Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Democracy, declared Abraham Lincoln, long ago, “is a government of the people, by the people, for the people”. However, it was observed that “people” excluded half of humanity, for women, remained excluded from the process of governance. This exclusion of women from the public sphere was reinforced and endorsed by most of the political philosophers, be they of the ancient period or of the more liberal and rational period of enlightenment.

In Politics, Aristotle explicitly argued, “the slave is entirely without the faculty of deliberation; the female indeed possesses it, but in a form which lacks authority, and children also possess it, but only in an immature form.”\(^1\) He opined, ‘men are born to rule and women are born to be ruled’. He declared that women were incapable of rationality; hence they must be excluded from the noblest pursuit, that is the art of politics. Similarly scholars like Hegel, Kant, Locke and Rousseau, whose ideas formed the basis of the notion of rights, have equally legitimized the exclusion of women from the public sphere, confining them to the private sphere. These scholars propagated that the subordination of woman was due to her biological origin, which made her inferior to man. On the basis of the ascribed ‘socio-cultural construct’, domination of man has been legalized. This situation has not changed and politics continues to be

\(^1\) Aristotle, Politics, Book 1, Chapter 13, Oxford Worlds Classic, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, p.35.
considered as masculine activity, resulting in the formation of a glass ceiling or boundary which women could neither break nor cross. In most of the countries, “the “less-than-equal” status of women to men still prevails, prompting a welfarist approach to the advancement of women – even in efforts to “mainstream” gender issues by governments, civil society, bilateral and multilateral development agencies. This tendency belies and even denies the idea that women are responsible persons, not only capable of making choices, but necessary to this process in any democratic society”.2

Towards the end of 18th Century and the beginning of 19th Century, however, voices had begun to be raised for women’s equality and liberty. A number of prominent women, including Abigail Adams, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Stanton, the Grimke sisters took up the cause of women’s rights. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* raised demands for women’s education and emancipation. J.S. Mill in his *The Subjection of Women*, and Frederick Engels in his *Family, Private Property and the State* too had taken up the cause of women’s rights. Earlier, the Declaration of Sentiments adopted at the Seneca Falls Convention in had emphatically declared the rights of women along with men. The suffrage movement for women’s rights also emerged alongside culminating in granting of the right to vote for women.3

The twentieth Century saw the emergence of a more radical stream of feminism represented by feminist scholars such as Charlotte Perkins

---

3 New Zealand was first to grant right to vote to women in 1893, followed by Australia, Russia, U.K., U.S.A.
Gilman, Emma Goldman, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem who raised women’s issues.

Feminist scholars challenge the lopsided distribution of power in both the spheres – public as well as private of the society with a dictum ‘What Is Personal – Is Political’. They further assert that gender issue is not merely an issue of equality, it is also one of natural justice, which must be extended to every sphere. For them everything is political; implying that private and every day life, and relationship between men and women became the political agenda.

It is argued that the inequality and lack of freedom of women in the socio-cultural sphere results in their exclusion from the political sphere. Women do not enjoy equal opportunities, as men do, to access the means for political participation. They are hampered by factors such as illiteracy, inexperience, lack of economic resources, financial dependence, and lack of access to assets and property rights. They often do not have decision-making power within the household which could translate into power in the public sphere. Thus, they have not been able to overcome gender bias and socio-cultural and structural barriers that obstruct their access to political decision-making.

This led to the realization that women’s exclusion from the political process implies their exclusion from decision-making, which in turn implies the exclusion of women’s needs and concerns from policymaking. The result is increasing feminization of poverty.

---

inequalities and conflicts. Everything personal has its impact on society and all political and social occurrences and decisions influence every one in the society. It further means that there should be no division between personal or domestic sphere and the public sphere. Morality, ethics, caring, the basic attributes of the domestic sphere must replace the present day politics and its culture of violence, double standards and hypocrisy. Therefore, incorporating women’s perspective in policy formulations and decision-making bodies is essential to have decisions that will reflect the needs and interests of women, which will ultimately result in achieving overall development for the society. Moreover, women’s participation is also necessary for sustainable development. On the whole, women’s participation in the political process can bring about a politics that is “transformed” and “transformational”.

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICS

Gender Perception of Transformative Politics

Women have come to be regarded as agents of transformative politics. But before going into the “whys” and “wherefores” of this, it would be pertinent to briefly review the changing meanings of transformative politics. The feminist scholars have a different vision of transformative politics. One of the earliest articulations of feminist vision of political transformation has been found in the 1985 pre-Nairobi writings of Southern Women’s Network.

---

7 Kamla Bhasin , 1999, “Women’s Place is in the House! This is Why They Should be in Both Houses of Parliament: Women and Governance”, talk given at interaction organized by the SAP Nepal in Kathmandu on the Changing Role of Women in Governance, p.7.
“We want a world where inequality based on class, gender, and race is absent from every country, and from the relationship among the countries. We want a world where basic needs became basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. Each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his full potential and creativity, and women’s values of nurturance and solidarity will characterize human relationships. In such a world women’s reproductive roles will be redefined: child care will be shared by men, women and society as a whole. We want a world where the massive resources now used in the production of the means of destruction will be diverted to areas where they will help to relieve oppression both inside and outside the home... We want a world where all institutions are open to participatory democratic processes, where women share in determining priorities and decisions... Only by sharpening the links between equality, development and peace, can we show that the ‘basic rights’ of the poor and the transformation of the institutions that subordinate women are inextricably linked. They can be achieved together through the self-empowerment of women.”

According to Rounaq Jahan, “Politics is both Transformed And Transformational”. **Transformed** because -it uses power to create change, to develop people, and to build communities; it is non-hierarchical and participatory in its structures and processes; and it accords priority to the disadvantaged sectors, such as the poor grassroots women in the rural and urban areas and indigenous women; **Transformational** because -it is development-oriented, issue based, and gender responsive; it seeks economic, social, and political equality

---

between sexes and among sectors; and it builds a society that is just and humane, and a way of life that is sustainable. The women of Asia-Pacific region will create a system of politics that is holistic, integrated, and life enhancing in its perspective.”

The feminist vision of transformative politics is to achieve good governance and gender equality. The vision of equality is not only to eliminate gender specific violations, but also to eliminate other forms of violence such as war, colonization, militarization, nuclear proliferation, and economic exploitation. Above all, equality between North and South Countries is also one of their critical agendas. In the words of Rounaq Jahan, “Transforming processes of governance implies, for example, changing them from being hierarchical to participatory; from corrupt to clean; from secretive to transparent; from burdensome to being empowering. Similarly transformation of institutions is visualized from being top down and bureaucratic to becoming egalitarian, responsive and accountable”. It is asserted that as women gain power they need to use it with others rather than over others, “not as an instrument of dominance and exclusion as it has been used so far, but as an instrument of liberation and equality”.

Such a transformation, however, necessitates a critical mass of women. Otherwise their voice remains unheard, as Alida Brill asserts, “without our own voices being heard inside the government arenas and

---

10 Rounaq Jahan, op. cit.
11 Rounaq Jahan, op. cit.
12 ibid.
halls of public policy and debate, we are without the right of accountability- a basic entitlement of those who are governed.”14

Equal and active participation of women in politics can only be achieved when **gender balance** in politics is attained. That means to have a **Critical Mass** of women in positions of power and decision making so that their voices can be heard in the corridors of power. Critical mass or the equality dimension is articulated in different ways. Some emphasize gender parity-50-50 representation of men and women in decision-making. Others suggest the Nordic formula of no more than 60 per cent and no less than 40 per cent of either sex as an example of gender balance. Beijing Platform for Action, refers to “Gender Balance” without specifying a numerical target.15 In so doing, women can change the nature and practice of politics to genuinely respond to society’s problems by pushing a gender-responsive policy agenda.

