GENDER POLITICS
AND QUOTA FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

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Abstract: Women's numbers in formal decision-making bodies have not increased over the years in India. The statistical records show that there has been only a marginal increase in the last few decades in the number of women candidates fielded during the elections. Women's enhanced participation in governance structures is viewed as the key to redress gender politics and inequalities in societies, especially in India. The main premise of this study is that the quota for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) in India strengthens the political empowerment of women, transforms the democracy and provides an answer to gender politics in India. It is widely recognised that reservation of seats for women in the local bodies and women's proactive participation on a large scale in the management of the local affairs in the villages has enhanced their status and rights. Thus reservation for women in PRI contributes to the process and project of women's empowerment.

Key Terms: Gender Politics, Quota for Women, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Women Empowerment, Democracy, Reservation, Gender Justice, 73-74 Constitutional Amendment Act, Critical Mass, Patriarchy.

1. Introduction

Empowerment of women in the society is a myth until they are conferred equality before law.[1] The foundation of freedom, justice and fraternity is based on the recognition of the inherent dignity and of equal and inalienable rights to all women of the society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 2 affirms that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without distinction of any kind."[2] The Constitution of India is based on the principles of equality. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth under Article 15. Though the constitution envisages political equality for men and women under Articles 325 and 326, women in India, by and large, have not benefited from this right.[3] The inadequate representation of women in decision-making bodies is one of the major factors that have contributed to their low status in the society.[4]

The statistical records show that there has been only a marginal increase in the last few decades in the number of women candidates fielded during the elections in India. Women's participation in positions of power in both houses of the Parliament has never exceeded 15% of all seats. The exception has been the 1991-1996 elections wherein their representation was at 15.5%. The trend after has been one of decline stagnating at around 8 percent, indicating a continued marginalisation of women in these institutions.[5] At the State level, their membership in the legislatures in many States is lower than their percentage in the Parliament. The latest data from the States show that Delhi (12.86%) has the highest proportion of women members followed by Andhra Pradesh (9.52%) and Kerala (9.29%). Similarly, women in the decision-making bodies of the major political parties range from a mere 5.1 per cent in the CPI (M) to 12.5% in the BJP.[6]

2. Quota for Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI)

For political empowerment of women, women quota system in PRIs has been one of the pioneering approaches. This will enable women to participate in local governance and will lead to better public decisions which reflect local priorities. This in turn will lead to greater efficiency in public expenditures, improved governance, and greater equity in the democracy. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 has reserved thirty three percent of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipal bodies respectively. With these constitutional amendments, over three million

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[1] R. C. Kessler and J. D. McLeod, "Sex Differences in Vulnerability to Undesirable Life Events," *American Sociological Review*, 49, 5 (1984), 620-631, 612.

[2] http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/, accessed on 24 September 2013.

[3] Neera Desai, "Indian March towards Equity: A Review of a Decade and half of Action and Policy on Women," *Janata: A Journal of Democratic Socialism* 45, 8 (1991), 9.

[4] George Mathew, *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States of India*, New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences, 2005, 23.

[5] Desai, "Indian March towards Equity," 18.

[6] Desai, "Indian March towards Equity," 67.

women are now actively participating in shaping the policies and programs of the country, though only at the local levels of governance and not at the State and Central levels. These amendments have given women the authority to deliberate, debate and participate in the process of formulating policy and in the choice and implementation of development programs that impact people's daily lives.[7] The empowerment of women, through a well-devised system of reservation, has not only brought about a change in socio-political culture but has also led to a virtual transformation of the rural scene where people have increasingly become aware of their rights and have started demanding their share in power.

