

Participatory Governance through Women's Representation in Gujarat: Assessing the Role and Relevance of Government Initiatives since 2000

Dr. Ahmed Raza¹

Abstract

The underrepresentation of women in the decision making process always amounts to be sensitive and patriarchal issues in a society as it totally violates the notion of equality. After 74 years of independence in India, the issue of poor representation of women in political system remained same or inadequate as compared to their population ratio, although, efforts in the form of reservation, awareness and laws are continued. The paper has chosen Gujarat as a case study in order to explore the rationales behind decreasing trend towards women representation in Gujarat state assembly election and Lok Sabha election held in 2017 and 2019 respectively. Though, representation of women through 50 percent reservation has been a successful in local bodies including Gujarat. This paper also made an analysis of legal and institutional steps carried by Gujarat government since 2000 towards empowering women for ensuring their inclusiveness in the decision making process.²

Keywords: women representation, decision making, policy, reservation

I. Introduction

Women's participation in political system amounts to be an essential and pre-requisite for women's interests as well as nation building. Although, women have different needs and perspectives on social, economical and political issues, hence, they must be incorporated at all of the societal viewpoints in policy and decision-making processes. But, the way, the democracy is being spread and being adopted throughout the world, women's participation has been an unfulfilled dream as women having about fifty percent of the population of the

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, MANUU (a central university), Hyderabad

² Article has been written as a part of ICSSR MRP, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

world did not acquire their proportional position in legislative bodies. As per the report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), only 24.3 percent of all national parliamentarians were women as of February 2019, leading Rwanda on top having 61.3 per cent of seats in the lower house.³ Equality from women's right to vote till appropriate representation in political system always happens to be core of any health democracy.⁴

Since independence, India has been making a strong foundation for participatory governance by providing equal opportunity for women in every sphere of life whether political, social, cultural etc. therefore; the share of women representation in legislatures has been increasing. But, they are still underrepresented as compared to the women ratio to whole population of the country which puts a number of questions on political willingness of every political party of India. Sensitization towards women representation into legislative bodies has always been a least preferred assignment of political parties.⁵ Hence, Gujarat has been selected as a case study as women's participation to political process in this state has declined despite of a being developed state in terms of economical, social, education and cultural. At last, there has been content analysis of legal and institutional initiatives taken for political empowerment of the women since the formation of the state in the year of 1960.⁶

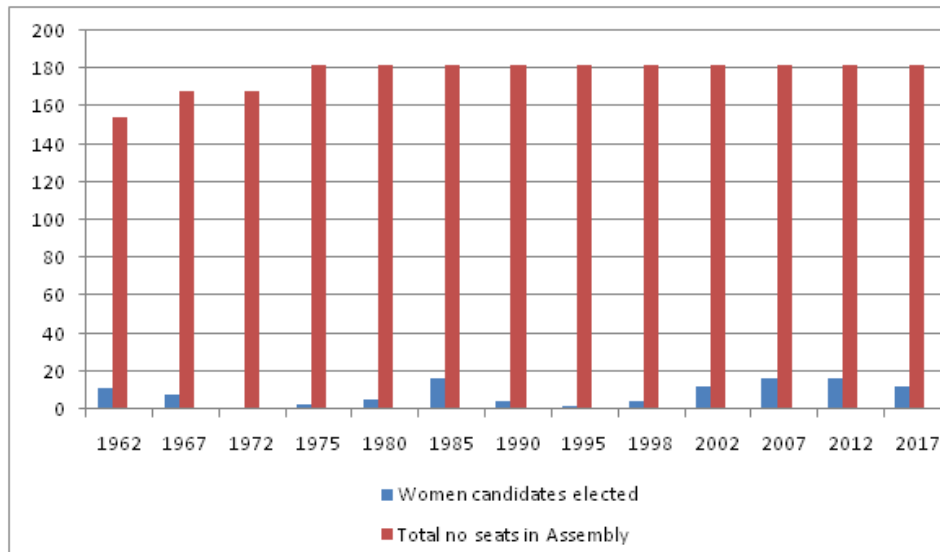
In order to reach the in-depth analysis on women representation to legislative bodies in Gujarat, the following a couple of figures would be relevant statistically

³The data has been taken by the [Inter-Parliamentary Union](http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm) on the basis of information provided by National Parliaments by 1st February 2019. Accessed from <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

⁴Nripendra Kishore Mishra, TulikaTripathi. 2011. 'Conceptualising Women's Agency, Autonomy and Empowerment', Economic & Political Weekly, March 12.

