

ENGENDERING POLITICS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE :
ADVOCACY BY WOMEN FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

- Usha Thakkar

The debate in India on the issue of reservation of seats for women in the Parliament and State Assemblies since 1990s has been intense and heated, often creating tense situations and revealing deep-rooted social prejudices. Though the Indian tradition calls the woman “Shakti”, power incarnate, power has remained elusive for most of the women in India.

Since the nineteenth century, when the woman’s question came to the forefront, there has been an awakening and growing realization among women that they have to contribute to the process of social change. By the end of the twentieth century this realization has resulted in multifaceted women’s social, political and economic structures. Today the activities of women in India range from the movement for good governance to protests against rape, domestic violence, dowry, food-adulteration and price-rise. They are raising their voice against discrimination and injustice in social, economic and political spheres.

This paper seeks to analyze the efforts of women’s groups in India to bring social and political change by advocating for the bill providing reserved seats for women. This advocacy has to be seen in the context of changing pattern of Indian politics and widening dimensions of the women’s movement. Section I provides a brief review of women’s political participation. Section II presents the context of the origin of the women’s reservation bill. Section III deals with arguments for and against reservation and initiatives by women to make a dent in the existing political structure. Section IV offers insights in engendering politics from the grass roots level and concluding remarks.

(I)

The establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 marked the beginning of the new era in the political history of India. It has to be noted, however, that the liberal perspective of the Indian elite initially was not broad enough to include women’s political rights. As expressed by Surendranath Banerji, a prominent member of the Indian National Congress, in 1890, “I am not aware that any responsible Congressman had even asked for representative institutions for women

or the masses of our people. However much we may love and respect our ladies, we do not think they are yet qualified for a representative government.” (1). For years most of the women who attended the Congress sessions worked as volunteers and took the lead in singing the national song. But the scene started changing, as women started realizing the importance of their rights and capacity to contribute to the uplift of the society. Annie Besant was the first woman to become the President of the Congress in 1917, followed by Sarojini Naidu in 1925 and Nellie Sengupta in 1933, (later Indira Gandhi in the post-independence period). However, it remained the task of Gandhi to turn the traditional symbols and ideals into sources of inspiration and energy for Indian women.

Women’s entry into national politics through non-violent methods under Gandhi’s leadership brought spectacular results. Thousands of Indian women, urban and rural, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, young and old, learnt the meaning of liberation from Gandhi and contributed to the struggle for independence with all their energy. During the Non-cooperation movement (1920-22) the Civil Disobedience movement (1930-32) and the Quit India Movement (1942), women came out in large numbers from their homes. They led processions, sang nationalist songs, attended meetings, organized processions, picketed before shops selling liquor and foreign cloth meetings, sold khadi, tolerated police atrocities and faced imprisonment.

Women fought for national freedom, and at the same time also fought for their right to vote. One of the major contributions of women’s organizations in pre-independence times - Women’s Indian Association (WIA), National Council for Women in India (NCWI), and the All India Women’s Conference. (AIWC)- was to raise and articulate women’s demand for rights and to struggle continuously to get them. (2). The issue of reserved seats for women used to surface in the political discussions during the 1930s. Women’s organizations agog with nationalism, however did not favour reserved seats for women based on the criterion of education, property or husband’s status. As the national movement gained momentum, the goal of independence became the only concern for men as well women. Feminism and nationalism remained closely interlinked. Participation in the freedom struggle did not generate any controversy on sex-roles. Voicing the confidence generated by the participation in the nationalist movement, women members in the Constituent Assembly said that they had never asked for privileges or special reservations but only for justice and equality.

It seemed in the period soon after independence that women and men in free India will have equal opportunities to develop and to share power. But that was not to be. Though India can boast of a powerful woman prime minister, a few able women ministers and some impressive women political leaders, experience clearly shows that electoral politics is the area, where women hesitate to enter. Though women have been participating in the formal channel of politics as voters, as party workers, and as candidates contesting various elections, only a few women have been able to occupy decision-making positions.

Soon after independence, the pattern of politics started becoming intricate and complex as the institutions of parliamentary democracy tried to take roots in Indian soil, full of variations of castes, languages, religions, regions, family structures and cultural norms. One great difficulty about the Indian political scene is that one cannot generalize about the inter-relationship between any single factor and political behaviour. Patterns of political behavior of women from different regions show different relationships, influenced as they are by inter-related factors such as the social status of women, their economic status, the cultural norms and the over-all regional outlook towards women's participation in the wider society. (3).