No doubt, it has always been a debatable point whether mere increase in numbers would really help in transformation of politics. Some scholars argue that an increase in numbers would not contribute to transformation, while others are equally certain that unless there is a critical mass of women in decision-making, it would be difficult to push women’s agenda any further. At the same time, other feminist scholars emphasize the necessity of numbers along with effective empowerment. Rounaq Jahan opines, “Numbers are important but what needs to happen is simultaneous strengthening of women’s constituency and agenda. Without the latter a greater increase in numbers would create a situation like Bangladesh where for 25 years a reserved quota ensured women’s

---

15 Rounaq Jahan, op. cit.
presence in parliament but they never took any autonomous proactive stance on behalf of women.”16

Likewise, the Asia-Pacific workshop on Gender Balance in Political Representation states that, “Numbers are a necessary but not sufficient condition for women’s full, equal, active, informed participation in economic, social and political decision making. Yet there is evidence that only when there is a critical mass (at least 30%) of women in all their diversity in decision making that the “politics of care” is practiced through policies on childcare, caring for women victims of violence, unpaid labor among others.”17 Hence, feminization of politics means to have both quantitave and qualitative women’s representation at the power and decision-making levels.

Nevertheless, to make women’s participation in politics effective, a critical mass is yet to emerge. Over the years it has been noticed that while women in increasing numbers are asserting themselves, acquiring new skills, seeking equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities in every sphere of life, few women have contested successfully in the political arena. Despite the substantial achievements made by the women’s movements over the decades in most of the countries, women are still largely underrepresented in government, almost at all levels, and have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies. The target of 30 per cent women’s representation at decision-making levels by 1995 as endorsed by the Economic and Social Council is not yet included in the International Development Targets.18 The world average

---

16 ibid.
of women in legislative bodies continues to be merely 12-13 per cent; only few countries have 30 per cent or more women in decision-making positions. Similarly, a chart prepared by the United Nations based on figures of gender inequalities on global data shows that women are poorly represented in positions of public and political power all over. Further many studies reveal that women are grossly under-represented even at ministerial and sub-ministerial positions. Even if they have been given ministerial posts, in most of the countries, they remain concentrated in the social affairs/social development portfolios such as social services and welfare, health, education and women’s affairs and are rarely assigned responsibilities in economic affairs such as finance, industrial development, agriculture, transport and communication, political affairs and all the executive levels, due to prevailing hierarchical gender relations in the society.

The United Nations Division for Advancement of Women (UNDAW) came out with its fact sheet on Women in Government, according to which the percentage of women in both ministerial and sub-ministerial level ranges from 0 per cent (in about 15 countries), to 30 per cent in 2 countries. 15 countries had 0 per cent of women in governmental positions in 1996, out of which 8 were Arab countries. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) statistics, the percentage of women representatives in Parliaments worldwide has increased four-fold. Their latest statistics (February 28, 2005) reveal that the world average of women in Parliaments (both Houses combined) is 15.7 per cent. However, the regional variations are very significant. The highest percentage of women in Parliaments is in the Nordic Countries at 39.0

---

19 Rwanda, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Netherlands, are few countries having more than thirty per cent of women in decision-making positions.
20 According to IPU regional classification, Regions are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in the lower or single House.
per cent, followed by Americas at 18.6 per cent, Europe- OSCE member countries (including Nordic countries) at 18.5 per cent, Europe- OSCE member countries (excluding Nordic countries) 16.9 per cent, Asia 14.9 per cent, Sub-Saharan Africa at 14.8 per cent, Pacific at 13.2 per cent\textsuperscript{21}, and lowest in Arab States at 6.5 per cent.\textsuperscript{22}

Among the individual countries, which have more than 33 per cent women in parliaments in the Lower House are Rwanda which stands first with 48.8 per cent (2003), Sweden second with 45.3 per cent (2002), Norway with 38.2 per cent (2001), Finland with 37.5 per cent (2003), followed by Denmark with 36.9 per cent (2005), Netherlands with 36.7 per cent (2003), Cuba (2003) and Spain (2004) with 36.0 per cent, Costa Rica with 35.1 per cent (2002), Mozambique with 34.8 per cent (2004), Belgium with 34.7 per cent (2003), Austria with 33.9 per cent (2002) and Argentina with 33.7 percent (2001). India ranks at 93\textsuperscript{rd} position with 8.3 per cent of women in Parliament (2004).

Significantly, South Asia presents a paradoxical picture. It is the only region, which gave the maximum number of women heads of Government and State\textsuperscript{23} including the first woman Head of the Government all over the world. Yet, it also has the lowest percentage of women’s participation in government structures. According to Human Development Report in South Asia, women occupy only 7 per cent of the Parliamentary seats; only 9 per cent of cabinet members are women; women in the judiciary hold only 6 per cent of positions; 9 per cent of the

\textsuperscript{21} It is disappointing to note that Pacific region is the only region where the women's representation has declined from 13.6 per cent in 2000 to 12.3 per cent in 2004.
\textsuperscript{23} These includes Ms. Srimavo Bhandarnaike in Sri Lanka, Ms. Indira Gandhi in India, Ms. Khalida Zia in Bangladesh, Ms. Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka, Ms. Shaikh Hasina in Bangladesh.
civil servants are women; and only 20 per cent members of local government are women.24

It is evident from this descriptive backdrop that women still have a long way to go to achieve gender balance in the positions of power. The issue is vital and it has come to the centre-stage of international and national discourse on women’s issues. Feminist scholars have started examining the prevailing power structures, the extent of women’s participation in the political institutions and processes, and to recommend strategies to enhance the ‘critical mass’ in the legislature and other decision-making bodies thereby moving towards attaining transformative politics. A brief review of the International and national efforts for the political empowerment of women reveal the centrality of the issue.

International Initiatives

At the international level, the United Nations since its foundation has taken up the issue of women’s rights. It set up the Commission on the Status of Women way back in 1947. Other efforts at ensuring women’s rights include the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) etc.

The United Nations in its various International Conferences adopted Policy Statements and Plans of Action and Documents, after

reviewing the factual situation of women globally, and also emphasized the need for the full and equal participation of women in socio-cultural, economic and political life at the national, regional and international levels. But special mention may be made of four important documents namely Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985); The Jakarta Declaration (1994); Beijing Platform for Action (1995); Beijing +5 Review (2000)-The Outcome Document.

Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, critically observe that “women by virtue of their gender, experience discrimination in terms of denial of equal access to the power structure that controls society and determines development issues and peace initiatives”. It was further pointed out that “for true equality to become a reality for women, the sharing of power on equal terms with men must be a major strategy”. Consequently this Conference recommended efforts to overcome prejudices, stereotyped thinking and obstacles to women joining previously male dominated professions and to persuade them to participate in decision-making processes. It further recommended that efforts have to be made to fix definite time-bound targets and there may be need to resort to alternate electoral system such as quotas. The Jakarta Declaration further gave a call for women as

---

25 In 1975, the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City adopted the World Plan of Action, which put forward various suggestions, for the recruitment, nomination and promotion of women in various branches of government, public bodies, trade unions and pressure groups. United Nations Decade for Women 1976-1985 focused on “Equality, Development and peace”. Second World Conference held in Copenhagen in 1980, recommended further steps to promote international cooperation and strengthen peace through women’s participation. In addition to these conferences, Plan of Action for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, 1992; Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development held at Cairo, 1994; and The World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995, emphasized the enhancement of women’s contribution to sustainable development through their full and active involvement in policy and decision-making processes at all stages.


27 ibid., Para 515
agents and beneficiaries of development to be fully incorporated in all fields and all levels of the development process, particularly in all aspects of planning and policy making and decision-making.

