



Political Reservations for Women (Women 'S Political Empowerment : A Democratic Imperative)

T.Chandra Shekar (Ph.D) Research Scholar

ABSTRACT

India is a democratic country where we are following the parliamentary form of government. The role and responsibilities of the citizens is very crucial in selecting their representatives to the parliament. Each and every citizen must participate democratically in the elections process for formation of effective government. But when we see the number of representatives in the house when compare to men, women strength is very low. In the 2014 general election only 61 women representatives are elected. This shows that the women strength is very low. There is a need to increase the women empowerment in politics. So that they can involve to take effective decision in solving the women related issues.

Even after the 67 years of independence it is noted that women are not at all political empowered and they are staying away from the politics. They are not motivated to participate in the political decisions in the society. We can see the gender differences existing in the society. Even though reservation is provided to them they are facing difficulties to participate politics. They are not utilizing the Right to Reservation for women. This paper discuss the how women can political empowered in a democratic state.

KEYWORDS : Women, Empowerment, Political, Democracy, Reservation

Introduction :

The right of women to participate in political life is guaranteed by several international conventions. But transforming an abstract right into a reality requires hard work on the ground. Political parties are key to women's participation in politics, as it is political parties that recruit and select candidates for elections and that determine a country's policy agenda. However, within political parties women tend to be overrepresented at the grassroots level or in supporting roles and underrepresented in positions of power. Without access to established networks of influence, and with very limited resources, few role models and mentors, and sometimes even limited family and community support, it is understandable that women's participation in political parties has remained well below that of men. How women participate in political parties – and how those parties encourage and nurture women's involvement and incorporate gender-equality issues – are key determinants of women's political empowerment

Gender equality and women's empowerment are not only human rights; they are also imperative for achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. Women's political participation is central to these goals, and political parties are among the most important institutions for promoting and nurturing such participation. With less than twenty per cent of the world's parliamentary seats occupied by women, it is clear that political parties need to do more—and should be assisted in those efforts—to support women's political empowerment.

Globally, although forty to fifty per cent of party members are women, women hold only about ten per cent of the leadership positions within those parties. Ensuring women's equal participation in the decision making structures of parties is essential for promoting gender equality within them – and, ultimately, within society as a whole.

They are also key to ensuring gender-equality issues are addressed in the wider society. If strategies to promote women's involvement in the political process are to be effective, they should be linked to steps parties can take across the specific phases of the electoral cycle – the pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral phases – and to the organization and financing of the parties themselves. The most effective strategies to increase women's participation in political parties combine reforms to political institutions with targeted support to women party activists within and outside party structures, women candidates and elected officials. These strategies require the cooperation of a variety of actors and political parties from across the political spectrum.

Women's Reservation Bill or the **The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill**, is a pending bill in [India](#) which proposes to amend the [Constitution of India](#) to reserve 33 per cent of all seats in the Lower house of [Parliament of India](#), the [Lok Sabha](#), and in all state [legislative assemblies](#) for women. The seats to be reserved in

rotation will be determined by draw of lots in such a way that a seat shall be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections.

The Upper House [Rajya Sabha](#) passed the bill on 9 Mar 2010. As of February 2014, the Lower House [Lok Sabha](#) has not yet voted on the bill. If the Lok Sabha were to approve the bill, it would then have to be passed by half of India's state legislatures and signed by the [President](#).

Women's reservations

In any case, it is argued by those in favour of reservation, there is no doubt that democracy and representation will be strengthened with compulsorily more presence of women through reservation. This is evident from the impact of the implementation of 33% reservation of seats for women in the local bodies (panchayats) in India by the 73 and 74th Constitutional Amendment as a result of which the representation of women in the formal structures of governance at the local level has recorded a steady increase. Women's presence at the decision making levels will not only enhance the status of women but will also strengthen democratic traditions and make democracy more meaningful in fighting injustice and oppression while at the same time help to bring a different, explicitly female perspective to the political arena. Unless women are brought into the decision-making levels directly, important women issues will never be tackled with the seriousness they require.