Many factors influence the voting behaviour of women. Important amongst them are education, region, caste and class, awareness about women's issues, opinions of male members in the family, preferences for women candidates and the programmes and policies of various political parties. Though voting is the first step of assimilation in the political process, and the gap between voting of men and women is narrowing, (4) Voting by itself it is not sufficient to bring political equality. Women's vote has not been considered of much consequence by political parties and leaders.

Political parties are usually generous in giving promises to women to better their future, but mostly such promises remain on paper. Women do not find a place on decision-making committees of political parties. (5). The manifestos of major political parties especially since the 1989 elections have given attention to women, mainly due to pressure from the women's movement. In the last three general elections (1996, 1998 and 1999) they promised many programmes to women, including 33 % reserved seats in Parliament and State Assemblies. But their practice has shown a different pattern. In 1999 elections, when the debate on the reservation policy was intense, there were only 277 women contestants for the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Parliament, of who only 47 won. To quote the figures of two major

parties, out of 50 candidates fielded by the Congress, only 14 won. The Bharatiya Janata Party fielded 54 candidates, but only 15 won.

Many factors are important in the election of women candidates. Important amongst them are: family background, family financial support, the support of male members in the family, personality, education, personal involvement in politics, local politics, caste affiliation, plans of party leaders, campaign strategy and pulls within the party. The combined result of all these factors is that very few women are given tickets and out of them only a handful get elected. Figures of women elected in the Lok Sabha (6) (The lower house of the Parliament), the Rajya Sabha (7) (the upper house of the Parliament) and State Assemblies (8) show this clearly.

Women over the years have realized that there are many obstacles to assimilation of women in the process of decision-making, operating at different levels.

The woman's traditional role demands full attention to home, husband and family. The age-old norms governing the social behaviour of the woman ask her to be modest, submissive, mild-mannered, soft-spoken and self-effacing. But the demands of her changed role in public life want her to be vocal, assertive, competitive, articulate, rational and ambitious. This dichotomy between the private and the public spheres causes pressures on her and she refrains from entering public life.

The word politics itself conveys 'a dirty game' and 'murky maneuvering' and acts as a deterrent factor for women. Political violence, criminalization of politics and threats of character assassination are enough to throttle the political ambitions of women. In addition routine political work, regular visits to the constituency area, active participation in the meetings, and preparedness to meet people all the time are not consistent with the woman's life with her family. Moreover, speaking at public meetings, asserting individual opinions and negotiating for power require training and experience, which are not easily accessible to women.

Though political parties have women's wings they are reluctant to field women candidates. The participation of women gets limited to voting, providing help in organizing processions and doing voluntary and ancillary work in party offices. It is important to note here, that inability of the woman to raise funds for her election or the party is a formidable hindrance. Economic dependence and prohibitive election expenses easily dampen the political aspirations of women.

(II)

It is important to understand the change in the perspective of women's groups on the issue of reservation. Need for reserved seats for women had seemed out of tune, as India in 1947 was ushered into a new era. To remember the words of a prominent woman leader and a member of the Constituent Assembly, "We have never asked for privileges...What we have asked for is social justice, economic justice and political justice." (9). But the scene changed completely in the 1990s, when women's groups all over the country were voicing their demands for reserved seats for women.

Initially it was felt that independence would prove to be a panacea to cure all kinds of inequality and injustice, experienced by women. Unfortunately this did not happen. As brought out by "Towards Equality" (Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, appointed by the Government of India) in 1974 dynamics of social change and development had affected the majority of women adversely, and had created new imbalances and disparities.

The issue of reservation was considered by this committee as a tool to help women to cope with the disabilities that hamper them. But consensus could not be achieved. Phulrenu Guha and Maniben Kara did not accept the norm of reservation, while Vina Mazumdar and Lotika Sarkar were in favour of extension of the principle of reservation to the legislative bodies. The Committee in its report recommended the establishment of Statutory Women's Panchayats at the village level, reservation of seats for women in municipalities as a transitional measure, the constitution of permanent committees in municipalities to initiate and supervise programmes for women, and inclusion of women in all important committees and delegations. The committee had made a noteworthy recommendation, that political parties should adopt a definite policy regarding the percentage of women to be sponsored by them (to begin with, 15 per cent) for election to State Assemblies and Parliament. These recommendations, however, were not implemented.

