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A CRITICAL STUDY ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Political representation is an important component of a democratic system since democracy is only relevant when all segments of society have the opportunity to participate in decision-making institutions. Women account for about half of India's population and make up a sizable portion of the voters. However, their representation in legislative and political institutions has traditionally been lower than that of men. The subject of women's political representation thus goes beyond the official recognition of voting rights to include an analysis of women's participation as voters, candidates, elected representatives, political party members, and decision-makers. The Indian Constitution establishes equality before the law, forbids gender discrimination, and makes specific protections for women. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments established a constitutional foundation for reserving at least one-third of Panchayat and Municipality seats for women. Several states have since provided for 50 percent reservation in municipal bodies. According to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, women have a 50% reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in numerous states, including Tamil Nadu. Women's representation in national legislatures remains disproportionately low. According to official parliamentary literature, 74 women were elected to the 18th Lok Sabha; alternative parliamentary material refers to 75 women members, reflecting discrepancies in counting periods or sources. The broad point is that women account for only roughly 14% of the House. The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act of 2023 included provisions for women to be reserved one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the Delhi Legislative Assembly, subject to the constitutional implementation framework. According to parliamentary materials, this legislation establishes a foundation for a 33% reservation. It examines constitutional provisions, electoral participation, reservations, political parties, social and economic hurdles, violence and harassment, intersectionality, judicial advancements, and women's experiences in local government. The paper takes a doctrinal and analytical approach, arguing that effective political equality necessitates not only access to political institutions, but also meaningful involvement, decision-making authority, institutional

support, and freedom from discrimination and intimidation.

Keywords: Women, Political Representation, Gender Equality, Political Participation, Reservation, Democracy, Panchayati Raj, Parliament, Constitutional Rights, Electoral Politics.

TABLE OF CASES

S. No.	Name of the Case	Citation	Relevance to the Present Study
1	K. Krishna Murthy v. Union of India	(2010) 7 SCC 202	Reservation and political representation in local self-government
2	Rajbala v. State of Haryana	(2016) 2 SCC 445	Eligibility conditions for participation in local elections
3	Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan	(1997) 6 SCC 241	Gender equality and protection of women's dignity
4	Anuj Garg v. Hotel Association of India	(2008) 3 SCC 1	Gender stereotypes and substantive equality
5	C.B. Muthamma v. Union of India	(1979) 4 SCC 260	Gender discrimination and equality in public service
6	Air India v. Nergesh Meerza	(1981) 4 SCC 335	Gender discrimination and constitutional equality
7	Charu Khurana v. Union of India	(2015) 1 SCC 192	Equality and removal of gender-based barriers
8	Secretary, Ministry of Defence v. Babita Puniya	(2020) 7 SCC 469	Equal opportunity and rejection of gender stereotypes
9	Lt. Col. Nitisha v. Union of India	(2021) 4 SCC 481	Substantive equality and institutional gender discrimination
10	Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India	Relevant electoral jurisprudence	Electoral transparency and democratic participation

TABLE OF STATUTES AND INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

S. No.	Statute / International Instrument	Relevant Provisions	Relevance
1	Constitution of India, 1950	Arts. 14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 325, 326, 243D, 243T	Equality, political rights, universal adult suffrage and reservation
2	Representation of the People Act, 1950	Electoral provisions	Electoral rolls and representation
3	Representation of the People Act, 1951	Election and candidature provisions	Conduct of elections and qualifications/disqualifications
4	Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992	Article 243D	Reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions
5	Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992	Article 243T	Reservation for women in urban local bodies
6	Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023	Articles 330A, 332A, 334A	Reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies
7	Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948	Arts. 1, 2, 7, 21	Equality, non-discrimination and participation in government
8	CEDAW, 1979	Arts. 1-5, 7, 8	Elimination of discrimination and women's participation in political and public life
9	ICCPR, 1966	Arts. 2, 3, 25, 26	Equal political rights and participation in public affairs
10	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995	Women in decision-making and political participation	Promotion of women's participation in political and public decision-making

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN INDIA

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Political representation is a fundamental element of democratic governance. In a representative democracy, citizens exercise political power primarily by electing representatives who participate in law-making, policy formulation and administration. Women's political representation is therefore not simply a question of the number of women occupying political offices. It concerns whether women have equal opportunities to participate in political institutions, contest elections, obtain party nominations, campaign freely, hold office and influence public decisions.

The Indian Constitution established universal adult suffrage from the beginning of the Republic. This was significant because political citizenship was not made dependent upon sex, property, education or social status. However, formal political equality did not automatically result in equal political representation. Women obtained the right to vote, but their representation among elected legislators remained comparatively low. The contemporary debate therefore concerns the movement from formal political equality to substantive political equality.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Political representation is a key characteristic of a representative democracy. It allows citizens to engage in government through elected representatives and gives many segments of society a voice in decision-making. In a democratic democracy, effective political representation necessitates the engagement of both genders. As a result, women's engagement in political institutions is a key measure of political equality, democratic inclusion, and socioeconomic progress.