Rural India has a total of 225,000 Gram Panchayats with a membership of 2,250,000 elected representatives. Of these, women constitute 950,000 or a third of the elected members. There are 150,000 scheduled caste and scheduled tribe members of which 50,000 are women. Of a total of 225,000 chairpersons, again one third of them or 75,000 are women in the year 2005.[8] In fact, in 2005, nine States have gone beyond the 33% reservation quota and four states have gone above 40% – Kerala 57.24%, Assam 50.38, Gujarat 49.30%., and Karnataka 43.6%. In 2011, 22 states have gone beyond their reserved quota. Currently, every five years, about 3.4 million representatives are elected by the people of whom one million are women. More than 60 city corporations, about 700 town municipalities, about 215 district panchayats, more than 2,330 block panchayats and about 10,010 gram panchayats, have women chairpersons.[9] A large number of hitherto socially excluded groups and communities like the tribals and dalits are now included in these decision-making bodies. A space has been created for Indian women to emerge as a formidable force to fight for social justice and human rights.[10]

This is a significant step towards achieving the constitutional goal of equality by making democracy more vibrant. Women's enhanced participation in governance is viewed as the key to redress gender politics and inequalities in societies, especially in India. The main premise of this research is that the quota for women in the political institutions strengthens the political empowerment of women and transforms the democracy in India. An affirmative state initiative is necessary to facilitate and enable women to participate at these levels of political action.

3. The Meaning of Political Empowerment and Democracy

The involvement of women in the political arena and in decision-making roles is an important tool for empowerment as well as monitoring standards of political performance in a democracy. World Bank describes empowerment as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. It is the process of transferring decision-making power from influential sectors to poor communities and individuals who have traditionally have been excluded from it.[11]

Political empowerment can be understood as a multidimensional social process by which people without means of self protection or control over changes affecting their lives, equip themselves with knowledge, skills and resources which increase their capacity to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes which in turn enables them to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. In its broadest sense, empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice and action. Political empowerment shows in the capacity to analyse, organise and mobilise.[12] It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.[13] This results in collective action which is needed for collective change; a process for ensuring equity, equality and gender justice in all of the critical areas of the lives of women, especially of political arena.[14]

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[7]E. K. Santha, *Political Participation in Panchayati Raj: Haryana, Kerela and Tamil Nadu*, New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences, 2004, 37.

[8]George Mathew, *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States of India*, New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences, 2011, 20.

[9]Nirmala Buch, *Women's Experiences in New Panchayats: The Emerging Leadership of Rural Women*, New Delhi: CWDS, 2000, 235-252.

[10]Jill M. Bystydzienski, *Women Transforming Politics: Worldwide Strategies for Empowerment*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, 45.

[11]Alsop Ruth et al., "Inclusion and Local Elected Governments: The Panchayati Raj System in India" Social Development Paper 37, *World Bank, South Asia Region, Social Development Unit*, http://go.worldbank.org/S9B3DNEZ00, accessed on August 15, 2013.

[12]Nanette Page and Cheryl E. Czuba, "Empowerment: What Is It?" *Journal of Extension* 35 (2002), 57.

[13]Page and Czuba, "Empowerment: What Is It?" 57-59.

[14]Oxaal Zoe and Baden Sally, *Gender and Empowerment: Definitions, Approaches and Implications for Policy*, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, 1997, 123.

4. Political Women Empowerment

The institutions of family, religion, education, media, law, etc. have sometimes negatively impacted on the condition and position of women and different degrees of power are being sustained and perpetuated through these institutions.[15] The power and control exercised over women for a prolonged period of time has placed them at the lowest stratum of society. This was established by patriarchy which stresses the prevalence of unequal power equation between men and women. Patriarchy has been prevalent though several theories disprove that there is a natural justification for patriarchy based on biological differences between men and women. This discrimination ultimately gets reflected in the Human Development Index where one-half of the human beings have failed to make progress in the ladder of development.[16] When looking into the corrective measures, suggestions came in the form of empowerment process of women, by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual resources and challenge the ideology of patriarchy and the gender-based discrimination in all the institutions and structures of society.[17] For the realisation of women empowerment, organising and acknowledging them as a political force is a primary requirement.

In the Indian context, this has been implemented through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act with which women are enabled to represent not only the problems of women but also the society at large. Generally women's perspectives are significantly different from men's as they are more associated with 'welfare and protective' activities. If these activities are intertwined with political power, the result would be potentially remarkable. The space created for women in governance is expected to bring such a conspicuous change.

The need for women's presence in politics should not be judged merely in terms of equity, i.e., giving reservation. Rather the process should enable women to participate effectively for more socially responsive governance. But this is not going to be an easy task since this process strikes at the root of existing power relations.[18] The existing power structure in the form of patriarchy, ideology and other institutions would show stiff resistance to change. With this backdrop, the present study analyses the position of women in governance, the problems they encounter and their performance in village panchayats in India.

