

Women in Electoral Politics

A Case Study of Women's Political Participation in Maharashtra

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January 2009

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First Published : June 2009

Published by

Centre for the Study of Society & Secularism
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Maratha colony, Tilakwadi
Belgaum 590 006

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was carried out as part of the Heinrich Boll Foundation grant to the Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism. I wish to gratefully acknowledge the support of the Heinrich Boll Foundation.

I would like to thank Dr Asghar Ali Engineer, Chairman, Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism for entrusting this project to me and for his encouragement from time to time.

I am grateful to Mrs. Mrinal Gore, Mrs. Kamal Desai, Dr. (Mrs.) Neelam Gore and Mr Harischandra Patil, past and present members of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly for sparing their valuable time and talking to me on issues relating to women's representation in politics.

Finally, I would not have been able to complete this project without the guidance of Dr (Mrs.) Vasundhara Mohan, Director (Research) of the Centre. She has helped me with this project in several ways; right from research methodology to advising me on my search for source material and going through the manuscript. I am extremely thankful to her for her interest that she has evinced in my work.

– Minal Mhatre

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Preface

Acclaimed to be one of the largest democracies in the World, India has a multi-party system, with hundreds of political parties competing for power both at the Central and State levels, in periodic elections. While both the Indian Parliament and State Assemblies are bicameral, it is the Lok Sabha (the Lower House) and the Legislative Assemblies at the State-level that are vested with law-making powers.

Religion, caste, sub-caste and other factors have come to act as major determinants in the distribution of tickets on the eve of elections as against the competency of a candidate. With a view to ensuring that persons belonging to the socio-economically backward Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes do not get left behind in the scramble for power, the Government of India have reserved certain constituencies in all the States for these classes. But, although women form almost 50% of the country's population, their representation in the Parliament and State Legislatures has been depressingly low even after sixty years of Independence.

So is the case with Maharashtra, one of the states in the forefront of Indian politics since the days of freedom struggle. The state's women have participated not only in the freedom movement but also have been involved in several social movements for the upliftment of the poor and downtrodden. The first female President of India, Mrs. Pratibha Singh Patil, hails from Maharashtra. However, women representing just about 4.5% in the State Legislative Assembly, it does not matter whether the President of India is a woman, leave alone a Maharashtrian. This phenomenon is similar to that found in the other States of India, in spite of the fact that women's movement for increased political representation had taken roots in Maharashtra several years ago.

The Government of Maharashtra has set up the State Commission for Women, which is a statutory body, constituted under Maharashtra Act No. XV of 1993. The main objectives of the

Commission are:

- ♦ To improve the status and dignity of women in the society.
- ♦ To investigate into practices derogatory to women and suggest suitable remedial measures to them.
- ♦ To effectively monitor implementation of laws affecting women.
- ♦ To advise the Government on all matters related to the improvement and upliftment of the status and dignity of women in society.

Basically, elimination of violence against women is the main focus area identified by the Commission. A number of other areas have been identified as relevant and basic to the development of women in the State. ⁽¹⁾ But, it is seen that political empowerment of women is not on the Commission's mandate. The Commission was headed from time to time by politically active women leaders like Prabha Rau, Advocate Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar and Advocate Rajanitai Satav. But, all the three high-profile women were more interested in entering the Assembly than heading the Mahila Ayog. Consequently, they left the job at the first opportunity to contest the elections. In fact, the post was lying vacant for two years.

An independent Department of Women and Child Development has been set up in the State in June 1993 as the nodal agency for formulating the State Women's Policy. A comprehensive policy for women was formulated in 1994 and a new policy for women was approved by the cabinet in 2001. The objective of this policy is to ensure improvements in the physical, mental and emotional quality of women's lives in the State. The goal is also to make them economically independent and self reliant. Certain areas have been identified as relevant and basic to the development of women. Once again, political empowerment of women is not one of the areas.

1. Available at <http://mahilaayog.maharashtra.gov.in/new/policy.php>

"The New Political Elite" by Gautam Vohra (Daya Books, 1992) is an excellent analysis of Maharashtra political elite, but it pays no special attention to women politicians of the State. An earlier researcher, Anne Feldhaus observes: "Two articles, "Profiles of women in Maharashtra" by S.N.Tawale and the all-too-brief Politicization of women in India by V.M.Sirsikar, both in "Symbols of Power: Studies on the Political Status of women in India (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1979) are the only material we have on the genera situation of women in Maharashtra politics. Sirsikar makes the interesting observation that scheduled caste women are more politically aware than others, but because of their economic situation unable to be active. ... four or five women have held high office in the government or in political parties but have received no academic attention, at least none in English. Shakuntala Paranjape did pioneering work in the legislatures on family planning in the 1970s. Mrinal Gore is a long time social activist, a member of the BMC, then the Maharashtra legislative assembly, then the parliament. Neelam Gore, an activist in women's work, was recently associated with Prakash Ambedkar in the Bharatiya Republican Party. Shalinitai Patel organized a meeting in 1975 to demand 50% reservation on elected bodies for women".^(2.) Of course, in a number of contemporary writings, the status of women in Maharashtra politics finds a passing mention. But, we could not lay our hands on any concise report on the subject.

The aim of the project is to study the status of political participation of women in Maharashtra and ascertain the reasons for the inability of the State's women to enter the legislative Assembly in more numbers than at present. The inquiry also proposes to look into the present status of the All Women parties that were launched earlier. The study also touches on the socio-economic background of some of the women who could make it to the Assembly in the past and what criteria are followed by the political parties in selecting their women candidates.

2. Anne Feldhaus, Anne. (Ed.), Images of women in Maharashtrian Society, State University of New York Press, 1998.

Introduction

Women comprise roughly about half of the world's population. According to Population Reference Bureau, 2004, (World Population Data Sheet, The United Nations) out of 3209 millions women living in the world, the share of India is 531.9 million. This amounts to nearly half of India's total population. As per 2001 Census, the ratio of females per thousand males is 933. Nearly seventy percent of the women are living below the poverty line and two-thirds of them are illiterate. According to the UNDP's Human Development Report 1995, "Poverty has a woman's face; of the 1.3 billion people in poverty, 70 per cent are women".

Women constituting half of the population of our country have been an integral part of our social structure principally due to their contribution to the socio-economic spheres of life, notwithstanding the fact that women in India have been discriminated because of gender bias prevalent in the patriarchic values of the Indian society. The dominant patriarchy has denied women equality of status and opportunities in socio-economic and political spheres. Amidst such patriarchic bias, women in India can not be treated as a homogeneous unit in view of the differences based in terms of class, caste, status, space (rural-urban divide) etc. Several studies have shown that the social, economic and political empowerment of Indian rural women is comparatively much lower than that of their urban counterparts. Rural Indian women have still been treated as "Object" of development rather than the "Subject" of development.

The involvement of women in the development process and political decision making process has always been advocated by social and political thinkers. The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, which is considered as a significant document on the socio-economic conditions of Indian women says that "though women's participation in the political process has increased, their ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible because of the inadequate attention paid to their political education and mobilization by both political parties and women's organizations. Parties have tended to see

women voters as appendages of the males. Among women, the leadership has become diffused and diverse having sharp contradictions with regard to inequalities that affect the status of women in every sphere - social, economic and political."

After declaring 1975-85 as the Decade for Women Development, the United Nations observed that "Women perform two-thirds of the world's work but receive only ten per cent of the world's income and only one percent of the means of production. Women are thus the world's largest 'excluded category'. The U.N. Report on Women observes: "The scales of world's equality are out of balance. The side marked 'women' is weighed down with responsibility, while the side marked 'men' rides high with power".

While women are entitled to equal rights for political participation and the right to involve in the process of political decision making, women are subjugated in many ways and such state of subordination has affected negatively the development process. The situation took a turn with the passage of liberal ideas. The issue of women's participation in political decision making assumed importance only in the late twentieth century. It is now on the international agenda and permeating many regional and national plans of action. The United Nations adopted the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952. The worldwide concern for women's participation was noticed in 1975 when the United Nations declared 1975-1985 as the Women Development Decade and adopted resolutions accordingly. In 1975, the World Plan of Action, adopted at the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City, put forward various suggestions for the recruitment, nomination and promotion of women in various branches of government, public bodies, trade unions and pressure groups. In Copenhagen, in 1980, further steps were recommended to promote international cooperation and strengthen peace through women's participation.⁽¹⁾

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1. Dilip K Sarkar Women's Empowerment, Good-governance and Decentralisation : Assuring Women's Participation in Panchayats of Two Backward Districts of Northern Part of West Bengal, Dept of Women and Child and Ministry of Human esource Development Govt of India, 2004

The issue of women's political empowerment gained momentum in the global debate for women's rights at the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing in 1995. The issue continued to hold centre-stage of all discussions on gender justice and equality.

Women's equal access to, and full participation in decision making was emphasized in the Platform for Action, as one of the critical areas of concern. It unequivocally declared "Women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account". It also affirmed that women should have at least a thirty percent share of decision making positions.

As a signatory to the Beijing Declaration of 1995 and the subsequent UN Resolution, India is obliged to take necessary steps to achieve gender equality and assist women's unfettered participation in all political and developmental activities. It is in keeping with these international obligations and demand from the country's women that India has been trying to reserve 33% of the seats in the federal and State legislatures for women. However, the Women's Reservation Bill, first introduced in the Lok Sabha in 1996, is yet to become a law; and women continue to wage an unsuccessful battle against male domination of the political scene.

The issue of providing adequate space for women's political participation has also repeatedly come up in the NGO Meetings of South Asia Watch, Asia Pacific Women's Watch as a priority issue and more categorically at the Regional Meet on Commemorating Beijing III organized by the UNIFEM.⁽²⁾

The Maldives Outcome Document recognized the "continuing invisibility of women in higher levels of governance, political leadership and civil service and the continuing resistance of

2. Third Beijing Biennial South Asia Regional Ministerial Meeting, Organised By UNIFEM, Maldives, Sept.26-27: 2000

mainstream political parties to provide space for women in politics". It further recommended, "sharing of experiences of affirmative action at grass-root levels as well as at national level; studying of different electoral systems and creation of a shared political agenda for women." The need to increase women's participation in political decision making has been a common issue at all the International and Regional Conferences relating to women held so far which means that women's political empowerment has been at the centre-stage of attention for all discourses on women's issues.⁽³⁾ Accordingly, various initiatives have been undertaken in India for enabling women to participate in the political process.

Global Efforts for Women's Equal Participation

Globally, it has been recognized that achieving sustainable and durable peace requires the full involvement and equal participation of women in conflict resolution and subsequent peace-building. The following are the important landmark declarations and resolutions adopted from time to time.

- ◆ Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, declared that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Consequently, everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
- ◆ Article 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights called on all the States that are parties to the Covenant to undertake to ensure equal rights to men and women and ensure the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the Covenant;

3. Promila Kapur: Empowering of Indian Women, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 2001)

- ◆ Article 25 of the Covenant also declared that every citizen shall have the right and opportunity-
 - ◆ To take part in the conduct of public affairs,
 - ◆ To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections;
- ◆ Article 26 declared that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law.
- ◆ The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, expressed the conviction that peace is inextricably linked with equality of women and men. The Beijing Declaration, a landmark event that focused on political empowerment of women and consequently, on the issue of women's reservation, has received international recognition and the consensus that establishment of quotas for women's political participation was legitimate and practical.
- ◆ A 1995 report of the United Nations Development Programme held that 30 per cent would be the minimum representation required for women as a group to exert a meaningful influence in legislative assemblies. Only 15 of the countries included in the survey conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union have achieved this level. Interestingly, though, 3 of the 15 -Rwanda (48.8 per cent), South Africa (32.8 per cent) and Mozambique (30 per cent) - are post-conflict societies, demonstrating how electoral measures instituted as part of peace processes can improve women's representation.
- ◆ At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, world leaders agreed on including Eliminating gender disparities at all levels by 2015 as one of the 'Millennium Development Goals', an ambitious agenda for reducing poverty and improving lives.

- ◆ UN Security Council adopted resolution (S/RES/1325) on women and peace and security on 31 October 2000, urging all Member States to increase the participation of women and the incorporation of gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts.
- ◆ At its forty-eighth session held in New York on 14 March, 2004, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted the following agreed conclusions concerning women's equal participation in elections as part of post-conflict peace-building and called on the Governments as well as all other relevant participants to:
 - ◆ Ensure equal access of women in all stages of the electoral process,
 - ◆ Ensure equal access for women to voter and civic education, provide women candidates with full support, training and financial resources, and eliminate discriminatory practices hampering women's participation either as voters or [as] candidates."
 - ◆ An election fails to comply with international obligations and standards unless the opportunity for full and equal participation by women is provided.
- ◆ Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women called upon the State Parties to condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women, Article 7 similarly desired that the State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country.
- ◆ By resolution 43/224 of 21 USG December 1988, the UN General Assembly endorsed the Secretary-General's decision to deploy, on a full-time basis, a Focal Point for Women in the Office of the Human Resources Management at the UN Secretariat, at the Principal Officer

level. The Focal Point was mandated to monitor the status of women in the United Nation's Secretariat, and through the Special Adviser on Gender, report on progress to the Secretary-General. This initiative of creating an office for the Focal Point for Women was in direct response to calls at three global conferences on women- Mexico, Copenhagen and Nairobi-and the resulting General Assembly resolutions which decreed that the United Nations must provide leadership and set an example for Member States by achieving gender equality for women in the Secretariat, in particular, at the decision-making levels.

The above developments show the concern expressed at the global level on the denial of equal rights to women and their inability to achieve equal political participation along with men.

Indian Women's Political Participation:

A Historical Background

The history of Indian women's participation in politics could be traced back to the reform movements of the nineteenth century, which emerged as a result of the conflicts between the Indian nationalists and the Colonial power. This class made attempts to reform the Indian society through campaigns against the caste system, polytheism, idol worship, animism, purdah, child marriage, and sati etc., Raja Ram Mohan Roy focused his efforts on women's education and abolition of sati. In the early 1850s, a campaign by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar resulted in the passage of the Widow Remarriage Act, 1856. Several eminent women reformers participated in these movements both on an all-India basis and from the Maharashtra region with the help of organizations like the Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Prathana Samaj etc. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Ramabai Ranade, and Serennai Cursetji established the Bharata Mahila Parishad, *Arya Mahila Samaj*, and *Stri Zarthosti Mandal* for philanthropic and charitable work for the upliftment and enlightenment of women. Begum Shah Nawaz's mother, Amir-un-Nisa, became a Founder-member of *Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam* in Punjab. However, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani started the first independent women's organization, the Bharat Stree Mahamandal, which had its first meeting in Allahabad in 1910. The Bharat Stree Mahamandal planned to open branches in all parts of India to promote female education. It established branches in Lahore, Allahabad, Delhi, Karachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Midnapur and Kolkata to bring together women, irrespective of their caste, creed, class and party affiliation, on the basis of their common interest in the moral and material progress of the women in India.⁽¹⁾

1. Women Activists (Available at <http://nrcw.nic.in/index2.asp?sublinkid=461>).

Similarly, Swarna Kumari Debi started the women's organisation Sakhi Samiti in 1886 for widows. These activities gave an opportunity for women's participation in public life, paving the way for their entry into the independence struggle. Swarna Kumari Debi, one of the two delegates elected from Bengal to represent the State at the 1890 Congress session is a case in point.

The *Swadeshi* movement in Bengal (1905-8) marked the beginning of women's participation in nationalist activities. Many of the women were from families already involved in nationalist politics. Even women from middle class nationalist families contributed jewelry, money and grain to the movement. They took active part in the boycott of foreign goods and in revolutionary activities. Sister Nivedita, as a member of the National Revolutionary Council, organized women for nationalist activities. Others like Agyavati in Delhi, Madame Cama, Kumudini Mitra etc were seen as a threat by the British.

The establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 marked the beginning of a new era in the political history of India as well as the entry of new educated middle-class into politics, transforming the Indian political scene. But, the liberal perspective of the Indian elite was not yet broad enough to include women's political rights. However, various sections of the society steadily developed their political agendas and learnt how to use their strategic resources in order to give concrete shape to their political goals.

The first concerted efforts at constitutional reforms in India took place in 1909 owing to pressure from the Indian elite, resulting in the increase in the number of men eligible for elected office, admission of Indians to the Secretary of State's Council, to the Viceroy's Executive Council, and to the Executive Councils of Bombay and Madras Presidencies, and the introduction of an elected element into legislative councils, with provision for separate electorates for Muslims. There was no provision for women in these reforms. ⁽²⁾

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2. The system of elections introduced by the 1909 reforms was very indirect and complicated. The people elected members of local bodies, who elected members of Electoral College, which in turn elected members of the provincial Legislatures. *(contd.)*

The years starting from 1917 were significant in the history of women's movement in India. Between 1917 and 1927, emerged the Women's Indian Association, the National Council of Women in India (The Council was founded by Lady Amerdeen. The three life patrons of the National Council were Dowager Begum Saheb of Bhopal, Maharani Saheb of Baroda and Lady Dorab Tata), and the All India Women's Conference. The Women's Indian Association was started by Margaret Cousins together with Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Malathi Patvardhan, Rani Laxmibai Rajwade (nee Dr. Naguti Moropant Joshi), Ammu Swaminathan, Mrs. Dadabhoy and Mrs. Ambujammal. Described as the first truly feminist organisation in India, it strongly supported the Home Rule Movement. The AIWC became extremely active on the question of women's suffrage, child marriage, Hindu Code Bill, labour issues, relief and nationalist work. Dedicated women like Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, and Renuka Ray were also associated with the AIWC). During this period, Maniben Kara, a well known social activist, organized *Sewa Mandir* to work among poor women dwelling in the slums. There were other organizations like the Ladies Congress in Madras and the Bharat Stree Mandal (founded by Sarala Devi Chaudhurani in Bengal and Punjab) which were localized bodies, but with equally important mandate even at the local level.

Montague and Chelmsford Reforms

The British had granted limited suffrage even for men; only to those who possessed a certain amount of property and education. They were not willing to consider universal adult suffrage, leave alone grant voting rights to women. Many educated nationalists in India were far from satisfied with the Morley-Minto reforms (1909) and started agitating for further reforms which were to culminate in self-rule. Englishmen still dominated India and there had been no real decrease in their power or increase in national power. Indians wanted further reforms.

(contd.) The members of the provincial legislatures finally elected members of the Central Legislature. (See, Morley-Minto Reforms Act, Available at http://www.indianetzone.com/25/morley-minto_reforms_act.htm)

The movement for Indian independence also gave rise to the question of women's suffrage. For a number of years most of the women who attended the sessions of the Indian National Congress worked as mere volunteers and sang the national song. But the scene started changing, as women started realizing their rights and that they too could contribute to the upliftment of the society. Mahatma Gandhi made use of the traditional symbols and ideals into sources of inspiration and energy for Indian women.

At this stage, in response to the Indian agitation for representative government, the British government set up a committee headed by Edwin Montague, the Secretary for India and Baron Chelmsford, Vice Roy and Governor General of India in 1917 to work out a proposal for further constitutional reforms aiming at the inclusion of some Indians in the government. Many groups presented their case for representation before the committee.

A delegation of women led by Sarojini Naidu called on the Committee on December 18, 1917 to demand voting rights for women.⁽³⁾ Except Surendranath Banerjee, prominent political leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vithalbhai Patel and Mohammed Ali Jinnah supported women's demand while giving evidence before the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Reforms.

Indian women's agitation for voting rights was due to Margaret Cousins, who was associated with the Irish Home Rule Movement and the Suffragette Movement in Britain. Arriving in India in 1916, she helped the Indian women to build up awareness about the issue of voting rights for women. She

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3. The delegation, organized by Margaret Cousins, included Lady Abala Bose, Mrs. Mazaharul Haq, Rameshwari Nehru, Begum Nishatunnisa Hasrat Mohani, and Annie Besant. The delegation asked for women to be treated as "people" when a franchise for the new Councils was drawn up for the same opportunities of women as for men." (Visalakshi Menon, p.113). See also, Geraldine Forbes. *Votes for Women: The demand for Women's franchise in India*, in Vina Mazumdar (Ed), *Symbols of Power: Studies on the Political Status of Women in India*, Bombay, 1979.

exhorted the women of India to conquer "timidity, shyness, sensitiveness, shrinking from insult, real or imagined."⁽⁴⁾ However, for the British, the demand of Indian women for franchise was quite preposterous because women in most western countries had still not been given the right to vote, despite a protracted struggle. (In 1918, only women over thirty in Britain were enfranchised as against men who could vote at twenty one. It was only in 1928 that women in Britain could vote on the same terms as men.) Consequently, Montague and Chelmsford were not in favor of conceding the women's demand for a right to vote. The Committee recommended:⁽⁵⁾

- ◆ Completion of the edifice of local self government, giving considerable measure of responsibility in various fields to provincial legislatures, which are to be composed of directly elected representative sand which will act under the broadest franchise possible under Indian conditions;
- ◆ A vice regal legislature which will be composed of two chambers, the second chamber being called "the Council of State":

Towards enfranchisement of women

The Government of India Act, 1919 enfranchised a mere three per cent of Indian adults for the provincial assemblies, based on qualifications of education and property. It excluded women from the vote. Indian nationalist leaders, however, were sympathetic to the cause of women's suffrage. The Bombay session of the Indian National Congress (August 1918) passed a resolution in favour of franchise for women. Later, in his Presidential Address delivered at the thirty-fourth Annual Session of the Indian National Congress on 27 December 1919, Motilal Nehru drew the session's attention to this failure in providing for the political rights of women. In spite of the fact that the Indian suffragists

4. Ibid. p.112

5. *The New York Times*, July 6, 1918. Available at <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf>

had secured the support of all the major political parties in India to demonstrate before the imperial state the willingness of the Indian politicians to support political equality for Indian women, the British left the fate of the Indian women's right to vote to be decided by the new political institutions (provincial legislative councils) created by the 1919 Government of India Act.

Accordingly, over the course of the 1920s, various Provincial Councils passed resolutions removing sex disqualification on voting, provided a woman owned sufficient property. Because of the extremely restrictive property and income criteria, only about a million women all over India were benefited. If a woman was entitled to vote for Provincial Council, she was also eligible for voting for the Central Legislative Assembly. When the bar on women contesting for elections or being nominated as Members of the Councils was removed in 1927, the Madras State Provincial Legislature threw open its membership to women.⁽⁶⁾

Women's demand for adult franchise without gender discrimination as contained in a memorandum emanating from a meeting of the women's organizations in 1930 was turned down by the British government. Even in India, a section of the male leadership opposed unfettered voting rights to women but there were also those who believed in liberal democratic virtues, and did not fear that votes for women would tear the fabric of society binding India together.⁽⁷⁾ At the 1931 Karachi session, the Congress party took the historic decision committing itself to political equality of women, regardless of their economic status and qualifications. The proposal met with virtually no opposition.

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6. In the UP Legislative Council, there was near unanimous support for granting voting rights to women when the question of women's franchise was being discussed in December 1921. The only member who raised some objections was the Nawab of Chattari, who cited the educational backwardness of women, the purdah system etc. in opposing voting rights to women. (Visalakshi Menon, P.115)
 7. Pearson, Gail. Tradition, Law and the Female Suffrage Movement in India in *Women's Suffrage in Asia: Gender, Nationalism and Democracy*, (Eds.) Louise P. Edwards and Mina Roces, London and New York (2004) Routledge Curzon, p.197.

The Government of India Act 1935 further expanded the franchise for men and women. It provided that "women could vote if they qualified on one of a number of conditions: ownership of property in their own right, attainment of education and literacy, and wifehood, if the husband was eligible to vote."⁽⁸⁾

The 1920's had also witnessed the emergence of a second generation of feminists like Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Lady Piroj Bai Mehta, Nellie Sengupta and others, who were advocates of women's rights. Several other women were active on causes other than the Independence movement including Prabhavati Mirza (Trade Unionist), Kamini Roy (social reformer), and Aghore Kamini Roy ⁽⁹⁾ A number of these reformist and revolutionary women were also eminent writers, who combined activism and writing.

Women who were strong leaders in the Independence movement were Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Basanti Devi. A strong supporter of women's rights, Sarojini Naidu worked with the Congress and the Muslim League. She was instrumental in the passage of a resolution by the Congress Party in support of women's franchise and became the first Indian woman to be elected President of the Indian National Congress. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay participated in the *Satyagraha* movement of the 1930s. Aruna Asaf Ali's first major political involvement was in the salt march at which she was arrested and prosecuted. She was also active in the Quit India movement, edited *Inquilab* magazine of the Congress and established the National Federation of Indian Women. She came to be known as the Grand Old Lady of the Independence Movement and heroine of the 1942 movement. Basanti Devi took active part in anti-British

8. Ibid.p.196

9. She was the mother of Dr B.C.Roy, the famous Chief Minister in the post-independent era. She founded the Brahmika Samaja, with the aim of helping the lot of poor and helpless Brahmo women in Bihar through various small-scale economic projects and assisted in widow remarriages.

activities and was arrested for picketing shops that sold foreign goods, and in 1922 presided over the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee.⁽¹⁰⁾

While fighting for their voting rights, women also joined the freedom struggle inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. Thousands of women joined in the salt Satyagraha, which is "generally remembered as the first time when 'masses of Indian women' got involved in the struggle for Independence". Several women's organisations were formed to mobilize women to participate in nationalist activities including processions, pickets, and charka spinning such as the Ladies Picketing Board, *Desh Sevika Sangh*, *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* and *Mahila Rashtriya Sangh*. In pre-independence days, women's organizations like the Women's Indian Association, National Council for Women in India, and the All India Women's Conference worked to raise and articulate women's demand for women's rights and to struggle continuously to get them. The issue of reserved seats for women continued to surface in the political discussions during the 1930s. But, women's organizations agog with nationalism, did not favour reserved seats for women and were in favor of seats reserved for them in multi-member constituencies, which they felt would enable women to learn to compete under the same conditions as men. Beyond any doubt, the active participation of women in the political struggles for independence consummated in a Constitution based on the principles of equality and guaranteeing equal rights to suffrage for women.