Similarly, the UNDP International Conference (1997) recommends actions centred on “equalizing (increasing up to 50 per cent) women’s representation at all levels of decision-making institutions, while increasing the allocation of international resources for capacity-building to that effect”. 28

The issue of women’s political empowerment came to the centre stage of the global debate for women’s rights at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The Platform for Action adopted at the Conference listed women’s political participation as one of the twelve critical areas of concern for action. It explicitly declared, “… women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account.” 29 A number of strategic objectives and actions to be taken were recommended for the government and the non-governmental community, nationally and internationally, to enhance women’s political participation and their role in all decision-making bodies. These included actions to be taken by governments to commit themselves to establishing the goal for gender balance in governmental institutions, reforms in electoral system, incorporating of gender issues and initiatives in the agenda of political parties, trade unions, monitoring and evaluation of progress in women’s representation,

28 UNDP International Conference, 1997, on Governance and Sustainable Equality, held in New York.
to develop mechanisms and training to encourage women to participate in the electoral process, political activities and other leadership areas. It affirmed that women should have at least thirty per cent share in decision-making positions. Since, these recommendations are not binding on any government or non-governmental organizations, many of them remained on paper only, as disclosed at Beijing +5 Review (2000).

The Outcome Document, adopted by the UN General Assembly, recognized that “the goal set and commitments made in the Platform for Action have not been fully achieved and implemented, and have agreed upon further actions and initiatives at the local, national, regional and international levels to accelerate the implementation of Platform for Action and to ensure that commitments for gender equality, development and peace are fully realized.” It further documented that “despite general acceptance of the need for a gender balance in decision-making bodies at all levels, a gap between de jure and de facto equality has persisted. Notwithstanding, substantial improvement of de jure equality between women and men, the actual participation of women at the highest levels of national and international decision-making has not significantly changed since the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, and gross under representation of women in decision-making bodies in all areas, including politics, conflict prevention and resolution mechanism, the economy, the environment and media, hinders the inclusion of a gender perspective in these critical spheres of influence. Women continue to be under-represented at the legislative, ministerial and sub-ministerial levels, …”

---

30 ibid., p.109-115.
Along with the United Nations initiatives, efforts have also been made at the NGO level to increase the participation of women in the higher echelons of power. One such important meet is the Manila Conference on *Why Women Should be Involved and What Politics are Expected to Do*. The Conference concludes that not only women with the “right family connection” but also ordinary women should also have the chance to reach the top leadership positions. Women’s political participation was equally focused on at the Asia Pacific Regional NGO Symposium in Thailand in 1999 with the theme “Asia Pacific Women: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century” which focused on women’s political participation as one of the critical areas for concern as recognized in Beijing Platform for Action.

Likewise, Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) in its launching programme in June 2000 during the Beijing +5 Review called upon the governments to work for “a provisional minimum target of 30% representation of women in cabinet ministries and legislatures as well as local authorities by 2003 and equal representation by 2005.”

The *Inter-Parliamentary Union* has also been focusing on women’s political participation. At the end of its *New Delhi Conference* (14-18 February 1997) on “Towards Partnership Between Men and Women in Politics”, it adopted the document – New Delhi Declaration, which stressed upon the need to increase the presence and partnership of women in decision-making bodies at all levels. Further it defines the

---

33 The Centre for Asia-Pacific Women In Politics, Congress of Women in Politics on *Why Women Should be Involved and What Politics are Expected To Do*, Manila, 1994.
critical areas of concern in relation to women’s political participation, which are: education, political parties, affirmative measures, changing attitudes, training, Parliament, national commissions of women, international bodies, and directories of information.

**Commonwealth** has also taken up number of initiatives for enhancing women’s representation in decision-making bodies. One such initiative was its 1995 meeting in which Commonwealth Heads of Government endorsed the **Plan of Action on Gender and Development**, which asked member countries to take action to increase women’s participation in all decision-making bodies at all levels. Commonwealth Ministers of Women’s Affairs, in their 1996 meeting suggested that the member States achieve a target of no less than 30 percent of women in the political, public and private sectors by the year 2005; and those countries already close to achieving this target were urged to strive for gender parity. The need to increase women’s participation in the political decision-making and peace processes in the Commonwealth was also part of the agenda of the Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Women’s Affair, Sixth Meeting held in April 2000 in New Delhi.

The **Non-Aligned Movement** has equally emphasised the need to enhance women’s participation in political life. **The New Delhi Document on Women in Development** adopted by The Conference of Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries on the Role of Women in Development, held in New Delhi, in 1985, emphasised the need for adopting certain immediate strategies towards this end. These included “reorientation of the leadership of political parties, trade unions and other political organisations to remove their existing biases and values and perceptions about women. This could be achieved through participatory
training and exposure to better information about women’s roles.”

It further stressed upon the need to provide “support services such as child care facilities, other ways of sharing household responsibilities and reduction of women’s work burdens at home to release time for political participation…” The Document also focuses upon the need to undertake “an active campaign against customs, convention and practices that seek to obstruct women’s participation in all types of political activity”.

This brief review of initiatives reveals that women’s political empowerment has been at the centre of all debates on women’s issues at the international level. Corresponding to these international efforts, various initiatives have also been /are being taken for women’s political empowerment at the national level too.

INDIAN SCENARIO

Prior to going into the efforts both, Governmental and non-Governmental to achieve a gender balance in political participation, a bird’s eye view of women’s participation in the political process before and after independence would be pertinent. History is witness to the fact that Indian women have been participating in the political realm since ancient times. Females have reigned over empires, bearing male titles or acting as regents during the minority of their sons. Razia Sultan was an Emperor in her own right. Similarly during the Mughal period, although Muslim women were in purdah and had a restricted public life, there are examples of women’s intelligence and capabilities. The wives of

35 Vida Tomsic, 1988, Women, Development and the Non-Aligned Movement, Centre for Women’s Development Studies, New Delhi, p. 59
36 ibid
37 ibid.
38 For details please see R.C. Majumdar, 1969, The History and Culture of Indian People, Part-1, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay.
Emperors, and Kings\textsuperscript{39} not only accompanied them in their work but also worked as advisers to them, and contributed a lot in the governance of the empire.

In the modern period, the iron-willed Rani of Jhansi – Rani Laxmibai was amongst the pioneers of India’s Struggle for Freedom during 1857, and fought with the British till her last breath to protect the sovereignty of the nation.

The overall status of women, however, was low and numerous practices derogatory to women continued to be the norm. It was in this context that a number of socio-religious reform movements arose in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth Centuries.

Raja Rammohan Roy in the early nineteenth Century followed by Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar and other reformers like Dayanand Saraswati in the late nineteenth Century through Arya Samaj, and Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, Pandita Ramabai and Maharishi Karve through Prathana Samaj in Maharashtra, pioneered the social reform movements. These reformers made efforts to spread education on one hand and to fight against the existing social evils like female infanticide, child marriage, sati pratha, restrictions on widow remarriage, dowry and Devdasi Pratha, on the other. Thus towards the end of 19\textsuperscript{th} century, India witnessed the emergence of an organized movement for women’s rights. However, most of these movements were led by men. The objective of these reformers was to redefine and improve the status of women within the family and society, without disrupting the social structures of society, to meet the requirements of a modern progressive nation. With these emerging views,

\textsuperscript{39} To name some, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Noorjahan, Mumtaz Mahal, Chand Bibi etc.
the reformers of this period besides focusing on important aspects of a woman’s life, were also committed to eliminating the serious and systemic injustice against women in social, educational and political realms.

Women’s Demand for Political Rights and Suffrage Movement

In conformity with the reformist movement, the elite women in India, being influenced by the western liberal ideas of humanitarianism and egalitarianism, joined the national freedom struggle against British colonialism. The Indian National Congress (INC) from its very inception encouraged political participation of women and they participated in all activities of the Congress.

