

## Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Legal Research

### RESERVATION FOR WOMEN IN PANCHAYAT

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#### Abstract

Women are the foundational core for a well-developed and integrated society. Women empowerment is a way to enlighten women by acknowledging their self-worth and ability to make choices. Government on the other hand is responsible for a stable society. Government and people need to work together for a better nation. For people to trust the government, they should have power in their hands and have a say in decision-making. This is the main purpose of introduction of Panchayat Raj Institutions as local level government which would enable people to solve their problems with immediate and proficient solutions. Development of a nation needs to base on developing all sectors and classes of society. This led to the reservation system to empower certain classes. For the same reason reservation for women was brought in PRI's. Several debates were made against reservation but the government's striving efforts led to a better future for women. This paper aims at analyzing the various reservations made for women through various bills and amendments and the oppositions made against them.

## Introduction

Panchayati raj is a structured form of local self-governance in India. Panchayati raj institutions help to ensure that the local administrative affairs are resolved by decentralized local government in unit level. They help in planning, coordinating, implementing, regulating and monitoring various national programmes and strengthen socio-economic development in rural areas. Part IX of the constitution enables the functioning of Panchayat raj institutions in three levels namely Gram panchayat at village level, Panchayat samiti at block level and Zilla parishad at district level. This was introduced by the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the Indian constitution. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment brought in reservation of women in local bodies and also the reservation for women in SC/ST quotas. The Panchayati raj institutions were made as a formal democratic body at local level with a vision for Gram Swaraj (village self-governance). Elections are conducted regularly every 5 years and members are elected with respect to the population of a particular territory. Seats are regularly reserved for Scheduled caste, Scheduled tribes and women for both the post of members and of chairperson. One third of all seats and chairperson posts must be reserved for women and in some state's half of all seats and chairperson posts are reserved for women (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2019)<sup>[1]</sup>. The introduction of reservation of seats were introduced a few decades ago and it took a little longer for that to be applicable to women. The report given by Balwant Rai Mehta committee instigated the formation of three-tier decentralized local self-governance. Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the very first Panchayati raj institution on October 2, 1959 at Nagour, Rajasthan. The first elections in Rajasthan were held in the same year between September - October under the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act, 1959 (Government of Rajasthan, 2021) <sup>[2]</sup>.

## Representation and Reservation for women

Representation for women have always been defined by male gaze or how the society expects them to behave. Many focuses on their sexuality and emotions whilst others focus on their relationship with their families. There persists the problem of under representation of women around the world. Gender imbalance in the society leads to harmful and unhealthy gender stereotypes. Rooted in patriarchal norms and etched in traditions, the consequences are far-reaching with detrimental, negative consequences on the personal, economic, and future well-being of women and girls, their families, and the community at large. Women's full and equal

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<sup>1</sup> "Basic Statistics of Panchayati Raj Institutions". Ministry of Panchayati Raj. 2019. Archived from the original on 24 April 2020. Retrieved 28 October 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <http://rajpanchayat.rajasthan.gov.in/en-us/aboutus/history.aspx#:~:text=Th%20e%20system%20later%20came,held%20in%20September%20October%201959.>

participation in all spheres of the society is a fundamental right of every human. Yet, one can find that there is under representation of women in all facets from politics and media to entertainment and sports. Political representation among women has doubled in the past 25 years but this only amounts to 1 in 4 parliamentary seats held by women around the globe. Even in the highest political positions, women are not equally represented. As per the reports on October 2019, there were only 10 women Head of State and 13 women Head of Government across 22 countries, compared with four Head of State and eight Prime Ministers across 12 countries in 1995 (Visualising the data : Women's representation in Society, 2020) <sup>[3]</sup>.