Government of India Act, 1935

The British government appointed the Simon Commission in November 1927 to "enquire into the working of the system of government and the development of representative institutions in

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10. *Baseline Report on Women and Political Participation in India*. Prepared by National Institute of Advanced Studies-Gender Studies Unit, Women's Voice, National Alliance of Women and Initiatives-Women in Development by a Core Group consisting of Shantha Mohan and others, coordinated by International Women's Rights Action Watch, Asia Pacific, Kuala Lumpur. (Advanced Unedited Version). Available at http://www.iwraw-ap.org/aboutus/pdf/FPwomen_and_pol_pax.pdf).

British India and matters connected therewith" and to report "as to whether and to what extent it is desirable to establish the principle of responsible government or to extend, modify or restrict, the degree of responsible government then existing therein, including the question whether the establishment of second chambers of the local legislatures is or is not desirable." As no Indian was included as a member in the Commission, both Congress Party and Muslim League and several women leaders opposed the composition of the Simon Commission and staged a boycott.

Independently of the Simon Commission, a Committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru by an all-party conference in May 1928. The Committee was asked to consider and determine the principles of a constitution for India. The Committee favoured a Dominion status for India, joint electorates with reservation of seats for minorities (except in Punjab and Bengal) on population basis, with a right to contest additional seats. While providing for full protection to the religious and cultural interests of the Muslims, the Committee suggested nineteen fundamental rights for inclusion in the proposed statute. The report sparked a great deal of objections, with some groups supporting reserved seats for women and minorities, and some supporting reserved seats for women but not for minorities, and others opposing reserved seats for both women and minorities.

In 1931, when a new Constitution for India was being discussed in the British Parliament, the three major organizations, i.e., Women's India Association, All India Women's Conference and National Council for Women in India, met and drafted a joint memorandum supporting adult suffrage and rejecting special measures to ensure women's representation in legislatures. The Memorandum prepared for submission to the Franchise Committee of the Second Round Table Conference demanded universal adult suffrage and mixed general electorates and rejected reservation, nomination, or co-option of women. Even earlier, during her Congress Presidential address in 1925 Sarojini Naidu had pleaded for a women's section of the Congress. As such women leaders held that reservation was a retrograde step after the acceptance of political equality in the Fundamental Rights Resolu-

tion of the Indian National Congress in 1931. In her presidential address to the All India Women's Conference, Sarojini Naidu said:

"We are not weak, timid, meek women. We hold the courageous Savitri as our ideal, we know how Sita defied those who entertained suspicion of her ability to keep her chastity. We possess the spirit of creative energy to legislate for the morale of the world. I think this conference is writing the history of women of the world. I will, however, confess to you one thing. I will whisper it into this loud-speaker. I am not a feminist. To be a feminist is to acknowledge that one's life has been repressed. The demand for granting preferential treatment to women is an admission on her part of her inferiority and there has been no need for such a thing in India as the women have always been by the side of men in Council and in the fields of battle We must have no mutual conflict in our homes or abroad. We must transcend differences. We must rise above nationalism, above religion, above sex. ⁽¹¹⁾

At the same session, Lady Tata lamented the absence of women members in the Legislative Assembly as a great drawback as women could have voiced the feelings of their sisters with greater directness and force, than men. In their letter to the Premier and Chairman of the Minorities Committee, the three organizations (AIWC, WIA and NCWI) jointly issued a memorandum on the status of Indian women in the proposed new Constitution and demanded immediate and complete recognition of women's equal political status in theory and practice. They further stated that they did not wish to seek any form of preferential treatment as that would violate the integrity of the universal demand of Indian women for absolute equality of political status. ⁽¹²⁾

Lord Lothian, Head of the Franchise Committee appointed

11. Kumud Sharma, *Power and Representation: Reservation for Women in India*, AJWS, Vol.6, No.1, pp.47-87, (Available at <http://ewhawoman.or.kr/down/data/2805025630000102.pdf>)

12. Ibid.

to find a solution to the problems, heard arguments for and against franchise qualifications and reserved seats for women. After meeting the women's delegation led by Sarojini Naidu, Lord Lothian remarked that "they were very firm in their demand for equality as a basis of the new Indian." (13)

The Committee recommended at the end of 1932 that women's right to vote be expanded and that 2.5% of the seats in all political bodies be set aside for women. To guarantee that these women were not drawn disproportionately from one community - i.e., the Hindus - the committee proposed electing these women on the basis of communal electorates so that, for example, Muslims would elect Muslim women and Sikhs would elect Sikh women. This overlapped with the committee's broader recommendation that all minority communities in India be assigned reserved seats on the basis of separate electorates, an idea which sparked another round of civil disobedience among all communities, including those supposedly favoured by these provisions.

After a third Round Table conference on the proposals, the British Government issued a white paper on the details of the working basis for the New Constitution of India in March 1933: diarchy at the Centre and responsible governments in the Provinces. On the basis of the Simon Commission Report, the Nehru Report and the outcome of the Round Table Conferences and the White Paper, the Government of India Act 1935 was enacted in February 1935 by the House of Commons. (14)

Even as the British were trying to solve the problem of representation by retaining separate electorates and reserved seats for minorities and asking provincial governments to nominate women if no women were elected directly, women's groups affiliated to the Congress Party drafted a memorandum in 1931 reiterating their opposition to reserved seats for women and all

13. Quoted by Muniruddin Qureshi (Ed.), *Social Status of Indian Women*, Anmol Publications Pvt Ltd., New Delhi (2003) p.113.

14. Grover, B.L. and S. Grover, *A New Look at Modern Indian History* (From 1707 to the Modern Times), New Delhi (1998), S Chand & Co., pp.401-402.

other social groups. However, a section of the women's movement continued to maintain that women were unlikely to gain election without reserved seats. Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz and Radhabai Subbarayan, pleaded for 5 per cent reservation for women in the legislatures. Other women activists did not appreciate this sort of favour-seeking but were in favour of universal adult suffrage through which women would automatically carve out their political niche. However, the Government of India Act, 1935, which broadened the franchise base, provided for formal induction of women in the political process both in reserved and general seats.

Under the Act of 1935, the right to vote was extended to more women. If earlier the proportion of women to men voters was approximately one to twenty in an electorate of seven million voters in the country, after promulgation of the Government of India Act 1935, the proportion increased to one woman to every five men, in an electorate of 35 million. However, only literate and married women of 21 years of age and above were eligible to vote provided they fulfilled the same property and taxation qualifications as men.

The Government of India Act of 1935 reserved six seats for women in the Council of State, nine seats in the Federal Assembly, and forty-one seats in the various provincial legislatures. In addition, the Act reserved seats for fourteen other groups based on profession, race, religion, social backwardness, and other minority status. Although earlier Acts had set aside seats for Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and 'depressed classes,' the dramatic increase in the number of reserved seats and recognized categories of representation led many nationalists to conclude that reservations and separate electorates were simply tactics to perpetuate British control by dividing the population into numerous special interests. For this reason, the Indian National Congress objected to special rights for any of these groups, and its women's group issued a statement rejecting special privileges for women for the sake of the common good. Some minority groups, for their part, protested the requirement to include some women within their allocation of reserved seats, concerned that this effectively diluted their own quota.

1937 elections

Although the Congress condemned the Government of India Act 1935 on a number of grounds, it eventually decided to contest the first elections to be held under the terms of the Act in 1937. The Delimitation Committee appointed by the government recommended carving out special constituencies comprised of male and female voters for the women's seats to ensure that the women elected to these seats were more concerned with social welfare than with party politics.

As parties began to prepare for the elections under the Government of India Act 1935, women discovered that parties were largely unwilling to nominate women for the general seats and were disinclined to nominate any more women than necessary for the reserved seats. The All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) met with the leaders of the various political parties to request that they nominate at least a few women to the general constituencies.

Following the 1937 elections, 56 women entered the provincial legislatures, with 41 of them representing the reserved seats for women. Ten women had won unreserved seats and five were nominated to the Legislative Councils. There were 36 congress women, 11 independent, 3 Muslim leaguers and one member of the Union Party in Punjab among the women legislators. Thus, Annapurnabai Deshmukh and Laxmibai were elected to the Bombay legislative Assembly in 1937 while Sumatibai Gore, Tarabai Modak and Indirabai Deshpande were elected to the Bombay Legislative Assembly in 1946. In the C.P. and Berar, Anasuyabai Kale was elected as the deputy speaker of the Assembly. However no Marathi speaking women was appointed as a member of the Bombay and the C.P and Berar ministries both in 1937 and 1946. Though the claims of women to a substantial share in political power were largely ignored, women continued to be loyal to the Mahatma and the Indian National Congress.

Despite these relative successes, women's organizations came to play a reduced role in subsequent elections even as

women's electoral turnout increased. A women's sub-committee established in 1939 under the National Planning Committee, was charged with reviewing the social, economic and legal status of women and suggesting measures to make equality of status and opportunity a possibility in the planned economy of free India. (Women in Modern India, Geraldine Hancock Forbes and Gordon Johnson, Cambridge University Press (1999) The Women's Subcommittee firmly rejected the option of quotas for women as a policy for women's empowerment. The question of reservation of seats for women in the State Legislatures and in the Parliament did not surface as a major issue until later.

Question of Reservation for Women:

Post-Independence

Though the foundation for political participation of women in India was laid during the nationalist movement, there was no follow up action or concerted effort to broaden the political base by incorporating women into political processes after independence. The space for women in the political arena has declined since independence and their participation in politics has been limited to family connections rather than convictions and commitment. Women have been promoted to political positions only when there are no other male to perpetuate the privilege of the family. By putting women in these positions, the family could still have control over the power vested with the office. The framers of the Constitution perhaps believed that law would lead to social change and bring about equality between the sexes. Yet inequality and discrimination continues to persist in all spheres of public and private life. This is quite evident from the fact that the participation of women in politics and in other decision-making bodies after attaining independence is very limited. ⁽¹⁾ As we have already seen, in 1939, the "Women's subcommittee", within the National Planning Committee formed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose to evolve the future economic policy of independent India, rejected the option of women's quotas.

In the months before independence, a new Constituent Assembly met in December 1946. The Congress leadership succeeded in convincing each province to send at least one female representative. When the Constituent Assembly met for the first time on 10 December 1946, there were 217 representatives, including nine women. ⁽²⁾ Speaking in the Constituent Assembly

1. *Baseline Report*, op cit

2. Though the Constituent Assembly comprised 296 members, including 80 Muslim members, the latter's attendance was poor due to Muslim League asking them to boycott the First Session of the Assembly. The women members present at the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly were: (contd...)

on 19 December 1946, on the question of equal rights of women, Hansa Mehta from Bombay said:

"I wish to offer a few remarks on that of this Resolution, the fundamental rights which affect a section of the people, namely, women.

It will warm the heart of many a woman to know that free India will mean not only equality of status but equality of opportunity. It is true that a few women in the past and even today enjoy high status and have received the highest honour that any man can receive, like our friend, Mrs. Sarojini Nadu. But these women are few and far between. One swallow does not make a summer. These women do not give us a real picture of the position of Indian women in this country.

The average woman in this country has suffered now for centuries from inequalities heaped upon her by laws, customs and practices of people who have fallen from the heights of that civilisation of which we are all so proud, and in praise of which Dr. Sir S. Radhakrishnan has always spoken. There are thousands of women today who are denied the ordinary human rights. They are put behind the purdah, secluded within the four walls of their homes, unable to move freely. The Indian woman has been reduced to such a state of helplessness that she has become an easy prey of those who wish to exploit the situation. In degrading women, man has degraded himself. In raising her man will not only raise himself but rise the whole nation. Mahatma Gandhi's name has, been invoked on the floor of this House. It would be ingratitude on my part if I do not acknowledge the great debt of gratitude

2. continued

Ammu Swaminadhan, Dakshayani Velayudhan, G Durgabai, Hansa Mehta, Leela Ray, Purnima Banerji, Sucheta Kripalani, Kamala Chaudhry, Sarojini Naidu, and Malati Chaudhary. Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur attended the Assembly on 17 December 1946 and 21 December 1946, respectively.

that Indian women owe to Mahatma Gandhi for all that he has done for them. In spite of all these, we have never asked for privileges. The women's organisation to which I have the honour to belong has never asked for reserved seats, for quotas, or for separate electorates. What we have asked for is social justice, economic justice, and political justice. We have asked for that equality which can alone be the basis of mutual respect and understanding and without which real co-operation is not possible between man and woman. Women form one half of the population of this country and, therefore, men cannot go very far without the co-operation of women. This ancient land cannot attain its rightful place, its honoured place in this world without the co-operation of women. I therefore welcome this Resolution for the great promise which it holds, and I hope that the objectives embodied in the Resolution will not remain on paper but will be translated into reality. (Cheers).⁽³⁾

The first draft of the constitution enshrined equality between women and men as a fundamental right and thus did not include any special provisions to facilitate election of women. The draft constitution retained reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, as well as Other Backward Castes. Thus, when the Constitution of India was adopted in 1950 it suppressed reserved seats for women that existed earlier and proclaimed equality between men and women.

In 1953, a National Backward Classes Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Kakasaheb Kalelkar, with the mission of identifying those groups qualifying as "Other Backward Classes". Touching the question of reservations for women, Kakasaheb wrote in his report:

"The position of women in India is peculiar. We have always felt that they have lived under great social handicaps and must, therefore, as a class be regarded as back-

3. *Constituent Assembly of India*, Debates. Vol.1, (Available at <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol.1, p.9.htm>)

ward. But since they do not form a separate community it has not been possible for us to list them among the backward classes." ⁽⁴⁾

This statement is remarkable insofar as it considers women as a class - a conception central to the second wave of the Indian women's movement, which was to emerge later in the 1970s. But Kalelkar underlined very clearly the major obstacle to this conception: *women do not form a community* for they cannot be isolated from men.

It may be recalled at this juncture that the founders of the Panchayati Raj had desired that women should not only become beneficiaries and contributors to development but also should have representation in the rural political institutions. Thus, the Balwantrai Mehta Committee (1957), on whose recommendations the Village Panchayat Act 1958 was passed, had recommended co-option of two women members and one member each from SC and ST to Panchayati Raj bodies. Although the final version of the law passed in 1959 did not make any specific requirements regarding women's representation, it did empower local leaders to nominate women to the council if no women were elected directly. Over the next two decades, most councils adopted this practice and co-opted one or two women if none were elected. This practice eventually became a crucial vehicle for women's participation in local government: among the 320 women in local councils in the state of Maharashtra in 1978, for example, only six had been elected directly.

The subsequent Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) had similarly laid special emphasis on the need to strengthen and reorganize women's constructive decision-making and managerial roles. Considering women as the most important part of the population, the Ashok Mehta Committee had suggested that a committee with all-women members of the Mandal Panchayats be formed so that

4. Quoted by Stephanie Tawa Lama-Rewal, CSH Occasional Paper, *Women in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation*, A Study in the context of the Debate on the Women's Reservation Bill, Available at www.cshdelhi.com/publications/downloads/ops/OP2.pdf+CSWI+Report&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=11&gl=in

decisions are made by women members themselves on priorities and choices in welfare and development programmes meant for women and children. But, women continued to be neglected and their political participation was almost non-existent.

The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79) coincided with the International Women's Decade. Noting the low participation of women in politics, the government of India constituted a Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) for undertaking a comprehensive examination of all questions relating to the rights and status of women in the context of changing social and economic conditions in the country and problems relating to the advancement of women. The Report of the CSWI (Towards Equality) published in 1974 represented the most ambitious survey ever on every aspect of Indian women's lives. The Report stated that the dynamics of social change has adversely affected a large section of women and had created new imbalances and disparities such as: declining sex ratio, lower expectancy of life, higher infant and maternal mortality, declining work participation, illiteracy and rising migration. ⁽⁵⁾

The Committee observed: "The rights guaranteed by the Constitution have helped to build an illusion of equality and power which is frequently used as an argument to resist protective and accelerating measures to enable women to achieve their just and equal position in society". The Report further stated that the "women's ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible because of the inadequate attention paid to their political education and mobilization by both political parties and women's organizations." ⁽⁶⁾

Other studies also revealed that while women's participation as voters had been increasing at a faster rate than men's, their

5. *Government of India*, Evaluation of Plan Programmes of the Planning Commission for Development, Chapter 6, Section: 6.5, Available at envfor.nic.in/unccd/annex-05.pdf

6. Quoted by Kumud Sharma, Transformative Politics, in *Writing the Women's Movement: A Reader*, (Eds.) Mala Khullar et al., New Delhi, Zubaan (2005) p.183

representation as candidates - successful or unsuccessful - registered an opposite trend. The marginalising trend was proved by the fact that in the general elections to the Lok Sabha, right from 1952, the percentage of women contestants remained virtually stagnant at 3.2 per cent, with the exception of the second general election in 1957, at which their percentage was 4.4. The success rate varied from 43.1 per cent in 1952 and 50 per cent in 1962 to the lowest ever 7.9 per cent in 1996. In state assemblies there were variations in representation, ranging from 1.8 in 1952 to a maximum of 6.3 in 1957, stagnating around 4.5 per cent in the rest of the elections. In the state averages covering the period 1952 to 1997 the variation was negligible, again showing stagnation at around 4 per cent. (7)

Political parties and women legislators which met the CSWI opposed reservations even as a transitional measure. A majority of the members of the Committee rejected the idea of reservations for women holding it as a retrograde step from the equality conferred by the Constitution and that in India women's cause has always been championed by men. They also apprehended that separate constituencies for women would precipitate similar demands from other groups. However, the Committee's report conveyed its authors' dismay at the glaring discrepancy between the promises of the Constitution and the reality even after 25 years after independence:

"The right to political equality has not enabled women to play their roles as partners and constituents in the political process [...] Instead, these rights have helped to build an illusion of equality and power which is frequently used as an argument to resist special protective and acceleratory measures to enable women to achieve their just and equal position in society." (8)

While unanimously recommending reservation for women in statutory women Panchayats at the village level, the Committee rejected the demand for reservation in legislative bodies. In-

7. *Baseline Report*, op cit

8. Quoted in Stephanie. op cit.

stead, the Committee asked the political parties to adopt a definite policy regarding the percentage of women candidates for contesting elections. After listing the arguments in favour of reservations for women in political assemblies, the Committee finally rejected the same on three grounds: ⁽⁹⁾

"Separate constituencies for women would narrow their outlook. [...] Women's interests as such cannot be isolated from economic, social and political interests of groups, strata and classes in society. [...] The minority argument cannot be applied to women. Women are not a community, they are a category." ⁽¹⁰⁾

In order to encourage a greater participation by women into the political process, however, the CSWI recommended that "women Panchayats", i.e. women's councils, be formed in every village as an integral part of the structure of local government. It also enjoined the political parties to increase the proportion of women among their candidates, "so that in time to come the representation of women in the Legislative Bodies has some relationship to their position in the total population of the country or the state." ⁽¹¹⁾

The recommendations of the CSWI did not seem to have had any significant impact on the proportion of women in elected assemblies. Political parties did not volunteer to promote women when elections were announced. No male political aspirant was prepared to give up his aspirations in favour of a woman. Thus, in the Lok Sabha the proportion of women peaked at 8.6 per cent in 1999, while in the Vidhan Sabhas, on an average, women constituted only four per cent of representatives between 1952 and 1997.

9. Only three women members of the Committee dissented on this, because they felt the Committee was being unwise in ignoring the need for institutionalised measures to eliminate or at least weaken institutionalised inequalities which universal adult franchise had failed to dislodge. (See Baseline Report op cit)

10. *Government of India*, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Department of Social Welfare, 1974.

11. Ibid

Women are thus defined as a group conspicuous by their near absence, throughout time, from political arenas. At the end of the 1980s, this established fact revived the notion of women's quotas as a way to force the invisible barrier that denied them access to politics. Quotas in political assemblies became a major demand of the Indian women's movement. The *National Perspective Plan for Women*, a document prepared under the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1988, updated the data compiled in *Towards Equality*, and recommended that (i) 33 per cent of seats in all elected assemblies, from the village to the Union level, be reserved for women, and that (ii) political parties promote women's electoral representation by giving at least 33 per cent of their tickets to women candidates. In 1989, the Rajiv Gandhi government introduced a decentralisation Bill which would ultimately become the 73rd and 74th constitution amendment bills, providing 33 per cent reservations for women in local elected bodies.

But women's quotas did exist at the local level even before 1993. Four States played a pioneering role in this regard: in 1985, the Janata government of Karnataka implemented quotas (25% of seats) in the village and district councils, and the first elections under the quota system were held in the state in 1987. Karnataka was followed in 1986 by the Telugu Desam Party government in Andhra Pradesh, which reserved 9% of the seats for women in district councils; in 1990, the Congress (I) government of Maharashtra introduced quotas (30% of seats) in urban local bodies as well as in the district, block and village councils; and in 1991, the Communist-led government of Kerala introduced quotas (30% of seats) at the district level only.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendments provided that "one-third of the total seats in Panchayati Bodies will be reserved for women. Reservation of seats for SCs/STs will be in proportion to their population to the total population. The reserved seats will rotate in different constituencies in a Panchayat. Further the offices of the Chairperson in the Panchayats shall be reserved for SCs and STs in proportion to their population in the state and one third of such offices shall be reserved for women by rotation in different Panchayats." These Amendments were implemented in

1993. They were enacted without any pressure or persistent demand from women or any other section.

Following the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution in 1992, it became mandatory that elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions be held once every five years. However, many states have sought to and even succeeded in circumventing this provision. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Pondicherry have not held Panchayat elections since the 73rd amendment came into force. In the case of Assam, where elections were due in 1997, they have been postponed first due to the budget session, then owing to the monsoons and, finally, because of the law and order situation in the state. Until recently, even Andhra Pradesh and Bihar belonged to the same category and held elections only after the intervention of the High Court and Supreme Court respectively. Further, states implementing the Panchayati Raj/ Nagarplanka Acts show variation in their numbers as well as in their participation.

Surprisingly in spite of over a million elected women representatives flooding the local governments after the constitutional amendments; the women's movement in India was totally silent over this issue till 1996. The response of women to these two measures in the elections that followed in several states, and the political dynamism demonstrated by them ultimately persuaded women's organisations into putting forward a joint demand for one-third reservation in state assemblies and Parliament.

In the euphoria generated in participating in the freedom struggle gender did not generate any controversy. Buoyed by the confidence generated by the participation in the nationalist movement, women members in the Constituent Assembly said that they had never asked for privileges or special reservations but only for justice and equality, as is evident from the speech of Hansa Mehta quoted above.

Though women have been participating in the formal channel of politics as voters, as party workers, and as candidates contesting various elections, only a few women have been able to occupy decision-making positions. Soon after independence, the

pattern of politics started becoming intricate and complex as the institutions of parliamentary democracy tried to take roots in Indian soil, full of variations of castes, languages, religions, regions, family structures and cultural norms. One great difficulty about the Indian political scene is that one cannot generalize about the inter-relationship between any single factor and political behaviour. Patterns of political behavior of women from different regions show different relationships, influenced as they are by inter-related factors such as the social status of women, their economic statuses, the cultural norms and the over-all regional outlook towards women's participation in the wider society.

Many factors influence the voting behaviour of women. Important amongst them are education, region, caste and class, awareness about women's issues, opinions of male members in the family, preferences for women candidates and the programmes and policies of various political parties. Though voting is the first step of assimilation in the political process, the gap between voting of men and women has been narrowing, voting by itself it is not sufficient to bring political equality. Women's vote has not been considered of much consequence by political parties and leaders.

Political parties are usually generous in giving promises to women to better their future, but mostly such promises remain on paper. Women do not find a place on decision-making committees of political parties. The manifestos of major political parties especially since the 1989 elections have given attention to women, mainly due to pressure from the women's movement. In the three general elections (1995, 1998 and 1999) they promised many programmes to women, including 33 % reserved seats in Parliament and State Assemblies. But their practice has shown a different pattern. In 1999 elections, when the debate on the reservation policy was intense, there were 277 women contestants for the Lok Sabha, of whom only 47 could win.

Question of Women Reservation

As we have seen from the above narration, the question of reserved seats for women has had a long history; appearing first

in 1935 as part of the Government of India Act, and disappearing when independent India promulgated its own Constitution. The question resurfaced in 1988 as part of the government's National Perspective Plan on women.

Women had begun to campaign for the right to vote and to stand for political office when the country was still a part of the British Empire. Although the Government of India Act of 1919 did not enfranchise women, they were not satisfied with the restricted franchise granted by the provincial legislatures between 1921 and 1929. Women's groups continued to press for the right to stand for election and over the course of the 1920s and there were suggestions about the possibility of reserving seats for women in various political bodies. Although all major political groupings agreed with the need to extend women's right to vote and increase the number of women in elected positions, members of the Simon Commission (appointed by the British in November 1927) and one section of the women's movement supported special franchise qualifications and the reservation of seats for women, while the nationalist movement and another section of the women's movement strongly opposed any mechanisms that would not provide for universal suffrage and that would recognize divisions among the population. The contending positions were based on whether women would be able to win election without the help of reserved seats, and the argument that women should stand for election on the same terms as men because legislators should rise above their personal identities to consider the country's best interests.

The question of political reservation in favor of women died out or at least became dormant till the early seventies, when the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India again debated the issue. Vina Mazumdar writes ⁽¹²⁾:

"Except for the Gandhian interlude, the first three phases of the women's question had focussed entirely on the issues of

12. Mazumdar, Vina. *Emergence of the Women's question in India and the role of women's studies*, Occasional Paper, Available at <http://cwds.ac.in/OCPaper/EmergenceVM.pdf>

women's familial status, their access to education and better legal rights as the instruments of reform. In the fourth phase, after independence, the question was deemed to have been solved, with the adoption of the principle of equality in the Constitution, and throwing open to women the rights to education, the vote and entry into professions, public services and political offices. This phase, which I prefer to describe as the hey-day of the middle class, benefitted a large number of women from this class, breeding in them a complacency and support for the status quo. Women's organisations which had fought militantly for women's rights during the 30s and 40s settled down to perform needed welfare services for the people with grants provided by the Government. For all practical purposes, the women's question disappeared from the public arena for a period of over 20 years. This was reflected in the decline of both research and writings about women during this period.

