CHAPTER I

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Politics has been traditionally viewed as the art of government or as what concerns the state.\(^{49}\) It deals with how people govern themselves; that is, the laws they live by, the constitutions they live under, and the nature of the rule to which they are subject.\(^{50}\) The Oxford English Dictionary defines politics as the science and art of government that deals with the formal political structures and institutions.\(^{51}\) Politics, thus is considered as the process of governing which is often defined by a particular set of geographical boundaries, be they local, regional or national, and therefore politics resides in the city council, the provincial or state government, or the national assembly, respectively.\(^{52}\) However, in recent years, apart from these institutions, the discipline of politics also includes movements, protests and struggles as legitimate expressions of political behaviour. Thus, today politics includes the spheres in social relations, where power relations are generated, institutionalized and used to encourage, and control or move people’s attitudes, beliefs in a specified direction to control and regulate the distribution of resources.\(^{53}\)

Politics has been defined as an art of acquiring and exercising power, the power to effectively influence the decision making processes and policies, to reverse the existing situation wherever they are disadvantageous and to bring about the necessary social changes.\(^{54}\) Politics has also been defined as the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in

\(^{52}\) Barbara Arneil, *op.cit.*, p. 2.
power in proportion for the welfare and survival of the whole community.\textsuperscript{55} It has been pointed out that politics considered as the sphere of “public” life, which deals with establishing, interpreting and enforcing the rules of personal and community relations, has excluded women.\textsuperscript{56} Participation in this exercise of power is thus seen as a necessity, particularly for the disadvantaged groups in society, especially women.

Participation of women in politics is seen as a major component of political empowerment. Empowerment refers to the process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation and decision-making power, and to transformative action which enables individuals or groups to change the balance of power in social, economic and political relations in society.\textsuperscript{57} The concept of political empowerment includes not only integration into formal political institutions and processes, but also extends to any collective action directed towards gender or other injustice. It encompasses much more than formal legal rights, extending to women’s recognition and assertion of their basic political rights.\textsuperscript{58} Women’s role in politics would thus involve full participation in the decision-making process at all levels and in the formulation and implementation of policies determining the functioning and well-being of the society.\textsuperscript{59} Despite having made advances on many fronts, women are considered largely either absent or barely visible in the political sphere. Thus, enhanced role of women in politics is considered to be major factor for gender equality. Political equality includes not only the equal right to franchise but also the

right to gain access to the formal institutionalized centres of power.\textsuperscript{60} In order to achieve gender equality, United Nations adopted a convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952. In 1985, at Copenhagen it took drastic steps towards promoting international cooperation and to strengthen peace through women’s participation. The World Conference of the United Nations held in Nairobi in 1985 stressed the importance of governmental and non-governmental organizations in educating women to exercise their civil, political and social rights.\textsuperscript{61} It was also stressed in the Declaration at the Conference that woman by virtue of their gender, experience discrimination in terms of denial of equal access to the power structure that controls society and determines development issues and peace initiatives.\textsuperscript{62} It was further asserted in the UN that for women the sharing of power on equal terms with men must be a major strategy for achieving equality.\textsuperscript{63} However, inspite of such initiatives, women still continue to be marginally represented, and what is of special concern, in areas where the various policies have a direct impact on them. Women’s participation in politics and their representation in power structure is therefore a significant aspect of the study of politics.

Women’s participation in politics and their representation in power structures over the decades has been an important factor determining their status in society.\textsuperscript{64} It may be stated here that the success of democracy depends on the equal participation of men and women in social, economic and political spheres. Participation is

