

## **CHAPTER: 3**

# **WOMEN'S ENTRY INTO POLITICS IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL REVIEW**

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### **CHAPTER OUTLINE**

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### 3.1.INTRODUCTION

The movement for gender equality the world over has been one of the defining developments of our time. While women have made significant advances in many societies, women's concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere. According to the Report of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, Copenhagen, July 1980: "While Women represent 50 per cent of the world adult population and a-third of official labour force, they perform nearly two-thirds of all working hours, receive only a-tenth of world income and own less than one per cent of the world property". The world over women are struggling to break the shackles that bind them and challenging the unequal distribution of power in society. Transforming the existing egalitarian pattern of gender relationships necessitates leadership in the state, markets and civil society—the key centres of power in the present globalising economy. It is, therefore, imperative for women to be in the corridors of power and have the power to negotiate a better deal for themselves, if they are to influence policy decisions which have an impact upon them. Empowerment of women in all spheres, in particular the political sphere is critical for their advancement and the foundation of a gender-equal society. Women's political empowerment is premised on "three fundamental and non-negotiable principles: (a) the equality between women and men; (b) Women's right to the full development of their potentials; and (c) women's right to self representation and self-determination". In empowerment, the key indeed is 'power': it is power to 'access', 'control' and make 'informed choices'. To use an Indian expression, it is *shakti*, which is manifested through the use of a mix of power, effectiveness, capability, force and influence to challenge and transform the structures and institutions of patriarchal ideology and existing power relations. According to the Jakarta Declaration, "Empowerment of women is not only an equity consideration; it is also a necessary precondition for sustainable economic and social development. Involvement of women in the political arena and in decision-making role is an important tool for empowerment as well as monitoring standards of political performance." The applications of the philosophical underpinnings of Jakarta Declaration are necessary, because in the countries where women have gained near equal representation such as in the Scandinavian countries, they have begun to alter the very nature of politics (Fadia, p.538-40).

In India, women's status has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From ancient times through the medieval period to modern India, the history of women has been eventful. In ancient India, reverence was given to women as mother's

image, a symbol of life, strength and purity with immense capacity for patience, sacrifice and suffering. Woman was depicted as '*Shakti*' and it was an accepted belief that where woman is respected, there is divine presence (Jharta, 1996, p.47). In modern India, women have held high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition. In the context of present research study, it is require assessing the history of women's involvement in freedom struggle movement and after the Independence their participation in political process and formal political structures for understanding the role of Indian women in political leadership. In this chapter, we have given a look into how women of India outdone a journey into the political domain.

### **3.2.WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIAN POLITICS: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

In the Rig-Vedic period women enjoyed a highly respectable position. The Vedic period can be called the 'Golden Age' regarding the status of Indian women. Women enjoyed a position of equality and were respected both in the family and society as well. They were imparted education like men and enjoyed a considerable freedom in their personal matters. The community as a whole showed concern and respect for them and they played a significant role in the familial, social and political life (Jharta, 1996, p.47). There was no difference, in terms of rights of powers, between men and women. We find mention of several tribal assemblies such as the 'Sabha', Samity, Vidatha, Gana in the Rig Veda, which exercised deliberative, religious and various military functions. From the political point, 'Sabha' and 'Samity' were more important and women were allowed to attend 'the Sabha' and 'Vidatha' in the Rig Vedic times. But from the latter Vedic period to medieval period, women were reduced to a derogatory position, thought to be inferior in the quality and thus were subject to the domination of male citizens.

In the latter Vedic period 'Vidatha' was completely disappeared. Women's right to participate in 'Sabhas' was denied and replaced by nobles and Brahmins. Thus the character of the village organizations changed and women were reduced to a derogatory position. In the family an increasing power and domination of the father was also discerned. Women did not take part in political activities as actively in the later Vedic period as in the Rig-Vedic period. They did not form a part of the Sabha. However, a reference in the Atharva Veda shows that women attended Samity (Jharta, 1996, p.48).

Kings were advised not to be guided by women or to govern kingdoms with their help. Women were also deprived of political right of succession to the kingdoms. In this period, we find no example of women ruling kingdoms and taking part in politics generally (Jharta, 1996, p. 48). A small number of women theologians could only take part in philosophic discussions and some queens got the opportunity to participate in coronation rituals. But the greater chunks of women, common women, were thought to be inferior in the quality and thus were subject to the domination of male citizens (Roy, 2015).

Women's position continued to be downgraded gradually due to certain internal changes in the society in post-Vedic period. Compulsory marriage, introduction of *dasi*-system, specialization of Vedic education and denial of religious and therefore intellectual education to women contributed much to their degradation. Institution of marriage and family confined them to home and early marriage, lack of education and some Brahmanical notions added to their ignorance and made them dependent upon men-folk, in respect of political affairs also (Jharta, 1996, p.49). The lower status of Women continued in Mauryan and Gupta period. However, in Mauryan empire, there were women spies and women constituted the force for the personal security and safety of the king (Jharta, 1996, p. 50), which means that during this period there was a faith in the competence and faithfulness of women. In the Gupta age, also, women were not disqualified from the exercise of public rights (Jharta, 1996, p. 50). An elaborate account of people and their economic, social, and cultural life is available from the descriptions of the famous Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien (399-414 A.D.). In the Gupta period women were allowed to take part in listening to the epics and the 'puranas' (mythology) but they had no right to property. However, they sell and mortgage their immovable properties including ornaments and jewellery given to them at the wedding ceremonies. The main reason behind their subordination to men can be attributed to the complete dependence on their husbands for their livelihood and maintenance (Roy, 2015).

Though there were a few capable and intelligent women, who actively took part in politics of the land and could influence the policies of the concerned governments, the overall status of common women had worsened during the Mughal rule. Such personalities as Rani Jodha Bai, Rani Durgavati, Rani Rupmati, Nurjahan and her mother Asmat Begum, Tara Bai Jiaj Bai were exceptional but all of them belonged to rich and ruling family. Thus the greater part was uneducated and poor village women who were

exempted from participation in all kinds of public activities, not to speak of formulation and implementation of the policies (Roy, 2015).

Besides, women were considered as merely the machine of child production and an object of enjoyment by elites, nobles, and the emperors. There was a fashion to keep a large number of wives, slaves and beautiful concubines in their 'harems'. Like the Mughals, the Rajputs also adopted the same policy of keeping multiple wives. Akbar had five thousands women in his 'harem' and Raja Man Singha kept about one thousand women in his 'harem'. The Sunni Muslims could keep four wives at a time legally and Shia Muslims enjoyed the liberty to have even more than more wives. Women were not allowed to go outside without aids. They were deprived of education and thus were the victims of age-old ignorance and superstition. On the other hand, the social evils like marriages, prohibition of widow marriages, polygamy and the practice of 'Sati' (women's cremation with her dead husband) were widely prevalent in society. All these social evils made them subject to social exploitation and crippled their participation in any outside activities including politics (Roy, 2015). The disintegration of the Mughal Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the consequent political confusion added to the miseries of Indian women (Jharta, 1996, p.54).

### **3.2.1. WOMEN IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD:**

With the British rule women's position became the worst in the history of the country. The 19<sup>th</sup> century reform movement and the social renaissance initiated the process of improving the status of women. The struggle for their uplift took place mainly in making laws for social reforms; women's education; and political rights. Efforts were concentrated on the first two in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries whereas political rights of women were achieved during the active phase of the independence movement. The emergence of renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century opened the eyes of Indian intelligentsia to the disgraceful social conditions of their own people especially that of women. They realized the shameful position of Indian women, which was nothing but a tale of suffering and humiliation from birth to death (Jharta, 1996, p.54-55).

Social reformers, who were by and large men, moved by the most pitiable conditions of women in society and felt that Indian society could not develop unless the conditions of the women improved. The crusaders in the dominant Hindu society were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar etc. These social

reformers fought against the system of sati (women's cremation with her dead husband) purdah (veil) and child marriage. The reformers supported widow remarriage and education of women. The movement launched by these social reformers had a limited goal. Their main aim was the reform of Hindu society and women's issues were tackled from that point of view. Basically, none of the social reformers challenged the male domination of the patriarchal system. Rather, it could be said that the movement launched by them was to make the patriarchal system a bit humane. Nevertheless, the social reform movement has created some social awareness amongst women (Saxena, 1994, p. 394).

The situation improved since the 19<sup>th</sup> century when women began to participate in various movements and agitations. But most of the struggles were dominated by the women of the elites of the society. It is pointed out that, "The elite perspective is dominant, which relates women's peasant women" (Sinha, 2000, p. 70). The modern educational system and the international women's movement also influenced the women of India. After the First World War a large number of women joined India's freedom struggle. M.K. Gandhi made women an integral part of all struggles which he launched during the freedom struggle against British colonialism. Women's participation in this movement was modest and it cannot be said that these movements were women's movements because the mere presence of women in any movement cannot make it a women's movement. The freedom of the nation was important for men and women as citizens of the country and as such women were also involved in it (Saxena, 1994, p. 394). The house wives, young girls, widows, old women and even tawaifs and prostitutes directly or indirectly participated in the freedom movement of the country though most of these are unrecorded. Also, it is important to mention here that the role of tawaif (tawaifs in the North, devadasis in the South, baijis in Bengal and naikins in Goa, these professional singers and dancers were dubbed as "nautch girls" during the British rule, and their profession was conflated with prostitution in the late 19th century; Rao, 2019) in the freedom movement is remain unsung always, while tawaifs also emerged as a key source of strategic support for many of the freedom-fighters during the rebellion of 1887; the homes of the tawaifs acted as places for secret meetings, while their enormous financial clout helped sustain the struggle against colonial rule (Purohit, 2020). However, the massive participation of women in freedom struggle was largely accomplished by the call given by Gandhi in the 1920s.

