. Women have now acquired their formal citizen status, but there is still a problem with their citizenship as a practice. They can be represented in politics by the right to vote, but they are not fully exercising their capacity to be representative, since their right to be elected is far from being effective.25

Feminist Arguments to increase Women's Political Representation

Feminist demands for equal representation between women and men have raised questions about women's interests and about identity politics. Arguably, women's interests are of many kinds, can be conflictual and may even be contradictory. Demands for a large number of women in parliament thus raise difficult questions about who represents whom and what is being represented. These elected women represent political parties and not women's issues, and there is no guarantee that the issues connected with women's situation will be better taken into account in the political agenda. The question is whether women's common points of interests and perspectives, though not with identical interest. The argument is that women today have shared civil and political incapacity and are still in most countries apolitical minority, who experience social and professional marginalisation, and often find their reproductive capacities controlled. The question is whether these experiences are sufficient to create the conditions enabling the emergence of

critical perspectives on the content of policies and on political priorities. In other words, is it possible to say that men and women participating in equal numbers in the voting and decision-making bodies would result in a different criterion for the selection and ranking of political issues?

Feminist scholars have argued that the presence of women in political and representative institutions, once a ‘critical mass’ has been reached, can contribute to change the relations of power, because women will be able to use the organizational resources of the institutions to improve their individual and collective position. One crucial question is whether parity or quotas change or reproduce the sexual divisions in politics, which tends to identify women politicians with the traditional myths of femininity?26

The idea that meaningful change can be achieved by working through the formal political system raises major issues to do with the continuing under-representation of women in elected assemblies. For a range of interconnected reasons, many feminists today see this as a central political issue.

The advocates of a balanced representation of women and men in politics have five basic arguments: justice, proportionality, utilitarianism, differences of interests and needs, and behaviours and values.27 Phillips argues, four distinct arguments for women’s equal participation in formal politics; the argument about role models, the argument concerning justice, the argument concerning women’s interests and the argument concerning the revitalization of democracy.28 The first is based on the belief that the existence of women representatives will encourage

26 Ibid., p. 182.
27 Ibid., p. 175.
others to gain the confidence that they too can aspire to this role. The second implies that numerically equal representation of women and men in legislatures is itself a sign of parity, regardless of the beliefs of those present or the policies enacted. The third holds that women need to enter formal politics to work for women’s interests; thus it is not presence alone, but the decisions made and policies formulated that matter. And the fourth proposes that women should enter into positions of power because they will engage in politics differently, thereby improving the nature of the public sphere.29

The argument of justice is based on the idea that expression must be given to the interests of the different social groups and so doing give substance to a deliberative democracy. The argument of proportionality implies that political representation must reflect as faithfully as possible, in quantity, the relative size of the different social groups in the community. The utilitarian argument underscores the lack of efficiency and legitimacy of a political system where half of society involved. This is sometimes followed by a belief that an increase in the political representation of women would lead to change in politics, which would take greater account of ‘women’s interests’. The argument of specific value and behaviour is based on the idea that women have their own identity, separate from men’s. From this perspective, an increase in the number of women representatives would mean a change in political values and the way in which politics is conducted.30

30 Marques, Pereira and Siim, op.cit., p.175.
For some, it is an obvious matter of justice that there should be an approximate gender balance, and it simply does not seem right that one sex should be able to dominate to the near exclusion of the other. In contrast to the under-representation of the very young or the very old, which can be seen ‘as part of a normal and natural life cycle’\textsuperscript{31}, many feminists argue that this exclusion is politically significant because it both reflects and helps maintain discrimination and oppression. In the influential \textit{Justice and the Politics of Difference}, Iris Young has argued that justice requires that we give political recognition to existence of gender difference (and also to other group differences such as those based on ethnicity and physical ability), and that denying their existence contributes to oppression rather than equality. She therefore argues for an elaborate system of representation in which all oppressed groups, including women, would have a guaranteed role in policy formation; such guarantees would not be necessary for the privileged, who already have access to decision-making positions.\textsuperscript{32}

Such arguments assume that women have shared interests as members of an oppressed group. For some radical feminists, these interests are directly opposed to men’s; if women are to use the state to improve their situation they must be represented in it, for they can expect only opposition from their oppressors. Although others argue that men can benefit from or support feminist demands, experience suggests that they are unlikely to prioritise them. To the extent that women’s claims for better pay and employment opportunities involve exposing and attacking men’s privileged workplace situation and its basis in inequalities within home, the interests of the sexes would appear to be in conflict,

at least in the short term. As Joni Lovenduski has argued: "The core of women’s interests is comprised of their disadvantaged position in the division of labour within the family, and for as long as that division persists it is sufficient reason for insisting that women’s interests may be represented only by women".\footnote{Ibid., p. 113.}

