
**Women's Empowerment in India through Political Participation
A Study of Constitutional Provisions and Achievements****Hillol Mukhopadhyay & Apurba Kumar Chattopadhyay****Link : https://santiniketansahityapath.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2_Hillol-Mukhopadhyay-Apurba-Kumar-Chattopadhyay.pdf**

Abstract: India is the largest democracy in the world. Democracy stands on free participation of all the people of the nation irrespective of caste, creed, gender or race. Equal and effective political participation of all the citizens is essential for success of the democratic system. Women comprise almost half of the population of the nation and their true and equal participation in the decision-making process is important for the democracy. Many constitutional and legislative provisions have been provided to safeguard the interest of women. This is an attempt to examine and understand the extent of rate of the political participation of women in the Parliament of India. It has been found that the political participation of women in India is low and it is lower than most of her neighboring countries. It is believed that the factors such as domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding roles of women in society and lack of support from family were among main reasons that prevented them from entering politics.

Key words: Women's empowerment, political participation, Constitutional and legislative provisions

I. Introduction:

"Women must be regarded as agents and beneficiaries of change. Investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development." – Human Development Report, UNDP, 1995

Since ancient times women in India took participation in political activities as evident from various historical sources, literary texts and archaeological findings. Women in ancient India held responsible positions as rulers, head of soldiers and took active participants in administration of the state. Being half of the world's population, women should have been in the equivalent leading positions as of the male, but their representation is very marginal in the legislative bodies of various countries of the world. Though India is one of the first few democratic countries to grant women their right to vote, representation of women in Indian Parliament or in the State Legislative Assemblies is very poor. The Government of India Act, 1935 granted right to women to exercise their franchise. Articles 14, 15, 325, 326 of the Constitution of India provide specific provisions for women in India and the 73rd and 74th Constitution amendment acts, 1992 reserved one-third seats for women in the Panchayats and Municipal bodies. However, till date the main hindrance for women's participation in politics at the village level is the intervention

and interference of men.

Women empowerment may come from equipping women with the skills, knowledge, resources so that they can participate and take decisions in social, economic, and political spheres. However, the scenario of political participation of women in India has been changing since last few decades but still there is shortage of women participating in the politics. Among the twenty-eight states, there is only one women chief minister (Smt. Mamata Banerjee) indicating that women are still far behind in responsible positions of active politics in India.

This article is organized in the following way: In Section II we summarize existing literature. Section III enumerates legislative and constitution provisions for the benefit of women. In Section IV we analyse trend of women participation in Lok Sabha followed by analysis of trend of women participation in Rajya Sabha in Section V. Section VI makes a review of women's participation at the international level and finally, in Section VII we make some concluding observations.

II. Political Participation of Women in India: A Brief Review

Political participation of women starts from the process of their exercise of right to vote which in fact, started prior to independence. The independent India provided equal right to the women in almost all the contexts as well as in the field of politics. Further, it has been observed that although reservation for women in local bodies has now been accomplished and this has been a sign of empowerment; reservation at the national level is still pending (at least till 2029). Even in the local bodies, the decisions of women representatives are influenced by their male counterparts in family or in the party she belonged which affects the process of gender equality. They took part in the politics as voter, as contestant, as elected members and as ministers in the state governments and in union government. However, their participation rate is still marginal.

The process for political empowerment of women started in 1957 with the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, which recommended the three tier Panchayet Raj System. Then the Ashok Mehta Committee (1977) recommended for a two-tier system in Panchayet. In September 1991, the Bill was submitted and passed in the Lok Sabha as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 and the three tier Panchayet system was introduced through the 73rd Amendment Act. This was a landmark in the women's participation in local government. One third reservation for women in the local government was provided in this amendment for the first time.

This issue has been studied by number of researchers. We summarize some of them in the following paragraphs.

Kabeer (2005) emphasizes on the positive effect of political representation, both in national and local levels to address the constraints on women. She argued that gender inequalities are multi dimensional and cannot be reduced to some single and universally agreed set of priorities and that provision should be made to allow women to participate and monitor policy making to realize their true potential.

According to Lindberg, et al (2011) there has been increase in women participation in local government leading to better influence due to reservation of seats for women as

politics, a better active panchayat. However, in some cases the women members were mere figurehead and affairs were managed by their husbands. Determining factors like caste and class influence a lot in the election process even in case of seats reserved for dalits. Regarding women's entry in politics, it was also found that more affluent women were active in Panchayats. However, reservation for women in local bodies changed the condition for local activities and led to advancement of women.

