

THE PARADOX OF THE FEMALE ELECTORATE: THEORIES AND REALITIES OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PRESENCE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India's female representation in the legislature remains very less in number, much lower than the global average. India is known to be the largest democracy of the world and the constitution ensures political equality to everyone, irrespective of any bias and prejudice. However, this promise is not reflected in actual practice in terms of women representation. The 17th Loksabha registered the win of only 78 female parliamentarians, making up only approximately 14.36% of the 543-member house. This condition is recurrently present in the Indian parliament since Independence contributing to an order of absolute under-representation of women community. Such a situation in the political sphere also leads to minimalist presence of women in the decision making body impacting the socio-economic issues that affect the lives of women. It also bars the potential role of women to serve as catalyst of change and development. Therefore, the question of participation, especially representation of women in the formal political process becomes an area of great importance in academic discourse. The participation of women in the electoral process is an indicator of their political consciousness as well as their aspiration for status enhancement. Women constitutes half of the citizenry and are legally entitled for any public office in most of the countries, so obviously they should also have an equal share and voice in the political life including in the decision making sphere .

Based on the above premises, this research paper explores the disconnect between the Political participation of Indian women and their formal inclusion as political representatives in the Indian democratic process and the substantive power they wield, moving 'beyond the ballot' .It also aims to analyze the structural barriers in the process of political representation of women. While India has achieved historic milestones—most notably the 2023 passage of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (Women's Reservation Bill) ensuring 33% seats in the Lok Sabha—the theoretical promise of representation often clashes with entrenched socio-political realities.

Despite the constitutional mandate for equality, the reality of women's representation in India is characterized by biased considerations and patriarchal choices which pose a serious hindrance in the realization of the essence of democracy. Women's voter turnout has finally surpassed men's in recent general elections in India but their representation in high-level decision-making bodies remains disproportionately low.

Keywords: Women, Representation, Substantive, Barriers

INTRODUCTION

Political participation instrumental for women as a group and as an individuals in every society. Political participation includes the gamut of voluntary activities with a bearing on the political processes, including voting support of political groups, communications with legislators, dissemination of political views and opinions among the electorate and other related activities. Political participation can be considered to include the involvement in any form of organised activity that affects or seeks to affect these power relationships. According to Geraint Parry, 'in a democracy we are concerned with political participation and it is the inclusion of the term political before

participation that complicates the subject.’ (Perry, 1972). Political participation entails, at the very least, taking part in some ‘political action’. However, ‘Political action’ does not have a clear definition and includes all the political activities starting from voting to contesting in elections. It refers to the activities being mainly intended to influence the act and behavior of those who have the power for decision making. In an electoral system, people engage in political activities to influence decision making processes and politics to bring in desired socio-political change. Political participation includes voting, standing for elections or supporting candidates. Citizen’s active participation in political affairs in a democracy is crucial and necessary because it provides legitimacy to the system and also strengthens the democratic fabric. (Narayanan, 1999) ‘There is growing consensus at national and international levels about the importance of participation both as a means and as an objective of development.’ (Ghai, 1990)

The 4th global conference on woman held in Beijing in 1995 brought the issue of women’s political participation and empowerment to the forefront out of the global debate for women’s right. It declared that “Women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in general process of advancement of women. Women’s equal participation in decision making is the demand for simple justice and necessary condition for women’s interest to be taken into account”. This declaration re-asserted the essence of democracy as democracy is based on certain positive principles like justice, freedom, rule of law and equality of status and opportunity of different social groups in enjoying the benefits of development. It is noteworthy that on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2022, India stands at rank 108 out of 193 countries with a score of 0.437. This symbolizes the impact of under-representation in other important elements like justice, equality, freedom etc. that constitute a balanced life. More than anything else, the modern state is distinguished from the traditional ones by the extent to which people participate in politics and an unequal and insufficient participation of women community in the political sphere raises question about the worth and credentials of the democratic apparatus of the country.(Das,1997)

Against this basic notion of democracy, in countries like India, women are excluded from different walks of life, more visibly in politics. The U.N observes that the women constitute the “world’s largest excluded category.” (UN, 2000) The fruits of development are basically enjoyed by a socio-politically privileged section i.e., a male dominated and directed group due to their strong hold in the decision making process. As a result certain social groups are sidelined or excluded from the mainstream (a word often used to mean socio- politically advantageous group). This exclusion is more visible in regard of politics. The gender biased political system of India have negated the importance of women in the political process and turned them more into mere objects of policy decisions.