Women are brought forward into the local political arena through the method of reservation of seats and they form 'critical mass'[19] which ought to result in governance more responsive to women. Even though the process of women empowerment is ongoing, this space for women in politics has become an important area of analysis, because the socialization process has created differences between men and women and has placed men at the top of the hierarchy, who would not allow women to exercise their political power. Women's perceptions are moulded with the ideology which they imbibed from the socialization process and there are external factors which try to bridle women by domination and restriction. The conundrum faced by women in this transmission process can be broadly classified under three heads, viz., ideological level, pragmatic level and domain level.[20]

At the ideological level, for a long period, women have been subordinated to uphold male power and this is deeply embedded in the consciousness of women. Ideology is a complex structure of beliefs, values, attitudes, and ways of perceiving and analysing social reality – virtually, ways of thinking and perceiving.[21] Even though the objectives and policies of the state may be superficially egalitarian, the ideology has an upper hand in performing its task of sustaining unequal power structure. This can be challenged by the collective force where marginalized sections of society raise their voice and make themselves sources of social power.

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[15] Jill M. Bystydzienski, *Women Transforming Politics*, 45.

[16] Tony Addison, *Development Policy: An Introduction for Students*, New York: United Nations University Press, 2004, 9.

[17] Usha Ranee Choudhury, "Political Awareness and Women's Participation in Politics," *Gender Perspective: Participation, Empowerment and Development*, ed., Anil Dutta Mishra, New Delhi: Radha Publications,1999, 131-139

[18] Vasanthi Raman, "The Implementation of Quotas for Women: The Indian Experience," *Quota Workshops Report Series No. 1*, Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2002, 22-31.

[19] Dahlerup Drude, "Using Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation," <http://www.idea.int/publications/wip/upload/3_Dahlerup.pdf>, accessed on 30 August 2013.

[20] Kumud Sharma, "Power and Representation: Reservation for Women in India," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 6,1 (2000), 74.

[21] George Mathew, "Panchayati Raj Institutions and Human Rights in India," *International Council in Human Rights Policy*, 2002, <http://www.ichpr.org/paper_files/116_w_04.doc>, accessed on 30 August 2013.

The 'critical mass' of women has to perform 'critical action' to shake the basic source of dominance against them.

When women in power deal with their proceedings, repression of patriarchy takes its own course in the form of domination, oppression, character assassination, agitation and all other activities which rapidly subjugate women. Men in the fear of losing their traditional power and control over women react sharply against women in power. They may not be ready to free themselves from their role as oppressors and exploiters, and through various ways and means try to re-establish their power and strike women hard, trying to shackle them with psychological blows (where women are vulnerable mainly due to their socialization process).[22] Therefore, the process of women empowerment should co-opt men and make them realize that this process will relieve men from gender stereotyping. Changing gender relations will bring a fruitful result in the power-relations also. The burdens of male and female can get exchanged, leading to the insurance of using the power resources sanely and safely.[23]

At the domain level, the state is not women-friendly. This has been witnessed in many areas like framing legal framework, policies and programmes. These are mostly gender-neutral instead of gender-transformative and ameliorative. In the era of globalization, the state is dominated by market factors and everything is equated in terms of production and profit. In this milieu, women are worse affected. In many cases it is observed that when women show resistance, the legal framework fails to rescue them. The dominance shown by these factors ultimately affects the performance of women and the state fails to create conducive environment to empower them. This can be solved only by adopting a strategy by creating enabling conditions to change women's position. The collective voice from women will serve as a catalyst.[24]

In all these three dimensions, the power balance is tilted towards men; hence the notion of power has to be re-defined. On the whole, the process should enable women to challenge and change these three dimensions. Even though this is a multi-layered and a prolonged process, the presence of women in grassroot governance for more than half-a-

decade proves their capacity so far. Their able leadership provided in terms of pro-poor, pro-nature, pro-community, pro-women, and pro-dalit activities is a great stimulant to the empowerment process of women.[25]

Without considering the voices of women in governance, the concept of human development will be full of flaws. Therefore, the state has to create enabling conditions to change women's position; men should co-opt themselves in this process; and finally women have to bring a change at their ideological level to quicken the process further.