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women irrespective of caste, creed and social position began to participate in political activities to evict the British Raj. Gandhi encouraged women by saying that India needed women leaders who were “*pure, firm and self-controlled*” like the ancient heroines: Sita, Damayanti and Draupadi. These were heroines who had suffered at the hands of men but survived with dignity. It was these heroines Gandhi recalled when he told women who wake up and recognize their essential equality with men (Forbes, 1998, p.124). If women were to be 'free' they had to be fearless'. Gandhi rightly realised that it was more a matter of psychological fear and helplessness, culturally imposed upon women by society, than physical weakness which kept women crippled. His constant message to them was that bravery and courage were not the monopoly of men. Even if all women could not become Ranis of Jhansi they could emulate the still better example of Sita who even the mighty Ravana dared not touch (Kishwar, 1985, p. 1691). Gandhi compared the British Rulers to the demon of Ravana who abducted Sita, wife of righteous King Ram. Under colonialism the enslaved people were losing all sense of dharma (righteousness). Restoration of the rule of Ram would come only when women, emulating the faithful and brave Sita, united with against this immoral ruler (Gandhi, 1965, p. 57-58 & 391-95).

The major events where women participated in large number in the pre-independence era were - *Anti-partition Movement of Bengal* (1905), *Non-cooperation Movement* (1920-22), *Salt Satyagraha* (1930), and *Quit India Movement* (1945-47) (Roy, 2015). The Swadesi Movement aroused a strong sense of patriotism and identity among the Bengali women. Women participated in the “**Anti-Partition Movement of Bengal**” in 1905 and tried all along to increase mass participation on women in public life. Sarala Devi set up clubs for physical culture and organized ‘melas’(fairs) and organized regular meetings of women for raising consciousness among them. Even some great personalities of foreign origin like Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins and Sister Nivedita played important roles in making them conscious of their position and role in the society. Under the aegis of the moderate, highly educated, rich, and urban born women the revolutionary movement against the British imperialism started to granulate in India. Madam Bhikaji Rustom K.R. Kama, the ‘Mother of Indian Revolution’ and Kamala Devi participated in the anti-British movement in India. Their participation in the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements against the British rule was encouraging (Roy, 2015).

In the first **Non-Cooperation Movement** of 1921, Gandhi consciously involved women in the attempt to link their struggle with the struggle for national independence. But the programme for women was devised in a way that they could remain at home and still contribute to the movement. It was with a remarkable insight that Gandhi, without challenging their traditional role in society; could make women an important social base for the movement (Bandyopadhyaya, 2009, p. 239). It was victory for Mohandas K. Gandhi and promised a more active role for women than that offered by the swadeshi vow. Congress declared April 6-13, 1921 satyagraha week, and women interested in politics held meetings to show their support. At one of the several meetings which Sarojini Naidu addressed, women decided to form their own political organization. Rashtriya Stree Sangha (RSS), an independent women's organization, required its members to join the District Congress Committee. Speaking to this group in August, Urmila Devi, the widowed sister of Bengali Congress leader C.R Das, urged women to be ready to leave their homes to serve the country. By November, 1000 Bombay women were demonstrating against the Prince of Wales' visit to India. In Bengal, events took an even more dramatic turn. C.R Das along with volunteers arrested for the incident of selling Khaddar (homespun cloth) on the streets of Calcutta in spite of government's ban on political demonstrations. Then his wife, Basanti Devi, his sister, Urmila Devi, and his niece, Miss Suniti Devi took to the streets and were arrested. After that a huge crowd of 'Marwaris, Muslims, Bhatias, Sikhs, coolies, mill-hands and school boys' milled around until the police released the women. Gandhi immediately recognized the value of having women form picket lines. Writing in Young India he urged women from other parts of the country to follow the brave example of Bengali women. The arrest of respectable women was viewed as an appropriate tactic to shame men into joining the protests. Less predictable, and certainly not an intended outcome, was the way these arrests affected other women. Times were changing. Women from all provinces of British India stepped forward in response to Gandhi's call. Gandhi's appeal went beyond 'respectable' women to women marginalized by middle-class society. He had a reputation as a political leader who believed women counted and had faith in their capacity to help the nation and themselves (Forbes, 1998, p.126-27).

In addition, during the Gandhi-led non-cooperation movement from 1920 to 1922, a group of courtesans in Varanasi formed the Tawaif Sabha to support the independence struggle. Husna Bai, who chaired the sabha, urged members of the group to wear iron



shackles instead of ornaments as a symbol of protest and to boycott foreign goods. In other parts of the country too, former courtesans and prostitutes sought to participate in the freedom movement. Gandhi met a group of prostitutes in Barisal (in present-day Bangladesh) and Kakinada (Andhra Pradesh), who expressed the desire to join the Indian National Congress. Gandhi urged them to give up sex work and start spinning the charkha instead. "My whole heart is with these sisters. But I am unable to identify myself with the methods adopted at Barisal," he wrote in an editorial in *Young India*, his weekly publication, in June 1925. "...I am firmly of opinion that, so long as they continue the life of shame, it is wrong to accept donations or services from them or to elect them as delegates or to encourage them to become members of the Congress" (Rao, 2019). The middle-class women who were participating in the movement in large numbers were uncomfortable with them, that was the reason the contribution of tawaif to freedom struggle movement remain unknown and unsung to us.

M.K. Gandhi urged women to boycott foreign cloth, spin and join in public defiance of British laws. At the same time, women's organizations were petitioning the British government for the franchise. Though Gandhi was not in favour of legal change rather he advocated celibacy of women. Saraladevi Chaudhurani, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Amrit Kaur and other women who followed Gandhi did not abandon the franchise issue. They were impressed with his empathy for women, personally committed to his vision, but unwilling to give up their work on behalf of civil rights (Forbes, 1998, p.128). Women, as part of Indian people, fought for freedom from colonial masters, but the nationalist leaders, including Gandhi, had not raised any voice against the male dominated social structure of Indian society. The humane treatment to women was in a sense the end of ideology of the women's right (Saxena, 1994, p.394). However, Gandhi helped ensure the entry of women into public life. The way of their participation in these initial years was patronized by participation of urban, middle class women in the political life of the country (Bandyopadhyaya, 2009, p.252).

In addition, Women's participation in the **Civil Disobedience Movement** of 1930-32 differed qualitatively and quantitatively from the early 1920s and won them a place in history (Forbes, 1998, p.129). The **Salt Satyagraha** marked a new high watermark of women's participation in the movement. Women's associations played an active role in violating the salt laws. Gandhi was constructing a new ideal for Indian woman and

rewrote passivity and self suffering as strength. Gujrati women living in Bombay responded to this message by forming an organization to plan and direct efforts to close shops selling foreign clothes. Bombay women's picketing and demonstrations from 1930-32 received more attention than women's activities in any other part of the country. The women's political organization, The Rastriya Stree Sangha, had remained under the presidency of Sarojini Naidu with Goshiben Naoroji Captain and Avantikabai Gokhale as vice-presidents. It stated its goals as swaraj and women's emancipation. By 1930, the leadership and structure of the RSS were sufficiently developed for it to spawn a new, smaller organization, the Desh Sevika Sangha (DSS) (Women Serving the Country) whose members were ready for action. In May 1930 with the Sevikas already picketing, Sarojini Naidu was nominated to lead the raid on the Dharasana salt works. She directed and protest and was arrested the same day and released. Her presence was symbolic both for Indian nationalists and British authorities. Many of her Indian supporters feared for her safety, but she told them: "I am here not as a woman but as a General". On May 21, Sarojini was arrested second time and sentenced to a year in prison. Her leadership inspired hundreds of women emulate her bravery by marching in the streets. Demonstrations and picketing continued in Bombay until 1931 when Gandhi was released from jail. During this time women proved their effectiveness in agitational politics. Merchants, faced with women picketing their shops, signed the pledge not to sell foreign cloth until an honourable peace had been arranged for the country. On the streets women joined men for flag-raising and demonstrations. The Desh Sevikas organized a number of demonstrations that grabbed headlines and inspired women all over India (Forbes, 1998, p.130-35).

Also, Women of Bengal came forward at this time and participated in demonstrations. Calcutta women made and sold salt, picketed cloth and liquor shops, preached the value of Khaddar, and took processions into the streets. The capital city was also the heart of revolutionary struggle and women's colleges became centers for recruiting new members. In district towns and villages women joined processions, wore khaddar, and hid fleeing revolutionaries. In this setting Gandhi's influence was no greater than that of prominent local leaders. Bengali nationalism had always valorised violence and this ethos profoundly influenced the participation of Bengali women in the freedom struggle. In 1928, the first formal organization Mahila Rastriya Sangha (MRS) formed to mobilize women for political work in Bengal. Latika Ghosh, an Oxford-educated teacher, founded

this organization because Subhas Chandra Bose had asked her to. He was impressed with Latika's ability to successfully field a women's demonstration against the Simon Commission and insisted she develop a women's organization connected with Congress. She confessed that she made a poor colonel, unable to stay in step or salute properly, but she wanted her female volunteers to appear as the equals of men in the struggle for freedom (Forbes, 1998, p.137). She achieved her goal; observers reported seeing women in a new light:

*"As the ladies clad in their saris marched past to the sound of the bugle and the beating of the drum, there could be traced not a touch of all the frailties that are so commonly attributed to them. No faltering, no hesitancy, no softness associated in popular minds with the womanhood of Bengal but chivalry written on every face and manifest in every movement"* (Forbes, 1998, p.137).

The MRS had goals similar to the RSS in Bombay; they wanted to achieve swaraj and improve women's status. Calcutta women formed the Nari Satyagraha Samiti (NSS) in 1929 in response to the congress call for women to be ready to serve the nation. This group had a core of 15 to 20 women who were willing to picket and risk arrest. They were all Bengali women belonging to the three highest castes: Brahmins, kayasthas, and vaidyas. At the same time as these women were picketing and joining processions, other women were recruited by revolutionary organizations. Most of the women of revolutionary groups at this time were students. Most of them joined secret societies after they had worked with women's organizations and with Congress. Whereas previously women had supported revolutionaries by keeping house for them, spreading propaganda, collecting funds, hiding and transporting weapons, and even making explosives, now they were directly involved in revolutionary acts. By 1933 most of the women revolutionaries were in prison and were subject to extreme police violence. Women from rural areas responded to the call to break the salt laws. There are many accounts of their bravery (Forbes, 1998, p. 135-41).