⁵Buch, Nirmala. 2000. 'Women's Experience in New Panchayats: The Emerging Leadership of Rural Women,' Occasional Paper no. 35, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi.

⁶ Socio-economic Review 2012-13, Gujarat State, Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Government of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, 2013

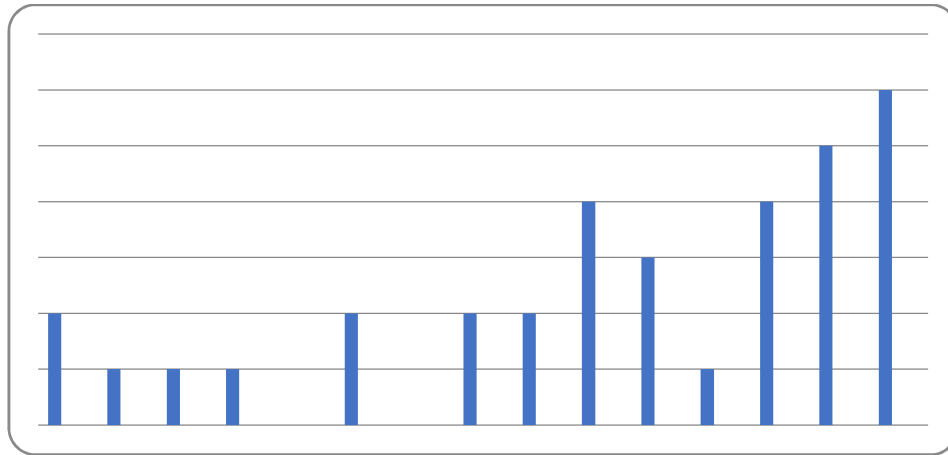
Figure – 1: Elected Women MLA from Gujarat (1962-2017)⁷

The figure 1 shows that numbers of contestants for state assembly in Gujarat have risen significantly from 19 in 1962 to 126 in 2017, but still women representation remained low, at an average of 8%.

Figure – 2: Elected Women Lok Sabha MP from Gujarat (1962-2019)⁸

⁷ Source: Gujarat State assembly official website

⁸Source:Lok Sabha official website, available at <https://loksabha.nic.in/>



The figure 2 may be referred to analyze a gradual improvement of women's representation in Lok Sabha. It shows that women representation in Lok Sabha has also not been pleasing in Gujarat in 1962, though, their representation begins to improve following Narendra Modi regime after 2000. But, in 2019, again, only six women from Gujarat could be elected as Lok Sabha member. The concept of participatory governance could never be imagined if the women's voice is unreached at legislative bodies such as Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha or state assemblies. Post independent India did not have an adequate representation of women into 1st Lok Sabha restricting elected women Lok Sabha member in 24.⁹ Over the time, discourse on adequate women representation in parliament has always been a catchy election agenda for leading political party which could reach at 78, the highest since independence, which is 14% of the house. On the other hand, the creation of local governance as the third tier of government was necessitated with the strengthening of democracy and of accommodating all sections of society. Therefore, one of the important purposes of having local governance becomes itself a boon for participatory governance in India.

In Gujarat, local governance in urban and rural level has been functional with the formation of Gujarat as a new state in accordance with the Gujarat

⁹ Report from official website of Parliament of India LOK SABHA, <http://164.100.47.194/loksabha/Members/womenar.aspx?Isno=1&tab=15>

Panchayats Act of 1961 following three structures patterns, namely gram panchayati, intermediate level and district Panchayat. Although, women representation in local bodies in Gujarat at beginning level could find only two seats at all levels. Later on, a landmark milestone for strengthening local governance constitutionally has evolved with the introduction of a Panchayat raj system and urban local governance in 1993 mandating one third reservation at all levels for women.

