

# **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN POLITICS- A STUDY OF HARYANA**

**A  
THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
MAHARSHI DAYANAND UNIVERSITY, ROHTAK  
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
POLITICAL SCIENCE**

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ROHTAK (HARYANA) 2015**

## Chapter - 7

### Conclusions and Suggestions

Women's empowerment in politics is the burning issue now-a-days. India being a traditional society has witnessed several ups and downs for her women. In the Vedic era, women had sufficient freedom to attend fairs, festivals and assemblies. They were not confined to four walls of their family houses. They enjoyed equal status with man in all field of life. During post Vedic era, woman started losing status in society. She lost her independence. She became a subject of protection. During the Moughal rule, the status of women in all spheres was that of an object being. The British Raj is known for its initiatives for improvement in women's condition in India.

The constitution of India is based on the principle of equality and guarantees equal rights and opportunities to its entire citizen. On the one hand, guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms and on the other prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, sex and place of birth. However, these rights have remained de jure and have not been translated into de facto rights. As such, women have been denied social, economic, civil and political rights in many spheres. The actual working of the constitution over 60 years reflects that women, constitute nearly half of our total population and voting strength, but they are not getting what is due to them. They have not been able to participate effectively in various walk of lives including political. Womanhood anxiously awaits power in decision making.

We are constantly in search of a society based on gender equality. The issue does not mean a clash between genders. It is fight against those traditions which have chained women by laying down different norms for men and different norms for women. It is men who must have to refuse and accept the fact that women are equal partners in life having an equal identity.

Although women are enfranchised members of our society, but actually they have remained second class citizens in terms of political participation and political power, especially at higher levels they are nowhere equal to men. Article 325 and 326 of the constitution of India guarantee political equal right to participation in political activities and right to vote respectively, yet women have not benefited from this right. There are no specific laws or policies so far, that can strengthen the grounds for political empowerment of women. The government has attempted to empower women politically through affirmative action by providing for one-third reservation for women in local government, to ensure their participation at grass-root level. Although, these initiatives have created the political space for women, but they have not been able to guarantee a non-discriminative or conducive environment for women participation in politics. The reservation of seats for women shows some light at the end of the tunnel. However, even this legislative intervention in higher political bodies i.e. State Assemblies and Parliament is absent.

The major conclusions of the study on various aspects of women empowerment in politics with special reference to the state of Haryana are briefly stated as under:-

To conclude, as stated earlier the meaning of the word 'empowerment' is simply power or authority given to somebody to act without discrimination and the meaning of women empowerment in simple way is building up women's intellect, capacity, maximum participation in decision making process and power sharing in representatives bodies, employment, security, access to property, access to information and resources, ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means,

ability to learn skills for improving status, health and potential for participation in every field of life. Political empowerment of women denotes a different role for women as a voter, as a member or as a policy maker in the political process. Woman empowerment, in fact, denotes a search for autonomy in decision-making.

The analysis of historical perspective regarding status of women in ancient period, that women enjoyed full right and regularly participated in religious and social ceremonies with her husband during the Vedic period, women also enjoyed limited rights in the economic and political field. But after Vedic period they started losing the status, they become a subject of protection and lost her independence. In the field of politics, they were not permitted to enter the same. At that time the political system was based on monarchy. There was hardly any political and administrative rights bestowed upon women.

If the Vedic period experienced the apex of women empowerment, the Moghul, empire was at the other end of the rod. Some Moghul emperor such as Akbar, Jahangir, and Aurangzeb tried to put an end to the evil like Sati Pratha, but it could not bring about improvement in the condition of women. During this period the status of woman was not worth talking and women depended on men in every field of life. She lost her identity after marriage. The position of women was as subordinate to men's. There was no place in the field of politics for women. During and after the Moghul period women never acquired freedom and equality of the age of Vedic. Therefore it may be said that the status of women reached its worst position during this period in every field of life.

The above discussion implies that women status in India has not been even and the same in all the ages. It has been subject to many great changes since ancient time. In ancient time they enjoyed equal status with men. Their position got deteriorated later in the Moghul period. The British period kept struggling for the upliftment of women, as is revealed by its various efforts. Although many efforts were made during the British period to improve the status of women, yet it is a fact that all these efforts failed to evoke an equally qualitative response. The condition of women, to be honest and impartial, is more or less the same even today.

There is no denying the fact that after independence women gradually have come out of the veil and their contribution in different fields of life is gaining momentum considerably. The government of India has taken numerous steps for improving the status of women and to eliminate the gender discrimination. Various legislative and constitutional provisions are in force for empowerment of women and many schemes and plans have been launched for improving their fortune. No doubt after these numerous provisions, a qualitative improvement has come in the position of women but their rural counterparts are not fortunate enough to feel this improvement in equal measure. The global gender gap index (2012) observed that India is not doing enough for its women. Only government's initiatives would not be sufficient for upliftment in women's position, society must also take initiative to create a good environment in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities in different sphere of life with a sense of equality.

It has been concluded that the female literacy rate both in India and Haryana has been improving over the years. The government has taken various steps and plans for empowerment of women in particular in education. Therefore, women have been growing well for the last 25 years. Education is the most powerful instrument for changing the status of women. It is very important for women but, unfortunately, in the male dominated society the education of women has been neglected for a long time. The growth of women education in rural area is very slow. In the end, we can say that

there has been a good improvement in the literacy rate of women during the last 15 years in both India and Haryana still there is a long way to go in this regard.