In the context of political participation, Sakthivel (2015) has found some political constraints of women which may be given as follows: (i) Harassment and exploitation of women leaders by officials, leaders, social workers and others; (ii) women generally by nature avoid leading the group organization and the society; (iii) the political provisions for certain proportion of women leadership are either not implemented or encroached by men, if implemented; and (iv) the ill motive people misguide the women leaders in their vested interest and thus weaken them. In an interesting article, Munshi (2005) implored that at the time of publication of the Report of the Committee on the Status of women in India in 1974 women leaders "believed that with the equality provided in the Constitution and increasing access to education and employment, there would be a gradual increase in the number of women MPs and MLAs elected through open competition. This, however, has not happened. The 'continued female demographic disadvantage in India' (Chattopadhyay 2011) got reflected in political participation of women. Therefore, it has been seen that elected decision making forums can never find the necessary time to discuss urgent issues facing women and such debates usually get pushed to the very last day of any session of the parliament. A substantially increased presence of women in the elected decision-making forums would force members to discuss such issues with more time and seriousness, since on the whole there is a wide consensus among women of different political parties on urgent issues facing almost half of the country's population" (Munshi 2005 p. 94). In realities, however it has been found that the decision-making positions of the parties have negligible presence of women. Even senior women with large experience are sidelined when it comes to allocating positions of responsibility within the parties. The only way to rise in politics for women is through the family connections.

III. Legislative and Constitution provisions for the benefit of women

The importance of women's equal participation in the society and polity was given emphasis soon after the independence. Thus, independent India took various measures for safeguarding the women's interest. This may be clearly discerned from the following table (Table-1) which details the legislative measures undertaken in India with a view to safeguard women's interest.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act 2023 has been passed in the Parliament of India for reservation of one third of all seats for women in Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies and the NCT of Delhi. It will take place after publication of the census followed by completion of delimitation of seats. Therefore, empowerment will be delayed at least till the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

Table-1:Legislative Measures For Safeguarding Women's Interest

Acts	Narration
The Special Marriage Act, 1954	This act fixed the age of marriage at 21 for males and 18 for females and provided right to women for inter-caste marriage, registered marriage.
The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955	It prohibits child marriage, polygamy, polyandry and provides equal rights to women to divorce and to remarry.
The Hindu Succession Act, 1956	It provides right to parental property to women.
The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956.	It authorizes childless woman to adopt a child and claim maintenance from husband.
The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	It prevents dowry and women exploitation.
The Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act, 1956	It prevents trafficking of women and girls for commercial sexual exploitation
The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.	It provides authority for termination of pregnancy on medical and some other special grounds
The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983.	It provides punishment for subjecting women to cruelty.
The Family Court Act, 1984	Provides establishment of family court to speedily solve family disputes
The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986	It prohibits indecent representation of women through advertisement, publication, writing, and painting or in some other manner.

Source: <http://mospi.nic.in>

The Constitution of India resolved “to secure to all its citizens JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.” It is the law of the land which assures the dignity of the individuals irrespective of their sex or community and women benefit from these rights equally with men as citizens of India. The constitutional provisions that aim to empower Indian women are enumerated in **Table- 2**.

Table-2: Constitutional Provisions for Empowering Women in India

Article	Provisions
Article 14	Equality before law for women
Article 15(i)	The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them
Article 15 (3)	The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children.
Article 16	Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
Article 39(a)	The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
Article 39(d)	Equal pay for equal work for both men and women
Article 39 A	To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities.
Article 42	The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.
Article 46	The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
Article 47	The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people.
Article 51(A)	To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women
Article 243 D(3)	Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Schedule Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat
Article 243D (4)	Not less than one- third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women (Article 243 D (4))
Article 243T (3)	Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T (3))
Article 243T (4)	Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide (Article 243 T (4))

Source: <http://mospi.nic.in>

IV. Trend of women participation in Lok Sabha

“One of the truest measures of a nation's advancement is the state of its women. For out of the women comes the new generation, and it is from their lips and from their laps that it begins to learn.”

-Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru

Women's participation in the freedom struggle started long back in the nineteenth century with the active contribution of women like Rani Laxmibai, Sabitribai Phule, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali and others. The Government of India Act, 1935 passed by the British Parliament enabled women to exercise their franchise. In the democracy, the government should comprise representative of all sections of the people so that the voice of even the weakest section may be heard. Even after this rich history of women's contribution to the nation, participation of women in the politics is still a matter of concern. Women's participation in politics, which ultimately leads to decision making process, is essential for the interest of the women as well as for democracy as half of the population is comprised of women. The different needs and perspective of women cannot be mitigated without active involvement of women in the decision-making process of the Government.