Women account for a significant proportion of India's population and have long contributed to the country's political, social, and economic development. During the liberation movement, women actively participated in many political and social movements. Following independence, India's Constitution enshrined the values of equality, nondiscrimination, and equal opportunity, laying the groundwork for women's participation in public life. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution guarantees equality before the law as well as equal protection of the law. Article 15 forbids discrimination on the basis of sex, while Article 15(3) allows the state to establish

particular measures for women and children. Article 16 guarantees fair opportunity in terms of public employment. These provisions reflect the constitutional commitment to gender equality and offer a legal foundation for policies aimed at increasing women's involvement in public life.

Despite these constitutional guarantees, women's representation in official political institutions has traditionally been lower than that of men. Women's voting participation differs significantly from their representation as candidates and elected officials. Women have increasingly voted in elections, although their representation in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies has remained relatively low.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were significant developments in this regard, as they increased women's participation in local self-government institutions. These reforms included constitutional provisions for the reservation of seats for women in Panchayats and municipalities. The reservation system enabled women to join grassroots political organizations and engage directly in local governance. At the same time, representation at the highest legislative levels continues to raise concerns about equality, participation, and access to political power. Political parties, electoral processes, financial constraints, social expectations, and institutional practices all have the potential to impact women's capacity to run for office and wield political power.

Another significant development is the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, which provides for the reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, subject to constitutional conditions relating to census, delimitation, and implementation. This trend has provided a new push to the legal study of women's representation in legislative institutions. However, the matter of women's political representation should not be approached solely through numerical analysis. A contrast can be made between descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation refers to the number of women in political institutions, whereas substantive representation refers to women's ability to influence political decisions and successfully represent varied interests.

Against this background, the present study undertakes a critical examination of women's political representation in India, with particular emphasis on the constitutional and legal framework, reservation, judicial developments and the barriers affecting effective political participation.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Women's political representation is crucial because democracy necessitates the involvement and representation of many segments of society in decision-making institutions. Political institutions cannot be deemed fully representative if a significant portion of the population remains underrepresented. The present study's significance arises principally from its examination of the relationship between political equality and actual representation. Constitutional equality grants women formal legal rights, but it may not provide equal access to political institutions. The study investigates whether existing legal processes can translate constitutional ideas of equality into meaningful political representation.

The study is also relevant because of the disparity between women's voter engagement and representation as elected officials. The increasing participation of women in elections demonstrates political knowledge and engagement, but it does not always result in proportionate representation in legislative institutions. This electorate-representation discrepancy necessitates a thorough legal review. Reservation is another major feature of the research. Constitutional reservations in local self government institutions have greatly increased opportunities for women at the grassroots level.

The inclusion of constitutional provisions governing the reservation of seats for women in legislative bodies has emphasized the relevance of investigating reservation as a legal method for obtaining political participation. The study is also notable in terms of substantive representation. Simply increasing the number of female legislators may not be enough if women are unable to exert substantial influence in political decision-making. As a result, the study investigates whether numerical representation can lead to increased engagement and political empowerment. Further, the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023 represents an important constitutional development. A doctrinal examination of its provisions is necessary to understand its legal significance and potential contribution to women's representation. The study will therefore be useful to legal researchers, students, academicians, policymakers and persons interested in constitutional law, electoral law, gender justice and democratic governance.

1.4 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of existing literature is essential to understand the development of scholarship on women's political representation and to identify the area requiring further research. The present study reviews the following literature.

1. M. A. Hoque, M. S. Azim and F. Parvin (2026)

Hoque, Azim and Parvin, in their study “Gendered Pathways of Power: Women’s Political Representation amid Democratic Backsliding in India, Hungary and Turkey,” examine women's political representation in three different national contexts. The study considers women's representation not merely in terms of numerical presence but also in relation to their ability to exercise political influence. Its comparative approach is useful for understanding the distinction between descriptive and substantive representation. The study provides an important foundation for examining whether increased representation necessarily results in meaningful political participation.

2. B. Goldar and S. C. Aggarwal (2026)

Goldar and Aggarwal, in “Female Workforce Participation in India: How to Step It Up and Increase Their Employment in Non-Agricultural Activities,” examine the participation of women in the workforce and the factors influencing women's economic participation. Although the study primarily concerns employment rather than political representation, it provides useful background for understanding the broader socio-economic conditions affecting women's participation in public life. Economic participation and access to opportunities may influence women's capacity to participate effectively in political institutions.

3. S. Kaur (2024)

Kaur, in “Political Participation of Women in India: An Analysis of Women Representation in General Elections,” examines women's political participation and representation in general elections. The study is directly relevant to the present research because it focuses on the representation of women in electoral politics. It helps demonstrate the continuing difference between women's participation in the electoral process and their representation among candidates and elected representatives.

4. A. Sharma (2024)

Sharma, in “The Paradox of the Female Electorate: Theories and Realities of Women's Political Presence in India,” examines the apparent paradox between women's participation as voters and their relatively limited presence in political institutions. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it highlights the electorate–representation gap. It provides a basis for examining why increased participation in elections does not necessarily result in corresponding representation in legislative institutions.