The All India Panchayat Parishad at its Sixth National Conference held at New Delhi in 1973 also passed a resolution recommending fuller representation of women and a reserved percentage of not less than one-third to start with. This resolution was not followed up in any of its subsequent meetings till 1990. At the Panchayati Raj Sammelans or conferences of the Northern and Western states in January 1989, delegates expressed different views about the reservation of seats for women. While the CSWI rejected, by majority voice, the proposal for statutory reservation of seats for women in legislative bodies, it recommended statutory women's Panchayats at the village level because of the neglect hitherto of women in rural development programs. It also called upon political parties to adopt a definite policy regarding the percentage of women candidates for contesting elections. The Committee also argued that the process of marginalization of women will result in their losing faith in the political process to change their conditions of life. They may opt out of the political system and become either passive partners or rebels.

A group of scholars who examined women's role in the political process, as part of the CSWI exercise came to the conclusion that the process of Indian women coming into their own in

politics has been slow because Indian culture is a political and the force of tradition has been pitted against their political participation. Improving the political status of women is an integral aspect of the overall problem of socio-economic change and of broadening the political elite structure. They noted that the failure of Indian society to "look upon women's participation with sympathy and understanding is an exceedingly retarding factor in political socialization of men and women." It was argued that 30% reservation of seats in the legislative bodies for women cannot lead to their becoming "isolated pockets in the nation" because women are not marginal to society as a minority group might be. Such a transitional measure to break through the existing structure of inequalities will not be retrogression "from the doctrine of equality and the principle of democratic representation" (13)

Women's groups, especially since the 1980s, have been making concerted efforts to convince the State to give special attention to women's issues. They have realized that their efforts to influence state politics have better chances of succeeding, if they have allies and women in sufficient number within the elected bodies. Since the 1980s, feminists have acted as pressure groups forcing the various political parties to spell out their agenda to women. Mainly due to the pressure from the women's movement, the Government has accepted, at least in principle, the approach of visualizing women as participants in the process of development and not as mere beneficiaries of welfare schemes.

Despite the Constitution Amendments, the belief and confidence that women would be elected to national government without the need for special intervention lulled the women's groups from taking any initiative in this area. When the 1971 census revealed that only a small number of women had occupied positions of political power during the last twenty years, the government began to view women's under-representation as a problem. The result was the setting up of the CSWI, to which a reference has already been made above. Having observed and experienced male-chauvinism at the political level, women now concluded

13. Quoted by Kumud Sharma, op cit

that the high ideals that they entertained and the high hopes that they pinned on the politicians in the pre-independence days had been proved wrong and misplaced. Hence the various women's groups met the Committee and presented that reservation for women was the only viable solution for improving women's access to political office at the local, state, and national levels. But the Committee in its final report (December 1974) ultimately took the view that the concept of reserved seats was a retrogressive measures that contradicted the principle of equality in the constitution.

Within the Committee, while Phulrenu Guha and Maniben Kara did not accept the concept of reservation, Vina Mazumdar and Lotika Sarkar were in favour of extension of the principle of reservation to the legislative bodies. In its final report, the Committee categorically rejected reservations for women based its arguments on the grounds that (a) separate constituencies for women threatened to narrow the political outlook of female voters and representatives, (b) women's interests were not distinct from men's interests, and (c) women were not a minority group. The Committee conceded, however, that reservations might be necessary at the local level to ensure the interests of rural and poor women and recommended that women's councils - elected directly by local women - be formed in every village and given the responsibility of managing and administering women's and children's welfare and development programs as part of the broader system of local government. At the same time, the committee also recommended that the political parties should adopt a definite policy regarding the percentage of women to be sponsored by them (to begin with, 15 per cent) for election to State Assemblies and Parliament. The Committee in its report recommended the establishment of Statutory Women's Panchayats at the village level, reservation of seats for women in municipalities as a transitional measure, the constitution of permanent committees in municipalities to initiate and supervise programmes for women, and inclusion of women in all important committees and delegations.

Most of the State Governments paid scant regard to the rec-

ommendations and took no concrete steps to facilitate women's access to political office. However, four States paid heed to the recommendations: in 1983, the Janata government of Karnataka implemented quotas (25% of seats) for women in the village and district councils, followed in 1986 by the Telugu Desam Party government in Andhra Pradesh, which reserved 9% of the seats for women in district councils; in 1990, the Congress (I) government of Maharashtra introduced 30% quota for women in urban local bodies as well as in the district, block and village councils; and in 1991, the Communist-led government of Kerala introduced quotas (30% of seats) at the district level only.

Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi identified improving the position of women's as a new priority issue. The Rajiv Gandhi government got a National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) prepared by a core group of experts in view of the under-representation of women. The NPP aimed at (a) Economic development and integration of women into the mainstream of the economy and (b) Equity and social justice for all women. The Report recommended:

a. 30% of Panchayat seats should be reserved for women at Zilla Parishad level and in local municipal bodies. Wherever possible higher representation of dalits/Tribals, women of weaker sections should be ensured;

b. 30% of executive heads of all local bodies from village Panchayats to district level and a certain percentage of chief executives of Panchayati Raj bodies at lower, middle and higher levels must be reserved for women; and

c. political parties promote women's electoral representation by giving at least 33 per cent of their tickets to women candidates.

But the report dropped the idea of extending 33% reservations to all levels of government, including the state legislatures and the national parliament, allegedly due to a great deal of opposition for such reservation. The authors of the National Perspective Plan seem to have come to the conclusion, in con-

sultation with autonomous women's groups and the women's wings of the various political parties, that it is prudent to pursue reservation at the local level first and then, once women had gained experience in elected politics, to seek to extend reservation to the national level. In fact, the Plan had proposed that the 30% reservation for women may be filled in the initial years by nomination/co-option. But, prominent women's organizations like the All India Women's Conference, Centre for Women's Development Studies, Joint Women's Programme, Mahila Dakshata Samiti, National Federation of Indian Women and Young Women's Christian Association, rejected the recommendation for nomination / co-option. The final version of the National Perspective Plan included provision of reservation for women in Panchayats and municipalities to be filled by election. This was later incorporated in the 64th Constitution Amendment Bill 1989; a comprehensive Bill covering all vital aspects of PRIs. Unfortunately, this Bill could not be enacted as it was not approved by the Rajya Sabha. Due to changes in the government at the Centre and elections during 1989 and 1991, the Bill went through successive revisions to emerge, finally, as the 73rd and 76th Constitutional Amendment Bill in 1992.

Although the 64th Amendment Bill was defeated, when new elections were organized several months later, various political parties incorporated a 30% quota for women in their party manifestos, despite the lack of mass mobilization of women in favour of reserved seats. But, in spite of the promises made in their manifestos, all parties nominated less than 10% women. The National Democratic Front government's attempt to introduce a new and slightly revised version of the Bill did not succeed, as before this bill could be addressed, the governing coalition collapsed and in the elections that followed, Congress was returned to power in 1991.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Bills, providing 33 per cent reservations for women in local elected bodies, were passed by the Parliament towards the end of 1992 and ratified in 1993, with no hostile arguments against reser-

vation of seats for women. ⁽¹⁴⁾

The 73rd and 74th Amendments in the Constitution of India made one million Indian women "elected representatives" in the rural and urban local self government bodies by granting 33% reserved seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1992. During last 16 years, many grass root activists of the women's movement have plunged in electoral politics for empowerment of women in their constituency. Women elected after the implementation of the reservation policy at the local level started making their presence felt.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments were thus a reflection spanning six decades, over the feasibility of women's quotas, as well as by a few local experiments. The 1990s were marked by a quasi universal consensus on the need for women to be better represented in political assemblies. These new policies were preceded everywhere by national debates on the need and ways to increase women's political representation. The provisions relating to quotas (for women, SCs, STs), were hardly discussed prior to the passing of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. This may be due to the fact that those who passed the two constitutional amendments and the implementation of the provisions were not likely to be personally affecting them. But when it came to reservations for women in state legislatures and the parliament, there was a tremendous resistance from the politicians.

Women's Reservation Bill

The relatively quick passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments inspired women's groups in India to come together to press for the immediate extension of 33% reservation to the state as-

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14. The 73rd Amendment mandated one-third reservation for women in all village, block, and district level bodies; in the posts of chairperson and vice-chairperson across all these institutions; and in the seats reserved for SC and ST in each body according to their proportion of the population. The 74th Amendment extended similar provisions to municipal corporations, municipal councils, and local councils. Under the terms of both amendments, the seats allocated to women were to be chosen by direct election and rotate across districts every five-year election cycle.

semblies and the national parliament. All the major political parties responded favourably by incorporating this demand in their manifestos for the 1996 elections. Although all parties presented fewer than 10% female candidates, the United Front government (a coalition led by Janata Dal) identified women's reservation as a priority issue in its Common Minimum Programme. But, in spite of a promise to pursue the Bill, the Deve Gowda government delayed introducing a bill until the last days of the session. When the government finally presented the 81st Amendment Bill in September 1996, there was hardly any time left to discuss or debate its provisions.

The fact that the Bill was tabled a day before the Parliament was to be adjourned, evoked spontaneous support and fierce opposition. Women MPs from different parties and ideologies like Girija Vyas (Congress), late Gita Mukherjee (Communist Party of India), Sushma Swaraj (Bharatiya Janata Party) and Renuka Chowdhary (Telugu Desam Party) pressed for its passage. But male members of the House had decided to oppose it. In addition to resistance to any measure to share power with women, the main criticism was that the bill contained no provision for OBCs (Other Backward Classes), Dalits and minorities. Doubts were also raised regarding the procedure of reserving constituencies for women. These resulted in referring the Bill to a Joint Parliamentary committee chaired by MP Geeta Mukherjee.

The Joint Select Committee rejected the demand for OBC sub-quotas and recommended that the bill be passed into law as soon as possible, though there were some notes of dissent. The Committee suggested that the question of reservation for OBC could be considered at a later date. The report of the committee was presented on 9 December 1996, but the bill could not be taken for voting, mainly due to the mood of politicians. While the female supporters pressed for an immediate vote, the speaker allowed MP's two days to review the report. But, MPs from Janata Dal announced their opposition to the bill and threatened to defy the party whip if OBC sub-quota was not provided. A memorandum signed by 80 (male) mem-

bers of the house, from different parties (many of them from Bharatiya Janata Party, Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party) was presented to the Prime Minister informing him that they intended to vote against the bill in its present form because it ignored the rights of the Other Backward classes, the Dalits and minorities. In addition, the chief ministers of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh requested that their states be exempted from reservation on the grounds of cultural specifics and lack of adequate eligible, trained women candidates among the Tribals of the North East. In any case, the Bill could not be debated before the end of the session. The following attempts were made to get the Bill passed after 1996:

- ♦ The motion for consideration of the Bill was mooted on May 16, 1997, but it lapsed, following the dissolution of the 11th Lok Sabha. Opposition to the women's reservation bill from certain sections of the males in the Parliament was so vehement that Sharad Yadav of the Janata Dal is reported to have thundered: "Do you think these women with short hair can speak for women, for our women... let them take out a rally. We will match them 1,000 for every one." "His rhetoric resounded rather ominously, as though he were thinking of vanquishing an enemy army rather than debating with fellow legislators on the merits or demerits of a bill under consideration" (15)
- ♦ When the Bill was brought before the House during the 12th Lok Sabha on July 14, 1998, as the Constitution (84th Amendment) Bill, 1998, some members from the Samajwadi Party and Rashtriya Janata Dal, with their supporters tried every un-parliamentary way to prevent the introduction of the bill. They raked up a controversy demanding reservations for S.C., S.T., DTNT, Disabled and minority women, and once again

15. Madhu Kishwar, Open Letter to Sharad Yadav, in Indian Express, June 17, 1997.

scuttled the bill. ⁽¹⁶⁾

- ♦ When the Bill was introduced on December 14, 1998, it did not reach the consideration stage and therefore lapsed, following the dissolution of the 12th Lok Sabha.
- ♦ The Constitution (85th Amendment) Bill, 1999, popularly known as Women's Reservation Bill, was introduced on December 23, 1999, only to be shelved on December 22nd, 2000, due to some members of the opposition (especially from Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal and Bahujan Samaj Party) prevented the speaker of the House from presenting the bill for discussion. Though the major parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Congress and leftist parties expressed their support to the bill, members mainly from the smaller parties have repeatedly succeeded in obstructing the bill. It seemed as if there was a silent male whip operating in the House.
- ♦ The National Democratic Alliance government brought the Bill to the Lok Sabha twice during 2002 and 2003 but could not succeed in getting it passed. On May 5, 2003, the Women's Reservation Bill was stoutly resisted in the Lok Sabha by many opposition parties and some sections of the ruling NDA alliance. The speaker announced that he would call for an all-party meeting to generate unanimity/consensus on the Bill in order that the house may agree to its smooth passage.
- ♦ The United Progressive Alliance elected in May 2004 promised to get the bill passed and introduced the 108th Constitution Amendment Bill in the Rajya Sabha on 6th May, 2008.

The repeated delays in introducing the Bill and stone-wall-

16. MP Surenda Prakash Yadav (RJD) snatched the bill from the Law Minister's hands and, passing more copies from the Speaker's table to about fifty other MP's, tore the bill to bits on the floor of the Lok Sabha. The action was applauded by the leaders of RJD and SP.

ing its discussion in the Parliament show the persistence of patriarchal power in the mainstream politics. On the one hand were MPs from Congress, BJP and Left parties advocating for converting the bill into an Act, while on the other the members of Janata Dal (U) and Samajwadi Party were persistently creating ruckus against introduction of the bill for past 12 years. Indian women's struggle for fair representation in the parliament is perhaps the longest struggle in the history of democratic India. One government after the other has either failed to even table the Women Reservation Bill let alone succeed in getting it passed.

Although all the major parties have committed, at least in principle, to pursue reserved seats for women, a large number of MPs have voiced opposition; some pointing out the negative experiences of women in local government to argue that women had not proven to be effective representatives. MPs belonging to Other Backward Castes have argued that reservation for women was likely to benefit those with greater social and educational opportunities. They wanted sub-reservation for OBC women. Muslim leaders claimed that reservations would only benefit mainly Hindus if there were no sub-reservations for Muslim women. Other minority groups have also made similar points. In response, the Women MPs protested that such objections had never been raised before and that the concern exhibited by the male MPs about minority women was simply an excuse to scuttle the Bill. Women MPs also contend that while the male leaders had never taken any steps in the past to promote women, the OBC men were in an excellent position to ensure the election of a large number of women if they wished, as they occupied approximately 200 of the seats in the 541-member Lok Sabha.

In spite of several parties issuing a whip instructing its MPs to vote in favour of the bill, some of the MPs openly declared their intention to defy the whip and some have gone to the extent of physically preventing MPs from entering the House. Efforts of the government to convene a meeting of the women MPs to discuss the situation were futile with some women (obviously tutored by the Party's male bosses) opposing the bill, and others saying that a meeting was unnecessary.

Against such resistance in the Parliament, women's groups could only pursue their demand for reservation by organizing public meetings, seminars and rallies. There was an impressive "train rally" for a week from 4 December 1998 from Delhi to Ernakulam. In February 1997, women's organizations and the National Commission for Women launched a new campaign calling for passage of the bill and demanded the acceptance of the Select Committee's recommendations in full. They noted that in view of the discrimination in candidate selection, reservations were the only way to ensure women fair access to politics. The campaign received an unexpected boost from a conference organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in New Delhi that brought together 240 delegates from 78 countries to discuss the theme "Partnership between Men and Women in Politics." Later, women's groups staged a rally in front of parliament to support early passage of the bill at an International Women's Day function. Prime Ministers Deve Gowda and later I.K.Gujral pledged to seek a 'consensus' on the Women's Reservation Bill. But both of them failed to muster the desired consensus.

With every political party voicing support to women's reservation bill outside parliament, but raising one objection or the other inside the House, it is evident that no political party wanted women's reservation. Some were more explicit in opposing the Bill and some pulled the strings from behind the curtain. Even the Congress party was divided on the issue of quotas for women. In such a scenario, several parties proposed amending the Representation of People's Act - instead of the constitution - to require political parties to nominate a certain proportion of women among their candidates.

Around this time, female opponents began to focus increasingly on the negative implications of the Women's Reservation Bill.

- ◆ Setting aside seats for women would admit and reinforce the weakness of women by imposing an artificial solution to improve their access to politics, undermining their legitimacy as political actors by implying that they were incapable of entering politics on their own.

- ◆ Women who would benefit from reservation would not alter existing power structures in politics or effect policy change beneficial to women at large. For, the parties will field the mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters of existing male politicians.
- ◆ The 'rotation system' would prevent the emergence of an enduring corps of female politicians and would reduce levels of accountability among all elected officials, apart from creating a ceiling for women's representation thereby undermining their opportunities to run for re-election.
- ◆ The lottery system followed for allocating reservations meant that neither men nor women would know in advance which constituencies would be open to them until just before the elections. Thus, both the aspirants and incumbents would have little incentive to nurse particular constituencies.

But, the feminists still generally supported the goal of increasing women's representation. To this end, they offered a number of suggestions for improving the bill.

With an eye on women's vote bank, all major parties methodically included a commitment to women's reservation in their respective party manifestos on the eve of the elections. The Speaker announced that the bill was being deferred for the time being due to lack of consensus over the amendment. This was followed by a blame game, with each political party blaming the other. The bill officially lapsed in April 1999 with a no-confidence vote against the government that resulted in the dissolution of parliament.

In October 1999, the BJP government proposed to reintroduce the Bill (as the 85th Amendment Bill). But, on December 20, with only four days left for the parliamentary session to conclude, Congress and left-wing MPs staged a walk-out protesting the delay in introducing the Bill and blaming the government that it was not serious about reserving seats for women. When it was finally introduced, there was a bedlam in the Parliament, with

MP's from several socialist parties demanding sub-quotas for OBC and Muslims. The House was repeatedly adjourned and the Bill could not be debated. Over the next two years several all-party meetings convened by the government produced no viable compromise, despite continuing pressure from women's groups and political parties.

Dual Membership

A series of meetings convened by the Speaker in July 2003, representatives of four parties converged around a new proposal to create dual-member constituencies in one-third of all electoral districts - and thus increase the total number of seats in parliament by 181 - to enable the election of one man and one woman from these particular constituencies. The BJP National Executive approved a resolution to pursue a constitutional amendment along these lines. The Congress and Left parties, however, expressed concerns that the new proposal would dilute the cause of women's reservation by reducing the proportion of reserved seats from 33% to 25%. Others acknowledged the advantages of the system as it did not require sitting male MP's to surrender their seats but worried about the fate of incumbent female MPs, whose districts would now reserve additional seats for men. Yet others remarked that the compromise was entirely silent on the issue of sub-reservations, the issue that had at least outwardly inspired the most powerful objections to the original bill. In any case, there was no consensus even on the dual membership proposal. Prime Minister Vajpayee blamed the Congress for stalling the Women's Reservation Bill and assured voters that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance would ensure passage of the legislation if voted into power again. Congress leader Sonia Gandhi also responded by pledging that her party, if elected, would also seek to pass the women's reservation bill.

Women's groups called both parties hypocritical pointing out that the lists of candidates - where women formed less than 10% - told a much different story about the parties' intentions regarding women's representation. When following the May 2004 elections the Congress Party was returned to power and formed

the United Progressive Alliance government, its Common Minimum Programme included a promise to introduce one-third reservation for women in state assemblies and the national parliament, as well as a pledge to earmark at least one-third of all funds provided to local governments for programs related to women and children.

Although the UPA government introduced the Women's Reservation Bill in the Rajya Sabha in May 2008, as usual the Samajwadi Party members resisted and prevented introduction of the Bill and demanded its withdrawal. The UPA government had other pressing matters to take care of (e.g., Nuclear Deal) and it did not come as a surprise that the consideration of the Women's Bill got further postponed.

As India is still finding it tough to get the Women's Reservation Bill passed, other countries in the South Asian region have done much better.

- ♦ Nepal's 1990 Constitution proclaims gender equality and mandates that the political parties put up at least 5% women as candidates for parliamentary elections.
- ♦ Pakistan's 1956 constitution provided for 10 reserved seats for women in the National Assembly. In January 1999, the Pakistan People's Party introduced a bill in the Senate, proposing 9 reserved seats for women in the Senate, 40 in the NA and 20% in the provisional assembly. Since 2002, sixty seats are reserved for women in Pakistan National Assembly. Presently a total of 71 women have obtained representation at national level, 60 on reserve seats and 11 on general seats. Women occupy a total of 128 seats in provincial Assemblies. In local government presently 33% seats are reserved for women. In March 2008, Pakistan elected its first women Speaker (Dr Fehmida Mirza)
- ♦ Women in Bhutan enjoy economic and political equality with the men. Bhutanese women are free to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies

and programs. At the national level, 14 out of the 150 National Assembly members are women.

- ♦ Sri Lanka has never accepted reserved seats for women. In the October 2000 election there were 22 political parties and 91 independent groups which fielded only 117 women in a total of 5,048 candidates. In the 2001 parliament, at the National level there were only 9 women in the parliament of 225 members (4%).
- ♦ Bangladesh has ensured 15% reserved seats for women in its parliament as per 14th Constitutional amendment introduced in 2004.

Compared to the above countries, the situation in India is discouraging. Among the 545 MPs in the Lok Sabha women MPs number a mere 45, which is just about 8.23% of the total members. Rajya Sabha is a little better with women forming 10.24% of the total strength of 244 members, even though 4 of the 25 women members are nominated, not elected.

The following Table gives the strength of women in the Lok Sabha from time to time.

Women in Indian Parliament (Lower House)

Number of the Lok Sabha	Total number of seats	Number of women members	Percentage to the total
1	499	22	4.40
2	500	27	5.40
3	503	34	6.70
4	523	31	5.90
5	521	22	4.20
6	544	19	3.40
7	544	28	5.10
8	544	44	8.10
9	517	27	5.22
10	544	39	7.18
11	544	40	7.18

12	543	43	7.20
13	543	49	9.02
14	545	45*	8.20

Source: 1. Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Women and Child Development, 2004. 2nd and 3rd CEDAW Periodic Report, New Delhi, P. 86 (2)
www.parliamentofindia.nic.in

- (*) In the subsequent by-elections 5 more women were elected, taking the total to 50 by September 2007.

Later development on women's reservation bill

Pursuing the Women's Reservation Bill by mustering consensus from the various political parties has been entrusted to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievance and Law and Justice headed by E M S Natchiappan (constituted on 5 August 2008). The Standing Committee consists of 31 members (including Jayanti Natarajan, Krishna Tirath and Tejaswini Gowda of the Congress, Kiran Maheswari and Najma Heptulla of the BJP, P. Sathee Devi and Brinda Karat of the CPM.⁽¹⁷⁾

Assuring that the committee was making efforts to evolve consensus on the issue of women's reservation and a majority of parties were ready to implement the bill, Natchiappan said that the Women's Reservation Bill (now the 108th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2008) may become a reality only after the 2009 general elections, with certain amendments for OBC and minorities.⁽¹⁸⁾

Women voters have played a significant role in bringing different political parties to power at different times in the past. Realising the importance of women's vote, all parties have been trying to mobilise women support (offering various kinds of inducements like distribution of saris, utensils and even money), resulting in women's

17. Available at <http://india.gov.in/outerwin.htm?id=http://parliamentofindia.gov.in/>.

18. Available at www.newkerla.com/topstory-fullnews-21249.html

increasing participation in political activities. But, once elections are over, women's issues are brushed under the carpet by all political parties, including those who have a large number of women in their cadres and those who are led by women. This shows that the political parties want to use women as a vote bank and nothing more. No male politician seems to like the idea of sharing power with women. The growth of education, employment and political awareness has contributed to the growth of political aspirations amongst a large number of women. But, although the situation in India provides appropriate grounds for the formation of an all-women political party, it has not been possible to translate the aspirations into reality. Will the Bill ever become a statute is a moot question. Maharashtra is no different.

The following Chapters examine the status of women's political participation in Maharashtra, as contestants and claimants to political power.

Women in Maharashtra Electoral Politics

The status of women in Maharashtra from the seventeenth century i.e. from the rise of the Maratha hero Shivaji to the first two decades of the nineteenth century was basically not different from that of the women in other parts of India. Here, too, women were dependent on men and had to play a secondary and subordinate role. Yet, in certain respects, the situation in Maharashtra was different from other parts of India. Women belonging to aristocratic and ruling families were taught the art of horse riding. They not merely used swords effectively on the battle field but also led armies. Jijabai was a great source of inspiration for Shivaji and was responsible for cultivating the spirit of bravery and humanism in him. Yesubai (wife of Maratha Emperor Sambhaji) is said to have aided her husband in the daily affairs of state, giving just and wise suggestions. Similarly, Tarabai (wife of Shivaji's son Rajaram) continued to fight Mughal expansion efforts even after the death of her husband. Other famous Maharashtrian ladies of the past include Rani Ahilyabai Holkar and Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi.

Englishmen such as John Malcom⁽¹⁾ and Captain Broughton admired the Maratha women for their bravery and courage. The following is an excerpt from Malcom's account :

"The females of both of the Brahmin and Sudra Mahrattas have, generally, speaking, when their husbands are princes or chiefs, great influence, and mix, not only by their power over individuals, but sometimes, as has been shewn, personally, in affairs of the state. If married to men of rank, they have usually a distinct provision and estate of their own; enjoy as much liberty as they can desire; seldom, if ever, wear a veil; and give feasts and entertainments to their friends

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1. Malcom, John. *Population of Central India including Malwa and adjoining provinces*, A Memoir of Central India, Parbury & Allen, London (1832) (Vol.II) pp.120-122

on births and marriages, and on particular anniversaries. They also expend much money on jewels and cloths, and even the poorest of this class has a set of ornaments. x x x xxx (Mahratta ladies) have always had great influence in their secret councils, and usage has latterly given them a considerable and increased share in the government, and in some cases they have been the acknowledged heads. They are usually instructed in reading, working, and arithmetic. The management of the horse always constitutes a part of their education, which is directed to qualify them or duties to which their condition makes them liable to be called".