Although liberal feminists are less likely to see the issue in terms of group oppression, they too can agree that women’s biology and social situation can give rise to distinct concerns and priorities that they need to articulate themselves. Most feminists therefore believe that it is wrong that men can legislate on issues to do with reproduction or sexual violence without women’s voices being adequately heard. Most also see that, as the primary carers of children, disabled adults and elderly people, and as the bulk of poorly paid, part-time workers, women also have particular concerns and interests in relation to welfare and employment policies, even when these appear to be gender neutral.

A further set of arguments stems from the claim that women can bring special qualities and/or experiences to politics. Such claims have a long history, and formed an important strand of earlier claims for the vote, when it was asserted that the ‘womanly values’ of temperance, purity and peace would lead to an improvement in the standard of public life. Today, the idea that women are more peaceful, compassionate and caring remains a powerful one, as does the claim that they have a distinctive way of thinking about justice. At a more practical level, many claim that women politicians would have no time for the infantile. As in the west, the British politician Shirley Williams has argued that women members of parliament are more able than men to provide the caring qualities needed for
effective constituency work. Although some argue that such ‘womanly’ values are based in biology, many others see them as a product of women’s experiences; from this perspective, it may be important to have decision-makers who have had experience of caring. This could be possible in case of India also.

None of the above claims is straightforward, and they have all been heavily criticized. For many critics, they seem to rest upon a freezing of gender identities, and an essentialism, which labels individuals by one attribute and ignore both the differences between women and the interests, which some women share with some men. As such, they can counter to post-modern accounts of the fluid and changing nature of gender, and, as so often in the past, they tend to equate the interests of women with those of the minority who are the most likely to win political office.

Such criticisms are not without foundation. Quite clearly, women are not all mothers or badly paid, part-time workers, nor do they all feel themselves to be sexually exploited or oppressed, and many are positively opposed to feminist goals. Moreover, the kind of women most likely to be elected to parliament are those who have most access to political resources and whose lives most clearly resemble those of successful men; unlike men, this means that they are disproportionately childless, as well as being white and middle class (in the early 1990s, 40 per cent of British women MPs did not have children, and only one was black. Such women may not be no more likely than many men to understand the needs and priorities of women intimidated by racism, or struggling to survive on

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34 Ibid., p.113.
state benefits; they may also have even less experience of childcare than male legislators, most of whom are or have been part-time fathers.\(^{35}\)

This does not mean that the under-representation of women is not important, but that it cannot be isolated from other forms of inequality. Feminists interested in improving the situation of all groups of women, rather than of an elite minority, must therefore retain as awareness of the complex nature of a 'politics of solidarity'. They must also remember that it is not simply the number of women in political office that is important, but what women do when they get there, and Anne Phillips cautions that 'However plausible it is to say that male-dominated assemblies will not adequately address the needs and interests of women, it cannot be claimed with equal confidence that a more balanced legislature will fill this gap.'\(^{36}\)

For Young, representation in the political processes of the social perspectives of the different oppressed social groups implies the right to propose policies based on their own interests and even a right of veto when general policies risk affecting them. This argument comes from a critical perspective on universalism. Young considers that the idea of equal treatment for all groups is a false universalism that only excludes those who do not comply with the dominant norms and perpetuate \textit{de facto} discrimination. Unlike Young, Phillips finds that liberal universalism can accommodate differences and that the individual's detachment from his or her particular group (religion, sex and so on) remains necessary within the political sphere. Both Mouffe and Phillips, however, reject the anti-quota arguments that are generally based on the idea that men and women

\(^{35}\) Ibid., p.114.
are legally recognized, as being equal and therefore a law establishing quotas for women would violate formal equality.

