

Women's Participation in Electoral Politics in India: A critical study through the general elections

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment as a phenomenon is not something absolutely new. The recent involvement levels of women in formal politics in India reveal the change in the ground level. Women participation in politics has always been an issue regarding modern-day political experts. Conventionally, they show a below average performance to their male counterparts for no faults of theirs. However, the incessant under-representation of womanhood in lawmaking bodies and within the rank and file of political parties counterbalances the crucial gains made in the people-driven feminization of electoral politics in India. Within a brief historical context identifying the early stages of women's electoral participation in India, the article presents a time series analysis of women's voting patterns. The continuous failure of the governments in New Delhi which is unable to pass the Women's Reservation Bill is categorized as the most expensive proof of the law maker's lack of momentousness attitude towards the issue. The general election of 2014 rebelled this to a level and replaced as breaking ground for women involvement. They registered their presence in line with the male voters. The crux of the paper is to systematically find out the presence of women in the general elections of Indian history. This paper will be relying on the secondary data for the statistics.

1. Introduction

Women throughout the world in the public sphere find difficulties and underrepresented in the public as well as in the decision-making body, in India, TheParliament. Though the politics of every country differs and the attitude towards the election and political participation is different, there is a common trait in every election and political participation which is the under-representation of the women and the difficulties restrained towards them with the prejudiced male showiest mindset. These barriers can be interrelated with the prevailing socio-economic and cultural compositions of that country. In the Indiancontext, the situation is not different, women are considered inferior to men and lacksdecision-making capabilities compared to men. India, the largest democracy in the world which positions itself as the greatest among the greatest democracies of the world, an old civilization but a relatively young state in the modern age, with a constitution that combines the finest skins of various constitutions of the world. The Republic of India started its journey with the ideals of liberty, equality, and justice enshrined in the preamble, but even after the 16th Lok Sabha is elected in 2014 the performance of the women in Indian politics marks very low compared to other countries. The constitution of the land makes secure to its citizen with amble feeling of secure feeling of protection, equality and gender justice and weathering away all practices of discrimination. However, the notion of equality remains unfulfilled yet with male dominant policymakers in the political arena as well as the governmental institution. As a sign of equality and freedom of the citizens of India, Political parties are having an important role in giving the equal opportunity across the gender in sharing political influences and providing liberty in the democratic framework of India's electoral politics. Women's role as the exercise of the voting rights, standing as the candidates, as an effective campaigner for the political party and holding the party positions remain a mere dream. This paper will analyse the involvement and

representation of women in this whole exercise of elections of India and studies the fundamental causal elements that stand still and control the future of women's involvement in elections.

The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said on the eve of International Women's Day that " (<https://www.un.org>, 2006)"

1.1 Methodology

The present work depend upon the United Nations reports of the election and the women's turn out and the world bank report on the Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, Constitution of India and the International conventions, Government of India reports on the gender sensitization and the voting pattern, Records of the election commission of India and the constitutional experts. This paper also studies the various Constitutional provisions and later amendments and sub-clauses of the constitution and the laws of the land as well.