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p.1
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p.1
considered as the essence of liberty and freedom\textsuperscript{65}, and also is a means of reducing power differences that contributes towards equalization and social justice.\textsuperscript{66} It also includes peoples’ involvement in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affects their lives. People may, in some cases, have complete and direct control over these processes while in other cases the control may be partial or indirect. Participation in this sense is an essential element of human development.\textsuperscript{67} The concept of political participation came into being with the acceptance of popular sovereignty as the legitimate base of political power. It implies that as political power is derived from people, people must have the power to exercise sovereignty in the form of participation in politics. Political participation generally refers to the activities of mass public in politics which include voting in election, financing in political campaign, writing or calling officials, petitioning, boycotting, demonstrating, etc.\textsuperscript{68} Further, it involves action designed to articulate demands and influence the process of decision-making that ultimately have binding consequences for larger groups or even the whole of society.\textsuperscript{69} According to Nie, political participation is the activity by the citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel or action they take.\textsuperscript{70} According to Lasswel and Verba, the concept of political participation is closely related with power relationships. As politics deals with power, political participation invariably involves power as a means to influence decision-making process, to change the existing system as well as to


bring about desired results. Thus, political participation is a wider concept which does not only mean physical presence, but also covers the influence exerted in the decision-making area through such participation. Political participation is considered an essential element of every political system. By involving the masses in the affairs of the State, political participation encourages stability and order by reinforcing the legitimacy of political authority. A society in which a substantial part of the population is denied any participation may lead to failure of a democracy.

Thus, political participation includes the activities such as taking part in political campaigns, strikes, petitioning, demonstrations, political memberships, voting, contesting elections, etc. The participation of women in politics depends on several factors such as an a). awareness of their rights and how to claim them, b). access to information about laws, policies and the institutions and structures which govern their lives, c). confidence, self-esteem and the skills to challenge and confront the existing power structures, and d). an enabling environment, such as a political, legal, economic and cultural climate that allows women to engage in decision-making processes in a sustainable and effective way. Political participation of women refers to women’s ability to participate equally with men, at all levels, and in all aspects of public and political life and decision making. Generally, women’s participation in politics involves women as voter, member of political parties, trade unions/pressure groups, elected members of parliament, state assemblies and various bodies of local self-government and taking part in decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation, and women as members of various women’s organizations and non-

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governmental organizations. Political participation is a major path towards women’s empowerment and participation in the decision-making process leads to women’s empowerment in the true sense of the term. In other words, increased decision-making power contributes towards greater ability to influence matters that affect the lives of women in private as well as public spheres. The concept of political participation of women is broader than the one covering women’s participation in the electoral and administrative processes. It may be noted here that in terms of decision-making or ministerial positions within legislative bodies in almost every nations women’s participation has always been limited. However, in recent times, it is seen that women’s participation in politics has increased to a certain extent. It is seen that women’s participation has covered a range of activities including mass movements, protests and support meetings on all issues concerned with labour, dowry, rape, domestic violence, food adulteration and deforestation, and also movements for the promotion of peace. However, inspite of the significant contribution of women in such activities, their presence has not been significantly felt in the decision-making institutions. As such, it has been claimed that political participation of women continues to be limited and marginal.

Women’s participation and access to formal political power structures vary across countries. It is seen that there is an increasingly upward trend in women’s political participation and representation in developed countries. However, the participation of women in politics in most of the developing countries is considered

73 Sushma Yadav and Anil Dutta Mishra, *op.cit.*, p. 93.
75 *ibid.*, p. 94.
low as compared to the developed countries. The common pattern of women’s political exclusion includes social and political factors, political structures and institutions and the socio-cultural and functional constraints that are shaped by social and political relations in a society. Thus, we note that several factors contributed towards hindering women’s political participation.

Political Factors

Politics is generally known to be dominated by men since time immemorial. Male domination of politics, political parties and culture of formal political structures is considered as important factors that hinders women’s political participation. Further, the notion of politics restricts political activity only in public arena while the private sphere of family life is rendered as apolitical. This public-private dichotomy is used to exclude women from political sphere. Also, the issues and policies of national or international importance often reflects only male perspective, women’s perspective on the other hand, have always been neglected or ignored. The gender biases of male leadership in political activities often resulted in low level of women’s participation in politics.