The value of political equity is central to normative theories of democracy and to a socio-economic equality. The multifaceted approach towards empirical democracy gives an outline about representation of women in national parliaments. Some countries had quite a significant number of women representatives but in contrast other countries had none. This problem persisted all around the globe and India was no exception. Sometimes this representation affects the quality of democratic life. On one hand countries like Rwanda had around 48.8% women in the parliament and on the other situations were totally upturned. Only 20.8% of the Canadian House of Commons (following the 2006 elections), 17.3% of the Italian *Camera dei deputati* (2006), 12.2% of the French *Assemblée nationale* (2002), 8.3% of the Indian Lok Sabha (2004), and 2% of the Egyptian *Majlis Al-Chaab* (2005) were the representation of women in national parliaments; About ten countries like Micronesia, Nauru, Tuvalu, and the United Arab Emirates have no woman member in their lower or single house of parliament. Even countries little-known for their democratic virtues, such as Cuba, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Tanzania, exhibit percentages of women parliamentarians between 30% and 48.8 %, while in developed countries with well-established democracy like Canada, France, Japan, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States the proportion of women legislators does not even reach 25% (Tremblay, 2007)<sup>[4]</sup>. Nordic countries have finest democratic governance with substantial number of women representatives.

For a healthy, flourishing, and affluent democratic nation representation of women is indispensably cardinal. Cultural, political, socio-economic factors all influence the level of representation at different magnitude at various countries.

All the factors immensely affect the conditions in where women can envision for a career in political and legal arena mainly. It also affects their accessibility to power. Political quality is key factor to good governance. For this to be achieved, there should be equal representation of both men and women. Women need to voice out equally and be a part of decision-making for the country they wish to develop and prosper successfully.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2020/2/infographic-visualizing-the-data-womens-representation>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13510340701398261>

## **What impedes women's representation?**

Cultural factors like morals, values, traditions, beliefs have all been engraved in history along with all the patriarchal norms. Age old traditions have constricted women within their homes. The gender based roles have been inherited through generations and women are austere following that. This need to be prevented from passing down and women should no longer go through that. These are perceived to be the primary natural factors that serve as a hindrance from women coming out of their homes and doing things they dreamt. They are imposed with some stringent rules so as to not get past their houses and explore things. Women fear that if they cross the boundaries set by the society, they'll be looked down upon and excluded. This can be quoted as the main reason as to why women's representation is low.

Socio-economic factors is another main reason. The family condition and its financial position determine the representation of women. Many girl children in the rural area are not accessible to primary education. With education, one's knowledge and viewpoint of society changes. The more people get educated, the nation will be well-developed. Many activists are fighting for girl children' education and as one of the great freedom fighters once quoted that "educating a girl child is like educating a whole generation therein after". Women's education help increase their socio-economic strata in the society, help in decision making and in building a better future. For women to move forward, they should all be able to get education up to a certain age at least and their socio-economic factor should not be a barrier to that. With development in their educational status, they can move forward and achieve mind-boggling things.

Another major cause that hinders women's representation is political factor. The political representation and rights of women are the main parts among it. Not many women come forward to stand in the elections. Women need equal political rights just like any other citizen. Women shall have the right to elect, right to voice out in decision making and have proportionate representation in democratic parliament. Women need to have access to power and to run elections to maintain a good democratic life. To expand the women representation regime, various steps were taken by governments across the world. For the first time, all rich men were only allowed to vote, then only men and later universal adult franchise was introduced. This allowed all citizens above a certain age to vote for a democratic nation irrespective of their background. The characteristics of voting system and representatives were changed during the course of time.

In India, states were divided into electoral districts for purpose of elections. Gender based quotas for women and caste based quota for Backward class, Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribes were reserved to increase their representation in the government. All stages of

government has reservation seats. Even the local government had these reservation for both its members and for the post of chairman in all three levels [Gram panchayat, Panchayat samiti and Zilla parishad]. Quota systems were one strategy followed to increase women representation. With reservation for certain categories, it would help people of that specific sector to come forward and run elections. This would in turn would help them to address problems faced by their community and find effective solutions for the same. The vote / seat proportionality promotes women's chances of being listed in eligible positions in the parliament.

As a step towards increasing the reservation of seats, a few bills were enacted and provisions were amended. Article 243(D) and Article 243(T) of the Indian Constitution ensures participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions by mandating not less than one-third reservation for women out of total number of seats to be filled by direct election and number of offices of chairpersons of Panchayats (Delhi, 2020)<sup>[5]</sup>. The Women's Reservation Bill, 2008 and the Constitution 108th Amendment Bill was also drafted for the same purpose.

