CHAPTER II

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND WOMEN
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Women's under-representation in politics is an empirical fact; they are not adequately present in elected assemblies in the same proportions as they are present in the electorate. But the characteristics of those elected may diverge in any number of ways from the characteristics of those who elect them, and this is not always seen as a matter of democratic consequences.¹

'Representing' means "acting in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them". Fair representation cannot be guaranteed in advance; it is achieved in more continuous process, which depends on a (some what unspecified) level of responsiveness to the electorate. The representation may and almost certainly will differ from those they act for, not only in their social and sexual characteristics but also in their understanding of where 'true' interests of their constituent lie.²

When the movement for women's equal rights started in the 18th century, there was no question of political representation for women. The reason was not that everyone agreed that women should be represented rather the argument was that women were indirectly represented. The justification for this agreement is best illustrated by the often-quoted common law view found in Blackstone's commentaries "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law, that is, the very being or legal existence of women is suspended during the marriage, or
at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of husband, under whose wing, protection, and cover, she perform every thing.\textsuperscript{3}

The movement for gender equality, particularly political equality and political representation for women has been one of the defining developments of our time. Despite the progress achieved in this direction, much more remains to be done. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that every one has the right to take part in the government of his or her country. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women’s social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote in for proper functioning. In this respect, women’s representation and participation in political life play a vital role in empowering women and sustaining democracy.\textsuperscript{4}

It was not until the French Revolution that the idea of women sharing political power gained any support. Women were in the forefront when Bastille fell and again when they proceeded to Versailles and forced the king and the Assembly to return to Paris. Unfortunately, enfranchisement did not come to women with the Revolution. Although the States Generals Meeting after 175 years, adopted universal suffrage to all citizens above 25 years, women were left
out. Even powerful clubs formed during the revolution and whose members were aiming at a pure democratic republic did not include emancipation of women in their agenda. On the contrary, women were kept out of politics and their clubs were closed.

Napoleon Bonaparte disliked representation for women and said:

"Nature intended women to be our slaves and it is only because of our distorted outlook that they venture to describe themselves as our rulers.... What a mad idea to demand equality for women. They are our property, we are not theirs".

In the UK it was only when the Chartist Movement started that women came together to demand political power. They felt that participation in the Movement along with men would pave the way for their enfranchisement. But when the charter was about to be presented the male colleagues took the women’s suffrage issue out of it feeling that it might bring ridicule upon the agitation and demanded only male suffrage. Opponents of women’s suffrage argued that women and working class men could not lay claim on the vote because their interests could be safeguarded by husbands and fathers and people of the middle classes. The idea of women as voters was ridiculed through cartoons also. Women were shown coercing men to vote for their candidates by influencing them with their beauty. They were called “sweetheart votes” and were shown as chairperson in meeting with nothing but tea and coffee on the agenda.
However, the election of John Stuart Mill to Parliament in 1865 marked the beginning of the real battle for women's enfranchisement. Mill was convinced that the social question was as important as the political question for women but even he was not for universal suffrage but for those women who fulfilled the requirements of property, etc., as was laid down for men. Unfortunately, in spite of his powerful arguments in support of women's enfranchisement, his amendment was lost. Subsequently, women kept up the pressure and got the franchise in the municipal election for women tax payers in 1869 and in the school boards a year later.

In the USA, where democracy was considered to be the strongest, universal suffrage was expected as necessary and essential fallout of independence but with independence even such suffrage as women had was taken away. In the absence of any support, women decided to link their demand with the issue of the abolition of slavery. But even after the abolition of slavery and the grant of suffrage to the male Negroes, women were nowhere near their goal. On the other hand, the courts reprimanded them when one of them went and cast her vote as a test case.

For away from the Western world it was in New Zealand and Australia, those women won the race for the vote. Their strategy was to bring women together on the issue of temperance first and then unitedly demand the vote to curb the evil drinking. The first petition was submitted to the New Zealand Parliament in 1891 and their demand for universal suffrage was acceded to in
1893. In Australia, the success was slow to come. Whereas two provinces granted the demand in the nineteenth century, the others had to wait till 1902.

Strong suffrage movements were engulfed the Scandinavian countries also at that time but success came only in early twentieth century. Finland gave universal and equal franchise to its women in 1906, Norway in 1913, Denmark in 1915 and Sweden in 1921.

Women in the United States had to wait till 18th August 1920 and those in the UK till 2nd July 1928 to get their right to vote. The struggle assumed violent properties in the UK many a time. The Russian women had got enfranchisement as a result of the communist takeover in 1917 when all the citizens were given equal rights in all spheres.5

The Second World War accelerated the granting of the right to vote to women in many more countries like France, Hungary, Italy and Yugoslavia in 1945. It may be seen that the Revolution in Russia and the two World Wars all violent events acted as catalysts to make the male Parliaments in the West to grant the right to women who had worked hard during those violent periods had produced excellent results even in those areas which were traditionally the male domain. Unlike men they had to prove their mettle to acquire it.

INDIAN WOMEN'S QUEST FOR REPRESENTATION

Representation of the Indian people in the governance of the country began with the policy of association under the Indian Councils Act, 1861 and was further enhanced under the Indian Council's Act, 1909, commonly known as the
Morley-Minto reforms. There were three kinds of electorates-general, class and special—but women were left totally out of any representation in the governance of the country.

It was not the result of any apathy of Indian Women toward political representation. Many had taken the lead to demand political rights to raise their status. The Indian National Congress had thrown its doors to them from the very beginning and they were regularly attending its sessions since 1889. In 1917, the INC even elected a woman Ms. Annie Besant as its president.

Dorothy Jinnarajadasa, Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant founded the first India wide organisation, the Women's Indian Association, in 1917 in Madras. It provided the voice to whom to demand the right to vote after the First World War. In spite of the sustained efforts women did not get the right even under the Government of India Act, 1919, commonly known as the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. Montague remained totally unimpressed with their demand and later remembered that the meeting was only as an “interesting” one. The Southborough Committee also rejected the demand as being ‘out of harmony with the conservative feeling in the country’, although all the political parties in the country supported it.