Annie Besant who took the initiative to establish the Home Rule League, encouraged women to join the freedom struggle in larger numbers. By 1909, under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu, women’s movement raised a voice for women’s rights at Social Service Conference; she emphasized emancipation of women and women’s full and active participation in the freedom struggle, was essential for achieving independence. Following this, in the year 1917 the Women’s India Association was formed and in 1927 All India Women’s Conference was established. To begin with these organizations focused on the social and legal reforms but soon got actively engaged in the suffrage movement for women.40

In 1917 itself, The Women’s India Association while addressing the Secretary of State, E. S. Montague, demanded universal franchise for

Indian women.\textsuperscript{41} The Bombay Women’s Committee for Women’s Suffrage passed a resolution. The Resolution stated: “Women ask no favour but claim rights and justice. If the vote is denied it will mean serious check to women’s advancements.”\textsuperscript{42} Margaret Cousins organized a deputation of women to meet Montague for the enfranchisement of Indian women. But the demand for universal suffrage could not be achieved because it had not received support from the local government except in Bombay and Assam.\textsuperscript{43} Therefore, The Government of India Act 1919, provided no voting right to women, but it did authorize Provincial Legislatures to have option to dislodge the sex restriction at their end. As a result many of the provinces passed resolutions to enfranchise women,\textsuperscript{44} but with provisions which greatly restricted the numbers of women voters.\textsuperscript{45}

Indian women intensified their demand for universal adult franchise, and won limited voting rights under the Reform Act of 1921, on the basis of education, property, and wifehood or widow of such a person who possessed property.\textsuperscript{46} Bombay and Madras were the first provinces to extend the franchise to women in 1921; United Province followed in 1923; Punjab and Bengal in 1926; and finally Assam, the

\textsuperscript{41} ibid, p.105.
\textsuperscript{43} Report of the Finance Committee, 1918 – 1919, as quoted in Vijay Agnew, \textit{op. cit.}, p.110
\textsuperscript{44} Bombay and Madras were the first provinces to confer the franchise to women in 1921; followed by United Provinces in 1923;Punjab and Bengal granted in 1926 and ultimately in 1930 it extended to Assam, the Central Provinces, Bihar and Orissa
\textsuperscript{45} In Madras 8.46 per cent of total voters were women, while 5.03 per cent in Bombay; 3.0 per cent in United Province and Bengal, and only 2.5 per cent in Punjab. Women comprise of 4.36 per cent of electorates in the Central Legislative Assembly.
\textsuperscript{46} Geraldine Forbes, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{46} Towards Equality Report, 1974, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 284.
Central Provinces, and Bihar and Orissa in 1930. In 1926 elections, women for the first time exercised their franchise, which was very much restricted. In Madras Province, Muthulakshmi Reddi was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1927 and she was subsequently elected as the Deputy President of the Madras Legislative Council. At her first success, she remarked, “this nomination marked the beginning of life-long efforts to “correct the balance” for women by removing social abuses and working for equality in moral standards.” Though, The Government of India Act 1935 increased the representation of women by fixing the ratio of voters at 1:5 still it could not meet the expectation of the women’s suffrage movement. Ultimately, women got equal right to vote in 1950, under the new Constitution of Sovereign India. It was the result of the vibrant movement initiated by the towering female personalities of pre-independence India, which led to the realization of demands such as universal adult franchise and Constitutional guarantee of equality.

Nationalist Movement

Along with the demand of suffrage, women were also in the forefront of the national freedom struggle. However, during the early
phase of the freedom movement the leadership of women’s movement remained in the hands of the elite women.  

The appearance of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian political scenario from 1918 onwards witnessed the transformation of attitude towards women’s role in the social revolution and reconstruction of Indian society. Women joined the regional and nation-wide Satyagraha under the influence of Gandhiji. Women’s involvement in these movements not only promoted women’s equality with men but also asserted their political rights to participate in public sphere and access to political activity. This resulted in the emergence of organized women’s movement, and women joining the movement in large numbers and from all sections of the society. Jawaharlal Nehru observed, “Our women came to the forefront and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there, of course, but now there was an avalanche of them which, took not only the British Government but their own men-folk by surprise. There were these women, women of the upper or middle classes, leading sheltered lives in their homes, peasant women, working class women, rich women – pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of government orders and police lathis. It was not only the display of courage and daring but what was even more surprising was the organizational power they showed.” The credit goes to Gandhiji for making women responsible for their rights and motivating them for political participation in large numbers.

For example we had leaders like Sister Nivedita, Sarla Devi, Madam Cama, Sarla Devi Chaudharani, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chatopadhyay, Kamala Nehru and other females from Nehru family, Vijalakshmi Pandit, Mridula Sarabhai, Sucheta Kripalani, Aruna Asif Ali, Kalpana Dutt, Hansa Mehta, Usha Mehta, Begum Ikramullah, Begum Shah Nawaz, Dr. Lakshmi Swaminathan, to name some.

numbers. He declared himself to be ‘uncompromising in the matter of women’s rights’.

It is pertinent to note here that while a section of the women’s movement and feminist scholars appreciate Gandhiji’s leadership for encouraging and motivating women’s political participation in large number, keeping the socio-cultural milieu of that time in mind, there is another section of feminist scholars (of the latter period) criticize the attitude of Gandhiji and INC leaders towards women’s actual political participation. They opine, that Gandhiji and other INC leaders wanted women to join Satyagraha and Civil Disobedient Movement in large numbers. Yet, in these movements, women were given duties which were generally an extension of their household responsibilities such as managing the Ashrams, ‘without belittling their roles as mothers and wives’. For them Gandhiji’s view on “women’s equality was located within a religious sense of the word and within the patriarchal system, projecting a concept of women’s role as being complementary to that of men embodying virtues of sacrifice and suffering’. For Gandhiji the ideal mythical woman was Sita, the self-sacrificing wife of Rama. Sita was ‘promoted’ as the model for Indian women. Moreover he forgot that this image of women had a ‘strategic function in the political movement.’ That was the reason women’s participation had been initially ignored by Gandhiji, which resulted in the disappointment of women. Gandhiji and INC leadership had to face a strong opposition from

Padmalaya Mohapatra and Bijoyini Mohanty, op. cit., pp. 67-68.
Kumari Jayawardena, op. cit., p. 95.
ibid., p. 96.
Dandi March initially was started with 75 disciples all men. At first, women had not been allowed to participate in the Civil Disobedient Movement. Vijay Agnew, op. cit, p. 38.
the women’s movement for ignoring them. For instance, Margaret Cousins on behalf of the Women’s Indian Association spiritedly protested against the division of work by sex. She strongly repudiated the idea that women were left to take over the charge of Ashrams while the men were on Satyagraha. Kamaladevi Chattopadyaya and Durgabai Deshmukh also met Gandhi and other leaders and expressed the desire for their active participation in the Satyagraha. This criticism was so effective that during the 1930 Satyagraha, it stimulated a lot of interest among women.

Thereafter, women joined shoulders with men throughout the freedom struggle. It is asserted that, “events prove that without the cooperation of women the freedom struggle would not have been so successful. Under Mahatma Gandhi’s direction the civil disobedience movement and the Salt Satyagraha saw the women in the forefront. The breaking of the forest laws, boycott of foreign cloths and liquor shops resulted in women suffering from police repression, incarceration in prisons and other indignities. Scores of women were in the vanguard of the movement.” Many times women outnumbered males in the Satyagrahas, and at one locale Sarojini Naidu led the Satyagraha. This roused the confidence in women. At other places also they actively participated in all the campaigns including taking part in prabhat pheries, picketing of schools, colleges, legislative councils and clubs. It will be significant to mention here that nearly 10 per cent of the prisoners in the independence movement were women with babies in their arms. Other women who did not go to jail were not directly involved in the activities.

