Historical Background
CHAPTER - II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

More than two thousand years ago, Aristophanes suggested that women in power would have a radical influence on politics. Aristophanes assumption about the impact of women in politics remains popular today. This view examines the assumption about women's political mobilization in India, by analyzing through the historical base.

The great women leaders from past make us feel proud. We admire their fight for equal rights and we feel that, we recognize something in their struggle with the contradiction about the great women, another kind of identification is possible. Many of us feel great involvement with unknown women, who have disappeared nameless in political history. The history of women's large-scale participation in primitive years is well known and in fact, one can go back to Vedic period, where women have shown immense courage in that period.

The Ancient Period

In Vedic period, women had access to all branches of training. Women like Ghosa, Apala and Visvawara, Lopamudra were composers of outstanding Vedic hymns. The age of Upanisads produced
philosophers like Gargi, who challenged the invincible Yajnaavalka in debate and Maitrey who spurned wealth because it would not give her immortal right. Women of highest caste were indispensable partners of their husbands in the Yajna. They could hold property and widows could remarry.

There are abundant references in our ancient literature as well as scriptures to establish the fact that women enjoyed an elite position in ancient Indian society. They also enjoyed equal status with men in all affairs of life including religion. From Vedic literature, it is learnt that Sabha, Samiti and Sena were the three important units of administrative machinery. Vedic society was patriarchal and hence, the males were the heads of administration and controlled politics. But the references available in the Vedic literature point out that power was not monopolized by the males. Religion was the strongest agency of social control of Vedic society. Women as equal partners of men in the sphere of religion might have exercised some control over the administration. Moreover, the make meaning more clear. Vedic state where forbade the participation of women in administration and politics.

In the field of administration, Indian women surprisingly enough, produced some notable figures during the ancient period. They were trained in self defence also. They had the knowledge to use the
bow and arrow. Sometimes, they used to go for dreadful battles along with their husbands. Vispaka, the wife of Kindkhela, is such an amanzon; she received a liberal education in almost all the branches of physical and spiritual instructions at the time. Women during the Rig Vedic age, enjoyed much liberty and the approach to administration was quite liberal.

Women seemed to have enjoyed equal status with men. Upanayana was performed for girls also and they received education, observed brahmacharya like boys. Women studied the Vedas, and we had several women 'seers' composing Vedic hymns. They followed the profession of teaching up to the Sutra period and even spinsters enjoyed the right to perform Vedic rituals. There is no indication of seclusion of women which characterized Indian society of later days. Women moved freely and participated in public life. Even there are many instances of women acquiring exceptional proficiency in sciences and letters. The name of Leelavati may be noted in this context, namely in arithmetic and astronomy.

The women of Rajput royal household were very famous for their patriotism and sacrifice. Rani Durgawati, Queen of Garh, fought against Mughal army of Akbar when the later attacked her minor son. Chand Bibi, appeared on the ramparts of Ahmednagar fort, dressed in male
attire and put heart in the defenders of the town, against the attack led by Akbar. Ahalyabai Holkar was an administrative genius, Sir John Malcom has paid a magnificent tribute.¹

In the list of famous administrators of Karnataka, the name of Akkadevi who lived during the period A.D.1010-64 was a Chalukyan princess, who ruled over various divisions of the Chalukya dominions, such as Banavasi, Kisukadu and Masavadi for nearly half a century. This great administrator was a daughter of Dashavarman and Bhagaladevi and was the sister of Vikramaditya- V and Jayasimha II, both chalukyan emperors of Kalyan.