Though, in Madras the nature of women involvement in the movement was different. Madras women never joined the revolutionary movement, nor were they subjects to extreme police violence. C. Rajagopalachari, a leading member of Congress, regarded picketing liquor shops as one of the most dangerous forms of protest in Madras and deemed inappropriate for women. Inspiring by Kasturbai (Gandhi's wife) Smt. S.

Ambujammal, the only daughter of S. Srinivasa Iyenger who was a brilliant lawyer and congress leader, joined the non-cooperation movement in 1920 and in 1928 she formed the Women's Swadeshi League in Madras. Krishnabai Rau, a loyal Gandhian since childhood, organised the Desh Sevika Sangha (DSS) under the aegis of the Swadeshi League. DSS women picketed foreign cloth shops with men volunteers. Standing at the entrance of shops, they stopped customers and pleaded with them: "India is already downtrodden. Please do not help in its further degradation by buying foreign made goods". When the police first moved against the demonstrators, they attacked the men but not the women. This only strengthened women's resolve to join the movement against the British. It was not long before the police began to treat women protesters the same as men. Madras women were among the first arrested in the country. In a protest incident police by lathi-charging killed three people and wounded five. This event frightened both Congress leaders and women satyagrahis neither of whom wished to incite mob violence and or provoke police retaliation. It had the effect of dampening the enthusiasm of women for mass demonstrations (Forbes, 1998, p. 143-46).

In North India women from Allahabad, Lucknow, Delhi, and Lahore joined public demonstrations and shocked a public unused to seeing respectable women in the streets without veils. In these northern cities demonstrations occasionally attracted as many as 1000 women, but most of them were much smaller. Leadership came from a few families, for example the Nehrus and the Zutshis, and most demonstrators came from schools and colleges. In Allahabad, women from the Nehru family were important leaders. Nehru's mother, Swarup Rani Nehru, wife, Kamala made public speeches and went door to door urging women to join movements. Women's demonstration in Delhi had a great impact on the men who witnessed them. The government's confidential records include detailed reports of how women's activities brought men into the movement. On one occasion Delhi women blocked access to the courts. They were surrounded by male supporters who acted as a protective shield. The women were steadfast in the face of police attacks and astounded everyone with their bravery. In the north, the political movement engaged elite women and women without any education. They belonged to two different worlds but they shared the burden of social norms that inhibited their autonomy (Forbes, 1998, p.146-49).

However, there were distinct regional differences in the number of women who joined, in their relationship with congress leaders, and the extent to which they synthesized women's interest with nationalist issues. Bombay women were the best organized, the most independent, and fielded the largest demonstrations. In Bengal women attracted a great deal of attention because of their militancy. Marching alongside men in the congress parade and later joining the revolutionary parties, they became the subjects of folksongs and legends. In Madras, where leaders were unwilling to use women's talents, fewer women joined the movement. In North India, the Nehru and the Zutshi families provided strong women leaders who put the nationalist agenda first. One cannot doubt their grasp of the importance of feminist issues but their immediate concern was mobilizing women for political demonstrations. They did not think it possible to raise women's consciousness about both politics and women's right at the same time. Most women leaders were unable to get beyond their own sense of respectability when they sought recruits. An exception to this, of course were the women who joined the revolutionary movement. They worked closely with men, wore disguises, travelled alone or in the company of strangers, and learned how to shoot, drive cars, and make bombs. Even though they were valorised they were not regarded by all as "respectable" women. Gandhi called them "unsexed" and Rabindranath Tagore wrote a novel in which the sexual allure of the revolutionary heroine was used to recruit young men to the cause. The revolutionary women have described themselves as sacrificing all the things a woman wants-marriage, children, a home-for the country. No one, including the revolutionary women themselves, considered revolutionaries representative of Indian womanhood (Forbes, 1998, p.155).

The demonstrations organized by the women in cities did little to generate a feminist consciousness. They marched and picketed in sex-segregated groups, usually wearing distinctive orange or white saris to emphasize their purity and sacrifice. Their directives came from the Congress Committees. Rural women, unless they were widows, protested with their families. Women could "come out" because the house was on fire. The expectation was that once the fire was out, women would go back inside the house (Forbes, 1998, p.156).

While the salt satyagraha and the civil disobedience movement encouraged and brought about greater participation of women, they also clearly brought out the fact that Gandhi,

for the time being, could only envisage a supportive role for women in the movement. By now, some women were getting impatient of playing an auxiliary role, and they wanted to fight for freedom like men, and not extend the traditional division of labour between men and women to the movement as well. However, according to Gandhi, the job even more suited to women's nature was the picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops. He chose women in this job because of their 'inherent' capacity for non-violence (Bandyopadhyaya, 2009, p.241). Gandhi's insistence on non-violence as a revolutionary weapon contributed to creating favourable conditions for mass participation of people, especially women. The programmes of action undertaken as part of nonviolent satyagraha were such that women would not feel limited or unequal to men; as they inevitably do when sheer muscle power or capacity for inflicting violence are to determine the outcome of a struggle. Thus women's traditional qualities, such as their lesser capacity for organized violence, were not downgraded but were held up as models of superior courage (Bandyopadhyaya, 2009, p.244).

Mahatma Gandhi understood the potentiality latent in women and believed that, "Woman in the companion of man gifted with equal capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man, and she has the same right to freedom and liberty as he..." (Bandyopadhyaya, 2002, p. 30). "Morally indecent" Bengali women were also touched by Gandhi's message. Manada Devi Mukhopadhyay tells in *Sikshita Patitāt Atmarcharīt* ("Autobiography of an Educated Fallen Woman", 1929), of how she and other prostitutes joined in collecting funds for Congress in 1922 and in 1924 participated in C. R. Das' *Satyagraha* against the lascivious and corrupt Mahant of Tarakeswar temple. Women throughout India participated in the Non-Cooperation movement by joining the processions, picketing, using Khadi and Charka and by renouncing all kinds of foreign goods, clothes and education (Roy, 2015).

Both Hindu and Muslim women also participated in the Non-Cooperation movement and worked for strengthening the bond in both the communities – Hindu and Muslim. Kasturba Gandhi, Abida Banu Begum, Hem Prabha Majumder, Rameshwari Mehra took part in the struggle against the British Raj by popularizing young girls to attend public meetings and in other constructive activities. Women outnumbered men in the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928. Dandi March (1930) was organized with a view to re-establish the right of the Indians to prepare salts from the sea. Women were not permitted to take part

in the movements initially, but at the request of Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Gandhiji agreed to accommodate Sarojini Naidu, Mithuben Patel with his team for the Dandi March on April 6, 1930. Gandhi was arrested on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1930 and he nominated Sarojini Naidu to lead the programmes at the Dharsana salt fields. After the arrest of Gandhiji, people from all sections of society massively participated in the Salt Satyagraha. The peasant, artisan and rural women also took active part to make it a national movement. Women, leaving behind household activities, come out to the streets in thousands to participate in political activities and faced police oppression and baton that led Nehru to observe, "Our women came out to the forefront and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there of course, but now there was an avalanche of them which took not only the British Government, but their own men folk by surprise. There were these women, of the upper or middle classes leading sheltered lives in their homes, peasant women, working class women, rich women – coming out into tens of thousands in defiance of government orders and police lathis. It was not only the displays of courage and daring, but what even more was surprising was the organizational power they showed" (Nehru, 1947, p.27).

The dalit women were also not lagging behind. They also took active part in freedom struggle. Women of the other backward classes like the Santals, Oraons and Mundas also actively participated in the movement. Participation of women in the struggle for freedom reached another stage with the launching of Civil Disobedience Movement by congress when women courted arrest along with male freedom fighters. Their participation gathered momentum during the **Quit India Movement** when they prepared themselves to sacrifice even their lives for the freedom of the country. In course of the movement most of the top political leaders were imprisoned and the movement became leaderless for the time being but found its leaders in women. They took the leading role in organizing meetings, taking out processions, raising slogans and holding strikes to cripple the Government (Roy, 2015). Aruna Asaf Ali, Kalpana Joshi, Preeti Waddadar, Kanaklata Barua, Roopvati Jain, Durga Bai, Sushila Devi Usha Mehta were the famous figures of the 1942 movement.

Participation of women in social and political movements was not confined to the freedom movement only. They took part in movements against the tyrannical Zamindars and their atrocities. The last phase of the freedom struggle is marked by the mass

resistance of common people, both men and women against the oppression of the Zamindars, Jotedars and Mahajans. The mass uprising at Worli (Maharashtra) against the Zamindars in the hilly areas of Thane district mainly spearheaded by the women force was directed against the exploitative practices of the Zamindars like 'Vet' and the systems of Lagan Das' and 'Bibaha Das'. Women played a significant role in the Worli Movement which is remembered as an act of courage and empowerment of women. During the course of these movements hundreds of women participated in the meetings, processions, demonstrations and some of them developed leadership qualities. Women had to face torture, abuse and threat both in house and outside and ultimately could not stick to their goal. But their determination and commitment to united actions against the common enemy to end exploitation and oppression strengthened the process of women empowerment (Roy, 2015).

With the dawn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, some progress was observed in the field of women's education which gave rise to the development of a consciousness among the educated women and this manifested itself in the emergence of some women's organisations (Jharta, 1996, p.57). Through their participation in various organizations and associations, unions and clubs, women developed their self-confidence to take up the position of leadership in larger spheres. In 1913, a Brahmin Widow's Home was founded by Subhalakshmi and Mahila Seva Samaj was also established in the same year in Mysore. Muslim women who are generally considered home bound and conservative did not remain far behind. They came forward to join the mainstream in some cases and participated in the formation of various associations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1916, All India Muslim Women's Conference was established by Begum of Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh). In 1917, the Muslim Women, led by Abu Begum, proposed a resolution against polygamy. In 1917, some elite and urban educated upper class women inspired a large number of women to participate in movements for achievements of their demands. These women, under the leadership of Dorothy Zinarasara, established Women Indian Association (WIA) of Madras (now Chennai) in 1917. Under the auspices of this organisation, a deputation led by Sarojini Naidu with the support of Mahatma Gandhi, met Lord Morley when he visited India in 1917. It demanded equal voting rights for women along with men (Jharta, 1996, p.57). They, at first, struggle for the Women's franchise. In 1925, National Council of Women in India (NCWI) was set up by Lady



Dorab Tata. All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was formed under the joint initiative of Smt. Margaret Cousins and the Women's India Association (Roy, 2015).