---

61 Vijay Agnew, op. cit., p.40.
63 Padmalaya, Mohapatra and Bijoyini, Mohanty, op. cit., P.70.
of the Congress movement shouldered the burden of supporting their families while their men were in jail.64

Prior to 1930, the Government hesitated to take action against women but the increasing number of women participating in the movements, particularly in picketing, compelled the Government to take action against them as women picketers sabotaged the business which in turn affected the Government revenues.65 Ultimately police repression also started on women. But this could not stop women from moving ahead. As a protest against the highhandedness of Government, women in high positions resigned from their respective posts. To name a few, Muthulakshmi Reddi resigned from the Legislative Council and her office of Deputy President of Council. Mrs. Hansa Mehta and Kamabai Lakshman Rao resigned their offices as Honorary Magistrates.66

On the other side, in spite of the fact that the participation of women in the Congress Party and especially in the various movements had increased immensely, yet there was no commensurate increase in women as representatives or delegates to the annual A.I.C.C. meetings.67 This again implied the attitude of national leaders that even though they wanted women in large numbers to join the struggle, yet they denied women’s representation at the decision-making forums except for a very few.

64 Hem Lata Swarup, Pam Rajput et. al, op. cit., p. 367.
65 Vijay Agnew, op. cit, p.47.
66 Padmalaya, Mohapatra and Bijoyini, Mohanty, op. cit, p.70
67 It is interesting to note that during the period 1922 to 1940 there was a decline in the number of women’s representation in the annual A.I.C.C. meetings. In 1922 out of 350 delegates to the A.I.C.C. only 16 were women. While women had made a significant contribution in terms of mass participation in the 1930 Satyagraha, against this their representation has reduced from 16 in 1922 to 13 in 1930. Out of 21 provinces only 8 provinces had elected 13 women representatives out of 350 delegates. By 1937 this number still reduced to 8 women delegates out of 285 total delegates. Further in the following annual meeting the women representation decreased to five out of total of 386 members.
Vijay Agnew, op. cit., p. 88.
At the same time women were also active participants in the activities of revolutionary organizations. During 1920s and 1930s many prominent women leaders joined the Communist Movement, after the formation of Communist Party of India in 1925, because of the disappointment, when Gandhiji called off the non-cooperation movement. These revolutionary women, cutting across the local provincial boundaries and issues, actively participated in the struggle against British imperialism. It is significant to note that along with the liberation movement these women were also involved in the multifarious struggles with varied issues which included working-class strikes, peasant revolt, and movements for the emancipation of women at the same time. They were actively involved in many kind of activities such as collecting funds, organizing training camps, distributing banned literature, carrying secret messages from one place to another, hiding their underground comrades, running *lungars*, and never looked back even when they had to perform militant actions. Some of these revolutionary women had taken bold steps and adopted militant actions by putting their life in danger for the cause of the motherland. Special mention may be made of some champions – the heroine of Chittagong Armoury Raid- Kalpana Dutt and the heroine of Quit India Movement- Aruna Asaf Ali who had adopted revolutionary means and taken up valiant activities during the movement to bring about

---

68 Famous among them were Kalpana Dutt, Kalyani Bhattacharjee, Kamaladas Gupta, Latika Ghosh, Bina Das, etc.

69 Kalpana Dutt at the age of 18 years led the Chittagong Armoury Raid, and was sentenced to life imprisonment, latter on, after the intervention of Rabindernath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, her period of imprisonment was reduced.

- Bina Das in 1932 attempted to kill Stanley Jackson, the Governor of Bengal.
- Kamaladas Gupta attempted assassination of Sir Charles Teggart, the police commissioner of Calcutta.
- Preetilata Waddedar aged 21 led the raid to bomb the Pahartali European Club.
- Shanti Ghosh and Sunita Choudhary, students of ninth grade, at the age of 15 and 16, murdered the Governor of Comilla.

social and political transformation in the country. For them the struggle to impress upon gender role was equally important. Thus Indian women had played a significant role in anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and democratic movements of the nation for over a long period.

With time the women’s movement became stronger along with the nationalist movement. In 1940 the movement was at its height. The call for Quit India Movement was given at the historic session of Indian National Congress at Bombay on 8th of August 1942. Although women in large numbers participated in this movement, at the same time the call divided the women of the Indian National Congress. There was a difference of opinion regarding the strategies to be adopted by the leadership during the movement. This gave a setback to the movement. Women leadership was also divided on this issue. Many of them had followed the Gandhian Path and peacefully allowed themselves to be arrested by the Britishers. Another section of revolutionary women under the leadership of Aruna Asaf Ali adopted different strategy during the Quit India Movement. Accordingly, Aruna Asaf Ali, Usha Mehta and Sucheta Kirplani with other fellow Congress members managed to escape from police successfully and went underground. Later on, they met at Bombay to draw up a plan and set up a shadow A.I.C.C. office. Though, Aruna Asaf Ali had suffered many hardships, the stand taken by her and

---

70 The researcher feels honoured to mention here that she had the privilege to be associated with Aruna Asaf Ali and Kalpana Dutt. One incident personally mentioned by Kalpana Dutt to the researcher must be highlighted for it tellingly reveals how these legendaries were fighting against socially ascribed gender roles even in prison. The incident relates to the days when Kalpana Dutt was arrested and imprisoned in Lahore Jail after the Chittagong Armoury Raid. She used to give morning *Aazan* from the jail mosque daily. The jail authorities used to stop her for being a woman and a Hindu, she was not permitted to do so. But for her, it was a normal practice. Apart from this she got into arguments with others on gender issues and challenged the stereotyped mindset of the public. This reveals that imprisonment, notwithstanding, these women continued their battle against social and gender inequalities.

* Aazan is the call for the Namaz from the mosque.

71 Kumari Jayawardena, op. cit., p.108.

72 Like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Sushila Nayyar, Vijayalaxmi Pandit and others.
her comrades symbolized the growing sense of confidence among other women.

By the time ‘Do Or Die’ call was given, Aruna Asaf Ali had already won over the younger generation and influenced them to join the movement. She had been known for the socialist belief that political freedom was not an end but a means to achieving freedom from exploitation and scarcity.73

After the arrest of Gandhiji and other important leaders of INC, once again Aruna Asaf Ali made efforts to streamline the Quit India movement. Number of women leaders like Bina Das, Kalpana Dutt and Preetilata Waddedar working as the cadre of secret and terrorist societies had undertaken dangerous assignments. Usha Mehta took the initiative to start transmission and broadcasting of a Radio Station – “This is Congress Radio on 42:34 meters somewhere in India”. Usha Mehta with her friends managed successfully to run this station for three months escaping from police by changing their location very frequently from one place to another. But at last they were arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment. Women in such roles were projecting a radical image. Their acceptance in the revolutionary role gave credibility and emphasized society’s commitment to give women the opportunity to participate in all aspects of public and political actions.74 Yet, they had been denied access to the proper representation in the Congress governing bodies and other decision-making bodies. This can be confirmed by Mridula Sarabhai’s assertion that women had to struggle within the Congress to be accepted as independent and responsible colleagues. She suggested that those

74 Vijay Agnew, op. cit., pp.74 -78

28
women who were satisfied with assigned roles were accepted and appointed to important positions. But women like herself who were assertive had to struggle to merely survive within the organization. Vijayalaxmi Pandit has also acknowledged this.\textsuperscript{75}

Analysis of women’s participation in the freedom movement reveals two trends that are very relevant for the purpose of the study. One that the career of leading women politicians such as Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kirplani, and Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya indicate that patronage and family association played a major role in their success which was a unique phenomenon and not a representative of a trend in society. Secondly, as rightly observed by Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar, ‘the assimilation of women in the struggle to free the nation had given them the confidence and access to positions of power and responsibilities, still the positions of power were not within easy reach’.\textsuperscript{76}

In an attempt to look at women’s response during the national movement from a feminist angle it can be said that the feminist critique of ‘patriarchy’ as such was not at all on their agenda. By and large, their participation in the freedom struggle had created great confidence to be able to tackle successfully their public-political roles. They did not have to struggle for ‘equality’ as such because usually the men in the freedom struggle were supportive of equality. Nehru himself was an example who reared his daughter, able enough, to be a political leader in her own right.