### **Women's Reservation Bill, 2008**

The 108<sup>th</sup> constitution amendment also known as the Women's reservation bill was drafted in 2008 but is still pending in the parliament. It proposes to amend the Indian constitution to reserve 1/3rd of all seats in the Lower house of Parliament of India, the Lok Sabha and in all State Legislative Assemblies for women. The seats were proposed to be reserved in rotation and would have been determined by draw of lots in such a way that a seat would be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections (Women's Reservation Bill, 2016)<sup>[6]</sup>. The Rajya Sabha passed the bill but it is still pending with Lok Sabha and they have not voted on it yet. The initiative for this bill was started in 1993 wherein a constitutional amendment was passed in India which aimed at a random one-third of seats reserved for women for the posts of village council leader or sarpanch in gram panchayat. This plan has been prevalent for a long time to reserve seats for women in parliament and state assemblies but the opponent parties at that time contemplated this to be a discrimination against women for having preferential treatment for a specific gender. This notion was carried for years and the bill remained dormant.

There were many objections raised against the women's reservation bill. Many people argued that reservation of woman may hinder the rendering of justice and equality will be disturbed.

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<sup>5</sup>[https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1658145#:~:text=Clause%20\(3\)%20of%20Article%20243D,offices%20of%20chairpersons%20of%20Panchayats.](https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1658145#:~:text=Clause%20(3)%20of%20Article%20243D,offices%20of%20chairpersons%20of%20Panchayats.)

<sup>6</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\\_Reservation\\_Bill#:~:text=The%20Women's%20Reservation%20Bill%20or,state%20legislative%20assemblies%20for%20women.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_Reservation_Bill#:~:text=The%20Women's%20Reservation%20Bill%20or,state%20legislative%20assemblies%20for%20women.)

Many contended that it will lead to a greater amount of discrimination of gender. The bill if passed would be an enlightenment to the future of women. A leading national daily conducted an urban opinion poll of which results stated that wide range of population favor the bill but late a few other articles were published against the bill in 10:1 ratio. Several arguments were stated against the favor of the bill.

The first argument was that political parties are in favor of the bill just to entice votes as there was a nationwide support for the bill. This kind of established the double standards of political parties as they were favoring the women's reservation bill while they had very low women representation in their own party. The BJP, which introduced the bill had allotted only 23 out of 477 seats it had contested in 1995 general elections to women, out of which 13 women were elected; In the BJP Working Committee, out of 75 members there were only eight women and in the 650-member National Council, there were only 150 women (Mondal, 2019)<sup>[7]</sup>. Even the Congress Party had only three women in its 20 member Working Committee, the Communist Party had only 12 women in its 150-member National Council, and three members in its 21-member National Executive. September 1999 general elections for the Lok Sabha witnessed that no political party has given tickets to women for more than 10% and other parties with less than 2% women representation. In some parties the percentage of women candidates is not even 2 to 3.

The second argument was that the reservation could be counter-productive. They feared that this would divide the nation further. Reservation for backward classes were made pertaining to the socio-economic conditions of people for a limited period. Some political parties suggested that reservation for women can be made within the already reserved seats within each caste as reservation always builds up tension and leads to conflict of interest.

The third argument was that reservations were made based on caste and most of the administrative and political posts would soon be occupied by such group and there is high probability that they would address issues that are concerned with their community only. This might not benefit the nation. Parties reasoned that with increasing number of women representatives, they would only be addressing their issues mainly whilst the nation needs high intellects with a great knowledge in vast areas for development of the nation as well as to enhance the international relations. Casteisation of politics need to be avoided and further quotas are dereliction to the whole reservation system. Though reservation within a reservation will lead to further isolate women and they will merely be sectorial elects rather than political leader, this did not unhinge the people those wanting to make amendments to the bill.

The fourth argument was regarding the efficacy of parliament with respect to larger women representation. They anticipate a structural reform in the core system might disrupt the motion

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/essay/women-reservation-policy-in-india/39182>

of parliament. The parliament and assemblies have rarely witnessed a qualitative speech or debate from women elects. Even in the local level government, in Panchayati Raj Institutions, the male members of the women delegates influence the decisions or at times the male members themselves take the decision.

The fifth argument was that, the reservation did not deliver desirable results or was not succeeding the expected results. In few cases it has been observed that the candidate elected from the reservation category were not able to adequately articulate the grievances and fend to the needs of the people in their constituencies.