The story of how women came to be first represented in legislatures in 1920s is in itself quite instructive. In 1917, during the visit of the Secretary of States for India to discuss Home Rule, fourteen representatives led by Smt. Sarojini Naidu met Montegu, the then Governor General of India, and Viceroy Lord Chelmsford in Madras. Apprehending a forthcoming discrimination against women in respect of franchise, they submitted a memorandum demanding equal status for women. The memorandum reads, "When the franchise is being drawn up, women may be recognized as 'people' and that it may be worded in such terms as will not disqualify our sex but allow our women the same opportunities of representation as our men" (Bandypadhyaya, 2002, p. 64). The Indian National Congress took up the issue of women's equal right to vote and their political representation. In 1918 it adopted a resolution that, "women possessing the qualifications are laid down for men in any part of the scheme shall not be disqualified on account of sex" (Bandypadhyaya, 2002, p. 64). Thus women throughout India began to understand the need for equal right to voting and representation. The more their consciousness grew, the more they participated in political movements.

In the mean time, the Southborough Committee or the Franchise Committee came to India with a view to going through the women's demand for right to vote. After a thorough study, the Committee observed that social condition was premature to confer the franchise to Indian women at that juncture. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1919 various women's organizations decried the comments of the Southborough Committee and in August, 1919 under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu and others (Smt. Herabai Tata, Barrister Mithan Tata, Annie Besant) a group of women leaders placed their demand for equal franchise along with men before the Joint Parliamentary session of Britain. When the members of Women Indian Association (WIA) met the Lady Secretary of State for India, she referred the matter to the Provincial Councils of India considering it as a 'domestic subject' of India. Instead of rejecting this demand, the British government was simply leaving it up to each of the individual provincial legislatures that they had just set up in India to grant or to refuse the franchise to women. Their assumption was that since Indians were so 'backward', they would never accept the idea of equal political rights for women. But despite the fact that at this time there was no mass-based women's suffrage movement in

India, each of the Indian provincial legislatures voted to make it possible within a short span of time for women to be represented at par with men without much fuss (Kishwar, 1996, p.2867).

However, after prolonged deliberations, the right to vote was granted to women in India under the Government of India Act, 1919 which came into effect from 1921 and Kamala Devi became the first woman M.L.A in 1926 in Madras Provincial Legislature. Though, this right was confined to a very limited number of women. She was the first to demand a uniform civil code for enhancing gender justice. She opposed the child marriage and stressed on the abject situation of women in the mining industry. It is observed that “many of her ideas that seemed radical are accepted as even today, like the right to maternity leave and child care and the need to consider women’s paid household labour and economic activity” (Gopalakrishnan, 2004, p. 93). In 1930, when a meeting of representative women’s organizations drafted a memorandum demanding immediate acceptance of adult franchise without gender discrimination, it was turned down by the British government. The same demand received a totally different response from the Indian leaders. The very next year, in 1931 the Karachi session of the Indian National Congress took the historic decision committing itself to the political equality of women, regardless of their status and qualifications (Kishwar, 1996, p.2867). Annie Besant became Congress Party president as early as 1919. Sarojini Naidu was Gandhi’s choice for president of the Congress Party as early in 1925. Starting with a more active and creative role, women’s participation in politics enhanced dramatically in the 1930s and 1940s which ushered a new era in women’s movement. Indian women got franchise at a time while their counterparts in many other European countries and America were struggling for universal suffrage.

### **3.2.2. WOMEN IN POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD:**

In the pre-independence period, the women’s mobilization was very much a part of the nationalist movement and that was the witnessed an increasing participation of women, while India’s history has taken a surprising turn after independence. The decades following independence witnessed a remarkable decline in women’s involvement in politics. From the end of the 1930s to the early 1950s women participated in a wide range of social and political movements. But in the five decades after independence women have become marginalized in politics as compared to the earlier decades.

Global data on parliaments, as per IPU's records of October 2020, across the world reveal the fact that India in spite of the largest democracy lags much behind other countries including its neighbors such as Nepal (45<sup>th</sup> rank), Bangladesh (105<sup>th</sup> rank), and Pakistan (110<sup>th</sup> rank) when it comes to the matter of women's participation in politics. While India shares the 145th position with 14.4% women parliamentarians, it is ranked 100 places below Nepal and 35 places behind Pakistan. Even China at 80th spot and Bangladesh at 105 are well above India.

After independence in 1947, Indian women have been given, formally, an equal status to men by Constitution. Article 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(1) of the constitution guarantees 'equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state' (Jharta, 1996, p.61). Article 39(a) guarantees right to an adequate means of livelihood for all citizen. Article 39(b) guarantees equal pay for equal work for both men and women. According to article 39(c), that the health 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. Article 42 guarantees humane and just condition of work and maternity relief. This is in accordance with Article 23 and 25 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 51-A clause (e) says that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India- to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, transcending linguistic and religious or sectional diversities, to renounces practice derogatory to the dignity of women.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment has added the following articles to the Constitution providing reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Article 243-(D) (2) states not less than 1/3 of the seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to S. C or as the caste may be S.T. Article 243-(D) (3)-extends political reservation to women not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. Article 243-(D) (4) extends reservation to elected offices as well. The office of the chairpersons in the Panchayats or any other level shall be reserved S.C and the S.Ts and women in such a manner as

legislature of a state may, by law provide. The legal Constitutional framework in India would appear a combination of Communitarian perspective on one hand and that of liberal democracy on the other hand. In spite of such provisions in the Constitution, the decades following independence witnessed a decline in the women's participation in politics. These rights appeared illusionary as there was a shift from the aims of the Constitution. Gap started widening in all political spheres. Article 325 makes no special electoral rolls on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex. Article 326 emphasizes that elections to the legislative assemblies of state are to be held on the basis of adult franchise.

With the right of universal adult franchise and all other political rights conferred by the Constitution, women's participation in political activities has increased and improved. Today we can see women taking active part in politics holding high offices. Though their number is not very high but their capacity in administrative and political matters has well organized. There have been woman Prime Minister, woman ambassadors and delegates to international bodies, woman Governors, woman Chief Ministers, ministers and legislators who have shaped the history of our country (Jharta, 1996, p. 61). But the overall situation is not very satisfactory. There is a difference between the constitutional rights and the rights enjoyed in reality by women. Seventy-five years of independence have made very little impact on women's active participation in politics. Their performance quantitatively has been rather insignificant. With a few exceptions women have remained outside the domain of power and political authority (Jharta, 1996, p. 62).

With the establishment of Central Social Welfare Board in 1953, this provides financial assistance as well as direction to voluntary welfare organizations, so that many women's organizations came into existence. In 1954, under the shelter of Leftist Political Parties, Indian Women's National Organization (National Federation of Indian Women) connected with International Democratic Organization, were established. The best-known organizations became institutionalized. While the prominent women's organizations had been criticized for their 'welfarist' approach and faulted for not preparing women for new responsibilities. The National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) drew attention on "*Women's struggle for equal rights and responsibilities in all spheres of life and for improvement in their living conditions*" (Forbes, 1998, p.225). There were other women, close followers of Gandhi, who saw economic and social change as more important than legal and constitutional rights. They too were dissatisfied. But many of these individuals

also believed in voluntarism and focused their attention on grass-roots projects. But till 1970, many organizations were on paper for the sake of names only. Their contact with general women was at the time of election only and they saw the problems of women in the limited perspective of implementation of welfare programme. Till 1970, Planning Commission also did not make any effort by thinking that welfare programmes will automatically reach to the women. In spite of Government's lack attention towards women's problems they were involving in movements and participating in the common struggles of peasants, laborers, and scheduled tribes etc. Moreover, the issue of women's participation seems to have lost the kind of moral and political legitimacy what it enjoyed during the freedom movement (Roy, 2015).

Women's Participation in Telengana movement is a glorious part of the history in post-independence period. The feudal land owning system, eviction of the title less sharecroppers from the land, unlawful tax collection and compulsory working without wages led the people of Telengana to revolt against the Nizam of Hyderabad. Women along with men participated in the revolt (Roy, 2015). In the post-independence period, the organized participation of women in the protection of environment and ecological balance is a case towards women's empowerment. The 'Chipko' Movement was a movement basically organized by women themselves. Women have always a special liking for the protection of trees. Vandana Shiva observes "Three Hundred years ago more than 300 members of the Bishroi Community of Rajasthan, led by a women called Amrita Devi, sacrificed their lives to save their Khejri trees by clinging to them. With the event begins the history of Chipko" (Shiva, 2001, p.192). We have found that, women are becoming more vocal in demanding resettlement and rehabilitation of the people in states like Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and in Maharashtra. The participants in the Narmada Bachao Andolan which include a sizeable number of women activists consider the raising of the height of the Sardar Sarobar Dam beyond 110 meters of height as a case of 'homicide of the people in the valley' (Lyla, 2004, p.94). Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) which includes the most vibrant women workers has brought the debate between development and displacement to the forefront.

Indian women have been participating in the World Social Forum (WSF) since its inception at Porto Alegre in Brazil in January 2001. Besides popularizing the idea of an 'alternative world' the World Social Forum (WSF) is also engaged in promoting the cause of women's political participation. "Women's struggle against patriarchy and the

unending battle against all forms of social exclusion based on descent, ethnicity, and race were specifically brought on the World Social Forum (WSF) agenda in Mumbai. More than the right to equality, the World Social Forum (WSF) enshrines the right to difference. And it commits itself to redressing any situation in which difference is a basis for social inequality” (Sinha, 2000, p.5).