In the Constituent Assembly of India (1946) there were fourteen women members, Ammu Swaminathan, Dakshayani Velayudhan, Durgabai Deshmukh, Hansa Mehta, Malti Chowdhury, Sucheta Kripalani, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Purnima Banerjee, Kamala Chaudhuri, Begum Aizaz Rasul, Sarojini Naidu, Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz, Lila Roy and Begum Ikramullah. The Constitution of India gave equal right to women to vote but their representation in the Parliament remained very low even after seventy-five years of independence. However, the encouraging fact is that there has been an increasing trend in the number, from 22 women members in the year 1957 to 62 members in the year 2014, 78 members in 2019 and 74 members in 2024. There has been a gradual increase in the number of women contestants also from the year 1951 to 2024. The number of women contestants in the year 1957 was only 45 whereas in the year 2014 it was 668, in 2019 the number was 726 and in 2024 it was 797. Though the percentage of women registered electors has not changed significantly (in 1957 it was 47.2% and in 2019 it was 48.1% of total registered electors) there has been a noticeable increase in the percentage of votes polled by women over total votes polled (in 1957 it was 38.3% and in 2019 it was 47.9%). However, the most significant change can be noticed in the percentage of votes polled by women over women registered elector during this period. In the year 1957 only 38.8% of women registered elector had cast their franchisee whereas in the year 2019 it was 67.2% (Table - 3).

Table 3: Participation of Women in Lok Sabha

Elect ion year	Number of Seats for which election held	Women Contestant s		Women elected over total seats		Women registered electors over total registered electors	Votes polled by women over total votes polled	Votes polled by women over women registre d electors
		No.	%	No.	%			
1957	494 (403) ##	45	3.0	22	4.5	47.2	38.3	38.8
1962	494	66	3.3	31	6.3	47.3	39.8	46.6
1967	520	68	2.9	29	5.6	48.0	43.4	55.5
1971	518	61	2.2	29	5.6	47.7	42.3	49.1
1977	542	70	2.9	19	3.5	48.0	43.6	54.9
1980	529@	143	3.1	28	5.3	47.9	43.1	51.2
1984	514	162	3.0	42	8.2	48.2	44.4	58.6
1985 *	27	9	5.0	1	3.7	45.7	45.4	71.7
1989	529	198	3.2	29	5.5	47.5	43.9	57.3
1991	524\$	326	3.8	37	7.1	47.5	43.0	51.3
1992 #	13	4	4.9	2	15.4	45.9	40.2	21.0
1996	543	599	4.3	40	7.4	47.7	44.0	53.4
1998	543	274	5.8	43	7.9	47.7	44.4	57.7
1999	543	284	6.1	49	9.0	47.7	44.3	55.6
2004	543	355	6.5	45	8.3	48.0	44.4	53.6
2009	543	556	6.9	59	10.9	47.7	45.8	55.8
2014	543	668	8.0	62	11.4	47.6	47.0	65.5
2019	543	726	9.0	78	14.4	48.1	47.9	67.2
2024	543	797	9.5	74	14.3	**	**	**

Notes: Data on participation of women is not available for 1951 elections

*Elections were held separately for States of Assam & Punjab

#Elections were held separately for State of Punjab

##Upto 1957 election, certain constituencies were represented by 2 or 3 seats (abolished vide Two-member Constituencies Abolition Act, January 1961)

@ Election was not held in 12 Seats of Assam, 1 Seat of Meghalaya

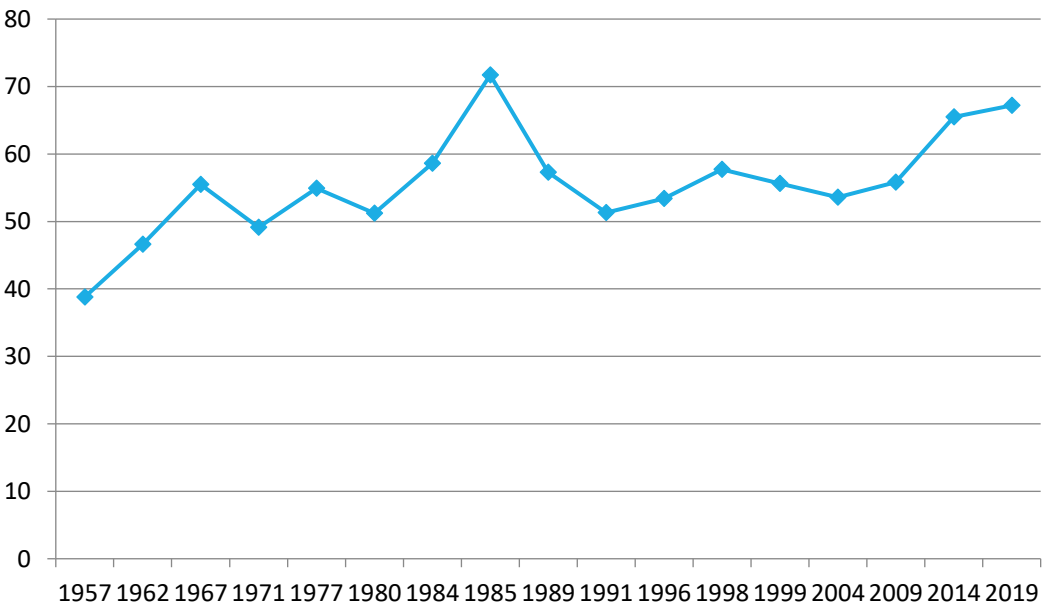
\$ Election was countermanded in 2 seats of Bihar, 1 seat of UP and could not be held due to court cases.