However, the behaviour of female politicians in Scandinavia provides grounds for optimism, as they have acted to prioritise needs and interests, which male politicians have overlooked. The more limited experience of women representatives in the United States and Britain also suggests that they have had an impact of political agendas and they are generally more supportive of feminist issues that men, regardless of their party affiliation. Although there are many examples of female politicians who have done nothing for their sex, the general pattern does not seem to confirm intuitive expectations; it therefore reinforces the claim that increasing the numbers of women in parliament is an important feminist goal.37 We know that there are women in politics who are not necessarily a guarantee for progressive women’s policy, but even more so we know: many men in politics are in no way a guarantee. Only if a balance has been reached between men and women then eventually the emphasis on issues will change and women’s affairs will be taken into account in the political agenda. Accordingly at the top we need at least one half women in order to support better the broad base of women.38

The Problems of Women’s Participation in Indian Democracy

Effective political participation is an indicator of true democracy. Political participation refers to “any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganised, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate

methods, intended in influencing the choice of public policies, or the administration of public affairs or the choice of the political leaders. The higher the participation of the people, the healthier the democracy. Indian democracy, inaugurated in 1950 with a written constitution, guaranteed to all women the fundamental right to equality and political participation. It recognized the political rights of women, without any discrimination, distinction or qualification to participate in the decision making for the nation at all levels. The constitutional provision says- equality before law and equal protection of law (Article-14), prohibits discriminatory provisions for women and children (Article.15); prohibits traffic in human beings and provides for just and human conditions of work along with maternity relief (Article.23 & 42). It is also a constitutional duty of every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article.51A). However, even after five decades and tremendous stride in democracy and development women's participation and role in public life has not made much headway.

Although women occupy a very predominant position in our social life and constitute 50 per cent of the total population, their political participation is very much limited in proportion to their size in a male dominated society at all levels. Going by numbers alone, nearly half of the members of Lok Sabha should be women. In 1952, the women representation was 4.4 per cent and after 50 years, it is 8.8 per cent. It is far below the world average of around 15 per cent. In May 2004 general elections, 539 candidates were elected to 14th Lok Sabha. Only 44 of them women, i.e., less than 10 per cent. The low number of elected women

prompted the Election Commission to write to the government about the need for providing adequate representation to women. As per the report of Inter-Parliamentary Union on 30\textsuperscript{th} June 2005, 18 countries had a representation of greater than 30 per cent for women, whereas 67 countries, including India, had a representation of less than 10 per cent.\textsuperscript{41} A glance at the data on the women’s representation in State Legislatures during 1952-1997 shows that it was 1.8\% in 1952, 6.3\% in 1957, 4.9\% in 1960-65, 2.9\% in 1967-69, 4.4\% in 1970-75, 2.8\% in 1977-78, 3.8\% in 1979-83, 5.3\% in 1984-88, 4.5\% in 1989-92, and 4.0\% in 1993-97\textsuperscript{42}, which means the representation of women is less than 0.5 percent in state legislatures in India.

Until the reservation of 33 per cent seats for women in local government bodies came into being in 1992, the gender bias pervaded all levels of governance in India. It is against this background of the continued marginalisation of women in the Indian polity that the demand to reserve one-third of the seats at various levels, particularly in local governance, marks a turning point in the debate over the political rights of women, for being acclaimed as a ‘revolution’ of the million of depressed women, to being dubbed as the token biwi (wife), beti (daughter) brigade; women’s bid to challenge political monopolies and enter formal political institutions has generated much discussion, interest and opposition\textsuperscript{43}.

\textsuperscript{41} See “Reservation for Women Annual Parliamentary Ritual: Empowerment remains a Dream,” \textit{Civil Services Times}, October 2005, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{CSDS Data Unit}, (As Quoted in “Empowering Women,” \textit{Seminar}, no.457, September 1997, p. 51).
As far as the participation of women in the political arena is concerned, a number of constraints have severely limited their participation capacity. One of the most important constraints stems from their depressed economic status. Poverty, economic dependence on men, exclusion from ownership of property and modern occupation and lack of access to resources like land, skills, technology and development assistance have rendered them powerless. For most of them struggle for livelihood assumes an overwhelming importance than taking an active part in politics. Secondly, the socio-religious institutions impose several restrictions on women especially on their participation in spheres outside their homes. Thirdly, a vast majority of women are illiterate and are not aware of their rights and responsibilities under the law of the land.