5. The Positive Impacts of Quota for Women in the PRI

Women being new to power are performing amazingly in spite of the problem posed to them by society. What they need is a helpful platform for their action. They consider the difficulties as an opportunity to show their ability but the hard fact is the mental trauma they undergo. Substantive measures should be taken in this regard by the civil society and the state. The major inferences drawn from cases which show the present condition and position of women in power are briefly explained and analysed below. These cases reflect their promising performance amidst the colossal problems.

Jesu Mary, the President of Michaelpattinam Panchayat of Ramanathapuram district is a lady with a strong determination; she first convinces her opponents to make her task easier.[26] There was no water source in the village and providing drinking water supply was the first priority in her village. With the help of Tamil Nadu Water and Drainage (TWAD) Board, she got her village included in the TWAD Board drinking water supply scheme. When she attended a training programme, she came to know of the importance of rainwater harvesting. With the help of SHGs, she installed the structures in all the 340 houses, but it took several months for the people to realize the importance of these structures. People started believing only when they saw the water level rising in their wells. In the whole state it was the first Panchayat to do rain water harvesting in all the houses in the Panchayat. This activity has credited her with the award by the World Bank and she was sent to Washington to receive the award.

Jesu Mary got five other Gram Panchayat women leaders interested in this work and then five other Panchayats also carried out this work

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[22]Stephen Castles, "Studying Social Transformation," *International Political Science Review* 10 (2001), 13-32.

[23]Raman, "The implementation of Quotas for Women," 22-32.

[24]Ruma Bannerjee, "Women in Panchayati Raj: A Study in West Bengal," Calcutta: Development Dialogues, 1995, 14.

[25] Poornima Vyasulu Vinod, "Women in Panchayati Raj: Grassroots Democracy in India," *Experience from Malgudi*, Delhi: UNDP, 1999, 56.

[26]K. Bunagan et al., "The Quota System: Women's Boon or Bane?" in *Women around the World*, April 2000, www.cld.org/waw5.htm, accessed on 15 August 2013.

because of her influence. Seeing this success, the Government of Tamil Nadu made it mandatory to install rain water-harvesting mechanism in all the buildings of Tamil Nadu. According to Jesu Mary for all her success, her opponents are responsible. Whenever she wants to introduce anything she discusses with them. She feels that critics are needed for a healthy democracy and critics' arguments will help the Panchayats to perfect the administration.[27]

Fatima Bi head of Gram Panchayat of Kalva has won the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Race Against Poverty Award from the Asia-Pacific region for her remarkable work as village council leader. Inspired in her new role by the angry, social-justice seeking heroine in a highly popular Andhra Film, Fatima Bi began organizing women for developing the village.[28] Through her efforts and leadership the village has roads, school building and check dams. She initiated a Rs. 200,000 scheme to dig a five kilometre irrigation canal and clear about 200 hectares of fallow land for paddy cultivation. On Fatima's encouragement, the women began saving a small amount of money every month and within a year, 40 thrift groups with 300 women members had saved Rs. 200,000. Impressed by this, the UNDP granted Rs. 1.2 million as an interest free loan to the Village Development Organisation in Kalva. Managed by a committee of representatives of women's self help groups, the village organization has Rs. 2.0 million and loans granted by it have helped many families to start small rural enterprises. Once poor and backward Kalva now stands out as a well-to-do village with modern amenities in almost all the houses.

Rani Sathappan, the President of K. Rayavaram Gram Panchayat in Pudukkottai District, is in her second term.[29] Sections/groups in a village community had a clash due to difference of opinion, particularly in a case related to temple celebrations. Two different groups claimed that the 'Muthal Mariyathai' i.e., the first honours, had to be given to its leaders. This resulted in the discontinuance of temple celebration for a decade. The Panchayat Council decided to bring the two opposing parties to a peaceful solution. Rani took special interest and played a vital role in bringing about a settlement between those groups and, at last the temple 'Kumbabisekam' was performed successfully along with the festival celebrations.