The study also brings to light the influence of factors like age, education, marital status, occupation, income, and family structure in determining the level of participation of women in diverse political activities. These political activities have determined the status of women in the political process.

Among these factors, the influence of education is more than the other factors. It is a fact that some of the important political activities have been influenced by the educational standard of elected women representatives. The study proves that the fact of higher educational status is vital in heightened interest of women in taking part in political activities. A notable factor observed from the study is that the educated women representatives in political activities are relatively higher than other women representatives.

It has been noted during the study that most of the women representatives are working at different levels in politics are less educated. Majority of them have no interest in political activities. Most of women representatives are house wives and engaged in agriculture, labour and household activities. It has also been revealed that the high level interference of male members of the family concerned reigns supreme in every activity related to Panchayat work. In this situation how can it be possible for the women representatives to exercise their responsibilities, use of their capabilities, power and official privileges, including their administrative functions?

At the same time, the study highlights the integral aspect of family background which exhibits the most of the women representatives have been already in politics in different ways- such as supporter, active member, office bearer etc. If not, then they surely have the privileges of the sound economic, social and educational status. Only a handful women representative belongs to the normal background. The strong family background acts as a clutch for women in order to ensure active participation in politics on their part. It is also revealed that most of the respondents have been from the non-political background i.e. 71 percent. It is either reservation or certain other circumstances that makes women participate actively in politics. Besides, there are examples of women who enter the world of politics only with a purpose to serve but they are far outnumbered.

After the examination of the background variables of the respondents, it has been found that the background variables such as education, income, age, family structure, marital status, occupational status and political background influence women in the process of political participation at different levels. In these background variables, education is the most important factor which helps women generate capacity, act their ideas, cast vote as desired, take decisions, attend meetings, awareness of rights and responsibilities. The age factor, similarly, exercises a strong influence over women- especially with regard to their performance in the political process.

The representation of women in all the political and administrative activities is very low. We have a long way to go in improving the political status of woman as a member, voter and decision maker. The conspicuous reasons behind this plight are the low literacy rate of women, lack of confidence, poor exposure to administrative skills, low economic-socio status, traditional attitude and perception of society as well as family, excessive interference of the male, low interest in political activities, high level corruption and crimes in politics.

Researcher found that the majority of women representatives are located at the grass-root levels in politics because of reservation. A whopping 98 percent of women representatives says that they would never contest an election, if reservation was not given to them. It adequately speaks volume for women lack of interest in participating in an election as a candidate. Most of them entered

politics owing to the constitutional provisions. Women respondents elected through reservation revealed that if the reservation rotates, they would not contest elections the next time.

Women elected for the first times often face problems of lack of experience, knowledge, responsibility and skill. It exerts a negative influence over their performance.

The study reveals the fact that lack of knowledge and awareness of work, less willing power, lack of motivation and apathy interest in politics, absence of decision making capacity among women are quite rampant. They have no idea about their rights, power, responsibilities and their own position in society. Most of the women confine themselves to the voting act, when it comes to active participation in politics.

The field survey reveals that women representatives, with a few urban exceptions, cast their votes in compliance with the instructions or choice of their husbands or male members of the families. They don't have the right to cast their votes as per their own choice. In-fact, they are ignorant of the value of votes. They cannot take independent decisions even at the initial stage of politics, hence it is a distant dream to develop this capacity in them to higher levels.

It also becomes evident from the field survey that women representatives especially the Sarpanch in the Gram Panchayat is more active than the Panchs. They are aware of the functioning of the Panchayat to some extent. In comparison to this, the members of the Panchayat (Panchs) do not take part in the proceeding actively. They are scarcely aware of the agenda or programme of the Panchayat. They are ignorant of their rights and responsibility.

The truth is that the participation of women in the political process at any level is closely related to their level of awareness. Therefore, it is essential to enquire into the general and the political awareness level of the respondents. The study focussed on the awareness level of the elected women representatives towards such important issues as various political activities, acts, planning and programmes, their functions, powers and responsibilities, their interest in political debates and discussions on television etc. The study reveals that the majority of the respondents are not aware of the functions, powers and responsibilities pertaining to the local body members. Only a handful of respondents can tell what their rights and what their responsibilities are as a member of the local bodies institutions. And these women are primarily those who are the members of either an urban local body or a political party. The women from rural background have little knowledge about the local body to which they relate. In short, they are not aware enough. Thus the study made an in-depth enquiry into the matter of general awareness of women representatives, and arrived at the conclusion that their awareness level is far low than satisfactory.

The study makes it conspicuous that women's participation in political process is far from being adequate. The main reason behind this fiasco lies in their lack of knowledge of the New Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, reservation of seats for women in Panchayat and the great campaign for reservation for them in the Parliament and the

State assemblies. Physically, they seem to be present in politics with the aid of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and the 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment. However, they are absent psychologically. They will not be particularly empowered until they take part in politics whole heartedly. Post 1994, the reins of authority have been handed over to women. However, an impartial study proves that they are mere rubber stamps, and not the 'queens' as was desired.