The Mugal princesses also played a notable role in the court of Agra and Delhi. Jehanara the partisan of Darashikohi, Roshanara the partisan of Aurangzeb, Zebunnissa, the daughter of Aurangzeb, whose poems came down to us and to other represented culture of the court and influenced the administration too. But the general status of womanhood cannot be properly judged from lives of queens and princesses. There were of course, some exceptions, Jijabai, the mother of Shivaji, was a more typical of Indian womanhood of the period. She was a true type of Indian woman a devoted mother, strong willed and autocratic at home, but wholly subordinating herself to the interest of her son.
The Medieval Period

Outstanding women like Smt. Ramabai Ranade, Pandita Ramabai, Smt P.K. Roy, Lady Bose, Madame Bhicaji and Shirin Cursetyi dedicated themselves for opening opportunities and careers for women. Rani Lakshmi Bai was not only the woman who fought against the Britishers, many other women, who were attached to the Rani were also prepared to give their lives for the cause of freedom. Lalita Bai Bakshi, wife of Maharaja Bakshi the ruler of neighbour state was the commander of women volunteer corps which the Rani had organized under the leadership of Kashi Bai, Jhalkari, Sundar, Mundar and many other brave women enrolled themselves as volunteers. Moti Bai, another woman was holding the post of the director of Intelligence under the Rani of Jhansi.

Begaum Hazarat Mahal of Lucknow also participated in mutiny. Rani of Tulsipur, Rani of Ramgarti in Madhya Pradesh, Rani of Juelpore and Rani Jindan also took active part in the mutiny. The involvement of Rani Tace Bai, Begum Zeenat Mahal, wife of Bahadur Shah Zafar of Delhi in meeting is also well known. There were several other women in different parts of the country who supported the cause. Their roles may not have been significant, but they helped directly and indirectly for such movements. For instance, the Thakurani of Budri contributed
to the rebel funds. Rani Digambar Koer joined the rebels at Gorakhapur and Rani of Tikari, Gaya added to the fortification of Tikari.²

Rani of Kittur Chennamma fought against the British empire after the death of her husband, Mallasarjana. It is revolutionary movement in India. The Kittur was a small territory in Karnataka of South India. She fought for the sake of Kittur province. She was a brave and intelligent woman who fought against Thackary, with the help of Sangolli Rayanna. She was the first lady who fought for freedom for her province against British Empire.

The Modern Period

The first outbreak of the revolutionary movement was marked in Bengal when Lord Curzon attempted the partition of Bengal. Miss Rumudini Mitter, daughter of Keisto Mitter, preached the cause of the extremists through Suprabhat, a Bengali magazine. It propagated the cult of revolution by sister Nivedita. She became a member of national revolutionary council and her library at Calcutta became the meeting place of revolutionaries. Sarala Devi Choudhariani, niece of Rabindranath Tagore, raised voice against the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh. She was supported by Mrs. Margaret Cousins in her franchise movement for Indian women.
Madame Bhicaji Cama was a leader of the revolutionary party organisation in Europe. Miss P.Nauroji, Miss.Mrinalini Chattopadhayaya played an important role for the success of revolutionary activities. Kaplana data, Pritilata Waddedar, Bina Das, Sumita took part in revolutionary activities. Kamala Chatterjee, Bimal Pratika Devi, Shobha Rani Dutta, Ujjala Devi, Bonalata Das went to jail also. This was unique in entire history of India, the spectacle of hundreds of women taking part in political mass movement. Annie Basant started the Home Rule Movement; this was followed by the formation of All India Women's Conference in 1921. During this conference, Annie Besant and Smt. Herabai Tata expressed their views on issue of women's franchise. As a result of these agitations the women for first time exercised their franchise in the election of 1926.

Before 1926, women were not permitted to be a member of Legislative Council and Assemblies. After 1926, Dr.Poonam Ducase became the Health Minister of Travancore Council. Dr.Smt. Muttulaxmi Reddy was nominated to the Madras Legislative Council. She was the first woman who got elected to Legislative council in our Indian political history. Smt Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya was the first women to contest for a seat, but was defeated by a narrow margin.
The Khilafat Movement

The most significant feature of the period was, the 'Khilafat Movement' launched by Mahatma Gandhi, the movement was based on the policy of non-violence and non-co-operation. Women from almost all the provinces of India participated in this movement. The women of Bengal organized the "Mahila Karma Samaj". The women of Assam also formed organisation, under the leadership of Sudhalata Dutta and Annapriya Basu. In Bengal, Mutangiri Hazra of Tamluk division was killed by the police, while leading a procession, Women formed the ‘Bidyat Bihini’ and Bhagini Sena’, the two organization which rendered appreciable services and sacrificed for the success of revolution. In Punjab, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Pushpa Gujral, Sudhalata Datta, Annapriya from Assam and many others joined the movement.