2. Women's Electoral Participation in India

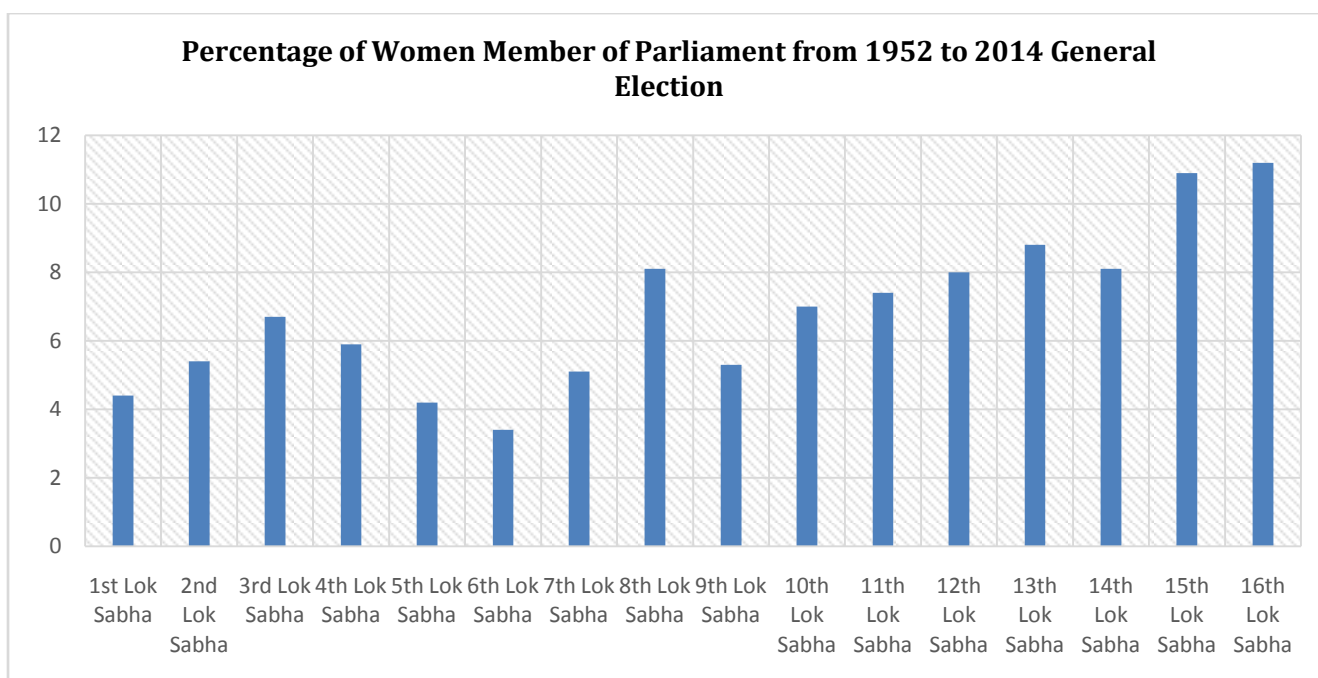
A chronological gestalt of women's rights and the participation in the electoral politics from the history can be traced to the Swadeshi movement in Bengal (1905–1908), which map out the beginning of the participation of women in nationalist undertakings and also tries to answer about the women's suffrage to the lead. Sketching the roots of the movement for women's suffrage in India is in the early twentieth century. It got great inspiration from the British women's organization and the agitations for the demand of the universal adult franchise. There is a great leader of support from the British women activists in India those times. The first demands for the cause arose in the year 1917 within an association, The Women's Indian Association which was set up in Madras with a prime objective to getting an equal role for women in the active politics and in the public matters. By the large popularity of this association and the success of this

initiative, in the year of 1920 and 1929, limited voting rights were given to the women who are having the prescribed property rights. This limited change or in a sense a narrow change was introduced in the Madras Presidency. Later in the Government of India Act of 1935, the women were provided with the voting rights to a large section of women, but it was again subjected to the property qualification, literacy, or marrying to a propertied man. This very Act gives suffrage to the women in 1:5 ratios (Visram, 1992). The Government of India Act of 1935 established 41 seats reserved for women in the central and provincial legislatures. The subsequent election after the Government of India Act of 1935, which guarantees a reservation for the women in the central and provisional legislatures, 80 women were elected into the legislators. Even if India is under the colonial rule of Great Britain, with 80 legislators elected, India becomes the third country in a number of women legislators elected after the United States and the Soviet Union. Even Great Britain was not having this number of women representations. Post-Independence and till the last general election the participation of women is not that successful. A constituent assembly was not in support of giving reservation for the women in the elections. Women's participation in the elections after the independence didn't witness much effort from the policymakers to enhance the electoral space for the women. It is true to state that the mass political participation of women gets declined after India got Independence. In India, we can see the women's in politics only if the family will be political or her kith and keem will be in politics. Usually, women were used as the election-winning strategy, immediately after the election the power will be vested with the women legislators, but the enjoyment of the power is done by the male member of the family, mostly by the husband.