Though women take active part in freedom movement in a meaningful way, they gradually rolled themselves back in the household activities after the achievement of freedom. The National leaders like Nehru and Gandhi did not show much interest after independence in involving them in the process of nation building. Strangely enough that Gandhi had to take a retarding view. Gandhi said, “She is passive, he is active, she is essentially mistress of the house. He is the bread winner.” (Sinha, 2000, p.70)

The United Nations Organization became worried at the level of women’s participation worldwide in the political arena. As a result, the United Nations adopted the convention on the political rights of women in 1952. Since the Mexico Conference (1975) four other International Conferences (Copenhagen 1980; Nairobi 1985; Beijing 1995; and +5 Review Conference) on women have been held under the U.N. auspices. “All the conferences have emphasized women’s political empowerment as key concern” (Rajput, 2001, p.226).

Pam Rajput (2001) mentioned in his work that The General Assembly of the United Nations observed that, “.....*the actual participation of women at the highest levels of national and international decision making has not significantly changed since Beijing 1995 and gross under-representation of women in decision making bodies in all areas, including inter alia politics, conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, the economy, the environment and the media hinders the inclusion of a gender perspective in these critical spheres of influence. Women continue to be underrepresented at the legislative, ministerial, and sub-ministerial levels...*”

### **3.2.2.1.WOMEN IN ELECTORAL POLITICS:**

While, with the introduction of democracy Indian women have obtained rights of participation and representation in parliaments and state legislatures but their percentage has remained extremely low. Indian women can vote and stand for election to all provincial and central bodies though the extent of their involvement falls far short to the

equality promised by the Constitution. Considering the issue of women's reservation, the attitude of the national leaders and the makers of independent India are well reflected in the composition of the national and state legislations in India. In 1973, All India Panchayat Parishad in its Sixth National Conference recommended reservation for women in at least one third of the seats. This resolution was followed by a report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1974. Though, the Committee rejected the demands for women's reservation in legislative bodies of the states and the Centre but recommended statutory women's Panchayats at the village level because of the neglect of women in rural development programmes. Two members of the Committee disagreed with the decision of not recommending reservation for women in legislative bodies and argued that greater representation of women on national and state level legislatures would build up a number of spokespersons for women's rights and opportunities. Hence, the recommendations of the Sixth National Conference of the All India Panchayat Parishad were largely ignored for a period of more than fifteen years. Later, the National Perspective Plan, 1988, urged all political parties to ensure at least 30% women among the candidates put up for election. However, none of the parties came anywhere near the promised 30% in any of their decision-making bodies, nor have fielded a comparable number of women contestants. In 1989, Rajiv Gandhi announced that 30 per cent of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions would be reserved for women. The issue of women's reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions became an election issue and when Congress returned to power in 1991, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill providing for one-third reservation or 33% quota for women in local self-government institutions were passed in December 1992, and were ratified by all states by April 1993. These Amendments created 1,000,000 slots for elected women representatives. These reservations or quota brought quantitative changes, facilitated women to be represented in local governments only but not in State or Central Governments (Roy, 2015).

In 1996, the Constitution (81st) Amendment Bill, proposing 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament was introduced. Though the major political parties supported the demand, but they themselves gave less than 15% of their total number of tickets to women. The political parties raise the issue of reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures just to earn the support of women organizations and activists for election purposes. Thus Reservation of seats for women is just an electoral plank. Over the long 14 years, the Women's Reservation Bill has crossed a very controversial

journey. However, after a long debatable journey finally in the Rajya Sabha the historic women Reservation Bill was passed on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and yet it is pending in the Lok Sabha. However, the Union Cabinet of the Government of India, on 27 August 2009, approved 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The Indian states which have already implemented 50% reservation for women in PRIs are Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. As of 25<sup>th</sup> November 2011, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura also reserve 50% of their posts for women (Roy, 2015).

The right to vote can be said to be the starting point in the struggle for women political equality. The participation of women in the electoral process is an indicator of their political consciousness. In the pre-independence period, there were thousands of outstanding women all over the country with the experience of the freedom movement behind them. Their involvement for long years in social and political work, running educational institutions, and so on, would have given them the requisite training and experience to be effective parliamentarians. But they were systematically ignored and bypassed. However, the very politicians who pay lip service to women's causes on public platforms and help enact laws favouring women actually help sideline women in their own parties. The marginalisation of women in Indian politics is that it is happening despite widespread social opinion in favour of women's active political participation (Roy, 2016, p. 38).

There are several socio-economic constraints by which women have been marginalised. The number of women in the leadership positions at the local, village, district, state and national level is still not commensurate with their numbers in society. In India, limited adult franchise was granted to women in 1937. Since then, women have been participating in political process, as voters, as candidates contesting the elections, involved in deliberations both in State Assemblies and Parliament and also through holding public office at different levels in the Judiciary. Voting is the basic activity by which the citizens get assimilated in the political process. Women's participation in formal elections is to a great extent dependent on the mobilization efforts of the political parties, general awareness among the community of the importance of exercising franchise and overall political culture (Kumar, 1995, p. 94). Hence, over the years,



women's participation by way of voting has been growing but not steadily as it is clearly visible in the Table no 3.1.

**TABLE NO: 3.1**  
**Percentage of Female Vote in General Elections (1952-2019)**

Year Of Lok Sabha Elections	VOTING PERCENTAGE		Gap Between Male And Female Voting Percentage
	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	
1952	53.0	37.1	-15.9
1957	56.0	39.6	-16.4
1962	62.1	46.6	-15.5
1967	66.7	55.5	-11.2
1971	60.8	49.11	-11.69
1977	65.62	54.91	-10.71
1980	62.17	51.2	-10.97
1984	68.17	58.59	-9.58
1989	66.13	57.31	-8.82
1991	61.58	51.34	-10.24
1996	62.06	53.41	-8.65
1998	65.86	57.69	-8.17
1999	63.96	55.63	-8.33
2004	61.98	53.63	-8.35
2009	60.24	55.81	-4.43
2014	67.00	65.53	-1.47
2019	67.00	67.17	+0.17

Source: 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> (1952 to 1967) General Elections from Susheela Kaushik, "Women, Women's Issues, and Ninth General Elections," Teaching Politics, Vol. XV, Nos. 3 & 4, 1989, pp.113.

Statistical Reports on the 5<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> General Elections (1971-2019) to the House of the People in India, Election Commission of India, New Delhi, available at [eci.gov.in](http://eci.gov.in)

The above table shows that over the years women's participation by way of voting has been growing but not steadily. It has shown that constant rise from 37.1% in 1952 to 39.6% in 1957 and 46.6% and 55.5% in 1962 and 1967 respectively. In the subsequent years it kept on fluctuating. From 1971 to 2009, there was a large turnout of women voters (58.59%) in 1984. But again it declined steadfastly to 57.31% in the general election of 1989 and 51.34% in 1991 respectively and the women polling remained within 51-57 percent in the years from 1977 to 2009. Since 2014 the situation has changed and surprisingly it upturned to more or less 10% that narrowing the gap between men and women voters. In 2009, it was 55.81% and in 2014 it became 65.63%. In 2019, women turn out in greater numbers than in previous elections. For the first time the turnout of

women exceeded that of men, it is 67.17%, it is the highest ever percentage and the men voting turnout is same as it was in 2014 (67%). The difference between male and female voting percentage shows that except in 2019, women always lagged behind of men in voting turnout. Hence, the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (2019) is the ray of hope for women that are showing the gender equality in political participation is no longer away from them.

If we have a look at the past history of the women's political participation we find that no serious efforts appear to have been made to mobilize women as political pressure groups by any political party. Caste, personality and families of candidates appear to be more important to voters than party ideology. Some other facts like education, religion, class and tradition also seem to affect women's participations. However, voting an indication of political participation for women in India, has its own strength and weakness. Voting has a tremendous impact for equalizing and mobilizing women. Yet, it has to be noted that voting requires the least initiative and internal motivation. Very often the women citizen treats the day of voting as a welcome break from her dull and tiring routine and does not appear to have a notion of why she should vote for a particular candidate (Kumar, 1995, p. 94).

In India, the major national political parties voiced their support for women's representation in parliament, although they themselves gave less than 15% of their total number of tickets to women. Their election manifestoes sometimes contain declarations relating to Women's empowerment, but a close scrutiny of the lists of contesting candidates of different political parties do not justify their claim. Political parties seem uniformly reluctant to field women candidates. Table no 3.2 shows party-wise representation of women in the Lok Sabha elections from 1957 to 2019.

**TABLE NO: 3.2**  
**Party-wise Women Representation in the Lok Sabha, 1957-2019**

Year	INC	*Left Front	BJS/BLD/BJP/BJD	JNP / JD	SWA/ BSP	IND	OTH	No. Of Women Contestants	No. Of Women Elected
1957	19	1	0	-	-	-	2	45	22
1962	26	1	0	-	4 (SWA)	-	-	66	31
1967	19	1	1(BJS)	-	3 (SWA)	2	3	67	29
1977	6	3	8(BLD)	-	-	-	2	70	19
1980	20	3	-	4 (JNP)	-	-	1	143	28
1984	37	2	-	-	-	-	3	162	42
1989	15	4	5	2	-	-	3	198	29
1991	20	3	10	2	-	-	2	326	37
1996	16	2	14	4	-	-	4	599	40
1998	10	5	15	-	1	1	11	274	43
1999	14	4	15	1	1	1	13	284	49
2004	12	5	10	-	1	-	17	355	45
2009	23	1	13	2	4	-	16	556	59
2014	4	1	30	-	-	-	27	668	62
2019	6	0	46 (41-BJP5-BJD)	1 (JD-U)	1 (BSP)	2	22*	724	78

\*Left Front- CPI/CPM

\*AITC-9, YSRCP-4, DMK-2 &from other various political parties-7

Source: Statistical Report on General Elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

The above table reveals that till 1996 elections Congress was the leading party of giving more representation to the women in the Parliament. A majority of women contest from the Congress Party even while the overall percentage of party tickets given to women remains shamefully low. In the next two elections the situation has been changed slightly, the BJP took the lead in respect of women representatives in the Lok Sabha. The table shows that the Congress had 19 out of 22 women representatives, with Left Front and other party claiming 1 and 2 respectively in the second Lok Sabha in 1957. The 10<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (1996) again had 16 out of 40 women MPs from the Congress, 14 from the BJP, 4 from the JD, one each from the CPI, and CPI (M). The number of women MPs increased to 59 in 2009; the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha had 23 Congress women MPs out of a total of 59, 13 from the BJP, 2 from the JD, 1 from the Left Front and 4 from BSP. The 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha

had total 62 MPs in the Parliament out of 668 contestants. 30 MPs elected from BJP, 4 from Congress, 1 from the Left Front. The present Lok Sabha has 78 women MPs that is the highest ever number. In the 16<sup>th</sup> (2014) and 17<sup>th</sup> (2019) Lok Sabha, the performance of Congress party concerning women is very much poor and while BJP's performance (30 & 41) is noteworthy. However, apart from two major national political parties (INC, BJP), the other national and state-level political parties put up some women candidates for elections, but their representation to the women in the Parliament is very much poor, never cross the limit of 5, though AITC (All India Trinamool Congress) is exceptional, its women representatives were 10 in 16<sup>th</sup> (2014) Lok Sabha and are 9 in 17<sup>th</sup> (2019) Lok Sabha. Hence, over the years, the number of women contestants for election has increased but the number of women representatives to the Parliament has not increased in order of women contestants. Therefore, the overall representation of women in Parliament is too low compare to men representatives (Roy, 2015).