** not available at the time of submission of this paper.

Source: Election Commission of India (as available till October 2024).

Though there has been a noticeable improvement in the women’s participation in electoral process since independence, there has been no remarkable change in last twenty years (starting from 1996 Lok Sabha election) in the percentage of women electors over total electors and in the percentage of votes polled by women over total votes polled. The change may only be noticed in the percentage of votes polled by women over total women electors. In the year 1996, total number of electors was 59.26 crores out of which number of women electors was 28.28 crores (47.7% of total electors) and the total number of votes polled was 34.33 crores out of which number of votes polled by women was 15.10 crores (44% of the total votes polled and 53.4% of the women registered electors). In the year 2014 total number of electors was 83.41 crores out of which number of women electors was 39.70 crores (47.6% of total electors) and the total number of votes polled was 55.42 crores out of which number of votes polled by women was 26.02 crores (47% of the total votes polled and 65.5% of the women registered electors). In the year 2019 total number of electors was 91.20 crores out of which number of women electors was 43.85 crores (48.09% of total electors) and the total number of votes polled was 61.47 crores out of which number of votes polled by women was 29.46 crores (47.93% of the total votes polled and 67.18% of the women registered electors)

Chart-1: Votes polled by women over women registered electors (%)

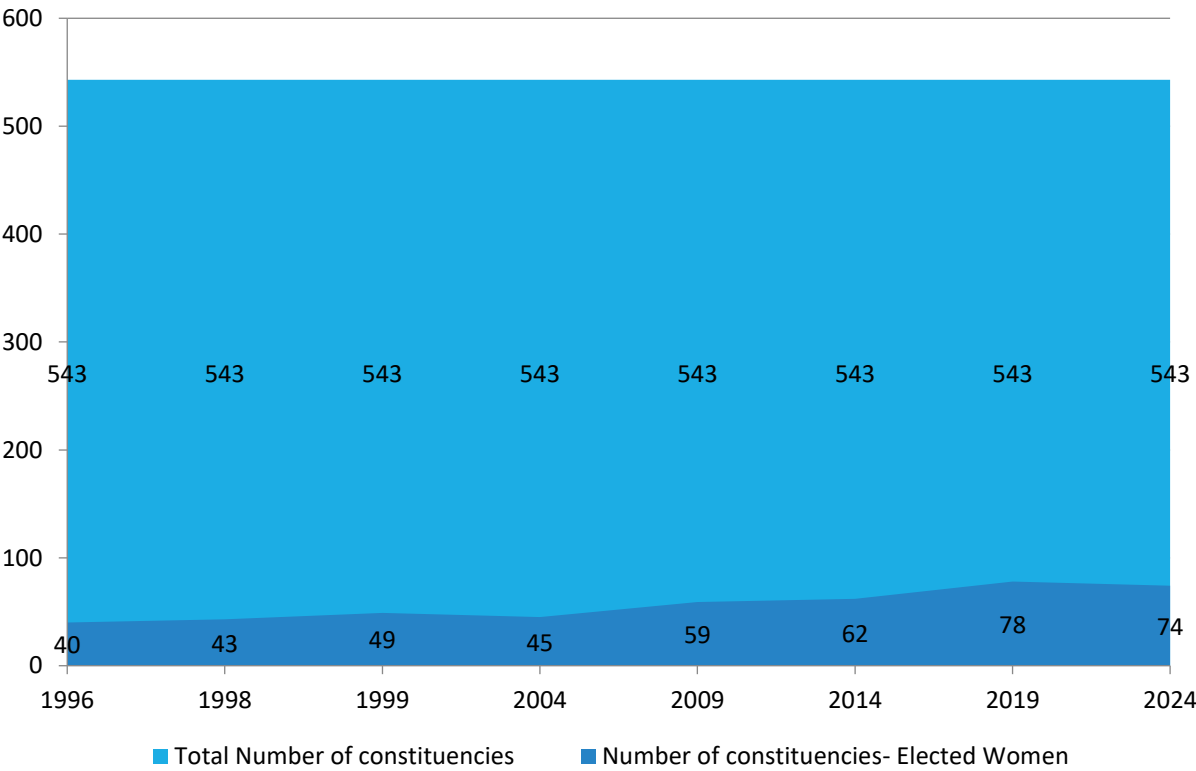


Source: Table-3.

The chart-1 clearly shows that the percentage of votes polled by women over total women electors increasing steadily. This clearly shows increasing political participation of Indian women over the last seven decades.

Interestingly, the number of constituencies that had elected women was only 40 out of 543 seats in Indian Parliament marking 7.37 percent of Parliamentary seats. It increased to an all-time high of 78 seats in the year 2019 which was just 14.36 percent of seats which however came down to 74 in the Parliamentary election of 2024. Chart-2 clearly depicts continuing meagre participation of women in terms of elected women members even after so many