Unfortunately, the pressure was kept up both by the political parties as well as the women's organisations and an Indian Women's delegation consisting of Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Heerabi Tata and Mithu Tata went to England to give evidence before a Joint Committee of the Parliament. Reluctantly, the British
Government passed on their burden to the provisional legislatures in India terming the demand of the Indian women as 'domestic subject'. It was under the false impression that none of the provinces would grant the right. This was proved wrong immediately. Madras Provincial Legislature gave the right in 1920. Bombay in 1921 and U.P. in 1923, Assam in 1924 not only enfranchised women but also gave them right to stand for election. In a country where men were accused of treating women as chattel, women got the right to vote without any violence and with full support from men politicians, leaving a country like England far behind.

However, as women got the right on the same terms as men, owing to property qualifications, the total number of women who could vote was only one per cent against the 14 per cent men.

Mahatma Gandhi launched his Civil Disobedience Movement and encouraged women to participate in it. They did it in large numbers and gained a lot of political confidence. In the historic Karchi Session, the Indian National Congress passed the Declaration of Fundamental Rights and recognised women's equality with men and favoured universal adult franchise. Thus, women's participation in national movement opened new vistas in women's struggle for political representation.

In the Three Round Table Conferences, the Indian women representatives demanded universal adult franchise so that their numbers could rise as voters, but it was rejected. On their demand for reservations of women in all the legislatures
for at least two elections, a demand made against the wishes of Mahatma Gandhi, the British agreed to extend the vote to wives and widows of property owing men but the Indian women did not accept it for the reason that “elementary rights of human being should not be based on some extraneous factors such as wifehood”. The women’s organisations also did not support the demand for any reservations because of their belief in equal citizenship.

Subsequently, the Government of India Act, 1935 while giving more powers to the Indians at local and national level, restricted the voting rights to only one-fortieth of the adult population. However, sexwise only 60 lakhs women got it against 13 crore men. Although small in number women voted with enthusiasm and stood in the 1937 elections in large numbers, 80 women got elected, the third highest in the world after USA (140) and Russia (130).

INDEPENDENCE AND THE FIRST GENERAL ELECTIONS

The Constitution of India gave franchise to all men and women above the age of 21. There were 17.3 crores voters in the first electoral list but the turnout of voters was poor at 45.7 per cent, much lower than many countries when they went for elections after getting adult franchise. The percentage of women who voted was only 37. The number of women who entered the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha was poor with only 14 and 16 respectively. This was after women had fought with men throughout the freedom struggle with credit.
A study was conducted in some rural and urban areas in Rajasthan to find out the impediments to women voters apart from continued larger distances of the polling booths and an overall poor status. Some of the reasons are listed below:

(a) Men of the family discourage women if the candidate(s) do not belong to their castes.

(b) Men do not feel the necessity of taking women along to vote if they are confident of their candidate winning the election with their votes alone.

(c) In cases where men have decided to capture the booth.

(d) Adverse weather.

(e) Purdah system.

(f) Lack of desire to travel unless the candidates provide vehicles to go.

(g) Expectation of violence.

(h) When men are away, women do not leave their homes.

(i) Repeated pregnancies, location, too many siblings to look after or poor health.

(j) Inability to get away from household chores like fuel wood, fodder and water fetching consuming all the time.

(k) Voting on a religious day.

(l) Most of women being in the unorganised sector of employment cannot get away from the contractors to vote.

Owing to the lack of attitudinal change in the male politician, there have been wide gaps between the years of the granting of the franchise to the women.
and any concrete action to bring about equal status and equality of opportunity in employment or equal wages. This has resulted in exhortations to governments to bring more and more women in their legislatures.

THE ISSUE OF RESERVATION FOR WOMEN: THE 73rd AND 74th AMENDMENTS

Owing to Rajiv Gandhi thrust on strengthening the Panchayati Raj structure and providing 33.3 per cent reservation for women, which was supported by other political parties also, the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act. 1992 came into force, but only after his death, on 20th April 1993. It entitled nearly 6.7 lakhs women to get elected to the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the country. It also reserved 33.3 per cent seats of Sarpanchas, Pradhans and Prmukhs to take women to the decision-making level.

WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN THE URBAN AREAS

Political support was given to those women only who had political, politically powerful families to fall back upon. Unfortunately, none of the candidate had only view on women's issues and none was willing to take them up as their election planks. They talked of the common problems like sanitation, etc., only. Many were not even contesting from their own wards but were put up by the political parties from other wards. Some of them, although against the purdah system, were themselves in the purdah for fear of upsetting their electorate. All of them unanimously accepted that their lives were under constant control of their men at home and that they would not do anything against their wishes.
There is unanimity in their views that reservation was a godsend opportunity for them without which they would not have ever dreamt of fighting an election. Most of them admitted that it would not be possible for them to give separate and sufficient attention to women's issues. They felt that the issues did not have any vote catching appeal. Most of the persons accompanying these candidates during canvassing were men. It was further noticed that women also were not very anxious to keep away from corrupt practices like distribution of cash or liquor to the electorate to get votes.  

**WOMEN PARTICIPATION: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN INDIA**

The factor, which contributed towards developing women’s movement, was the spontaneous and massive participation of women in the struggle for national freedom. The movement as developed by Mahatma Gandhi encouraged women to actively participate in it. This participation helped in the removal of social shakes and activized women to press for political equality.

The 19th Century reformers had to a certain extent paved the way for the movement of women’s emancipation. This groundwork was the main achievement of the 19th century reformists in India. In the early 20th century a beginning was made in the direction of organised efforts for the betterment of women by forming women’s organisations led by women.