Thus, women belonging to higher castes and classes took part in politics and played an important role in shaping the history of Maharashtra. Though the women in general could not get education, women from the aristocratic ruling families could read and write as is also evident from the letters of some remarkable women. According to the report of the Imperial Census Commission, in 1881 less than five and half lakhs of women (out of a total population of 29 crores) were literate. The number of girls dropping out of schools after marriage was high and remained so even by the end of the 19th century. Very few women's were fortunate enough to continue their studies at home provided their husbands were keen to help them in this venture. In such circumstances it was not surprising that women did not participate in public life. It was extremely difficult for male social reformers to persuade even the educated women to meet regularly for discussing the common problems of all women. Though there was practically not much of a participation of women in public life all over India, visitors from other parts of India were impressed by the progress achieved by women in Maharashtra. In 1881, Bipin Chandra Pal visited Bombay for the first time and could never forget what he saw there. He admitted "Bombay was socially far ahead of Bengal, female education and the freedom of social intercourse and movement of respectable Maharatta ladies was a new and inspiring experience which I had in Bombay, both the Parsis and the Mahrattas did not observe the zenana seclusion or the pardah which is universal among higher class Hindus and Moslems in Bengal and upper India".

Pandita Ramabai, a high-caste Hindu by birth, challenged patriarchy both through her personal life and the causes she adopted for her struggle - self-improvement and women's participation in public including political life. Her personal independence, her marriage of her own choice to a man of different caste and her conversion to Christianity marked her out as a rebel and a feminist. Ramabai was responsible for the entry of women as delegates to the annual session of the Indian National Congress held in Bombay in 1889. Similarly, Anasuyabai Kale, a freedom fighter from Nagpur, founded the Bhagini Mandal in 1920, which served as a centre for the activities of freedom fighters. She also participated in the Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements. After independence, she was elected to the second Lok Sabha at the 1957 elections from Nagpur.

Efforts made by social reformers from Maharashtra since 1848 resulted in the emergence of educated women, who made significant contribution to the freedom movement, which drew large numbers of women, particularly from the working class. Mention should be made of Ahilyabai Rangnekar, who realised that women needed to participate in the freedom struggle and fight for their own rights within this context. She and her comrades started the Parel Mahila Sangh, comprising mainly wives of workers. It demanded maternity benefits and better wages and eventually became the nucleus of the left and democratic women's movement in Maharashtra. During this period, Rangnekar worked with other well-known women activists and freedom fighters such as Vimal Ranadive, Malti Nagarkar, Maniben Patel (Vallabhbhai Patel's sister), Sofia Khan (Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's wife) and Aruna Asaf Ali. All these women courted arrest, were on the run, were separated from their families and faced violence as part of the freedom struggle and later as members of political parties. The most noteworthy part is that they never lost direction; they kept on with their work.

Though Maharashtra's women may not have been on an equal footing with national-level women leaders like Dr. Annie Beasant, Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit, Aruna Asafali, Sucheta Kirpalani and others, many women from

Maharashtra such as Avantikabai Gokhale (Lokmanya Tilak named her the Sarojini of Maharashtra), Janakidevi Bajaj, Prema Kantak, Padmavatibai Harollikar, Anusuya Kale and Laxmibai were equally important. Thousands of Maharashtrian women participated in the Quit India movement of 1942 and were imprisoned. It was expected that a group of women leaders, though a small one, would emerge from these young activists of 1942. But, during the post-independence period, experienced women leaders like Prema Kantak and Padmavati Harollikar, kept away from politics. Other young women from Maharashtra, who had worked with full force and devotion during the Quit India movement, also distanced themselves away from the day-today politics and devoted their energy and time to social work through trade unions and women's organizations. The changing economic scenario of the country forced most of these young women to complete their studies and start earning for the maintenance of their families. The Second World War had changed many basic concepts of life all over the world and Maharashtra was no exception. Then began the period where we find that the young women who entered the field of politics in Maharashtra, were women have male relatives already established in politics. Such women - except a few - lacked the motivation and ability to lead the people. ⁽²⁾

While women continued to agitate on matters concerning the family (dowry system, domestic abuse, divorce, rape, price rise etc), raising protests as mothers and wives and not as citizens of the country, it narrowed down the political strength of women's movements. In view of their distancing away from politics, the elections held for the Parliament after independence witnessed the participation of very few women as candidates. The number of women, who have won the elections to the Lok Sabha from the earlier Bombay Presidency and later Maharashtra, is extremely small. In fact, till the bifurcation of Bombay Province into Maharashtra and Gujarat states, one or two women candidates were put up by the Indian National Congress, all of whom won the elections. There were no women candidates from the other par-

2. Gawankar, Rohini. *Political background of Women in Maharashtra*, (PhD Dissertation), SNDT University, Mumbai.

ties. The following is the list of women candidates who contested the elections to the Lok Sabha during 1951, 1957 and 1962 and got elected from Bombay Province (combined Maharashtra and Gujarat).

Bombay Province (Maharashtra & Gujarat),

Elections to the first Lok Sabha, 1951

Constituency	Candidate Elected	Party
Kaira (South)	Maniben V Patel	INC
Pune (South)	Indira M Anant	INC
Bombay Suburban	Jayshri N Raiji	INC

Bombay Province (Maharashtra & Gujarat),

Elections to the second Lok Sabha, 1957

Constituency	Candidate Elected	Party
Girnar	Jayaben Vajubhai Shah	INC
Anand	Maniben V Patel	INC
Nagpur	Anasuyabai Purushottam Kale	INC

Bombay Province (Maharashtra & Gujarat),

Elections to the second Lok Sabha, 1962

Constituency	Candidate Elected	Party
Ratnagiri	Sharada Subroto Mukherjee	INC

(Source: All three Tables above, Election Commission, Government of India)

Elections to the State Assembly

Following the separation of the Bombay Province into Maharashtra and Gujarat, more and more women started contesting elections to the State Legislative Assembly. At the 1967 general

elections to the Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra, 19 women contested the elections and all of them were first-timers. Eleven of the 19 candidates were nominated by the Congress Party, two by the Republican Party of India, one each by the Swatantra Party and Peasants and Workers' Party. Four women contested as Independents. None of the independents and those contesting under non-Congress banners could win.

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly, 1967

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party	Result
Sangameshwar	1. L.B.Bhuwad	INC	Won
Mazgaon	2. L.B.Melville	IND	Lost
Ghatkopar	3. A.N.Magar	INC	Lost
Jawahar (ST)	4. K.S.Karawande	INC	Won
Deolali	5. S.D.Dani	RPI	Lost
Sinnar	6. R.V.Waze	INC	Won
Malegaon	7. S.D.Bhalerao	IND	DF
Chopda	8. S.S.Patil	INC	Lost
Bhusawal	9. S.S.More	RPI	DF
Edlabad	10. Pratibha D.Patil	INC	Won
	11. A.S.Pandit	PWP	DF
Buldhana	12. S.S.Patil	INC	Won
Murtazapur	13. P.B.Tidake	INC	Won
Nagpur (W)	14. S.Balraj	INC	Won
	15. V.Mesram	IND	DF
Hadgaon	16. L.D.Dange	IND	DF
Akalkot	17. N.V.Bhonsle	INC	Won
	18. P.M.Shah	S P	DF
Barsi	19. P.S.Zadbuke	INC	Won

INC: Indian National Congress; RPI: Republican Party of India; PWP: Peasants and Workers Party; SP : Swatantra Party; IND: Independent; DF: Deposit Forfeited

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

The number of women contesting rose to 56 at the 1972 elections to the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, with a majority of them contesting under the Congress Party banner. Again, except Laxmibai B Bhuvad (INC, Sangameshwar), all others were first timers. As the Election Commission statistics for the election results do not give the votes polled by all the contestants except the winning candidate and the runner up, it has not been possible to identify the names and party affiliation of all the women candidates.

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly, 1972

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party Result	
Sangameshwar	1. Laxmibai B.Bhuvad	INC	Won
Mahad	2. Kamal Vichare	INC	Lost
Colaba	3. Aloo Chibber	INC	Won
Girgaum	4. Y Vinayak Khadikar	INC	Lost
Walkeshwar	5. J Navinchandra Mehta	BJS	Lost
Dadar	6. (Name?)	(?)	Lost
Matunga	7. Kamala Raman	INC	Won
Vile Parle	8. Kantaben Chandulal Shah	INC	Won
Malad	9. (Name)	(?)	DF
	10. Mrinal Gore	SOP	Won
Thana	11. (Name)	(?)	DF
	12. Vimal K Rangnekar	INC	Won
Kalyan	13. (Name?)	(?)	DF
Deolali	14. (Name?)	(?)	DF

Malegaon	15. Aisha Chirag Hakim	INC	Won
Sakri	16. (Name?)	(?)	Lost
Shahada	17. (Name?)	(?)	DF
Sindhkheda	18. Lilabai V Patil	INC	Won
Dhulia (S)	19. Kamalabai Chhaganlal	INC	Won
Chopda	20. Sharadchandrikabai	INC	Won
Bhusawal	21. (Name?)	(?)	DF
Edlabad	22. Pratibhatai D Patil	INC	Won
Shegaon	23. Yaminibai D Alsi	INC	Lost
Murtazapur	24. Pratibhadevi Tidke	INC	Won
Daryapur	25. Kokila J Patil	INC	Won
Phulgaon	26. Prabha Rau	INC	Won
Nagpur (N)	27. Name (?)	(?)	DF
Nagpur (E)	28. Name (?)	(?)	DF
Nagpur (W)	29. (Name?)	(?)	DF
	30. Sushilabai Balraj	INC	Won
	31. Sumati B Siklikar	BJS	Lost
Gondia	32. (Name?)	(?)	DF
	33. (Name?)	(?)	Lost
Jamgaon	34. (Name)	(?)	DF
Adyar	35. (Name)	(?)	Lost
Saoli	36. (Name)	(?)	Lost
Wani	37. Vimalatai D Gohokar	INC	Lost
Hingoli	38. (Name)	(?)	DF
	39. Ashatai M Tale	INC	Won
Vijapur	40. Shakuntalabai Patil	INC	Won

Chausala	41. (Name)	(?)	Lost
Ahmedpur	42. Sushilabai M Raddy	INC	Lost
Sholapur City (S)	43. Nirmala T Shankar Rao	INC	Won
Barsi	44. Shailaja Shitole	INC	Won
Ahmednagar (S)	45. Kalabai S Ranade	INC	Lost
Pathradi	46. Manikbai Gajre	INC	Lost
Kasbapeth	47. (Name)	(?)	Lost
	48. (Name)	(?)	Lost
	49. (Name)	(?)	Lost
	50. Lilabai Merchant	INC	Won
Dhaund	51. Ushadevi K Jagdale	INC	Won
Bhor	52. Usha Chaudhari	INC	Lost
Man (SC)	53. (Name)	(?)	DF
	54. Prabhavati G Shinde	INC	Won
Radhanagari	55. Bakuabai D Khandekar	INC	Lost
Kagal	56. (Name)	(?)	DF

SOP: Samyukta Socialist Party; BJS: Bharatiya Jana Sangh

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

The Drive for women's political power in Maharashtra

In the post-independent Maharashtra, the drive for women's political power had its beginnings in the rural areas. In 1975, following the holding of the first major feminist rally, the *Samyukta Stri-Mukti Sangharsh Parishad* in Pune, a group of rural women decided to put up women candidates for the village elections. Ten years later, in 1985, women of Indoli village in Satara district in Maharashtra decided to organise an "all-woman" panel for the elections. A similar attempt was made by women from a nomadic community in another Satara district village. Finally, a year later, in 1986, at the founding conference of the *Shetkari Mahila Aghadi*, women's front of

the *Shetkari Sanghatana*, a resolution was passed to sponsor all women candidates for the upcoming Zilla Parishad elections - and to call on all progressive political parties to participate. (3) However, Madhu Kishwar strongly contends that "women of the *Sanghatana* did not press on their own to get representation in panchayats and zilla parishads. The move came from the farmers' movement leader, Mr. Sharad Joshi, who worked hard to instil political ambition among women and make politics more woman- friendly, though with limited success. It is also noteworthy that for several years the male cadres of Shetkari Sanghatana accepted this pro- women thrust very gracefully and worked hard to secure the success of women candidates". (4) Citing the role of men like Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, and Shankar Guha Niyogi in encouraging women to take active part in resisting government decisions that were likely to have adverse impact on the environment or by wresting decision-making powers in the society and Ramakrishna Hegde in being the first Chief Minister to introduce reservations for women in the PRI, Kishwar gives credit to the men who have "played a pioneering role in giving women new aspirations. They did not respond to women's "push from below" but initiated moves which generated a new ferment and facilitated women's entry into politics" (5)

In any case, the above attempts were not successful and the husbands who supported their wives were to face derision and open hostility. All kinds of pressures, including near-kidnappings, were used by the established political parties to force the women to withdraw. The all-women panels for the Zilla Parishads never really got off the ground. In spite of the efforts of the Shetkari Sanghatana in confronting the prejudice of male activists and succeeding in collecting an impres-

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3. Omvedt, Gail. Women and Political Power, in *The Hindu*, May 20, 2000. <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2000/05/20/stories/05202523.htm>
 4. Kishwar, Madhu, 'Sabotage in the guise of support?' in *The Hindu*, 31 May, 2000.
 5. Ibid.

sive number of women, none of the other political parties gave a favourable response. ⁽⁶⁾

"Where will we find the women?" was a common refrain of the political parties, as if in all their lakhs of membership no qualified women were to be found. "You're splitting the left and democratic vote", was another accusation. In the end, the elections were postponed so long that by the time the reserved seats for local government bodies intervened, and the *Shetkari Mahila Aghadi* could put up candidates only against the reserved seats and there was only some modest success in several constituencies. Yet none of the women participating in these campaigns felt they were failures. "We stood and so we won," has been the general refrain. There was a sense of exhilaration especially among the women of the farmers' movement, some of whom were moving outside their homes for the first time, that they were breaking new ground. And, though the parties generally mocked the idea of "all-women panels", some kind of process was set off in Maharashtra. By the early 1990s, at least ten villages could be found, five of them in *Shetkari Sanghatana* areas, in which women were supported by their men to campaign and win for all- women gram Panchayats.

When this "push from below" of women for political power was met by efforts to give legal support through reserved seats, thousands of women throughout India, including Maharashtra, were becoming members and Sarpanches and even Mayors, and a new kind of political process was taking place. This prompted Women's organisations to focus their attention on constitutional change to guarantee women's representation, by pushing for the enactment of the Women's Reservation Bill in the Parliament.

In Maharashtra, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment has made a powerful impact on women by enabling them to enter into the decision making sectors. Through Panchayati Raj Institutions women are making the State sensitive to issues con-

6. Gail Omvidt., op cit.

cerning poverty, inequality and gender justice. Women have infused confidence and inculcated sense of empowerment by enabling them to exercise control over resources, and challenge the officials. Maharashtra rural women have endeavoured to bring about the changes by raising issues such as health, sanitation, education, water scarcity, alcohol and domestic violence. Women have started coming out from under the shadow of their husbands and have started taking up Panchayat works themselves. Women members of the Panchayats along with other *gram sabha* members (mostly women) have started actively participating in *gram sabha* meetings which has helped in ensuring that the Gram Sabha does not become an all-male affair.

Study by the UNDP in collaboration with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India reveals that "in Maharashtra, elected women representatives were successful in fighting alcoholism by stopping illicit liquor production in villages, arranging cooking gas connections for women and houses under '*gharkl*' *yojana*, providing drinking water connections, organizing women belonging to the below poverty line (BPL) category and encouraging them to take up income generating opportunities under various government schemes, rallying against corrupt officials. There have been incidents of attempts to remove honest women Panchayat members who have been instrumental in exposing corrupt practices within the Panchayat but have continued to stay on the post owing to support from other women members of the Panchayat and the gram Sabha".⁽⁷⁾ According to the Annual Report for 2007-2008 of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, out of 229,740 elected members in the PRI of Maharashtra, 76,581 were women (33.35 %).

7. *EWR Case Studies*, Available at <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/decn/cr/res25080605.doc>

Break-up of elected representatives in the three tiers of Panchayats in Maharashtra

	No. of PRI	Number of elected representatives					Women %
		General	SC	ST	Total	Women	
Village Panchayats	27,893	172,370	24,624	26,863	223,857	74,620	33.30
Intermediate Panchayats	351	3,022	430	470	3,922	1,307	33.30
District Panchayats	33	1,482	215	264	1,961	264	33.35
Total Panchayats	28,277	176,874	25,269	27,597	229,740	76,581	33.35

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, Annual Report, 2007-2008, Annexure-6.

While the elected rural women in Maharashtra have found the role and work exciting due to recognition and status gained as individuals, they also keep facing barriers to executing programmes in the form of lack of cooperation, misappropriation of power, interference of political parties, corruption etc. Women Panchayats have a far more gender-sensitive agenda. They want to start biogas plants, open schools and take other welfare measures. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India notes (8):

"The last 15 years of Panchayati Raj in India have seen women go from strength to strength in terms of their political participation. While many faced resistance initially to their presence in offices of responsibility, over time, acceptance of women within the Panchayati Raj framework has been increasing. Out of the total 28 lakh elected representatives, around 10 lakh are estimated to be women. ... Several elected women representatives have been able to bring about considerable change in the socio-economic conditions

8. *Government of India*, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Annual Report, 2007-2008, Government of India, New Delhi, p.23.

prevailing in their areas. Their achievements underline the importance of creating a space for women's political participation through mandates affirmative action."

Reverting to the position of women from Maharashtra in the State Assembly and Parliament, it is said that in spite of Articles 325 and 326 of the Constitution of India guaranteeing political equality to all men and women, women from Maharashtra have not been able to enjoy the benefits arising out of these constitutional provision. This is the case with women of all other States too. Though women account half of the population of Maharashtra, their representation even in the state legislative assembly has always been very poor.

After independence, Maharashtra was seen as a bastion of the Congress party, producing chief ministers like Y.B.Chavan, until 1995 when Shiv Sena and the BJP formed a coalition to secure a majority in the elections. Following the creation of Maharashtra State, the number of women candidates contesting the elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assembly started increasing. Apart from the Indian National Congress, other parties also started nominating women candidates, although Congress has always nominated more women candidates compared to other political parties. However, at no time in the history of the Maharashtra legislature, women constituted more than 10 per cent of the total number of members of the Legislative Assembly.

The following are the results of the elections to the 4th and 5th Lok Sabha from Maharashtra.

Maharashtra State Elections to the 4th Lok Sabha, 1967

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Ratnagiri	1. Sharada S Mukherjee	INC	Won
Dahanu	2. C.A.Nandkar	SSP	Lost
Chanda	3. Tai Kannamvar	INC	Lost
Hatkanangle	4. M.V.R.Bhonsle	PWP	Won

:INC: Indian National Congress; SSP: PWP: Peasants and Workers' Party
Source: Election Commission, Government of India

Maharashtra State Elections to the 5th Lok Sabha, 1971

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Rajapur	1. Sharada S Mukherjee	NCO	Lost
Bombay (C)	2. Kamala Ramaswamy	IND	DF
Bombay (NE)	3. Saraswati Bhutani	IND	DF
Jalgaon	4. Kazi Amtul Latif Zafarali	IND	DF
Akola	5. Vidya Kasturibai Jain	PBI	DF

DF: Deposit Forfeited; IND: Independent; NCO: Indian National Congress (Organisation)

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

Election results of the 4th and 5th Lok Sabha from Maharashtra reveal:

- ◆ Except Sharada Mukherjee, others were new entrants.
- ◆ A Muslim lady contested the elections to the 5th Lok Sabha from Maharashtra for the first time.
- ◆ The time was not yet ripe for women to fight elections as independent candidates.
- ◆ By not sticking to the Congress party led by Indira Gandhi, even a stalwart like Sharada Mukherjee lost the election.

Elections to the 6th Lok Sabha, 1977

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Bombay (SC)	1. Roza V Deshpande	CPI	DF
Bombay (NC)	2. Ahilya P Rangnekar	CPM	Won
	3. Kamala Ramaswamy	IND	DF
Bombay (N)	4. Mrinal Gore	BLD	Won
Bombay (NW)	5. Saraswati Butani	IND	DF
Buldhana	6. Sumitrabai N.Gawai	IND	DF

Ramtek	7. Alka U Pande	IND	DF
Karad	8. Premalabai D Chavan	INC	Won

CPI: Communist Party of India; CPM: Communist Party (Marxist); BLD: Bharatiya Lok Dal

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

At the elections to the 6th Lok Sabha, only three out of the 8 women could win. Of these, Ahilya Rangnekar and Mrinal Gore won the election on their own steam; by the goodwill that they had earned by fighting the cause of the common people. On the other hand, Premalabai D Chavan won the election on the strength of the party under whose banner she contested (INC) and also because she happened to be the wife of late Dajisaheb Chavan.

The 1980 elections for the 7th Lok Sabha were held after the lifting of Emergency. The excesses of emergency had adversely affected the Indian National Congress (Indira Gandhi faction), resulting in its candidates losing elections, to the benefit of the Janata Party that came into prominence after Emergency. Even a political heavy weight like Shalinitai V. Patil wife of Vasantdada Patil, the strongman of Maharashtra, could not succeed fighting the elections to the 7th Lok Sabha under the INC (Indira) banner. Even after the INC (I)'s fortunes changed at the elections to the 8th Lok Sabha, Shalinitai V Patil could not win the election as INC candidate due to her problems with the State Maratha leaders of the INC, especially Sharad Pawar.

Elections to the 7th Lok Sabha, 1980

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Bombay (S)	1. Shakuntala Devi	IND	DF
Bombay (SC)	2. Kamala Prasad	IND	DF
Bombay (NC)	3. Pramila M Dandavate	JNP	Won
	4. Ahilya Rangnekar	CPM	DF
Bombay (N)	5. Mrinal Gore	IND	DF

Bombay (NE)	6. Yashoda Butani	IND	DF
Nashik	7. Shanrabai Dani	IND	DF
Nandurbar (SC)	8. Bhuribai Mansingh	IND	DF
Erandol	9. Jogindar Bedi J	JNP(S)	DF
Amaravti	10. Usha Chaudhari	INC(I)	Won
	11. Kamala Gawai	RPI	Lost
Nagpur	12. Kamal Dhabe	IND	DF
Chirmur	13. Chandrakala J	IND	DF
Chandrapur	14. Pratima Nuruddin	JNP(S)	DF
Beed	15. Kesarbai Kshirsagar	INC(I)	Won
Solapur	16. Prabhavati S Zadbhuke	INC(I)	Lost
Satara	17. Shalini V Patil	INC(I)	Lost

JNP: Janata Party; JNP(S): Janata Party (Secular); RPI: Republican Party of India, INC (I): Indian National Congress (Indira)

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

Elections to the 8th Lok Sabha, 1984

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Bombay (S)	1. Jayawantiben Mehta	BJP	Lost
	2. Kasturi Raja	IND	DF
Bombay (NC)	3. Pramila M Dandavate	JNP	Lost
	4. Kamala Ramaswamy	IND	DF
Bombay (SC)	5. Roza Deshpande	IND	Lost
Bombay (NW)	6. Aroona Sahai	IND	DF
Amaravti	7. Usha Chaudhari	INC(I)	Won
Karad	8. Premalabai D Chavan	INC	Won

Nagpur	9. Chandrakanta P Kimble	IND	DF
Chandrapur	10. Jayshri Ingale	IND	DF
Beed	11. Kesarbai Kshirsagar	INC(I)	Won
Satara	12. Shalini V Patil	INC(I)	Lost

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

Elections to the 9th Lok Sabha, 1989

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Bombay (S)	1. Madhu Mehta	IND	DF
	2. Sayeeda Bano	IND	DF
Bombay (SC)	3. Moon Mala Rushi	BSP	DF
Bombay (NE)	4. Jayawantiben Mehta	BJP	Won
	5. Neelam D Gore	BRP	DF
Bombay (NW)	6. Molly Damania	LKD(B)	DF
	7. Kasturi Raja	JP	DF
Bombay (N)	8. Mrinal Gore	JD	Lost
Nashik	9. Leela G Kamble	BSP	DF
Amaravti	10. Usha Chaudhari	INC	Lost
	11. Prabhadevi A Tripathi	JNP(JP)	DF
Nagpur	12. Yamunabai Dhawade	IND	DF
	13. Subhadrabai R.P	IND	DF
Bhandara	14. Suwarnalata Makode	IND	DF
Chandrapur	15. Urmilabai Pathak	DDP	DF
	16. Jesthagauri K.Bhasar	IND	DF
Beed	17. Kesharbai S Kshirsagar	IND	Lost

Khed	18. Supriya Kadam	BSP	DF
Karad	19. Premalabai D Chavan	INC	Won
Ramtek	20. Latabai V Kshtruya	LKD(B)	DF

LKD: Lok Dal; JNP: Janata Party (Jaya Prakash Narain); BSP: Bahujan Samaj Party; DDP: (Doordarshi Party)

Source: Election Commission

Elections to the 10th Lok Sabha, 1991

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Bombay (S)	1. Sunita Ram Choitramani	IND	DF
Bombay (NC)	2. Radhika Kanavi	IND	DF
Bombay (NE)	3. Jayawantiben Mehta	BJP	Lost
Bombay (NW)	4. Anees Sayeed	JD	DF
	5. Rita Paul	IND	DF
Bombay (N)	6. Narmada Parekh	IND	DF
	7. Malati Moon	BSP	DF
	8. Surekha Kokate	IND	DF
Malegaon	9. Kusumtai B Sonavane	LKD	DF
Jalgaon	10. Suman M Bodavade	IND	DF
Buldhana	11. Parwathibai M Gawai	IND	DF
	12. Bayanabai PB	IND	DF
	13. Vatsalabai G Wankhede	IND	DF
Akola	14. Ratnaprabha P Wankhede	IND	DF
	15. Prabhavati J Dhande	IND	DF
Amaravti	16. Pratibha D Patil	INC	Won
Ramtek	17. Devkibai P Nagarkar	IND	DF
Nagpur	18. Meenaxi R Iyer	IND	DF