The issue of women’s historic exclusion from structures of power, is being recognized by the international community and a global commitment is being made to redress gender imbalance in politics. Increased participation of women in governance structures is considered as the key to redress gender inequalities in societies. The global debate on the promotion of women’s political participation/representation has been surrounded by intrinsic and instrumentalist argument. The intrinsic argument advocates for equal participation of women in politics from the human rights perspective. Women constitute half of the world population and legitimately they should have equal participation and representation in world democracies. Instrumentalist argument emphasizes on women’s greater participation on the essentialist ground that men and women are different. Women have different vision and concepts of politics owing to their sex and their gender roles as mothers and home makers. Therefore, it is assumed that women in politics will bring a special caring focus and female values to politics.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The chief objectives of the study are-

- To understand the basic difference between political participation and representation
- To describe the different theoretical underpinnings of representation.
- To identify barriers unique to the Indian socio-cultural context.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive, analytical, and qualitative research design to examine the systemic disconnect between women's rising political participation (e.g., voter turnout) and their formal, substantive representation in the Indian legislative framework. Exploring the entrenched socio-cultural barriers, theoretical underpinnings, and recent legislative developments the study follows a multi-dimensional approach in tracing and examining the facts.

DIFFERENTIATING BOTH CONCEPTS: PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

In various literatures that deal with political empowerment and status of women, the terms participation and representation are unanimously used. However in reality, there are certain differences between the two terms. The term participation has a very wide meaning. It is not only related to 'Right to Vote', but simultaneously relates to participation in decision making process, political activism, political consciousness, etc. Women in India participate in the political process in capacity of voters, campaigners and work as party supporters and run for public offices. Political activism and voting are the strongest areas of women's political participation in India.

Though, contesting for a public office or representation is one of the important dimensions of political participation but analyst and authors have tried to establish political participation and representation as two different issues. Participation is a necessary but insufficient condition for representation because representation does not flow automatically from participation. Women all over the world have participated widely in political movements in times of crisis, but once crisis is over they are relegated again to domestic arena. (Nelsson & Choudhery, 1994). They could hardly assert their role as representatives in the formal political system.

The exact meaning of the term can be correctly conceived only if the objectives, values and contexts in which it is used are explicitly expressed. In politics, representation describes an act where some individuals stand in for others or a group of others, for a certain time period performing as their agents or mouthpiece. Representation is a term that usually refers to representative democracies, where elected officials nominally speak for their constituencies in the legislature. Generally, only citizens are granted representation in the governance though some democracies have extended this right further. Hence, any systematic study of the problem of participation warrants an in-depth insight into the matters such as scientific definition of the term, rationale of the use, means/methods involved and inter-relations among the various variables influencing the problem. The ultimate meaning of the term implies a process of influencing the authoritative allocation of values for a society. Representation as the highest level of political participation means incumbency of political portfolio as leader. As representation and the aspect of leadership are always associated and 'leadership entails envisioning and articulating a new reality, persuading others of its benefits and inspiring them to embrace and actualize it.' Thus, the role of representation is closely associated with participation. So, it becomes very important to discuss the issue of representation (as a necessary associate of leadership) which is very much pertinent in context of development of women community, creating awareness among women about various socio-political issues and to create a society based on gender justice and

egalitarian norms. Moreover, elected women can become the role-models of other women and this will help to attain gender equality in the socio-political domain in the long run.

THEORITICAL FRAMMEWORKS: UNDERSTANDING REPRESENTATION

Multiple theories are associated with the concept of representation. These theories help in providing conceptual clarity about the nature and role of popular representatives in the process of policy-making and also throws light on the limits of their authority and functions. Most prominently, these theories are the associated with the concept of egalitarianism, essence and values of democracy, power sharing and objectives of political representation. Prominent traditional theories in this regard include- liberal, radical, reactionary and conservative theories. Many political authorities have also forwarded their opinions regarding political representation. To quote Burke, "It ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him; their opinion, high respect; their business, unremitting attention. It is his duty to sacrifice his repose, his pleasures, his satisfactions, to theirs; and above all, ever, and in all cases, to prefer their interest to his own. But his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. These he does not derive from your pleasure; no, nor from the law and the constitution. They are a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable. Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion." (Burke, 1774)