The process of turning the Congress Party into an instrument of authoritarian rule started after the Nehru era. As Indira Gandhi and her sons came to power, the Congress Party degenerated dramatically and saw a further decline in women's political participation. Even though women across the country related to Indira Gandhi as a symbol of inspiration and saw her as Durga incarnate, she did not care to channel that enthusiasm into facilitating the entry of more women into politics. She seemed particularly averse to sharing the limelight with other women politicians, especially those who had cultivated an independent political existence. Therefore, many women stalwarts like Tarkeshwari Sinha and Nandini Satpathi as well as women of Indira Gandhi's own family (barring the corrupt and sycophantish Sheila Kaul variety) were deliberately eclipsed during Indira Gandhi's regime. Thus India's celebrated woman prime minister played a leading role in pushing women out of the political arena by making the world of politics so unsavoury that few self-respecting women or even men would dare venture into it. Not surprisingly the few women who survived were either as tough or corrupt as the worst of the male politicians or were wives and other female relatives of powerful male politicians who provided the necessary protection. Hence the phenomenon of 'biwi- beti' brigades making their appearance during election time while during normal times the Congress Party lost its claim to having the largest contingent of active women workers (Kishwar, 1996, p.2867).

When Rajiv Gandhi came to power in 1984, he tried to project a pro-woman image for his party. He fielded a slightly larger number of women candidates (40 out of 492). In the sympathy wave that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination, the Congress Party won by a landslide benefiting even the new-comers among women and 37 of the 40 Congress (I) women candidates were elected to the eighth Lok Sabha. There were 44 women MPs during Rajiv's first tenure as prime minister. Yet they constituted no more than 7.9 per cent of the total. However, barring a few exceptions, he attracted mostly glamorous socialite types of women into the party (counterpart to his Doon School brigade) because by then the Congress Party had lost the ability to attract a new generation of dedicated women (or men) workers into the party (Kishwar, 1996, p.2867).

Now-a-days the BJP attracts far more women workers than the Congress but the BJP and other parties also use their women's fronts as mere auxiliaries mobilised into action for demonstrations, mass protests and campaign work during elections. In recent years, the BJP is overtaking the Congress Party in fielding relatively larger number of women and giving them a certain visibility. And another fact is that the individual parties have fielded progressively fewer women candidates over the decades (Roy, 2016, p.40).

Though the women voting participation is not very poor in comparison to men, but their participation and representation in law-making and law implementing bodies is very deplorable (see Tables 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5).

TABLE NO: 3.3

## Women Members in the Lok Sabha (1952-2019)

Year of Lok Sabha Elections	Total No of Seats	No. Of Women Contestants	No. Of Women Member Elected	Gap Between Contesting & Electing Percentage of Women Members	Percentage of Elected Women Over Total No. of Seats
1952	499	51	22	56.87	4.4
1957	500	45	22	51.12	4.4
1962	503	66	31	53.04	6.1
1967	523	67	29	56.72	5.5
1971	521	86	22	74.42	4.2
1977	544	70	19	72.86	3.4
1980	544	143	28	80.42	5.1
1984	544	162	42	74.08	7.7
1989	529	198	29	85.36	5.4
1991	544	326	37	88.66	6.8
1996	541	599	40	93.33	7.3
1998	545	274	43	84.31	7.8
1999	543	284	49	82.75	9.02
2004	543	355	45	87.33	8.2
2009	543	556	59	89.39	10.8
2014	543	631	62	90.18	11.4
2019	542	724	78	89.23	14.3

Source: Statistical Report on General Elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

The table 3.3 shows that there were 51 women contestants in the first general election held in 1952. Their number increased to 631 in 2014. As far as women members in the Lok Sabha are concerned, 22 (4.4%) women were elected to the first Lok Sabha in 1952. In the subsequent elections their number fluctuated. In 2014, 62 (11.4%) women are elected out of 631 contestants to Lok Sabha. However, in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha the overall representation of women is too low barely 10 or 11% in comparison to their about 50% share in voting population (Roy, 2016, p.41). While, 78 women members are elected in 2019, which makes 14.3% and this is the highest number ever. Also, the table shows there is exist percentage of difference between contesting and electing women members, since 1991 steadily the difference becomes wider, in 1996 the gap of percentage was 93.33%, that is highest ever percentage.

The representation of women in Rajya Sabha (Council of States) is also not encouraging. The following table (No.3.4) gives us a clear picture of the women strength in the Rajya

Sabha. In years 1952-54, the numbers of women representatives were 15 out of 219 total members and their number reached at 30 out of 245 in the years 2014-2016 which is the highest number ever but again it was starting to decline. In the Rajya Sabha, 28 women members are there in the years 2018-2020. This trend indicates that various ruling political parties in the respective states of the country are biased against women in nominating them to the upper house. Presently (as per available data till 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2020) we have 25 women members in the Rajya Sabha which makes the percentage of 10.33% but it is very much deplorable. From the below tabulation it is clear that yet women have to walk a long way for equal representation in the governing bodies. However, the situation of Rajya Sabha in case of women representatives is better compare to Lok Sabha (Roy, 2016, p.41).

**TABLE NO: 3.4**  
**Women Members in the Rajya Sabha**

Years	Total No. Of Seats	No. Of Women Members	Percentage of Women
1952-54	219	15	6.85
1954-56	232	16	6.90
1956-58	236	20	8.47
1958-60	236	22	9.32
1960-62	236	24	10.17
1962-64	238	17	7.14
1964-66	238	21	8.82
1966-68	240	23	9.58
1968-70	240	22	9.17
1970-72	243	14	5.76
1972-74	243	18	7.41
1974-76	244	17	6.97
1976-78	244	24	9.84
1978-80	244	25	10.25
1980-82	244	29	11.89
1982-84	244	24	9.84
1984-86	244	24	9.84
1986-88	245	28	11.43
1988-90	245	25	10.20
1990-92	245	24	9.80
1992-94	245	17	6.94
1994-96	245	20	8.16
1996-98	245	19	7.76
1998-2000	245	19	7.76
2000-2002	245	22	8.98
2002-2004	245	25	10.20
2004-2006	245	28	11.43
2006-2008	245	25	10.20
2008-2010	245	24	9.80
2010-2012	245	27	11.02
2012-2014	245	24	9.80
2014-2016	245	30	12.24
2016-2018	245	28	11.43
2018-2020	245	28	11.43
2020- Till 17th Nov 2020	242	25	10.33

Sources: [https://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/member\\_site/women.aspx](https://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/member_site/women.aspx)  
[http://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/information\\_booklet/INFORMATION%20AT%20A%20GLANCE.pdf](http://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/information_booklet/INFORMATION%20AT%20A%20GLANCE.pdf)  
file:///C:/PH.D/Rajya%20Sabha%20members%20list/chapter-10.pdf  
file:///C:/PH.D/Rajya%20Sabha%20members%20list/chapter-2.pdf  
file:///C:/PH.D/Rajya%20Sabha%20members%20list/women%20members%20in%202016.pdf

Despite general acceptance of the need for a gender balance in decision-making bodies at all levels, a gap between de jure and de facto equality has persisted. Notwithstanding



substantial improvements of de jure equality between men and women, the actual participation of women at the highest levels of decision-making has not significantly changed and under representation of women in decision-making bodies present in all areas. Women continue to be underrepresented at the ministerial level; the following table reveals the reality in this regard (Roy, 2016, p.42).

**TABLE NO: 3.5**  
**Women in the Council of Ministers (1952-2019)**

Year of Lok Sabha Elections	Total No. Of Ministers	No. Of Women Ministers	Percentage
1952	26	2	7.6
1957	38	3	7.8
1962	52	8	15.3
1967	51	5	9.8
1971	53	4	7.5
1977	44	4	9.09
1980	51	6	11.7
1985	40	4	10
1989	39	2	5.12
1991	39	9	23.07
1995	49	5	10.20
1996	39	4	10.25
1998	42	4	9.52
2002	80	7	8.75
2004	67	7	10.4
2009	79	7	8.8
2014	46	7	15.2
2019	58	6	10.34

Source: [www.parliamentofindia.nic.in](http://www.parliamentofindia.nic.in)

The table 3.5 shows that a clear picture of the number of women ministers in the Council of Ministers since 1952. Their numerical strength is also marginal in decision making bodies. Only a few women have succeeded in getting into the council of ministers. As is clear from the below table, the maximum number of women ministers has been only 9, in the year 1991. Women membership in the Council of Ministers, which is the apex policy making body in India, has never gone beyond 10 percent mark. There had never been more than one woman cabinet minister; most of the women ministers had been of the rank of the state ministers or deputy ministers. The table shows that in 1962 and 1991, comparatively more women were in the Council of Ministers. In 2019, though the number of women voters (67.17%) is larger than men voters (67.00%) but still their presence in the council of ministers remains very disappointing, again it decreased to 10.34% from

15.2% in 2014. However, from the following tables it is clear to us that the representation of women in the national level political institutions is very deplorable. The results of 1st to 17th General Elections reflect low level of women's participation in Lok Sabha. Women comprises nearly 50 per cent of the total population, but their share in the highest decision making body is always less than 15 per cent. In the first general election their representation in Lok Sabha was only 4.4 per cent and it became only 14.3 per cent in the recent 17th Lok Sabha election (2019). Though women's representation in the Lok Sabha is not of course a barometer of their representation in the political process, but it is a marker of sorts. This shows that the actual power is male monopoly with just a few exceptions. Women are not only rare in decision-making positions, even if they are elected, they have to struggle within the formal structure heavily weighted against them. In independent India, pervasive gender discrimination has resulted in sidelining even veteran women politicians. It is difficult for women to establish a foothold without patronage from powerful men in the party. This is indeed a matter for serious concern because the level of political participation among women acts as a reliable barometer of the health of its democracy (Roy, 2016, p.43).