5. S. G. V. Shyamala (2026)

Shyamala, in “Women Empowerment Process in India: An Overview,” examines women's empowerment as a broad process involving different dimensions of social, political, and

economic development. The study provides a broader conceptual background for understanding the relationship between political representation and women's empowerment.

1.5 RESEARCH GAP

Election participation, empowerment, and representation have all been studied in previous research on women's political representation in India, but there are still a number of gaps. The majority of research focuses on women's numerical presence rather than their significant impact on political decision-making. Despite high voter turnout, women continue to be underrepresented among candidates and elected officials. The status of local government institutions, State Legislative Assemblies, and Parliament has received little attention. More research is also needed to determine how socioeconomic variables like work, education, and economic independence relate to political engagement. It is necessary to conduct a comprehensive study of structural hurdles, such as sexism, political party practices, financial limitations, social views, and political violence. Additionally, nothing is known about how well reservation policies work to achieve significant political empowerment. Thus, by combining electoral participation, institutional representation, socioeconomic variables, structural impediments, and substantive engagement, this study critically investigates women's political representation in India.

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To trace the evolution of women's political participation and representation in India.
2. To analyse the role of constitutional reservation in promoting women's representation in local and legislative institutions.
3. To identify the major legal and institutional barriers affecting women's political representation.
4. To suggest appropriate legal and institutional measures for strengthening women's effective political participation and representation in India.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the constitutional and legal framework governing women's political representation in India?
2. How has women's political representation evolved in India?

3. To what extent have constitutional and legal measures contributed to increasing women's political representation?
4. Why does a gap continue to exist between women's participation as voters and their representation as elected representatives?
5. Does increased numerical representation of women necessarily result in substantive political representation?
6. What are the major legal and institutional barriers affecting women's political representation in India?
7. How have Indian courts approached issues relating to gender equality, affirmative action and political participation?
8. What is the legal significance of the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023 for women's representation in legislative institutions?
9. What legal and institutional measures can strengthen the effective political representation of women in India?

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.8.1 Nature of the Research

The present study adopts a doctrinal legal research methodology. The research is librarybased and focuses on the systematic examination, interpretation and critical analysis of legal principles relating to women's political representation in India. The uploaded law research guide identifies doctrinal research as the analysis of constitutions, statutes, case law and legal principles and explains that doctrinal research may rely on primary legal sources along with secondary academic materials.

1.8.2 Primary Sources

The primary sources for the present research include:

- The Constitution of India, 1950;
- Constitutional Amendments;
- Relevant Central and State legislation;
- Electoral laws and regulations;
- Judicial decisions of the Supreme Court of India and relevant High Courts;
- Parliamentary and legislative materials;
- Government reports;
- Law Commission reports;

- Relevant committee reports and recommendations.

1.8.3 Secondary Sources

The secondary sources include:

- Books on constitutional and electoral law;
- Research articles;
- Law journals;
- Academic papers;
- Government and institutional reports;
- Commentaries;
- Relevant scholarly literature relating to women, gender equality and political representation.

The uploaded guide similarly recommends using reliable primary sources such as the Constitution, Acts, rules, regulations and case law, together with secondary sources such as law journals, books, articles, reports, research papers and committee reports.

1.8.4 Method of Analysis

The collected materials are analysed through interpretation and critical examination of constitutional provisions, legislation and judicial decisions. The study examines the development of legal principles relating to equality, non-discrimination, affirmative action, reservation and political representation. The research also critically evaluates the arguments presented in existing academic literature to identify areas of agreement, disagreement and research gaps. The analysis is qualitative and does not involve primary empirical data collection.

1.8.5 Scope of Doctrinal Analysis

The study focuses on the legal and constitutional dimensions of women's political representation in India. It examines relevant legal provisions, judicial developments, reservation mechanisms and constitutional developments relating to women's representation. No survey, questionnaire, interview, fieldwork or other empirical research method is adopted.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study is subject to the following limitations:

1. The study is restricted to doctrinal legal research and therefore does not include interviews, questionnaires, surveys or field studies.
2. The research primarily focuses on the constitutional, legal and institutional dimensions

of women's political representation in India.

3. The study does not independently collect empirical data from women voters, candidates, elected representatives or political parties.
4. Social, economic and political factors are considered only to the extent that they are relevant to the legal and constitutional analysis.
5. The study depends upon available primary and secondary legal materials, judicial decisions, academic literature and published reports.
6. The practical impact of recent constitutional developments may require further evaluation after their implementation and sufficient institutional experience.
7. The study does not attempt to examine every aspect of women's empowerment and is specifically focused on political representation.

1.10 SCHEME OF THE STUDY

The present study is divided into six chapters, arranged to provide a systematic and critical examination of women's political representation in India.

Chapter I – Introduction: The first chapter provides the foundation of the research. It discusses the background and significance of the study and presents the review of literature, research gap, research objectives, research questions, doctrinal research methodology and limitations of the study.

Chapter II – Constitutional and Legal Framework Relating to Women's Political Representation: The second chapter examines the constitutional and legal framework governing women's political representation. It focuses on constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination, affirmative action, reservation provisions and relevant electoral laws.

Chapter III – Evolution and Existing Position of Women's Political Representation in India: The third chapter traces the historical development of women's political participation and representation. It examines women's representation in Parliament, State Legislative Assemblies and local self-government institutions and discusses the development of reservation as a mechanism for improving representation.

