

# Political Participation and Empowerment of Women in Local Bodies in India-A Study

**Dr. M. Bhaskara Raju**

Assistant Professor Dept.of Political Science, Govt. Degree & PG College,  
Puttur-517583, Chittoor Dist, Andhra Pradesh

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## ABSTRACT

*Empowerment of Women in all the fields, in particular political field is essential to achieve gender equality in the society. Gender equality is very important to Social, Economic, Political Cultural and Scientific development of the nation.*

*"Territorial representation with direct franchise was introduced in India for the first time by the Act of 1919 under Montague Chelmsford Reforms. All the modern democratic countries are governed by territorial constituencies.*

*The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment acts 1992 brought great breakthrough in political empowerment of women. Local bodies both Panchayat Raj institutions and Municipal institutions got constitutional status and also the 33 percent of seats are reserved for women*

*"There are 13.72 lakh elected women representatives in Panchaytiraj institutions which constitute 44.2 percent of total elected representatives as on December, 2017. Women Sarpanches accounted for 43 percent of total Gram Panchayats across the country, exhibiting active leadership of women in local governments"*

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Territorial Representation, Panchayati raj,

## Introduction:

Democracy is a modern form of government, election is the key to democracy, and Representation is the premise to elections. But without representatives, citizens alone can no longer rule themselves especially in the modern nation states which are large in size and population.

Empowerment of Women in all the fields, in particular political field is essential to achieve gender equality in the society. The participation of women in politics, decision making bodies, government and also the judiciary is very limited. Women population is nearly 49 percent, but political representation is very low since Indian independence.

## Representation during the British Rule in India:

India was being ruled by a particular caste or religion until the advent of the British rule, but during the British rule there is no governing caste, but has only monopolized elections and legislature. *"Territorial representation with direct franchise was introduced in India for the first time by the Act of 1919 under Mont ford reforms (Montague Chelmsford Reforms)"<sup>i</sup>* . All the modern democratic countries are governed by territorial constituencies. After independence equal opportunities are provided through the constitution to all the sections of the people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex and birth, introducing the adult franchise through the Article 326 of the Indian Constitution. Due to this reason have-nots have gained numerical supremacy over the haves and elites. In reality representation is deprived for women in the political arena.

## Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the women representation in the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary in India
2. To study the women representation and political empowerment in Local bodies after 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment acts 1992.

## Women Representation-World Scenario:

Women Representation in politics and law making bodies and also the heads of the Nation or Government indicates the political empowerment of women. Inter-Parliamentary Union classified 193 countries by descending order on the basis of the percentage of women in the lower house or single house. An African country Rwanda is the highest representation in the world, 49 members are women out of 80 members in the lower house of parliament. In Cuba 53.2 percent are women members, 322 members are women representatives out of 605 in single house parliament. Bolivia stood at 3<sup>rd</sup> place with 53.1 percent women representation in the lower house and 47.2 percent in upper house, 69 women members are elected out of 130 in the lower house. Rwanda, Cuba and Bolivia are the first three countries out of 193 have more than 50 percent of women representation.

Only 69 countries have more than 25 percent of women representation in lower house or single house parliament, remaining 124 countries have below 25 percent of women representation in the parliament. United States of America also got only 102<sup>nd</sup> place out of 193 with 19.5 percent only the women in the House of Representatives. Communist country China 70<sup>th</sup> place, 742 members out of 2980 members is women. 04 Countries have no women representation in their parliament.

In South Asia, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh are above the India in women representation, India got 147<sup>th</sup> place in the descending order of women representation in the lower house or single house. Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka are behind to India in women representation. In the South Asia, Nepal is in the first place with 32.7 percent of women representation, Sri Lanka stood at the last place with 5.8 percent.

### Women Representation at the National Level:

International Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEADW) has been ratified by a majority of UN states; India is also a one of the signatory country among them.

### Women Representation in the Lok Sabha:

**Table 1.1 shows the Women Representation from 1952-2014**

Sl.No.	Year	Total No of Seats	Women MPs	% of Women MPs
1	1952	499	22	4.41
2	1957	500	27	5.40
3	1962	503	34	6.76
4	1967	523	31	5.93
5	1971	521	22	4.22
6	1977	544	19	3.39
7	1980	544	28	5.15
8	1984	544	44	8.9
9	1989	517	27	5.22
10	1991	544	39	7.17
11	1996	543	39	7.18
12	1998	543	43	7.92
13	1999	543	49	9.02
14	2004	543	45	8.03
15	2009	543	59	10.86
16	2014	543	62	11.04

(Source: Dr.B.L.Fadia and Dr Kuldeep Fadia, Indian Government and Politics, Sahitya Bhavan Publications, Agra, Page 959)<sup>ii</sup>

As table 1.1 shows In India in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha 64 members are women out of 542, it is 11.8 percent, whereas in 1952 in the 1<sup>st</sup> Lok Sabha 22 members were women out of 499 it was 4.41 percent. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha 19 women out of 544 members were elected in 1977, this was the lowest representation for women in the Lok Sabha history. First 03 Lok Sabha elections women representation was in ascending order, next 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha general elections women representation was in descending order. From the 1991 onwards percentages of women representation in ascending order. The average women representation in Lok Sabha is nearly 7 percent only, whereas world average is 23.8 percent.

In the Rajya Sabha (upper house) as table 1.2 shows only 29 members are women out of 245, it is 11.83 in 2014, in 1952 women members were 16 out of 219 members, in 1990 women members were 15.5 percent, this is the highest percentage in Rajya Sabha history, in 1971 there was only 17 women members out of 243 members, this is the lowest only 7 percent of women members in the Rajya Sabha history.