In order to strengthen democracy and to make it more transparent and to decentralize power the government has laid down the provision of 33% reservation for women at different levels of local body institutions. It means that government implies to take democracy to the grass root level of society. Though the government has given women the right to participate in politics, yet women

are still at warfronts against social customs and traditions. Of course, they have right to participate, but they lack the freedom to use it and the freedom to make decision of their own. Chained in kind of social and familial tradition, women find themselves confined to the four walls of the household, even when they head villages. It is their husbands or the sons who take decision on her behalf. Women act as mere rubber stamps even in high offices. Their participation, needless to say, fulfils only the legal provision in this regard. The withdrawal of these provisions from the Panchayati Raj may reinforce the participation of women in the same, erstwhile, negligible condition in which it used to be prior to these acts. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments have succeeded in securing the women participation only on papers. In reality it is their relatives who enjoy the actual participation. Most of the meetings are attended by the members of their families, even proxy signatures are done on their behalf by their relatives.

The numerical participation of women in politics is much better in the Local Government Institutions as compared to the Parliament and the state assemblies. The fact is that women participation in politics grew only after the 73<sup>rd</sup> and the 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments came into force. Prior to these reforms, only a few women were elected in the local body institutions in India. Of course, after these amendments, the concept of the male dominance in politics has been changed in the rural and the urban local bodies. These amendments have facilitated women's election the local government institutions, yet she is blatantly deprived of decision making power. It is their husbands and sons who make decisions. Women have been reduced to mere rubber stamps even in those high offices. The meeting are attended by their male representatives; even they put proxy signatures on their behalf. Their participation, needless to say, fulfils the legal provision only. The withdrawal of those constitutional amendments from the local government institutions may force the participation of women in the same erstwhile negligible condition in which it used to be prior to these acts. These amendments have secured women's participation in politics only in record. De facto, the show is stolen by the male members of their families.

It is a classic case of democratic irony that even after a lapse of sixty five years of the inception of Indian constitution, half of its citizens are still struggling for due representation in the political process of the state. The political participation of women has been really appalling. It has been at such low levels as 11.37% in Lok Sabha, 11.83% in Rajya Sabha, 8% in all State/UT Assemblies and approximately 37 % in local government institutions in India in comparison with their voting percentage which stands at 50%. The participation of women in decision making bodies is also marginal. The actual political power rests in the male hands whereas tiny bits and crumbs are thrown to women. A number of factors behind this low and inactive participation in politics at all level are illiteracy, narrow and neglecting attitude of family and society, poverty, traditional pattern of the family and society, will power and excess interference by the male segment.

A glance at the global picture of women's participation in politics shows that most of the countries have failed to give women their due space and representation in politics. India is called the world's largest democracy. But the representation of women in both the Parliamentary houses is far lower than satisfactory. India is worse off as compared to its neighbours such as Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and China. India is ranked 105<sup>th</sup> in women's political representation with only 62 MPs out of 543 in the Lok Sabha and 29 women MPs out of 245 in the Rajya Sabha stand elected. Bangladesh is placed at number 60 while Pakistan is rank is 51, Nepal is ranked 20 and China is ranked 60. In this regard, countries like Britain, US, France, Italy, Germany are ranked 62<sup>nd</sup>, 72<sup>nd</sup>, 63<sup>rd</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> respectively. Women representation in the Lok Sabha's and the Rajya Sabha's averages at 11.37% and 11.83 % respectively. The world average, however, stands at 22%. The ratio

of women's participation in politics at global level was 16% in 2005 which improved to the level of 22% in 2015. From this aspect, India has recorded no improvement at all.

An analysis of figures directly points to the successful participation of women. At present, a whopping 10 lac of women represent as a member of local bodies as compared to the total 30 lacs across the nation. Some state like Bihar, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh have 50% reservation for women in the local government institutions as per the state legislation but the other states including Haryana have not adopted the similar legislative provision. The government has undoubtedly, helped women stand in various elections at the local levels so that they are able to play a significant part, yet no ground was provided to women for its successful execution. The male category is dead set against women empowerment. Until and unless voice of this half of the population is heard, especially in the decision making process and the active involvement in political process, there will always be a question mark on these reforms. Society will not progress without making the best use of its women. Not doing so is like running a race with one leg only or thinking with half a brain. Through the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Act 2015, the Government of Haryana has begun a great campaign of improvement in the standard of the rural local government institutions. In order to bring about the qualitative change at the grass root level governance, the government has laid down one condition of the educational qualification for the election aspirants. As per this amendment, the Sarpanch-post aspirants should be matric pass (general category), and 8<sup>th</sup> pass (schedule caste and women). The candidates for membership in the Panchayats, they should be 8<sup>th</sup> pass (Gen. Category) and 5<sup>th</sup> pass (schedule caste and women). This education requirement shall render the 83% persons of schedule caste, 70% general category populations and 56% male from general category disqualified for the Panchayat elections. It suggests that the people of Haryana are acutely inadequately educated, in particular, those who either wish to enter politics, or are already in it. The survey also records that most of these matriculated and 8<sup>th</sup> pass don't know the basics of readings and writing. Although the Honourable Supreme Court of India has stayed the Panchayati Raj Act (Amendment) 2015 on September 17, 2015, yet it may be regarded as a good step towards qualitative administration.