In 1910 Bharat Shree Mahamandal was inaugurated as an attempt to bring all organised women’s groups together. In 1917, another organisation called Women’s Indian Association was started in Madras, which led a delegation for
women's franchise. This was the first attempt to organise women on all India basis. By 1921, the organisation had established 48 branches.

The Government of India Act, (1919) did not enfranchise movement, but it did empower provincial Legislatures to remove the sex barriers at their discretion. In the first election in 1926, the Act enfranchised less than one per cent of the total female population. The vote was a symbol of equality and women wanted it.  

The National Congress had a wing of 'Desh Sevikas' (Female Servants for the Country) who pledged to non-violent methods of popularising social reforms. In 1918, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League had endorsed franchise for women.

In 1927, the All India Women's Conference was established, whose emphasis was on education. But later, in the wake of the new Constitution to be framed for India, the conference also included in its function, to discuss and contribute to all questions and matters that affect the welfare of the people of India with particular reference to women and children.

In 1931, the women's organisations submitted a combined memorandum before the franchise sub-committee to the Round Table Conference that was to meet in London, which emphasised on:

(a) Equal rights and obligations for all citizens without any bar on account of sex;
(b) No disability to attach to any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex, with regard to public employment, office of power of honour and in the exercise of any trade;

(c) Women to fight election on equal terms with men in the mixed general elections; and

(d) No reservation of seats for women, as such or special nominations.

The social reforms of the 19th and early 20th centuries prepared a fertile ground on which Gandhi could sow the seeds of inspiration for women's participation in the political movement. This participation in the freedom struggle, in a true sense, was a beginning of breaking the chains of a home bound and constructed life for Indian woman hood.⁸

With India attaining independence on August 15, 1947 and the framing of her Constitution, many of the demands of the women's movement were incorporated. This special attention given to the problems of women and the recognition of political equality was a radical departure from the norms prevailing in traditional India. The Indian Constitution is described as a manifesto of social revolution. But even after 50 years, freedom and social justice have not reached all women. There is evidence to suggest growing violence against women, rape, wife battering, family violence, dowry deaths and prostitution. This is the stark reality for million of women. The declining value of women is surfacing in almost every aspect of life.
The Constitution of India has granted women equal rights of participation in the political process of the country along with equal opportunity and rights in education and employment. The Indian Constitution also guarantees political equality through the institution of adult franchise. Article 15 prohibits any kind of discrimination. Article 15 (3), which empower the States to make ‘any special provisions for women and children’ even in violation of the fundamental obligation of non-discrimination among citizens, on the basis of sex.

This provision has enabled the State to make special provision for women. Article 16 (2) forbids discrimination in respect of any employment in office under the State on the grounds of “religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any one of them”. All these have assured normatively a significant position and status to Indian women.

The Directive Principles of State Policy in part IV of the Constitution incorporate the policy goals of welfare state. Some Article there deal with women indirectly while a few other concern women directly and have a special bearing on their status.

Together with the chapter 3 on Fundamental Rights, they concretise Constitutional vision of a new Indian socio-political order based on the principle of equality.

The Constitution of India has granted women equal rights but in practice or reality these rights are not sufficient because their voice is hardly given any
weightage. This is possibly due to their poor representation in the offices of Parliament. The following tables shows clearly.

**TABLE SHOWING WOMEN MEMBERS IN LOK SABHA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL NO. OF SEATS</th>
<th>NO. OF WOMEN MEMBERS</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
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<td>34</td>
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<td>22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>529</td>
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<td>544</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE SHOWING THE 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>
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</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>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table clearly indicates the low representation of women in the upper house of the Parliament. It was as high as 15.5 per cent Members in Rajya Sabha in 1990. Subsequently, it was decreased to 8.6 in 1998. It is significant to note that the Deputy Chairperson of a Rajya Sabha is a women, yet the women face increasing competition from male politicians for nomination to Rajya Sabha.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MALES</th>
<th>FEMALES</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF MALES WINNING</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES WINNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>26.05</td>
<td>51.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1473</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>2302</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2369</td>
<td>21.30</td>
<td>44.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
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<td>2784</td>
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<td>4478</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>4620</td>
<td>11.50</td>
<td>19.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>5406</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>5574</td>
<td>09.20</td>
<td>25.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>5962</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>6160</td>
<td>08.50</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1991</td>
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<td>325</td>
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<td>15.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>3976</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>4254</td>
<td>12.30</td>
<td>17.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obviously, the number of women contesting election has always been low, as may be seen from the above table. The highest number of women contestants has been nearly 599 in 1996, while the number of contestants has always been thousands, as the total contestants is as high as 13353 in 1996. However, it is encouraging to note from the table that the percentage of winners, women has considerably been more than that of men.
Data from a United Nation's Survey (1980) of Member Governments indicate recent levels of elected women officials at the local level and improvements have taken place in a few cases.

(a) In the German Democratic Republic, women in local office increased from 32.3 per cent in 1970 to 36 per cent in 1977.

(b) In the USSR in 1978, 49 per cent of the deputies to the local Soviets were women.

(c) In Kenya 20 per cent elected to local office were women.

(d) Romania increased local women representatives from 30 to 33 per cent from 1975 to 1978.

(e) In the Denmark women in local government increased from 12.1 to 17.7 per cent from 1975 to 1978.

(f) In Sweden, women in local government increased from 17 to 23 per cent during 1975 to 1978.