The women's reservation bill initiated a debate for India's political future and the pathway for women into the political belt. The socio-economic people and other backward classes have been dispossessed with power, but extending mass opportunities alone does not ensure their proper representation. Emancipation of woman and entering the political belt is noteworthy but is abandoned by a lot of people for various reasons. Political parties are in favor of the bill majorly for electoral benefits only and not to serve the community in large.

The bill drafted by Rajya Sabha on May 6, 2008 highlights that there shall be a one-third reservation in seats for women in both Parliament and State Assemblies and the reserved seats may be allotted to different constituencies in state or Union territories by rotation but this reservation process will cease to exist from 15 years after commencement of the act. The reservation includes one-third reservation for women belonging to Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe. While the Lok Sabha did not vote on the bill, it has been referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice headed by the Chairperson Dr. E.M. Sudarsana Natchiappan, which was scheduled to submit its report by October 6, 2008 (Sanyal, 2008)<sup>[8]</sup>. Vajpayee government persuaded for the bill to be passed, but all efforts were in vain. 6. After the reintroduction of the bill, it was passed by Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010. The bill was still left pending in the lower house though it was reintroduced by the upper house. While political personalities like LJP's Chirag Paswan and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnayak at that time have been heavily pushing for the Women's Reservation Bill in their rallies and speeches, on the other hand Lalu Prasad who led RJD [Rashtriya Janata Dal] party has been one of the vocal opponents for the Women's Reservation Bill, along with Samajwadi Party (Women's Reservation Bill: All you need to know about the bill which will bring 33 percent reservation for women in Lok Sabha, 2020)<sup>[9]</sup>.

Though the bill remained inactive in Lok Sabha in the following years, people have urged the government to pass the women's reservation bill for 33% representation of women in the

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<sup>8</sup>[https://www.prsindia.org/uploads/media/Constitution%20Eighth/bill184\\_20080923184\\_Legislative\\_Brief\\_Womens\\_reservation\\_Bill\\_final.pdf](https://www.prsindia.org/uploads/media/Constitution%20Eighth/bill184_20080923184_Legislative_Brief_Womens_reservation_Bill_final.pdf)

<sup>9</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/women-s-reservation-bill-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-bill-which-is-yet-to-be-passed-in-lok-sabha-1653451-2020-03-07>

government. Speculations regarding this bill have come to the attention of the present government. The bill would be passed if the ruling government supports the bill with full force as they already have majority in Lok Sabha. There has not been any substantial changes made to passing of the bill despite of all people voicing out and rallying in the streets to pass the bill. Congress president Rahul Gandhi also wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding the same on July 16, 2018 (Women's Reservation Bill: Rahul Gandhi appeals to PM for passage, BJP reacts, 2018)<sup>[10]</sup>. In his letter to the Prime Minister, Rahul Gandhi extended his unconditional support towards passing of the bill and stated that it's high time that women have equal representation in the democratic parliament. One of BJP's 2014 manifesto had a key promise to enact the women's reservation bill but it has not been fulfilled yet. Rahul Gandhi criticized that BJP government is appearing to have hesitancy in passing the bill while clearly it has been remarked that Panchayati Raj Institutions with woman leadership have potentially transformed the government for good. The Congress president along with his party members garnered around 3.2 million signatures from Indian citizens in favor of the bill and submitted the same to Prime Minister Modi for his support. BJP reacted to these contentions stating that Congress is having 'double-standards'. "This shows the double standard of Congress as it is in alliance with those who opposed the legislation", said the senior BJP leader and Union minister Prakash Javadekar to the reporters. He was questioning as to the ally of Congress with RJD with respect to the letters of support. Prakash Javadekar further claimed that BJP approved the bill during the time of its introduction itself.