The period after this report brought important changes in national politics as well as the demands and working of women's groups. Some of them were: the Chipko movement in the hill areas of Uttar hand (where women and men clung to trees to save them from felling by contractors for profit, 1973), the anti-price rise movement of women in the western regions of India (1973), the declaration of Emergency in 1975 by the government, which crushed human rights and civil liberties and protests

against it, student's movement in Gujarat and Bihar, the declaration of the U.N. in 1975 as the International Women's Year, and later of the Women's Decade, emergence of autonomous women's groups, visibility of women's movement on the issues of domestic violence, dowry, rape and media projection of women as sex objects in 1980s, the development of Women's Studies in the academic arena, the Shah Bano case (when a case involving the maintenance rights of a Muslim woman on divorce brought out the tension between conservative and progressive elements, 1986) and the subsequent passing of the Muslim Women (Protection of Divorce) Act of 1986, the Sati instance of 1987 (a young educated Hindu woman burned herself on her husband's pyre in the village of Deorala in Rajasthan), demolition of Babri Masjid (1992) and the ensuing communal riots.

These instances drew women's groups into confrontation with the state on the one hand and regressive religious forces on the other. It was perhaps, from recognition of its implications for women that feminists increasingly felt the need for political assertion within institutional structures. (10).

Women's groups especially since the 1980s have been making concerted efforts to convince the State to give special attention to women's issues. They have realized that their efforts to influence state politics have better chances of succeeding, if they have allies and women in sufficient number within the elected bodies. The Government also mainly due to the pressure from the women's movement has accepted, at least in principle, the approach of visualizing women as participants in the process of development and not as mere beneficiaries of welfare schemes.

Forced to reconsider their strategies, feminists realized that they cannot hope to make an indent into male misogyny from outside the structures of electoral politics. Therefore, since the 1980s, feminists have acted as pressure groups forcing the various political parties to spell out their agenda to women. (11)

The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) prepared by the Government of India, in view of the under-representation of women, had recommended 30% reservation for women in all elective bodies, from the Panchayat to the Parliament. It further stated that in the initial years this quota may have to be filled by nomination/co-option. Prominent women's organizations (AIDWA- All India Women's Conference, CWDS- Centre for Women's Development Studies, JWP- Joint Women's Programme, MDS- Mahila Dakshata Samiti; NFIW- National Federation of Indian Women; and YMCA- Young Women's Christian Association) organized a

debate to discuss the provisions of the National Perspective Plan. The recommendation for nomination / co-option was rejected. Women's organizations demanded 30% reservation for women in Panchayats and municipalities with due representation for women belonging to the Dalit and Tribal communities.

The final version of the National Perspective Plan included provision of reservation for women in Panchayats and municipalities to be filled by election. This was later incorporated in the sixty-fourth Constitution Amendment Bill 1989. The late 1980s and the early 1990s were full of political upheavals. The bill seeking changes in the Panchayati Raj went through modifications, and finally the seventy-third and seventy-fourth Constitutional Amendments were passed by the Parliament to strengthen the local self- government in the end of 1992 and ratified in 1993. One of the most progressive elements of these amendments has been reservation of seats for women in elected bodies of local self- government in rural and urban areas. It is important to note that when these amendments were passed, none of the hostile arguments against reservation of seats for women came up.

Women elected after the implementation of the reservation policy at the local level started making their presence felt. The seventy-third Amendment has drawn in nearly 750,000 women as members at Gram Panchayat level, 17,000 women at intermediary level, and 1,583 women at the district level. (12). The policy of reservation has certainly brought power within reach of rural women. Karnataka and West Bengal already had reserved seats for women in elected bodies in rural areas even before the seventy-third Amendment. Their experiences, and now those of other states, have been largely positive.

The persistent demand of women's groups for reservation in the Parliament and State Assemblies (an extension of seventy-third and seventy-fourth Amendments) finally found its response in the eighty-first (later eighty-fourth and eighty-fifth) Amendment to the Constitution. According to this bill one third of the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies shall be reserved for women retaining one third from such seats reserved for women from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It further provides that reservation will be on the basis of rotation, and there will be a review of reservation after fifteen years.