	19. Devkabai P Nagarkar	IND	DF
	20. Sushila Indal Sarade	IND	DF
	21. Ragini P Ramteke	IND	DF
Bhandara	22. Nandabai S Bhowale	BSP	DF
Chirmur	23. Damayantibai K Bhavsar	IND	DF
Yavatmal	24. Rekha G Savaskade	IND	DF
	25. Vimal A Yedsikar	IND	DF
Nanded	26. Suryakanta Patil	INC	Won
Parbhani	27. Sulabai A Mohite	IND	DF
Aurangabad	28. Wachchalabai N Tayade	IND	DF
Beed	29. Kesharbai S Kshirsagar	INC	Won
Osmanabad	30. Vimal N Mumndada	BJP	Lost
Solapur	31. Kalawati Gaidhankar	IND	DF
Baramati	32. Pratibha Lokhande	BJP	Lost
Chandrapur	33. Jeshtagauri G Gavit	IND	DF
Dhulia	34. Kamalabai G Gavit	IND	DF

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

Elections to the 11th Lok Sabha, 1996

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Bombay (S)	1. Jayawantiben Mehta	BJP	Won
Bombay (NC)	2. Smita R Mandevia	IND	DF
Bombay (NE)	3. Ashrafbegum Bahadarkhan	IND	DF
	4. Sk. Akhtar Jahan	IND	DF
	5. Anjana H Awari	IND	DF
Mumbai (NW)	6. Nirmala P Swant	INC	Lost
	7. Madhur Singhji	IND	DF

	8. Chanda M Bhatia	IND	DF
Mumbai (N)	9. Surekha V Kokate	IND	DF
Thane	10. Neeta Masurkar	IND	DF
Dhulia	11. Shantabai G More	IND	DF
Erandol	12. Indirabai B Patil	JP	DF
Jalgaon	13. Joharabak Hamid Tadvî	IND	DF
Buldhana	14. Umaji P Aware	SAP	DF
	15. Sanghamitra N Kasture	IND	DF
Akola	16. Shobhatai S Nande	IND	DF
Washim	17. Nirmala M Pardhi	IND	DF
Amaravti	18. Vimal Vasant Patil	JP	DF
	19. Pramila R Patil	IND	DF
	20. Kanta R Ashtamkar	IND	DF
Ramtek	21. Kamalabai P Ghate	IND	DF
	22. Lata Kailas Fulzale	IND	DF
Nagpur	23. Kunda A Vijaykar	INC	Lost
Bhandara	24. Vinodini M.I.,	IND	DF
Yavatmal	25. Pushpatai A Pundalik	BSP	DF
	26. Nirmala N Kharate	IND	DF
	27. Batsalabai D Gholap	IND	DF
Hingoli	28. Sangarbai B Banjewadi	IND	DF
	29. Shantabai R Wankhede	IND	DF
Nanded	30. Ranjana D Patil	IND	DF
Jalna	31. Vaishali P Bhise	IND	DF
Aurangabad	32. Tejashwini R Jadhav	IND	DF
Beed	33. Rajani A Patil	BJP	Won

	34. Kesharbai Kshirsagar	INC	Lost
	35. Sushila G Morale	PWP	DF
	36. Gayabai D Sirasat	IND	DF
Latur	37. Mumtaj Sk.Nurmohammad	IND	DF
	38. Usha P Waghmare	IND	DF
Pune	39. Rajendrakaur Tohal	PPNM	DF
Karad	40. Venutai B Patil	IND	DF
Ichalakaranji	41. Nivedita S Mane	IND	Lost
Ratnagiri	42. Mangala R Shinde	AIIC (NT)	DF

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

Elections to the 12th Lok Sabha, 1998

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Rajapur	1. Nalini B Bhuvad	IND	DF
Mumbai (S)	2. Jayawantiben Mehta	BJP	Lost
Mumbai (C)	3. Krishna Arjun	BRC	DF
Mumbai (NE)	4. D.B.Joshi	IND	DF
Mumbai (NW)	5. Kirti S Meshram	BSP	DF
	6. Shantidevi Verma	IND	DF
Thane	7. Chandrika Kenia	SP	Lost
Dhulia	8. Kalabai S Sonavane	IND	DF
Erandol	9. Mirabai P Patil	IND	DF
Buldhana	10. Mandakini B Kankal	IND	DF
Ramtek	11. Rani Chitralekha Bhonsle	INC	Won
Nagpur	12. Rekha V Choube	ICS	DF
Bhandara	13. Bhagirathi M Wasnik	NRP	DF
Wardha	14. Saroj R Kashikar	JP	DF

	15. Indumati K Wankhede	IND	DF
Hingoli	16. Suryakanta Patil	INC	Won
Parbhani	17. Dr Bharati Murkute	IND	DF
Solapur	18. Bharati R Patil	JD	DF
Ichalakaranji	19. Nivedita S Mane	SHS	Lost
	20. Prof.Maya Pandit Narkar	CPM	DF

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

Elections to the 13th Lok Sabha, 1999

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Kolaba	1. Pushpa T Sable	INC	Lost
Mumbai (S)	2. Jayawantiben Mehta	BJP	Won
Mumbai (NW)	3. Sushila G Dalal	GRC	DF
Nandurbar	4. Bhuribai M Shemele	CPM	DF
Washim	5. Bhavana P Gawli	SHS	Won
Ramtek	6. Rajashri Devi	GGP	DF
Chandrapur	7. Shobha S Potdhuke	NCP	DF
Wardha	8. Prabha Rau	INC	Won
Hingoli	9. Suryakanta Patil	NCP	Lost
Parbhani	10. Noorjahanbegum Rehman Khan	IND	DF
	11. Mumtazbegum Md.Yahyakan	IND	DF
Aurangabad	12. Vatsalabai N Tayade	IND	DF
Baramati	13. Dr Pratibha Lokhande	BJP	Lost
	14. Hira Mohan Palande	ABHS	DF
Satara	15. Sangita J Gaikwad	IND	DF
Ichalakaranji	16. Nivedita S Mane	NCP	Won
	17. Sunita A Mane	IND	DF

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

Elections to the 14th Lok Sabha, 2004

Constituency	Name of the Candidate	Party	Result
Mumbai (S)	1. Jayawantiben Mehta	BJP	Lost
Mumbai (NE)	2. Jyoti M Ware	IND	DF
Mumbai (NW)	3. Arti Mehta	IND	DF
	4. Sairabno Md.Patel	IND	DF
Mumbai (N)	5. Vidya Chavan	IND	DF
	6. Anita Naik	NSTP	DF
Nashik	7. Vimlatai N Avhad	IND	DF
	8. Lata Bhika Barde	IND	DF
Buldhana	9. Anita P Gawai	ARP	DF
	10. Sunita S Ghule	IND	DF
Washim	11. Bhavna P Gawli	SHS	Won
Ramtek	12. Nayana Dhawad	VJC	DF
Nagpur	13. Dr Banimala Golpelwar	IND	DF
Chandrapur	14. Tayara Chotu Shaikh	IND	DF
Wardha	15. Prabhavati Rau	INC	Lost
Hingoli	16. Suryakanta Patil	NCP	Won
	17. Madhavi P Rathod	BSP	DF
Nanded	18. SkWahida Mahaboobpasha	BSP	DF
Jalna	19. Archana M Khillare	BSP	DF
Latur	20. Rupatai D Nilangekar	BJP	Won
	21. Mandakini G Godbole	PRCP	DF
Osmanabad	22. Kalpana R Narhire	SHS	Won

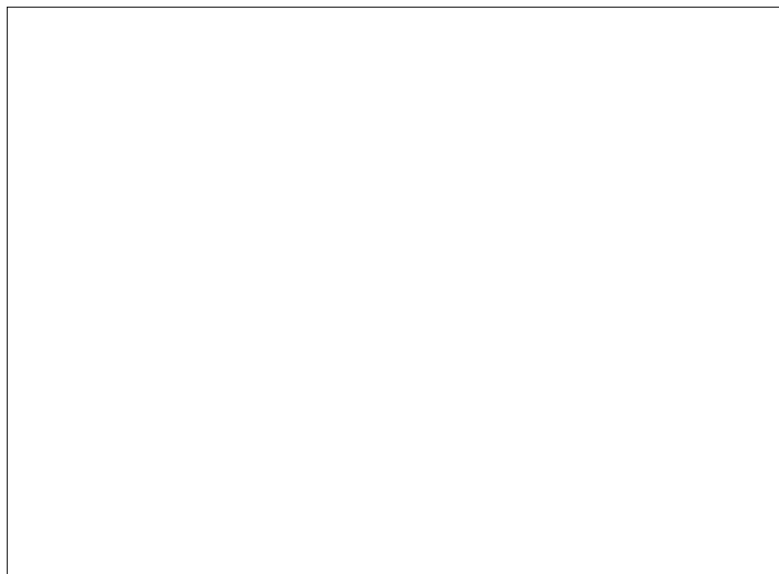
Solapur	23. Ujwalatai S Shinde	INC	Lost
	24. Nagamani K Jakkan	IND	DF
Pandharpur	25. Dr Sharada H Sonavane	IND	DF
Pune	26. Pramila Rawat	IND	DF
Ichalakaranji	27. Nivedita S Mane	NCP	Won
	28. Sumita A Mane	IND	DF
Kolhapur	29. Sunanda P More	PWP	DF

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

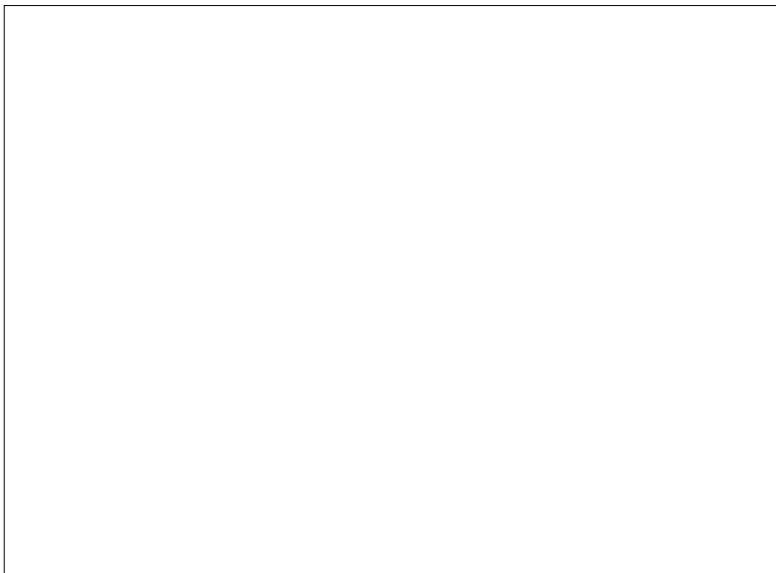
It will be seen that except at the elections to the 13th and 14th Lok Sabha, not more than three women were ever elected from Maharashtra, in spite of increasing numbers of women contesting the elections even as independent candidates.

Women's representation in the State Assembly

Creation of Maharashtra as a separate state and the rise of feminism enthused more and more women to participate in the



No. of women elected to the Lok Sabha from Maharashtra



elections to the state assembly, as has been the case with Lok Sabha elections. In the elections held to the state assembly after the lifting of Emergency, as many as 51 women contested the elections, of which only 8 could win. Five of the winning candidates belonged to the Janata Party. In keeping with the all-India trend in the post-emergency period, except two (Prabha Rau and Rajkumari G.N.Bajpayee), 19 Of the 21 candidates fighting under the INC (Indira) party lost the election, some of their losing their security deposits.

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly, 1978

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party	Result
Ratnagiri	1. Kusumtai R Abhayankar	JNP	Won
Opera House	2. Jayawantiben Mehta	JNP	Won
Malad	3. Kamal Desai	JNP	Won
Yaval	4. Sindhu Parth Chaudhari	JNP	Won

Edlabad	5. Pratibha D Patil	INC(I)	Won
	6. Anjanabai S Pandit	PWP	DF
	7. Bharati R Naik	IND	DF
Phulgaon	8. Prabha Rau	INC(I)	Won
Gondia	9. Rajkumari G N Bajpayee	INC(I)	Won
	10. Manoramabai M Dhote	INC(I)	DF
Shivajinagar	11. Shanti Narayan Naik	JNP	Won
	12. Shantabai S Gokhale	HMS	DF
Sangameshwar	13. Laxmibai B Bhuwad	INC(I)	Lost
Colaba	14. Manjula M Vyas	INC(I)	Lost
	15. Aloo Jal Chibber	INC(I)	DF
Matunga	16. Padma Subha Bhat	INC(I)	DF
Mahim	17. Ashalata V Toraskar	INC(I)	DF
Amboli	18. Indumati T Patil	INC(I)	DF
Trombay	19. Lalita Rao	INC(I)	Lost
Thane	21. Vimal K Rangnekar	INC(I)	DF
Kalyan	22. Sulochana A Nagrale	IND	DF
Vasai	23. Tarabai Vartak	INC(I)	Lost
Igatpuri (ST)	24. Bababai A P	IND	DF
Malegaon	25. Aisha H.C.Pathan	INC(I)	DF
Akrani (ST)	26. Bhuribai M Shemle	IND	DF
Sindhkheda	27. Bhagabai N Bhil	IND	DF
Erandol	28. Parwatibai C Wagh	INC(I)	Lost
	29. Lila M Dandawate	IND	DF
Chalisingaon	30. Jijabai S Chavan	IND	DF

Yaval	31. Mirabai D Tadvi	INC(I)	Lost
Akola	32. Parimala S Jain	JNP	Lost
Mangrulpur	33. Kalawati S Khandare	RPK	DF
Teosa	34. Usha P Chaudhari	IND	DF
Kamptee	35. Rajni KP Rai	RPK	Lost
Nagpur (S)	36. Suman G Kotangle	IND	DF
Nagpur (W)	37. Sumati S.B	JNP	Lost
	38. Sushila Balraj	INC(I)	DF
	39. Sunanda A Padole	IND	DF
Kalmeshwar	40. Vinodini I Meshram	IND	DF
Bhandara	41. Salini M Deshkar	JNP	Lost
Brahmapuri	42. Shantabai D Kale	IND	DF
Singanpor	43. Sarawatibai G Swami	IND	DF
Basmati	44. Yaminaai V Wajwade	IND	DF
Hingoli	45. Ashatai M Tale	INC(I)	DF
Beed	46. Kesharbai K Sonaji Rao	INC(I)	Lost
Solapur (S)	47. Nirmalatai S Thokal	INC(I)	DF
Mangalvedha	48. Vimal D Borade	INC(I)	Lost
Bopodi	49. Jayashri V Giri	IND	DF
Parvati	50. Shalu B Tukaram	INC(I)	Lost
Sangli	51. Chandra S Nevarekar	IND	DF
Parbhani	50. Shakuntala B Khande	IND	DF

Source: Election Commission, Government of India

The mandate that the Janata Party received at the 1978 elections was wasted when people felt betrayed for having voted to a non-performing government. Intra-party squabbles and ego prob-

lems within the top echelon of the Janata Party (a combine of several parties) resulted in the resignation of Morarji Desai and elevation of Chaudhari Charan Singh as the Prime Minister, with Indira Gandhi supporting from outside. Charan Singh did not last long (he was the only Prime Minister who could not attend the Parliament even for a single day). He resigned even without seeking a vote of confidence.

When the country went to polls in 1980, both at the Centre and in the States, Indira Gandhi's INC (I) was brought back to power. In keeping with the "Indira Wave" sixteen of the 21 women candidates who contested the state assembly elections under the INC (I) banner were elected. Prabha Rau and Laxmi Bhuwad were the only repeaters who lost the election.

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly, 1980

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party	Result
Sangli	1. Shalinitai V Patel	INC(I)	Won
	2. Anasuya K Apte	IND	DF
Dhaund	3. Chandrbhaga R Sadaphule	IND	DF
Bhavanipeth	4. Sheela M Kirad	INC(U)	DF
Kasbapeth	5. Shantabai Gokhale	IND	DF
Shivajinagar	6. Shanti Naik	JNP(SR)	DF
Haveli	7. Shahida M Karim	IND	DF
Manglvedha(S)	8. Bimal D Borade	INC(I)	Won
Akkalkot	9. Pawarti G Malgonda	INC(I)	Won
Her (SC)	10. Sunita D Arlikar	JNP(SC)	DF
Kaij (SC)	11. Veena B Khare	INC(I)	DF
	12. Laxmibai B Mhaske	IND	DF
Badnapur	13. Shakuntala N Sharma	INC(I)	Won
Kalamnuri	14. Rajani S Satav	INC(I)	Won

Hadgaon	15. Suryakanta J Patil	INC(I)	Won
Chimur	16. Yashodhara B Bajaj	INC(I)	Won
Gindiya	17. Rajkumari G Bajpayee	INC(I)	Won
Bhandara	18. Janabai S Shahare	RPK	DF
Ramtek	19. Vinodini I.Masram	INC(I)	DF
Phulgaon	20. Prabha Rau	INC(I)	Lost
Amaravti	21. Malti V Joshi	BJP	DF
Morshi	22. Kokilaben Jhavade	INC(I)	Won
Akola	23. Pramila Asghar Hussain Tople	BJP	Lost
Jalamb	24. Shraddha P Tapre	INC(I)	Won
Edlabad	25. Pratibha D Patil	INC(I)	Won
Erandol	26. Panbai C Wagh	INC(I)	Won
Chopda	27. Shraddhachandrika S Patil	INC(I)	Won
Dhule	28. Kamalabai C Ajmera	INC(I)	Won
	29. Vijaya V Vichare	JNP(JP)	DF
Nandurbar	30. Nalinibai T Gavil	INC(U)	Lost
Sinnar	31. Vasanti A Hemale	JNP(SC)	DF
Vasai	32. Tarabai Vartak	INC(I)	Won
Kalyan	33. Kusum S Pawar	INC(U)	DF
	34. Ratnabai G Gaikwad	IND	DF
Ratnagiri	35. Kusum R Abhayankar	BJP	Won
Sangameshwar	36. Laxmibai Bhuwad	INC(I)	Lost
Opera House	37. Jayawantiben Mehta	BJP	Won
Dadar	38. Sharaya B Thakur	INC(I)	Won
	39. Saroj D Telang	IND	DF

Dharavi	40. Shakuntala C Salve	IND	DF
Andheri	41. Shanti Naik	IND	DF
Trombay	42. Lalita Rao	INC(I)	Won
Kurla	43. Celine D'Silva	INC(I)	Lost
Ghatkopar	44. Gunvanti Shah	INC(U)	DF
Mulund	45. C.M.Ajgaonkar	IND	DF
	46. Y.R.Butani	IND	DF
Kandivali	47. M.M.Mehta	BJP	Lost

Source: Election Commission, GOI

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly in 1985 saw a large number of women contesting. However, of the 83 candidates, only 16 could win. All independents either lost or forfeited their deposits.

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly, 1985

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party	Result
Umarkhadi	1. Chandrika P Kenia	INC	Won
Shivadi	2. Rekha P.Gotmare	IND	DF
	3. Meena Pareira	IND	DF
Worli	4. Vinita Datta Samant	IND	Won
	5. Meena Periera	IND	DF
Dadar	6. Sharayu G Thakoor	INC	Won
	7. Smita Raul	IND	DF
	8. Shalini P Kulkarni	IND	DF
Mahim	9. Krantigeeta Mahabal	IND	DF
Bandra	10. Sudha Varde	JNP	Lost

	11. Aroonabehen Reejsinghani	IND	DF
Vile Parle	12. Vanita Patel	IND	DF
Goregaon	13. Mrinal Keshav Gore	JNP	Won
Trombay	14. Neelam Diwakar Gore	JNP	Won
Chembur	15. Parvati Laxminarayan Parihar	INC	Won
Kurla	16. Desilva, Selin	INC	Won
	17. Pushpa Mehta	IND	DF
Mulund	18. Yashoda R Bhutani	IND	DF
Kalyan	19. Shakuntala Paranjpe	INC	Lost
	20. Ratanbai Gangadhar Gaikwad	IND	DF
	21. Rekha Ramakant Rahalkar	IND	DF
Vasai	22. Tarabai N Vartak	INC	Lost
	23. Ushatai Ramchandra Kangane	IND	DF
Palghar (ST)	24. Vimal Rausing Valvi	IND	DF
Sinnar	25. Vasanti Arjun Hemade	LKD	DF
Dabhadi	26. Pushpatai Vyankatrao Hiray	ICS	Won
	27. Indirabai Baliram Hiray	INC	Lost
Nawapur (ST)	28. Nojubai Fulsing Gavit	IND	DF
Sindhkheda	29. Vidyatai Laxman Patil	INC	Lost
Dhule	30. Shalini Sudhakar Borase	INC	Won
Erandol	31. Parubai Chandrbhan Wagh	INC	Won
Bhusawal	32. Amtul Latif Zafarali Kazi	IND	DF
Raver	33. Mirabai Dagekhan Tadavi	INC	Lost
	34. Suman Chudaman Patil	IND	DF
Buldhana	35. Sumanbai Shivajirao Patil	ICS	Lost

	36. Tarabai Prahlad Gawande	IND	DF
Mehkar	37. Shantibai T Wankhede	IND	DF
Jalamb	38. Shradha P Tapare	INC	Won
	39. Manorama Mdhavrao Bhaltalak	IND	DF
Akola	40. Pramila Vshnu Tople	BJP	Lost
Washim (SC)	41. Madhuri Namdeo Ingle	IND	DF
Mangrulpur	42. Venutai Ramchandra Ingole	IND	DF
Morshi	43. Ushatai Madhukar Atram	IND	DF
Amaravti	44. Chandraprabha Narendra Boke	ICS	Lost
Arvi	45. Kanta Deorao Naitam	IND	DF
Pulgaon	46. Prabha Rau	INC	Won
	47. Nirmala R Pathak	IND	DF
Wardha	48. Simitra Narayanrao Chidam	IND	DF
Hinganghat	49. Lalita Madhusudan Katariya	IND	DF
	50. Kamal Vinayak Kumbhare	IND	DF
Kamptee	51. Sangita Premdas Belekar	IND	DF
Nagpur (N)	52. Damauantibai M Deshbaratar	INC	Won
Adyar	53. Sarojini Rushi Gaidhane	IND	DF
	54. Gita Tularam Themburne	IND	DF
Gondia	55. Rajkumari Bajpai	INC	Won
Gadchiroli (ST)	56. Tikalabai R Talandi	IND	DF
Rajura	57. Nirmala Purankumar Pechal	IND	DF
Saoli	58. Shobhatai M Fadnavis	BJP	Lost
	59. Jayashri A Ingale	IND	DF
Wani	60. Urmila Pathak	IND	DF
Yavatmal	61. Maltibai Madhukar Pahankar	IND	DF

Digras	62. Kamaladevi S Khare	IND	DF
Parbhani	63. Ayeshabegum Iqbal Hussain	INC	Lost
	64. Ranubai Tukaram Wavle	IND	DF
Kalamnuri	65. Rajanitai S Satav	INC	Won
Beed	66. Sushila Morale	CPI	DF
Ashti	67. Kranti Sudhakar Rao Chaudhari	ICS	Lost
Her (SC)	68. Padmawati S helhalkar	IND	DF
Kalamb (SC)	69. Vijayatai M Ingle	IND	DF
Mangalvedhe (SC)	70. Sushila Laxman Aute	INC	Lost
Karjat (SC)	71. Ranjana Onkar Patil	JNP	Lost
	72. Kanta Ramchandra Borade	IND	DF
Sangamner	73. Shakuntala K Thorat	INC	Lost
Ambegaon	74. Chhayatai Padval	INC	Lost
Parvati (SC)	75. Shalubai Tukaram Budhiwant	IND	DF
Kasbapeth	76. Girijabai Gore	IND	DF
Bhavanipeth	77. Aishabai Syed Nazir	IND	DF
Daund	78. Ushadevi K Jagadale	ICS	Won
Baramati	79. Rukhmini Rangnath Mane	IND	DF
Sangli	80. Sharda Madhukar Deshpande	IND	DF
Shirol	81. Sarojini Babasaheb Khanjire	INC	Won
Vadgaon (SC)	82. Mangala Prabhakar Solankar	IND	DF
Radhanagari	83. Sarojani Haribhau Kadav	INC	DF

ICS: Indian Congress-Socialist

Source: Election Commission, GOI

As many as 144 women contested the 1990 polls to the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly. However, only 6 were suc-

cessful, with almost all the independents losing their security deposits. The Bahujan Samaj Party, which is basically a 'North Indian Party', tried to enter Maharashtra. But, all the 7 women candidates fielded by the party lost their deposits. The continuing trend of women increasingly contesting the polls even as independents shows their desire to enter the Legislative Assembly. It also appears that the magnetic attraction of elected office is so powerful that it prompted at least one candidate (Suman Muralidhar Bodwade) to contest as an Independent from three constituencies viz., Jalgaon, Bhusawal and Raver), even though it resulted in her losing the security deposit from all the three constituencies.

