



## IMPACT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

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### **Abstract:**

*The presence of more women is required if the local governance system is to become inclusive of the diversity of the people it represents, especially women. Furthermore, change is more likely to occur when elected women are supported by the presence of more women at the most senior administrative levels in the local governance system. Through their knowledge and understanding of the construction of power relations at the local level, rural women have creatively managed to produce, reproduce and use alternative strategies which are based on their sexuality and traditional gender roles in challenging and transforming gender inequality at the local level and in improving the quality of rural women. The constitution of India under Articles 325 and 326 guarantee equal right to participate in political activities effectively. However, lack of space for participation in political process has not only resulted in their absence in numbers of decision-making bodies but also neglect their common issues and problems. For strong and effective democratic system, the participation of women is essential. There cannot be any real democracy if the voices and issues of women are ignored or sidelined. This paper analyzes the participation of women in politics and also analyzes whether or not women's voices and demands are articulated to the public as matters of importance.*

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Women equal participation in local governments and decision-making processes is vital for creating gender sensitive policies and for enhancing sustainable development. Unfortunately, women are under-represented in politics and they consistently face a number of obstacles that range from cultural exclusions to the resistance of key political institutions and mechanisms to creating gender balanced local administrations. For instance, in communities where women's roles as politicians and decision makers are not well accepted, women face strong cultural barriers entering local governments. The factors that hamper or facilitate women's political participation vary with level of socioeconomic development, geography, culture, and the type of political system. Women themselves are not a homogeneous group; there are major differences between them, based on class, race, ethnicity, cultural background and education. The exclusion of women from decision-making bodies limits the possibilities for entrenching the principles of democracy in a society, hindering economic development and discouraging the attainment of gender equality. If men monopolize the political process, passing laws which affect society at large, the decision-making process does not always balance the interests of the male and female populations.

### **The Challenges of the Political System**

The political system has several interrelated segments. Therefore, problems in one area can have ramifications in others. In the same vein, changes in one area can be experienced downstream. Within national political processes, the culture of power disadvantages women. In a system of multiparty politics such as India, political parties bear some responsibility for the low numbers of women who contest elections. While Ghana has

had political parties since independence, the long years of political instability and coup d'état regimes has meant that political parties have been in continuous existence only since 1992. There have been several mergers and fissures on the party front since then. Even the larger and more stable political parties such as the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party are quite weak internally and do not function fully in between elections. Women in political parties are largely organized through women's wings which tend to be marginal except in periods of mobilization for elections Party electoral processes discriminate directly and indirectly against women candidates in various ways

### **Objectives**

- To know the role of women in the political arena and their political consciousness.
- To examine the causes responsible for low level participation of women in Indian Politics.
- To explore the constraints faced by women in performing their role in electoral politics.

### **2.0 Literature review**

The renewed attention to women's organising can be linked to a growing realisation of its unique location within social movements, in particular the critical and potent role it can play in political and social projects, in revitalising social movements, and in deepening democracy in society at large [1]. There are at least two related reasons behind such a role: First, the women's movement forwards an encompassing conception of political engagement that spans "the personal and the political", which confronts the question of power in both the reproductive and the productive spheres, underscoring the need to intervene in private and public arenas of political contention [2]. In many cases, male dominated political parties are not willing to involve women in their local branches and subsequently in local politics. According to the UN Habitat, most local governments are inherently patriarchal institutions. Their structures and procedures are designed for and by men and do not take into account women's multiple responsibilities in their homes and communities or differences of communications and decision-making styles existing between men and women [3]. Shaul in the study on the status of women comments that there is no country in the World today where women have equal status with men in all of the major areas of life [4]. Few women like Indira Gandhi, Goldamer and Bandaranaike have held important positions. And women who hold such important national offices are mostly from upper class families with a good record of political participation, and are highly educated. The author also points out that in most of the developing countries; the low level of education makes women unaware of their rights. Although women are enfranchised and given constitutional equality, they remain practically in a subordinate position to men in almost all the spheres of socio-political life [5]. Legally, most of the modern democratic constitutions of the world including India had established equality of men and women in matters of rights and opportunities but contrary to this picture they have to encounter so many obstacles like tradition, prejudice, social and economic conditions. points out that discrimination against women was deeply rooted in the structure of the society, in the roles the women played and in the sexual division of labour which

restricted women primarily to the domestic spheres of life. These discriminatory laws and practices engender women's under-representation in politics.