During the initial period, her focus was on the provision of basic amenities to the villagers. In course of time she came to understand the problems of farmers. There were three ooranies and four kanmais in her Panchayat. Two kanmais belong to the PWD and two are under the Union Panchayat, when there was an encroachment on the inlet channel by an individual belonging to a nearby village. The Panchayat decided to deal with the issue carefully, otherwise there would be a clash between the two villages. Rani attended the monthly grievance day and brought the matter to the attention of the District Collector, who arranged for an inspection by the revenue officials. The revenue officials twisted the matter, and threatened that they would book the Panchayat President, if she did not obey the officials. She complained against the revenue officials. It is more than three years of struggle with the bureaucrats, but the encroachment is not yet removed. "Efforts will bring about change" is the slogan printed on her official letter pad.[30]

Another significant achievement is that she made her village plastic-free. Nearly ten animals died after swallowing polythene materials dumped in dustbins. Taking this tragedy to the Gram Sabha, she discussed this issue with the people. Having convinced the people she evolved the norm that no one should use plastic articles in the Panchayat area and that individuals who violated the rule would be penalized.

Bhavani Ilango, the President of Merpanaikadu Gram Panchayat, Pudukkottai district was totally opposed by a section of the men folk.[31] She was kidnapped by the opposition group from where she escaped. She decided to move closely with other women. She formed 23 Self Help Groups (SHGs). These SHGs helped the Panchayat in desilting a tank, which provided drinking water to the entire area. Valuing the work done by the women worth Rs. 60,000/-, the officials helped the Panchayat by laying a pipeline for the supply of drinking water. She is confident that the Panchayats, especially women-headed Panchayats, can achieve many more things if they get the support of other women. She felt that men have not changed their perception and attitude towards women even after seeing the transformation effected by the women leaders in Panchayats. They are to be conscientized on the concept of gender and its implications.

The firmness of these women shows that they are able leaders. Steps taken by Bhavani Ilango in spite of stiff resistance through male

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[27]M. Banerjee, "Women in Local Governance: Macro Myths, Micro Realities," *Social Change* 85 (1998), 87-100.

[28]Vinod, "Women in Panchayati Raj," 56.

[29]Buch, *Women and Panchayats*, 100.

[30]Vinod, "Women in Panchayati Raj," 63.

[31]Banerjee, "Women in Local Governance," 91.

dominance, Pappa's affirmative action against the politicians and bureaucrats, and Rani's action against the usage of plastics are a few examples of their resoluteness. Women act as an agent of change and once decided they will achieve their desired result in spite of all the hurdles.[32] They are changing their position from (i) Subordination to resistance, (ii) Curbs to challenge, and (iii) Suppression to co-optation. Of course, this phase is going to be the toughest phase for the whole society and women in particular, but there is a hope that change in power relations will bring favourable situation for development.

6. Change in the Women' Perception

Women have gained a sense of empowerment by asserting control over resources, officials and, most of all, by challenging men. It has also given many women a greater understanding of the workings of politics, in particular the importance of political parties. On the other hand, some women's involvement in PRI has helped them affirm their identity as women with particular and shared experiences. This self-perception arises from two sources: from women's own sense of their shared experience and from attitudes and imagery imposed on them by the men. It appears that gender can supersede class and party lines. Women have opened up the possibility for politics to have not only new faces but a new quality. Some of the ways in which women, through PRI, are changing governance are evident in the issues they choose to tackle; water, alcohol abuse, education, health and domestic violence. Women also express different values. Women value proximity, whether it is to a drinking water source, a fuel source, a crèche, a health centre, a court of justice or an office of administration. The enormous expansion of women's representation in decentralised government structures has highlighted the advantages of proximity, namely the redress of grievance and (most important of all) the ability to mobilise struggle at a local level where it is most meaningful. Thus women are helping to radicalize local government.

The self-confidence women gained through belonging to local organisations seems critical to enabling women to step out of unequal relationships.[33] This sense of freedom is even more profound when the group to which women belong is the PRI. This freedom is carried into the very activity of politics by these women. There is a visible difference, a sense of excitement, in the women of rural India.