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly, 1990

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party	Result
Devgad	1. Kamaltai B Parulekar	JD	DF
Dapoli	2. Vidya Belose	INC	Lost
Colaba	3. Usha Tripathi	JD	DF
	4. Suhasini R Mhatre	IND	DF
Opera House	5. Dagmar John Desouza	IND	DF
Malabar Hill	6. Gangaben R Somaiya	IND	DF
Chinchpokhli	7. Khatunbi Md. Yusuf Ansari	IND	DF
Nagpada	8. Anjum Ahmed	SHS	Lost
Worli	9. Vinita Datta Samant	JD	Lost
Dadar	10. Prabha R Chitre	IND	DF
Matunga	11. Chandrakanta Goyal	BJP	Won
	12. M.K.Eapen	ICS(SCS)	DF
	13. Uma Mishra	IND	DF
Vile Parle	14. Bharati V Bhatt	LKD(B)	DF
Amboli	15. Madhavai Raghunath Patil	IND	DF

Santacruz	16. Felcy R Pinto	IND	DF
Andheri	17. Asha Eknath Bhosale	BSP	DF
Goregaon	18. Indumati Patel	INC	DF
Malad	19. Naina Kharte	IND	DF
Trombay	20. Lalita Rao	IND	DF
Nehrunagar	21. Saroj Sandesh Naik	INC	Lost
Kurla	22. Celine DeSilva	INC	Lost
Thane	23. Savitridevi Lalansingh Thakur	IND	DF
Ulhas Nagar	24. Gauri Gobind Lalwani	IND	DF
Ambernath	25. Padmashri S Talpurkar	IND	DF
Kalyan	26. Shakuntala Anant Paranjpe	IND	DF
Deolali (SC)	27. Shakuntala B Donde	IND	DF
Dhabadi	28. Pushpa Vyankatrao Hiray	INC	Won
Chandwad	29. Smita Chandrakant Gaurav	JD	DF
Baglan (ST)	30. Suman Rambhu Chavan	IND	DF
Sakri (ST)	31. Kamalabai G Gavit	IND	DF
Kusumba	32. Minabai T Baisane	BRP	DF
Dhule	33. Shalini Sudhakar Borse	INC	Won
	34. Bimaltai V Bedse	IND	DF
	35. Kusumbai B Patil	IND	DF
Chalisgaon (SC)	36. Saroj Kiran Ahite	JD	DF
Chopda	37. Indirabai B Patil	JD	DF
Erandol	38. Parvatibai C Wagh	INC	Lost
Jalgaon	39. Suman Muralidhar Bodwade	IND	DF
Bhusawal	40. Suman Muralidhar Bodwade	IND	DF

Raver	41. Suman Muralidhar Bodwade	IND	DF
	42. Nababai Lakha Rathod	IND	DF
Edlbad	43. Kamal Dagadu	JD	DF
Buldhana	44. Kamal Ashru Patil	IND	DF
	45. Prabha M Parlewar	IND	DF
Khamgaon	46. Maltibai P.Ingle	BRP	DF
Jalamb	47. Vasanthi S Gawande	PWP	Lost
	48. Shraddhatai P Tapre	INC	Lost
Akot	49. Radha Dilip Belsare	IND	DF
Borgaon Manju	50. Janabai Pahlad Bhole	IND	DF
	51. Vatsalabai H Badere	IND	DF
Balapur	52. Vijaya Devidas Dongre	IND	DF
	53. Sarala P Meshram	IND	DF
	54. Padmavati P Gawande	IND	DF
	55. Mirabai R Tayade	IND	DF
Washim (SC)	56. Annapurnabai K Kankal	IND	DF
	57. Laxmi Tulsiram Bagate	IND	DF
Melghat (ST)	58. Fulkai Buda Bhilavekar	JD	DF
	59. Mamtatai Netam	BSP	DF
Morshi	60. Kumud K Yawalkar	JD	DF
	61. Radhanjali D Belsare	IND	DF
Walgaon	62. Shailaja B Ramekar	IND	DF
Amravati	63. Pushpatai Vijay Bonde	INC	Lost
	64. Rameshwar Srirao	IND	DF
Badnera	65. Vimaltai D Wankhede	IND	DF

Chandur	66. Sushila Manikrao Patil	IND	DF
Arvi	67. Jyoti Vijayrao Khonde	JD	Lost
Pulgaon	68. Saroj Ravi Kashikar	JD	Won
	69. Prabha Rau	INC	Lost
	70. Suman Vijaykumar Dahake	IND	DF
Nagpur (N)(SC)	71. Lilabai Dayaram Patil	IND	DF
	72. Tulsi Ramji Pagare	IND	DF
	73. Lilabai Darshan Modak	IND	DF
	74. Kantabai B Bhalerao	IND	DF
Nagpur South	75. S S Kumbhare	IND	DF
	76. Sushila Rambhau Wankhede	IND	DF
Nagpur West	77. Pushpa Tulsiram Ramteke	BSP	DF
Kalmeshwar	78. Sunanda Prabhakar Shete	JD	Lost
	79. Anasuya Walmik Masram	IND	DF
Katol	80. Prerna P Bartokar	IND	DF
	81. Minakshi R Takam	IND	DF
Savner	82. Chitralekha R Gazbhiye	IND	DF
	83. Shakuntala B Lohale	IND	DF
Adyar	84. Mandakini G Kalamkar	IND	DF
Tirora (SC)	85. Sushila Rambhau Wankhede	IND	DF
Sakoli	86. Janabai Karu Malkambe	IND	DF
Gadchiroli (ST)	87. Pramili Jangluji Gawande	IND	DF
Chandrapur	88. Jaishri Ajay Ingle	RPI	DF
Saoli	89. Shobhatai M Fadnavis	BJP	Won
Bhadrawati	90. Urmilabai B Pathak	DDP	DF

Wani	91. Sudha Girijashankar Telang	IND	DF
Ralegaon (ST)	92. Pushpatai P Atram	BSP	DF
Kelapur (ST)	93. Vimalbai A Yedshikar	IND	DF
	94. Kalavati T Kulsange	BSP	DF
Yavatmal	95. Vijaytai Jambuwantrao Dhote	INC	Lost
	96. Shantabai A Ambadkar	IND	DF
Darwha	97. Sandhya V. Ingole	JD	DF
Pusad	98. Shakuntala M Vilayatkar	IND	DF
Hadgaon	99. Kamalabai K Maheshwari	IND	DF
Nanded	100. Kavita Bhalerao	JD	DF
	101. Sushilabai S Ratole	IND	DF
Kandhar	102. Sindhutai S Tale	IND	DF
	103. Ushadevi H Thakur	IND	DF
Basmath	104. Kamalabai B Jadhav	IND	DF
Kalamnuri	105. Rajanitai S Satav	INC	Lost
Partur	106. Laxmibai B Adhav	IND	DF
Jalna	107. Latabai Hari Babar	IND	DF
Badnapur	108. Preshilabai B Ambhore	IND	DF
Kannad	109. Vithalbai M Khairnar	IND	DF
	110. Ashabai N Sonawane	DDP	DF
	111. Indubai S Bagul	IND	DF
Vijapur	112. Anandi Arvind Annadate	JD	DF
	113. Kusumtai K Bagul	IND	DF
Aurangabad(W)	114. Sima Tamboli Vaje Patil	IND	DF
Paithan	115. S Prabhat Chavan	BSP	DF
Manjlegaon	116. Padminibai P Dhabade	IND	DF

	117. Nasimsultana Abdul Rehman	IND	DF
Beed	118. Sushila Ganpatrao Morale	JD	DF
	119. Ujwala Y Khetre	BSP	DF
Chausala	120. Usha Motiram Darade	ICS(SCS)	DF
Kaij (SC)	121. Vimal Nandkishore Mundada	BJP	Won
Kalamb (SC)	122. Kanta Uttam Sonawane	DDP	DF
Ausa	123. Savita Santaram Bundge	IND	DF
Nilanga	124. Jankibai D Dorve	IND	DF
Solapur City (S)	125. Vijaya Vedprakash Patil	IND	DF
	126. Amirun Harun Wangikar	IND	DF
	127. Kusum S Limbale	IND	DF
Pandharpur	128. Suman S Zodage	IND	DF
Karjat (SC)	129. Ranjana Onkar Patil	JD	Lost
Srirampur	130. Vani Vimal Viswanath	SHS	DF
Sangamner	131. Asha B Bhangare	IND	DF
Shivajinagar	132. Chhaya S Godbole	IND	DF
Parvati (SC)	133. Renuka A Gangurde	IND	DF
Bhavani Peth	134. Gulshamim Sk.Abdul Karim	IND	DF
Daund	135. Ushadevi K Jagadale	INC	Lost
	136. Bhivabai K Waghmode	IND	DF
Man (SC)	137. Kamal Tukaram Mhaske	IND	DF
Koregaon	138. Shalinitai Patil	JD	Lost
Wai	139. Shradha R Chavan	IND	DF
Satara	140. Rajmata Kalpanaraje	SHS	Lost
Patan	141. Vijayadesvi S Desai	IND	Lost

Shirala	142. Shobhatai D Naik	SHS	Lost
	143. Indumati B Patankar	CPI	DF
Brahmapuri	144. Damayanti M Sonkushare	IND	DF

BSP: Bahujan Samaj Party; ICS (SCS): Indian Congress-Socialist Sarat Chandra Sinha); JD: Janata Dal; BRP: Bharatiya Republican Paarty; DDP: Doordarshi Party; PWP: Peasants and Workers Party; SHS: Shiv Sena

Source: Election Commission, GOI

The 1995 assembly polls witnessed a further increase in the number of women contestants from 144 in 1990 to 247 in 1995. However, 165 of them were independents reflecting the urge among the women to find a seat in the Assembly. The contestants included 14 Muslim women, the largest number so far. The elections saw only 11 women candidates winning.

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly, 1995

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party	Result
Sawantwadi	1. Varsha Liladhar Palav	SHS	Lost
	2. Satwashiladevi SS Bhonsle	IND	DF
Vengurla	3. Kamala Balkrishna Parulekar	IND	DF
Khed	4. Asha Keshavrao Bhosle	INC	Lost
Mahad	5. Supriya Suresh Sheth	IND	DF
Shriwardhan	6. Rehana A Rahim Undre	PWP	Lost
Alibag	7. Meenakshi Patil	PWP	Won
Umarkhadi	8. Amina Syed Mohammad	INC	DF
Khetwadi	9. Ila Dagli	HJP	DF
Opera House	10. Sujata Dhawale	INC	Los
Malabar Hill	11. Bina A Sharma	IND	DF
Mazagaon	12. Rashida Jumman Khan	IND	DF
Shivadi	13. Radhika S Kanavi	IND	DF

Dadar	14. Sharayu Govind Thakur	INC	Lost
	15. Nirmaladevi R Varma	DDP	DF
Matunga	16. Chandrakanta Goyal	BJP	Won
Bandra	17. Jayashri R Naik	BJP	Won
	18. Tasneem Khan (Advocate)	JD	DF
	19. Chandravati R Chauhan	DDP	DF
	20. Zaheda Khan	IND	DF
Kherwadi	21. Shaila Satpute	JD	DF
Vile Parle	22. Norma Tellis	IND	DF
Amboli	23. Pushpa Ashok Patil	BSP	DF
	24. Chandra M Bhatia	IND	DF
Santacruz	25. Nancy Oommachhan (Adv)	INC	Lost
	26. Jinoveva P Fernandes	SP	DF
Andheri	27. Nirmala S Choudhary	IND	DF
Kandivali	28. Lilaben C Patel	IND	DF
Borivali	29. Manjulabai R Patel	IND	DF
	30. Nikaben Sandhvi	PDP	DF
	31. Vimal Kotian	IND	DF
	32. Shaikh Asghari	IND	DF
	33. Hamida Masum Ali Mistry	MUL	DF
Trombay	34. Noorjehan A Inamdar	IND	DF
	35. Tulsabai R Salvi	IND	DF
Chembur	36. Shakuntala G Rao	IND	DF
Kurla	37. Ashrafbegum B Khan	IND	DF
	38. Manorama D Patil	INC	Lost

	39. Jijabai K Takalkar	BSP	DF
	40. Tavinderkaur Chadda	IND	DF
Thane	41. Malati R Bhoir	INC	Lost
Ulhasnagar	42. Manjitkaur K Nile	IND	DF
	43. Anita Arjun Chingari	IND	DF
Ambernath	44. Kumud R Bendale	IND	DF
	45. Vandana B Gote	NVPP	DF
	46. Laxmi Rajaram Parte	IND	DF
Kalyan	47. Sushma V Bansode	IND	DF
Murbad	48. Shobha S Ingle	BSP	DF
Vasai	49. Mary M Andrades	IND	DF
Palghar (ST)	50. Manisha M Nimkar	SHS	Won
Nashik	51. Adv. Vasudha D Karad	CPM	DF
	52. Sandhya P Patil	DDP	DF
Deolali (SC)	53. Suman B Kardak	IND	DF
Nandgaon	54. Sarojbai V Erande	IND	DF
Malegaon	55. Swaleha A Gani	IND	DF
	56. Vidya Dhananjy Mali	IND	DF
Dhabadi	57. Pushpatai V Hiray	INC	Won
Surgana (ST)	58. Sushila S Albad	IND	DF
Kalvan (ST)	59. Sitabai B Bagul	IND	Lost
Nawapur (ST)	60. Mira Kishor Vasave	DDP	DF
Shahade	61. Kamal Nimba Thakur	IND	DF
Sindhkheda	62. Nababai S Bachchav	RPI	DF
	63. Akkabai M Bhadane	SJP(M)	DF

Kusumba	64. Pramilabai B Bhamare	IND	DF
Dhule	65. Shalini Sudhakar Borse	IND	DF
	66. Maya Mhasu Karat	IND	DF
Parola	67. Kamalabai Laxman Ghisade	IND	DF
Chopda	68. Indirabai Bhanudas Patil	IND	DF
Erandol	69. Parvatibai Chandrbhan Wagh	INC	DF
Jamner	70. Malutai M Chaudhari	IND	DF
Bhusawal	71. Indumati Purushottam Kale	DDP	DF
	72. Suman Muralidhar Bodwade	IND	DF
Raver	73. Sandhta Pritamsing Patil	DDP	DF
	74. Suman P Nannavare	IND	DF
Edlabad	75. Pushpa Shirish Kale	DDP	DF
Malkapur	76. Rekha P Chaudhari	DDP	DF
	77. Sumanbai L Chopde	IND	DF
Chikhli	78. Rekha P Khedekar	BJP	Won
Sindhkhedraja	79. Satyabhama E Kayande	IND	DF
Jalamb	80. Vasanti Shrikant Gawande	PWP	Lost
	81. Gokarnabai R Nagpure	IND	DF
Akot	82. Minatai R Wanare	IND	DF
Borgaon Manju	83. Sitabai M Taide	IND	DF
	84. Sunanda R Daberao	IND	DF
	85. Lilabai N Gopnarain	IND	DF
Akola	86. Maya M Khanbahadur	IND	DF
	87. Kirti Madhukar Nayak	IND	DF
Balapur	88. Kanta M Mhaisane	IND	DF
	89. Sunanda Ashok Ghatol	IND	DF

Medshi	90. Parnabai B Dhanbhar	IND	DF
	91. Lilabai Kisan Nirban	IND	DF
Karanja	92. Dipatai D Manwar	IND	Df
Daryapur	93. Asha Manik Gawande	IND	DF
	94. Nirmala P Wanhede	IND	DF
Achalpur	95. Nandatai Abhayankar	IND	Df
	96. Lata N Savarkar	IND	DF
	97. Kantabai R Astonkar	IND	DF
Morshi	98. Ashata V Tarar	SJP(MP	DF
	99. Shobha Pandurang Kolhe	IND	DF
	100. Tarabai Gulab Taraskar	IND	DF
Teosa	101. Pramilatai K Kawale	IND	DF
Walgaon	102. Nilima Srikant Mahale	IND	DF
	103. Punam Dilip Watane	IND	DF
Amaravati	104. Kamal Sriram Kamble	IND	DF
	105. Sushila R Mahajan	IND	DF
Badnera	106. Usha Prakash Chaudhari	INC	DF
	107. Vina Suresh Vimak	IND	DF
	108. Kusum R Khaitwar	IND	DF
	109. Sulochana D Meshram	IND	DF
Chandpur	110. Rama Charandas Vaidhya	IND	DF
Pulgaon	111. Prabha A Rau	INC	Won
	112. Saroj Ravi Kashikar	IND	Lost
Wardha	113. Kanta B Naitam	IND	DF
	114. Sushila R Saraf	IND	DF

Hinganghat	115. Prabha S Raghatate	IND	DF
	116. Shantabai M Shende	IND	DF
Kamptee	117. .Sulekha N Kumbhare	JG	Lost
	118. Shobha S Manvatkar	RPI	DF
Nagpur (N)(SC)	119. Indutai R Dahiware	IND	DF
Nagpur South	120. Ramdulari Pal	IND	DF
	121. Vatsalabai Gazbhiye	IND	DF
Nagpur Central	122. Tulsa Bansi Dongre	IND	DF
	123. Naseem Siddqui	IUML	DF
Nagpur West	124. Prabhatai Motilal Oza	INC	Lost
	125. Asha Jannu Singhumare	IND	DF
	126. Asha Marutirao Shende	IND	DF
	127. Leela G Mahishankar	IND	DF
Kalmeshwar	128. Sunanda P.Shete	JD	DF
Katol	129. Dipti D Kalmegh	IND	DF
	130. Perna P Barokar	BJP	DF
	131. Sumitra H Wahane	IND	DF
Savner	132. Manorama S Shende	IND	DF
Tumsar	133. Hansa Patiram Bagade	IND	DF
Bhandara	134. Vaishala V Yerkade	IND	DF
Adyar	135. Kisnabai V Bhanarkar	IND	DF
Tirora (SC)	136. Sharda P Rahulkar	IND	DF
Gondia	137. Kantabai Tighare	IND	DF
Goregaon	138. Gangubai P Waghare	JD	DF
	139. Kalabai N Barapatre	IND	DF
Sakoli	140. Vandana H Urkude	IND	DF

Lakhandur	141. Pramila Premraj Kute	INC	Lost
Armori (ST)	142. Rajani B Warthe	RPI(K)	DF
Sironcha (ST)	143. Madhavi Bharat Siriya	IND	DF
Rajura	144. Vimal S Umare	IND	DF
	145. Pushpatai P Shedmake	SJP(M)	DF
Chandrapur	146. Suman B Kolgantwar	IND	DF
	147. Nalini Jseph Mojes	IND	DF
	148. Triptakaur H Jabbal	IND	DF
Saoli	149. Shobhatai M Fadnavis	BJP	Won
Chimur	150. Yashodara B Bajaj	IND	DF
	151. Mandabai T Chauke	BSP	DF
Bhadrawati	152. Lilabai S Jambhule	IND	DF
	153. Vasudha W Ingale	IND	DF
	154. Tara M Kale	IND	DF
Kelapur (ST)	155. Vimal A Yedsikar	IND	DF
Yavatmal	156. Sandhya W Ingole	IND	DF
	157. Jyoti V Kale	IND	DF
	158. Chhabutai V Meghe	IND	DF
Darwha	159. Minakshi G Rathod	IND	DF
	160. Bilkisbegum T Deshmukh	IND	DF
Kinwat	161. Ashatai U Kadam	IND	DF
	162. Ratnabai P Pawar	IND	DF
Hadgaon	163. Saraswati G Sawatkar	RPI	DF
Nanded	164. Vrashali R Waghmare	IND	DF
	165. Alimunnisa Z Khursheed	IND	DF

Mudkhed	166. Kamalbai B Kamble	IND	DF
Gangakhed (sc)	167. Dwarakabai B Kamble	INC	DF
	168. Shantabai S Gadekar	IND	DF
Singnapur	169. Mangala Haribau More	SHS	Lost
Parbhani	170. Haribai S Kamble	IND	DF
	171. Laxmibai V Aglawe	IND	DF
Basmath	172. Shantabai S Gayakwad	IND	DF
Kalamnuri	173. Dr Pushpa Anilrao Munde	IND	DF
	174. Panchabai D Asole	IND	DF
Hingoli	175. Shobha T Tapre	IND	DF
	176. Ranjana B Suradkar	IND	DF
	177. Shantabai R Wankhede	IND	DF
Jintur	178. Sheshekalabai K Chawan	BBMS	DF
	179. Asha Rajesh Gaikwad	PWP	DF
Pathri	180. Shantabai M Shamkavar	IND	DF
Vaijapur	181. Kusumtai K Bagul	IND	DF
Gangapur	182. Ashatai Shrimantrai	SHS	Lost
Aurangabad (E)	183. Parvatibai Trimbakrao	INC	Lost
Paithan	184. Babanbai G Chavan	IND	DF
	185. Vimalbai O Chaudhari	IND	DF
Manjlegaon	186. Sumantai M Kshatriya	IND	DF
Beed	187. Shahapari Ismail Pathan	IND	DF
Ashti	188. Krantibai S Chaudhari	IND	DF
	189. Sayambar Dattu Maruti	IND	DF
	190. Indubai B Bhavar	IND	DF
Kaij (SC)	191. Dr Vimaltai N Mundada	BJP	Won

	192. Prabhavati S Jogdand	IND	DF
	193. Sojabai V Mhaske	IND	DF
	194. Ujwalabai S Sonavane	IND	DF
Renapur	195. Vimalbai K Akangire	JD	DF
	196. Gayabai Dagdu Sirsat	IND	DF
Kalamb (SC)	197. Kalpana R Narhire	SHS	Won
Nilanga	198. Chanchala D Suryawanshi	SHS	DF
Solapur City (N)	199. Saraswati S Shete	JD	DF
	200. Jayashri D Mahindrakar	IND	DF
Mangalvedhe (SC)	201. Vimaltai D Borade	IND	Lost
Barshi	202. Prabhavati S Zadbhuke	INC	Los
Karjat (SC)	203. Ranjanatai O Patil	IND	DF
Ahmednagar (S)	204. Alka Manek Pardeshi	SJP(M)	DF
	205. Jotsna A Tribhuvan	IND	DF
	206. Chhabutai D Palave	IND	DF
Ahmednagar (N)	207. Vijayatai C Kute	INC	Lost
	208. Vimal S Gophane	IND	DF
	209. Shahin Nisar Pawar	ICS	DF
Sheogaon	210. Zumberbai S Thorat	IND	DF
Shrirampur	211. Suman W Patare	IND	DF
Shirdi	212. RajashreeB Vikhe	BBMS	DF
Kopargaon	213. Jaibai A Shejwal	IND	DF
Junnar	214. Farida Rahamt Ali Sayyad	SJP(M)	DF
Maval	215. Ruplekha K Dhore	BJP	Won
Haveli	216. Mandakini V Rokade	RPI	DF

Bopodi	217. Adv.Vijayalakshmi D Patil	IND	DF
	218. Naini K Pidekar	IND	Df
Shivajinagar	219. Adv.Vandana Chavan	INC	Lost
	220. Shobha R Salunke	IND	DF
	221. Mangal Bhimrao Shelke	IND	DF
Parvati (SC)	222. Vaishali N Chandane	BBMS	Df
Kasba Peth	223. Sheela G Ghaisas	IND	DF
	224. Vijaya Raosaheb Gandhi	IND	DF
Bhavani Peth	225. Madhavi Vinod Shah	IND	DF
Pune Cantonment	226. Vijaya Baban Bhosale	IND	DF
Shirur	227. Jayashri A Palande	BJP	Lost
Purandhar	228. Kusum S Takawale	IND	DF
	229. Vandana S Takawale	IND	DF
Man (SC)	230. Sawant NB	BSP	DF
Koregaon	231. Shalinitai V Patil	IND	Lost
Jaoli	232. Vanita R Bagade	IND	DF
Satara	233. Lata Pundalik Jadhav	IND	DF
Karad North	234. Indubai K Patil	IND	DF
Shirala	235. Shakuntala S Kamble	RPI	DF
Bhilwadi Wangi	236. Shakuntala H Salunke	IND	DF
Sangli	237. Neeta Shrirang Kelkar	BJP	DF
Miraj	238. Maniktai A Gaikwad	INC	Lost
Jat (SC)	239. Jayshri V Dhabade	JD	DF
Shirol	240. Veershri S Patil	IND	DF
Vadgaon (SC)	241. Kalpana V Ghatage	IND	DF

Panhala	242. Lilaben Patel	IND	DF
Sangrul	243. Indira P Deshmukh	IND	DF
Kolhapur	244. Shivani D Desai	INC	DF
	245. Anuradha R Desai	IND	DF
Karvir	246. Saroj S Vankudre	IND	DF
Gadhinglaj	247. Sujata S Desai	IND	DF

SJP (M): Samajwadi Janata Party (Maharashtra); JD: Janata Dal; NVPP: Native People's Party; MUL: Muslim League Kerala State Committee; IUML: Indian Union Muslim League

Source: Election Commission, GOI

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly, 1999

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party	Result
Guhagar	1. Suchita S Velhal	IND	DF
Alibag	2. Meenakshi Patil	PWP-I	Won
Colaba	3. Prema Dinesh Mishra	IND	DF
Mazgaon	4. Sunita Subhash Shinde	NCP	DF
Worli	5. Dr Vijaya Patil	INC	Lost
Dadar	6. Visakha Raut	SHS	Won
	7. Ulka Harshad Thakur	IND	DF
Matunga	8. Chandrakanta Goyal	BJP	Won
	9. Geetha Dasarathan	ADMK	DF
Vandre	10. Parveen Noor Md.Shaikh	BSP	DF
Kherwadi	11. Sunanda Rajpal	ABHS	DF
Amboli	12. Aisha Riyaz Shaikh	SP	DF
	13. Nalini Ratan Jagtap	ABHS	DF
Malad	14. F.S.Jadhav	BSP	DF

	15. Jayna Pandit	IND	DF
Borivali	16. Deepali Dinesh Parab	ABHS	DF
	17. Surekha Girish Jariwala	IND	DF
Trombay	18. Shama Parveen Md.Hanif	NLP	DF
Chembur	19. Uma Datta Gharat	IND	DF
Ghatkopar	20. Chandrika Premji Kenia	INC	Lost
Ulhasnagar	21. Jyoti Suresh Kalani (Pappu)	IND	DF
Palghar (ST)	22. Manisha M Nimkar	SHS	Won
	23. Geeta Gajanan Pagi	JD(S)	Lost
Niphad	24. Mandakini Raosaheb Kadam	SHS	Won
Pachora	25. Sarala Kiran Patil	IND	DF
Bhusawal	26. Jayashree Saligram Nyati	IND	DF
	27. Sumantai Muralidhar Bodwade	IND	DF
Buldhana	28. Muktabai Shamrao Khare	IND	DF
Chikhli	29. Rekha P Khedekar	BJP	Won
Sindhkhedraja	30. Nandabai D Kayande	INC	Lost
Mangrulpir	31. Sitadevi Dhanraj Chavhan	IND	DF
Achalpur	32. Vasudhatai P Deshmukh	INC	Won
	33. Surekha S Thakare	STBP	DF
Morshi	34. Tarabai G Baraskar	ABHS	DF
Badnera	35. Sumitra B Warghat	IND	DF
Pulgaon	36. Kaushalyabai P Gazbhiye	IND	DF
Hinganghat	37. Surekha A Deshmukh (Prof)	IND	DF
Umred	38. Sk.Zebunnisa Md.Nazir	BSP	DF
Kamptee	39. Sulekha N Kumbhare	RPI	Won