Below Graph points out that in the First Lok Sabha election of 1952, women can win 4.4 per cent of the total seats. This is a remarkable achievement towards the strong and mass involvement of women in the freedom struggle. Then in

the year of 1957, the second general election got 5.4 per cent of women member of Parliament with an increase of 1.0 per cent from the last general election. This growth of positive increase in the percentage of women representatives in Parliament can be seen in the next general election even, i.e., in the year of 1962 with 6.7 percentage, an increase of 1.3 per cent. These three years were having a positive effect on the rising the percentage of the women members in the lower house. This disproves in the next general election of 1967, where the percentage of the women members reduced to 5.9 and in the consecutive year it further reduced to 3.4 in the year of 1977. In the year 1980 and 1984, the percentage got increased to 5.1 and 8.1 respectively. This shows the regaining of political awareness among the women communities of India. In the year 1989, the percentage again got fluctuated and it reduced to 5.3 per cent out of 529 seats. Women's groups and the members working on the gender politics and gender equality insisted of reservation for women in the election and in due to encouraging the grassroots level participation of women in balloting politics of the state. This resulted in the amendment of the constitution of India, amendment number 73rd and 74th in the year of 1993 introduced 33 per cent of reservation for women in the panchayat level and urban bodies.

From the 1989 General election, the percentage of women did not decline till the 2014 general election. Thirteenth Lok Sabha saw 8.8 percentage of the women in the house and for the fourteenth general election housed 8.1 percentage of women. Due to the change in the norms and culture of the society, in the year of 2009, during the fifteenth Lok Sabha constituency, saw a double-figure percentage in the women's participation. 10.9 percentage of the house in 2009 was women and in the subsequent government shows a mere increase of just .3 percentages, which is the current government in India. And Indian Election Commission has declared for the election dates and India is awaiting its seventeenth Lok Sabha election with eyeing towards a good increase in the strata towards the women in the parliament.



2.1 Politics and Female Participation in India

Women in the Indian Politics had played a significant part in the Indian freedom struggle to today's electoral politics even though with grim support from the society and the culture they are living in. Their role in politics and political participation and the decision making is seen as an instrumental. She joined in the freedom struggle and oust the colonial masters from her land along with the male counterpart with sharing shoulder to shoulder and shredded many women's blood and modesty in the name of nationalism in India. The colonial masters and the king of the princely states used women as the object of pleasure and leisure. They began to take an active role in the ousting of British from India with all the other freedom fighters do, and there was no such discrimination during those periods as there was only one and only one motivation for all of them which was to acquire freedom from the colonial power. This unitedness ultimately led to the usurping of the British Empire from India.

The noteworthy names during the freedom struggle are Rani Lakshmi Bai, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kriplani, Bhikaji Cama, and there are many women's whose blood is fallen in this great country and yet not recognized by the historians or in a way we can state that the male dominant society and the male historians rewritten the history in their favouritism where to show only the male part of the freedom struggle. The supportive document for the above-said statement is the NCERT textbooks where the number of the male freedom fighters will be more in number and there will be only very hand few of women freedom fighters.

The post independent India also saw the role of women in various decision-making positions of the newly created India as well as in the various positions of the world. The first Indian to serve as the president of the General Assembly of the United Nations was a woman, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit. The first woman to become the chief minister of a state in India is Sucheta Kriplani and served in that position for the state of Uttar Pradesh. Another prominent lady figure in Indian politics was the none other than the Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who was instrumental in shaping the destiny of our country. Mother Teresa was the first Indian woman to be bestowed with the prestigious Noble Peace Prize. In the year of 2007, Pratibha Patil becomes the first women head of the state succeeding Dr Kalam. In the fifteenth Lok Sabha, India got its first Women speaker, it was adorned by Meira Kumar.