The women's reservation bill has a very long history with many reintroductions. The history of the bill dates back to September 12, 1996 when the bill was first introduced by H.D. Deve Gowda's government as 81st Constitution Amendment Bill and was referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee headed by CPI MP Geeta Mukherjee for they would later report to the Lok Sabha on December 9, 1996 with regard to the bill (Women's Reservation Bill: Chronology, 2010)<sup>[11]</sup>. This bill was introduced as a result of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment act in 1993 to reserve one-third seats in panchayats which was a successor to the very first report submitted to the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare by a Committee on Status of Women in India, emphasizing the low representation of women in political bodies. The bill introduced by Gowda's government lapses as they dissolved the government shortly after passing the bill. The bill was again reintroduced in 12<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha headed by the National Democratic Alliance [NDA] party as 84<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment but lapses again as this government was also dissolved with Vajpayee government reaching minority. The bill was again reintroduced by NDA government in the 13<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha but they failed to gather support for the bill. Despite of NDA reintroducing the bill twice in 2002 and 2003 with the majority parties assuring their support to the bill, the bill did not pass through unfortunately.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/rahul-gandhi-pm-modi-womens-reservation-bill-bjp-1295801-2018-07-25>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/57134/womens-reservation-bill-chronology.html>



In 2004, United Progressive Alliance [UPA] declared their intention to pass the bill as promised in the Common Minimum Programme, once they came to power. The Bill was once again introduced in 2008 at Rajya Sabha and referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Justice, who presented their report before the houses of parliament a year later. Later, in the year 2010, February 22 then President Pratibha Patil acknowledged the government early passage of bill. Three days later, on February 25, 2010 the Union Cabinet approves the bill. Finally on March 9, 2010 women's reservation bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha but is still pending in the Lok Sabha. In spite of the incessant efforts of the government to pass the women's reservation bill, it still remains in the lower house for them to vote on the bill. For almost more than 20 years, the journey of the bill still continues. The Constitution (112th Amendment) Bill 2009 makes amendment to the Art.243(T) providing for 50% reservation of women in Urban Local Bodies was introduced in Lok Sabha later on 24 November, 2009 (THE CONSTITUTION (ONE HUNDRED AND TWELFTH AMENDMENT) BILL, 2009)<sup>[12]</sup>. Though many acts and amendments were made to increase reservation seats for women, the women's reservation bill, 2008 has not been passed till date yet people have pinned their hopes on it.

Political equality is one most important factor in democratic agenda. The struggle for women's representation threatens the democratic and representative institutions. The enticement towards liberal democracy was the concept of equality to all classes. The stratified society brought in a disparity between political freedom and socio-economic classification. The metamorphosis of reservation of women came in the form of the women's reservation bill, 2008 where 33% seats shall be reserved for women in all levels of government. Apparently, the bill that remained inactive in the Lok Sabha for almost more than a decade after passed by Rajya Sabha. The legislation if passed would have been ground-breaking trailblazer in the Indian history of democratic politics. Women getting preferential treatment in fields of education are seen as sexist as they in a way promote discrimination while feminists were fighting for reservation of women to get a play in the field. After the 1993 constitutional amendment, 33% seats were compulsorily reserved for women. 19 states, including Bihar and Odisha, have increased the reservation to 50%, according to the Panchayati Raj Ministry (Press Information Bureau, 2011)<sup>[13]</sup>. This all had its primary foundation from the British India where people had already started fighting for equal rights especially in the political arena. Even during recent times, during the International women's day, several woman elects spoke regarding the women's reservation bill in Rajya Sabha and seek out for a 33% reservation for women representation in parliament. "24 years ago, we proposed a 33% reservation for women in Parliament. Today, 24 years later, we should raise this to 50% reservation for women in Parliament and assembly," said Shiv Sena's

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<sup>12</sup> [http://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/243T\\_Constitution\\_25.pdf](http://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/243T_Constitution_25.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=74501>

Priyanka Chaturvedi in the Parliament. The debate for passing of the reservation bill still continues (Shivani, 2021)<sup>[14]</sup>.

### **Position of women during the British Colonial Era in India**

Women were typically viewed as domestic figures to carry on household duties and tend to the domestic needs of family. They were mostly dependent on male members of the family and were deprived of equal status and opportunity as like their male counterparts. The basic rights were also dispossessed from them and independence or freedom was never an option for women at least in the near future. They couldn't see the light on the other end of the tunnel and mostly were considered as sub-ordinates to men. The 19th century social reform debates and movements had a trajectory reformation for women. Society denied to look at them even as citizens. The predicament that they endured were simply ghastly. The British used the division of gender to expose their supremacy on Indians. In fact, male superiority triumphed within the British itself oppressing women. The women's movement in India did not just blame the British for their inferiority as the British interestingly helped women have a better life at times and on the other hand pushed them down too. Women's movement recognized in constructing their demands. Not just constricted to domestic work and they strongly opposed male supremacy both in India and under British. Women's equality was not identical with foreign rule, for men in the nationalist movement opposed the demands of women when they were a peril to men's privileges (Liddle & Joshi, 1985)<sup>[15]</sup>. Both imperialism and male domination contributed to the women's tyranny.