Participation of Women in Political Process

In 1925, Sarojini Naidu became the President of Indian National Congress and provided leadership to women in liberation movement. In 1930, during the meetings of representative women’s organization, immediate acceptance of franchise took place without any discrimination between men and women. In 1931, they got the right to candidature in elections with certain conditions of eligibility. Those conditions were definite amount of property and they were in favour of
women. She should be graduate for seven years prior election, which means only the educated and rich women were given this right. Due to these terms and conditions, almost all women got deprived of this right.

In 1931, the Indian National Congress declared the provision of all types of right to all the citizens without any discrimination.

In 1937 elections, 8 women elected from common constituencies of states and reserved constituencies. Smt.Vijayalaxmi Pandit became minister of Regional Government of Uttar Pradesh. They got political rights in 1947 when India got independence. Thus, the promise made by Congress for political equality of woman was fulfilled after independence. It declared the basic rights of women including political and legal equality.

Gandhiji had also approved the political rights in the form of means of achieving general equality of status and opportunities for getting social, economic and political justice.

**Women As Co-Makers of the Constitution**

The present Constitution of India framed by the Constituent Assembly in the year 1950, is not a handiwork of men alone. The Constituent Assembly associated with prominent Congress women like Smt.Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Durgabai, Renuka Roy and Malati Chowdhary.
"As for as representation of women members in Constituent Assembly is concerned, there were, in all, 17 women members who were elected/nominated from various provinces and states. Among these, 5 were elected from the United Provinces, 3 from Madras, 3 from Bengal and one each from the Provinces of Bombay, Bihar, Central Provinces, and Berar, Punjab, Orissa and one women member was nominated from princely state of Travancore-Cochin.

The following Table - 2.1 gives the number of total representatives, number of women representatives and their percentage to total elected and nominated members from the various provinces and states to the Constitution making body of India.

Table -2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Name of the Province/ State</th>
<th>Total members elected/ nominated to Constituent Assembly</th>
<th>Women Members Elected/ Nominated</th>
<th>Percentage of Women Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>United provinces</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>C.P. &amp; Berar</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ajmer-Merwara</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Coorg</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>N.W.F.P.***</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sind</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Baluchistan</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Travancore Cochin State</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>06.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** C.P. Central Province , *** North-West Frontier State.
The following table 2.2 gives women representatives who were elected from various Provinces and States to the Constituent Assembly.

**Table 2.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Women Members</th>
<th>Name of the Province/State</th>
<th>Party Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Begum Aizaz Rasur</td>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>Muslim League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Smt. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit</td>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Smt. Sucheta Kripalani</td>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Smt. Kamala Chaudhrani</td>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Smt. Purnima Banarji</td>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Smt. G. Durga Bai Deshmukh</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Smt. Ammu Swaminadhan</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Smt. Dakshayani Velayudhan</td>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Smt. Renuka Roy</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Smt. Lila Roy</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Begaum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramulla</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>Muslim League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Smt. Sarojini Naidu</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Smt. Malati Choudhary</td>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Begum Jahanara shah</td>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>Muslim League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Smt. Hansa Mehta</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Rajkumari Amrit Kaur</td>
<td>C.P. &amp; Berar</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ms. Annie Mascarene</td>
<td>Travancore-Cochin State</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Women members of the Constituent Assembly took an active part in the proceedings of the Constitution making body. They made effective use of every available opportunity to present their view points on various matters.
The Constituent Assembly took two years, eleven months and seventeen days to complete its historic task of drafting the Constitution of Independent India. During this period, it held eleven sessions conversing a total of 165 days. Of these, 114 days were spent on the consideration of the Draft Constitution. In all, 284 members actually signed the Constitution when it was eventually ready for signature. Out of 15 women members, 10 appended their signatures in the original copy of the Constitution.