When we are looking up on the state level politics the role of women politicians is unequivocally great. In the south India AIDMK supremo, J Jayalalitha is considered as the AMMA for the Tamil Nadu. She is devoted to the Dravidian land with her famous pro-poor and people friendly governance and policies and welfare measures. When we look upon the Eastern side, there is TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, where she is doing such an amazing job with ousting the 33 years of hegemonic RED rule from Jyoti Basu a strong CPIM leader of West Bengal. Then in the tension affected Jammu and Kashmir the strongest women with all the odd in the society Mehbooba Mufti become the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir

respectively. In the recent past, Mayawati, Sheila Dikshit, Anandiben Patel has served as the chief minister of the states of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Gujarat respectively.

In the present Government in the Centre the Defense Ministry is handled by a woman and at the beginning, the prestigious Human Resource Development ministry was handled by a woman. Uma Bharti, Nirmala Sitharaman, Sushma Swaraj, Smriti Zubin Irani are the present cabinet rank women ministers in the present government of India.

3. Provisions for Women under the Indian Constitution

The constitution of India has enshrined the Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and in the Directives Principles, the need of the of gender equality are enshrined in the Constitution of India with a very beautifully crafted preamble. The basic crux of the constitution of India is the guaranty of the Fundamental Rights, which is enshrined in Part III of the constitution. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution deals with the Right to equality. The Constitution states it as "Equality before law The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth" This Article positions itself against all form of inequality prevailed in India from centuries. Article 15 of the constitution positions itself as there won't be any form of discrimination on the ground of religion, race, sex or place of birth. Subclause no. 3 of Article 15 states that "*Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children*". Article 16 of the constitution states that "*There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State*". Article 21 states the protection of life and personal liberty of its citizens.

Part IV of the Constitution, The Directives Principles of State Policy in Article 39(a)—Right to an adequate means of livelihood equally for men and women, Article 39(d)—Equal pay for equal work for both men and women. This is in accordance with Article 23 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

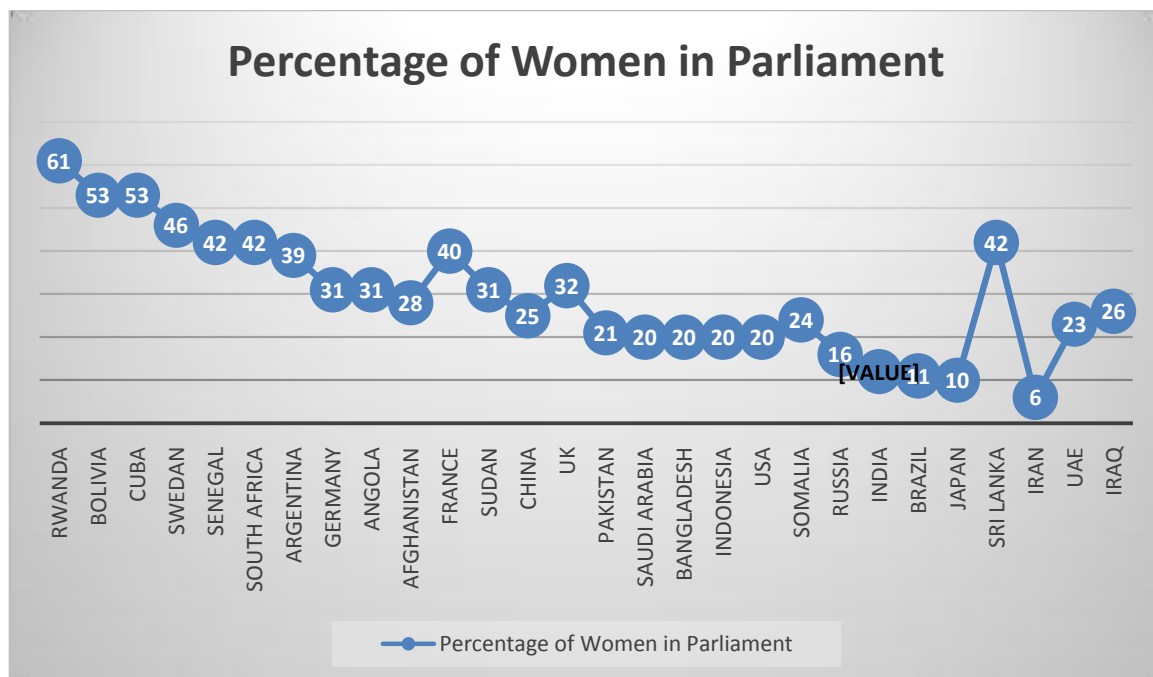
The Constitution in its 73rd constitutional Amendment pictured the reservation of seats for women in Panchayat elections. This amendment stands as the benchmark revision of the constitution of India which gives the reservation to the women up to 1/3rd of the seats need to be reserved to the women. This amendment is intended to improve the positions of the women at the village level. One-third of the total number of seats to be reserved for women. One-third of the seats reserved for SCs and STs also reserved for women. One-third offices of chairpersons at all levels reserved for women (Article 243D). In the Amendment number 74, there is reservation for the women, for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population of which not less than one-third shall be for women and for women which not less than one-third of the total number of seats will be reserved.