The Bill was tabled on 12 September 1996, a day before the Parliament was to be adjourned. It evoked spontaneous support and fierce opposition. Women from different parties and ideologies like Girija Vyas (Congress), Gita Mukherjee

(Communist Party of India), Sushma Swaraj (Bharatiya Janata Party) and Renuka Chowdhary (Telugu Desam Party) came together on this issue and pressed for its passage. But male members of the House had decided to oppose it. In addition to resistance to any measure to share power with women, the main criticism was that the bill contained no provision for OBCs (Other Backward Classes), Dalit, (the oppressed groups) and the minorities. There were also some doubts regarding the procedure of reserving constituencies for women. Ultimately, the bill was referred to the Joint Select Committee chaired by Gita Mukherjee. Joint Select Committee had 21 members from the Lok Sabha and 10 from the Rajya Sabha. This committee received 102 memoranda and 16 oral evidences. The Committee recommended that the bill be passed as it is, though there were some notes of dissent. It added, however, that the question of reservation for OBCs be considered in the near future.

The report of the committee was presented in December 1996, but the bill could not be taken for voting, mainly due to the mood of politicians. A memorandum signed by 80 (male) members of the house, from different parties (many of them from Bharatiya Janta Party, Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party) was given to the Prime Minister informing him that they planned to vote against the bill in its present form because it ignored the rights of the Other Backward classes, the Dalits (the oppressed) and minorities. Another noteworthy fact is that the chief ministers of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh in their joint memorandum to the Joint Select Committee had requested exemption from reservation for their states on the grounds of cultural specifications and lack of adequate eligible, trained women candidates among the tribals of North India.

Against such resistance, women's groups pursued their demand for reservation by organizing public meetings, seminars and rallies. To give an example, there was an impressive train rally for a week from 4 December 1998 from Delhi (in the north) to Ernakulam (in the south) covering 11 states. Women sarpanches (heads of village councils) in an all-India convention in Delhi organised by seven national women's organizations in 1997, pressed for the passage of the bill. Universities, Colleges, women's organizations and bodies like Indian Association of Women's Studies organized conferences and discussions to bring awareness about the issue.

By this time, Prime Minister Dev Gowda heading coalition governments was replaced by I.K. Gujral (both from the Janata Dal). Gujral supported the bill, but some of his colleagues vehemently opposed it. Ultimately Gujral said on 13 August

1997, that his government would get the bill passed only after attaining a consensus. Women's organizations were again disappointed. The coalition politics of the nation brought about the elections of 1998. This time, A.B. Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party headed the coalition government. He brought the bill as the eighty-fourth amendment bill in 1998 on 13 July. Some members from the Samajwadi Party and from Rashtriya Janata Dal, with their followers tried in an unparliamentary way to prevent introduction of the bill. The attempt to reintroduce it ended in literal shredding of the bill on the floor of the House by an agitated member.

With the adjournment of the House it became clear that the obstacles in the way of passing the bill were formidable. The government again tried to introduce the bill in December 1998, but nothing was achieved.

The changing political pattern of 1999 brought about yet another general election. Vajpayee, heading the National Democratic Alliance, became Prime Minister. The Lok Sabha was thrown into turmoil when the government tried to introduce the bill on 23 December 1999, but the government was finally successful in introducing the bill after having failed earlier. The issue, however, did not move further.

At the end of December 2000 once again there were two very raucous days in the House, when some members of the opposition (especially from Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janta Dal and Bahujan Samaj Party) prevented the speaker of the House from presenting the bill for discussion.

It is important to note that though the major parties like the Bharatiya Janta Party and the Congress and leftist parties expressed their support to the bill, members mainly from three small parties, have repeatedly succeeded in obstructing the bill. It seemed as if there was a silent male whip operating in the House.

The factors common to all the attempts to introduce the bill (by two United Front Coalition Governments and two National Democratic Alliance Coalition Governments) are: half-hearted attempts, wrong timings (like being often the end of the session), noisy protests and disruption by some members resulting in utter chaos, physical obstruction by some members and violation of parliamentary procedures and conventions, forcing the speaker to adjourn.

(III)

The review of the course of women's reservation bill brings to surface deep-rooted social inequalities and prejudices. There has been vehement opposition to this bill.