On the other hand, some women's involvement in PRI has helped them affirm their identity as women with particular and shared experiences. A woman at a Panchayat meeting in Karnataka stated: "When we meet we work together as women, for our lobby. We don't take much notice of our party identities." Party politics, a necessary condition for classical democracy, is competitive, but the women bring a non-competitive or cooperative ethic as they are drawn to work together across party lines and seem to have similar interests. Gender can supersede class and party lines. Women have opened up the possibility for politics to have not only new faces but a new quality.

PRI has helped to change local government beyond simply increasing the numerical presence of women. Visible changes in the articulation of ideas and leadership qualities exhibited by this minority were noted in the survey between 1987, the first year, and 1990. Evidence from West Bengal and Rajasthan shows that when a woman is the chair of the local council, the percentage of village women attending the open Village Assemblies rises (in West Bengal from about 7 to 10%) This confirms the common observation that the presence of women in politics improves the rate of political participation of women in general.

7. The Arguments against the Reservation of Seats for Women in PRIs

Legal quotas to enhance women's representation, while increasingly common, are still highly controversial and heavily debated. Regardless of whether a person thinks that an equal representation of men and women is desirable, there are a number of arguments that speak against the introduction of legislated quotas for women's representation.

Some opponents to legislated quota claim that the women elected through quota are less competent than their male counterparts, and that the main reason for the low level of women candidates is that there are fewer competent potential women candidates.[34] Women are in this case are perceived to have been nominated only because of their gender; they are not perceived as being equally competent as their male counterparts.

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[32] Evelin Hust, "Political Representation and Empowerment: Women in the Institutions of Local Government in Orissa after the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution," *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics*, http://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/SAPOL/HPSACP.htm Working Paper No. 6, August 2002, accessed on 20 August 2013.

[33] Banerjee, "Women in Local Governance," 102.

[34] Bystydzienski, *Women Transforming Politics*, 46.

Women may therefore prefer to be elected without a quota.[35] Some argue that the basic freedom of choice of voters is taken away from voters if a certain number of seats in the legislature are reserved for women. Some argue that quota gives the erroneous idea that only women can represent women – while men can represent both men and women. This would work against women in gaining representation based on the political ideas they represent rather than on their gender. Legislated quota tends to benefit the wives, daughters, sisters, cousins, etc. of traditional male politicians, rather than women who have developed constituencies of their own.

Some argue that legal quotas are too difficult to pass and require a very strong majority in the legislature. From this point of view, legislated quotas would not work as a ground-breaking rule since a majority of both elected members and political party leadership must be committed to achieving gender equality already. Some argue that it is easier and just as effective to lobby for voluntary party quotas instead.[36] Some argue that legislated quotas place a ceiling on women's participation rather than a lower floor, and that this hinders women from achieving real parity. Some argue that reserved seats foster an environment where women compete against each other rather than working together to achieve more influence in politics.[37]

8. Conclusion
The state intervention in the form of reservation of seats for women through 73rd and 74th Amendment Act can indeed become a real source of power. But this political space is highly contested and men, the "previous stakeholders, may not easily accept the shift in power equations."[38] This is the beginning of a long process and collective action is necessary to quicken the process further. The power exercised by women should be meant for social, political, economic and cultural development.[39] Firstly, women have to articulate their oppression collectively since the critical mass has been evolved and it will be easier for them to raise their voice collectively. Secondly, in this process women should enter into collaborative action with other multi-lateral organizations, which work for the same cause. Finally, the critical action taken consciously by integrating the activity and strategy will show better results, which may help women to utilize the space for political participation effectively.[40]

As Annie Marie Goetz, UNIFEM adviser on Governance, Peace and Security observed,

> Women's effectiveness at promoting women's rights once in public office, however, is dependent upon many other factors besides their numbers. Institutional changes are needed in civil society, the media, political parties, legislatures and the judicial system in order to support women's policy agendas and to make the transition from policy to practice.[41]

The responsibility to create supportive environment for gender equality and advancement of women as shared responsibility falls equally on the national and international communities. Along with implementing an action plan designed specifically to increase women's political empowerment, it is important to secure broad changes in the political system. This could be done through internal political party reforms to achieve higher levels of transparency, justice and gender equality. These broad movements towards greater democratization should also factor the importance of establishing real autonomy in the various political, legal, and social institutions. Let me propose some strategies:

1. The UN should develop a system of incentives for countries that work towards narrowing the gender gap in education, health and employment. Clear guidelines for modalities and implementation of affirmative measures that lead to empowering women and creating their ability to critically engage with the state and the society for a social change and gender equality should be developed.[42]

2. Without changing socio-cultural, political and economic structural barriers at the national and international levels, the goal of gender equality in politics and development will remain impossible to attain. Access to education, health and employment is directly linked with women's ability to create space for themselves in politics and development. Women's

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[35]Bystydzienski, *Women Transforming Politics*, 49.