4. Key Determinants and Barriers of Women in Political Participation

The present participation of women in the formal politics in India reveals that there is an increase in the voting turn out and participate in various elections. But still, the women remain as under-represented in both the legislative bodies of centre and the state government. The Constitution of India promulgated in the year 1952 that, "to secure to all its citizen's justice, social, economic and political" and "equality of status and of opportunity" (Basu 1998: 21). Even after 66 years of promulgating equality in the constitution why the government of India cannot implement the equal status to the male and female as well as the third gender? Despite the fact that equality is beautifully crafted in the constitution, women in India, as well as the transgender, are underrepresented in the country. When the proportion of the seats held by the women in national parties is 23.96%. India, claiming with the largest democracy in the world is having only 11.2 per cent of the total number in the sixteenth Lok Sabha. Countries like Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, China, Iraq, Israel, Nepal, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Uganda, UAE is having the minimum of

attesting 20 or more in the female population in the parliament. Pakistan, highly criticized with underdeveloped and political instability in the country is having 20.60 per cent of women in the lower house, which is almost double to India. As per the data, 11 women are serving as the head of the state and 10 as the head of the government. Rwanda is having the highest number of parliamentarians with 61.2 per cent of seats in the lower house.

To represent the 586,469, 174 Female community in India, the present Lok Sabha is having 66 seats out of the 543-member Lok Sabha seats. In the case of the Legislative Assemblies in the 29 states of the country, it is still worse with a mere 9 percentage of women members in the assembly. The best among the states in India are Bihar, Rajasthan and Haryana which is having have 14% representation for the women while the poorest states/UT are Puducherry and Nagaland, where there is no single seat is occupied by women.



The involvement of women in the electoral politics in India is mixed in different states and the level of participation is quite varied and inaccurate. If we are analyzing the women's participation in politics, we need to consider the women in politics with four different echelons', to start with the women representation in the parliament, women standing for the election, women as the active campaigner for the political party and at last the number of the first-time women voters in India. From the above division, the State of India is having a smaller number of active participation or in a way we can say that the women are not acknowledged in society.

Whys and wherefores which leads to the short representation in the politics can be categorized by (a) The current socio-cultural policies and the gender discrimination supported with the temptation of the society as the women is inferior to them and the lack of decision-making capability and the gender stereotype makes the society makes the ground so tensed and unsupportive in nature for their rising. These

elements in the society are supported by the socio-historic archives of the nationalist movements of India. This is hampering the will of women's political participation and taking up the lead role in the organisations. (b) If the society is the barrier for the rising of the women community then it the failure of the government to implement the reservation of seats for women in the general election and the state legislative assembly election. In the fundamental rights, the constituent assembly had beautifully drafted Article 14, Right to Equality. If the society is standing as the barrier, the government should bring out the 50 per cent of reservation for the women as well. Then the other reason might be (c) The political parties, no matter which political party in India, whether it is the national party or the state party, the lack of willingness to give constituency tickets to the women party members. There is a common trait seeing in the Indian politics that, where there is a reservation of the seat for the women only in those seats we can find a women candidate. So, the political parties are itself one of the reasons for not trusting the women to give a