The 1931 Karachi Congress had passed a resolution on ‘Declaration of Fundamental Rights’, which later, on independence, was

\textsuperscript{75} ibid. pp.85-86
incorporated in the Constitution of India as the Fundamental Rights of all citizens for equality, liberty, justice and brotherhood. Even affirmative action for the weaker section of the society and women were incorporated. Thus Indian women did not have to wage a bitter struggle against their own men or patriarchy in general. In our enthusiastic feminism one cannot forget that freedom from imperialism, which was oppressive and exploitative, was the most important national task in the decades before independence.

Though, women’s movement had been stressing and campaigning for the abolition of the existing social evils in society that causes the low status of women they hardly focused on the transformation of gender roles. Only few women had been able to challenge these norms of the society. Since their number was less they were unable to change the trend. Thus, it would not be incorrect to say that women’s movement in India during the Nationalist movement demanded equal political rights, but could not press for women’s equality. Women’s participation in the movement was indispensable to achieve freedom at the earliest, but women’s issues did not attract the concerns of the national leadership.

Independent India

The dawn of independence saw the adoption of a Constitution based on secular, liberal and democratic principles guaranteeing equality regardless of narrow parochial considerations of race, class, caste and gender. Women to their credit and to that of the leaders of the time were actively involved in the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly,

---

although their number was quite minimal. Women have been enjoying *de jure* political equality with men, including the right to vote, contest elections to the local governing bodies, State Legislative Assemblies and Central Parliament and to the other elected bodies and to hold public office.

These egalitarian values and guarantees, enshrined in the Constitution, notwithstanding, women are far from achieving *de facto* political equality. The traditional, socio-cultural and economic barriers prevent women from entering into politics, or even from deciding to attempt to do so. One of the basic reasons for this was the emergence of ideological differences on the directions to be adopted by the women’s movement immediately after independence. There was a division in the women’s movement. One section of women’s movement believed that with the attainment of India’s independence, women’s equality had also been achieved; thus women’s problems would automatically be solved. It was perceived that as India developed, these inequalities would diminish. Thus they became complacent towards women’s issues.

Another section of women carried forward their struggle for women’s emancipation and transformation of society on socialist lines to promote a better deal for women. They played a significant role in social and political movements and have been part and parcel of trade unions, working class movements, agricultural labourers and poor peasant movements on an equal footing. Even though, few in number, women

---

78 Out of total of 296 members of the Constituent Assembly, only 15 were women. Some eminent names include Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Hansa Mehta, Sucheta Kripalini, Poornima Banerjee, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. They had also worked as members of the Central Legislative Council in the First Five years immediately after independence.

79 Women have participated, shoulder to shoulder with workers in 1974 All India Railway strike, Bombay textile strike in 1984 and in many other important all India workers
Trade Union leaders have been playing a major role in bringing about changes by formulating and monitoring implementation of labour laws, to provide protection to women workers. Similarly, women’s participation in large numbers can also be traced in various other movements such as the tribal movement, student movement, and environmental protection and displaced peoples’ movements.

Thus active participation in various movements, however, did not translate into a commensurate participation of women in the political process and legislative bodies either at the national or at the State level. Very few women have been able to cross the boundaries of gender and move into the male fortress of political power. While substantial gains have been made over the decades, this has not been reflected in the increased representation of women in positions of power. There is still a wide gap between Constitutional guarantees and the actual representation of women. Only a handful of women managed to contest elections and even fewer managed to win. The representation of women in the Lok Sabha has always been marginal. Table: 1.1 reveals that the number of women representatives in the Lok Sabha has almost doubled in half a century from 22 in the first general election held in 1952 to 45 in the Fourteenth Lok Sabha elections held in 2004. However, as a proportion of the total members women’s representation have never exceeded 8.83 per cent. In the 8th Lok Sabha women’s representation had jumped by 3 per cent to 8.1 per cent from 5.1 per cent in the previous Lok Sabha, but the next General Elections took the percentage of women back to 5.2 per cent. While the percentage of women members has increased from 4.4

strikes etc. They also participated in large number in agrarian movements like in Moplah Rebellion in Kerala (early twentieth century), Avadh Movement (1920-21), the Tebhaga Land Reforms in West Bengal (1945-50), Telengana Movement (1946-51) and Chhotanagpur (1950).
TABLE 1.1

Representation of Women Members from First to Fourteenth Lok Sabha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lok Sabha</th>
<th>Total Seats</th>
<th>No. of Women Contestants</th>
<th>No. of Women Elected</th>
<th>Percentage to the Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First (1952-57)</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second (1957-62)</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third (1962-67)</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth (1967-70)</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth (1971-77)</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth (1977-79)</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh (1980-84)</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth (1984-89)</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth (1989-91)</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenth (1991-96)</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleventh (1996-97)</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>40*</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelfth (1998)</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>44*</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirteenth (1999-2004)</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourteenth (2004-)</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One member nominated by the President.

Source: PIB, Government of India

(1952) to 8.8 (2004), the graph has not been a smooth curve, but witnessed several ups and downs. No doubt, the number has been increasing steadily but it has been than 9 per cent of the total strength of the Lok Sabha. Only in 1999, it touches the figure 8.83 per cent, which has been the highest so far. Women still have a long way to go to achieve the target of 33 per cent, to have the ‘critical mass’ required for the transformation of politics.

The percentage of women’s representation in the Rajya Sabha has always been a little higher than that of Lok Sabha. Table: 1.2 reveals that before 1977 it revolved around 8 per cent. It was only in 1977 that it touched 10.2 per cent. It was the highest in 1990 at 15.5 per cent and shows a declining trend thereafter. While the number of women is on the increase in the Lok Sabha where they have to face direct elections; their declining number in the Rajya Sabha becomes a critical issue of concern.
TABLE: 1.2

Representation of Women Members in Rajya Sabha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Seats</th>
<th>No. of Women</th>
<th>Percentage of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India

and needs to be studied. It implies the attitude of political parties and the leadership at the higher level of political hierarchy, towards women’s representation in politics and their will to meet the commitment to provide 33 per cent representation for women at all levels.

Table: 1.3 also reveals that the percentage of women contestants has always been very low as compared to male contestants. Till the eleventh general elections to the Lok Sabha, the percentage of women contestants remained around 3 to 3.7 per cent. It was only in the eleventh Lok Sabha elections in 1996, that it crossed 4.2 per cent and thereafter it kept on increasing in the subsequent elections. In the thirteenth Lok Sabha elections, the percentage of women contestants increased to 6.5, which is almost three times more than the first Lok Sabha elections held in 1952. Paradoxically, the percentage of women contestants has increased in the last few general elections but the percentage of female winning candidates has not increased. The figures show a constant decline in the percentage of female winning candidates from 1952 to 1999. It will be significant to note that the increase in number of women contestants is due to increase in number of women contesting the elections as independent candidates, which shows their inspirations for joining...
legislatures. In the Indian electoral scenario, the independent candidates as against the candidates supported by political parties have never fared well, it is equally true of women independent candidates.

**TABLE: 1.3**  
Women as Contestants for Lok Sabha Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total contestants</th>
<th>Males contestants</th>
<th>Percentage of male contestants</th>
<th>Females contestants</th>
<th>Percentage of female contestants</th>
<th>Percentage of males winning</th>
<th>Percentage of females winning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>97.70</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1518</td>
<td>1473</td>
<td>97.03</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>96.52</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>2369</td>
<td>2302</td>
<td>97.17</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2784</td>
<td>2698</td>
<td>96.92</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2439</td>
<td>2369</td>
<td>98.27</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4620</td>
<td>4478</td>
<td>96.92</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>5574</td>
<td>5406</td>
<td>96.98</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>6160</td>
<td>5962</td>
<td>96.78</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>8699</td>
<td>8374</td>
<td>96.26</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>13952</td>
<td>13353</td>
<td>95.70</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>4750</td>
<td>4476</td>
<td>94.23</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>4254</td>
<td>3976</td>
<td>93.46</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PIB, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.  
- Source for 2004 is CSDS Data Unit.  
NA means information not available.