Further, the lack of party support, such as limited financial support for women candidates and limited access to political networks also act as an obstacle towards women’s political participation. Women play important roles in campaigning and mobilizing support for their parties, yet they could not occupy decision-making positions in formal political structures. Although political parties possess resources

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78 Farzana Bari, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
79 *ibid.*, p. 4.
for conducting election campaigns, women do not benefit from these resources. The selection and nomination process within political parties is also biased against women. These contributed towards women’s low level of participation in the decision-making process.\textsuperscript{82}

Again, the lack of contact and co-operation with other public organizations such as trade unions and women’s groups also hampers women’s participation in politics. However, during the last decade women’s parliamentary representation in developed countries has increased to a certain extent.\textsuperscript{83} Various women’s organizations in most of the developed countries worked with political and government institutions to secure electoral changes to facilitate women’s nomination and election. This strategy resulted in increasing women’s representation within legislative bodies. However, the situation is different in developing or recently developed countries as compared to the developed countries. There is a limited contact and co-operation between women politicians and women’s organizations or other broad interest organizations such as trade and labour unions.\textsuperscript{84} Moreover, women’s movements and women’s groups in most of these countries do not invest in organized channels of communication and lobbying on issues related to promoting women in decision-making levels. This is considered as a result of lack of knowledge of potential benefits and resources among women.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{82} Janet C. Beilstein, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{ibid}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{84} A. Thanikodi and M. Sugirtha, \textit{op. cit.},p. 592.
Further, the absence of well developed education and training system for women’s leadership in general and for orienting young women towards political life in particular is also responsible for women’s low level of participation in politics.

Ideological and Psychological hindrances

In many countries, society imbibered with patriarchal values and norms often results as a hindrance towards the advancement, progress and participation of women in any political process. Patriarchy as a system of male domination contributes towards shaping women’s relationship in politics. It transforms male and female into men and women and constructs the hierarchy of gender relations where men are given more privileges. Further, the gender role ideology is used as an ideological tool by patriarchy to place women within the private arena of home as mothers and wives and men in the public sphere. This is one of the important factors that shape women’s level of political participation globally. Although the gender role ideology is not static rather remained in a flux while intersecting with economic, social and political systems of a particular society, women continue to be defined as private across countries which resulted in their exclusion from politics.

Women’s lack of confidence in themselves is another reason for their underrepresentation in formal political institutions, including parliaments, governments, and political parties. Women are considered as good campaigners, organizers and support-mobilizers, but it is seen that they rarely contest parliamentary posts. A

87 Farzana Bari, op.cit., p. 4.
88 ibid., p. 4.
certain culture of fear prevents women from contesting elections and from participating in political spheres.\textsuperscript{89}

Also, in some countries, women perceive politics as a “dirty” game. This psychology among many women has barred their confidence in their ability to confront political processes. In fact, such a perception is prevalent in most of the countries of the world.\textsuperscript{90}

Socio- Economic and Cultural Factors

The subordination of status of women vis-à-vis men is a universal phenomenon, though with a difference in the nature and extent of subordination across countries. The ideology of gender role does not only create duality of femininity and masculinity, it also places them in hierarchal position in which female sex is generally valued less than male sex because of their socially ascribed roles in reproductive sphere.\textsuperscript{91} The gender status quo is maintained through low resource allocation to women’s human development by the state, society and the family. This is visible in the social indicators which reflect varying degrees of gender disparities in education, health, employment, ownership of productive resources and politics in almost all nations.\textsuperscript{92}

The dual roles that women had to play in the productive and reproductive spheres, also is responsible for women’s limited participation in political spheres.

\textsuperscript{91} Farzana Bari, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{ibid.}, p.5.
Further, in some of the countries, particularly in South Asia, women also face constraints on their mobility. The mechanisms of sex segregation and purdah are used to restrict their mobility. Politics on the other hand requires women’s exposure to interact with male and female constituents and address public meetings.\(^9^3\) Thus, the socio-cultural dependence of women is considered as one of the main factors that hampers women’s political participation.