Nagpur West	40. Ratnakala Dinesh Balraj	NCCP	DF
Katol	41. Dipti Dilip Kalmegh	SHS	DF
Lakhandur	42. Rekha Mansaram Pandhare	GGP	DF
	43. Padma T Meshram	IND	DF
Gadchiroli (ST)	44. Anandibai D Madavi	GGP	DF
Sironcha (ST)	45. Saguna Penta Talandi	INC	Lost
Saoli	46. Shobha M Fadnavis	BJP	Won
	47. Mrunalini G Khobragade	RPI	Lost
	48. Mandakini S Nale	IND	DF
Chimur	49. Chandrakala N Jambhule	IND	DF
Bhadrawati	50. Tarabai M Kale	IND	DF
Yavatmal	51. Ushatai D Bhalerao	IND	DF
Pusad	52. Chandrakala R Ingale	IND	DF
Kinwat	53. Ashatai U Kadam	IND	DF
	54. Anitabai S Jadhav	CPI	DF
Mudkhed	55. Hemlata Narendra Patil	SHS	DF
Mukhed (SC)	56. Anita C Degloorkar	BSP	DF
Kandhar	57. Rukminibai S Gite	IND	DF
Kalamnuri	58. Rajani S Satav	NCP	Lost
Kannad	59. Tejashwini R Jadhav	NCP	Lost
Aurangabad West	60. Nasimabi Abdul Syed	NMP	DF
Kaij (SC)	61. Dr Vimaltai N Mundada	NCP	Won
Renapur	62. Dayabai D Sirsat	HJP	DF
Ahmedpur	63. Shobha S Waghmare	IND	DF
Her (SC)	64. Saraswati N Kamble	IND	DF

Kalamb (SC)	65. Kalpana R Narhire	SHS	Won
	66. Kashibai P Khandagale	IND	DF
Osmanabad	67. Radhabai Suresh Mali	IND	DF
Omerga	68. Sishila S Surwase	IND	DF
Tuljapur	69. Shamal K Vadane	SHS	DF
Solaur City North	70. Nagamani Kisan Jakkan	IND	DF
Solapur (N) (SC)	71. Nanda E Ganeshkar	IND	DF
Madha	72. Meera Sudam Shinde	IND	DF
Shrigonda	73. Vijaya B Gangadre	IND	DF
Ahmednagar (S)	74. Hawabi Sk.Umar	IND	DF
Shirdi	75. Sumanbai D Pathare	IND	DF
Kopargaon	76. Sangitha P Shinde	CPI	DF
Rahuri	77. Lata Bhausahab Jadhav	ABHS	DF
Khed-Alandi	78. Asha Arun Gawali	ABHS	DF
Parner	79. Anjanabai V Bande	IND	DF
Maval	80. Sandhya N Kalokhe	IND	DF
Mulshi	81. Kasubai B Pawar	IND	DF
Shivajinagar	82. Adv.Vandana Chavan	INC	Lost
Shirur	83. Jayashri A Palande	BJP	Lost
Bhor	84. Shobha S Pasalkar	SHS	DF
Koregaon	85. Dr Shalinitai Patil	NCP	Won
Sangli	86. Nita Shrirang Kelkar	BJP	DF

ABHS: Akhil Bharatiya Sena; PWPI: Peasants and Workers Party of India; ADMK: All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; NCP: Nationalist Congress Party; NLP: National Loktantrik Party; STBP: Swatantra Bharat Paksha; GGP: Gondvana Ganatantra Party
Source: Election Commission, GOI)

In the 1999 polls 86 women had contested the election of which only 12 were successful. In the 2004 polls, although 157 women contesed, only 12 women were successful. In an Assembly that has 288 members, this means that just 4.1 per cent of the assembly comprises women, in a State that has 47.9% of women in its population (2001 census). Of the 12 women who were elected, five were re-elected. All five of the Nationalist Congress Party's (NCP) women candidates won, two each were won by Shiv Sena (SHS) and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) and Three by Indian National Congress (INC). The Bahujan Samaj Party (Mayawathi) and Samajwadi Party (Mulayam Singh Yadav) drew blank. As usual, none of the women who tried to enter the Assembly as independents could win. Affiliating themselves to totally local outfits did not help. Of the 9 Muslim women, 2 contested on BSP ticket, one under the SP ticket, on the consideration that they are secular parties. Four Muslim women contested as independents and the remaining two under local outfits. All the nine women lost their deposits.

Elections to the Maharashtra Assembly, 2004

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party	Result
Vengurla	1. Neeta Ranjit Rane	IND	DF
	2. Kamaltai Parulekar	JD(S)	DF
Rajapur	3. Pramila G Bharathi	ABHS	DF
Khed	4. Usha K Guhagarkar	IND	DF
Alibag	5. Meenakshi Prabhakar Patil	PWPI	Lost
	6. Meenakshi Patil	IND	DF
	7. Meenakshi Vishnu Patil	IND	DF
	8. Meenakshi P Patil	IND	DF
	9. Meenakshi R Patil	IND	DF
	10. Meenakshi Ajit Patil	IND	DF
	11. Meenakshi N Patil	IND	DF

Panvel	12. Dr Manisha K Parulekar	RSPS	DF
Colaba	13. Annie Shekhar	INC	Won
	14. Mayadevi G Chatole	IND	DF
Umarkhadi	15. Sharda S Oza	SHS	Lost
	16. Sabira Aslam Sikwani	BSP	DF
Malabar Hill	17. Anjali Nimbalkar	WPI	DF
Mazgaon	18. Manisha Madan Khale	IND	DF
Naigaum	19. Sneha Gopichand More	IND	DF
Dadar	20. Ulka Harshad Thakur	BSP	DF
	21. Madhura Pratap Gore	WPI	DF
Dharavi (SC)	22. Varsha Eknath Gaikwad	INC	Won
	23. Snehal Sudhir Jadhav	SHS	Lost
	24. Neta Harishankar Ingale	WPI	DF
Bandra	25. Shaina Nana Chudasama	BJP	Lost
	26. Hawabai Khan	BMSM	DF
Amboli	27. Shantabai R Pawar	IND	DF
Santacruz	28. Tahira Bastiwala	BSP	DF
	29. Kirti S Meshram	IND	DF
Andheri	30. Reshma R Dukhande	IND	DF
Goregaon	31. Avisha K Gopalakrishnan	WPI	DF
	32. Putlibegum Abdulla Sk	AIKC	DF
Malad	33. Nirmala S Prabhavalkar	INC	Lost
Kandivali	34. Salma Salim Almelkar	IND	DF
Borivali	35. Dr Vandana Pradeep	RSPS	DF
Trombay	36. Vrinda S Sonavane	BBM	DF

	37. Naseem Qureshi	IND	DF
	38. Nilima Gorad	PWPI	DF
Mulund	39. Alka Anant Desai	INC	Lost
	40. Lilaben R Rathod	BBM	DF
Belapur	41. Devata Mangala Singh	LJNSP	DF
Ambarnath	42. Sudha Naresh Gaikwad	IND	DF
	43. Kumud Ramdas Bendale	IND	DF
Kalyan	44. Alka Avalaskar	INC	Lost
Murbad	45. Shobha S Ingle	BSP	DF
Vasai	46. Jayshree U Samant	JD(S)	DF
Palghar (ST)	47. Manisha Manohar Nimkar	SHS	Won
	48. Geeta Gajanan Pagi	JD(S)	DF
Dahanu (ST)	49. Lalitha Manu Rathod	BSP	DF
Igatpuri (ST)	50. Asha Genu Gavari	IND	DF
Nashik	51. Shobha Dinesh Bachhav	INC	Won
Deolali (SC)	52. Manaswi Milind Tayade	IJP	DF
Niphad	53. Mandakini Raosaheb Kadam	SHS	Lost
Chandwad	54. Lata Bhika Barde	IND	DF
Sakri (ST)	55. Zingubai K Pawar	IND	DF
Nawapur (ST)	56. Savita R Gangurde	IND	DF
	57. Durgabai Hiru Gawali	IND	DF
Talode (ST)	58. Savitri Magan Padvi	IND	DF
Akrani (ST)	59. Hirabai Vilas Padvi	IND	DF
Sindhkheda	60. Sanjivani S Sisode	IND	DF
Dhule	61. Hema Anil Gote	SJP(M)	Lost

Chalisgaon (SC)	62. Mayawati Viswas Pagare	ABHS	DF
Parola	63. Sumanbai Rajaram Salve	IND	DF
Amalner	64. Adv.Lalita Shyam Patil	INC	Lost
Raver	65. Meenakshi S Mahajan	SVRP	DF
	66. Nutan Shakhar Tadvi	IND	DF
Chikhli	67. Surekha P Khedekar	BJP	Won
Khamgaon	68. Mangala Narendra Khond	KKJHS	DF
Borgaon Manju	69. Prof. Leela J Kale	IND	DF
Washim (SC)	70. Dayabai Namdev Kamble	IND	DF
Mangrulpir	71. Rukhmanibai M Pawar	IND	DF
	72. Zulekha Salim Saye	IND	DF
Murtajapur	73. Vandana Padmakar Vasnik	RPI(A)	DF
Karanja	74. Radhatai Anil Chaware	BSP	DF
Achalapur	75. Vasudha P Deshmukh	INC	Lost
Teosa	76. Yashomati B Thakur	INC	Lost
	77. Shobhatai S Kursange	GGP	DF
	78. Nirmala S Ubale	ARP	DF
	79. Sangita Rajkumar Vighne	PRBP	DF
Badnera	80. Sulabha Sanjay Khodke	NCP	Won
	81. Shalu Bhimrao Ialpate	GGP	DF
Pulgaon	82. Saroj Ravi Kashikar	STBP	Lost
	83. Chandrakala S Doiphode	ARP	DF
	84. Sumati R Hatekar	IND	DF
Wardha	85. Sunitha B Ithape	IND	DF
	86. Manda B Kombe	IND	DF

Umred	87. Takshashila K Waghadhare	IND	DF
	88. Sunanda D Narnaware	IND	DF
Kamptee	89. Sulekha N Kumbhare	RPI	Lost
	90. Mayatai Chawre	SP	DF
	91. Shashi Dhurve	IND	DF
Nagpur (N) (SC)	92. Meena Motghare	LJNSP	DF
Nagpur Central	93. Suman Gupta	WPI	DF
Nagpur West	94. Dr Shakuntala P Gote	ARP	DF
Kalmeshwar	95. Sunita Ramesh Gawande	IND	Lost
Bhandara	96. Asha Maruti Bodale	BBM	DF
	97. Nande Virsingh Madavi	GGP	DF
Adyar	98. Satyabhama V Wasnik	IND	DF
Sironcha (ST)	99. Sagunatai P Talandi	SP	DF
Chandrapur	100. Yashodhara K Potanwar	SJP®	DF
Saoli	101. Shobha M Fadnavis	BJP	Won
Bhadrawati	102. Tara Mahadeorao Kale	IND	DF
Ralegaon (ST)	103. Madhuri K Anjekar	AVRP	DF
Kelapur (ST)	104. Madhavi Neeta Anandrao	IND	DF
Yavatmal	105. Meenakshi G Rathod	IND	DF
	106. Indutai P Datar	IND	DF
	107. Vina H Nagdive	PRBP	DF
Digras	108. Ratnabai P Ade	BSP	DF
	109. Suman Baliram Rathod	INC	DF
	110. Jyoti M Namulte	IND	DF
	111. Anu Bhaurao Kakade	IND	DF

Pusad	112. Aarti H Phupate	SHS	Lost
Umarkhed	113. Sunanda G Deshmukh	IND	DF
	114. Jaimala Ramrao Pawar	IND	DF
Kinwat	115. Ashatai U Kadam	IND	DF
	116. Anuradha Datta Dhanve	IND	DF
Nanded	117. Anasuya Prakash Khedkar	SHS	Won
	118. Nisha Vijay Sonavane	RPI(D)	DF
Mudkhed	119. Dr Shobhatai Waghmare	STBP	DF
Parbhani	120. Durgatai Madhavrao Tak	IND	DF
Basmath	121. Prema Nandkishor Jaiswal	IND	DF
Kalamnuri	122. Raisa Md.Osman Qureshi	IND	DF
	123. Mamta M. Bembalge	IND	DF
Pathri	124. Shantabai M Shamkuwar	IND	DF
Paritur	125. Ansabai S Rathod	BBM	DF
Badnapur	126. Kalpana Sarjerao Shinde	IND	DF
Aurangabad West	127. Rajashri S Ingale	PRCP	DF
Aurangabad East	128. Kaushalyabai S Magare	PRCP	DF
Manjlegaon	129. Pushpabai B Galande	PRCP	DF
Beed	130. Sushila P Morale	SP	DF
Kaij (SC)	131. Dr Vimala N Mundada	NCP	Won
	132. Srilata M Nikalje	PRCP	DF
Renapur	133. Anasuya Vilas Rode	PRCP	DF
Her (SC)	134. Mainabai T Sabane	IND	DF
Nilanga	135. Sukshamabai B Kamble	IND	DF
Akkalkot	136. Meenakshi S Patil	JSS	DF
Solapur City South	137. SkHaji Shahanaz Mahabub Sab	SP	DF

Solapur City North	138. Nagmani Kisan Jakkan	IND	DF
Karmala	139. Adv.Savita B Shinde	SP	DF
Shrirampur	140. Verunika Suresh Maid	IND	DF
Kopargaon	141. Prabhavato T Pawar	IND	DF
Parner	142. Shakuntala K Khaire	BRSCP	DF
Junnar	143. Ujwala V Pawar	IND	DF
Haveli	144. Kausalya Bhaskar Chate	WPI	DF
Bopodi	145. Adv.Vanita Chavan	IND	DF
	146. Vaishali Bhagwan Shinde	WPI	DF
Kasba Peth	147. Himani Ashok Savarkar	ABHM	DF
Bhavani Peth	148. Kamal Ulhas Dhole Patil	NCP	Won
Pune Cantt.	149. Leelavati Vithal Tupe	SHS	Lost
	150. Smitha Bhatt	WPI	DF
Daund	151. Ranjana Subhashrao Kul	NCP	Won
Khataav	152. Kantabai Ashok Baile	BSP	DF
Koregaon	153. Dr Shaliitai VPatil	NCP	Won
Wai	154. Kumudini R Kondhalkar	WPI	DF
Karad South	155. Banubai D Yelve	IND	DF
Miraj	156. Padminidevi M Shinde	IND	DF
Shirol	157. Ranjanitai V Magdum	INC	Lost

WPI: Womanist Party of India; BMSM: Bharatiya Minorities Suraksha Mahasangh; AIKC: All India Krantikari Congress; LJNSP: Lok Janashakti Party; KKJHS: Krantikari Jai Hind Sena; SVRP: Shiv Rajya Party; RPI (A): Republican Party of India (Athawale); ARP: Ambedkar Republican Party; PRBP: People's Republican Party; RPI(D): Republican Party of India (Democratic); BBM: Bharipa Bhujan Mahasangha; RSPS: Rashtriya Samaj Paksha; ABHM: Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha; PRCP: Prabuddha Republican Party; JSS: Jan Surajya Shakti

Muslim women

If women belonging to other communities performed poorly, Muslim women have had hardly any chance of winning elections to the State Assembly, except during 1967. While most of them have contested as independent candidates, the few who tried their luck with "secular" parties also could not make it. On occasions they have tried the BJP and Shiv Sena too. In most cases they could not get even 100 votes, which goes to show that even the Muslim community did not wish to vote one of their own candidates.

Election year

Constituency	Name of candidate	Party	Result
1967			
Malegaon	Aisha Chirag Hakim	INC	Won
1978			
Malegaon	Aisha H C Pathan	INC(I)	DF
1980			
Haveli	Shahida M Karim	IND	DF
Akola	Pramila Asghar Hussain Tople	BJP	Lost
1985			
Bhusaval	Amtul Latif Zafarali Kazi	IND	DF
Parbhani	Ayeshabegum Iqbal Hussain	INC	Lost
Bhavanipeth	Aishabai Syed Nazir	IND	DF
Chinchpokli	Khatunbi Md. Yusuf Ansari	IND	DF
1990			
Nagpada	Anjum Ahmad	SHS	Lost
Manjilegaon	Nasimsultana Abdul Rehman	IND	DF
Solapur City (S)	Amirun Harun Wangikar	IND	DF

Bhavanipeth	Gulshamim Sk.Abdul Karim	IND	DF
1995			
Shriwardhan	Rehana A Rahim Undre	PWP	Lost
Umarkhadi	Amina Syed Mohammad	INC	DF
Mazgaon	Rashida Jumman Khan	IND	DF
Vandre	Tasneem Khan (Advocate)	JD	DF
	Zaheeda Khan	IND	DF
Borivali	Shaikh Asghari	IND	DF
Trombay	Hamida Masum Ali Mistry	MUL	DF
	Noorjehan A Inamdar	IND	DF
Kurla	Ashrafbegum B Khan	IND	DF
Malegaon	Swaleha A Gani	IND	DF
Nagpur Central	Naseem Siddqui	IUML	DF
Darwah	Bilkisbegum T Deshmukh	IND	DF
Nanded	Alimunnisa Z Khursheed	IND	DF
Ahmednagar	Shahin Nisar Pawar	ICS	DF
1999			
Vandre	Farida Rahamt Ali Sayyad	SJP(M)	DF
Junnar	Parveen Noor Md.Shaikh	BSP	DF
Amboli	Aisha Riyaz Shaikh	SP	DF
Tromay	Shama Parveen Md.Hanif	NLP	DF
Umred	Sk.Zebunnisa Md.Nazir	BSP	DF
Aurangabad West	Nasimabi Abdul Syed	NMP	DF
Ahmednagar (S)	Hawabi Sk.Umar	IND	DF

2004

Umerkhadi	Sabira Aslam Sikwani	BSP	DF
Bandra	Hawabai Khan	BMSM	DF
Santacruz	Tahira Bastiwala	BSP	DF
Goregaon	Putlibegum Abdul Sk	AIKC	DF
Kandivali	Salma Salim Almelkar	IND	DF
Trombay	Naseem Qureshi	IND	DF
Mangrulpir	Zulekha Salim Saye	IND	DF
Kalamnuri	Raisa Md.Osman Qreshi	IND	DF
Solapur City (S)	SkHaji Shahanaz Mahabub Sab	SP	DF

Representation of Women in Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Maharashtra

Year of Election	Seats Contested by Women	Seats Won
1952.....	16	5
1957.....	35	14
1962.....	36	13
1967.....	19	9
1972.....	56	0
1978.....	51	8
1980.....	47	19
1985.....	83	16
1990.....	147	6
1995.....	247	11
1999.....	86	12
2004.....	157	12

The few women that got elected, either on the strength of their political background or the basis of the favour enjoyed by the Party which nominated them on the eve of the elections, did nothing more than attending the Legislative Assembly sessions. For, very few among the women MLAs belonging to the Party in power were favoured with Ministerial positions and even when some of them were made Ministers, they were allocated "softer portfolios" as if they have no intelligence and initiative in dealing with matters of importance and the capacity to take decisions.

It appears that the male political bosses, irrespective of the Party in power, firmly believe that women ministers cannot handle other portfolios. This is evident from the fact that there was never a woman Home Minister in any of the States, including Maharashtra.

Portfolios allocated to Women Ministers in Maharashtra

Period	Rank	Port folio
1. Pratibha D. Patil		
Dec 1963	Deputy Minister	Public Health and Social Welfare
1967-1976	Deputy Minister	Public Health, Prohibition, Tourism, Social Welfare, Cultural Affairs, Housing, Rehabilitation and Parliamentary Affairs
1974 - 1976	Cabinet Minister	Public Health and Social Welfare Prohibition, Rehabilitation and Cultural Affairs
1977-1978	Cabinet Minister	Education
1982-1985	Cabinet Minister	Urban Development and Housing, Civil Supplies and Social Welfare,

2. Prabha Rau

1972 - 1975 Minister of State	Education, Planning, Industries
1975 - 1978 Cabinet Minister	Education, Sports, Youth Welfare, Coperation and Tourism
1982 - 1983 Cabinet Minister	Urban Development, Housing, Slums, Social Welfare
1988 - 1990 Cabinet Minister	Revenue and Social Welfare

3. Shalinitai Patil

Minister Of State	Revenue and Rehabilitation
Cabinet Minister	Urban Development

4. Tarabai Vartak

Minister of State	Building and Communication, Social and Tribal Welfare and Transport
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5. Dr. Pramila V. Tople

Minister Of State	Public health and family welfare
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6. Dr. Lalita Rao

1982 - 1983 Minister of State	Public Health and Social Welfare
Cabinet Minister	Public Health and Family Welfare

7. Shanti Naik

Minister Of State	Social Welfare and Housing
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8. Pramila Yagnik

Cabinet Minister	Housing and Slum development
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9. Rajani S. Satav

1982 - 1983 Dy Minister	Public Health, Law, Justice and Social Welfare
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1983 - 1988 Minister of State	Revenue, Law and Judiciary, Cultural Affairs, Rehabilitation, Public Health and Family Welfare, Medical Education and Tribal Development
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10. Yashodhara Bajaj

Minister Of State	Building and Communication, Public Work and Assembly Affairs.
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11. Parvatibai Malgonda

Minister Of State	Education
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12. Celin D'Silva

Minister Of State	Finance, Tourism, Planning and social Welfare
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13. Chandrika Kenia

1986-1988 Minister of state	Law, Judiciary, Education and Employment
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14. Damayanti D

Minister of State	Forest, Social Forestry. Social Welfare and Legislative Affairs
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15. Pushpatai Hire

Minister of State	Transport and Energy
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Minister of State	Public Health
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Cabinet Minister	Drugs, Family Welfare
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It is, however, a fact that only some of the women legislators have taken active part in the deliberations of the legislature. They have not only raised questions and moved non-official resolutions but have also participated in the debates over official bills and articulated the grievances of the people. Among the women members of the Parliament from Maharashtra, Ahilya Rangnekar, Mrinal Gore, Pramila Dandavate, Tarabai Sathe and Saroj Khaparde have taken keen interest in the discussions of various issues before parliament and have been very active as members.

Profiles of Some Maharashtra Women Politicians

Politics, at least in India, is a family business; a business of rich families, to be specific. For, there are very few poor MLAs and MPs. While some politicians bring in their kith and kin when they retire or have an occasion to vacate their "seats", there are others who induct their wives/brothers/sons/daughters into politics while they are still in power. This phenomenon cuts across party lines. Maharashtra has a number of examples. Another trait is defection or party-hopping. If a politician finds that he has been overlooked in Ministry formation or has been denied a plum portfolio, or has only been offered crumbs, he does not waste time in hanging on to the party. How can he "serve" the people without a Ministership? For one with sufficient mass-base or local influence crossing over to another party for better prospects is no big deal. Women politicians of Maharashtra have proved that they are no less than the male politicians in this respect. We cite a few examples.

- ♦ Kesarbai Kshirsagar (OBC) has been a Member of the Parliament for 10 years, apart from being a Member of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly. She brought her son J Kshirsagar into politics. He was offered Congress ticket in 1980 (Maharashtra Assembly) but was defeated. Later he won the 1990 elections. He heads an educational institution which runs 20 high schools and 8 colleges. He is also connected with the Beed District Agricultural and Rural Cooperative Bank Ltd., and Sugar Mills.
- ♦ Chandrika Premji Kenia, one time cricketer and lawyer by training, has been described in the media as the "ace defector". She was a Congress Member of the Maharashtra Assembly from 1985-86 and Minister of State for Education in the S. B. Chavan ministry from 1986 to 1988. She de-

fected to Shiv Sena and was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 1990. But, after her election to the Rajya Sabha, she shifted her affiliation to the Chhagan Bhujbal group of Shiv Sena and merged her 'party' with the Congress in 1992. In 1998 Kenia once again defected, this time to the Samajwadi Party, "to strengthen the hands of party supremo Mulayam Singh Yadav".⁽¹⁾ By way of explanation, she said that she had lot of expectations from the Congress as well as the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance in the state, "but it had proved to be most inefficient, with rampant corruption, extortion and atrocities on women and dalits". She lost out to Shiv Sena candidate at the 1998 elections to the Parliament from Thane constituency.

- ♦ Dr Shalinitai Patil, wife of late Vasantdada Patil, the strong man of Maharashtra had joined Congress Party on the demise of her husband, got elected to the Assembly and was made the Revenue Minister. In 1981 she played a key role in dethroning A.R.Antulay, then Chief Minister. But, she left Congress to join the Shiv Sena in 1995, when that Party came to power in the State. But, she left the Shiv Sena to join Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party despite the fact that Sharad Pawar never got along well with Vasantdada Patil and in fact, in 1978, he pulled the rug from under Vasantdada Patil's feet to grab the chief minister's chair.⁽²⁾ Shalini Patil fell foul with the NCP by making a demand at a public meeting (2003) that "reservation of seats in Government jobs & Educational institutions based on Economic considerations

1. *Rediff.net*, February 3, 1998

2. These differences were reflected in sugar politics. When the Jarandeshwar Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana (SSK) co-operative sugar mill near Satara, run by Shalinitai Patil, which had accumulated liabilities totaling Rs 102 crore, was leased out by the management to the Faizabad-based KM Sugars, the banks regarded this as illegal since they were not informed. The state government adopted the attitude "let the law take its own course".

rather than Caste basis." Very vocal in her criticism of the Centre's move to extend 27.5 % reservation for OBCs in the central academic institutes such as IIT and IIM, she had even appreciated Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray for his blunt stand against reservations. She was served a show cause notice.⁽³⁾ In August 2006, the NCP expelled Shalini Patil for six years. Shalinitai Patil also demanded the scrapping of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, alleging that it had become a 'means of blackmail.' Ms Patil held that the act was being misused.⁽⁴⁾ In December 2008 she floated a new political party, the Kranti Sena.