The arguments against reservations echo the arguments put forward by the Committee on Status of Women in its report. (13). The Committee had felt that the women's cause in India has always been championed by all progressive elements, men as well as women. Joint efforts are required for a climate favourable for raising women's status. Moreover, there is a possibility that separate constituencies for women would narrow their outlook, and this step would be a retrograde one, departing from the principle of equality. If granted, it would be difficult to withdraw and would perpetuate unequal status. It was also feared that such a step would encourage other communities and interests to put forth similar demands which would threaten national integration. In addition, women's interests cannot be isolated from the social, economic and political interests of other groups, strata and classes in society. Women share with men the problems of their groups, localities and communities. Women are not a community; they are a category and are not concentrated in certain areas or confined to a particular field of activity.

Added to these arguments is the argument rooted in the caste politics, which has come to prominence. As democratic institutions started taking roots in India, the social structure started gaining political significance. The Other Backward classes, like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Classes, have emerged as a political force in Indian politics, and political parties cannot afford to neglect them. (14). The leaders from the oppressed sections and other Backward classes are very suspicious of the policy for reservation. This was evident when Sharad Yadav said that he did not like the idea of "Prakati Mahilaen" (short-haired women, implying women from the upper castes and the upper class) coming to the Parliament as a result of the reservation policy, because this would be edging out the members from the lower castes. This statement was condemned by women activists throughout the country. Now women's groups have become aware of the caste dimensions of the reservation policy. As expressed by a prominent woman activist, the struggle over women's reservation bill can be an eye-opener for those in the women's movement who think that gender politics can be completely independent of caste and class politics. (15).

There are a few women activists who do not favour reservation. Important among them, are : Ela Bhat of SEWA, who believes that reservation will not yield the desired results, what women need is economic power; and Madhu Kishwar, editor of “Manushi” (the journal about women and society) who maintains that the policy of reservation is unlikely to improve the overall quality of governance in the country. It will ghettoize women, keeping them forever pitched against each other in electoral battles. We may end up feminizing corruption, if women decide to play by rules set by men. (16). Kishwar with others has proposed an alternative women’s reservation bill suggesting that all recognised political parties allot a mandatory quota of seats to women candidates. (17).

The arguments in favour of the bill are more or less the same as those presented before the Committee on the Status of Women: (18) The difficulties faced by women in getting elected, the reluctance of political parties to give tickets to women, the possibility of women losing faith in the political process and becoming passive spectators, and the potential of the reservation system to motivate women and political parties. It is also argued that the bill would break the male bastion of power , provide the ‘critical mass’ necessary to be effective in decision-making bodies and broaden the base of women’s representation in the legislative bodies.

Latika Sarkar and Vina Mazumdar arguing for reservation had stated in their note of dissent that “Our investigations have proved that the application of the theoretical principle of equality in the context of unequal situations only intensifies inequalities, because equality in such situations merely means privileges for those who have them already and not for those who need them”. (19). Vina Mazumdar, who was the member secretary of the Committee on the Status of Women in India states that she and her generation as “daughters of independence” had criticized reservation, but gradually they changed their views in the context of the continued inferior position of women. (20).

Experienced and well-respected women politicians also express their views on similar lines. Mrinal Gore, who did not favour reservation till recently, now favours the bill in view of successive governments not having been able to improve the lot of women during the long span of 50 years since independence. She demands a drastic change in the anti-woman stance of political parties and emphasizes the role of women’s organizations in seeing that good candidates are selected. (21). Pramila Dandavate who also earlier did not believe in reservation has changed her stance.

According to her there is opposition to the bill providing reservation because men do not want to share power with women. Once women realize their power, more and more women will come in to contest elections. She further asserted that she was highly impressed with the way women in panchayats in Karnataka were discharging their duties. (22). Women's entry to politics is necessary to help them in their struggle against injustice and to strengthen democracy. This argument is put forward forcefully by women's groups, women activities and leftist sections. (23). Veteran leftist woman politician and a staunch supporter of reservation, Gita Mukherjee had forcefully argued that empowering women would not merely benefit them but would benefit the country as a whole. (24).

Women arguing for reservation believe that this provision would help them to overcome discrimination. Their argument is, "Women are discriminated against per se. This discrimination is total and complete. Any woman will tell the local MPs (Members of the Parliament) that when she is born, she first faces discrimination as a girl, and then, later as a member of her community. Be she a Muslim, backward, Brahmin, Rajput, she is made to pay the price of being born a girl. It is this discrimination that has to be addressed first. The fight for social equality is the second fight in which she can join the menfolk only if she is recognized as an equal within". (25).