Apart from the representation in the Parliament, women representation in the Council of Ministers has always been negligible. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was the first woman appointed as a Cabinet Minister in 1952 with the portfolio of health. After her no woman minister had cabinet rank till Mrs. Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister in 1966. Surprisingly not even a single woman with Cabinet rank was appointed during Mrs. Gandhi’s time.\(^\text{80}\) There was only one woman

\(^{80}\) Human Development in South Asia 2000, op. cit., p.140.
minister of Cabinet rank in Rajiv Gandhi’s Government. The thirteenth Lok Sabha had the highest number of women in the Union Council of Ministers in post-independence India with 9 women ministers out of a total of 84. Among these 9 ministers 4 were of Cabinet rank. Analysis of the trend of appointment of women Ministers reveals that most of the time they have been given welfare oriented portfolios such as women and child development, social welfare, health, education and consumer affairs. Rarely, if ever, are they appointed to the ministries such as finance, industries, commerce, defense, external affairs, home, or science and technology. Till date there have been only 3 women who had served in the Ministry of External Affairs, one woman as the Deputy Home Minister, one served as Deputy Minister of Finance and one worked as Minister of State for Law.81 That is one of the reasons that women have hardly been able to influence decision and policy formulations.

The scrutiny of the Parliamentary Committees too reveals the low representation of women in these committees. It is only the Committee on Empowerment of Women that has a majority of women members; all other committees have one or two women members. Similarly no committee other then the Committee on Empowerment of Women has a woman as Chairperson.82

State Assemblies

In the State Assemblies, the picture is all the more dismal as the representation varies from 0.3 per cent to 6.1 per cent in different States. Table: 1.4 reveals that the highest percentage of women in the State

---

81 Laxmi.N Menon, Kamla Sinha and Vijaye Raje Scindia have served as Ministers of State for External affairs. M. Chandrakeshwaran was in Home Ministry, Tarkeshwary Sinha was Minister of State (Independent Charge) in Education, Petroleum and Power, and Deputy Minister in Finance and Dr. S. Mahishi in Law, Justice and Company Affairs.

82 Najma Heptullah was the ex-officio Chair of a few Committees in the Rajya Sabha when she was the Deputy Chairperson of Rajya Sabha.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>52**</th>
<th>57</th>
<th>60-65</th>
<th>67-69</th>
<th>70-75</th>
<th>77-78</th>
<th>79-83</th>
<th>84-88</th>
<th>89-92</th>
<th>93-97</th>
<th>State Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.P.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>2.2*</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goa</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.4*</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J&amp;K</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.4*</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1.0*</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.8*</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>3.3*</td>
<td>4.0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.9*</td>
<td>1.6*</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>N.E</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondicherry</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Period Average</strong></td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table Entry stands for percentage of Women MLAs elected to State Legislatures in the relevant elections.

- State did not exist; N.E: No elections held in that year/period; *: 2 elections held during this period. The figure given here is an average of the two; **: In 1952, the Election Commission did not recognise women as a separate category. The figures given here are based on the name recognition and hence liable to underreporting of women representatives.

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

---

83 This is the latest information available for the State Assemblies.
Legislative Assemblies has been 10.8 per cent, the highest ever in Madhya Pradesh in 1957 and lowest 0.3 per cent in 1952 in Tamil Nadu. 20 States had higher percentage of women in their respective State Assemblies than the Average State percentage in various elections. Haryana has had the highest average of women in the Assemblies at 6.1 per cent followed by Delhi at 5.9 per cent, Madhaya Pradesh 5.2 per cent and Maharashtra and Rajasthan both at 4.7 per cent. On the lower side of representation falls Manipur with 0.3 per cent and a little higher with 1.5 per cent stand both Jammu and Kashmir and Mizoram. The period average shows that the percentage of women in the State Legislatures varies from 2.2 per cent at its lowest in 1952 and the highest in 1957 at 6.0 percent. Thereafter it has been declining and during 1993-1997 it reached 4.0 per cent. Significantly, there seems to be no correlation between the literacy rate and women representation. Kerala with the highest literacy rate has a low State average representation at 3.6 per cent, similarly Mizoram with the second highest literacy rate, is second from the bottom with 1.5 per cent representation of women, while the States with low level of female literacy rate have higher women’s representation, for instance, Bihar with the lowest literacy has 4.5 per cent followed by Uttar Pradesh at 4.3 per cent.

Likewise, there seems to be no proportional correlation of sex ratio with women’s representation in the State Legislative Assemblies. States with high sex ratio have low level of average women representation, contrary to those States with low sex ratio, which have higher state average of women participation in the State Assemblies. For example, Kerala has the highest sex ratio, followed by Pondicherry, and Tamil Nadu. However, these States have a lower state average at 3.6, 2.7 and 3.3

84 Literacy rate of the following States according to the Census of India 2001 are Kerala - 90.92% (87.86), Mezoram - 88.49% (86.13), Bihar - 47.53% (33.57), Uttar Pradesh - 57.36% (42.98). Within parenthesis the female literacy rate is given.
per cent respectively. As against this, States with low sex ratio, such as Delhi followed by Haryana and Punjab have higher State average women representation at 5.9 per cent followed by 6.1 and 4.2 percent. Further it is very interesting to note that Rajasthan and Maharashtra both have equal sex ratio (922) along with the equal percentage of state average of women representation (4.7). This raises two posers: one, why do States with a high sex ratio have lower representation of women? Second, why is it that States where women’s representation is higher, these women are unable to challenge the socio-cultural ethos and strive for enhancing the status of women? This might need an in-depth study later; right now it is not the focus of the present study.

The representation of women in the National and State Assemblies is also reflected by their positions within the party hierarchy. Women are further underrepresented in the inner party structures, especially at the actual decision-making levels and that is the reason they are hardly able to influence the party decisions and to set a political line on women’s issues within the party. Most of the political parties have not focused on women’s issues on their agenda nor have they adopted gender equality in their everyday functioning. That shows the reluctant attitude of the political parties towards women’s issues. Moreover, women’s issues have been identified as social issues to be dealt by the women’s wing of these political parties and have never been taken seriously as political agenda of national importance.

It is worth mentioning here that the number of women contestants is showing a rising trend. This, however, is not the result of increase in the number of tickets allotted to women by political parties but an

increase in the number of women contesting as independent candidates. Women, by and large, are the last choice for the political parties, if not compulsive, as candidates for contesting elections. Even when women are given the tickets, the seats allotted to them are those where the chances of winning are less. As a result, the percentage of women winners is not increasing at the same rate as women contestants.

Further it is ironical that even those women who manage to “break the glass ceiling” and reach the helm of affairs, women’s issues and concerns are not a priority with them. The probable reasons could be, first that they are acting in nexus with their male counterparts and contribute to reinforcing the patriarchal relations in society. Secondly, there is a lurking fear that focusing on women’s issues would lead to their identification as “women activist” rather than as “people’s representative”. In the absence of feminist consciousness they are not able to realize that the feminist slogan of “all issues are women’s issues” and “women’s issues are everyone’s issues” is a reality and not merely a jungle. Thirdly, women members being present in a miniscule proportion in the House are not able to make their voices heard “in the corridors of power”. This is particularly apparent from the Report of the Committee on Status of Women in India.