However, since 1984, there has been also noticed an important shift in the perception of the society towards women's participation in politics and women leaders and post 1990 indicates a trend that the number of women participating in the electoral fray have increased and more and more women are contesting the polls under the banner of the state and regional political parties or independently rather than the national political parties. In 1984 and 1989, there was marginal difference between women contestants of national parties and state or regional parties but post 1990 the difference becomes wider. In this regard, the following table 3.6 is showing the clear picture.

**TABLE NO: 3.6**  
**Performance of Women in National Parties vis-a-vis Others**

<b>Years Of Lok Sabha Elections</b>	<b>Political Parties</b>	<b>Women Contestants</b>	<b>Elected Women Members</b>
1984	National	63	39
	State/ Regional/ Independents	99	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>42</b>
1989	National	87	26
	State/ Regional/ Independents	111	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>29</b>
1991	National	119	35
	State/ Regional/ Independents	207	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>37</b>
1996	National	125	36
	State/ Regional/ Independents	474	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>40</b>
1998	National	107	31
	State/ Regional/ Independents	167	12
	<b>Total</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>43</b>
1999	National	104	35
	State/ Regional/ Independents	180	14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>49</b>
2004	National	110	30
	State/ Regional/ Independents	245	15
	<b>Total</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>45</b>
2009	National	134	43
	State/ Regional/ Independents	422	16
	<b>Total</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>59</b>
2014	National	146	36
	State/ Regional/ Independents	522	26
	<b>Total</b>	<b>668</b>	<b>62</b>
2019	National	171	58
	State/ Regional/ Independents	553	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>78</b>

Source: Statistical Report on General Elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

The rising importance of state level parties in national politics in what many have called the “third phase of democratization” in Indian politics. The Lok Sabha elections of 1989, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004 and 2009 in India have brought into sharp focus the importance

of coalition building and part alliances in order to win elections, so much so that it is recognized that they have 'become a central factor shaping politics in India' (Siddiqui, 2010, p. 351). The regional political parties in India emerged as a result of India's vast diversity and the federal structure of the Indian polity, which paves the way for a kind of 'electoral federalism'. The regional political parties most have followed the national parties in the case of formation of a particular wing for women within the party, and under the inspiration, guidance and activities of the women wings of political parties increasing the number of women in politics. As a result, changes in party politics in India present alternative opportunities for women in India. Several prominent female political leaders have occupied the office of chief minister in different states simultaneously, some for a longer period than others (Siddiqui, 2010, p. 353). State level parties and regional parties have provided the avenues to women for political participation, so women become confident about their ability in political spheres and even they also started to contest elections individually in more number. Thus changing Indian electoral politics has led to the increase in the level of participation of women in politics in India.

Some point to the changing political party system; others attribute this to India's vast diversity in terms of electoral demands, from Dalit movement of Uttar Pradesh to the regional identity discourse of the southern states. Many see both as factors causing change of political scene of Indian electoral politics. Secondly, populist politics in India is driven by discourse centred around a politics of identity, which fragments and destabilises the political agenda. Region-based politics as a result of India's vast diversity and the federal structure of the Indian polity have also contributed to this fragmentation of the political agenda and has given rise to the emergence of a fickle and unstable coalition politics sometimes based more on expediency than ideology or policy agenda (Siddiqui, 2010, p. 351).

Also, there are several factors that helped to increase the number of women leaders in politics such as proper education, positive perceptions of society, changing behaviour of political parties and attitudes of male leaders (detail discussed in the chapter 4), government's policies and schemes, e.g. quota reservation, which played significant role in local-governance we have seen, has a great impact in regard to greater number of women's participation in politics.

### 3.2.2.2.COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION VARIATION ACROSS STATES:

While India has a good record of women holding all the important posts in the country, the overall participation of women in politics is not very satisfactory. While a large enough proportion of women turn out to vote and the gender gap in turnout has dropped to the single digits in the 1990s from almost 20 percent in 1971 and presently sometimes it crossed men's turnout but women still are not well represented in political life that requires them to be active in the public sphere – such as membership in Parliament and in State Legislative Assemblies. To redress the low level of participation by women in deliberative bodies the Government of India, in 1992, amended the constitution (73rd and 74th amendments) that reserves a third of the seats in the *Panchayats and Municipalities* (local governments) including the chairpersonship of these local bodies for women (Chhibber, 2002, p.410). This constitutional amendment has indeed brought women into local bodies (Gopalan and Shiva, 2000, p.119). But, the question arises why still women's participation in politics is lower? Prominent arguments, both in India and elsewhere have suggested that women's participation is generally lower either because they have been socialized differently (especially as far as marriage, motherhood, employment, and property ownership are concerned), or because they have fewer resources. An implicit assumption in these sets of arguments is that the lower levels of participation of women are mostly the result of a process of socialization that leads them to think of political activity in a different way than men. In other words, women don't take as active a part in political life because they don't think (as autonomous actors) that political participation is important. An implication that follows from this line of reasoning is that women do not think that entering political life would necessarily be advantageous for if they did, as autonomous actors they would participate. But this argument is not true always, it observes that women are aware of the advantages that politics brings but are still not active participants in political life. This lower level of participation is not only a consequence of the resources that women possess but also a result of the place of a woman in the family (Chhibber, 2002, p.409-29).

Political participation of women can be measured in three different dimensions: their participation as a voter, their participation as an elected representative and their participation in the actual decision making process (Shanker, 2014). In India, the

experience of different states in regard to women's involvement in politics is very unsatisfactory. Table 3.7 shows the statistics of the voting percentage of women and the percentage of women representatives across different states in the recently held (2019) Lok Sabha elections. As following Table indicates, women have consistently turned out to vote nearly equal or equal to men such as Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Lakshadweep etc and even sometimes female turnout become more than men for instance Goa, Manipur, Daman & Diu, Puducherry though their representation is surprisingly nil in these states. Only Chandigarh is exceptional union-territory where women representation is 100% and in Tripura it is 50% though in both states women voter turnout is less than men. The following table provides the evidence that the gap is visible across the different states in the matter of representation in spite of equal voter turnout.

TABLE NO: 3.7

Statistics of the Voting Percentage of Women and the Percentage of Women Representation across different States/ UTs in 17<sup>th</sup> (2019) Lok Sabha

Sl. No	States/ UTs	Women Voter turnout Percentage over total No. of Voters	Percentage of Women Representatives over Total No. of seats
1	Andhra Pradesh	49.94	16
2	Arunachal Pradesh	49.44	0
3	Assam	48.62	7.14
4	Bihar	48.93	7.5
5	Goa	51.75	0
6	Gujarat	45.37	23.07
7	Haryana	45.67	10
8	Himachal Pradesh	50.17	0
9	Jammu & Kashmir	46.3	0
10	Karnataka	48.58	7.14
11	Kerala	52.02	5
13	Madhya Pradesh	46.18	13.79
14	Maharashtra	45.93	16.66
15	Manipur	51.74	0
16	Meghalaya	52.17	50
17	Mizoram	50.41	0
18	Nagaland	49.12	0
19	Odisha	49.33	33.33
20	Punjab	46.83	15.38
21	Rajasthan	47.22	12
22	Sikkim	47.15	0
23	Tamil Nadu	50.39	7.89
24	Tripura	48.92	<b>50</b>
25	Uttar Pradesh	46.16	13.75
26	West Bangal	48.66	26.19
27	Chhattisgarh	49.1	27.27
28	Jharkhand	48.65	14.28
29	Uttarakhand	49.18	20
30	Telangana	49.58	5.88
	Andaman & Nicobar	47.09	0
31	Island		
32	Chandigarh	47.21	<b>100</b>
33	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	47.98	0
34	Daman & Diu	52.41	0
35	NCT OF Delhi	44.64	14.28
36	Lakshadweep	50.08	0
37	Puducherry	52.96	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>47.45(Across India)</b>	<b>13.42(Across India)</b>

Source: www.eci.gov.in

The position of women in public political life in India is deplorable—particularly in their virtual absence in legislative bodies – at the state and at the national level. What is surprising about the fact that there are very few women present in legislative bodies in the Indian states is that the proportion of women in the legislature remains low even in those states where women have a better quality of life in terms of access to education and life expectancy such as Kerala. The smaller proportion of women who have a place in the *Lok Sabhais* replicated in the *Vidhan Sabhas* (state legislative assemblies) as well (Chhibber, 2002. p.409-29). Table 3.8 shows the percentage of women representatives in the most recent State Assemblies women who are members of the legislative assemblies and it is clear that the proportion of women who find a place in these legislatures is low and remains in the single digits for almost every state. What is remarkable about this very low level of representation for women is that it occurs even in states like Kerala where it is only 5.71% that have been hailed for their favourable treatment of gender concerns. While women indeed have achieved almost universal literacy in Kerala and are far more active in the labour force, their political presence in the legislative bodies is remarkably low. This difference, by itself, should give pause to arguments that seek to link women's education and employment to a place in public political life axiomatically. Since women in India have little place in the public arena or they may also express less faith in the political process (Chhibber, 2002. p.409-29).Table 3.8 provides evidence that Indian electoral politics is still the domain of men.