The opposition to the bill and the behaviour of the male members in the House have brought to the surface their anger, frustration and fear. If the reservation bill gets passed, at least 181 seats in the house of 554 go to women, displacing the present male members occupying them. Most of the male members feel that allowing the passage of the bill would be to commit political hara-kiri. Inability of political parties to push the bill clearly brings out this fact. It is important to note in this context that there was not much resistance to the provision of reserved seats for women in the seventy-third and the seventy-fourth Amendments; it is only after the bill for the eighty-first amendment that unprecedented chaotic scenes in the House have erupted over the bill, and there was a scathing denunciation of the bill in public debates. Evidently, the success stories of elected women representatives at the local level, especially in the Panchayati Raj institutions, have sent signals of the determined efforts of women for change, creating anxiety in male-dominated power structures.

Women have displayed their ability for political leadership, but they find it very difficult to reach the positions of power. If their representation in the Lok Sabha is allowed to go at the present rate, it would take decades to reach 33%. In fact experience has shown that women candidates have done better than men candidates. Concerned with the casual attitude of political parties to women, such as Vimochana, Forum for Women's Rights in Bangalore, Stree Mukti Andolan Sampark Samiti in Pune and SEWA in Ahmedabad, have come out with special appeals for voting. Women exercise their own choices during elections. After many meetings at grass root levels in 1996, the National Alliance for Women has presented a women's manifesto and a charter of demands reflecting women's perspective on politics.

Women activists have argued convincingly that men politicians who demand special reservation for women of their communities, in actual practice, do not show support for their women candidates. For instance, it was estimated that in 1997 there were in the House about 280 members from the middle class, of which 160 were estimated from Other Backward Classes, but only 4 of these were women. In states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the Other Backward Classes constitute the largest bloc of caste groupings. In Uttar Pradesh state assembly, out of 120 members of the Legislative Assembly from the Other Backward Classes, only 7 were women; while in Bihar there were 157 members of the Legislative Assembly from the Other Backward Classes, but only 5 were women. (26).

The treatment that the bill for reservation of seats for women has received from male members of different parties recently has disappointed women's organizations and women legislators, but they are not disheartened. Their efforts to make a dent in the male-dominated political structure continue. As Mohini Giri, the then chair-person of the National Commission on Women had said, "you cannot expect a thousand years of male domination to end within a day." (27)

The bill seems to be entangled in the web of male dominated politics. Political parties have no unanimous stand on the bill. The issues of sub-quota for the backward classes and the method of reserving constituencies have been causing differences and apprehension. It has once again become clear that the enactment of a law for women's betterment has never been easy, as is seen from similar earlier experiences in the passage of the bills pertaining to dowry and rape. But as women politicians and activists say, the process is not going to stop now that it has started.

Women's groups continue their demand for reservation, because they realize its importance in bringing about social and political change for a better tomorrow.

(IV)

Women's entry in the public sphere has to be seen in the larger context of the democratic system. It demands the percolation of the values of equality and justice in daily life, the support of citizen's groups in protest against oppression, and the acceptance of the feminist perspective in the public sphere. Women have to recognize, collectively and critically, the forces that limit them, and to work collectively and continuously to change the unequal power structure. Their participation in the freedom struggle has brought a new dimension to politics. They could, through the use of principles and techniques of non-violence, present a critique of the colonial state, which was oppressive, and so unethical. The domestic or civil domain was not deemed the submerged, weak and ineffectual 'female' domain within the 'male' world of state politics. (28).

Women in rural India, after entering politics at the local level in post – seventy-third Constitutional amendment are making their presence felt. A study of such women in Maharashtra shows that development activities are high on their agenda. (29). They want health and education facilities, water, electricity and good roads for their villages. Their work and methods is bringing a quiet revolution. Another study points out the commitment of members of the all-women Panchayats in Maharashtra. (30). There are many instances in Karnataka, Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and other states where women have fought bravely against corruption, alcoholism and other social evils, and have worked for the development of the community.

The range of women's activities in the public sphere from protests against injustice to the contribution to development projects shows that politics for women cannot be just involvement in the power relations, it has to go beyond the participation in the formal channel of politics to cover the efforts to reorganize the lives of the members of the society and to make a dent in the unequal power structure. The public-private divide can no longer be used to exclude women from politics. Women's reservation bill at present has not been passed; but that does not diminish its importance. Arguments for and against the bill (31) and efforts by women's groups for its passage draw our attention to the need for the 'politics of presence.' (32).