In 1993, a constitutional amendment was passed in India that called for a random one third of village council leader, or pradhan, positions in [gram panchayat](#) to be reserved for women. The village council is responsible for the provision of village infrastructure – such as public buildings, water, and roads – and for identifying government program beneficiaries. Although all decisions in the village council are made by majority, the pradhan is the only full-time member and exercises significant control over the final council decisions. Recent research on the quota system has revealed that it has changed perceptions of women's abilities, improved women's electoral chances, and raised aspirations and educational attainment for adolescent girls.

There is a long-term plan to extend this reservation to parliament and legislative assemblies. In addition, women in India get reservation or preferential treatments in education and jobs. Its opposers consider this preferential treatment of women in India as discrimination against them in admissions to schools, colleges, and universities. For instance, several [law schools](#) in India have a 30% reservation for females. A segment of feminists in India are strongly in favour of providing preferential precedence to women in order to create a level playing field for all of its citizens. Since,

- There will be more women participation in politics and society.

- Reservation for women is expected to increase opportunity for women.

Women will avail 33% reservation thus after this bill is passed political, social Justic and economical condition of women is expected to improve drastically as a result.

Women are not asking for grace and charity. Their contribution to the cause of nation-building exceeds that of men. An International Labour Organisation study shows that "while women represent 50 percent of the world adult population and a third of the official labour force, they perform nearly two-third of all working hours, receive a tenth of world income and own less than one percent of world property." Therefore, reservation for women is not a bounty but only an honest recognition of their contribution to social development.

An alternative to the Bill suggests amending the Representation of People Act, 1951, to compel political parties to mandatorily nominate women candidates for at least one-third of the seats on the pain of losing recognition. This is politically flawed and not even constitutionally permissible.

More than economic empowerment, women need political empowerment, "The political parties want women's votes but they do not want women to share the political space. It is this mentality that has stalled the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill demanding 33 percent reservation in the legislative bodies after it was introduced in the Rajya Sabha,"

It is observed that the self-help groups in the state have brought economic empowerment to women to some extent. "There is economic empowerment with government proposed SHGs and with women taking up all kinds of jobs. However, until they get power to make laws, the atrocities against them will not stop,"she opined. Besides, she lamented over couples being ignorant of the Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act which was enacted in 2002 by the state government. "This particular legal provision will help us to document the details about bride, bride-groom and exchange of gifts at the time of marriage. However, this is not being implemented now,

Understanding gender equality and women's empowerment

"Special Central Assistance (SCA) to Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCSP) implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all.

Where women's status is low, family size tends to be large, which makes it more difficult for families to thrive. [Population and development](#) and reproductive health programmes are more effective when they address the educational opportunities, status and empowerment of women. When women are empowered, whole families benefit, and these benefits often have ripple effects to future generations.

The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined -- they are socially determined, changing and changeable. Although they may be justified as being required by culture or religion, these roles vary widely by locality and change over time.

Addressing women's issues also requires recognizing that women are a diverse group, in the roles they play as well as in characteristics such as age, social status, urban or rural orientation and educational attainment. Although women may have many interests in common, the fabric of their lives and the choices available to them may vary widely. This task is related to the critical need for sex-disaggregated data, and UNFPA helps countries build capacity in this area.

Key issues areas for women empowerment

- **Reproductive health:** Women, for both physiological and social reasons, are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems. Reproductive health problems, including [maternal mortality and morbidity](#), represent a major -- but preventable -- cause of death and disability for women in developing countries. Failure to provide information, services and conditions to help women protect their reproduction health therefore constitutes gender-based discrimination and a violation of women's rights to health and life.
- **Stewardship of natural resources:** Women in developing nations are usually in charge of securing water, food and fuel and of overseeing family health and diet. Therefore, they tend to put into immediate practice whatever they learn about nutrition and preserving the environment and natural resources.
- **Economic empowerment:** More women than men live in poverty. Economic disparities persist partly because much of the unpaid work within families and communities falls on the shoulders of women and because they face discrimination in the economic sphere.
- **Educational empowerment:** About two thirds of the illiterate adults in the world are female. Higher levels of women's education are strongly associated with both lower infant mortality and lower fertility, as well as with higher levels of education and economic opportunity for their children.
- **Political empowerment:** Social and legal institutions still do not guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of land or other resources, in employment and earning, and social and political participation. Laws against domestic violence are often not enforced on behalf of women.
- **Empowerment throughout the life cycle:** Reproductive health is a lifetime concern for both women and men, from infancy to old age. UNFPA supports programming tailored to the different challenges they face at different times in life.