legal changes for empowering Indian women. This also reflects tendency of political parties to nominate women candidates in relatively unwinnable constituencies while making gesture of gender equality in the list of nominated candidates. This will be understood once we compare percentage of women candidates nominated across the political spectrum and percentage of women candidates becoming members of parliament.

Chart-2: Women's Elected in Election to the Lok Sabha from 1996 to 2024



Source: Election Commission of India

The participation of women in the electoral process (Table-4) and their election to the Lok Sabha is not uniform over the country. Considering four states from four parts of India it is observed that some states have very meager participation rate. However, the rate has increased convincingly in 2009 Lok Sabha election, 2014 Lok Sabha election and in 2019 Lok Sabha election. Table-4 shows women participation in election to the Lok Sabha in some selected states.

Women's Empowerment in India

In Kerala, the percentage of women electors over total electors in 2009 was 51.8%, in 2014 this was also 51.8% and in 2019 it was 51.4%; the percentage of women voters polled over total votes was 51.6% in 2009 which became 51.6% in 2014 and 52.02% in 2019; the percentage of women voters over total women electors was 72.6% in 2009 which became 73.7% in 2014 and 78.78% in 2019.

Table-4: Participation of Women in the Electoral Process across Selected States in India

States	Percentage of Women electors hover total electors			Percentage of Women's votes over total votes polled			Percentage of Women voters over women electors		
	2009	2014	2019	2009	2014	2019	2009	2014	2019
Kerala	51.8	51.8	51.4	51.3	51.6	52.02	72.6	73.7	78.78
Punjab	47.9	47.3	47.06	47.7	47.5	46.83	69.4	70.9	65.94
Rajasthan	47.3	47.3	47.79	43.7	45.8	47.22	44.8	61.1	65.55
West Bengal	47.5	48	48.64	46.8	47.8	48.66	80.3	82	81.79

Source: Election Commission of India and <https://data.gov.in/>

In Punjab, the percentage of women electors over total electors in 2009 was 47.9% and in 2014 this was 47.3%, in 2019 it was 47.06%; the percentage of women voters polled over total votes was 47.7% in 2009 which became 47.5% in 2014 and 46.83% in 2019; the percentage of women voters over total women electors was 69.4% in 2009 which became 70.9% in 2014 and 65.94% in 2019.