Women's organizations mainly opposed the customs like child marriage, sati, female feticide, denial of entry into temples for lower class women, and imperialism and male supremacy all together led to the movements. The overwhelming portrayal of woman in colonial India nothing short of arduous. Faced with humiliation, defeat and oppression women have come a long way now. Studies on women in colonial India have generally tended to waver between the achievements of the exceptional and educated few—against a presumed backdrop of ignorance and helpless passivity—on the one hand, and radical activities on the other (Ghosh, 2008)<sup>[16]</sup>. Women were struggling between domestic household chores and finding their own identity but got lost somewhere in the middle of the imperialism era.

Social changes were brought in the society carefully not disturbing any prevailing customs or traditions. Women had strict customary prohibition to carry on the “purity” of their caste and

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/international-women-s-day-women-mps-push-for-33-reservation-in-parliament-bill-101615185297685.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4374973>

<sup>16</sup> [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9780230583672\\_1](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9780230583672_1)

not to own any property or remarry or adopt children. The British in India saw themselves as a medium to liberate women and took few steps towards it and also to improve their legal position. Between 1772 and 1947 they introduced nine major reforms including the laws forbidding female infanticide, abolishing sati and child marriage, and those raising the age of consent, allowing widow remarriage, and improving women's inheritance rights (Liddle & Joshi, GENDER AND COLONIALISM: WOMEN'S ORGANISATION UNDER THE RAJ, 1985)<sup>[17]</sup>. Mahatma Gandhi was keen on including women to lead national movements for he thought that would help in liberalization of women too in the process. Women took part in all types of Swaraj movements from peaceful and militant to legal and illegal. The success of woman ensued the Freedom movement and brought them out of seclusion. Women did not officially have any political power or have any legal position yet they formed groups and led processions, movements and participated in all nationalist movements. Civil disobedience movement of 1930-1931 boosted up the way for women's rights like no other. Women then slowly started to join the Congress party and took part in Congress committees and movements. With rise of all the avalanche movements, British decided to declare Congress as an illegal organization. This started to heat up the tension, many men were locked up but women came forward in thousands and took over the charge of all movements. Sarjini Naidu led the Satyagraha movements after Gandhi was arrested though she herself was later beaten up for the same and thrown into jail. Sarojini Naidu accompanied a female All India delegate to Montague, Indian Secretary of State, who came to address India's parliamentary participation demands and a few weeks before the elections the state legislature of the province of Madras opened its membership to women.

The initial phase of the women's movement coincided with the creation of three women's organizations, the Women's Indian Association 1917, the All India Women's Conference 1927 and the Indian National Women's Council in 1925. In 1910, a number of local and regional women's organizations formed, which eventually fused into national organizations (Newman, 1999)<sup>[18]</sup>. They fought for legislative offices and liberalization of women. The Simon commission boycotted the congress party and women protestors in 1928 as they saw that as a threat to them (Britannica, 2020)<sup>[19]</sup>. Women from groups argued with the commission to vest women with electing rights and reservation for women. The commission denied independent electoral system but agreed to reserve seats for the oppressed sections. During the first table round conference boycotted by congress, the British government nominated two women Radabhai Subbarayan and Begum Shah Nawaz to support a woman's qualification and

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.uaf.edu.pk/faculties/social\\_sci/courses/gender\\_and\\_development/02.pdf](http://www.uaf.edu.pk/faculties/social_sci/courses/gender_and_development/02.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [LOUISE MICHELE NEWMAN, WHITE WOMEN'S RIGHTS: THE RACIAL ORIGINS OF FEMINISM IN THE UNITED STATES \(1999\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-National-Congress>

women's seats in legislatures (Sharma, 1998)<sup>[20]</sup>. The topic for political reservation was there only till the early 1970's when Committee of Status of Women in India and then only in All India Panchayat Parishad, at its Sixth National Conference conducted in New Delhi in 1997 declared that one-third portion will be reserved for women<sup>[21]</sup>.