While reviewing the literature about political representation and empowerment of women, one cannot ignore the contribution of Phillips (Philips, 1995) who says that the basis of representation should be shifted from- politics of ideas to- politics of presence. She offers four key arguments for politics of presence which are: the significance of symbolic recognition, the requirement to tackle those exclusions inherent in the party-packaging of political ideas, the need for a more strong support for disadvantaged groups and the importance of a politics of transformation in opening up a full range of policy options Through political participation ,as a community, women can't only work to prevent gender -based injustices but also counter the non-gender specific injustices of the society. The most important group benefit from political participation of women is influence on decision making to make public policies sensitive to the needs of the group in question i.e., the women. In their independent capacity women, through participating in formal politics, can become empowered and assertive in the political domain. Women's political participation is most often measured in terms of members found in formal politics, in positions of public office to which they have been elected.

Hanna Fenichel Pitkin established four theories of representation in her book '*The Concept of Representation* (1967).' She defines political representation fundamentally as 'making present' the voices, opinions, and interests of the represented, rather than merely standing in for them. She argues that true representation requires acting in the best interests of citizens through a balance of substantive, formal, descriptive, and symbolic dimensions.

Key dimensions of Pitkin's framework include:

Substantive Representation: The core idea that representatives must actively act for the benefit of their constituents, rather than just holding a position.

Formalistic Representation: The rules, mechanisms, and procedures, such as elections, that authorizes a representative to act and hold them accountable.

Descriptive Representation: The degree to which the representative resembles the constituents in terms of shared characteristics (e.g., gender, race, class).

Symbolic Representation: The way in which a representative stands for or symbolizes the constituency in terms of identity, evoking feelings of being represented.

A close analysis of Pitkin's theory reflect that representation is important inform of "acting for" rather than just "standing for," .Pitkin emphasizes that the representative must be responsive to the needs of the represented. Her views primarily focus on policy responsiveness, where representatives actively pursue the needs and viewpoints of their constituents, serving as an agent for their constituents' interests. Pitkin's substantive representation encompasses various dimensions like a) Acting for constituencies where the representative acts in the best interest of the people they represent. b) Representatives are evaluated on their actions, specifically how their legislative behavior aligns with the interests of their constituents to ensure policy responsiveness. C) Pitkin also talks about Independence of action where she emphasizes a delegate-trustee model, where the representative makes decisions based on the interests of the represented.

Therefore, substantive representation contrasts with descriptive representation (having similar backgrounds to constituents) and symbolic representation (standing for the people). Ultimately, substantive representation is defined by the quality of representation and the extent to which the representative's actions reflect the needs and interests of the represented group, ensuring their voices are present in policy-making.

The division in theories of political representation mainly focuses on the difference between descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation contends that a legislative body should "reflect" the demographic makeup of the society it oversees. If women constitute about half the population, they ought to occupy a comparable proportion of seats to guarantee their distinctive experiences and viewpoints are included. Conversely, substantive representation emphasizes the actions of representatives rather than their identities, suggesting that the actual gauge of representation is how well a legislator promotes the interests and policy preferences of their constituents, regardless of shared demographic characteristics. This theoretical conflict is key to the discussion on gender quotas. Critics of descriptive quotas claim they could favor identity over merit, whereas supporters argue that without descriptive representation, particular substantive interests—like gender-focused health or safety concerns—are consistently overlooked by a prevailing group.

However, these theories will have worth and significance in a political system, only when significant numbers of women assert their political presence in capacity of representatives in the formal sphere. In developing countries like India, many structural –functional barriers prevent the entry, sustenance and growth of female political representatives in the decision making process.

THE INDIAN SCENARIO: IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS IN THE WAY OF EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS.

Women constitute approximately 49.6% to 50% of the global population, making the gender ratio roughly equal. However, their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. But, their representation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant.

In context of Indian women, it can be said that they have a great legacy of political participation and representation. Even before the Independence of the country, Indian women participated in the sphere of politics. If we recall history we find many heroic female figures who participated in all sorts of wars and agitations throughout the ages in India. It is important to note here that the movement for women's

suffrage in the West, began in the early 1900s in response to a national movement for suffrage, even though vast majority of neither men nor women had a right to vote during the British colonial rule before 1947. After Indian independence from Britain, the Indian Constitution in 1950 officially granted women and men suffrage. It is important to note that prior to universal suffrage, provincial legislatures had granted women the right to vote. In this regard, Madras was the first state to grant women's suffrage in 1921, but voting rights were offered only to those men and women who owned land property according to British administration's records.