Women members of the Constituent Assembly of India played a very significant role in framing of the Constitution of India. The contributions of women members are in no way less significant than those of their male counterparts. The areas of their interest in the debates of the Constituent Assembly cover not only the issues concerning the uplift of women, but also other issues of national and international importance.3

The Preamble of the Constitution of India promises “to secure to all its Citizens, Justice—Social, Economic and Political, Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status, opportunity; and to promote among them all fraternity, assuring the dignity of the nation.”
While improvement in the status of women was a pledge made by the Constitution makers and admitted by the national government at the very outset as one of the major tasks facing the country, no comprehensive review of the achievements in the direction has been undertaken.

**Women In Other Higher Political Position**

Since independence, women in India have enjoyed higher position in political field, at the center, states and the local bodies. For instance Smt. Vijayalaxmi Pandit who was holding ambassadorial post for many years also had the distinction of being the first woman who occupied the Presidential chair of the World Organization, the U.N. General Assembly. Smt. Sarojini Naidu became the first woman Governor of a state. Her daughter Smt. Padmaja Naidu was also Governor of West Bengal. Coming to organizational sphere, Smt. Indira Gandhi was the Congress President and first woman Prime Minister of India. At present Smt. Sonia Gandhi is the President of Congress Party. The Women’s progress in our country is directly traceable to the Congress and goes largely to the credit of this national organization.

Congress lays no claim to monopoly of women’s welfare. There are number of women's organizations, old and new and those which have been working almost exclusively for the advancement of women.
For instance, we have National Council of Women, Y.W.C.A, and Federation of Women’s University. There is Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust which has been working in rural areas.

There are tasks on hand in which the women should actively engage themselves, quite important among these are:-

1) Welfare of Women and Children.
2) Social Education and Literacy Drive.
3) Promoting a deeper Sense of patriotism among the women.
4) Helping in food economy drive.
5) Campaigning for general austerity.
6) Encouraging national savings including investment in defence and gold bonds.

"The Indian Constitution took a very progressive step that they made a provision for universal adult franchise. This meant that every adult irrespective of sex, class, creed and religion could equally participate in the election process. Indian Women like men were encouraged to exercise their franchise. The leaders of the Congress took very concrete steps to see that some fair numbers of women are elected to the various legislatures. Particular care was taken to see that a few capable women were always included in the list. If we consider the so called backwardness of the Indian society, this stands out as one of the
remarkable achievements of the Indian leaders. Also, considering the fact that many women in Western World had to struggle hard to win their right of franchise, Indian women were fortunate in getting easily this right”.4

Political Status of Women In Various Countries

Women enjoyed independence and high status in Babylonia and in Egypt. The code of Hammurabi, the king of Babylonia, who reigned in 18th century B.C., granted a great deal of financial and personal freedom to married women. In ancient Egypt, they owned property, worked in many sectors of economy, took part in public life and mixed freely with men. In Sparata too, women enjoyed equality with men, mixing freely with them in public and there was even wrestling between men and women. They had a voice in political and public affairs.

The thinkers like Socrates and Plato said that women were entitled to the same type of education with men in Greek city-states. History repeats with evidence that royal and aristocratic women have exerted political power, had led armies in to battle and have devised laws and engaged in state craft. They showed a tremendous capacity of leadership.
After French Revolution some philosophers and revolutionaries made efforts to achieve equality of men and women for women. The first draft on the charter of Rights and Liberties was composed in 1838 and it contained the famous six issues, they are:

1) Equal electoral areas.
2) Universal suffrage.
3) Payment of members.
4) No property classifications.
5) Vote by ballot.
6) Annual parliaments.

Half of the Human Race in 1825 was arguing that women should have the franchise, because organizations of the society necessarily required emancipation of women which in turn involved political democracy. John Stuart Mill wrote a book on ‘Enfranchisement of Women’. In 1840 a few politicians had also raised the issue of women’s enfranchisement in their speeches. It was supported by Richard Cobben and Joseph Hume.