The CSWI, which was appointed by the government of India, in 1971, in its landmark report “Towards Equality” (1974) had also said that, “Every legal measure designed to translate the constitutional norms of equality or special protection into practice has had to face tremendous resistance from the legislative and other elites. We were therefore, forced to observe that all the indicators of participation, attitudes and impact come up with the same results- the resolution in social and political status of women for which constitutional equality was to be the only instrument, still remains a very distant objective...From this point of view, though women do not lack the three recognised dimensions of inequality of class (economic situation), status (social position) and political power. The review of the disabilities and constraints on women, which stem from the socio-cultural institutions, indicates that majority of women are still very far from enjoying the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them by the constitution... The social laws, that sought to mitigate the problems of women in their family life, have remained
unknown to large mass of women in this country, who are as ignorant of their legal rights today as they were long before". On the whole, the report argued that greater opportunities needed to be given to women to actively promote their participation in the decision making process and to recognise the social inequalities and disabilities that hamper them. It, therefore, recommended:

"The establishment of statutory women’s panchayats at the local level to ensure greater participation in the political process. These bodies are not meant to be parallel organisations to the Gram panchayats but should form an integral part of the Panchayati Raj structure with autonomy and resources of their own for the management and administration of welfare and development programmes for women and children. We recommend it as a transitional measure to break through the traditional attitudes in rural society, which inhibit most women from articulating their problems, or participating actively in the existing local bodies. An exclusively women’s body would eliminate this difficulty and provide opportunity to more women to gain more experience and confidence in managing their own affairs. Their enhanced legal status, we believe, will have a direct impact on general status of women in rural society and their increasing experience and responsibility may be expected to improve women’s keenness and capacity for greater participation in political process. Lastly, the

existence of such statutory bodies would help to ensure better coordination of various government services and programmes for women at the level of implementation.”

We had to wait till 1992 for any feasible proposition45.

So far as the reservation of women in the national and state legislatures is concerned, there are many differences on that among women’s groups. One argument is made in feminist terms, using the language of women’s liberation and equal rights. The case for reservations is made in terms of the need for affirmative action and a straightforward link is posited between the presence of women in Parliament and gender justice. The feminist argument against has been made by the Shetkari Mahila Aghadi, which has been campaigning for full panels of women while being opposed to reservations. Its argument is that the experience of reservations in panchayats in Maharashtra has not been favourable—relatives of established male leaders are fielded, and there has been no impact at all on inefficiency and corruption46. Madhu Kishwar too had similar arguments and both have in addition made suggestions for amendments in the Bill if it is serious about improving the participation of women in Parliament. The second kind of argument for and against reservation for women is made, implicitly or explicitly, in terms of caste. The most reviled has been the opposition of Sharad Yadav to reservations and his derogatory reference to ‘short-haired women’ who would overrun parliament47.

47 Ibid.
However, due to constant pressure both by women in panchayats and women within political parties, the government tabled the Constitution (Eighty First Amendment) Bill, 1996, to provide not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women in parliament and state assemblies. Furthermore, one-third seats of the 22 per cent seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Tribes were to be reserved for women from these groups. Together this adds up to 33 per cent reserved seats for women in national and state legislatures.

This WRB has been listed for debate in every session of parliament since its introduction in 1996, but a handful of leaders have stalled it each time. A slightly modified version, the Constitution (Eighty-Fifth Amendment) Bill, 1999, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 23 December 1999, but no discussion was allowed, the result has been that neither of the two bills has ever been discussed or voted upon.

A subsequent attempt to table the bill by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in May 2003 too failed. On Jan 20, 2005 nine years after it was first introduced in parliament, the UPA government led by Congress Party once again pushed ahead with a bill guaranteeing 33 percent reservation for women in parliament and state legislatures. The SP and the RJD want separate quotas for Other Backward Castes (OBCs), Dalits and minorities within the number of seats proposed to be set aside for women in parliament and legislatures. The Janata Dal-United too favours similar reservations within the quota for women. The Left parties, Congress and BJP want the bill to be introduced in the present form --
guaranteeing one-third of seats in parliament and legislatures for women.\textsuperscript{48} However no consensus among the political parties has been reached yet.

However, the WRB is both a direct attempt at empowering women to make laws and also making Parliament and our state legislatures hopefully a better mannered place. It is also an attempt to redress the power imbalance which many see as against the law of nature: as American columnist Will Henry put it, “Nature gave women too much power; the law gives them too little.”\textsuperscript{49} In the words of Shabana Azmi\textsuperscript{50}, M.P, Rajya Sabha, “I believe the Women’s Reservation Bill is crucial and it is a matter of deep regret that we haven’t been able to pass it in spite of all the parties claiming to support gender justice. The bill is no magic wand but it will help give women the right to participate in the decision-making process. I believe when a critical mass of women get empowered politically, they will transform the very notion of power itself”.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Indian Express}, 20 January 2005.