Chapter IV – Critical Analysis of Women's Political Representation in India: The fourth chapter critically examines the major challenges affecting women's political representation. It analyses the electorate-representation gap, institutional barriers and other relevant factors. It also examines the distinction between descriptive and substantive representation.

Chapter V – Judicial Perspective and Recent Constitutional Developments: The fifth chapter examines relevant judicial decisions concerning gender equality, affirmative action and

political representation. It also analyses recent constitutional developments, particularly the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, in the context of women's reservation in legislative institutions.

Chapter VI – Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion: The final chapter presents the major findings emerging from the doctrinal analysis. It provides appropriate legal and institutional suggestions for strengthening women's political representation and concludes the study by assessing the effectiveness and limitations of the existing legal framework.

CHAPTER II

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FOUNDATIONS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

2.1 CONSTITUTIONAL VISION OF POLITICAL EQUALITY

The Constitution establishes equality as one of its foundational principles.

- Article 14 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- Article 15 prohibits discrimination on specified grounds, including sex.
- Article 15(3) permits the State to make special provisions for women and children.

These provisions together establish the constitutional basis for measures designed to address historical and structural disadvantages faced by women.

2.2 CONCEPT AND MEANING OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Political representation refers to the process through which individuals are elected or otherwise authorised to act on behalf of citizens in political institutions.

Women's political representation can be understood at several levels:

- representation as voters;
- representation as political party members;
- representation as electoral candidates;
- representation as elected representatives;
- representation in leadership positions; and
- participation in policy-making and decision-making.

Representation has both a **numerical** and a **substantive** dimension. Numerical representation asks:

How many women are present in political institutions?

Substantive representation asks:

Are women's concerns and interests effectively represented in political decision-making? A critical study must consider both dimensions.

2.3 WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation includes voting, campaigning, joining political parties, contesting elections, attending political meetings, participating in local governance and influencing public policy. The 2024 Lok Sabha election demonstrated the substantial electoral participation of women. The Election Commission recorded approximately 47.63 crore women electors and reported female voter turnout of 65.78 per cent, compared with 65.55 per cent for male electors. This indicates that women's role as voters has become an important component of the Indian electoral process. However, participation as voters does not automatically translate into representation as legislators.

2.4 EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN INDIA

The evolution of women's political representation may broadly be divided into four phases:

Phase I – Freedom Movement

Women participated in the national movement through political campaigns, public demonstrations, social reform movements and organisations.

Phase II – Constitutional Democracy

After independence, women received equal citizenship and voting rights under the constitutional system.

Phase III – Local Political Empowerment

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments created a constitutional framework for women's representation in rural and urban local government.

Phase IV – Legislative Representation

The 2023 constitutional amendment introduced a framework for one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, subject to the constitutional implementation conditions. Thus, the development of women's political representation has moved progressively from political citizenship towards institutional representation.

2.5 IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN A DEMOCRACY

Women's political representation is important for several reasons.

First, democratic institutions should reflect the diversity of the population. Second, political

representation provides women with an opportunity to participate directly in decisions affecting education, health, employment, safety, family welfare, infrastructure and social development. Third, women's participation can contribute to greater political visibility for issues that may otherwise receive inadequate attention. Fourth, representation can challenge traditional assumptions that political leadership is primarily a male domain. Finally, women's participation can strengthen the democratic principle that public institutions should be accessible to all citizens.

2.6 EQUALITY BEFORE LAW

Article 14 establishes a general constitutional guarantee of equality.

In the context of political representation, equality requires that women should not be denied political opportunities merely because of their sex.

However, substantive equality recognises that identical treatment may not always eliminate historical disadvantages.

This provides the constitutional justification for affirmative measures such as reservation.

2.7 PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION

Article 15(1) prohibits discrimination on grounds including sex. This provision is particularly relevant to political participation because women historically experienced restrictions and social barriers affecting their participation in public life. Article 15(3) allows special provisions for women, thereby enabling affirmative constitutional measures.

2.8 EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Article 16 provides equality of opportunity in matters relating to public employment. Although political representation and public employment are constitutionally distinct areas, the broader principle of equality of opportunity supports the constitutional commitment to eliminating gender-based exclusion from public life.

2.9 SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN

Special provisions for women are not necessarily inconsistent with equality. Instead, they can be understood as mechanisms for achieving substantive equality. Political reservation is based on the recognition that merely allowing women to contest elections does not necessarily create equal opportunities where social and institutional barriers remain.

2.10 UNIVERSAL ADULT FRANCHISE

Universal adult franchise is one of the most important foundations of political equality in India. The constitutional system gave adult citizens the right to participate in elections without discrimination based on sex. Consequently, women became equal political citizens from the commencement of the democratic constitutional system.

2.11 REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment strengthened Panchayati Raj Institutions, while the 74th Constitutional Amendment addressed urban local government. These amendments established constitutional provisions for reservation of seats for women in local bodies. This created an institutional pathway through which women could enter politics at the grassroots level.