“New Zealand is the first country in the world to enfranchise women in 1893, followed by Australia in 1902. Finland gave voting right in 1865 for widows and unmarried women, in local government. However in that country they received universal suffrage in 1906.
Women tax payers in Norway received the right to vote in municipal elections in 1901. Danish women started voting in municipal elections from 1901 and for Parliament from 1915. Between 1910 and 1920, women in twelve more countries secured voting rights.\(^5\)

In 18\textsuperscript{th} century, women for the first time in England proposed for voting right. In 1870's, the women's suffrage bills were introduced in parliament nine times in ten years. In 1869, women were granted the power to vote in town councils and country councils. Sweden granted right to vote in 1918. Soviet Union granted equal voting rights to women following the Russian Revolution of 1917. Luxemburg and Germany granted voting rights to women in 1918 and 1919 respectively. Women of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland gained voting rights in 1919. Hungarian and Lebanon women received voting rights in 1920 and 1952 respectively. Another nine countries granted voting rights to women in subsequent decade. The other countries like South Africa in 1930, Brazil in 1932, Cuba in 1934 and Turkey in 1930 granted voting rights to women.

Thailand became the first Asian country to establish universal suffrage in 1932. Italy and Greece granted voting right to women in 1945 and 1915 respectively. In Japan this privilege was given in 1945. The Constitution of India recognized this political right in the year 1950.
By 1987, women had the right to vote in at least 115 countries, according to the Inter Parliamentary Union, the NGO of National Parliaments.

Instances of women rising to high political position are uncommon in history. A few queens and some women of extra ordinary personality yielded great power as they rose to meet the existing situations. Queen Elizabeth- 1st John of Arc, Cleopatra, Catherine the Great, Jhansi Rani, Kittur Rani Chennamma and Razia Sultan were the some great personalities. Queen Amine of Katsina became families for widespread conquests during the first half of the fifteenth century. Queen Boadicea of the Iconic in Britain rose against the Roman invasions and socked camelodunum. Queen Isabella was known as great general of Spain. She and her husband Ferdinand jointly ruled Argon and Castle in 1479. Madame Poncet served as hussar under Napoleon. During nucleonic wars, Louisa Scanagatti served as an Lieutenant in Austrian and Sardinian armies.

The Women of 20th Century

Miss Agnes C. Macphail, the first woman member entered the Canadian House of Commons in 1921 and continued up to 1940s. The first woman to hold cabinet rank in the central government was Mrs. Ellen Furlough who become the minister of citizenship and migration. In 1963, Miss Judy La Marsh became the minister of National Health
and welfare. Miss Charlotte Whiten served in capacity of Mayor in the city of Ohawa. She was declared Canada's woman of the year six times.

Elizabeth K. Lane became the first woman High Court Judge of Britain in 1966. Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister of U.K. and was leading political person in the world. Nina Bang joined the Danish Cabinet in 1924 and Muina Sillanappa the Finish Cabinet in 1927. They served as ministers of Education, Associated minister of Social Affairs and Ambassador to Norway. In Sweden, women served in different capacities at national and international levels.

Smt. Alva Mydral led the Swedish delegation to 17 nations Disarmament Committee in Geneva. Mrs. Ingebarth Honsen became the first woman President of Danish Parliament. Miss Raghilder Helgadottir became Ice Land's first woman speaker of Parliament in 1963. Mrs. Mara Radic was Ambassador of Yugoslavia to Switzerland for four years. Mrs. Josephina Mc Neil was Eire's minister to Switzerland, Mrs. Amentia de castillo Led become the first woman to hold a ministerial post in Mexican Government. Then she became the under secretary in Department of Education in 1960, Mrs. M.C. Salmorande Tamayo appointed as Judge of the Mexican Supreme Court. In 1954, Madame Melahat Rucan became the first woman
appointed as judge of the Turkish Supreme Court, Smt. Golda Meri was the minister of Labour and Foreign Affairs in Israel.