### **3.0 Research methodology**

In India, women have been given an exalted position in society. During ancient times they were treated at par with men even in political and philosophical spheres. However, down the centuries, the position of women in society deteriorated and politically they were pushed to the background. It was only in the twentieth century, particularly during the freedom movement under the charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, that involvement of women was accepted as the natural course in India. In fact, Gandhi's notions and approach towards the role of women in the freedom struggle stood in sharp contrast to the age-old prejudices against them ingrained in the Indian psyche. The social condition of women was quite appalling in those times and it was primarily due to the conscious efforts of the leadership, at the forefront of the freedom struggle, that women fought against the might of the British empire in partnership with men. Gandhi believed that women have to play a much meaningful role in politics, making it more accountable, transparent and corruption free. He prophetically said, "as long as the women of India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country." Our freedom struggle was viewed by the national leaders in a wider perspective of restructuring the socio-economic and future political set up, to provide in it, among other things, equality of both men and women. It is worth mentioning that way back in 1920 Smt. Sarojini Naidu and Ms. Margaret Cousins led a group of women to demand equal rights of representation for the fair sex in the Indian Provincial Legislatures. Tilak was of the view that political action on the part of women could be independent of their social status and that political action was possibly more important than social reform in empowering women.

#### **Arguments For Women's Participation in Local Governance:**

Women's representation and participation in politics at the local government level is a key driver for their empowerment. It is at the local government level where political parties are able to recruit their members and identify potential candidates who can later move on to contest at the national level. It is also at the local level where there is a higher probability of direct impact of women in politics because of its proximity to the community. Global evidence about women's actual presence in rural local governments and their potential impact is still very scarce. Although information about the number of women in urban local governments and national parliaments is collected and systematised as a key indicator for assessing progress on the advancement of women's political rights, research available at the global and local level on women's presence in rural local governance is virtually non-existent. While women's participation in politics, at both national and local government levels, is a matter of gender equality, argues that the ability of any group of people or their chosen representatives to participate in decisions affecting their lives not only puts them in a position to contribute ideas but also provides them with the tools and options for reshaping the course, direction, and outcome of specific programmes and activities which will determine their future. It is therefore critical to engage women in decision-making processes within the



communities where they reside and obtain their livelihoods. Other assertions often encountered are that local politics is about issues that concern women's daily lives such as water, waste disposal, health and other social services. This implies that participation in local government is an extension of women's involvement in the civic issues facing their communities' other scholars also suggest that it is easier for women given their household constraints and childcare responsibilities, to participate in public life at a level more proximate to them Such assertions may imply that national-level politics is about issues more distant from and perhaps incomprehensible to women. However, practical concerns are undoubtedly important as such arguments seem to convey the ideological flavour of patriarchy.

### **Constitutional Provisions:**

The Constitution of India adopted a parliamentary form of government and guarantees justice, liberty and equality to all citizens (men and women). The Constitution not only grants equality of treatment to women but also calls upon the state to adopt measures favouring women neutralizing the socioeconomic, educational and political disadvantages that they face. Therefore, adoption of our Constitution heralded a new era of equality for women of India. It guarantees equal political rights including the right to vote to women. Almost all the provisions contained in the UN Convention on the 'Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women' are there in the Indian Constitution. Not only does the Constitution guarantee equal political status to women, there is even a scope for 'positive discrimination' in their favour as is evident in Article 15(3) of the Constitution. There are many other provisions in the Constitution which lay stress on equality between men and women. Article 14 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of law within the territory of India. Art 15 prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth. It is a guarantee against every form of discrimination. According to article 15(3), nothing shall prevent the state from making special provisions for the benefit women and children. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matter relating to employment or appointment to any office under state. Secondly no citizen shall, on ground of religion, race, cast, sex, decent, place of birth residence or any of them, be eligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the state and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizen are not forced by economic necessity to enter occupations unsuited for their age or strength.