2.12 CONSTITUTIONAL RESERVATION

Article 243D provides for reservation of seats for women in Panchayats. Similarly, Article 243T provides reservation for women in Municipalities. The constitutional minimum is one-third in the relevant local bodies, while several States have legislated for 50 per cent reservation. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj identifies Tamil Nadu among the States providing 50 per cent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

2.13 WOMEN'S RESERVATION IN LEGISLATIVE BODIES

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023 introduced provisions for reservation of one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and the Delhi Legislative Assembly. The amendment represents a significant constitutional development in the legal framework concerning women's representation in higher legislative institutions. Parliamentary material records that the legislation provides for 33 per cent reservation in these legislative bodies. Its implementation is connected to the constitutional process relating to delimitation and census-based allocation.

CHAPTER III

EVOLUTION AND PRESENT STATUS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN INDIA

3.1 WOMEN DURING THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Women participated in India's freedom movement in multiple ways. They participated in:

- protests;
- political campaigns;
- public meetings;
- constructive programmes; and
- nationalist organisations.

Their participation demonstrated that women were capable of performing important political and organisational roles. However, participation in the freedom movement did not automatically produce proportional representation in post-independence legislatures.

3.2 WOMEN IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Women participated in the Constituent Assembly and contributed to constitutional debates. Their participation was significant because the Assembly addressed questions of equality, citizenship, fundamental rights and political representation. The constitutional framework ultimately adopted universal adult franchise and equal political citizenship.

3.3 WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

Women have entered both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, but their representation has historically remained below equal or proportional representation. Parliamentary material states that 78 women were elected to the 17th Lok Sabha and that approximately 74–75 women were members of the 18th Lok Sabha depending on the counting date/source. This represents roughly 14 per cent of the House and demonstrates the continuing difference between women's share of the population and their representation in Parliament.

3.4 WOMEN IN STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES

Women's representation in State Legislative Assemblies has also generally remained limited. Several factors influence this situation:

- candidate selection by political parties;
- electoral competition;

- campaign finance;
- social attitudes;
- political networks;
- family responsibilities; and
- access to organisational resources.

Therefore, legislative representation cannot be understood solely through constitutional provisions.

3.5 WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS

Local government has become one of the most important avenues for women's political participation. Reservation has enabled large numbers of women to enter elected office. According to parliamentary material, approximately 14.5 lakh women were elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions, accounting for about 46 per cent of elected representatives in the cited data. The experience of local government demonstrates the potential of institutional reservation to expand women's political presence.

3.6 WOMEN IN URBAN LOCAL BODIES

Reservation has also facilitated women's participation in municipalities and other urban local institutions. Women elected to urban local bodies may participate in decisions relating to:

- sanitation;
- water supply;
- roads;
- public health;
- local infrastructure;
- welfare programmes; and
- community development.

This provides women with practical political experience and opportunities to develop leadership skills.

3.7 ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

Women's participation as voters has increased substantially. The Election Commission reported that female voter turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha election was 65.78 per cent, slightly higher than male turnout of 65.55 per cent. It also reported that women constituted 48.62 per cent of

registered electors. The increasing participation of women voters is therefore an important feature of contemporary Indian elections.

3.8 POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Women have occupied important constitutional and political positions in India. Their presence demonstrates that women can participate at different levels of political authority. However, individual examples of women reaching senior positions should not be treated as evidence that gender equality has been fully achieved across political institutions. The appropriate assessment requires examination of the broader representation of women across institutions and social groups.

CHAPTER IV

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR PROMOTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

1.1 CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS

The Constitution provides the basic framework for political equality through:

- equality before law;
- prohibition of discrimination;
- special provisions for women; and
- reservation in local government.

1.2 REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT

The Representation of the People Acts provide the statutory framework governing elections to Parliament and State Legislatures. They regulate matters such as:

- electoral qualifications;
- election procedures;
- nomination;
- electoral offences;
- corrupt practices; and
- election disputes.

The legislation applies to women and men alike, establishing a common electoral framework. However, equal electoral rules do not by themselves guarantee equal access to candidacy.

1.3 73RD CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The 73rd Amendment gave constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions. Reservation for women became an important mechanism for increasing women's presence in rural political institutions. This changed the structure of grassroots politics by creating institutional opportunities for women who might otherwise have had limited access to electoral politics.

1.4 74TH CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The 74th Amendment strengthened constitutional recognition of urban local government. Reservation for women in municipalities enabled women to participate in urban political decision-making. The importance of this amendment lies in the creation of a structured pathway for women to enter local governance.

1.5 106TH CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023 introduced provisions concerning reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. It represents a movement from local-level constitutional reservation towards a framework for women's representation in higher legislative institutions. The critical question is therefore not merely whether reservation exists, but how effectively it translates into women's political leadership and substantive participation.

1.6 ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

The Election Commission plays a central role in conducting elections and maintaining electoral rolls. Its initiatives concerning voter registration and participation have contributed to greater inclusion. The 2024 electoral data demonstrates the significant participation of women in the electorate.

1.7 NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

The National Commission for Women plays an institutional role in addressing issues relating to women's rights and gender equality. Its work can contribute to political empowerment by increasing awareness of legal rights and highlighting structural discrimination.