(g) Lebanon reported 10 per cent of elected local government positions were held by women in 1975, and

(h) In Newzeland, urban women increased their position in local government from 11.9 to 16.4 per cent from 1975 to 1977.\(^{10}\)

In the literature on Panchayati Raj in India when reviewed there are a number of studies. But in particular about women, a few studies have been conducted. A beginning was made in 1974 by the Government of India (Department of Social Welfare) by appointing a Committee to look into the status
of women. The report entitled Towards Equality (1974) is the first major attempt
to review and evaluate data on women's role, right and opportunities in the wake
of planned development. The report covered a wide perspective, including all the
important aspects affecting the life of women. It stressed the need for political
participation and representation in political institutions in the Parliament and State
Assemblies. It further states that it is only through reservation of certain
percentage of seats in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. We can expect women to
enter these institutions in larger number and participate effectively. The
Committee therefore recommended the establishment of statutory women's
panchayats at the village level to ensure greater participation by women in the
political process.  

Symbols of power, (edited volume) contains several articles on the
political status of women in various States of the country. The general view is that
women in India are showing signs of political awakening but their progress is
hindered by illiteracy, domestic pressures, dependency on men. By and large, a
few women who have emerged significantly into political prominence are those
who are economically well-off, and who belong to the upper state of society. A
few references to women in Panchayati Raj representation in those states where
no such provision existed before. The majority of women are found to be
nominated and hardly any women stand for elections.

It was to improve this situation and to make them to come out of the coma
of social bondage, that the 'policy of reservation' has been introduced. But why
reservations? Despite the existence of constitutional and legislative provisions designed to guarantee equality of women, the majority of women are still vastly under-represented in political and administrative posts that make important policy decisions affecting them. While efforts to improve women’s status have had some success, it is evident that new measures need to be taken to solve the problem of the continuing inequality of women.12

To empower is giving women the capacity to influence the decision-making process by integrating them into our political system. Implementation of this is the policy of reservation. Reserving seats of women in the political institutions will provide them an opportunity to raise their grievances and other related social and economic problems in a formal manner. This is necessary in order to ensure better position for women in all spheres of life.

Today, one of the issues of concern is the level of women’s participation in political life. This is because achievement of equality in all areas is seen as inseparable from active political participation. Here, political participation includes the right to vote, right to contest, right to candidacy, women as campaigners, women as members, women’s involvement in the decision-making process and appointment of women at all levels of government, including the participation of women at the grass-roots through the Panchayati Raj institutions.

But the major obstacles to women’s full participation in politics, is a nearly universal societal attitude that has valued women principally as mothers and wives. Because of this, women have been restricted from equal opportunity.
Reservation of seats is an instrument of political empowerment of women. Although, this technique guarantees women representatives and recognition to half the population, many feel that through such method a small number of women representative can be isolated from decision-making and not represent a power to be reckoned within these institutions.\textsuperscript{13}

THE CONSTITUTION AND ISSUE OF WOMEN'S EQUALITY

The Constitution of India accepted the principle of equality of sexes. Its preamble spoke of equality of status and opportunity and of social, economic and political justice. Article 14 assured equality before the law and equal protection of the laws as a fundamental right. Articles 15 and 16 forbid any type of discrimination on the ground of sex in access to public places and public employment. Article 15 also provides that state may make special provisions for women and children and that such provisions, may not be unconstitutional violation of right to equality. Through Article 23, which gave right against exploitation, traffic in human beings and forced labours were prohibited. The Directive Principles referred to women at these places, Article 39 (d) asked the State to direct its policy to see that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women; and Article 39(c) enjoins on the State to see that the health and strength of men and women workers is not abused.

Though at first sight, the Constitution of India seems to negate discrimination based on sex, a careful scrutiny of its provisions reveals its endorsement of subordinate and dependent position of women. It tends to negate
whatever it seeks to give and at places has adopted an anomalous position on the issue at women’s rights and equality. For example, while Article 23 prohibited ‘forced labour’, the directive was placed in the Directive Principles of State policy with no time limit within which such a law would be enacted. It was only in 1976 that such a law was ultimately enacted with its own inherent problems whereby it is of help to a miniscule number of women workers in the organised sector only.¹⁴

Similarly, the retention of personal laws, which are premised on the principles gender inequality and subordination of women to male members of family and the equal rights for men and women, also negated principles of justice and equality enshrined in the preamble and Article 14 and 15 of the Constitution. The Right to Freedom of Religion embodied in Articles 25 to 28, as interpreted and legislative in the form of personal laws deny equality to women in personal, economic, sexual, social, educational and cultural level. The Constitution has nothing to say on women’s labour at home. A.R. Desai spells out economic assumption of the Constitution, enshrined in Articles 23,24 Part XII and Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, which according to him, exclude all labour, which produces use values (not produced for market) as non-productive and non-renumerable. This assumption excludes women’s labour at home, generating use values and not commodities, as having any economic value. Nor does it treat the work women do day and night for the family as economic exploitation, more specially in the absence of equal rights over property and productive resources of
the family. This decision left a large population of women from the purview of justice and also diluted the right to equality.

Thus two sections of the Constitution, namely, the section of Right to Freedom of Religion and Right Against Exploitation as formulated in various laws of the land clearly reveal how Constitution by permitting discrimination religious personal laws and by not acknowledging women’s labour at homes as exploitation have perpetuated gender injustice at the very source of law. Though Article 15(3) of the Constitution empowers the State to make special provisions with regard to women and children, the approach seems to be reformist, welfarist and causal. It was so because any polices for affirmative actions to be taken by the Government towards eradicating special disabilities related to women were bound to come into conflict with the ideology of gender discrimination inherent in personal laws.