### **4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Globally, women make up a little over half of the human population in most countries. They play key roles in the socialization processes in their societies especially as mothers. Through their dual roles of production and reproduction, they make significant contributions to development. Millions of women work as volunteers for major political parties and for individual candidates' world-wide. In spite of all these, the process of governance has been male centered and until the twentieth century, women were either totally marginalized or absent in the process of governance at all national levels throughout the world Article 39 (a), states that the State shall direct its policy towards securing equally to

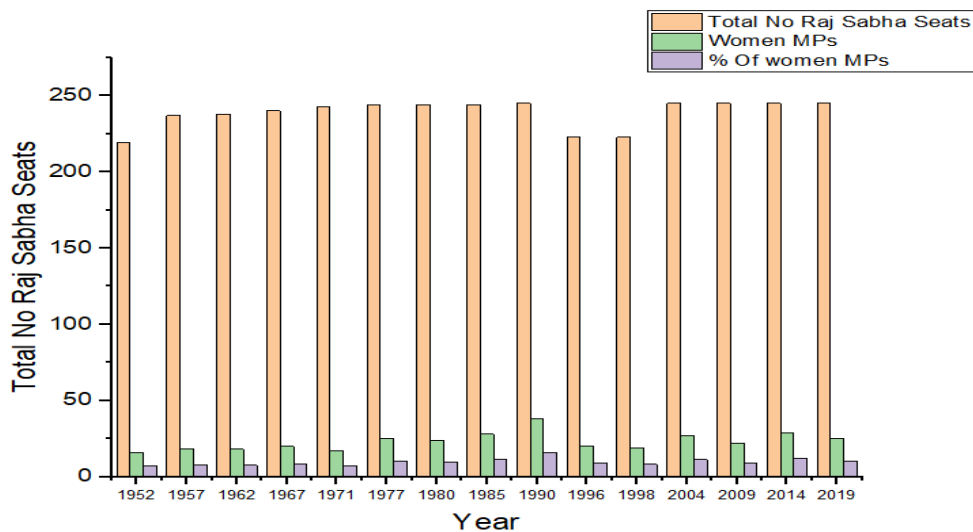
men and women the right to an adequate means of livelihood, and 39(d) enjoins the State to direct its policy towards securing equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Article 42 provides for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief and Article 51(A) (e) refers to the fundamental duty of citizens to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have provided reservation of 1/3 seats for women in panchayats and municipalities. Article 325 and 326 guarantee political equality, equal right to participate in political activity and right to vote, respectively. While the latter has been accessed and enjoyed by large number of women, the right to equal participation is still a distant dream. The lack of space for participation in political bodies has resulted in their presence in meagre numbers in these decision-making bodies. Women are the world's largest excluded group in political arena. 21.9 % of the members of national parliament worldwide are women. Women hold 16.0 % of the seats in Arab state parliaments and 21.8 % of the seats in Sub - Saharan African nation's parliament. In Americas women hold 26.6 %.

#### **Women contestants in General Elections:**

Even though women enjoy equal political rights, very few of them are actually participating in the elections. In the Sixth General Elections out of the total contestants of 2439 only 70 candidates were women and in the Fourteenth General Elections, out of the total numbers of contestants of 5435, only 355 were women. Though the number of women participating in the elections may be increasing gradually, they continue to constitute a very small percentage of the total number of contestants

**Table: Status of women in Raj Sabha**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total No Raj Sabha Seats</b>	<b>Women MPs</b>	<b>% Of women MPs</b>
1952	219	16	7.3
1957	237	18	7.6
1962	238	18	7.6
1967	240	20	8.3
1971	243	17	7.0
1977	244	25	10.2
1980	244	24	9.8
1985	244	28	11.4
1990	245	38	15.5
1996	223	20	9.0
1998	223	19	8.06
2004	245	27	11.1
2009	245	22	8.97
2014	245	29	11.83
2019	245	25	10.2