In Srilanka, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandarnaike became the first woman Prime Minister in 1959. Smt. Indira Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister of India in January, 1966. Since independence, other women who have held high offices in India are Smt. Vijayalaxmi Pandit who has made her mark as ambassador to the USSR, the US and the U.K. Smt. Sarojini Naidu was the Governor of the United Provinces. Smt. Sucheta Kripalani was the able Chief Minister of U.P. in 1963. Smt. Padmaja Naidu was quite successful Chief Minister of West Bengal. Smt. Nandini Satpati, Smt. Shashikala Kakodekar became chief ministers of Orissa and Goa respectively. Smt. Ramadevi became first woman governor of Karnataka. Uma Bharati, Smt. Vasundara Raje, Smt. Rabri Devi, Smt. Sheela Dixit too became women Chief Ministers of various states.

Benzir Bhutto was the first woman Prime Minister of Pakistan. Mrs. Khaleda Zia was Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The sisters Mrne Sunnet Sen and Mme Chiang Kat Shek were very powerful women in China. The Dame Annabella Runkin of Australia was the Minister of Housing in the late 1960s. In Afghan Miss Kobra Nuorzai was the minister of Public Health.
Many factors helped women to occupy many political and administrative positions. Some political leaders of various countries helped them to progress in politics. For instance, in 1966, women Governors were appointed in all 26 provinces of the country. Smt. Indira Gandhi, Smt. Bandarnaike of Sri Lanka and Mrs. Person of Argentina had a political background, which helped them greatly. Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher came up through their talent and diligence.

**Participation In National And Local Politics**

In Sweden, single woman elected to the Senate in 1921 and three women were elected to the Chamber of Deputies. The first woman was elected to the Dominion Parliament in 1933. Participation of women in parliaments of Scandinavian and East European Countries show an increasing trend, fluctuation is marked in Countries like United States, Germany, Brazil and India.

A slender upward movement in participation of women in National Legislatures of the Countries is noted during the mid-1970. The political scientists opined that the increasing number of highly educated women, international consciousness and the greater participation among women all over the world account for this upward swing.
A few decades ago, women enjoyed the position of Mayor in different cities of the World. Mrs. Inga Thomson was the first woman Mayor elected to the City Council of Stockholm in 1959. Mrs. Edel Saunter became the first female Lord Mayor of Copenhagen for four years. Mrs. Tom Clarke was first Chairperson of Dublin Country Council, Mrs Catherine Bvrne was the next Dublins Lord Mayor in 1958. In India Smt. Sulochana Modi became the Mayor of Bombay in 1956. Smt Aruna Asaf Ali was elected for second term as Mayor of Delhi, in 1994.

After independence, the states of Southern Asia developed educational opportunities for women and sought to improve their legal and Constitutional rights. Women’s organizations in Indonesia, Vietnam and India continued to press for social reforms and political equality, mostly under affiliation with male dominated political parties. The political and economic opportunities have widened for middle and upper class women, especially in India and the Philippines.

At Global level, out of 191 Countries in World, only nine countries currently have women elected head of states and 39 states have elected women Presidents and Prime Ministers. According to the UN Report, women today comprise less than one third of the world’s Cabinet Ministers and one- fifth of all sub- ministerial positions. The Inter- Parliamentary Union estimates that world-wide there were about 5,400 women at parliament in 2001.
After India's Independence the position of women in society has been expected to improve due to the provisions of equal rights. Women have begun a very significant role in every walk of life. In different stages of its existence, Indian society is experiencing the changes in social organizations and relations between its component parts and also in ideology. The status and empowerment of women as a vital aspect of Indian society reflect similar changes.

The Indian Constitution guarantees political equality through the institution of adult franchise and Article 15 which prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex. It should be kept in mind that this recognition of political equality of women was a radical departure not only from socio-cultural norms prevailing in traditional India, but also in content of political evolution. Political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and in value given by society to the role of women.