The manner in which Article 15 of the Indian Constitution was formed that clubbed the special disabilities suffered by women with children and other socially and educationally backward classes of citizens such as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), is reflective of the attitude of the political leaders leadership involved in drafting the Constitution of dominated society and social injustices inflicted on the lower castes because of the perpetuation of caste system were not viewed as wider issues of social exploitation inherent in the patriarchal system and hierarchically ordered caste system. Rather, the law status of women as well as of other backward castes and classes was perceived as
resulting from social disabilities arising out of a situation of backwardness and 'weakness'. That is why the Constitution envisages special provisions' clause to help these classes and castes to remedy the disadvantage, disabilities or inequalities suffered by women, thus, was not perceived in a manner that viewed it as entrenched in the social, economic and political structures of society and polity. Its abolition required special efforts both at the material and ideological level, so that principles of equality and justice could be made a reality for women. Thus, if the Constitution neither treats gender inequality as a problem needing special attention and care, nor feels the need to create a culture, through its laws and legal ideology—wherein the values of social equality are accepted in everyday life, it only means that the Constitution quietly and tacitly supports a male dominated society.\textsuperscript{15}

This ideology is bound to reflected in the post-independent governmental efforts to ameliorate the conditions of women. It was natural that the ambivalence that was visible during social reform and national movements and was carried on in the Constitution Assembly would surface when efforts were made in the form of laws and policies by the Indian State to blunt the edge of male domination.

**POLITICAL AND LEGAL STATUS**

Women must have votes and legal status... thus wrote Gandhiji in 1929. Five and a half decades later, the Nation's women still seem to be merely at the threshold of political and legal equality.
On the political front, participation by women is on the increase the voter turnout is an indication, but such participation has extended significantly beyond voting.

On the legal front, the multiplicity of personal laws, lack of uniformity among these and ineffective implementation of the existing legal provisions have tended to perpetuate sex discrimination.

**POLITICAL STATUS**

Political equality is granted to women under the Indian Constitution, guaranteed through the instrument or adult franchise and Article 15, which prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex. Women however enjoy the Constitution sanction only to a limited extent in reality. No doubt more and more women are now actively participating in the political process but still only a few women hold elected positions. Fewer still are so placed as to able to influence political thinking.

**POLITICAL AWARENESS**

Today there is greater awareness among the power that the right of franchise gives to them. This awareness transcends castes, community, income levels or geographical barriers. The extent of awareness though varies significantly between different groups and different regions.

The levels of urbanisation and literacy do have some impact on awareness but this is not uniformly felt. On influence, however, are such factors as the
political culture of the area, the approach of the political parties to women and the inspiration provided by local leadership.

The political parties have generally been indifferent towards women. Treating them more as appendages to men. This has been a major factor in the continuing difference in the level of political information and understanding between men and women.

There does not appear to be any correlation between political awareness and political participation. For example, working women and women professionals do generally tend to have a high level of awareness but this is reflected in the level of their participation in the political process.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{POLITICAL PARTICIPATION}

Political participation is to be viewed in wider context; it covers, besides voting, active party membership, working during elections and contacting official for community related needs. Viewed from this angle the level of participation among women is generally low except in voting and perhaps attending meetings.

Electoral trends in Tamil Nadu do point to greater participation by women in the more recent times compared to the early 1960. Women voters account for nearly 49 per cent of those that cast their votes in 1984, against 47 per cent 1962. There have been variations in the intervening elections but these are marginal and the trend is an upward one over this period.
POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

The idea of women's franchise was mooted first in 1917, when a deputation of Indian women waited on (the late) Mr. Edwin Montagu, the then Secretary of the State for India. But in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms that followed, no mention was made of voting rights for women. This brought about an intensification of their campaign. From then on, progress was rapid and, in the short space of thirty years, a dream became a fulfilment.

In 1930 three Indian women participated in the Round Table Conference held in London to settle India's political future and in 1935, when a restricted system of franchise was introduced, women were accorded the vote. But it was not till the dawn of India's freedom and the adoption of her new Constitution, when elections were held on the basis of adult suffrage, that women really secured complete political parity with men. They now enjoy the right to vote and seek election, the right to seek and hold public office and the right to exercise public functions. Articles 14 and 16 relating to Fundamental Rights, guarantee to all citizens, irrespective of sex, "equally before the law", "equal protection of the law", "equality of opportunity in matter of public employment".

With the vast increase in their voting strength, women's political power has considerably enhanced, and women began to enter in large numbers the administrative departments of the Government, all grades of legislature, the cabinets in the Centre and in the States, and the various services, professions and vocations.
But their number everywhere has been disproportionately small. This is largely because women all over the world over entered rather late into public life. It might take a generation or two to bridge the gap.\(^7\)

Since the early twenties until the present era of the demand for 33 per cent reservation of seats in the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies, the Women’s Movement in India has equipped itself to carry on the struggle for women’s right to freedom, equality and empowerment. The history of demand for women’s reservation may be traced to the days of the Simon Commission in 1929 when women’s deputation demand that all literate women be given the right to vote to ensure their participation in politics and the electoral process. The dialogue for women’s participation continued all through the freedom struggle. Women got adult franchise and equal rights in the political process like men. However, since they were considered unequal both culturally and in accordance to the dictates of religion they failed to compete in male dominated politics. The report on the ‘Status of Women’ published in 1975 pointed out the declining number of women in the electoral process. This inspired the women’s voice for the reservation of seats from Panchayat to Parliament. However, the Government rejected the idea of reservation. The National Perspective Plan of 1988 recommended 30 per cent reservation of seats for women in the Panchayat Samities and Zila Parishads. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution provided one-third reservation of seats for women in the Gram Panchayats and Municipalities. This encouraged women to continue their struggle for 33 percent
reservation in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Their very low percentage, that is 8 per cent in the Lok Sabha is a serious matter of concern for democracy. The Women’s Reservation Bill is now pending before Parliament and there is doubt whether the Bill will see the light of day or die an unnatural death. But the women are aware their rights such as freedom, equality and empowerment and they will achieve their goal in due course.18

STRATEGIES

(a) Local leadership amongst women be identified, sensitised and trained to mobilize women in organised groups to articulate their demands and ensure proper action. Particular attention must be paid to development of interpersonal communication skills amongst the trainers and community leaders.

(b) The entire gamut of communication media must be used imaginatively to raise the self worth of women to make them effective citizens. Today’s world has been ushered into the ‘age of information’. Information and its flow to the citizens are vital for any analysis of political behaviour. Exposure to mass media is of tremendous educative value in today’s society. As with education and employment women benefit much more than men in improving their rates of political participation through exposure to mass media.