**Figure: Status of women in Raj Sabha different variations**

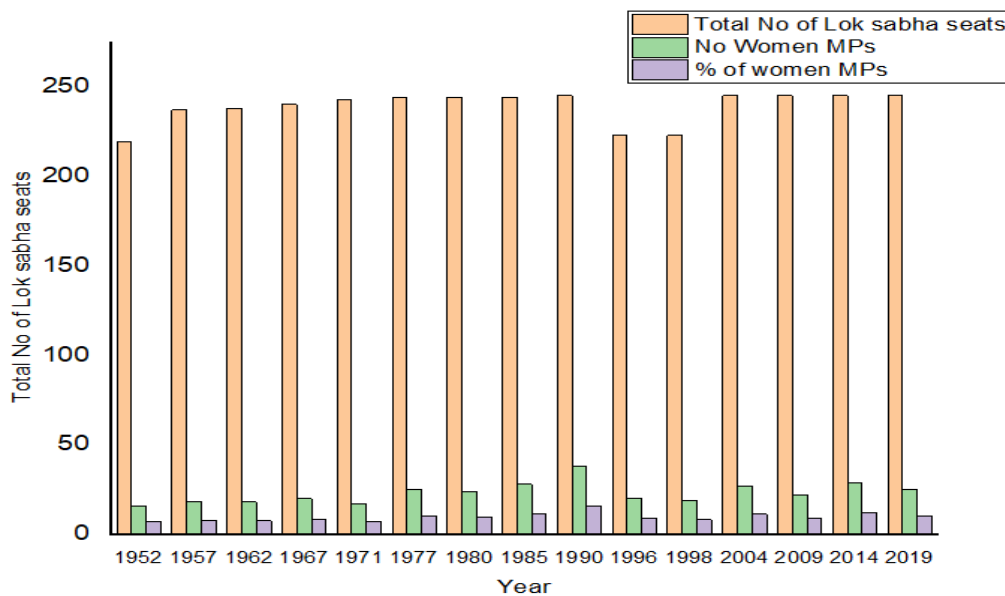
The 73rd and 74th amendment of Indian Constitution have brought about a silent revolution by the provisions related to 33% reservation for women in the institutions of local self- government. They have brought a drastic transformation in India as far as participation of women at the grass root level politics is concerned.

Women in India are much better represented in the panchayati raj institutions as compared to the parliament. States like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan have reserved 50 per cent seats for women in panchayats and Sikkim has reserved 40 per cent seats for women. This indeed, makes a historic beginning for the effective participation of women in the decision-making process at the grassroots level. The efforts and work of several women representatives in panchayats in Maharashtra, Gujarat and West Bengal have been widely acclaimed. Thus, women are making significant gains in the political sphere where increased participation is rapidly empowering women. However; women have not found an adequate representation in the Lok Sabha. The percentage of elected women Lok Sabha members has never exceeded 12 per cent. The presence of women in the Upper House has been only slightly higher overall, probably due to indirect elections and nomination of some women members.

**Table 2: Status of women in lok Sabha**

Year	Total No of Lok sabha seats	No Women MPs	% of women MPs
1952	499	22	4.41
1957	500	27	5.40
1962	503	34	6.76
1967	523	31	5.93
1971	521	22	4.22
1977	544	19	3.29
1980	544	28	5.15

1984	544	44	8.9
1989	517	27	5.22
1991	544	39	7.17
1999	543	49	9.02
2004	543	45	8.03
2009	543	59	10.86
2014	543	62	11.41
2019	724	78	14.63



**Figure: Status of women in Lok Sabha different variations**

Most political parties agreed to introduce 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures. When the Bill was introduced in 1997, several parties and groups raised objections. The objections focused around two main issues: first, the issue of overlapping quotas for women in general and those for women of the lower castes; second, the issue of elitism. The Bill was first introduced by Dev Gowda led United Front Government. The demand for sub-quotas for OBCs and minorities is seen a way of stalling reservation for women; there are no instances of political parties having such quotas in their own cadres. The Bill has already been introduced several times, but is stalled each time. However, the Rajya Sabha took a 'historic step' by passing this bill and provided one-third reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies for women. The key feature of the bill is that one-third of all seats on the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will be reserved for women. The reservation will work as a quota within quota – 1/3 of the seats will be reserved for SC and ST women. Till today the bill neither have been passed by the Lok Sabha nor ratified by one half of the states before it comes into effect

**Conclusion:**



The active involvement of women in local government has been identified as very necessary because of the effective management capabilities of women and also because of the fact that women constitute the largest proportion of Indians population. Successive governments since independence have made efforts to boost women participation in local governance especially by putting in place several laws and ratifying several other international conventions on women participation as well as ensuring that the local government act is put to full utilization. Women's empowerment can positively influence the lives not only of women themselves but also of men, and of course, those of children. Political parties cannot remain indifferent towards women who constitute 586.5 million population and nearly 48.46 per cent of the electorate Although almost all political parties have attempted to build women organizations to secure their support and make their organizations more broad based, but in practice they have fielded much less proportion of women candidates in the elections giving them proportionately much less representation in the legislative bodies than their actual population strength. Therefore, it is urgently required that we have to take special measures to enhance women's political participation in ways that help them influence decision-making at all levels of our society and polity. Our democracy seriously flawed if it fails to yield adequate space to women for their political empowerment.

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