The prevalence of poverty, unemployment and lack of adequate financial resources also act as a hindrance towards women’s political participation. Women’s lack of access to and ownership of productive resource act as a limitation of the scope of the political work for women.

It may be noted here that the exclusion of women from positions of power and from elected bodies impoverishes the development of democratic principles in public life and inhibits the socio-economic and political development of a society. It is claimed that the majority of governing institutions are dominated by men who further gives less preference to the promotion of women and women’s issues. Thus, it remains imperative to emphasize that women themselves must organize and mobilize their networks, enhance their communication with different organizations, and develop mechanisms to enhance their own representation.

The United Nations Organizations suggested some strategies to increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making process.\(^9^4\) These are-

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\(^9^3\) ibid., p.5.

Actions to be taken by Governments, national bodies, private sectors, political parties, trade unions, employers’ organizations, sub-regional and regional bodies, non-governmental and international organizations and educational institutions:

a) Provide leadership and self-esteem training to assist women and girls, particularly with special needs, women with disabilities, and women belonging to racial and ethnic minorities to strengthen their self-esteem and to encourage them to take decision-making positions;

b) Have transparent criteria for decision-making positions and ensure that the selecting bodies have a gender-balanced composition;

c) Create a system of mentoring for inexperienced women and, in particular, offer training, including training in leadership and decision-making, public speaking and self-assertion, as well as in political campaigning;

d) Provide gender sensitive training for women and men to promote non-discriminatory working relationships and respect for diversity in work and management styles;

e) Develop mechanisms and training to encourage women to participate in the electoral process, political activities and other leadership areas.

However, inspite of the various efforts made to enhance the political participation of women, it is seen their exclusion from mainstream politics still continues to exist.

In the recent past, feminists sought to make women more visible in every sphere of life with the objective of empowering them. They have argued that women
have been confined mostly in the private spheres unlike men who have dominated politics and other areas of public life, and that women have always been excluded from the mainstream politics.\(^5\) Thus, the feminists believed in broadening the definition of the study of politics, extending the scope of the discipline to include the study of women in the political structures and processes, as well as in social movements and local campaigns.\(^6\)

Feminism has been defined as the recognition that, virtually across time and place, men and women are unequal in the power they have, either in society or over their own lives, and the corollary belief that men and women should be equal; the belief that knowledge has been written about, by and for men and the corollary belief that all schools of knowledge must be re-examined and understood to reveal the extent to which they ignore or distort gender.\(^7\) Further, feminism has been defined as a struggle to end sexiest oppression. Therefore, it is a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination.\(^8\) The movement and efforts for gender equality launched by feminists since the end of the nineteenth century indicates the beginning of women empowerment and their socio-political transition. Among the various approaches of feminism, the following three major approaches viz. Liberal feminism, Marxists feminism and Radical feminism has been discussed in terms of feminists’ approaches regarding exclusion of women from politics.

The liberal feminists argue that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that have kept women out from the mainstream

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\(^6\) ibid., p. 4.


An extremely significant form of customary discrimination consists in reluctance to appoint qualified women to certain jobs, particularly prestigious, well paying or supervisory positions. They argue that such discrimination begins in the nursery level, where male and female infants are perceived and handled differently, which continues in the educational system as well, where boys are encouraged to train for prestigious or well-paying “masculine” occupations while girls are trained for the lower paying but more “feminine” service occupations.

This approach views that women have simply been excluded from the liberal framework. They consider men and women as equal, emphasizing the similarities between them and argue that women can be as capable and rational as men. However it is seen that women have not enjoyed the same rights as men, have not been subjected to the same rule of law, have therefore not been party to the contract of government and as a result women failed to enjoy equality with men in real sense of the term. Further, the liberal feminists believe that the treatment of women in contemporary society violates, in one way or another, all of liberalism’s values, the values of equality, liberty, and justice. They argue women in contemporary society suffer discrimination on the basis of sex. They believe that certain restrictions are placed on women as a group, without regard to their individual wishes, interests, abilities or merits. It may be stated here that the liberal feminists do not challenge the fundamental premises of liberalism as wrong; they simply argue that women must also be treated equally as men.