Women did not only fight for freedom but also for their own liberalization. Women's movement was strongly linked with Freedom movements radicalizing it to be explicitly political. After leading a few movements and taking part in numerous movements, they finally found the courage to set up their own autonomous organizations and developed programme of actions. They saw that women's oppression stemmed from effects of imperialism so they channeled all their energy and angry into movements and Swaraj campaigns to earn back what they have lost in the decades. Women started to join in masses for their years of silent- suffering and all of that led to something favorable to women one by one. The hypocrisy here was that Indian men also supported the British against women's liberalization and their demands.

Even before colonization, women were suppressed by religious laws which stated that women were created for procreation and to handle domestic chores only. Hinduism and Islam the two largest religious sects during the colonial time were accountable for gender oppression. The religious laws allowed men to remarry, have more than one wife, inherit all property while women had to endure child marriage, sati, and female infanticide and also were denied even the basic human rights. The hierarchal system made lives of women in the lower caste even worse as men could abuse or thrash women and could simply get away without any repercussions. Later after independence, laws against women were abolished and acts in their favor were commence. To ensure that they have equal representation, reservation system was brought in and that is where reservation bill comes into play majorly. All the reservation were made in best interests of women to promote their representation but the political parties that came in used these to beguile people's votes rather than focusing on their betterment. While only 14 out of 47 women contested in the first Lok Sabha election things have changed but India now has one of the highest number of female politicians in the world with women having held high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition. The Indian states Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura have implemented 50% reservation for women in Panchayati raj institutions (Women in India : Politics, 2020) <sup>[22]</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> [Kumud Sharma, Power vs. Representation: Feminist Dilemmas, Ambivalent State and the Debate on Reservation for Women in India 22](#)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2019/10/18/womens-reservation-bill-what-can-india-learn-from-other-countries/>

<sup>22</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_India#Politics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_India#Politics)

## 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment to constitution of India

Reservation and representation of women has now reached the very primary level of government. Panchayati raj institutions at village level, intermediate level and block level were brought in via 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment brought in urban local bodies like municipal corporations, municipal council and nagar panchayat. Both the amendments gives recognition and protection to local government in each state since 1992. Both the types of local encourage people to participate and contest in elections, both have a reservation system too. Reservation is made for backward classes, SC/ST and women for post of members and of chairperson. Article 40 of the Indian constitution directs the government to establish panchayats to serve as institutions of local self-government (Ghai, n.d.)<sup>[23]</sup>. The reservation for women shall not be less than one-third. The 33% reservation for woman was introduced in the women's reservation bill but it is still pending in the Lok Sabha for them to vote on it and a few states have even reserved 50% of seats for women including states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and few others. Decentralizing power at grass root levels have been on the national agenda for a long time and was implemented successfully. Women after the introduction have PRI's have become a familiar face of power and have started to transform their places for good. While the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment has opened the gateway for women to exercise their right in village governance, it neither lets them define programme priorities, develop and manage natural resources nor lets them have an integrated approach to environmental planning at a micro level because each department has its own plan (Pradeep, et al., 2021)<sup>[24]</sup>.

Social myths and stigmas are being broken down, with women entering politics. While many people were hesitant about the idea of women having power in their hands will be controlled and manipulated by her family, they proved the people wrong and most of the successful panchayat institutions are now lead by women. with women administrators being in power they are making wholesome reformations to their constituency and are speaking up against issues of physical abuse of women, rape, girl education, sanitization and cleanliness, corruption and so on. Various plans are being implemented by government to promote participation of women in panchayats like Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA), Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan (PMEYSA) (Rotation of Panchayat Seats Between Men and Women, 2020)<sup>[25]</sup>. RGSA was implemented for strengthening PRI, to