The Independence brought the promise of actual liberation and equality. The Constitution pledged the nation to achieving a just society based on the individual and proclaimed the right to political and legal equality as the fundamental rights to all Indians.
Rights of Women Under The Constitution

The Constitution of India clearly gave the picture of rights and measures in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights and Directive principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties. The Article 14 of the Constitution provides for equal rights in political, economical and social affairs. Article 15 prohibits any discrimination against women. Article 16 and 19 of the Constitution provide for equal opportunity as well as equal pay for equal work, irrespective of sex. Under the Directive Principle of State Policy, Article 42 directs the government to make provision for women. Fundamental Duties inserted in the Constitutional 42nd amendment calls up on all the citizens to adopt practices that uphold the dignity of women. In keeping with this spirit of equality, the Constitution through its 73rd Amendment provides for reservation of 33 percent seats for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

After Independence, the government of India has taken several measures to improve the status of women. A National Commission for Women was appointed. The Government of India has enacted a number of women related acts such as Child Marriage Act, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, The Suppression of Immortal Traffic in Women and Girls Act 1956, later amended in 1976 and 1986. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, the Maternity Benefit Act of 1961, amended in

The international environment is so conductive in increasing the status of women in India. The four World Conferences namely Mexico 1975, Copan hagen 1980, Nairobi 1985, Beijing 1995, the World Summit for Children 1980, the International Conference of Nutrition 1992, the International Conference on Population and Development 1994 gave ample support for women and their development programs in India.

Role of Women in State Governments:

Women Legislators simultaneously made their appearance in Central Assembly, among the more notable are Renuka Roy, Radhabai Subbarayan, Ammu Swami Nathan, Sucheta Kripalani, Mridula Sarabai, Rameshwari Nehru and Kamaladevi Chattopadhayaya.

Smt. Violet Alva, Renu Chakravarty, Dr. Seeta Paramanad, Jaishri Raiji, Uma Nehru, Indira Mayddeo, Tarkeshwari Sinha, Savitri Nigam participated in political field as Parliamentarians. Notable among the new member of Parliament are Renuka Roy, politician and social worker, became Minister of Rehabilitation in Government of West
Bengal. Parvati Krishnan, a communist member was a brilliant debater in Parliament. Subodra Bai Rani, Sudha Joshi were Parliamentarians.

In Assam, Usha Borthakar was Deputy Minister of Social Welfare and Rural Development. In Bihar out 32 of women legislators in State Assembly two were Deputy Ministers. Jyottivmooyee Devi was incharge of Welfare Department. Nirmala Raje Bhosale was Deputy Minister of Education in Bombay State, Kumari K.R.Gouri was Minister of Revenue and Excise in Kerala.

The National Federation of Indian Women was formed in 1954, by active left wing members of A.I.W.C, who struggled for Egalitarian and socialist structural changes in socio- economic sphere. They demanded a network support services for working women in Urban and Rural areas. Women peasants, agricultural labourers, workers in factories, the service sectors, school and offices joined in a large numbers in this struggle. The leaders were highly educated and progressive minded elite women. Mahila Dakshata Samithi and Women’s Competence Committee founded in 1977. Many groups those are autonomous from parties like-Samata Manch, Equality Forum, Stree Sangarsh Samiti, Women’s Struggle Committee, Stree Mukti Sangathan, Women’s Emancipation, Feminist Network Collective, Stree Sangathan, Women’s Power organization and Purogani Sangathan, Forward
Stepping Organization, Agni, represented a new awareness of women and the necessity of organized struggle against social injustice to ensure the achievement of the goals of women's decade, 1975-1985.

Organization were involved in bringing women into development, namely Self Employed Women's Association in Ahmedabad, Working Women's Forum in Southern States and Annapurna Mahila Mandal in Bombay.

Late Smt. Indira Gandhi gave a speech at inaugural of All India Women's Conference, New Delhi on March 1980, on subject True Liberation of Women. She told that from the beginning, the Congress struggled not only for political freedom, but also for economic, cultural, individual freedom. This freedom did not mean that we imitate other country's system or any other path, but meant creating an Indian road improving the Indian personality. So that we could bring equality and justice in our society without sacrificing its original value.