99 Barbara Arneil, op.cit., p. 6.
100 Barbara Arneil, op.cit., p. 127.
102 ibid.p.27.
103 ibid., p.128.
Liberal feminists also believe that sex discrimination is unjust because it deprives women of equal rights to pursue their own self-interest. Women as a group are not allowed the same freedoms or opportunities granted to men as a group. They argue that, in a discriminatory situation, an individual woman does not receive the same consideration as an individual man. Whereas man is judged on his actual interests and abilities, a woman’s interests and abilities are assumed to be limited in certain ways because of her sex. In other words, a man is judged on his merits as an individual; a woman is judged on her assumed merits as a female.\textsuperscript{104} They also believe that justice requires equal opportunities and equal consideration for every individual regardless of sex. The sex of an individual should be considered only when it is relevant to the individual’s ability to perform a specific task or to take advantage of a certain opportunity.\textsuperscript{105}

The liberal feminists believe that, women within the contemporary society suffer a variety of forms of discrimination, such as, the legislation that provides different responsibilities, obligations, and opportunities for men and women. For example, in certain countries, women are exempted from maximum hours of work, minimum wages, or may restrict certain types of nighttime work, etc. which in resulted in the exclusion of women from better paying jobs and promotion. Liberals view these sorts of discrimination as unjust because they deprive women of equal opportunities for pursuing their own self-interest.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{104} *ibid.*, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{105} *ibid.*, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{106} *ibid.*, p. 181.
The Marxists referred politics as the apparatus of the state and considered political power as merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another.\textsuperscript{107} Political power thus is said to be rooted in the class system. As opposed to believing that politics can be confined to the state and a narrow public sphere, Marxists believed that the economic is political. From this perspective, civil society characterized as Marxists believe it to be by class struggle, is the very essence of politics.

The Marxists feminists argue that gender inequality is derived from capitalism. According to the Marxists, class relations and the economic exploitation of one class by another is the central feature of social structure, which determines the nature of gender relations.\textsuperscript{108} They believe that men’s domination over women is a by-product of capital’s domination over labour. Marxists believe that within capitalist society women are subject to a special form of oppression which affects primarily those women who are excluded from wage labour.\textsuperscript{109} They argue that women wage laborers suffer the same sort of oppression that is experienced by the rest of the working class. Within capitalist society, therefore, Marxists believe that women are subject to two distinct, though related, kinds of oppression. Women’s oppression in the paid labour force and family as the basis for women’s oppression.

Marxists however, believe that when women enter the paid labour force, they seem to be alienated in exactly the same way as male wage labourers. They further argue that women suffer from a sex-specific form of oppression that is additional to the alienation of the wage laborer. In contemporary society Marxists believe that this form of oppression is rooted in the specific sexual division of labour that characterizes

\textsuperscript{107} Barbara Arneil, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 138,139.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{ibid.}, p.4.
capitalism, this division excludes many women from the wage labour force and assigns them to work in the home.\textsuperscript{110}

The family on the other hand, is considered to benefit capital by providing a cheap way providing the day to day care of workers, such as food and clean clothes. It is cheap because women as housewives do such kind of work for no wage, merely receiving maintenance from their husbands. Thus they argue that capital benefits from the unequal sexual division of labour within the home.\textsuperscript{111}

The radical feminists attacked the ‘public/private’ divide, proclaiming instead that ‘the personal is the political’. They believe that what goes on in domestic, family and personal life is intensely political, and indeed that it is the basis of all other political struggles.\textsuperscript{112} The radical feminist holds that society is patriarchal, in which women are systematically subordinated and subjected to male power. According to radical feminists, the bifurcation between male and female experience means that every society in fact has two cultures—the visible, national, or male culture and the invisible, universal, female culture.\textsuperscript{113} “There is always a women’s culture within every culture.”\textsuperscript{114}