Experience has shown that addressing gender equality and women's empowerment requires strategic interventions at all levels of [programming and policy-making](#).

Political Empowerment

Throughout much of the world, women's equality is undermined by historical imbalances in decision-making power and access to resources, rights, and entitlements for women. Either by law or by custom, women in many countries still lack rights to:

- Own land and to inherit property
- Obtain access to credit
- Attend and stay in school
- Earn income and move up in their work, free from job discrimination

Moreover, women are still widely under-represented in decision-making at all levels, in the household and in the public sphere.

Addressing these inequities through laws and public policy is a way of formalizing the goal of gender equality. Legal changes, which most countries have now implemented, are often a necessary step to institute gender equality, but not necessarily sufficient to create lasting changes. Addressing the gaps between what the law proscribes and what actually occurs often requires broad, [integrated campaigns](#).

Women 's Political Empowerment : A Democratic Imperative

Advancing democratic governance requires creating and sustaining an environment of inclusive and responsive political processes and promoting the empowerment of women. The inclusion of the perspectives of women and their participation in politics are prerequisites for democratic development and contribute to good governance. Political parties are the most important institutions that affect the political participation of women. In most countries they are responsible for candidate recruitment and selection, and decide on which issues are placed on the policy agenda. How women participate in political parties -- or how political parties encourage and nurture women's involvement -- is a key determinant of their prospects for political empowerment.

Because of the influential nature of political parties on women's po-

litical empowerment, civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations and development assistance providers have heightened their focus on the role of political parties.

Globally, women remain sidelined from the structures of governance that determine political and legislative priorities. In the world's parliaments, women hold 19 percent of the seats – up from 16 percent in 2005. ¹ The proportion of women ministers is lower, averaging 16 percent.² The proportion of women heads of state and government is lower still and has declined in recent years, standing at less than 5% in 2011.³ The low numbers continue in the face of three decades of lobbying and efforts by the international community to eliminate discrimination and empower women. In 2000, the United Nations recognized the central role of women in development by including the empowerment of women as one of the Millennium Development Goals, yet no region in the world is on track to achieve the target of 30 percent women in decision-making positions. Although some notable exceptions and good practices in this area are discernible, several bottlenecks remain to women's full and equal participation as contestants.

During the electoral period, candidates need to be aware of effective techniques for **campaigning and communicating** with their constituencies. Political parties can help to educate voters about the rights of women to participate in politics and the importance for all of society in advancing gender equality. Actions that parties can take during this period include:

- Providing training to women candidates in such skills as fund-raising, message development, media relations and communicating with voters;
- Training and promoting women in campaign leadership positions (e.g. in campaign management, get out the vote, voter contact, and communications);
- Ensuring women's visibility in the campaign by providing additional media exposure;
- Identifying and disseminating party positions that are priorities for women, which could also attract more women's votes for their party;
- Monitoring elections, including by recruiting women as party agents to be present at polling stations, particularly if those polling stations are allocated for women only;

Even after the elections are over, political parties continue to play a central role in encouraging women's participation in politics. Actions that parties can take in the post electoral PERIOD to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in **governance** include:

- Conducting an assessment of the level of gender equality within the party, with the aim of identifying, and ultimately eliminating, any practices or rules that may directly or indirectly undermine women;
- Promoting gender-sensitive reforms to political institutions, such as changing the sitting times of parliament and the parliamentary calendar to accommodate parliamentarians with families;
- Ensuring gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in party policies, including by supporting gender-specific policy reform, such as combating gender-based violence or targeting parental leave or reproductive rights issues, and by promoting gender equality in areas like access to justice, health, nationality, labour, land rights, social security and inheritance;
- Supporting cross-party networks of women and women's parliamentary caucuses, as these can help channel women's interests and concerns and can help to mainstream gender in policy development and government oversight;
- Ensuring women elected to a political institution are provided with leadership roles within the parliamentary group (e.g. group chairperson) and parliamentary committees (e.g. chairperson or group focal point);
- Forming strategic partnerships with civil society organizations.