(c) Some sort of education is necessary for bringing out the potentialities of individual and making them more useful. The superiority of an individual
emanates from the excellence of her personality development through education. Education system should concentrate more on personality development.

(d) As a transitional measure, reservation of seats in the legislature should be adopted.

(e) To ensure women's effective participation in international affairs greater representation to women in all delegations must be provided.

(f) All political parties must be urged to ensure that at least some percentage of the candidates for election are women.

The political status of women should be improved and more women should be made to take active part in politics. In modern political frame, the need has arisen to form pressure groups. Women must become a force of reckon with, so that women leaders can create intelligent public opinion, thereby creating increased awareness of their rights. 19

Thus it seems that exposure to urban area, higher education, exposure to the system of co-education and employment are the facts favouring modern outlook and development of rational approach, which in turn would empower women to be active politicians.

WOMEN AND NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Indian women's involvement in politics in the modern era started in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although British imperialism profoundly influenced the political engagement of both elite and non-elite women
during this period, its impact on the character and purposes of their engagement was very different. Non-elite women fought against the British colonialists. Moved by the hunger of their children, the British confiscation of their land (their means of livelihood) and oppressive British taxes, women along with men, participated in “famine revolts” in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and other revolts in the nineteenth centuries.

Elite women were mainly involved in the Indian Renaissance – the social reform movement of the nineteenth century. The main goals were to do away with what were to elite women the most offensive of traditional Indian practices through the abolition of female infanticide, sati (immolation of widow on her husband’s funeral pyre), child marriage, and law prohibiting widows to remarry. The women in this movement also campaigned for women’s education. Although high caste women composed the main body of the movement, high caste western education men led it. The emphasis was not on women’s equality but rather on the separateness and complementarity of the roles of women and men in society. The movement was an attempt to make women into better mothers and wives for progressive western educated men by promoting women’s education and eliminating what these men saw as backward and degrading practices like sati.

With the beginning of the twentieth century a number of organizations exclusively for women appeared among high-caste or elite women. Beginning in 1913, Saroj Nalini Dutt, the educated daughter of a high-caste Hindu in the Indian Civil Service who was married to an officer of the same class and caste, founded
Mahila Samitis (Women’s Committees) in many towns. She also started women’s institutes in Bengal. In 1910, Sardadevi Choudhurani, also married to an officer of the same class and caste, founded the Bharat Shree Mahamandala (Great Circle of Indian Women) to assert women’s independent identity. She explained her frustration with other women’s organizations: “They are the so-called social reformers. They advertise themselves as champions of the weaker sex; equal opportunities for women, female education, and female emancipation are some of their pet subjects of oratory at the annual show. They even make honest efforts at object lessons in the above subjects by persuading educated ladies to come up on their platform and speak for themselves”.

In 1919, when Lord Montague came to India to discuss Indian demands for political representation, the WIA raised the issue of women suffrage. Its lobbying was somewhat successful and influenced the passage of the 1919 Government of India Act, which granted a restricted franchise to women, such that the right to vote in elections for the provincial assemblies was based on wifehood, property and education. In 1935 the act was extended so that women were also allowed to participate in elections to the Central Assembly.²⁰

The independence movement brought the two streams of politically involved women together - the elite and the masses, which both participated in the struggle for independence. They were non-violent soldiers in Gandhi’s army of liberation in the 1919 protest movements against the promulgation of the Rowlatt Acts - while strengthened control over the press and legalized internment without
trial for suspected subversives-and against the Jalian Wala Bagh massacre. Their support was vital in Gandhi’s 1921-22 No.1-Cooperation Movement, the Khalifat Movement (a pan-Islamist protest against the British policy undermining the Turkish Khalifat rule), the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31, the Salt Satyagraha of 1931, the Individual Satyagraha Movement of 1941, and the Quit India Movement of 1942. Women wore the hand-spun and hand-woven khadi cloth as a uniform, and they made salt and did not pay salt taxes in defence of the oppressive Salt Laws. They also picketed liquor and foreign clothes shops, burned foreign clothes, braved lathis (long, sturdy batons) and bullets, and went to jail. Nearly 10 percent of the prisoners in the independence movement were women with their babies in their arms. Other women who did not go to jail or were not directly involved in the activities of the Congress movement shouldered the burden of supporting their families while their men in jail.

By the time of independence the elite women’s movement had won the battle of the franchise, the partnership of a few women’s organizations and the Congress movement had been established, and women from all sectors of society had participated in politics. Direct political participation promoted women’s confidence and self-reliance and broke the barriers of the public private dichotomies in their lives.

Independence brought women constitutional guaranteed of justice, liberty, equality, and dignity for the individual in the form of the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of the constitution. Nehru for a new Indian socio-political
order was supported by the AIWC and the women who would soon form the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW). The NFIW's affiliation with the Women's International Democratic Federation made them aware of global trends and the thrust of the first U. N. Development Decade (1961-70).²¹

CONTEXT OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION

Of all aspects of relationship between women and politics it is women's political participation that has attracted most sustained attention from political scientists. Hence, it would be desirable to look into various dimensions of political participation of women.

According to some scholars political participation is a complex phenomenon liable to be influenced by different variables. It denotes a series of activities, which have bearing on the political process. To be more specific, these activities mainly are:

(a) Voting at the polls

(b) Supporting possible pressure groups being a member of them

(c) Personally communicating directly with legislators

(d) Participating in political party activity and thus acquiring a claim on legislators

(e) Engaging in habitual to discuss politics than vote and more vote than join parties or work in campaigns.²²

Politics was understood as a public activity dominated by men and requiring typically masculine, while women were identified above all with a
private world of family and domesticity. However this male oriented perspective was seriously challenged, particularly, from the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century contributing to important changes in perspective towards women's role in politics.