Radical feminists believe that the dominant male culture or patriarchy promulgates a certain picture of social reality, a picture visible by male values.\textsuperscript{115} They argue that male culture is portrayed as the only culture of a given society. Women’s culture is denied and women are defined as weak, passive, emotional,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Alison M. Jaggar, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 217.
\item \textit{Ibid}, p. 217.
\item Valerie Bryson, \textit{op.cit.} p. 27.
\item Alison Jaggar, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 249.
\item Judith Moschkovich, ““But I Know You, American women,”in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (eds.), \textit{This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color}, Watertown: Persephone Press, p. 82.
\item Alison Jaggar, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 250.
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intuitive, mysterious, un-responsible, childish, dependent, submissive, etc. whereas men are considered as positive, forceful, aggressive, dominant, objective, strong, intellective, etc. They argue that characteristics like passivity, vanity, subservience and self-sacrifice are not masculine virtues, but the male culture accepts and even values these qualities in women.

The radical feminists’ analysis of women’s oppression exposes the destructive quality of women’s relations with men and shows that such destructiveness is rooted in the systematic coercive power that men have over women.\(^{116}\)

They further argue that patriarchy as a total system of domination. Through imperialism, racism and class society, groups of men seek to dominate each other. Mostly, however, they seek to dominate women who suffer characteristic forms of oppression in every patriarchal society. To legitimate its domination, the dominant male culture invents ideologies that define subordinate groups as inferior for one reason or another, as lazy, greedy, emotional, childish, uncultured, etc. The radical feminists argue that under patriarchy, many of these attributes are applied to women as well as to subordinate groups. Patriarchal ideology defines women in a way specific to their sex, whose special function is to gratify male sexual desires and to bear and raise children. This ideology limits what women may do under patriarchy and de-legitimizes whatever they do that goes beyond the limits of the patriarchal values.\(^{117}\) The radical feminist thus argue that women’s subordination and oppression are legitimized by patriarchal ideology, which defines women as natural mothers or as sexual objects.

\(^{116}\) ibid., p. 255.  
\(^{117}\) ibid., p. 256.
Though these approaches differ in certain aspects, their common concern however is exclusion of women from politics. Thus, this common concern has been identified as the core area of this study.

Constitutions of most nations guarantee equal and political rights both to men and women contributing to a certain extent some space for women in politics. The spread of education, adult franchise, role of women’s organizations, etc. have further contributed to the increasing role of women in politics, because of which, today the political interventions by women range from movements for peace and good governance to protests against rape, dowry, domestic violence, food adulteration, price rise and deforestation. They are raising their voices against discrimination and injustice in social, economic and political spheres. Politics for them does not mean only activities of electing representatives and governing, it also includes efforts of raising consciousness and changing the unequal power structure for a just and equal system. However, it is seen that several factors still continue to hamper women’s empowerment and her role in politics continues to be marginal.

Patriarchy and gender discrimination is seen as important factors negatively affecting the role of women in politics. The word ‘patriarchy’ literally means the rule of the father or the “patriarch”, and originally it was used to describe a specific type of male-dominated family. Now it is used more generally to refer to male domination; the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over

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women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society. It implies that men hold power in all important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power.\textsuperscript{121} This phenomenon is manifested in the values, attitudes, customs, expectations, and institutions of the society, and it is maintained through the process of socialization. Some societies are more patriarchal than others, but virtually all are characterized by the phenomenon in one form or another. Patriarchy is a function of male physical, social, economic, and political power.