With regard to women's participation the one thing that strikes us that they have alienated themselves deliberately. The legal compulsion renders it possible for them to be elected. However, despite of this support, they are not able to identify themselves as a part of the great democratic system only a selected few participate whole heartedly in this domain of politics.

It is especially noticed that the Indian people had to wait for a period of forty five years to establish a Panchayati Raj System with uniform structure for the whole country. It marks a revolutionary change in the local government and administration and empowerment of women in politics. The irony of all these is that most of the women themselves do not know this.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments are milestones in opening up the space for women in the field of politics and in acknowledging their role in development of the rural India. In order to ensure women empowerment in politics, these amendments were aimed at providing one-third reservation seats for women at the local level of politics. Besides, these amendments have made several provisions for women in politics, such as the caste based reservation. However, this represents a mere initiative point for women to enter the world of politics. The study shows that the reservation for women can act as an important impetus for them to participate in politics. It is not a guarantee for the empowerment of women in the political arena. The dream of women empowerment cannot be realised through the reservation of seats only. There are also other

factors involved in determining their active and free participation in politics. These factors include the knowledge of social, economic, administration and legal activities. Women find it difficult to participate in public life with compliance, capability and power. It implies that there is an urgent need for a good platform for women so that they may explore their strength and convert their demerits, into merits, with convenience of the reservation system.

India, needless to say, is a democratic republic. The constitution of India grants equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens without discrimination on the basis of social, religious, geographical and economic background. The provisions have, indeed, compelled an improvement in the status of women. Still the women of India are in an extremely detestable condition. Access to political opportunities and participation in the decision making process are the integral aspects of political empowerment of women. However, the reality is quite the opposite. Women's participation in the decision making process is extremely worrisome. This aspect of women's active participation in the decision making process is put under critical scanner on the basis of secondary data and the data collection by interviewing the women respondents.

The study strikes us with the exposition that women are excluded from the meetings of Gram Sabha. This limitation over them is put by the male members of their families. Even if elected women representatives attend the meetings they are not allowed the facility of expressing their views. It is generally observed that only those women who themselves are a party someone else from their families attend the Gram Sabha meeting. They attend the meeting in case there is no male member in their family to attend the same. If the meeting is held to discuss such impersonal issues as social welfare, development or some planning, then women prefer to avoid the programme.

The study makes it conspicuous that the overall performance of women representatives at the grass root level does not impress as satisfactory, particularly with respect to women at the village Panchayat level. All the work related to Panchayat is executed by the male members of their families. The major hindrances behind this abased reality lies in the lack of education, the lack of political will, the lack of experience, dependence on the male members, apathy for politics and Panchayat administration, chaos, indifference approach of bureaucracy, the direct or indirect interference in the local bodies by the social big-guns, the conventional, classbased and caste based tension rampant in society and the social mistrust in the administrative competence of women. The study compares and contrasts the women belonging to the municipal committees and corporations and the political parties with their rural counterparts. It proves that the urban representatives are better off about the general awareness of functional responsibilities as political activities in diverse fields. Not only has this but they also out performed their rural counterparts in carrying out these specified responsibilities. The performance of rural local bodies' representatives, particularly the members of the Gram Panchayat and the Panchayat Samiti commands no appreciation as it fails to impress. The primary reasons behind this anomaly lies in their lack of quality education, lack of experience, lack of political will and an overdominance of the male, lack of communication skill, fear, low financial background, social and family constraints and an acute lack of confidence in them.

It is observed that most of the women, particularly the rural local body representatives, do not raise their voice against exploitation and sex discrimination. They do not even stand for women welfare and their social and economical development. It is found that a meagre 34% of the women respondent took part in discussions so important as the improvement in women's condition during the meeting.



It is also noted that almost all the respondents have been elected owing to the reservation or the influence of their families at different levels of political institutions. Out of the population size of the selected area of study only .50 percent elected women won the elections sans of reservation. However, the influence of their families cannot be denied in these cases.

The study reflects that the majority of the educated women avoid being involved in political manoeuvres. They detest active politics. They prefer jobs in or outside the village which work as a comfort zone for them. Still, the illiterate women like to spend their time on household chores and agricultural activities. It is an illusion that politics does not suit women. They, too, underestimate themselves in this regard.

During the study a very interesting point which is noted is that a significant number of women do not attend the meeting. As many as 38.83% of women respondent attend the meetings themselves whereas 56.31% are replaced by the male members of their families for these meetings. Besides, all the efforts for women empowerment seem to end in smoke as the respondents confine that they are not allowed the freedom of speech and the freedom to express themselves, even if they attend the meetings.

The irony looms large as we confront the fact that the women representatives who attend the training and orientation camps organized by the government from time to time are not able to follow the instructions of the lectures. The chief motive of their attendance is to register their presence. At the same time, 60% of women representatives never attend such gatherings or training programmes at any level. It simply means that women are not interested in fulfilling their responsibilities in a professional manner. Women suffer acutely from the lack of political will power yet they are not prepared to alleviate this drawback. In order to carry out their political responsibilities, women have to replenish or revive their political will power. The governmental efforts to empower women will succeed, if they themselves co-operate with the government in this campaign of women empowerment. The study shows that a 52.50% of women seek permission from the male members of their families to attend official meetings and a 55.83% of them feel either inferior or isolated in such assemblies. Under such circumstances nobody can make a prophesy relating the time and the contribution of women for the national development. As a matter of fact, she herself is sulking away from the required responsibility to become empowered, and, the male dominance and the other related social constraints continue to be the adamant barriers on her path.