1.8 POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties are extremely important because they function as gateways to electoral representation.

Parties determine:

- candidate selection;
- political training;
- leadership opportunities; and
- access to organisational networks.

Therefore, constitutional reservation alone cannot fully address underrepresentation if political party structures remain unequal.

1.9 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Civil society organisations and women's organisations contribute through:

- political awareness;
- leadership training;
- voter education;
- advocacy; and
- capacity-building.

CHAPTER V

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN INDIA

5.1 PATRIARCHAL SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Patriarchy remains an important structural factor influencing women's political participation. Traditional expectations may associate women primarily with household responsibilities while associating political leadership with men. Such attitudes can influence families, voters, political parties and institutions.

5.2 POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL BARRIERS

Election campaigns require:

- financial resources;
- organisational networks;
- public visibility;
- political connections;
- campaign workers; and
- sustained political activity.

Women may have unequal access to these resources.

5.3 FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Political campaigns can require substantial expenditure. Women who lack independent financial resources may find it more difficult to contest competitive elections. Financial dependence can also reduce political autonomy.

5.4 POLITICAL PARTY BARRIERS

Political parties play a decisive role in candidate selection. Even where women constitute a large part of the electorate, they may not receive proportional opportunities to contest elections.

This creates a distinction between:

women's electoral importance and women's candidate representation.

5.5 VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION

Women in politics may face political intimidation, threats, harassment and gender-based hostility. Such conduct can discourage women from entering politics and can affect their ability to participate freely. Protection from violence is therefore essential to meaningful political participation.

5.6 ONLINE HARASSMENT

Digital platforms have created new opportunities for political communication but have also introduced new forms of harassment. Women politicians may face:

- gender-based insults;
- sexualised harassment;
- misinformation; and
- coordinated online attacks.

This can discourage political expression and public participation.

5.7 GENDER STEREOTYPES

Women politicians may be judged differently from men. Their appearance, family life, personal behaviour and communication style may receive disproportionate attention. Such stereotypes can affect public perceptions and political opportunities.

5.8 FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

Women frequently continue to carry substantial household and caregiving responsibilities.

Political careers require mobility, time and continuous public engagement. The conflict between political responsibilities and unequal domestic responsibilities can therefore become a barrier.

5.9 CASTE AND CLASS BARRIERS

Gender does not operate independently of caste and class. Women from disadvantaged communities may experience multiple layers of exclusion. Therefore, women's representation should also be examined through an intersectional framework.

5.10 RURAL–URBAN DIFFERENCES

Political opportunities can differ between rural and urban environments. Rural women may face:

- limited mobility;
- restricted access to information;
- economic dependence;
- social pressure; and
- inadequate institutional support.

At the same time, local government reservation has created significant opportunities for rural women to enter political institutions.

5.11 PROXY REPRESENTATION

One important concern in local governance is the possibility that an elected woman may be influenced or controlled by male relatives. This phenomenon is commonly discussed through the concept of **proxy representation**. However, the existence of such practices should not lead to the assumption that all women representatives lack autonomy. Many women elected through reservation acquire experience, confidence and independent decision-making capacity.

5.12 REPRESENTATION VERSUS EFFECTIVE POWER

The central critical issue is whether occupying a seat necessarily means possessing political power. A woman may technically hold an elected position but have limited:

- access to information;
- administrative authority;
- financial control;

- party support;
- decision-making power; or
- institutional independence.

Therefore, political empowerment must be measured through both representation and actual influence.

CHAPTER VI

JUDICIAL APPROACH TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

6.1 ROLE OF THE JUDICIARY IN GENDER EQUALITY

The Indian judiciary has played an important role in interpreting constitutional equality. Judicial decisions concerning women's employment, dignity, discrimination and autonomy have contributed to the development of substantive equality principles. Although not every gender-equality case directly concerns electoral representation, such decisions provide constitutional principles relevant to women's participation in public life.

6.2 C.B. MUTHAMMA V. UNION OF INDIA

The case concerned discriminatory service rules affecting women in the Indian Foreign Service. The Supreme Court examined discriminatory conditions affecting women employees. Its significance lies in the judicial rejection of gender-based institutional discrimination and the broader constitutional principle that women should not be disadvantaged merely because of their sex.

6.3 AIR INDIA V. NERGESH MEERZA

The Supreme Court examined discriminatory service conditions applicable to women employees. The case is important for understanding constitutional scrutiny of gender-based classifications. Its broader relevance lies in the principle that policies affecting women must satisfy constitutional equality requirements.

6.4 ANUJ GARG V. HOTEL ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

The Supreme Court considered restrictions imposed on women's employment in establishments serving alcohol. The judgment is significant because it moved away from protective assumptions that restrict women's autonomy. It supports the broader idea that women should

be enabled to participate in public and economic life rather than being excluded in the name of protection.

6.5 VISHAKA V. STATE OF RAJASTHAN

The Supreme Court recognised the importance of protecting women from sexual harassment in the workplace. Although the case was not specifically about electoral politics, its principles concerning dignity, equality and safe participation are relevant to women working in public institutions.