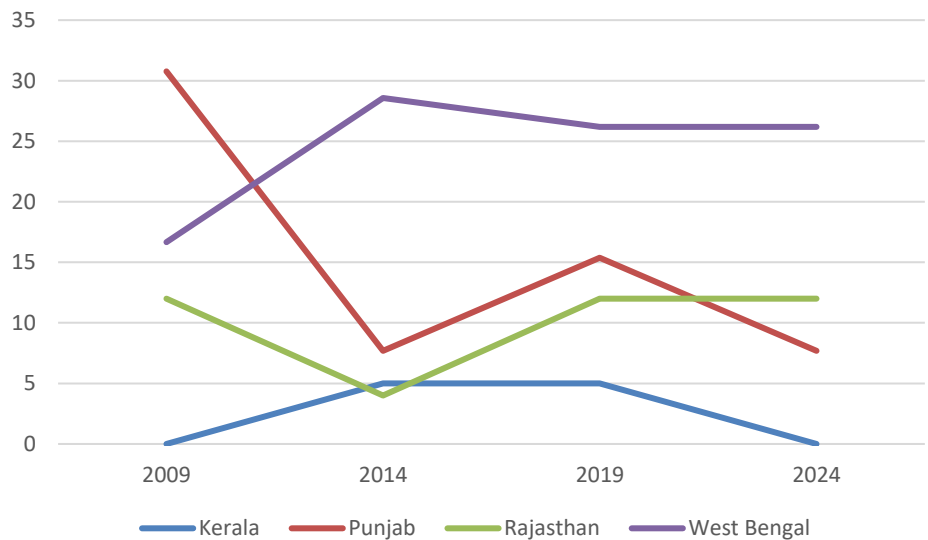
In Rajasthan, the percentage of women electors over total electors in 2009 was 47.3% and in 2014 this was also 47.3%, in 2019 it was 47.79%; the percentage of women voters polled over total votes was 43.7% in 2009 which became 45.8% in 2014 and 47.22% in 2019; the percentage of women voters over total women electors was 44.8% in 2009 which became 61.1% in 2014 and 65.55% in 2019.

In West Bengal, the percentage of women electors over total electors in 2009 was 47.5% and in 2014 this was 48.0%, in 2019 it was 48.64%; the percentage of women voters polled over total votes was 46.8% in 2009 which became 47.8% in 2014 and 48.66% in 2019; the percentage of women voters over total women electors was 80.3% in 2009 which became 82.0% in 2014 and 81.79% in 2019.

However, in the case of number of women elected to the Lok Sabha it is observed that in Kerala, out of 20 constituencies no woman member was elected in 2009 and it was only 1 member in 2014 and 2019 elections and again no woman member was elected in 2024. Only after re-election in one constituency, Kerala could send one woman MP. In Punjab, out of 13 constituencies 4 women members were elected in 2009 and number of women MPs declined thereafter and only 2 members are elected in 2024. In Rajasthan,

of 25 constituencies 3 women members were elected in 2009 and the number of women MP did not increase thereafter. In case of West Bengal, out of 42 constituencies 7 women members were elected in 2009 and the number was 12 in 2014, in 2019 it was 11 and again the number is 11 in 2024 Lok Sabha election which is 26.19% of the total seats. The proportion of women MPs during 2009-24 from the selected states are depicted in Chart-3 and it is clear that women representation is higher from West Bengal compared to other states.

Chart-3: Proportion of Women MPs during 2009-2024 from the Selected States



Source: Election Commission of India and <https://data.gov.in/>

V. Trend of women participation in Rajya Sabha:

“Today woman power is a hidden treasure that we are discovering and utilizing for the benefit of the nation .The empowerment of women might well be a decisive factor that will purify and save the democratic politics in India from the deterioration of standards and values it is experiencing today. The awakening of the women of India is something that gives us hope.”