On the basis of our study, it cannot be declared that women are politically empowered. At the same time, nobody can deny the fact that they have accessed authority and confidence to some extent. And this much of success is a direct outcome of reservation has exercised a positive influence over women. It has imparted a new direction to women empowerment. However, they are still in dire need of cooperation from society, government and women folk themselves.

The study also proves that the reservation in politics is used as an easy shortcut by women for the purpose of participation. Without proper constitutional backup, it is not possible for women to participate in politics in the current scenario. During the study, it is also found that the reservation system has succeeded in merely ensuring the number of women representatives in politics. The great ideal of women empowerment which motivated the Reservation Act is still a distant dream. Sex discrimination continues to afflict the Panchayat since women are not given due respect in most of the cases. Their decisions and suggestions go without acceptance. If they wish to express themselves, they are suppressed brutally. A social misconception is that women lack motivation to

come ahead in politics, but the fact remains that they are pulled back the moment they show an urge to advance.

The study highlights the fact that in most of the cases the Gram Sabha is not working properly. The role of the Gram Sabha in the planning process has not been clearly defined. The intellectual and the rich avoid taking part in the meetings. As a result of this, there is no pressure on the Panchayat for developmental and welfare goals. It facilitates the Sarpanch to act according to his whims and fancies. He even does not take counsel from the members of the Panchayat in such cases. That is why the Sarpanch is presumed to be invincibly powerful at the Panchayat level. This arbitrariness is carried forward by the male members of the family where Sarpanch is a woman. The functions of the Panchayat Samiti are performed by the Chairman and the Panchayat Samiti is no better in this regard. The Chairman of the Panchayat Samiti exercises every bit of power in face of the powerless members.

Another striking revelation of the study is that the most crucial obstacle in the way of actual participation in politics by women occurs at the stage of filling nominations for candidature itself. Most of the women fill their nomination to local body institutions not out of their own will, but because of the pressure from the male members of their families. Since this phenomenon came into existence, women have found the political gates opened for them legally. The present study shows that this trend will not come to an end in the near future.

It is observed that the involvement of the urban elected women representatives in the political process is satisfactory to some extent, as compared to their rural counterparts. It is because they are better educated and more aware. It is also found that the member of the urban local bodies and the Zila Parishad, the Chairman of the Panchayat Samiti, Sarpanch meet the Block Development office (BDPO) and the District Development Officer (DDPO) for the purpose of development work, guidance and other kind of helps reach out to the higher authority but the other members of Panchayat Samiti and Village Panchayat make less contact with BDPO or DDPO, So it can be said that the members of the urban bodies members of the Zila Parishad, the Chairman of the Panchayat Samiti and the Sarpanch are more active and powerful whereas the role of the rest is merely nominal.

The status of women is not only the parameter of socio-economic and political development, but also an indicator of social transformation, a pioneer of changing mindset of the people towards the fair-sex in society. Education defines the individual's standard of life and hence is a basic requirement for human development. The Goddess of education and learning, Maa Saraswati, is a woman. Still, women are denied the blessings of the same mother, i.e. learning, particularly in the backwaters of India. Though Education is lifeline for a modern person, yet it remains blatantly neglected in this male dominated society. Illiteracy is root of all evils in a woman's life. The only solace is that, finally, the importance of women's education is being acknowledged gradually by society, as well as by the state and the centre governments.

The reservation bill regarding one third reservation for women in the Parliament and the State assemblies is pending since 1996. It, again, proves that the Indian politicians are not prepared to accept the parity with women. Hence, a new drama is enacted every time the bill is floored in the house, and new demands from political parties display their outlook. Although the bill got passed amid a lot of ruckus in the Rajya Sabha on March 09, 2010, yet it has failed to meet the same result in the Lok Sabha. The bill was dissolved automatically as the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha dissolved. Thank God that the better sense prevailed at last. Moreover, when the so called backward and the

fundamental society like Pakistan can grant 33% reservation to women in its senate then why should India, the largest democracy in the world, lag behind?

We live in a free country and this freedom is a natural boon of democracy. Our constitution provides us the right to freedom and, more importantly, to exercise this freedom in a manner of equality. Still women are not enjoying this equality particularly in the field of politics at different level. The government has granted one third reservation of total seats to women in the local body institutions to ensure their participation and maintain equality in politics to some extent. However, this equality is a different goal to achieve. Reservation provides a definite short cut to women's political participation and reservation in the legislative bodies may not be enough for empowerment of women. An environment should be created wherein women choose power independent of men. Although reservation of women in politics will not bring instant changes in the political empowerment of women, but their participation in politics will move upwards. This reservation provision will lead to a giant leap tomorrow in the desired direction.