The actions suggested are not exhaustive; they are offered as guidance, based on best practices, not as prescription. When taking any action to encourage women's political participation and to advance gender equity more broadly, it is crucial to involve men. Men are essential partners for lasting change. The goal of more women in pol-

itics is not fewer men in politics, but a more equitable society for everyone

As per the 14th Loksabha out of 525 member of parliament member we have only 52 Women members.

Women's wings usually perform some or all of the following activities:

- Contribute to policy development, promote women's interests in policy platforms and advise party leadership on gender issues;
- Contribute to, or oversee the implementation of, gender equality policies, including the implementation of quotas in the candidate recruitment process;
- Coordinate the activities of women members of the party;
- Serve an outreach and mobilization function, particularly reaching out to women voters during an election and enlarging the party base;
- Provide support and training to newly elected parliamentarians and office holders;
- Contribute to transforming power relations within the party and sensitizing and training party members about gender equality;
- Reach out to male party members.

Reasons for failure of women in Politics

Without women the real human development is not feasible. The importance of the women's role in the development process and need to intensify action to improve the status of women are recognized internationally since 1975, when the General Assembly (UNO) has proclaimed the international women's year.

As the country celebrates Women's Day today, data on parliaments across the world reveal that India, the largest democracy, lags much behind other countries including its neighbors such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal when it comes to women's participation in politics.

With only 11 % of representation of women in Lok Sabha and 10.7 % in Rajya Sabha, India ranks 105th in the world, according to the latest comparative data released by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, an international organization that works for promoting democracy in the world.

India, the world's largest democracy, has only 60 women lawmakers in the current 543-member Lok Sabha, while there are 24 women MPs out of 240 members in Rajya Sabha at present. Two seats in Lok Sabha and five in the Upper House have been lying vacant. While India shares the 105th position with West African country Cote d'Ivoire, it is ranked 85 places below Nepal and 53 places behind Pakistan. Even China at 60th spot and Bangladesh at 65 are well above India, according to the IPU data that are based on information provided by Parliaments by December 31 last year.

- The positions of authority of these women leaders did not include any specific mandate to address only women issues.
- In this sense as leaders of political parties, they were as power driven as their male peers.
- Women leaders been typically anxious to give greater representation to other women within their own organizations or in the political process.
- Male domination in decision making and policy implementation.
- Not following the reservation
- Difference among the social status in the constituency.

Suggestions :

The inclusion of the perspectives of women and their participation in politics are prerequisites for democratic development and contribute to good governance, and political parties are the primary vehicles for political participation.

- Reservation must be provided as per the sex ratio of women.
- Women empower can be achieved in all sectors if women is empowered politically because legal they can bring the act and involved themselves in administration.
- It can be politically and financially advantageous for political parties to promote women's empowerment initiatives actively throughout the electoral cycle.

- By openly and formally supporting women's participation through reforms, political parties can alter public opinion, generate new support bases, attract new members, increase the flow of public funding to the party, and improve their standing with other countries, among other political and practical benefits.
- The formal support of political parties is required to overcome the barriers to women's participation in politics.
- Women continue to be discouraged from direct competition with men and from public exposure and interactions, and are instead assigned roles that steer them away from decision-making.
- Every woman shall have a right to be free from sexual Harassment and the right to work in an Environment free from any from sexual harassment.
- Need to protect the women from Sexual Harassment at work places.
- Necessary to establish Mahila police stations and She Cabs for women.

Conclusion :

Women's presence at the decision making levels will not only enhance the status of women but will also strengthen democratic traditions and make democracy more meaningful in fighting injustice and oppression while at the same time help to bring a different, explicitly female perspective to the political arena. Unless women are brought into the decision-making levels directly, important women issues will never be tackled with the seriousness they require.

When women have a real voice in all governance institutions, from the political to those in the civil service, the private sector, and civil society, they will be able to participate equally with men in public dialogue, and influence the decisions which determine their own future and that of their families, communities, and nations.