[36] Leslie J. Calman, "Women and Movement in Politics in India," *Asian Survey*, 29, 10 (1989), 940-958, 940.

[37] Khullar, Mala, "Women's Caring in India: The Intersecting Public and Private Sphere," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 5, 3 (1999), 60.

[38]Leslie J. Calman, "Women and Movement in Politics in India," *Asian Survey* 940 (1989), 940-958.

[39]Khullar, "Women's Caring in India," 64.

[40]Bystydzienski, *Women Transforming Politics*, 58.

[41]Shantha Mohan, *Women in Politics and Decision-Making in the Late Twentieth Century: A United Nations Study*, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1992, 70.

[42]Santha, *Political Participation in Panchayati Raj*, 37.

consciousness of their political rights is another critical element for women's individual and collective agency. Political consciousness through building transformative communities is the sustainable way to transform politics and development. A strong women's movement and civil society is another condition of enabling environment that can influence the direction of politics and development in favour of women.[43]

3. The rules and regulations of the electoral system as well as for candidacy should be clear and well articulated in the community, especially for women. Increasing the awareness and knowledge of women about electoral laws and changes in structure and process will enhance women's political participation.[44]

4. Whatever the electoral system, women should be prepared to be candidates. Women need to organize themselves within and outside of political parties. Continuous awareness-raising activities such as leadership training/seminars are necessary to develop women's skills and knowledge to prepare them for their political career.[45]

5. Strengthening networks continues to empathetically pressure various sectors. A resolute women's movement translates memberships into votes, which means major parties which are mostly male-dominated, will be moved to include women in their list of candidates.[46]

6. The number of men in strategic positions within the party is always higher than women. This means that men are always in the list of party candidates. Women should be allowed easy access to resources and accurate and up-to-date information which can act as inputs for making decisions and as evidence to push for gender-equal legislation.[47]

7. The government must take immediate action to ensure that the Women's Reservation Bill be passed immediately. It is for the women's movement to demonstrate their political responsibility, not merely through the politics of protests, but also through direct intervention in the tasks of governance. And this is not possible unless larger numbers of women are present in all these bodies to collectively engender politics.

8. Certain electoral conditions do favour women's representation and can accelerate changes in the gender balance of legislatures. Local government, proportional representation systems, multimember districts and political quotas all provide favourable conditions for women's political empowerment.[48]

Democratic restoration meant growing political spaces for NGOs and people's organizations, but a new political mode and language could not be developed overnight. Women are especially equipped for the task of redefinition for their movements have critiqued society in whole and in part through the lens of gender. Having dwelt in the margins for so long, women are well placed to challenge the concept of power as 'power-over' or domination, contrasting it with an understanding of power as empowerment.[49] Women are also equipped for the task of developing, or transforming, political practice for their culturally ascribed role of reproduction has developed in them such skills as nurturing, healing, and negotiating. These human development skills are the currency of a transformative politics.[50]

It is perhaps here that the NGOs can step in as a major player. Although the NGOs are actively involved in the empowerment exercise, they ought to assume a more dominant position, given the crucial role they have to enact. They need to equip women with capacity and the confidence to empower and motivate them to enter the political domain, to facilitate horizontal and vertical interaction of women elected at different levels of governance to enable the sharing of experiences and building solidarity and networking and to conduct political education and political training for women to realise the power of their vote, the need to seek and be accountable and to gender stream the political agenda.

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[49] Kathleen Bratton, "Critical Mass Theory Revisited: The Behavior and Success of Token Women in State Legislatures," *Politics and Gender* 93 (2005), 97-125.

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