constituency to a woman as if they are not in a position to believe that a woman is capable to win in the election. The other reason might be the (d) continuation of patriarchal thinking and the strong gender discrimination in the new form and the women subordination by the male and the aged people in the family is also playing an active role even today in deciding whether the women can go out for even casting the vote. A married woman is considered as the free maid of the home, while the male members of the home come back to home the food should be ready by then, so how a woman can be able to go and work for the society? Mostly her life will be surrounded within the family and the husband. Lastly, we can state that the lack of awareness of the political structure and the importance of the political participation and the taking part of the political lead, the women in India is facing an existential crisis within the society with lack support from the society and the political parties which is not ready to give up the tickets to the women and trusting them in winning the constituency.

2014 general election saw a drastic change in the way of the electoral campaign was conducted, the use of social media and the print media was highly utilized by the winning party. But still with a large number of illiterate people in India, the print media, door to door campaigning as well as the distributing party manifestoes and palm leaf as well as holding the rallies plays an active role in the electoral campaign. Women in India are having an active role in contributing in election campaigns, on the other hand, their levels of participation are not that to the mark of the other countries with no track record of republic democratic country with such a long history. One of the foremost ins and outs for the increase in the participation of women in the electoral politics and the campaign can be traced due to the mobilization of women by the political parties who understand the need of the hour of the changing the mindset of the people after getting education and the foreign influence after all the influence of the social media.

The other reasons for the improvement of women's participation in the capability as the voters in the various elections from 1990 can be linked with the liberalization and the opening up the economy to the private players, which in a way creates a platform for the women to develop and the many multinational companies came to India and began to hire the women which makes a sense of financial security which in a way gives a great push to be independent and think out of the box. The opening of the economy gives rise to in a flare-up of the electronic media and the active user in social media is increasing like the level of poverty in India. The increase in the number of social media user in a way creates an active role in building consciousness and enlightening women about the political and electoral rights which is enjoyed by the women in the other countries as well as the constitutional provisions which are in support of them.

The other supportive reason is the increasing number of civil society and women's organization's and their active role in sensitization and the awareness campaigns makes the grass root level development of the women to come out from the home take an active role in the decision-making arena of Indian politics and governance, by educating the rights of the women which is enshrined the constitution. The other factor for

the taking up of this role by the women might be the proactive role played by the Election Commission of India with the strong and competent initiatives in educating the women to lead active participation in the politics and by large conducting a free and fair election with violence and tension free atmosphere. The other reason for the increase in the participation of the women in the electoral politics is the reservation of 33 per cent enshrined in the 73rd and 74th constitution amendment. This lead role of the government clears the pathway for women to contest in the local body elections. Finally, the word politics itself is seen as the paradise of the corrupt and the society is judging the young people who are entering the politics as the unworthy and only one with no job is entering into it. Entering into the politics is in a way seen as the jobless activity and the youngsters with strong passion in the politics are not allowed by the family and the society to engage in the politics as there is no financial security within it. The success in the women taking part in the panchayat election is a supportive element for the women to take part in the general elections even.

The other challenge faced by the women in political participation is the proxy participation in the election. Due to the reservation policy, certain women got elected into the government or the legislature and the parliament, they are more or like the proxy members. The male members of the family or the Husband will be ruling on behalf of her in actual. They are just the spokesperson of the male members. They act as a puppet in the hands of the male members. This is clearly seen in Bihar when the powerful politician of Bihar got arrested for the corruption case and sentenced to the jail, he introduced his wife into politics, this shows the intention of the male-dominated political attitude of the politician in India. This lay down the fact that there is a likelihood of on-roll women participation to be increasing while the exact women participation in the existence might be very low and differ on the ground. Awareness programs and an increase in female education is now taking care of such happenings and women active participation is on an increase.