The emergence of new trend has drastically changed the domain of women politics and relationship during the last five decades. The increasing involvement of women in the mainstream politics and the impact of feminist movements all over the world led to an entirely different approach towards the role of women in politics. Taking as its starting point the politics in the broadest sense as an enterprise dominated by male, the new approach started exploring several new issues connected with the role of women in politics. Subsequently, women's participation in politics has emerged as a new field of interest as well as research in different social sciences.

In the Indian context the involvement of women in politics continuously is far less until recently. In this country, the participation of women in political process has been a logical outcome of their involvement in the freedom struggle. Unlike the west where the women had launched several movements to get political rights, in India the National Movement helped to enter into the area of politics. After Independence women are involved in the political process in various capacities as voters, as candidates contesting various elections and as participants in the debates of legislative bodies at different levels. They also hold positions in political organisations at different levels including the cabinets. Yet it can be noticed, despite the fact that the extent of their involvement in the elections
as voters reflects their majority. The representation in the various legislative bodies presents an extremely dismal picture, which depicts the near absence from the decision-making bodies at various levels. As evidences indicate there has been the considerable increase in the number of women as voters in various elections held to the Parliament and State Assemblies but their representations in these bodies continued to be extremely marginal.²³

As a result of the policy initiatives of the Government, welfare programmes and women's movements there have been some enlightened changes in the lives of the women.

Women's low participation in political decision making bodies at different levels and their poor representation in the services were taken for granted and steps were being initiated to enhance their representation in all levels such as legislative bodies and in Government services.

The policy makers and planners are increasingly becoming gender sensitive. Inspite of these positive developments the position of women all over the world presents a gloomy picture in all fields, particularly in political field. Unfortunately the development rhetoric of the State, its policy concerns and the changed attitude of political parties could not make much different in the direction of providing them equal opportunities in the political field along with men.

Access to higher education has expanded the boundaries of women's social roles, which resulted in an increased sharing of responsibility in the management of family affairs, continuous participation in electoral political
activities and greater participation and representation in legislature and political activities.

On the whole it can be stated that during the last fifty years of India’s Independence mainly two types of changes have taken place in the field of women’s participation in politics. One, the realization and acceptance of need elimination of gender bias in order to increase the number of women in the formal political system and second, the urgency of adopting reservations as a state policy for increasing women’s representation in the political sphere. It is important to state that women’s prominent role in social movements for a long time and their constant protests and demonstration since the seventies and the eighties did succeed in making meaningful State interventions and getting some of their demands accepted. For instance, the National Commission For Women (NCW) was formed in 1992 to promote and safeguard the interests of women, and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, reserving one-third seats for women in the local bodies like the Panchayat Raj and Municipal bodies came into effect in 1993. These few efforts resulted are shifting the emphasis of women’s programmes from welfare to development and empowerment perspectives.

“Politics” for women then, is no longer so untouchable and ungradable as in the past. Even if politics is viewed as sphere of violence and corruption, women no longer shrug from it but feel that they could make their contribution by improving the situation. This change of approach and attitude in women towards
politics is clearly visible today as also society's perception towards them as political leaders.  

Besides women's representation in political institutions in the other elements, which determine their political participation are voting pattern, the number of contestants, success ratio and the increasing political awareness. It is said that women particularly the rural illiterate women are not independent voters, they guided by the choice of their male members of the family and they completely lack information and political awareness. But the social mobilization and awareness campaign rather than literacy and urban living have been significant factors in increasing the number of women voters. The extent, nature and trends of Indian women's participation in the electoral process is much greater than in many other countries, including the developed ones and has been steadily expanding over the years. The gap in the voters' turnout between the men and women is getting narrow.

The percentage of women voters in various elections increased in the first few decades after which it has fluctuated without any systematic trend. But there has always been a gap of 8 to 11 per cent between men's women's turnout in the elections held to the Parliament and State Legislatures. There has also been a steadily increase in the number of seats contested by women, both for the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections.

Now a day, the Indian women are agitating for entry into Parliament and for this purpose demanding reservation of 33 per cent of the total seats in Lok
Sabha and State Assemblies. However, this issue has become very complicated than it may seem. It is not only question of a few more or a few women in the corridors of Parliament and legislatures but also a response to the fact that a large section of society had historically been denied its legitimate share in the exercise of political power, that ultimately determines its density.

After all, what is democracy if 50 per cent of the population have little or no say in it?

Reservation of seats for women in local bodies has shown that it has tremendous implications, not merely in terms of the number of women entering the public arena and holding public office, but also in terms of the social, economic and political impact that these reservations have had for the total system.

It is for these reasons that women are increasingly demanding political roles for themselves. They realised that the guarantees provided by the Constitutional do not ensure them effective participation and political equality as well as their due place in the political process. Hence, they wanted to gain entry into political institutions and in the functioning of the State, and to share control over the political power for the fulfilment of their ambition.

This alone would lead to a situation where women are able to change reverse the existing political situation, which has consistently been against their extension and aspirations and bring about the necessary changes in policy and the
The position of women in the Indian political scenario remains by and large, low profile and unorganised save for women who are from elite families, who are closely related to political leaders through blood or through marriage, and women who are high profile in other professions and their glamour is considered glitter of politics.

One unique aspect of high profile women in Indian politics is their political family background. Women who are not necessarily from elitist backgrounds, such as Ahilya Rangnekar, come from politically conscious family backgrounds. Few women like Mrinal Gore come directly from the grassroots level. Political power for most Indian women who have risen to prominence in politics, such as Indira Gandhi, Shankarpana Patil, Sucheta Kripalani, Jayalalithaa and now Laxmi Parvathi and Rabri Devi is the direct out come of their close relationships with politically important men. In journalese, we often call this 'widow-crazy' or 'daughter-crazy'. All these women have successfully extracted emotional mileage from these relationships.