6.6 JOSEPH SHINE V. UNION OF INDIA

The Supreme Court invalidated the adultery offence under the Indian Penal Code. The judgment emphasised constitutional values of dignity, autonomy and equality. These principles are relevant to understanding women as autonomous citizens rather than individuals subject to patriarchal control.

6.7 JUDICIAL RECOGNITION OF SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY

The broader judicial trajectory demonstrates that constitutional equality cannot always be understood as identical treatment. Substantive equality requires examination of whether legal and institutional arrangements actually permit women to participate with dignity and autonomy. This principle is important for analysing political representation.

CHAPTER VII

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN INDIA

7.1 FORMAL EQUALITY AND SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY

India provides formal political equality to women. Women can vote, contest elections and hold public office. However, formal equality alone does not eliminate:

- financial inequalities;
- social restrictions;
- party-level barriers;
- gender stereotypes; and
- unequal family responsibilities.

Therefore, substantive equality requires policies that address actual barriers.

7.2 DESCRIPTIVE AND SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION

Descriptive representation concerns the numerical presence of women. Substantive representation concerns whether women are able to influence political decisions. A political institution may have increased numbers of women without necessarily ensuring equal influence. Therefore, both forms of representation should be assessed.

7.3 RESERVATION AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Reservation provides an institutional mechanism for correcting historical underrepresentation. Its strongest demonstrated impact has been at the grassroots level. The large number of elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions illustrates the capacity of reservation to expand women's political presence. However, reservation should be accompanied by:

- training;
- institutional support;
- access to information;
- financial autonomy;
- protection from intimidation; and
- leadership development.

7.4 WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Local government provides an important entry point into political leadership. Women representatives can gain experience in:

- public administration;
- budgeting;
- local development;
- public speaking;
- negotiation; and
- political decision-making.

Local political experience may therefore contribute to the development of a broader pool of women leaders.

7.5 POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATE SELECTION

Political parties are central to determining who receives opportunities to contest elections. Greater representation requires attention to:

- transparent candidate selection;
- internal party democracy;
- leadership opportunities;
- political training;
- campaign resources; and
- sustained support for women candidates.

7.6 INTERSECTIONALITY

Women should not be treated as a single homogeneous political category. Political participation can be affected by:

Gender + Caste + Class + Location + Education + Economic Status + Social Background.

An effective representation policy should therefore consider multiple forms of disadvantage.

7.7 MEDIA AND WOMEN IN POLITICS

Media plays a significant role in shaping political perceptions. Balanced political coverage can increase public awareness of women's leadership. However, excessive attention to appearance, family life or personal matters rather than policy positions can reinforce gender stereotypes.

7.8 DIGITAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Social media has created new opportunities for political communication. Women can use digital platforms to:

- communicate directly with voters;
- build political networks;
- discuss policy; and
- increase visibility.

7.9 INSTITUTIONAL GAPS

The existence of laws does not guarantee implementation. Important gaps may arise between:
Constitutional Promise → Legislation → Institutional Practice → Actual Political Empowerment.

The effectiveness of women's political representation therefore depends on implementation as much as legal recognition.

7.10 HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Political participation is closely connected with equality, dignity, freedom and non-discrimination. From a human-rights perspective, women must be able to participate in public affairs without discrimination or intimidation. Therefore, women's political representation should be treated not merely as an electoral issue but as an issue of equal citizenship and democratic rights.

CHAPTER VIII

FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

8.1 MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study makes the following findings:

1. The Constitution establishes a strong legal foundation for political equality.
2. Women possess equal voting rights within the Indian democratic framework.
3. Women's electoral participation has become substantial.
4. Women's representation in Parliament and State Legislatures remains comparatively limited.
5. Local government reservation has significantly expanded women's access to elected office.
6. Several States provide 50 per cent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
7. The 106th Constitutional Amendment represents an important development concerning women's representation in higher legislative institutions.
8. Political parties remain important gatekeepers for legislative candidacy.
9. Social and economic barriers continue to affect women's political opportunities.
10. Numerical representation alone cannot guarantee substantive political empowerment.
11. Intersectional barriers affect women differently depending on caste, class, rural/urban location and economic status.
12. Political safety and freedom from harassment are necessary for meaningful participation.

8.2 FINDINGS ON ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

The evidence indicates that women have become highly significant participants in the electoral process. The 2024 Election Commission data recorded female voter turnout of 65.78 per cent, slightly higher than male turnout of 65.55 per cent. This demonstrates that the question is no

longer simply whether women participate as voters. The more significant question is how their substantial electoral participation can translate into greater representation among candidates and legislators.

8.3 FINDINGS ON POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The representation of women differs significantly according to the level of government. At the grassroots level, constitutional and State-level reservation has produced large-scale participation. At Parliament and State Legislature levels, women's representation has remained substantially lower. This demonstrates the importance of examining political representation institution by institution.

8.4 FINDINGS ON RESERVATION

Reservation has demonstrated its capacity to create entry opportunities for women. However, reservation should not be considered the complete solution. Political empowerment requires:

- education;
- political training;
- financial independence;
- institutional support;
- leadership opportunities; and
- freedom from political violence.