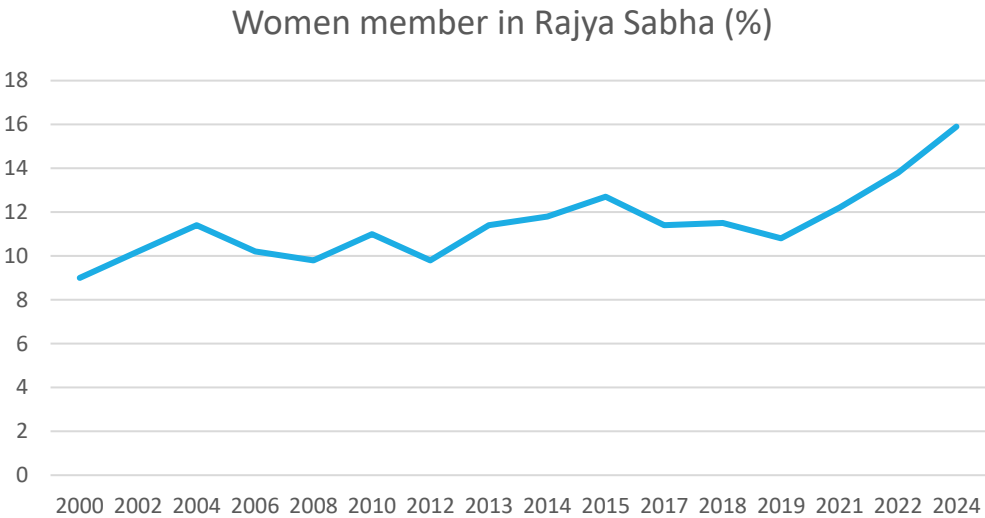
-Shri K. R. Narayanan

According to the Constitution of India, Rajya Sabha is the upper house of the Parliament of India. This is a permanent house and is not subject to dissolution. The maximum strength of the Rajya Sabha is 250 out of which 238 members are representatives of States and Union Territories and 12 are nominated by the President. The Members of Rajya Sabha are elected by the Members of Legislative Assemblies by an indirect method. One-third of the Members of Rajya Sabha retire every second year. It may be noted that female participations in Rajya Sabha in 1952 was 6.9 percent, it increased to 10.2 percent in the year 1960. The lowest participation rate of women in Rajya Sabha was in the year 1970 which is only 5.8 percent. In 1980, the participation rate of women increased to 11.9 percent. In 1990, the rate was 9.8 percent, in 2000 it was 9.0 percent and in 2010 the rate increased to 11.0 percent. The highest participation rate of women in Rajya Sabha has reached at 15.9 percent in the year 2024 (Chart-4).

Women's Empowerment in India

In last two decades, the rate of participation has not differed a lot from the earlier five decades. The rate of participation varied from 9.0% to 12.7% which indicates that still it is far behind to reach the optimum percentage in comparison to the percentage of women population in the country. The rate of change is showing an increasing trend since 2021 when compared to a very low base in 2019.

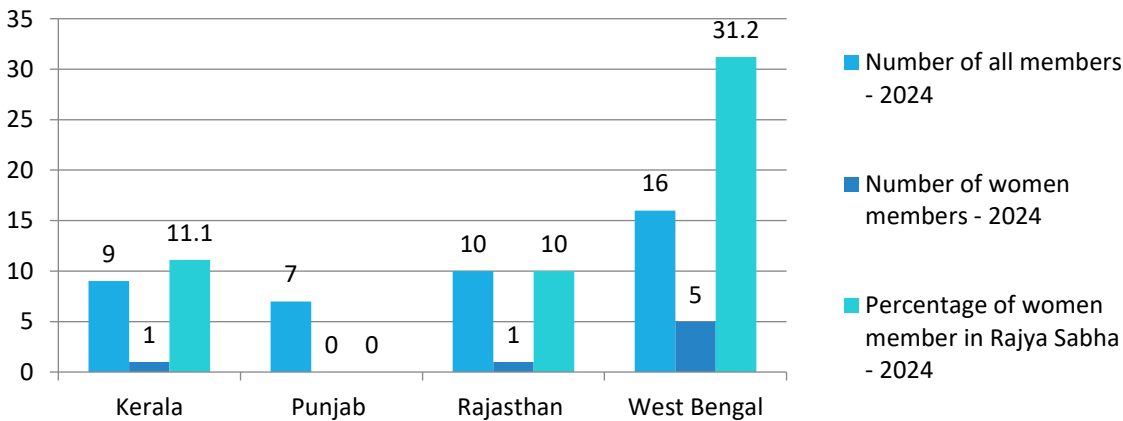
Chart-4: Women's Participation in Election to the Rajya Sabha from 2000 to 2024 – India.



Source: <http://Rajya Sabha.nic.in>

The participation of women in the Rajya Sabha is not also uniform over the country. Considering four states from four parts of India it is observed that some states have very meager participation rate. In Kerala, out of nine members, at present there is one women member to the Rajya Sabha. In Punjab, out of seven members, at present there is no woman member to the Rajya Sabha. In Rajasthan, the scenario is same as Kerala and out of ten members, at present there is one women member to the Rajya Sabha. In West Bengal, out of sixteen members, at present there are five women members to the Rajya Sabha. (Chart-5)

Chart-5: Women participation in election to the Rajya Sabha (2024) in some selected states.



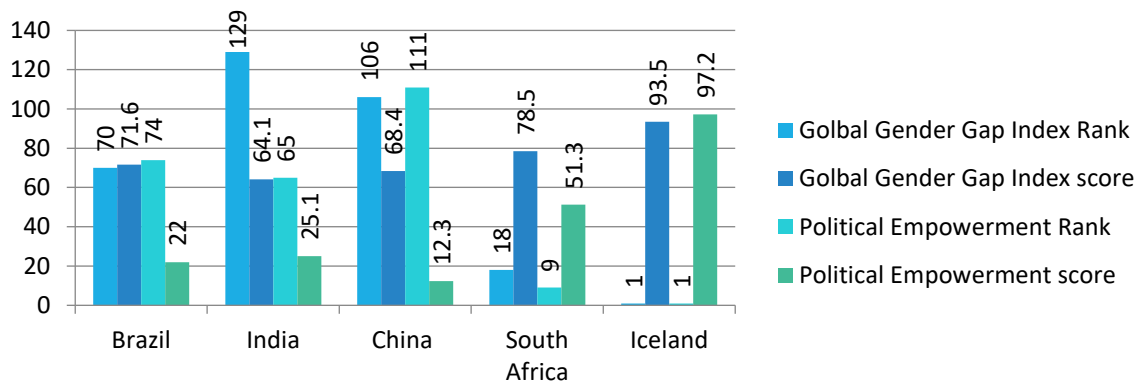
Source: <http://Rajya Sabha.nic.in>

VI. International Scenario:

Women’s participation in politics is a concern not only for India but for all the democracies round the world. Participation of women in politics as well as decision making process is essential for the interest of women as well for democracy as they constitute half of the world’s population.