The study also shows that the government of India has taken a number of steps to improve the status of women and to eliminate the gender discrimination through various legislative and constitutional provisions, schemes and plans. All this is amid at improving their future. Meanwhile a number of commissions and committees have been set up to deal with women's problems. Endless reports, numerous suggestions and several solutions have been offered. There is no doubt that all these efforts have produced a qualitative improvement in the position of women. However, this improvement has not reached the rural women folk in the same intensity and measurement.

Despite the constitutional guarantee of the equality of sex and the constitutional mandate of social justice, important discrimination and exploitation of women continue unbarred.

We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet we cannot boast of a society which carries civilization enough to provide gender equality. Fight for justice and cry for equality by women by no means represent a fight against men-the male element. It is simply a revolt against those suppressive customs and repressive traditions that give birth to different norms for different sexes. It is the responsibility of men that they must realize and accept women as their equal partners. And in this equality, they are provided an equal identity too in all spheres of life.

Another finding of the study is that the majority of the respondents get married about 95% and that the most of them (77%) belongs to individual families. The study further reveals that approximately 32% of the respondents read no type of essays, periodicals, articles in any regional or national newspaper and that the 61% never listen to the speech of any political leader. It is also found that they don't want to listen to any political debate or discussion on television or radio. They like to enjoy on entertainment channels on television. As many as 39% of the respondents said that they avoid any discussion over politics even with their family members. An overwhelming majority of the respondents come from individual family and they are grossly engaged in household and agricultural activities. Hence, they are not able to create co-ordination between these demands of diverse nature. Most of the respondents spend their maximum time on their customary chores and that is why they often fail to come up to the desired performance level in fulfilling the political duties or responsibilities.

The study concludes that the urban women representatives of the local body institutions are far more educated, full of informations, better oriented and entertain a better willing power than their rural counterparts. The political status of the women who represents rural local bodies is not up to the mark. In particular, those women who represent gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti found lack of political interest, education, less willing power, low confidence, poor communication skill

and low level of knowledge and awareness. The Zila Parishad's women representatives are better off. The condition of ward member (Panch) is the worst in this regard during my visits to several villages, the revelation that startled me was that people do not know even the names of the women panchs and Sarpanch. The villagers generally know the names of the husbands and sons of these women representatives and maintain that they (husbands or sons) are themselves the representatives. Almost all the villagers fall in this category. If the head of the village is fallen in this plight, the condition of the Panch can be easily estimated. The panchayat samiti members enjoy more or less the same condition. The Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha member's political status is up to the mark. I, in person, interviewed Ms. Kumari Sailja MP, Mrs. Kiran Chaudhary M.L.A., Mrs. Geeta Bhukkal Ex education minister, Mrs. Kavita Jain M.L.A. (Sonapat), Mrs. Shankuntala Khattak Ex M.L.A. and reached the conclusion that the political status of the women in the higher political institutions is satisfactory, though their representation is numerically low. Besides, the women who are linked to different political parties as activist, ordinary or executive members also enjoy a better political condition.

To conclude, the goal of women's empowerment in politics shall remain heresy until and unless the structural changes occur in all the related fields such as social, economical, political, psychological and legal.

On the basis of an indepth and detailed study as well as the analysis of different aspects of women's participation in diverse areas of active politics at different levels, the following points constitute the recommendations and suggestions, resulting from the present study:

1. Political empowerment of women is not to be discussed in isolation from other aspects. It simply requires an open platform combined with a comprehensive approach towards it. Hence, an urgent need of major structural, social, economical, psychological progress and growth so that women may be politically empowered and exhibit their empowerment in various political activities and diverse processes.
2. As far as the decision making process and dimension is concerned, no room is allowed to women at all. Whether it is within the family, or the administrative or the political level, she gets ignored at each level of the decision making process. Women empowerment, in a way, is relative to her participation in the decision making. And, yes! Charity begins at home. The importance and regard given to their decisions at the familial level, may pave way to the administrative and political platforms for her.
3. Better facilities such as transport, communication, health, favourable environment, security and proper training should be provided to the functionaries of the local bodies so that they may obtain the competence enough to perform their duties effectively. Such a firm step will further motivate the educated women to become active in politics. There is a requirement of a political environment which inculcates such holistic issues for women as power, capacity building, honour status economic independence, awareness, gender equality in social and cultural texture, congenial behaviour, administrative

assistance and co-operation of society, and all kinds of the possible help from the higher levels of the political executives and officials.