In September 1971, Government of India set up a Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), which examined the status of women in India and a report entitled ‘Towards Equality’ was submitted to Government in 1974 and tabled in Parliament in March 1975. This report was an eye opener not only for women’s rights advocates but also for the Government. The report reveals the astonishing fact that notwithstanding the Constitutional guarantees and planned development, women continued to face “stark” inequalities. The findings of the CSWI
report revealed that there was an increase in the participation of women in the political process. But it was not reflected in their ability to influence the political process because “of the inadequate attention paid to their political education and mobilization by both political parties and women’s organizations. The structures of the parties make them male dominated and in spite of outstanding exception, most party-men are not free from general prejudices and attitudes of the society. They have tended to see the women voters and citizens as appendages of the males and have depended on the head of families to provide block-votes and support for their parties and candidates.”

Kumud Sharma, while referring to the CSWI Report, remarks that “a political system cannot be based on ideology alone but must keep in touch with the actualities of the social situation... The continuing understanding of women prevents their proper participation in the decision-making process in the country... When one applies the principle of democracy to a society characterized by tremendous inequalities such special protections are only spearheads to pierce through the barriers of inequality. An unattainable goal is as meaningless as a right that cannot be exercised.”

The CSWI Report also refers to the policy of “tokenism” by having few women in the legislature and executive wings of the government, who are ineffective ‘as spokesmen for women’s rights and opportunities’. Criticizing the token representation of women in local self-governing bodies, the Report recommended the setting up Women’s Panchayats at the village level; reservation of seats in the municipalities;

88 Toward Equality op. cit., p. 302.
constitution of permanent committees in municipalities to initiate and supervise programmes for women’s welfare and development. It also suggested that political parties should adopt a definite policy regarding the percentage of women candidates; it further recommended the inclusion of women in all important committees, commissions or delegations that are appointed to examine socio-economic problems. Since the Committee was not unanimously in favour of reservation, therefore, it did not recommend quotas for women.

The question of reservation for women was left to the National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 AD, that ‘views women not as the weaker segment of society or as passive beneficiaries of the development process, but as a source of unique strength for reaching national goals.’ Therefore it advocated that the Government should effectively secure women’s participation in all decision-making processes at National, State and Local levels. It further observed that the political participation of women is gravely restricted, hence, it recommended that 30 per cent reservation for women should be introduced at all levels of policy planning and decision-making bodies. Appreciating a shift in approach of governance from centralized to decentralized governance, since decentralization is a prerequisite for effective mainstreaming of women’s concerns in development, and further to meet the country’s commitment to strengthen democracy at the grass-roots level by encouraging women’s participation in politics, it recommended that initially reservation for women should be made at the local governing bodies level.

---

89 ibid. p. 304-5.
91 ibid., pp. 164-65
It was in 1992 that the issue was taken up by the Rajiv Gandhi Government and an attempt was made to correct the gender imbalances at the local governance level through providing 33 per cent reservation for women. When the Seventy-Third Constitution Amendment Bill was introduced in 1991 by the Congress government, it became a polemical issue – whether the introduction of the reservation at the grass roots level was really meant to enhance the representation of women or was a mere strategy of Congress Party to strengthen its women vote bank. This controversy came to an end, when on 22\textsuperscript{nd} December 1992, Lok Sabha passed the Seventy-Third and Seventy-Fourth Amendments to the Constitution of India, to provide 33 per cent reservation for women in Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies respectively. This resulted in a veritable silent revolution, which brought more than a million women into grassroots governance. They have now emerged as a ‘critical mass’, which enables the articulation of women’s issues and concerns in decision-making. This had the added effect of strengthening democracy by making local governance participatory and accountable. Women have prioritized the issues of education, health and access to basic amenities.

Recognizing the achievements made by the 73\textsuperscript{rd} and 74\textsuperscript{th} Constitution Amendments, in the history of women’s political empowerment, the demand from women’s movement for 33 per cent reservation once again gained momentum in 1995. This time the focus was on reservation for women in the legislature, both in the State Assemblies and the Parliament. A bill to this effect was first introduced by the H.D. Deve Gowda led United Front Government in 1996. Notwithstanding the promises made by most of the political parties in their election manifestoes in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, the passage of the Bill was scuttled by a strong lobby within Parliament. The debate in the Parliament over the Bill reflected stiff opposition from several
quarters. Since then the Bill has been reintroduced several times but vested interests have managed to prevent its passage each time.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has also been pursuing demand for the 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in the State Assemblies and the Parliament and efforts were made to mobilize public support in its favour.

Women’s organizations too have not lagged behind. The whole debate on reservation has provided a platform for the networking of various voluntary organizations for mobilization, lobbying and advocacy in favour of women’s political reservation. Such organizations as Joint Women’s Front, Seven Sisters, National Alliance of Women (NAWO) have played a significant role in this direction. The National Alliance of Women organized a National Consultation on Mainstreaming Women’s Agenda into Electoral Politics in March, 1996 at New Delhi. For the first time over 100 women from all over the country came together as political beings and drafted a Women’s Manifesto, first of its kind that challenged the dominant style of politics and electioneering. The manifesto and the Charter of Demands adopted at the said consultation

92 The continuous demand for the sub-quota for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Minorities, was referred to a Joint Select Committee of the Parliament consisting of members of both Houses, under the Chairpersonship of late Geeta Mukherjee for consideration. The Joint Select Committee in its report refused to consider the demand for the sub-quota and reaffirm its original stand and suggested several Amendments. The Bill was again scuttled in December 1996.

Another effort was made by Shri Inder Kumar Gujral in 1997. He too had to suffer humiliation as his own party president and MPs did not support him. Atal Bihari Vajpaee’s Government introduced the Bill (the 84th Amendment) in 1998, it too faced strong opposition from its own ranks on the plea that the Bill does not provide a quota for OBC women. Therefore lack of political will to pass the Bill resulted in its lapse. On August 10, 2000, Government virtually washed its hands of the contentious Women’s Reservation Bill and shifted its burden to the political parties to reach a consensus in the way that is amiable to all the parties.

demanded 33-50 per cent reservation for women in all the political institutions from local to national level, an end to criminalisation of politics and politicization of crime, right to recall elected members, separation of politics from caste, class, and religion, right to information that affects the lives of the people and public declaration of assets of candidates among other things. The women’s movement in India has strongly been lobbying for the issue and has been actively engaged in organizing workshops, seminars, conferences, dharnas and processions and interface with the parliamentarians and the leaders of the political parties and making persistent efforts to transform this movement into a ‘Jan Andolan’ (Mass Movement).

These initiatives, notwithstanding, women continue to be excluded from the political process. The reasons are manifold but have been compressed into four major ones by the Fawcett Society. The problems of the women aspirants to run for the Parliament have been described as the “four Cs” – culture, childcare, cash and confidence. These impediments to the transference of power to women limit the fundamental transformation of politics and socio-economic realities. It is very essential to break the patriarchal control that limits the potential and scope of women’s actual and de facto participation in public life. Gender roles make it difficult for women to avail the politically significant changes, further, the present day political culture, which is dominated by the elements of criminalisation, corruption, money and muscle power inhibits women’s full participation in political processes. In addition to this, lack of orientation, training and preparation to fulfill the role and

---

responsibilities as well as the abrupt change in their life after marriage further underscores the nature of the challenges to be confronted. Therefore governmental and non-governmental interventions are necessary to promote women’s participation in the decision-making processes at all levels, to have greater participatory democracy, social equality and gender justice.\textsuperscript{95}

In this context, pertinent questions are: why so few women seek and wield power; why are they so scarce at the upper level where decisions are made and policies are formulated, and those who venture and succeed in entering the legislatures, what kind of women are they; do they have capacity to be effective legislators, do they perceive politics differently than men; do they have distinct political goals; do they have distinct legislative interests; do they have distinct role orientation; what is their role perception and their level of efficacy; is there a women’s approach to the problem of public policy; do they continue with patriarchal legacy or are guided by feminist consciousness. These are empirical questions that can be answered only by a systematic inquiry. The present study is a modest attempt in this direction.