However, after having a rich history of political stake holding, Indian women still lack due share in the process of political representation which is instrumental to enable them to act as influencers of the policy making process. "This is hardly proportional representation in the world's largest democracy," says Delhi-based sociologist Dr. Pratibha Pande, former professor at the Delhi University. "However, if a third of the parliamentarians in India are women, a system of checks and balances will organically be kicked in to ensure enhanced vigilance from authorities in cases of rape and a skewed sex ratio, which is rampant across the country," she asserted. Overall, women comprise just 17 percent of India's lower house and 13.6 percentage in the upper house in the current Indian Parliament. This is a dismal figure when compared to many countries, including India's South Asian neighbors. Within the representative collective, only a few instances of women becoming popular representatives can be found in Indian context and very rare cases of holding portfolios of home, industry, external affairs etc can be seen because women are mainly consigned to what are considered as 'women specific' departments. The whole story of women's poor representation in the political process reflects that women are marginalized and neglected even within the central/core set –up of power barring them from putting forward real political expressions.

Women's equal representation is important to establish 'Democratic legitimacy' in the country because a system that excludes 50% of the population cannot claim true "will of the people." It is also important to establish a role-model or aspirational impact effect where presence of women in power encourages younger generations to enter public life. The correlation between female political representation and higher GDP/lower corruption levels is also very important.

THE DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTAL, STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL BARRIERS IN THE WAY OF WOMEN'S EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION/REPRESENTATION ARE:

1. Psychological and physical conditions: The attitude of patriarchal society, the practice of gender based discrimination against women, treating women as a secondary human being in individual and social level, large scale mental and physical violence met against women community has reduced the capacity of the women community to stand as a catalyst in the way of women empowerment. Commonwealth parliamentary conference delegates from India recently indicated that, especially in developing countries, women are born into a state of bondage and are victims of slavery, sexual exploitation and harassment, rape and violence. Bigamy, polygamy and child marriages remain on the list of crime against women. In such situations, chances of women coming to the forefront of political struggle are very less.

2. Masculine Model of Politics: The long practiced masculine model of politics restricts and hampers women political participation to a great extent. Women get very less scope to move and express in the tenderized political system. According to Shvedova, the men dominate the political arena, men formulate the rules of the political game and men define the standards for evaluation. In addition, political life is structured according to male norms. (Shvedova, 2005) For example, the political model, is based on the idea of winners and losers, competition and confrontation, rather than on shared respect, teamwork and consensus building. This environment is habitually unfamiliar with women.

Thus, according to her, the presence of this male-dominated model of politics results in women rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics.

3. Language: Language is one of the most problematic of markers which signifies the dialectics involved in differentiating between the involvement of men and women in politics. The very usage of the word 'man' emphasizes the problems in linguistic marking of territories of participation. 'Man' is one of the most overworked nouns in English language. It is used to mean a person, worker, member, agent, candidate, representative and voter and so on. Such overwhelming importance on the term 'Men' in politics tends to sideline 'Women' and it signifies a situation where women political aspirants find themselves very low. The language used in parliamentary and Assembly debates can be considered as sexist by the public including the women. The male centric language may make the women to develop a psyche that politics is something which is not associated with women. Moreover, there are instances of use of abusive language by male parliamentarians towards the women counterparts in case of not seconding their opinion or just because of reacting to that.

4. Society, religion, culture and tradition: Religious, cultural and traditional practices prevalent in the society have restricted the freedom of women in most of the developing nations including India. Particularly in the developing countries, long-standing traditions rooted in patriarchal assumptions inhibit women's access to assets, their ability to own property and capital goods, and to obtain credit. (Harder, 1992) Moreover, a society based on religious and traditional norms like that of India restrict women participation in politics as politics has been always considered as a male domain. The process of socialization and tenderization i.e. process of assigning social values and traits to men and women contributes in such a way where women easily give the pass to male counterparts considering themselves as the creatures of the 'private' domain.

5. Education: Education or the rate of literacy is a major instrument in increasing or decreasing political participation of women. Infact, education is strongly associated with political participation for women and men. American sociologists Burns, Scholzman and Verba assert, on the basis of decades of research into the factors influencing women's and men's engagement with politics in the U.S.A, that education is an 'especially powerful predictor of political participation'. (Burns et.al 2001) They identify a range of direct and indirect effects that formal education has upon political participation. A voter's political literacy, the capacity to make coherent choices and decisions in casting vote, contesting election and at the level of representation, is also dependent on level of formal education to a great extent.