The strange contradiction that exists in the scheme of final politics that brings the woman from her inner domain to be part of the public sphere is that, though family stability is an essential prerequisite of a woman's political success, once she attains a height no one seemed possible, the very stability of the family that formed her support structure begins to collapse. Families by and large, appear extremely supportive of their women joining the "political battlefield". But, they feel threatened when the same women assume larger-than-life proportions by
virtue of their fame and power earned through electoral triumph and personal grit. The very entry of married women into politics involves a re-negotiation of duties and responsibilities among members.

Across cultures, both elite and egalitarian, women have to struggle hard to assert themselves. They must display greater degrees of patience, understanding and toughness to gain acceptance in the public mind. Other factors like the girls socialisation process, the education system, poverty, work in the organised sector and in non-remunerative work also hinder the participation of grassroots women in active politics, says a UNESCO study conducted in seven South-East Asian Countries.26

"If the majority of women are little attracted to political careers" writes Maurice Duverger in The Political Role of Women "it is because everything tends to turn them away from them; if they allow politics to remain essentially a man's business, it is because everything is conductive to their belief: tradition, family life, education, religion and literature. The small part played by women in politics merely reflects and results from the secondary place to which they are assigned by the education and training tend to make them accept as the natural order of things".27

RESERVATION AND WOMEN IN POLITICS

In India, reservation of seats for women in village panchayats and in urban municipal councils (effected through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments) has apparently placed political power in the hands of
approximately one million Indian women for the first time in history. But the use of the adverb 'apparently' shows that even constitutionally vested powers in the hands of women might be far from equal to actual and real power enjoyed directly. Thus several questions arise. How effective is this participation of women in the political process? What implications do such vested powers have in bringing down gender-centric and gender-based discriminations? Are the elected women representatives equal to the task even in the manner of articulation of an agenda? Do they, in actual fact, remain mere pawns in the hands of men within the family and community who enjoy power by proxy via these women and use the reservation for their own ulterior benefit? Who are these women representatives accountable to? Are they answerable to the people who vote them to power? Or, are they accountable to the political party who gave them their ticket? Or rather, are they accountable to furthering the women's movement in their respectable political fields and regions?

One-third reservation of Seats for Woman in Local Bodies through the constitutional amendments had opened a channel in the power structure for women from different Strata of the Society both vertically and horizontally, to occupy the Legitimate Space. The new entrants are large in number and they definite roles, however insignificant in terms of their capacity, to play in the given structure. The inherent impediments and hurdles associated with the women in Indian Society, particularly in the political and economic structure, are common to the elected Women Leaders too. Yet, they occupy these positions and perform
their role and faithfully discharge their responsibilities. How do they perform their role? How are they different from the Male Leaders? What are the problems they are confronting? How do they manage the problems in their institutions? These are some of the real issues and problems one has to address.

Till the enactment of the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, academics in Political Science were not sure and specific about the role to be played by the women in the process of development of the society in general and the development of the women in particular. Political scientists hardly find any role of the women in the political process of the society. Indian Council of Social Science Research had undertaken a major review of studies conducted in India on different areas of polity. One is unable to find a chapter on women and politics like one can on caste and politics, students and politics and SC/ST and politics. So, this is the status of the studies on women in politics in India. 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India prompted the academics to think of the role to be played by the women leaders in the political process at the grassroots level.

Empowering women is a loaded concept, which connotes different meaning to different individuals. To the empowerment of women refers to the process by which women are acquiring due recognition as men, to participate in the development process of the society though the political institutions as a partner with human dignity. The barriers, which had been very active in the process of development of women, have to be removed, for which interventions
are imperatives at different levels. Reservation of seats in the local bodies is one of the steps in this direction and this is not the only way to ensure the participation of women in the development process. It has to go a long way in the process of development in society.

The reservation of seats for women has been looked at from many perspectives. One basic question normally addressed in this context is the objectives kept in the minds of the framers of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India. While providing 33.3 per cent of reservation of seats to women, secondly, the women leaders who are in local bodies should have a clear perception about the objectives of the reservation of seats for women in local bodies. There are other notions on the similar issues perceived by the people and the functionaries who are working with the women leaders at the grassroots level. One could see the incongruity and ambiguity in perceiving the role properly.

There is a second aspect i.e. the general perception about the role to be performed by the women leaders as these perceptions are being guided by the historical notion about women folk and their responsibilities and capabilities. This provision of seats in local bodies makes the women as well as the society to move out of the traditional track. But in reality, despite several weaknesses, the elected women leaders are in positions in discharging the earmarked responsibilities with varying degree of success. This study attempts to identify the problems encountered by the women leaders and to find out the ways and means to
facilitate the women leaders to discharge their role and function effectively in their domain.

Women have come to positions in the local bodies as provision has been made in the Constitution. The outlook of the society towards the women has started changing. But there are hurdles in the process empowering women. Steps are being taken by the women on their own to overcome the hurdles. It is long-drawn process. A structure, which had been created over centuries to work against the interest of women, cannot be altered overnight. To fight against the existing structure, an organised movement involving masses is imperative. In order to make the women achieve results in their positions a number of interventions are necessary.²⁹

Women need orientation, sensitisation, capacity building, information and counselling continuously through organisations. The ongoing experiments and experiences suggest that periodical training; orientation and sensitisation can help the women leaders to perform the assigned role in a better way. When the women leaders are responding to the socio-political challenges in this society, they are to be supported by the organisations and institutions, which are working for empowerment of women. Wherever such interventions are available, potential and achievement of the women leaders are substantial and impressive. Government will respond to the needs of these women leaders only when social organisations and groups support them.
In a way, 33 per cent reservation for women in both rural and urban local bodies have ensured women’s representation and participation in political activities. It must be remembered that the silent revolution has begun, it has to go a long way.
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2. Ibid.


6. Ibid., P. 195.


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