Further, patriarchy is considered as a form of society where men’s needs, concerns, and interests are central; where a family’s children are named after the father, not the mother, and the authority of the father/husband over both wife and children is revered. In patriarchy men materially control women’s bodies and lives.\textsuperscript{122}

Patriarchy is universally prevalent where male domination and female subordination are salient features of social structure in virtually all societies, regardless of the race, ethnicity, class, or religion of the members. Most patriarchal societies have adopted characteristics associated with male domination, namely, aggression and power, as well as the consequences of these characteristics, namely, war and destruction. The basic characteristics of a patriarchal system may be identified as follows:

Male Dominance: In a patriarchal system, men make all decisions in both society and in their family unit, hold all positions of power and authority, and are considered superior.

\textsuperscript{121} Gerda Lerner, \textit{The Creation of Patriarchy}, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{122} Jenny Ruby, “Resistances to Patriarchy”, Vo. 33, No. 3/4, March-April 2003, p. 39.
Male Identification: Men are concerned with identification that includes qualities of control, strength, forcefulness, rationality, strong work ethic, and competitiveness. Each of these qualities contributes to male identification in a patriarchal system.

Male Centeredness: In a patriarchal system, the center of activity and progression is on men and what they do to move the society forward. In any patriarchal system, men will be the focus and developer of all events and inventions, men will be the heroes in all situations, and men will be the center of social engagement, fun, and entertainment.

Obsession with Control: Men living in a patriarchal system or society must be in control at all times. They have a desire to control all social and family situations and must make all decisions regarding finances and education.

Additionally, in a patriarchal society, the oppression of women is emphasized. The term oppression means to push down or restrict; therefore, women are not allowed to rise up to leadership levels or make decisions. Women are also not allowed to demonstrate independence or suggest changes to any social order.

Women’s position and status is defined by gender and gender relations in society. Gender generally refers to socially constructed category for both men and women. In other words, it refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman; the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles. It is used as an analytical tool to understand social realities with regard to women and men. Gender is defined as the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male.

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and female and the relationships between women and men, and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Also, gender is considered as a constituent element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and is a primary way of signifying the relationships of power. Further, gender has also been defined as the qualitative and interdependent character of women and men in society. It is constituted in terms of the relation of power and dominance that structure the life chances of women and men. It may be stated here that very often the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are used interchangeably. However, the feminists views that there is a clear distinction between these two terms. Accordingly, while the term ‘sex’ refers to the biological characteristics of males and females, ‘gender’ on the other hand refers to the socially produced attributes of masculinity and femininity and the social arrangements based upon them. Thus, gender, although based on biological difference, are socially and culturally created.

Gender is seen as one of the foundations of every existing social order. From the perspective of social construction of gender, women and men are compared as

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127 Toshimenla Jamir, op.cit., p. 3.
gender categories (female-male, feminine-masculine, girls-boys, and women-men) and this perspective analyzes how different social groups define them in everyday life and in major institutions such as the family, polity and economy.\textsuperscript{128} Gender denotes not only the sexual difference, but also the power and sexual hierarchy.\textsuperscript{129} By these definitions, it is evident that the social relations between the sexes determine gender and gender is a socially constructed, internalized category by which the subordination and oppression of women is constructed and constantly reconstructed.\textsuperscript{130}

The social construction of gender, i.e., what constitutes masculine qualities and what constitutes feminine qualities can be deemed to be a system of power that assigns greater value to the activities associated with masculinity. It may be noted here that in almost every sphere of human functioning, the roles defined for women are subordinated to those defined for men; the rights for women are fewer or less emancipating than those that men have. Unequal gender relations imply that men can exercise greater power than women in almost all spheres of functioning.\textsuperscript{131} Further a gendered relation is reinforced by culture, religion, tradition, custom, etc. Thus, gender division is not biologically fixed but constitutes an aspect of the wider social division of labour, which in turn is rooted in the condition of production and reproduction, reinforced by the cultural and ideological systems prevailing in society. Subsequently, in most societies, significant gender gaps in prospects and earnings continue and all national work forces continue to be highly segregated along the gender lines.