4. Both, the print and the electronic media, can play an important part in increasing political awareness among the elected women representatives. It can act as an agent of political socialization, and may go a long way to create among people the sense of gender equality, gender justice, honour, sacrifice, positive attitude, co-operation, knowledge, ability, education and information. The Radio and the Television should broadcast a programme each day and this programme should have such comprehensive approach as to cover aspect like the role and functions of the Panchayat, power and responsibilities of the members of Panchayat, village and town development programmes, old age pension and other welfare plans, domestic violence, legal provisions related to women empowerment, knowledge regarding Right to Information Act, guidelines regarding preparing official documentation, leadership capacity and the other capacity building programmes.
5. Panchayat facilitation centres should be set up in every block, so that awareness may be created among the common people and the elected representatives on every issue belonging to the Panchayat functioning. This centre, besides, should offer a help desk (toll free number) which can furnish 24 × 7 information about the elected representatives, government policies, the Panchayati Raj System and the ways of their functioning.
6. The Panchayati Raj System should be made subject to open discussions in the Panchayat meetings, extension lectures by experts should be delivered to educate the elected representatives thoroughly on the Panchayati Raj System. The Sarpanch who is setting examples in administrative prowess should be called to address the Gram Sabhas other than hers. If it happens, she may share her experiences with other needy colleagues.
7. It is not only women but also men who need to alter their approach and perception for women empowerment. Men should avoid imposing their ideology on women. Instead, they should motivate women to take part in the political process as per their own evaluation and preference free will. For this, men require moral education, positive attitude towards women and self analysis. The curriculum at the school and the college level should undergo a revolutionary change in order to generate better and healthy gender relations. Necessary steps should be taken to cultivate gender sensitivity among the senior secondary level students and the syllabus should be changed accordingly. At the same time, the legal and constitutional provisions should be implemented in letter and spirit so that protection and equality of liberty for women may be ensured.

8. There is social misconception that women lack the leadership qualities. Leaving apart a handful, most of them are not familiar with required skills. This approach should end now. Women's leadership skills get repressed under the burden of their families. They are furnished with these skills, the need is to develop them. For this the government should organize orientation programmes, and training camps for both the elected and the non-elected women who wish to participate in politics. The training programmes should be redesigned keeping in view the need of the elected representative. At the same time there is an urgent need to train these women as leaders through different educational courses at the school and the college levels so that they would be able to manage the responsibilities assigned to them at every level of politics.
9. Women should create organizations to empower themselves. They should grow in strength and capacity through organization of such units as women Mandals, self help groups and the social organizations. These women organizations can play a vital part in women empowerment in different fields. The government should provide appropriate financial administrative and infrastructural help to women organizations. These organizations can prove vital, in increasing women's social and political activity. Hence, the government should not hesitate to render each and every possible help to these organizations.
10. Incentives, better honorarium rewards and facilities should be provided to local body functionaries so that they are able to perform their duties honestly, interestedly and actively because these incentives and rewards play a positive role in ensuring the participation of women in the political process. During the study, it is observed that the majority of the educated women avoid joining politics as there is an acute lack of these incentives and rewards. Therefore they prefer joining jobs instead of politics. If proper incentives, honorarium, rewards and facilities are offered to educate women, they will also willingly participate in active politics. They will contribute in the national development by implementing the policies and programmes putting in their all out efforts.
11. The researcher finds a common complaint from women representatives that they are not apprised of the Panchayat agenda, venue and meetings at all. Therefore, it is suggested that the Panchayat or the government officials must send information about the agenda, venue and the date of meetings well in time so that they are able to attend the meetings and contribute in the same. Further, there should be a high level co-ordination and co-operation between the government officers and local body institutions functionaries, so

that they can perform their duties, role and responsibilities effectively and positively. A good and appropriate communication system is urgently needed so that appropriate information's are shared promptly.

12. The Aadhar enabling bio-matric attendance system (AEBAS) through thumb impression linked with Aadhar-number must be installed for the meeting related to the Panchayat work for all the training programmes so that any proxy attendance may be avoided. Moreover, this attendance system should be linked to the server of the Panchayati Raj Department. The department should be able to monitor both the organizers of the camp, and those who attend it. If a public representative is found constantly absent from such programmes, she should be subject to strict departmental action. If the situation is immensely serious even the candidature must be cancelled. Not

only this, the doors of politics should be closed for such offenders even in future, because the government fulfils its aim of social welfare and development through such meetings and the training camps.

13. At the grass-root level, reservation for women must continue. It is because the reservation system is viewed as the shortest cut for women to facilitate their participation in politics. Now-a-days it is not possible for women to participate in politics without constitutional provisions. It is suggested that the reservation should be enhanced from 33% to 50%. At a time when half of the population with qualitative education will jump into politics than the scene of political culture in towns and villages will acquire new dimensions. It is important to note that the constitution of India confers equal right to women with regard to casting vote and participation in politics. A mere numerical participation in voting or participation may not reflect actual representation of women empowerment in politics. Equality with equity is a goal which may not easily be achieved merely through giving quota to women in the legislative bodies and to enact a law for equality. For actual representation, the reservation is not only the need of the hour, but the participation of women in the political process can be made possible only through reservation in the beginning. Mere casting votes, contesting elections and making provisions for reservation through affirmative action alone do not provide adequate force to empower women in politics. Reservation and right to vote is no guarantee for empowerment of women in real sense of the word. Other supportive measures cannot be overlooked in this regard. They are vital to bring valuable changes in society as can lead to egalitarian and harmonious social system. The first prime minister of the nation, Pt. J.L. Nehru's remark holds true even today : "When women

progresses the family progresses, the society progresses, the nation progresses and ultimately, the world progresses.”