Finally the reservation policy is not an end in itself, we should see it as a means to achieve gender equality. It is important that women enter decision-making bodies in sizeable numbers. This 'critical mass' is important if women's voices are to be heard in politics and if politics is to be engendered. But mere entry into the political system should not end transparency, accountability and commitment for the women's movement. Instead of being submerged in the vastness of events, procedures, dogmas and ruthless competition, the movement must sail on to its destination of equality and empowerment. The task is uphill, but not impossible.

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1. Quoted in Neera Desai, Women in Modern India, Vora & Co., Bombay, P. 132
2. See Vijay Agnew, Elite Women in Indian Politics, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979; Jana Matson Everett, Women and Social Change in India, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1981; Geraldine Forbes, Women in Modern India, The New Cambridge History of India, IV 2, Cambridge University Press, Published in South Asia by Foundation Books, New Delhi, 1998.
3. Towards Equality, Government of India, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 287-8.
- 4.

Voters and Electors (1952-1996)

Year	Voting percentage		
	Total	Male	Female
1952	60.5	53.0	37.1
1957	63.7	56.0	39.6
1962	55.0	62.1	46.6
1967	61.0	66.7	55.5
1971	55.1	69.7	49.15
1977	60.0	65.62	54.91
1980	75.9	57.69	51.29
1984	62.4	63.61	68.17
1989	62.0	70.09	43.09
1991	53.05	52.56	47.43
1996	57.94	62.47	53.41
1998	62.04	66.06	58.02

(Sushila Kaushik, women and political participation, quoted in Sarla Gopalan and Mira Shiva ed.s, National Profile on Women, Health and Development: Country Profile- India, Voluntary Health Association of India and World Health Organization, New Delhi, 2000, p. 138)

5. Cynthia Stephen, Women in Governance- Trends and Challenges, Integral Liberation, Vol-2, No.4, Bangalore Social Action Trust, Bangalore , December 2000, p.255.

6. **Women in the Lok Sabha.**

Lok Sabha	Year	Total Seats	No. of Women Contested.	No. of Women Elected.	Percentage to the total
First	1952	499	-	22	4.4
Second	1957	500	45	27	5.7
Third	1962	503	70	34	6.7
Fourth	1967	523	67	31	5.9
Fifth	1971	521	86	22	4.2
Sixth	1977	544	70	19	3.4
Seventh	1980	544	142	28	5.1
Eighth	1984	544	164	44	8.1
Ninth	1989	517	198	27	5.2
Tenth	1991	544	325	39	7.18
Eleventh	1996	544	599	40*	7.18
Twelfth	1998	544	271	44*	8.8

* one member nominated by the President.

(Listen to Women's Vote-an Indo-British interaction, jointly presented by the National Commission on Women and the British Council, New Delhi, 1998, p.67)

47 women were elected in 1999 elections. For details for political participation of women in India, see, Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar, Women in Indian Society, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 95-121.

7. **Women in the Rajya Sabha.**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total No. of Seats</u>	<u>Total No. of Women Members</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1952	219	16	7.3
1957	237	18	7.5
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	24	9.7
1991	245	38	15.5

(Knocking at the Male Bastion: Women in Politics, National Commission for Women, New Delhi, 1997, p. 150) In 1998 there were 18 women members in the Rajya Sabha.

8.

Representation of Women in Assemblies of State Governments.

<u>State</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Women</u>
Andhra Pradesh	1957	252	11	1994	294	9
Karnataka	1957	179	18	1994	224	7
Kerala	1957	127	6	1991	140	8
Madhya Pradesh	1957	218	26	1993	320	12
Punjab	1957	101	5	1992	117	6
Rajasthan	1957	136	9	1993	200	9
Tripura	1967	30	0	1992	60	2
Uttar Pradesh	1967	341	24	1993	425	12
West Bengal	1967	195	11	1991	294	18
Delhi	1972	56	3	1993	70	3

(Country Report, Fourth World Congress on Women, Beijing, 1995, Government of India, 1995, P. 69)

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14. Ashutosh Varshney, The Twelfth Election of India's Lok Sabha, <http://www.asiasociety.org/publications/update-indian-elections.html>, February 1998; Nagindas Sanghavi and Usha Thakkar, Regionalisation of Indian Politics, Economic and Political Weekly, 12 February , 2000. pp. 514-18.
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