**Table 1.2 shows the Women Representation in the Rajya Sabha:**

Sl.No	Year	Total Seats	No.of Women	% of Women
1	1952	219	16	7.3
2	1957	237	18	7.6
3	1962	238	18	7.6
4	1967	240	20	8.3
5	1971	243	17	7.0

6	1977	244	25	10.2
7	1980	244	24	9.8
8	1985	244	28	11.4
9	1990	245	38	15.5
10	1996	223	20	9.0
11	1998	223	19	8.6
12	2006	245	25	10.2
13	2009	245	22	8.97
14	2014	245	29	11.83

(Source: Election Commission of India)<sup>iii</sup>

In states do not have considerable ratio of women representation, the average women members in law making bodies is only 09 percent. Bihar, Rajasthan and Haryana have 14 percent, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal with 13 percent and Punjab with 12 percent, at the same time Nagaland and Pondicherry legislative assemblies do not represent to the women.

### Women Representation in Local bodies:

Though in the parliament and the state legislative bodies record low women representation, the local bodies District, Block and Village levels and also the urban local bodies Municipal corporations, Municipal councils and Nagara Panchayats women participation is considerably increased. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments brought great breakthrough in political empowerment of women. Local bodies both Panchayat Raj institutions and Municipal institutions got constitutional status and also the 33 percent of seats are reserved for women.

In part IX, Article 243D (3) of Indian Constitution provides that the Panchayats not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. 243D (4) of the constitution provides that not less than one third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women, provided also that the number of offices reserved under this clause shall be allotted by rotation to different panchayats at each level.

In the same manner Part IX(A), Article 243T (2) Provides not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes. Article 243T (3) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality. Article 243T (4) the offices of Chairpersons in the municipalities shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may, by law provide.

*"By 1999, under the provisions of aforesaid Amendments 2,27,698 Gram Panchayats at the village level, 5906 Panchayat Samitis at the Block level and 474 Zilla Parishads at the district level had been created. In addition, some 3,586 Urban Local bodies had been created. So far, 2.5 million members have been elected at the Block level to Panchayat Samitis, and another 12,671 members have been elected at the District level as Zilla Parishad members. By 1999, as many as 7,68,582 women had been elected to Gram Panchayat Samitis. Another 4030 women were elected as Zilla Parishad representatives"<sup>iv</sup>.*

Whereas 16 states out of 29 states provided 50 percent of seats in panchayatiraj institutions and municipalities, due to that there is substantial changes have been taken place in the representation of women at the level of Local bodies. *"There are 13.72 lakh elected women representatives in Panchayatiraj institutions which constitute 44.2 percent of total elected representatives as on December, 2017. Women sarpanches accounted for 43 percent of total Gram Panchayats across the country, exhibiting active leadership of women in local governments"<sup>v</sup>*

The scenario is not different in Executive and Judiciary also. In the Union government it is not at all exceed 15 percent. In the Judiciary women representation is so miserable. 70 years of Independent India only or two judges are women in Supreme Court and only 15 women judges are there out of 501 High Court Judges. 229 judges are appointed to the Supreme Court since 1950 out of them only 06 judges are women. The first woman judge Fathima Beevi was appointed only in 1989.

### Need of Women Representation in Politics:

1. Law making bodies carry out their duties smoothly with dignity.

2. They perform their duties with higher responsibility and accountability.
3. Transparency will be high-level in the administration.
4. Corruption practices will be significantly reduced.
5. Violence and criminalization of politics will be substantially decreased.
6. Women problems can be understood and resolved confidently and empathetically.
7. Finally empowerment of women will be materialized.

#### **Difficulties in Women Representation:**

India is the largest Democratic country, but diversity in representation is very poor. There are many reasons like traditionally women should limit to house only. Politics is intertwined with violence. Politics is costly affair, but Women are financially dependent, due to this reason their entry into politics depends upon the men in their home. Now a day Politics is not smooth and moral, due to this reason, women generally back foot to enter into politics. According to a survey there are five factors that deter women from entering into politics. They are Domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the roles of women in society, lack of support from family, lack of confidence and lack of Finance.

#### **Way Forward to True Representation:**

1. Women higher education should be encouraged by the Government liberally and generously. Basic amenities should be provided each and every school. Even today so many schools do not have adequate toilets, pure safe drinking water. Due to this reason so many girls drop their schooling.
2. Leadership training is given from the school level to all the students and also should encourage the girls. Government should bring gender sensitization.
3. Right to property should be equal to both men and women. A mere recognition of the women property right in principle is useless.
4. Women should be self dependent. Self dependency or economic independence is an important factor for empowering women. Government should encourage to set up self-help groups and financing through banks.
5. Abusing the girl child and women related problems should be solved emphatically; Government prevents and stern actions against teasing of girls and women.
6. Reservation for women should be implemented both in Parliament and also the state legislative bodies. Parliament to Panchayat levels women representation should be at least 33 percent.
7. Ministries are also reserved for women at least 33 percent both at Union and State level.
8. In the Judiciary also Reservations should be implemented for women.
9. Political parties should begin with the women representation at the party level. All parties should allot at least 33 percent of party positions to the women.

Finally women empowerment is a multitask activity. By the women participation women in politics Social, Economic, Political, Cultural, Scientific fields achieve great progress. So in all the fields women should be encouraged to bring significant changes in Indian politics and also the nation building.

References:

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