**TABLE NO: 3.8**  
**Women's Representation in State Assemblies**

SI No.	States/ UTs	Election Year	Percentage of Women Representatives Over Total No. of Seats
1	Andhra Pradesh	2019	8
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2019	5
3	Assam	2016	6.34
4	Bihar	2020	10.69
5	Chhattisgarh	2018	<b>14.44</b>
6	Delhi	2020	10
7	Goa	2017	5
8	Gujarat	2017	7.14
9	Haryana	2019	10
10	Himachal Pradesh	2017	5.88
11	Jammu & Kashmir	2014	2.29
12	Jharkhand	2019	12.34
13	Karnataka	2018	3.13
14	Kerala	2016	5.71
15	Madhya Pradesh	2018	9.13
16	Maharashtra	2019	8.33
17	Manipur	2017	3.33
18	Meghalaya	2018	5.08
19	Mizoram	2018	0
20	Nagaland	2018	0
21	Odisha	2019	8.90
22	Punjab	2017	5.12
23	Puducherry	2016	<b>13.33</b>
24	Rajasthan	2018	12
25	Sikkim	2019	9.37
26	Tamil Nadu	2016	9.33
27	Telangana	2018	5.04
28	Tripura	2018	5
29	Uttar Pradesh	2017	10.55
30	Uttarakhand	2017	7.14
31	West Bangal	2016/ 2021	<b>13.26</b>

Source: [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in)

At the local level, women participation as an elected representative is high primarily because of the reservation introduced for women as per the 73rd amendment in the Indian

constitution. The 73rd amendment to the Indian constitution was introduced in 1992 with the ostensible purpose of giving women a larger voice in the political process. The amendment reserve, not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every *Panchayat* for women and it would also ensure that a third of the chairmanships of the *Panchayats* would be reserved for women. In so far as the 73rd amendment also required that states hold elections to the *Panchayats*, and as the amendment was adopted in 1992, the amendment could influence the extent of political participation by women almost instantaneously (Shanker, 2014). Though, many states introduced 50% reservation, within own jurisdiction, for women at grassroots level, so that political empowerment of women is increased. The enhanced reservation is applicable to the total number of seats to be filled by direct elections, the offices of Chairpersons, and the seats and offices of Chairpersons reserved for scheduled castes and tribes. Providing reservation for women in panchayats is under the jurisdiction of states and so many states have exercised their rights to give such reservation. While states like Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have already implemented 50 per cent quota for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. As per the information available with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 20 States namely Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal made provisions of 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in their respective State Panchayati Raj Acts. A statement showing the number of elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the country, State/Union Territory-wise is given at Table 3.8. Half of the Indian states ensured 50% (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Sikkim & Telengana) even in some cases more than 50% women's participation and representation in PRIs such as Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand & West Bengal. But, concerns have been raised over the genuine participation of women as an elected representative. It has been reported that the men have been ruling with their women as a proxy.

**TABLE NO: 3.9**  
**States/UTs Wise Percentage of Elected Women Representatives in PRIs Elections**

Sl. No.	States/ UTs	Total PRIs Representatives	Total Elected Women Representatives	Percentage of Elected Women Representatives
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	858	306	35.66
2	Andhra Pradesh	156050	78,025	50
3	Arunachal Pradesh	9383	3,658	38.98
4	Assam	26754	14,609	54.60
5	Bihar	136573	71,046	52.02
6	Chhattisgarh	170465	93,392	54.78
7	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	147	47	31.97
8	Daman & Diu	192	92	47.91
9	Goa	1555	571	36.72
10	Gujarat	144080	71,988	49.96
11	Haryana	70035	29,499	42.12
12	Himachal Pradesh	28723	14,398	50.12
13	Jammu & Kashmir	39850	13,224	33.18
14	Jharkhand	59638	30,757	51.57
15	Karnataka	101954	51,030	50.05
16	Kerala	18372	9,630	52.41
17	Ladakh	NA	NA	NA
18	Lakshadweep	110	41	37.27
19	Madhya Pradesh	392981	196490	49.99
20	Maharashtra	240635	128677	53.47
21	Manipur	1736	880	50.69
22	Odisha	107487	56,627	52.68
23	Puducherry	NA	NA	NA
24	Punjab	100312	41,922	41.79
25	Rajasthan	126271	64,802	51.31
26	Sikkim	1153	580	50.30
27	Tamil Nadu	106450	56,407	52.98
28	Telangana	103468	52,096	50.34
29	Tripura	6646	3,006	45.23
30	Uttar Pradesh	913417	304538	33.34
31	Uttarakhand	62796	35,177	56.01
32	West Bengal	59229	30,458	51.42
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3187320</b>	<b>1453973</b>	<b>44.03</b>

Source: Press Information Bureau, Govt. of India www.pib.gov.in as on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2020.

\* NA- Not Available

In Rajasthan, West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Gujarat, Maharashtra, local government has been extremely important whereas it has been less significant in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, local government is almost non-existent. The position of women in these states is also different. The female-male ratio varies from 993 in Andhra Pradesh to 908 in Uttar Pradesh as per 2011 Census while female literacy varies between 75.87 percent in Maharashtra to 57.18 percent in Uttar Pradesh. The states also differ in economic indicators and party strength. Their per capita income in 2019-20 ranged from Rs. 202,727 (in Maharashtra) to Rs. 70,418 in Uttar Pradesh. The political landscape of the states too was different with different party system configurations in each state. The right wing Hindu party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has a significant presence in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat; the Communist Party of India (Marxist) ruled West Bengal and presently TMC leads West Bengal; the Congress party or the split wing of INC is still an important electoral force in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Kerala and Assam. Politics in Kerala is dominated by two political fronts: the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Indian National Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) since late 1970s. These two coalitions have alternated in power since 1982. INC was the leading political party of Assam. Rajasthan is also ruled by two parties Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC). The current government in Rajasthan is that of the Indian National Congress. Hence, the number and percentage of women's representation at grassroots level depends upon political and other factors of each state. It is remarkable presence of women in the PRIs of Chhattisgarh, Assam and Uttarakhand, 54.78%, 54.60% and 56.01% respectively.

### **3.3.CONCLUSION:**

Women's right to equal political participation, including their right to vote, was accepted very gracefully in India much earlier than most western societies conceded to this demand. Indian women did not even have to fight for this right, unlike their western counterparts. Since 1980s, the increase in the electoral participation women in India has the visibility of women in the legislative politics. But, this has not happened in the exercise of executive and judicial power due to their lack of presence in the decision making structures. Electoral participation and quotas through affirmative action alone are not enough to result in gender equity. Although, we have raised our voice for women's

reservation as the means of women's political empowerment, but at the same time it is also true that, the large number of women in legislature will not be the appropriate solution to the problem. It is foolishness to think that it will solve the entire problems faced by women and bring equality immediately. But it is just a step to mobilize women into the political arena. Therefore, women's involvement in politics requires special consideration, and cannot be left to the forces that presently dominate our parties and Government (Roy, 2015).

In the present scenario, it is important to note here that the struggle of women to prove themselves as equal to men, in the political arena, is found more difficult work. When a woman has been able to prove herself as an active parliamentarian for the one time then she has been elected repeatedly in the Parliament and that time political party does not matter from which party she belongs. In this regard, women leaders such as Vijaya Raje Scindia, Dr. Sushila Nayar, Maneka Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee who were/are in the position to make or influence public decisions on the same footing as men, so they don't need the reference of any political party. But, for one time, if she has been failed to prove herself then she may never be choose by the same political party for the election. Though, this trend we have seen rarely in case of male candidates. In case of men members, they don't need to prove themselves again and again but this is necessary for women all the time. In this respect, one thing is need to mention here that male party leaders have shown little willingness to include women in party decision making bodies or help to create a suitable atmosphere for women's participation in their own organizations. This attitude of male party leaders is not a healthy sign towards women participation in politics as well as in decision-making bodies and also for democracy. Hence, all these tendencies towards women participation in the political process making the journey of women towards politics harder literally.

However, here the entire chapter tried to examine the history of the journey of Indian women in the political domain. The women all over the world, east-west, north-south, as silent sufferers made tremendous contribution to society in the past, which remained unrecognized and therefore, history is considered 'his' achievements and 'hers' has been completely blacked out. This secondary and relegated position of women in social and political life is not a contemporary phenomenon but has been in existence since the beginning of the civilized society in India. For centuries, women have been suppressed, oppressed, and treated as subordinates, not equal to men in various fields of activity and

politics is one among them. Throughout the ages women have been struggling to set equal steps with men and trying to cope with the existing in egalitarian gender relations in all spheres of life.

➤ **SUMMARY:**

- In India, women's status has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From ancient times through the medieval period to modern India, the history of women has been eventful. The history of women's participation in politics has been divided into pre and post-independence period.
- Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century women began to participate in various movements and agitations. But most of the struggles were dominated by the women of the elites of the society. After the First World War a large number of women joined India's freedom struggle. M.K. Gandhi made women an integral part of all struggles which he launched during the freedom struggle against British colonialism. The house wives, young girls, widows, old women and even tawaifs and prostitutes directly or indirectly participated in the freedom movement of the country though most of these are unrecorded. The massive participation of women in freedom struggle was largely accomplished by the call given by Gandhi in the 1920s. The major events where women participated in large number in the pre-independence era were Anti-partition Movement of Bengal (1905), Non-cooperation Movement (1920-22), Salt Satyagraha or Civil Disobedience Movement (1930), and Quit India Movement (1945-47) (Roy, 2015).
- The decades following independence witnessed a remarkable decline in women's involvement in politics. From the end of the 1930s to the early 1950s women participated in a wide range of social and political movements. But in the decades after independence women have become marginalized in politics as compared to the earlier decades. Indian women have been given, formally, an equal status to men by Constitution. But there is exists a gap between the constitutional rights and the rights enjoyed in reality by women. Seventy-five years of independence have made very little impact on women's active participation in politics. Their performance as representatives quantitatively has been rather insignificant in the formal political bodies. With a few exceptions women have remained outside the domain of power and political authority (Jharta, 1996, p. 62). The number of

women in the leadership positions at the local, village, district, state and national level is still not commensurate with their numbers in society.

- For centuries, women have been suppressed, oppressed, and treated as subordinates, not equal to men in various fields of activity and politics is one among them. The secondary and relegated position of women in social and political life is not a contemporary phenomenon but has been in existence since the beginning of the civilized society in India.

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