14. To empower women in the field of politics, the male-dominated society will have to undergo a change in its outlook towards women. At the same time women need to boost their social, economic and educational capabilities. The provision of legal rights for women does not provide them the equality of rights. Instead, the first thing which must be done is to change the social approach and to eradicate the feelings of complex, shyness, nervousness, and low self-esteem. Therefore, it is suggested that the government institutions, non-government organizations, media, educational institutes, and other social groups should unite to develop capability, efficiency, will power, activity, interest, awareness and confidence among the women through training camps, demonstrations, communication and skill development programmes, workshop etc, so that they may fully contribute in the massive mission of social welfare.
15. The centre and the state government in unison are driving several campaigns for women empowerment in every field one of these important programmes is ‘Beti Bachao-Beti Padoo’. Through this campaign, the honourable Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi has conveyed the message that women are central in the concept of ‘world peace.’ If the government is really sensitive to the development and security of women, the above campaign should be linked to the rights and programmes of the village Panchayats.
16. Now a days, most of the women respondents are demanding 50 % reservation of seats in the local body institutions and they also raise their voice for reservation in higher political institutions such as the Parliament and the assemblies. Almost 15 of the total Indian states have increased women’s reservation from 33 to 50 per cent in the local body institutions. This is a positive step in the direction of ensuring a greater participation of women in politics. However, an increase in the number of the elected women representative will hardly do a lot in their empowerment. If they do not acquire sufficient skill to fit in the political manoeuvrings they will become the butt of ridicule defacto. Women need proper training along with reservation. Steps should be taken to ensure their self-confidence. The Sarpanch Pati custom and the proxy system should end immediately. A qualitative change in the education of women will be of great importance in this regard.
17. The study indicates that there is a lack of education among the respondents. It is the most important inhibiting factor in the way of building capacity in women. On account of this lack of education, women are not ready to face the challenges, particularly in rural area in the field of politics. Without qualitative education it is not possible to empower women from all aspectssocial, economical, political etc. It is also virtually impossible to reach full potential for growth and prosperity in society if there is a lack of education.



Hence the quality in education is the first and the most important pre-requisite for women empowerment. The second is the change in social mindset, the third is making new laws and reforming the existing one to protect women's interest and to ensure quality in all spheres of life, and the fourth requirement is of proper implementation of the laws concerned at the grass-root level.

18. There should be a fair and proper communication system between the elected persons of both the sexes. Both should be motivated to share, knowledge, ideas and capacity to transform and implement policies and programmes, allocation of resources and the other related informations.
19. Further, it is also suggested that the central and the state universities should start a six month certificate course on rural administration and it must be a condition for all the women who wish to join politics that they pass this course only such certificate holders should be allowed to fight the electoral contests. If all the public and the private institutions require special skills and degree-diplomas, why politics does not need any such specialization? The political leaders frame the laws for public welfare. Hence they need such skills more than anyone else. Therefore it is suggested that there should be a professional qualification with regard to the political administration for a leader at different levels of politics.
20. The education of women plays a significant role in improving their status in different fields of life. A higher female literacy rate can improve the quality, standard and performance of life in every sphere while a lower literacy rate exercises and adverse effect on the status of women. Therefore, it is an urgent need to improve the literacy rate of women as it is a need in every field of active politics. The government should take all necessary steps to promote literacy among women who are working at the different levels of politics, and

for those who wish to enter the process of active politics. The government will have to create atmosphere which may impart quality and functional education. The government is raising slogans like "Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao" yet the limited seat in the higher education institutions deprives a number of them of admission. Hence the government should abolish limits on seats to universalise education for women.

21. Another fascinating aspect of the study is the revelation that the incompetency and poor qualification of the respondents has resulted into bad governance in the state. Nobody would deny that good governance has been the dream of every awakened citizen. Therefore a condition of minimum educational qualification should be laid down for those who aspire to hold the specific posts or who want to contest the elections. This

condition for minimum educational qualification can be different for different levels of politics. It is also suggested that the political parties, the pillars of democracy, should rise to hope and expectations of the people and should try their best to give priority to the educated aspirants. It will be a morally motivating act.

22. It is further suggested that the government should take the proper and suitable steps to enhance the prestige, power, reliability, strengthening the status of 'Gram Sabha' so that it may be ensured that the participation becomes more effective both qualitatively and quantitatively.
23. It is also suggested that in order to increase the participation of women in the political process at the initial stage, the exercise of adult franchise should be made mandatory, irrespective of the gender. Those who shirk from voting should be prosecuted and given punishment.
24. It is also suggested that the government and the officers should give importance to the decentralized administration as it is integral with the democratic ideals. They should delegate greater power and the financial and non financial authority to the members of the local body institutions. At the same time, the accountability, the responsibility of the local body members should be fixed, too.

If the government seriously wishes that women get their due in political scenario, then it must be realized that along with reservation, the political will needs to be generated, gender-bias should end immediately, we need to transform the social perception towards women, to create safe and secure environment for women, to give quality education to women, to promote their administrative skills, awareness to do something and to boost their consciousness and readiness to achieve something in life. It is impossible to attain the specified targets for women in politics merely with the aid of the clutches of reservation. Reservation in this regard is just like planting a tree without enough watering and proper fencing. Plants need both of them to be free. Similarly, the plant of women empowerment needs social, political, economic, psychological and educational support to grow into a full free. Only then we can expect women empowerment in politics to be a reality.

Here is a subject with an enormous scope for vast and deep research; nonetheless, the study seeks to be exhaustive as much as possible, despite all possible limitations involved. The humble hope is that the present work will inspire further academic enquiries in the field.