\textsuperscript{129} Elaine showalter, “The Prototypicality of Gender, Contemporary Notions of Masculine and Feminine ”, \textit{Women’s Studies Journal}, Vol. 19, No. 6, November-December 1996, p. 589. \\
In order to achieve gender equality, United Nations adopted a convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952. In 1985, at Copenhagen it took drastic steps, towards promoting international cooperation and to strengthen peace through women’s participation. UN also stressed in the declaration of Nairobi that woman by virtue of their gender, experience discrimination in terms of denial of equal access to the power structure that controls society and determines development issues and peace initiative. Further, UN asserted that for women the sharing of power on equal terms with men must be a major strategy for achieving equality. Consequently it is seen that though women’s rights are legalized through various international, national and regional instruments, yet it has been noted that women are still left in the periphery of the political process and political participation remains elusive to most of them, inspite of voting and election, and also capture of some seats of power and influence.

In India too, women’s role in politics has been marginal, although certain factors like the Constitution guaranteeing equal civil and political rights both to men and women have contributed to a certain extent some space for women in politics. Women in India, for ages have been claimed to be subjected to varying degrees of social discrimination, i.e., women are always confined to the traditionally ascribed roles. They had been the object of prejudice and had to be content with a secondary place in the society. Women are often presumed to have different assets and liabilities than men and behave differently, and as a result of this both men and women feel that sex makes a difference in

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133 Susheela Kaushik (ed.), *op.cit.*, p xi.
Around the eighteenth century the banning of sati, child marriage (Civil Marriage Act of 1872), the spread of education and the promotion of widow remarriage improved the condition of women to a certain extent. However, the further continuation of the fossilized customs, traditions, superstition beliefs and irrational bigotry were responsible for women’s subjugation in India around twentieth century. Under such circumstances, women lost their separate entity and were forcibly subjugated to male superiority, physically and intellectually. During this period of India female education was given least importance. Due to such intellectual stagnation women were considerably less visible in the public sphere. The beginning of the nineteenth century also witnessed women in deplorable condition in India. The socio-religious movements such as the Brahma Samaj, Prathana Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission fought for the improvement of women’s condition. Also the advent of western education and liberalism contributed towards the eradication of age old freedom struggle against the British colonial rulers. Women leaders like Mrs. Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu accelerated the process of women’s association with the freedom struggle. With the initiative of Mahatma Gandhi, women got new direction, strength and inspiration to the freedom movement and participated in the Indian national movement in large numbers. When India became independent, the Constitution guaranteed to all men and women equal political rights. In consonance with the right of universal adult franchise conferred by the Constitution, women’s participation in political activities is shown to have increased and improved. The spread of education, adult franchise, role of women’s organizations, etc. have further contributed to an increasing role of women in politics, because of which, today the

political interventions by women in India range from movements for peace and good
governance to protests against rape, dowry, domestic violence, food adulteration, price-
rise and deforestation. They are raising their voices against discrimination and injustice in
social, economic and political spheres. Politics for them does not mean only activities of
electing representatives and governing, it also includes efforts of raising consciousness
and changing the unequal power structure for a just and equal system.\textsuperscript{138} But inspite of
such initiative from the Indian government, women are still deprived and they failed to
get their due share, and the social norms, customs, traditions, the economic factors, and
the cultural constraints were the reasons for their lagging behind.\textsuperscript{139} The New Delhi
Document on Women in Development (1985) recognized that despite the rapid growth of
informal political activity by women, their role in the formal political structure had
virtually remained unchanged.\textsuperscript{140} Thus in general, it may be said that inspite of their
tremendous contributions and sacrifices, women are still believed to have been denied
their basic social, economic and political rights which is also true in the Indian context.
Women’s role in politics still is considered to be fairly marginal and limited. Thus, a
study and analysis of women’s role in politics, with reference to the context within which
women participate in politics and their political empowerment becomes a significant area
of study.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{138} Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 96.
\item \textsuperscript{139} R. Letha Kumari, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.24-25.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Arunima Baruah (ed.), \textit{Women in India: An Exhaustive Study}, New Delhi: Anmol publications,
2003, p. 213.
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