8.5 EVALUATION OF HYPOTHESIS

- Legal provisions support women's political representation.
- Reservation has increased women's participation, especially at the local level.
- Women remain underrepresented in higher legislative bodies.
- Social, economic and political barriers continue to exist.
- **H₀ is not fully supported; H₁ is supported.**

8.6 ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Constitution provides equality and political rights to women.
2. Women's political representation has gradually increased.
3. Local bodies show greater women's representation due to reservation.
4. Reservation has improved women's entry into politics.

5. Patriarchy, finance, family responsibilities and political barriers limit participation.
6. Political parties play an important role in candidate selection.
7. Numerical representation does not always ensure real decision-making power.
8. Caste, class and rural–urban differences affect participation.
9. Judiciary has strengthened gender equality and women's rights.
10. Legal, institutional and political reforms are needed for effective representation.

8.7 SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase women's representation in political parties.
- Provide political leadership training.
- Improve access to campaign finance.
- Strengthen women's participation in local governance.
- Prevent political violence and harassment.
- Address online harassment of women politicians.

8.8 CONCLUSION

Women's political representation is an essential component of democratic equality in India. The Indian constitutional framework has established important guarantees of equality and political participation. The introduction of reservation in local government created a major institutional pathway for women's participation in grassroots democracy. The subsequent constitutional development concerning reservation in legislative bodies represents another important stage in the legal framework for women's representation. At the same time, the existence of constitutional rights and reservation cannot alone guarantee substantive equality. The continuing difference between women's high electoral participation and their comparatively lower representation among legislators demonstrates the importance of examining the entire political process. The central issue is therefore not merely how many women occupy political positions, but whether women have equal opportunities to enter political institutions, contest elections, exercise authority, influence policy and participate in decision-making without discrimination or intimidation. A meaningful approach to women's political representation requires a combination of constitutional protection, reservation, political-party reform, leadership development, financial access, institutional support and protection from gender-based violence and harassment. Women's political representation should ultimately be understood as an issue of equal citizenship, democratic participation, dignity and substantive

equality. The objective should not simply be the numerical inclusion of women but the creation of political institutions in which women can participate effectively and independently.

8.9 SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- ❖ The impact of the 106th Constitutional Amendment on women's representation after implementation.
- ❖ Comparative representation of women across different State Legislative Assemblies.
- ❖ The long-term political careers of women elected through Panchayati Raj reservation.
- ❖ The relationship between local political experience and entry into State and national politics.
- ❖ Women's representation across caste and socio-economic groups.
- ❖ The effect of social media on women's political participation.
- ❖ Online violence against women politicians.

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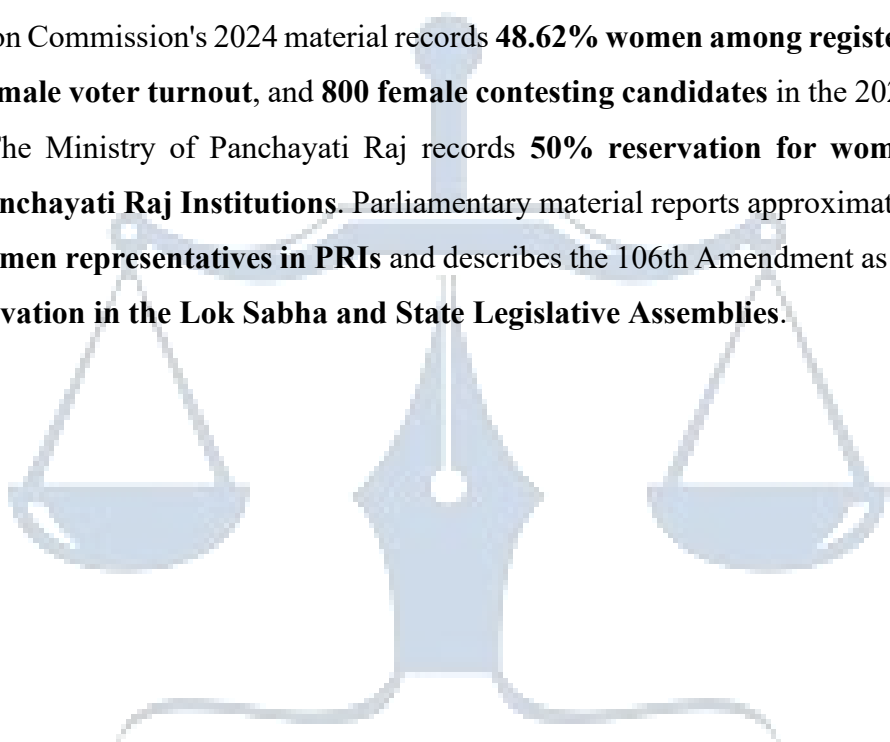
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The Election Commission's 2024 material records **48.62% women among registered electors, 65.78% female voter turnout, and 800 female contesting candidates** in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj records **50% reservation for women in Tamil Nadu's Panchayati Raj Institutions**. Parliamentary material reports approximately **14.5 lakh elected women representatives in PRIs** and describes the 106th Amendment as providing for **33% reservation in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies**.



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