The 33% reservation in local bodies- Panchyats and Municipalities is a historic move that will allow a large number of women to participate in decision making. According to some estimates, over million women will benefit from 74th Constitutional Amendment of 24th April, 1992. Under the new dispensation there will be 2.26 lakh Gram Panchayats with a average of 10 women members per Panchyat,
there will be 22.6 lakh Panchayat women members. There will be 5,736 Panchayat Samitis and also 457 Zilla Panchayats. The potential for women’s participation at these levels of government is therefore, tremendous, with one-third reservation and seats at all levels.

A woman in India has a special role. She is the upholder of traditions and a careful acceptor of modernity. Her task is to be a vehicle for social reform and to bring in of a new society. Women have played a very significant role in the growth and development of Parliamentary Democracy in India. They have occupied important positions both in legislature and the government. “Down the ages, women have played important role in vital sectors of collective life. Our Indian Civilization witnessed the equality of status between men and women in Vedic Period. The transformation of society and the resultant changes in Women’s social movements that highlighted the issues relating to equality of men and women.

The impact of nineteenth Century reform movements and the spread of modern education women brought about qualitative changes in their consciousness regarding their status in setting up of women’s organizations, namely the Women’s Indian Association, this was later merged in All India Women’s Conference.
Women’s activism displayed during the struggle for freedom was a distinguished from the traditional nation of their role in society. This was mainly due to the function of mesmerizing call given by Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhiji to all sections of society to fight non-violently against colonial rule.

Mahatma Gandhiji had a decisive impact on women towards the freedom struggle. Events proved that without the co-operation of women the freedom struggle would not have been so successful. They participated in Satyagraha also. In 1931, the Karachi session of Indian National Congress took the historic decision, committing itself to political equality of women, regardless of their status and qualifications. The Government of India Act, 1935 increased the number of enfranchised Indians, the proportional suffrage rights of women. With the enactment and adoption of constitution of free India in 1950, a new era dawned for vast millions of country particularly in context of women, this symbolized the beginning of a progressive period.

In fact, women’s empowerment and gender equality is a prerequisite for effective participation of women in strengthening the institutional structure of democracy. Women’s participation in legislature is not only indispensable for the success of democracy but also for the overall progress and development of society and nation.
Women's empowerment and their representation in decision-making bodies is considered as basic and critical to every aspect of nation building.

Down the ages the women's role in society has been constantly changing. It is from primitive up to modern period. Women's role in society has been changing in political field too. The overall analysis of the comparative study indicates the distinctive nature and character of the leadership of women as well as their role in political process.

Women enjoyed a high status in Vedic times. Indian women were looked upon as 'Sahadharmini' and equal partner of men in all walks of life. With the advent of foreign rule in India like Muslims and then British, the 'Paradh' system being adopted and women became confined to the four walls of the house. Their education suffered and they had very little role to play in outside world. However, the influence of western education, the liberal ideas of great leaders and reformers like Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Jawaharlal Nehru and many others changed the status of women in India. Women were participated in National Movement as a part of general struggle for political emancipation in India. It is in this background the franchise movement has taken its position. The Constitution of India recognized and ensured equal political rights to all women in all spheres of life.
The general awareness, perception and grasp of women leadership exhibits high degrees of maturity. The women are conscious of their status, position, role, handicaps and other limitations. They are equally aware of their iniquitous and unjust representation in formal organs of the power such as party organization, Legislative Bodies and Council of Ministers. It is vital and imperative that women leadership establishes grass-root linkage with mass of women and mobilize them through movement to exert greater pressure on the decision making process.

In western societies democratization of women in political life through French Revolution, American War of Independence and later Feminist movements. It emphasized that the political rights resulting in enfranchisement consequent to such movements, women franchise was extended in France in 1918, England 1915 and Switzerland in 1971. The Feminist Movement succeeded to secure political rights for women in 1920 in U.S.A.

The women today is poised to take off. The 'Voice from the Kitchen' is beginning to be heard at national and international level. Without the participation and mobilization of women no programme could be successful and we can neither make progress nor build a new India.
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