Over the year, Gujarat government broadened its political willpower by passing the Gujarat Local Authorities Laws (Amendment) Act, 2009 providing a provision of 50% reservation for women in urban and rural local bodies which led to increase to 49.99 percent of total elected representation at all level local bodies in the 2015 election.¹⁰ It is utmost a victory in the paradigm of a long awaited battle against underrepresentation of women in decision making opening up of immense space in the heart of government. on the other hand, the 50 per cent reservation for women was also brought into effect in Gujarat's urban local bodies for the first time during the 2015 municipal corporation elections. Though, few of reports were also published highlighting issues of women's representation in local bodies due to unwillingness, lack of political maturity, patriarchal family setup etc prohibiting them into jumping into the real political arena in Gujarat. Though, the Gujarat state happened to be an eye witness of numbers of constitutional and institutional changes during 2000 to 2015 in order to make women's representations more feasible and practical. But the women's representation to political process has gone down despite of state categorized as developed state. Government initiative of the Gujarat amounts to be a remarkable as compared to other states of India particularly after 2000 in order to fulfill the gap between women and men's representation in legislation.¹¹

On one hand, there has been a sharp fall in women's representation in Gujarat state assembly 2017; on the other hand, India has witnessed the highest women representation in post independent India in the 2019 general election, which is a

¹⁰ November 11, 2009, India Today Magazine, published at Gandhinagar, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/gujarat-govt-clears-50-pc-reservation-for-women-in-local-bodies-60616-2009-11-11>

¹¹ Gujarat "Nari Gaurav Niti", (State Policy for Gender Equity) 2006, Women and Child Development, Government of Gujarat, Gujarat State.

matter of intense debate as Gujarat happens to be India's prosperous States, but, it did not see adequate representation in the state assembly and Lok Sabha. Therefore, few of analysis on Narendra Modi's initiatives as Chief Minister of Gujarat for women empowerments are mandated as a numbers of state-run programs and schemes for women empowerment has been launched particularly after 2000.¹²

II. Legal and Institutional Initiatives towards Increasing Women's Representation in Gujarat since 2000

A. Creation of Department of Women and Child Development

Formation of separate departments for women and child development in 2001 may be accorded a landmark initiative for effective implementation of the Gender Equity Policy in the state.¹³ This year also was dedicated to women by celebrating as "Women's Empowerment Year". The department positively took all the responsibility of empowering the women in the state through launching policies, schemes and projects leading to catalyzing women's representation for next 10 years. The Gender Resource Center and Swayamsiddha have been two leading programs of the department for gender equality in terms of political and social aspects of life. Swayamsiddha enables women to have a life with dignity and self-reliance at Panchayat level effecting an increase of women's representation in legislation in the long run.

B. Reserving 50 percent Seats for Women in Local Bodies

Participation of women in panchayati raj institutions involves women as voters, member of political parties, candidates and elected members.. However, by virtue of the 73rd constitution amendment Act, 1993 the women ration have

¹² See an article by Charu Sudan Kasturi, "Truth vs hype in Modi's boast about Gujarat's women" published at Hindustan Times, New Delhi, April 09, 2013, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/truth-vs-hype-in-modi-s-boast-about-gujarat-s-women/story-EJ5SyLLW0KkcAaGDF0euWK.html>

¹³ Prior to year 2001, there was no separate department for addressing the concerns of women as the year 2001, was celebrated as "Women's Empowerment Year".

been one third reservation of seats in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.¹⁴ As a consequence of the 73rd amendment Act, Gujarat experienced a notable growth in women's representation in rural bodies. In the year of 2002, it was noted-down about 27.09 percent representations of women at all levels in Gujarat PRI. Following this footstep, the government further demonstrated its big wisdom by extending 50 percent reservation for women in local bodies in 2009 in order to showing optimistic gesture towards women's representation in the decision making bodies resulting in 49.99 percent of total elected representation at the local bodies in 2015 election. The then government deserved to be applauded as reservation prepares the way to first level of victory over the chronic issue of underrepresentation of women in local bodies. Though, present study here, brought few questions for policy makers and social scientist to explore rationale behind ruining of the women's representation in the last Gujarat assembly election held in 2017 as their numbers shrank to 13 only out of 182 member house.