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/constitution/73rd-and-74th-constitution-amendments-and-reservation-for-women/40440#:~:text=73rd%20And%2074th%20Constitution%20Amendments%20and%20Reservation%20for%20Women,-Article%20shared%20by&text=Article%2040%20of%20the%20Indian,institutions%20of%20local%20self%2Dgovernment.>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.downtoearth.org/in/indepth/panchayats-working-women-22753>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/rotation-of-panchayat-seats-between-men-and-women>

fund local needs, optimize usage of resources for development and to implement sustainable solutions. GPDP aims at participation of women, making budget plans, and implementation and monitoring of other schemes or plans or programmes. PMEYSA focuses on empowerment of women and youth in local government. Despite of many oppositions and hesitancies, all these plans were implemented by government for the betterment of women. This would help to promote socio-political equality among people and show people that women with administrative powers are capable and worthy of it.

The 1980's saw strategies being enforced for integration and development of women. The inclusion of women into legislative and decision-making bodies were highly advocated. The National Perspective plan for women 1998-2000 argued for at least 30% reservation in seats for women in all levels of government inclusive of PRI. B.R. Mehta committee, 1957 and Ashok Mehta committee, 1978 also showed their acceptance towards the reservation and later the 64<sup>th</sup> amendment bill proposed for 30% reservation for women in all three levels of panchayats and mandated reservation of one seat for women if there were only two seats (Buch, 2009)<sup>[26]</sup>. V.P.Singh government later made the reservation for women for not less than one-third.

Reservation for woman from the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment act have been phenomenal as women in village had a lot of barriers to even step out. Now those women have crossed all the obstacles on their way and are now contesting elections. The magnitude of political empowerment of women in India is incredibly remarkable. Both the Central and State government are taking incessant efforts from their side to promote participation of women in PRI. While few states have already started to reserve 50% of seats for women, the central government promised that official mandated constitutional amendments will be made to reserve 50% seats for women. During 2016, Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Birender Singh, has said that the government would be pushing a Constitutional amendment, first cleared by the UPA [United Progressive Alliance] Cabinet, to increase reservation for women in panchayats from 33 per cent to 50 per cent in the budget session of Parliament (Bureau, 2016)<sup>[27]</sup>. The UPA government's Cabinet in its second term, cleared the 110<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment and the Standing Committee on Rural Development was also asked to report on the bill. The Bill was first introduced in the Lok Sabha in November 2009, after which it went through the committee process. The bill was then re-introduced in Lok Sabha in 2010 after the report had been tabled but it lapsed at the end of the 15th Lok Sabha in 2014. The main aim of the amendment was to increase the reservation quota for women up to 50% so as to increase the representation of women in local government and vest with administrative power in their hands. Many bills were introduced to increase reservation for women, but unfortunately most of them lapsed or were

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25663646>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/50-quota-for-women-in-panchayats-planned/article8194551.ece>

not voted upon by the houses of the parliament for it to be passed as an act. Many organization came forward in support of the bills and once they were implemented, especially after the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment various campaigns were conducted to make people aware of the PRI and regarding the reservation seats for women too. Even legal aid camps educated rural women about the reservation system to encourage them to participate in elections. So with all the continuous efforts made by the government and other organizations, women will soon experience better lives with power in their hands.

## Conclusion

Gender inequality was a class trap prevailing from time immemorial. Women around the world still experience inequality and gender bias in all fields. Indian culture and social ethos prohibit women's independence by promoting a patriarchal system. They are still widely under-represented in many fields. Decades later, women are also given equal socio-economic and political status to some extent. Even Mahatma Gandhi advocated forcefully for equal participation of women in all movements. The Indian constitution in its federal principles and DPSP have also focused on representation of women. For women to feel empowered they need to have at least some power in their hands. Government initiated the PRI in aim to increase the participation of rural India and especially the oppressed sector. Amendments and bills were passed to increase reservation quotas expecting a higher participation rate. Panchayat Raj System envisages political and administrative decentralization of power which would lead to political awakening and enlightenment. The government has taken various steps to bring in women to various field including the legislative and political sector. They believe that representation of women in such fields is very crucial. Non-interference of male members in reservation quotas of female would be rendered effective as they can voice out in decision making without any influence of her family. Dynamic performance of women in political arena is studied in this paper widely. Women's political empowerment is seen as an effectual way to combat gender inequality. The process of rural development of a country starts with participation of people especially women who proved that they are powerful leaders.

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