6. Economic Status: One of the major deterrents of women's political participation in politics is low economic status of women. As most of the women of India are dependent on the male partners for economic assets, so obviously they can't emerge as successful due to financial constraints. Women candidates can't invest money for their political gain like the male political contestants during the time of campaigning and most of the time they are fully dependent on party sponsorship. Moreover, economic status also acts as a psychological barrier for women political aspirants. In India women believe that only the rich and educated can enter in politics. Poor men may also be disadvantaged, but men as a gender are not as poor as women, with wives to support them and to care for their families when they campaign or hold office. Even where women have been successful in politics, in Asia and the pacific, cross cultural studies underline the wide gap between women politicians and activists, and ordinary women. In fact, women who reach the top positions in politics often have the support of wealthy husbands or families. (Bledsoe & Herring, 1990)

7. Electoral system: Electoral system itself may emerge as a systematic barrier on the way of political participation of women. Male dominated political systems can very easily ouster or minimize the

number of women political aspirants in the disguise of financial incapability of women or on the basis of other consideration. Political parties may adopt such agenda and practices which can pose a restriction in the way of political participation of women candidates. Winning the nomination to run in an election or gaining a place on the list of candidates, depending on the system, can be a major obstacle. Countries which have adopted a form of proportional representation (PR) consistently elect more women than countries with single-members plurality systems or First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) systems such as Canada's. (Task Force Report, P.8) Research indicates that political structures can play a significant role in women's recruitment to parliament. The system of elections based on proportional representation (PR), for example, has resulted in three to four times more women being elected in countries with similar political cultures. As India also has adopted the system of FPTP, so it has emerged as a systematic barrier in the way of political participation of women.

8. Communication and Media: Women have less access to communication and information in comparison to their male counterparts as they exist within the so called 'private' domain. Moreover they are less assertive than the male counterparts both in private and the public field. The media, which can take a positive role in communicating the women issues and making those to reach the women community to make them aware, leave out women in general. The mainstream media agencies do not take any initiative to make women media friendly so that the women members can be encouraged to speak out on debates and discussions relating to women issues. A bird eye view of existing newspaper reporting and T.V telecast will reveal the pre-dominant presence of the male folk controlling and manipulating the media for their own benefits. Limited access to political networks, lack of sustained contact and cooperation with other public organizations such as trade (labour) unions and women's groups etc also pose as constraints in the way of political participation and representation of women candidate. A sort of pro-women attitude of the media will obviously help in greater politicization of the women community.

9. Use of Money and Muscle power in politics: The large scale use of money and muscle power in the field of electoral politics has prevented the entry of women in the political field. The dominance of money and muscle power in the electoral process means that the large sections of the population lacking access to these resources, which includes women, continue to remain under-represented in the legislative bodies. Nor are the established political parties capable of mobilizing such resources much inclined to further the cause of women in this respect, nor have women succeeded in organizing themselves to this level. (Mahanta, 1998) This has converted the political domain almost into a area where there is the pre-dominance of people having money whether white or black, and criminal background. As women have less access to resources and being not so matured in the political play they hardly can make any influence through the use of money. Moreover, the concept of muscle power becomes irrelevant in context of women as there are rare examples of women involved in criminal activities or having a criminal background.

10. Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP): Another important barrier in this regard is violence meted out with women politicians which restrict their political participation. A study conducted by U.N. states that 'The spectrum of violence against women in politics throughout South Asia stretches from intimidation and character assassination of women in politics to abductions, kidnapping, physical assault, torture and even murder. As a result women have largely been excluded from engaging with, or participating within political realm. Candidates and their families, as well as voters have routinely faced violence during elections.' (Inter Parliamentary Union, 1997)

11. Lack of Motivation and Mobilisation: Women historically are an excluded community. The clutches of society, tradition and patriarchy have always put women in a marginalized position where women are stuck to the established and defined functions of home and family. They hardly move to

the public domain to assert themselves and most of the time play the role of receptors rather than decision makers. So, it is very important to mobilize the women to become the stake holders of the development process otherwise women will have less chances of entering into politics as disorganized and stagnant community. In this regard Women organisations, NGOs and Women's Wing of different political parties can play the role of a catalyst.