C. Financial Strengthening of Samaras Yojana since 2002

An admirable planning, namely 'Samaras Yojana' has been already persisting since 1992 in Gujarat promoting a consensus among the Panchayats so as to nominate representatives from all sections including women. The financial positions was strengthened following the takeover of the new regime after 2001 onwards resulting in an upwards trend for women representatives. As an effect of the yojna, women Panchayats increased from 20 in the 2006 elections to 254 in the 2011 elections. The government kept on focussing Yojana by providing grant time to time so as to spread at wider level in state.

MahilaSwarajAbhiyan (MSA)

The initiative namely MahilaSwarajAbhiyan as a form of state level network based in Ahmedabad has been taken by encouraging and spreading awareness for bringing women's participation towards panchayat raj system.¹⁵ It has a long history associated with the promotion of democracy at grass root level through

¹⁴ Dalit Women's Right to Political Participation in Rural Panchayati Raj: A study of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu© JayshreeMangubhai, Aloysius Irudayamsj& Emma Sydenham, 2008

¹⁵ See the detail from official website of MahilaSwarajAbhiyan (MSA), Ahmedabad available at <http://www.wecaretoo.com/Organizations/IND/mahilaswarajabhiyan.html>

organizing seminar, workshop, symposium, etc. so as to establish the concept of self governance among the women. It acts as a catalyst in order to motivate women standing in last of the long existing queue. The Gujarat government has been maintaining a harmonious relationship in order to pushing women's representation. The MSA also coordinates with two women's organizations, namely Kutch MahilaVikasSangathan and Society for Women's Action and Training Initiatives for extending the work.

D. Gender Resources Centre

An organization registered under the Societies Registrations Act, 1860 has been in operation under the guidance of department of women and child from March, 2004 making no of efforts towards incorporating gender equity and equality in the overall development process.¹⁶ The dynamics of GRC dashed in flying mode of operation taking into the confidence of different sections of society in order to hit the target against gender related hurdles. The GRC's beginning for improvement in the life of women's lives has been a primary objective, but, it always dedicates itself to sensitize women's representation in decision making in Gujarat. In this process of vibrancy, it is also facilitated by departments, NGOs and academic institutions.

E. State Commission for Women

The countrywide trend of introducing commission for women in each state has been a prime concern of central government resulting in the formation of a commission for each state after 2000. Keeping the priorities in mind, the then government immediately signaled green flag by establishing Stat Commission for women in Gujarat in the year of 2005.¹⁷ The commission conventionally was nurtured thoroughly with a wide range of jurisdictions pertaining to empowering the women. It has also been assigned consolidating voice and tone of women in legislative process. . However, being as advisory body to the government, commission executed a number program to empower the women so as to

¹⁶ Annual Report 2009-10, published by Gender Resource Centre, Govt of Gujarat, Ahmedabad, available at https://grcgujarat.org/pdf/programme_annual_report_2009_10.pdf

¹⁷ See detail from The Gujarat State Commission for Women Act, 2002 Gujarat Act No. 12 of 2002, available at <http://www.bareactslive.com/Guj/guj195.htm>

improve the representation in legislative bodies. The commission remains engaged with no other organizations in order to undertake promotional, educational research so as to seek suggestions for ensuring representation of women at all levels of life. A large number of seminar, conferences and workshop through financial support from the government always help increase the awareness level for women.

III. Conclusion

The above mentioned government sponsored efforts and schemes in different ways need not be tested as they are undoubtedly dedicated for women's representations. The efforts tried to reach its zenith following the takeover of Narendra Modi as chief minister of Gujarat as he himself has shown full gesture and willingness towards women empowerment which led to rise women representation remarkably. Though, it could not be accepted full of satisfaction as few of government policies after 2000 has sparked controversy for example 'two child norm creating negative impact to bring younger women into politics'. On the other hand, the fiscal pattern of the Gujarat model of local governance makes PRIs more dependent on governments at state and central level as finances are sanctioned to local government through central and state schemes. In this parameter, elected women representatives' autonomy is hindered which prevents new women entrants into local election.. To conclude, foundation for women's representation in the past 15 years is well prepared, but there must be proper monitoring of all state initiatives schemes at implementation level.