The following chart shows the score of BRICS countries in Political Empowerment for women in comparison to the country in the top in the overall ranking (Iceland). Within the BRICS countries, in the field of political empowerment, Brazil ranks 74 (overall 70), India is at 65 (overall 129), China – 111 (overall 106), South Africa ranks 9 (overall 18), and Iceland, the overall topper, ranks 1 here also. **(Chart-6)**

Chart-6: Score* of BRICS countries in Political Empowerment



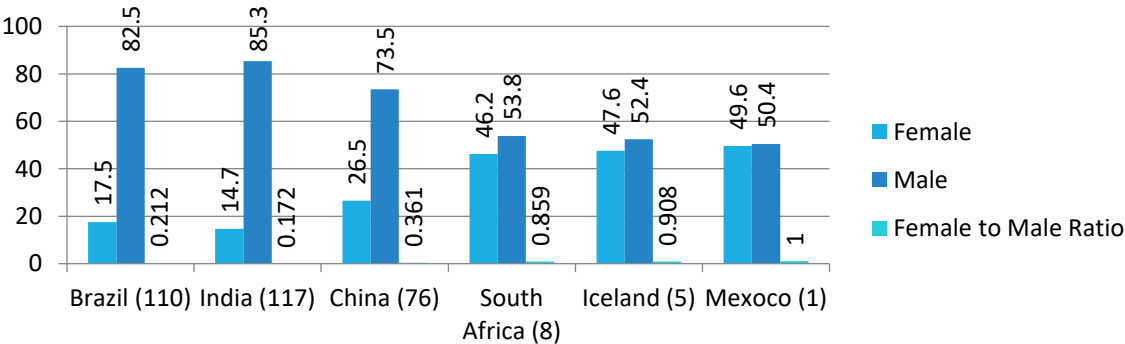
*Score has been multiplied by 100 for representation

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024

Women in Parliament:

In the field of female to male ratio of Women in Parliament, within the BRICS countries Brazil ranks 110 (overall 70), India is at 117 (overall 129), China is at 76 (overall 106), South Africa ranks 8 (overall 18), and Iceland, the overall topper, ranks 5 and Mexico is at No. 1 (overall ranking 3) in this field. **(Chart-7)**

Chart-7: Female to Male ratio of women in Parliament of BRICS countries



Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024

VI. Conclusion:

“There isn't a single country in the world - not one- where men and women enjoy completely equal opportunities... that is why we must change attitudes and policies. The aim must be to give each and every human being greater freedom to make choices about their own lives... ” -Gro Harlem Brundtland, (Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995)

Comparing the situation in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha it has been found that the participation level of women in Indian parliament has remained very poor over the years. It is important to increase women's participation near to 50 % to equalize the true representation of the men and female in the country. The scenario of political participation of women has been changing since last few decades. However still there is shortage of women participating in the politics. Snehalatha Panda (2006) emphasized, “women's participation in political processes is important for strengthening democracy and for their struggle against marginalization, trivialization and oppression. Emergence of women as a strong group would change the prevailing political practices, the nature and content of debates in the legislature and women's issues can be taken care of from feminist perspective both in policy formulation and implementation.”

Thus, the participation of women in the field of politics is very poor and it is immediately required to identify the causes behind this. Munshi (2005) collected data on the participation of women in leading political parties in West Bengal in the year 2000. She has found that only Indian National congress (INC) reported 50 per cent women members to total members followed by 30 per cent in Bharatiya Janata Party. On the other hand, CPI (M), CPI and RSP (partners of the then ruling Left Front government) had only 9.6, 14.66 and 15 per cent women members respectively. There is reason to believe that INC figure is over estimation. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2009) the top five factors that deter women from entering politics are (i) domestic responsibilities; (ii) prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the roles of women in society; (iii) lack of support from family; (iv) lack of confidence and (v) lack of finance. It is important to take policy initiative by the state and society until women are given the same opportunities that men enjoy. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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