5. Last General Election: Trends and Female Voters

The Lok Sabha election of 2014 shows promising voting turn out. The improved female involvement had a thought-provoking saga of its own. The alleged "backward" states of India like Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh which shows a very progressive sign in the rise of voters turn out in the 2014 general election. This proves that the developed states in India and the so-called underdeveloped states of India proved the fact that women in India are starting to make their existence in the terms of turning up for voting in various elections. The women electorates of India want to make it clear that they are also the part of the electoral college of India and there is an equal say in the election with a par with the male counterpart.

The gender-wise outlines of the vote in the 2014 general elections ended up with two broad conclusions. At the notable level, the trend is around the augmented turnout among women voters in the 2014 elections. At the milieu of a momentous upsurge in the whole voter turnout (from 58 to 66 per cent) at an all India level calculation, there is an extraordinary closing of the gender gap amongst men and

women voters. In rather a few States in India, the women have outstripped men voters. If this cannot be seen as the new an occurrence for the northeastern states, like Manipur, Meghalaya and Sikkim; it is certainly a new thing happening in the states like Bihar, Rajasthan, Punjab, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand etc.

6. Conclusions and Policy Implications

The democratic expansion that taking place in India is likely to remain and despite some limitations of the electoral process, 'people have succeeded in instituting their own democratic meaning in this process' (Palshikar & Kumar, 2004: 5417). The increasing number of participation of women in the politics and the political campaign and exercising the right to vote discloses a process of feminization of Indian politics with a positive flow. The positive trend in the rise of increasing the number of participates and the turn out started in the year of liberalization policies of the 1990s which gives a positive turnout till the last general election with a 65.6 per cent female turnout. The male and female voter turnout has gone down to 1.5 per cent in the year 2014 (Last General Election). This tapering gender gap in the coming elections institutes a doubtless fact that in the coming elections more the women will be exercising their electoral rights and the participants in the election.

Correspondingly, women's participation in the election campaigns is also on the verge of rising with a subsequent increase from the year 1999 to 2014. However, it is likewise clear that this feminization of Indian politics is being battled by the male-dominated political structure in India and the established configuration of the political organisations and the mechanism. The political parties that are exhibiting a destructive role in scuttling the Women's Reservation Bill in the last Lok Sabha have turn out to be terminated after the general elections in 2014.

Three far-reaching assumptions can be drained from this paper on the political participation and involvement of the women in the electoral politics in India. Voter turnout has remained at healthy strata from the year of 1990. The 1990s LPG initiative of the then government influenced the women in India and the women's organisations of India by getting

influenced with the foreign media and the getting influenced by the various social media. One of the widerchanges that can be seen is the composition of the voter turnout. These can be sorted as the sign of the merging of the democratic norm in the country. Later in the 2000s the stability got affected and in the year of 2004 the voter turnout again falls down and increased in the year 2009 and the latest election is having a mere increase. The 90s saw the women, Dalits in India, Adivasi, and OBCs trusting more and more on the electoral politics and the universal adult franchise as the instrument of development.

It can be overwhelmingly specified that there is a need of urgent and radical change in the movement for empowerment of women in every sense, not only the political sphere but also the decision-making sphere of her. Acknowledgement of the fact that women are becoming a political force, both nationally and internationally and becoming the next best alternative for the present scenario of world politics. In this environment it would be worth mentioning to evoke the comments of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen in his book, "*India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*", "*Women's empowerment can positively influence the lives not only of women themselves but also of men, and of course, those of children*".

In the present outlook of the nation and with a well informed and the well-equipped and independent women in India the Political parties cannot keep on the indifferent attitude shown to women. The women in the Indian state become empowered with various policies and the know-how of the social media and influence from the success stories of the other countries. Female Population of the country exceeds the whopping 586.5 million populaces and approximately 48.46 per cent of the voters (2011 Census). An enlarged political involvement by women in all spheres of political life and electoral competition will safeguard political equivalence and equality with men. This also ensures the total upliftment of women and empowering themselves by themselves.

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For the study to write this paper I had accessed the Central library of Pondicherry University.

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