12. Political Environment: Political environment of a given political system in its totality is very crucial in increasing the political participation of a particular group or community. If we consider women as a group, then it becomes important to study the overall environment that shapes the nature and amount of their political participation. Political environment refers to the political ideology that is established and has an impact on the political system, the level of political awareness among people, the level of political culture and socialization in a given political system, the nature and working of various political parties, the reactions of the electorate towards government initiatives and policies, the amount of maturity of public opinion, the level of modernization and urbanization, the impact and influence of criminal activities and other mal-practices in the political field, the pressure of various N.G.Os and other organizations active in society, the threat of violence and insurgency and the approach of the political system that interprets and responses towards the women who aspire to join politics.

13. Apathy of political parties to give candidature to female candidates: One of the most important deterrents in women's political participation is apathy of political parties to give candidature to female candidates. In a democratic set –up the road to decision making leads to assemblies and parliament via political parties. Political parties are the gatekeepers to political systems in most of the Asia-Pacific countries. They provide funds, mobilize voters and mass, campaign and advocate for party platforms, and transmit an image of the candidate that may have broad public recognition. Candidates who affiliate with a party essentially step into an apparatus that has experience in how to campaign and win. Infact, women's participation in electoral politics, by and large is also determined by their position within political parties. Women play important roles in campaigning and mobilizing support for their parties, yet they rarely occupy decision-making positions in these structures. In fact, fewer than 11 percent of party leaders worldwide are women. (Shvedova, P.37) Although political parties possess resources for conducting election campaigns, women rarely benefit from these resources. Many parties do not provide sufficient financial support for women candidates. Research indicates that a large pool of women candidates, combined with sufficient financial resources, can significantly increase the number of women elected. An 'old boys' club' can inhibit and prevent women from integrating themselves into their party's work. This in turn impacts on the perception of women as viable candidates on the part of those who provide money for election campaigns. In addition, women are often not placed in winnable positions on party lists. (Rajput, 2003)

14. Digital Violence and digital divide: The rise of cyber-harassment, deep fakes, and trolling against women politicians have been emerging as critical emergent issues in the way of political participation and representation of women community in politics. In an environment of digital humiliation and stalking where women's integrity is being questioned in the public domain, many women find it susceptible to enter into active politics. Along with this, digital divide between men and women is also one of the structural barriers that restrict women from coming into power. Digital devices and platforms have emerged as most important determinants of voting behavior influencing electoral politics in the contemporary times. Massive psychological mobilization can be made through digital media to influence electoral turn-outs deciding the public fate of political representatives. As women can't make proper, constructive and optimum use of the digital devices and platforms due to issues like, financial exclusion, lack of proper digital literacy, usage gap, affordability and infrastructure,

socio-cultural norms and time constraints, their chances of winning the elections are being compromised to a great extent.

15. The Future Delimitation Dilemma: It is expected the Women reservation Act passed by Indian parliament will greatly contribute in improving the quantity and quality of female political representation in India. But it is very important to ponder upon the theoretical and practical implications of the The Women Reservation Act 2023, officially known as the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, (the *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam*). This act, which is supposed to come into effect from 2029, poses implementational challenges related to re-drawing of electoral constituency boundaries, reservation of quotas for women and other categories, federal concerns, the question of rotation etc.

CONCLUSION

The study identifies many factors and causes which pose structural challenges and act as systematic barriers in the way of women's political representation. These factors can be identified as linguistic, psychological, physical, economic, political, legislative, technological, social, demographic, cultural, religious, institutional, organizational and attitudinal.

The hindrances that pose a threat in the way of effective participation of women in politics should be viewed and analysed from a socio-economic, cultural, psychological, institutional- structural and most importantly from a gender glance and effective, systematic and long-term efforts should be adopted to create a pro-women political atmosphere where women feel safe, secure, confident, determined and hopeful to contest in elections. In this regard, both the government and non-government institutions should make efforts to induct greater member of women in executive positions. To provide a training ground for female political aspirants, student organizations and other associations should include more and more women within their structure so that a platform can be prepared from where women can participate in public domain. It should be reiterated that numerical parity is only the first step toward genuine empowerment. To increase numerical strength of women as political representatives and prove their credentials as active and effective catalyst of the political process, beyond the ballot certain positive measures should be adopted. Mandatory internal party quotas, capacity-building programs, legal safeguards against proxy representation etc will work as effective tools to ensure women's real stake holding as political representatives. Instead of their hitherto established role only as voters and party supporters or passive recipient of policy decision, women should come to play active and assertive role in the formal decision making process in greater quantity and quality. True representation requires a shift from viewing women as "beneficiaries" to seeing them as "agents of change."

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