- ◆ SuryaKanta Patil (NCP) was originally with the INC and began her political career in 1971 as President of the District Congress Committee (women's Wing) Nanded and General Secretary of District Youth Congress (1972-74). A Municipal Councillor of Nanded during 1980, she was elected to the Maharashtra Assembly (1980-1985). She was elected to Rajya Sabha during 1986-91. She contested and got elected to the 10th and 12th Lok Sabha as a Congress (I) candidate. She shifted to NCP on whose ticket she contested the 1999 elections and lost. However, she was re-elected to 14th Lok Sabha (2004) on NCP ticket and is now the Union Minister of State for Rural Development and Parliamentary Affairs since May 2004.
- ◆ Dr Vimal Nandkumar Mundada was first elected in 1990 as a BJP nominee. In 1994, Vimal Mundada, elected from a reserved seat, was the only woman Minister. Re-elected on BJP ticket in 1995, she later parted ways with BJP and joined NCP to be reelected in 1999 and 2004. Mundada had for long complained of being sidelined by Gopinath

3. *The Economic Times*, 8 July 2006

4. <http://news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/India/20081113/1103866.html>

Munde, the BJP strong man from Maharashtra.⁽⁵⁾ In the Ashok Chavan Ministry constituted after 26/11 Mumbai tragedy, Dr Vimal Mundada is made the Cabinet Minister for Public Works (Public Undertakings)

- ♦ In 1998, Rajni Patil was BJP's Member of Parliament from Beed. But, she left the party to go back to the Congress which she had left in 1996. Explaining the reason for joining the BJP, she said that "she was disappointed with P V Narasimha Rao", as she felt that the younger generation had no future in the Congress party. But, following Sonia Gandhi's taking over Congress Presidency, she felt that she must rejoin "my parent party". She admitted that she had no grouse against the BJP leadership. But, being a Rajiv Loyalist, she rejoined the Congress once Sonia Gandhi came into active politics. She also admitted that Gopinath Munde whom she met before leaving the BJP, told her that if her loyalties are more towards the Nehru-Gandhi family than the BJP, he did not mind her leaving the party. She made up her mind to "strengthen the Congress at the grassroots level".⁽⁶⁾
- ♦ Kalpana Ramesh Narhire (Shiv Sena), Member, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly two times (1995 to 2004),

5. "By far the most serious set of offences -- and a clear exploitation of one's position -- are recorded against Vimal Mundada. A gutsy woman, she decided to take on Munde's might right here in his fiefdom. Elected from Kaij constituency, Mundada has borne the brunt of his fury. She was attacked, a whisper campaign was launched against her and even her family made to suffer. Mundada is now fighting in Kaij on the Nationalist Congress Party ticket that party chief Sharad Pawar was only too pleased to give her. During her campaign in village Sakul, her jeep was attacked with stones and abused, allegedly by Munde's strongmen, one of whom was a former sarpanch. The driver and a few others received injuries but Mundada was saved because she was not in the jeep". (Manojkumar, K.S. *For Munde, all's fair in power war*, in Indian Express September 4, 1999. <http://www.indianexpress.com/res/web/pla/ie/daily/19990904/ipo04068.html>)

6. *The Rediff Election Interview*, January 16, 1998. <http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/jan/16rajni.htm>)

She was elected to the 14th Lok Sabha (2004) and was a Member of the Committee on Empowerment of Women, and other Parliamentary Committees. She is not even a graduate and her social activities include participating in "Ganesh Utsav, Nav Ratra Utsav, regional cultural programmes and other social activities" and her interests include "watching cultural programmes, cricket, cinema and listening to music." However, unlike other MPs and MLAs, she is reported to lead a spartan life in her small house with few worldly possessions.⁽⁷⁾

- ◆ Prabha Rau (Congress) began her political innings as the President of the District Central Co-operative Bank. In 1972, she was elected MLA from Deoli constituency, which returned her five more times. She spent a total of nearly 22 years as a member of the Assembly (1972 to 1990 and 1995 to 1999). She was elected to the Lok Sabha from Wardha constituency in 1999, but lost in 2004. Prabha Rau has handled several Ministries in the State Government. She was also the Chairperson of the Maharashtra State Commission for Women (1993-1995). A known loyalist of the Nehru-Gandhi family, she has served as General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee in charge of Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Goa, Rajasthan, Delhi and Gujarat. She was appointed chief of MPCC in June 2004, a position she held till her appointment, in July 2008, as Governor of Himachal Pradesh.
- ◆ Rekha P Khedekar (BJP MLA from Chikhli in Buldhana district) is the wife of Purushottam Khedekar an Executive Engineer with the State PWD. The latter floated the *Maratha Seva Sangh*, a social outfit in the name of the Maratha community, and became close to several Maratha Ministers/politicians in the NCP. He is also the founder of the controversial *Sambhaji Brigade*, which attacked the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in

7. Paupers of Parliament, in the *Times of India*, 15 May 2006

Pune (January 2004), alleging that the Institute helped a foreigner write derogatory anecdotes about Shivaji

- ♦ Ranjana Subhashrao Kul contested a by-election on NCP ticket following the death of her husband Subhash Kul. According to Sharad Pawar, she has proved to be an efficient legislator.
- ♦ Chandrakanta Goyal is the wife of Late Ved Prakash Goyal, BJP, former Union Minister of Shipping (2001-03) and Treasurer of BJP.
- ♦ Dr. Shobha Dinesh Bachhav, MLA from Nashik and Minister of State for Public Health and Family Welfare, Food and Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection, has been the Mayor of Nashik Municipal Corporation, which was the first to ban the use of plastic bags thinner than 20-25 microns from 1 July 1999.
- ♦ Nirmala Samant Prabhavalkar, who was denied a ticket at the 1999 elections, was 'compensated' with the post of Chairperson of Maharashtra Women's Commission. Not happy with the assignment, she sought entry to the Maharashtra Assembly and a cabinet berth. On the eve of 2004 elections, she pleaded her case before the several screening committees. She pinned her hopes on her earlier position as the ex-mayor of Mumbai (1994-95) and councillor, and her work as chairperson of the Women's Commission in getting a ticket to contest from Bandra West or Malad. She approached Sonia Gandhi to justify her candidature on the principle of 33 per cent reservation for women. However, when the list was finalised, she found that she was elbowed out by Baba Siddiqui. She believes that the party leadership was wrongly briefed about her affiliation to Pawar, resulting in her being denied the ticket.
- ♦ Seema Yerpede, who sought Congress ticket for Nagpur West constituency, contended that her 15 years of "relentless" party work would stand her in good stead.

Seema Yerpede's claim to fame was based on the fact that "I was the first one to burn Pramod Mahajan's effigy at Variety chowk, for using derogatory words against Madam (Sonia Gandhi)"

- ◆ An Advocate by profession, Rajanitai Shankarrao Satav founded the Jagruti Mahila Mandal in Kalamnuri in 1976 and started mahila mandals in every village. She was elected MLA in 1980 on Congress ticket from Kalamnuri and held the position of Deputy Minister for Health, Law & Justice, Social Welfare and Cultural Affairs during 1982-1985. She was re-elected to the Assembly from Kalamnuri and worked as Minister of State. During the period 1991-1994 she was the Vice President, MPCC. Satav was the founder member of the State Women's Commission (1993). At the 1994 elections she was elected MLA from Parbhani. In 2002, the BJP alleged that the Congress government in Maharashtra had allotted petrol pumps to its members illegally. Rajni Satav's gas agency in Kalmuneri was one of the instances listed in the BJP's allegation. (Times of India, 10 August 2002) She was appointed Chairperson of the Maharashtra State Commission for women from 7th Sept 2006.

The few profiles that we have given above show that like their male counterparts, women are also power-hungry and do not hesitate to change party affiliation if it serves their purpose and also promote their kith and kin.

Factors affecting Participation of Women in Politics

The data furnished in the previous chapter shows that women are not adequately represented in the Political scene of Maharashtra. This is also the case with other states in the country. There are a variety of reasons as to why women do not enter politics in large numbers or are not encouraged to take part in elections as contestants. The following could be cited as some of the reasons:

Wrong Social and Cultural values

It is generally accepted by a majority of the people, both male and female, that the women's role is in the home. Women are considered ignorant when it comes to matters of any real importance. When they are constantly being told that they are not intelligent enough to participate in politics it is no wonder that they lose their confidence. Women are generally encouraged to believe that politics is much too complicate for them to understand and so it is best left to men. They should stay at home, cooking and cleaning and bringing up and taking care of children. Women with an inclination to achieve something in life might be encouraged to take up a soft and 'feminine' job. There is no doubt that this scenario is gradually changing.

Lack of Education and Awareness

Literacy rate of women is considerably lower than that of men. Boys are encouraged to attend school whereas girls are of more use in the home. This denial of a basic education means that the majority of women do not realize that they are not receiving their full rights. It is not always easy to teach them when they cannot read and difficult for them to stand up for themselves when they cannot write.

Patriarchal Values and Norms

The main reason for low political participation of women in politics is the patriarchal structure of society. According to traditional Indian society and culture, participation of women in politics and being in the the public eye is against the generally accepted role of women. The patriarchal values have subjugated and distempered women.

Criminalization

Politics has become increasingly criminalised over the years. Money and muscle power and the art of manipulation have come to play dominant roles in Indian politics. Political parties do not hesitate to nominate candidates with criminal background, as long as they are able to win seats for the party. Intimidation of opposition party workers, rigging the polls and snatching away ballot boxes etc. has become common occurrences in several constituencies across the country. Even within the Assembly or Parliament, male members do not hesitate to use abusive and unparliamentary language against women members. Under the circumstances, women do not become motivated enough to come forward to take part in politics.

Lack of Family Support

Women's participation in politics depends a lot on family support. It is easy for women who come from political families with a strong political history to continue the legacy. Others need the permission and support (both moral and monetary) from their husbands or fathers in order to embark on a political career. Without such support it would very difficult for women to become a fulfleged and successful politician.

Lack of Institutional Support

A number of institutions exist both governmental and non-governmental, for helping the over all development of women. But, there is a lack of institutional mechanism, which encourages and supports women to take part in elections. Women's organiza-

tions affiliated to different political parties take up women's causes and agitate on their behalf. But we have not heard of any women's organisation that is willing to provide moral and financial support to women who are interested in becoming involved in politics. Women belonging to the ruling party generally do not participate in agitational politics as such participation would virtually amount to censuring their party's government. Bound by party discipline, they are expected to air their grievances and express their difference, if they have any, in the meetings of the party. Very few are women who dare the party and such women invariably face dire consequences. Examples include Nazma Heptulla, Uma Bharati and Margaret Alwa. On account of such constraints, no woman MP of Samajwadi Party or the Rashtriya Lok Dal, for instance, has ever voiced her views in support of the Women's Reservation Bill.

Women Politicians' Views

In spite women forming 47.9% of the State's population, the number of women MLAs in the Maharashtra Assembly has almost remained static over the past three elections. Following the 2004 polls, women constituted just about 4% in an Assembly that has 288 members. Of the 12 women members, five were re-elected. Cutting across party lines, women politicians contend that it is not lack of elective merit but lack of opportunity that has led to their disproportionately low numbers in the assembly. For instance, BJP MLC (Member of Legislative Council) Sanjeevani Raikar blames political parties. "In the BJP, there was talk of giving 30 per cent of the tickets to women, but very few women finally made it. The leaders say it is elective merit and charisma that help decide the candidates. But what about all those men who have been defeated?"

Dr Neelam Gore, a Shiv Sena MLC, says it is an uphill task for a woman to obtain a ticket. If a woman is politically active and is perceived as a threat by local men who are aspiring for a ticket, they ensure that her wings are clipped. She alleges that she is not invited to party programmes and her supporters are victimised. If she receives media coverage, she

is defamed, and if she has the support of a powerful party leader, aspersions are cast on her character. "She is discredited for being a woman and has to keep proving herself at every stage. Most women therefore prefer not to contest elections."

Dr Vimal Mundada of the NCP, categorically says that unless there is a legislation reserving 33 per cent of the seats for women, it is unlikely their numbers will increase in the Assembly in the near future. Dr Mundada feels that "money and muscle power play major roles in electoral politics. Local politics also play a decisive role. For most women, this makes it very difficult," she says. Raikar points out that, at present, all those who obtain tickets and win are related in some way to local political bigwigs. "Unless you are given an opportunity, how can you prove yourself? The 33 per cent reservation rule has worked well at the Panchayat and Zilla Parishad levels. There is no alternative to reservation in the assembly as also parliament," she adds.

Interviews with male and female politicians

This author spoke to both male and female politicians of Maharashtra in February-March 2009 to know their views on women's political participation in the State. The interviewees included Mrs. Mrinal Gore (Socialist Party) (popular as "*paniwali bai*" (the water lady) because of her efforts in solving the drinking water problems of Goregaon, a western suburb of Mumbai), Mrs. Kamal Desai (Indian National Congress), Mrs. Neelam Gore (Shiv Sena) and Mr. Harischandra Patil (BJP).

All the four interviewees agreed that unless the Women's Reservation Bill becomes an Act, women have no chances of improving their tally in the State Assemblies and Parliament. If men will not voluntarily give up their seats for women, there has also not been unanimous and concerted support from the women members in the Parliament to the Bill. Women members of the Parliament are compelled to follow their party's policies in lending support or objection to the Bill. Mrinal Gore, veteran politician feels that by and large there is a lack of will among the

women's groups in extending all-out support to the Reservation Bill, which is evident from the fact the various women's groups have not shown enough aggressiveness.

All the three women politicians interviewed blamed patriarchy for male domination of the politics. Also, the structure of Indian society did not encourage women to enter politics, for, once married, a woman got tied down to running the home and bringing up children. Consequently, unless a woman belonged to a political family, she cannot expect enthusiastic support from her family. Without such support, and money, she cannot hope to make politics her main avocation. The women politicians interviewed did not pin the blame on the society, saying that the society in fact supported women politicians and trusted them more than they would men. In their opinion, the voters supported any candidate, male or female, who worked for their problems. But, it is the party which did not favour women candidates. Mr. Patil attributed Women's low representation in Maharashtra Politics to the patriarchal structure of the society. He however felt that instead of depending on the reservation bill, women should take initiative to enter active politics. In addition to the above views, Neelam Gore said that there was a notion among the male members of a political party that women who enter politics are characterless. She admitted that she had to face many problems as a Women Politician, because the women are always seen as Characterless in politics and she was discriminated everywhere.

Mrs. Kamal Desai deplored that in spite of women forming 50% of the total population, they were poorly represented in politics and every party is dominated by males. She demanded that instead of 33%, women should have 50% representation. Women's low representation is also on account of their lack of money power. Mrs. Neelam Gore (Shiv Sena) supported the reservation bill but not in its present form. Like Mrs Desai, Neelam Gore also wanted that there should be 50% reservation for women in politics. She said that the Bill in its present form was defective as it proposes revolving constituencies, which would only result in waste of seat if proper candidates are not chosen.

Mrs. Desai said that the Congress party had always promoted women, Mr Patil, who claims that he is connected with various social activities and women's development issues, said that Bharatiya Janata Party supported the Women's Reservation Bill in spite of some flaws in the Bill and had included the same in its election manifesto and also gave more tickets to women.. Neelam Gore said that Shiv Sena too supported women and pointed out that she was encouraged by the Shiv Sena Chief Bala Saheb Thackeray and Uddhav Thackeray, as they were happy with the work she did for the party.

Mrinal Gore, Kamal Desai and Patil did not think that a separate women's political party was an ideal solution if the aim is to increase the presence of women in the assemblies or the parliament. Male politicians will then totally ignore women and ask them to seek their chances with the all-women parties. Mrs Desai felt that women's representation in politics will improve when they work hard. However, politics having become a matter of money and muscle power, women were left to depend on their work and principled stand to get identified. Neelam Gore said that an attempt was made earlier to form all women Party (*Kranti Kari Mahila Sanhghatna*) in 1981. The Sanhghatna put up women candidates in 1985-86 Panchayat elections and was successful in getting 35 women elected for the Mahila Gram Panchayats. Two candidates who stood for the corporation election lost the election. She however rues that the elected women were unable to establish their own identity and they had to take support of one or the other party. Consequently, the exercise was given up and after 1995 the Sanhghatna's women who were interested in politics were allowed to contest as independents or get nominated by any political party. Neelam Gore pointed out that because the Mahila Aghadi (Mahila Wing of Political Parties) was not active and efficient in promoting women candidates. She squarely puts the blame on the male politicians, who do not wish to support women candidates beyond the gram Panchayat level

Mrinal Gore and Kamal Desai stress that women have to rise from ranks with a proven record of social service and popu-

larity at the grassroots level. Reservation of seats in the PRI for women has been of great help, providing an opportunity if a woman wants to rise in politics. But, Mrs Mrinal Gore finds that a majority of the women contesting elections to the Assembly or Parliament have not been active in social service on account of which they are not known to the voters. The electorate have no evidence of their work to repose confidence. If a female candidate with no grassroots support gets elected, it is only because she could get a party's nomination.

Very few successful women members of the Legislative Assemblies and Parliament are made Ministers and even those who are inducted into the Cabinet, are allotted softer portfolios, and at a lower rank (as Deputy Ministers or Ministers of State). All the four politicians interviewed agreed that women are allocated soft portfolios because the male politicians of the party that comes to power think that women are incapable of or are not strong enough to handle Departments like Home, Finance, and Industry etc. Women have therefore to be satisfied with traditional departments like Public Health, Women and Child, Social Welfare, Sports and Culture etc. Males forget that given a chance, women can prove that they are equally competent in handling tough portfolios. Mr Patil and Ms Neelam Gore however felt that women are comfortable in handling issues relating to women and children efficiently than men. Neelam Gore also expressed that in allotting softer portfolios to women there was no conflict of interest among the party members over the portfolios given to women. This is a myth and given a chance, women can prove that they are capable enough to handle higher responsibilities and work more sincerely than males. She felt that once a woman proved herself, she will not have any problem in commanding admiration and support even from the males.

As regards training prospective women politicians, Kamal Desai, Neelam Gore and Harishchandra Patil agreed that there was a need for training of women trying to enter politics as our social structure does not encourage women to take part in active politics, and no political education is imparted. Such

training will also enable them become more alert about their rights and responsibilities while handling their jobs.

While party-hopping is a common phenomenon with male politicians, we have also witnessed some female politicians indulging in party hopping, if they are denied tickets by one party. The female politicians interviewed contended that there was nothing wrong if a woman was compelled to leave one party and join another, if the former denies her a re-nomination. Political ambition is not the preserve of men alone, they asserted. Neelam Gore said that women in politics should not be emotional and if they are denied re-nomination they could always choose another party. "In politics nobody is your permanent friend or enemy. So she should be firm in taking decisions", she said. But, all three women politicians agreed that by and large, women politicians were honest and less corruptible. Neelam Gore added that when women is in charge of a Department, there is less corruption in the concerned Department as she is sincere and dedicated to her duties and the responsibilities.

Efforts to promote women's political participation

While no political party has honestly tried (or has been trying) to promote women's political participation, there have been sporadic efforts by women themselves, by forming associations to advocate political participation and affording training to women interested in taking the plunge. Of these, mention should be made of Mahila Rajsatta Andolan and Women's Forum.

Mahila Rajsatta Andolan

Mahila Rajsatta Andolan is a movement created by several non-government organisations across Maharashtra to enforce laws which give women 33 per cent reservations in local self-government bodies. Thousands of rural Maharashtrian women formed *Mahila Bachat Gat*, where they learnt the importance of economic self-reliance for women.

Mangala Daithankar, Director, Administration of the Resource Support Centre for Development of Social Action for

Association and Development (SAAD) ⁽¹⁾ states that there are thousands of women in Maharashtra who are social activists and who are striving to usher in social and political changes in the state. They are trying to prevent the efforts of men to keep women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions away from power-through proxy politics, unwarranted court cases, no-confidence moves, manipulated loss of important papers, pressures to resign, by organising awareness programmes. The Centre works with several non-governmental organisations to run schemes like the *Mahila Bachat Gat* and the *Mahila Rajsatta Andolan*.

Mahila Rajsatta Andolan has been providing necessary infrastructure for women to come forward and demand their legitimate political rights, and undertake campaigns to change laws to strengthen rural administrations. The Andolan has been fighting for more decision-making powers for the *Gram Sabhas*, which comprises the whole village with 50 per cent women, apart from seeking better rural banking facilities, supply of seeds and fertilizers, education and medical services. The Rajsatta Andolan has also been seeking enhanced financial powers to the Gram Panchayats.

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1. Social Action for Association and Development (SAAD) was established in June 1997 with the aim of empowering and promoting weaker sections of society, especially women, through various programmes and capacity-building training. SAAD has worked on the legal, social and political empowerment of women and marginalised sections of society through awareness-generation and building people's organisations for greater access to and control over common resources, and the exercise of their rights. SAAD also helps train community-level activists in Maharashtra's Marathwada region and has initiated several interventions towards building the capacities of vulnerable groups. SAAD is involved with various movements in Maharashtra, with special emphasis on the promotion of the Marathwada Lok Vikas Manch (MLVM), Vidarbha Lokvikas Manch (VLM), gairan land rights (GLR) movement, etc. The organisation proposes to undertake a capacity-building programme for leaders and social activists from CSOs associated with gairan land rights (land rights campaign) who are active in eight districts of Marathwada. Also, organising dalits in the region with the aim of regularising encroachments on gairan lands.

Women's Political Forum

The Women's Political Forum⁽²⁾ was constituted on March 8, 2005 in Mumbai by a group of women who believed that women's active participation in the governing process could bring about the much desired change in the state of affairs. The forum's aim is to identify potential women leaders and develop a talent pool so that it can serve as a resource centre for future women politicians. The forum also wants to act as a pressure group for women, who are already a part of the political process at the initial stages of their political endeavors/careers apart from providing succor to the existing women politicians, who could be facing discrimination in their present set-up. The following, among others, are reported to be the specific objectives of the Forum:

- ◆ Bring right-minded women under one umbrella towards equal participation in government.
- ◆ Act as a support institution for women from all political parties, who are being used by them but not accorded their due platforms or posts.
- ◆ To eliminate prejudices about women entering politics and remove the injustice and inequality faced by women in political life.
- ◆ To create the right understanding about the role of women in politics.
- ◆ To assess them and organize long and short term training programs according to party needs depending on the candidate's choice of a political party.
- ◆ Bring out a monthly magazine to spread awareness among the women and keep them up-dated and well-informed.
- ◆ Organize a 10-point program for elected and nominated women political candidates.

2. *Women's Political Forum*, Available at <http://www.womenpoliticalforum.org/abs.html>

All Women's Party

Varsha Kale, an activist, launched the 'Womanist Party of India' (*Bharatiya Streewadi Party*) on 31 October 2003 with a view to contesting the 2004 parliamentary and state legislative elections by fielding women candidates. The decision to start an all-Women's party was a natural outcome of the frustration and disillusionment at the way the mainstream political parties treated women, offering only rhetoric and unfulfilled promises.

Varsha Kale feels that although thousands of women were elected to the PRI, very few were actually taking part in the governance. Many elected women were shadowed by proxy rule of their husbands or other influential male members of the village or political parties. Those who tried to work had to face many obstacles arising out of the patriarchal set-up of the society, caste, traditional norms and customs and the lack of socio-economic-political strength to stand against strong opposition. Still, participation in the PRI had thrown up a group of women with some degree of political experience and awareness. But, women who tried to enter mainstream politics were subjected to ridicule in the past even when they were capable and confident. Varsha Kale observed that the "political parties routinely excluded women from decision-making positions, resisted nominating them as candidates, and denied their women candidates' adequate campaign support. Many of these women believe their efforts are wasted and at best overlooked, no matter how talented they are or how hard they work".⁽³⁾

However, Nikhil Wagle, Political analyst and editor of the Marathi newspaper, *Mahanagar*, said: "Kale and her party are mere publicity-mongers who do not possess a serious political or ideological agenda. In a democracy, every citizen has a constitutional right to start a political party. But, I do not believe that women's issues can be resolved by women alone. Women's problems are human rights-related and you need men as well as women to resolve them."⁽⁴⁾

3. Available at <http://varshakale.blog.co.uk/?tag=women-in-politics>

4. The Womanist Party of India in the *South Asian*, October 28, 2004. (Available at http://www.thesouthasian.org/archives/2004/the_womanist_party_of_india.html)

Even Mrinal Gore, the veteran Janata Dal leader and social activist dismisses the WPI as a wasted initiative as it was not going to achieve anything. Gore agrees that greater representation to women in the political process and decision-making is the need of the hour, but it cannot be achieved by segregating women as a separate political entity. "You can't say you will only work for women's issues. As a political representative, you have to handle all issues irrespective of gender. In fact, an all-woman party will end up hampering the process of empowerment." ⁽⁵⁾

As proposed, the Womanist Party contested 9 seats "to make an impact" at the 2004 elections to the State Assembly but failed to return even a single candidate.

Candidate	Constituency	Votes	Result
Anjali Nimbalkar	Malabar Hill, Mumbai	373	FD
Madhura Pratap Gore	Dadar, Mumbai	281	FD
Neeta Harishankar Ingale	Dharavi (SC), Mumbai	269	FD
Avisha Kulkarni-Gopalakrishnan	Goregaon, Mumbai	1212	FD
Kumudini Ramachandra Kongdhalkar	Wai	1278	FD
Kausalya Bhaskar Chate	Haveli	496	FD
Vaishali Bhagwan Shinde	Bopodi	199	FD
Smita Bhat	Pune Cantonment	280	FD
Suman Gupta	Nagpur Central	825	FD

FD: Deposit Forfeited

Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi, Statistical Report on General Elections, 2004 to the Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra

It will be seen that leave alone winning, all the nine candidates of the WPI forfeited their security deposits.

Political Parties which say that there are not enough women candidates to enable them allot 33% tickets to women are just

5. Ibid.

handing out an excuse. It is not that women are not interested or there are no competent women to be found if the parties are genuinely interested in nominating women. For example, women voters outnumber men in the coastal districts of Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri and Raigad and Satara because a large number of men have moved out to Mumbai in search of jobs or have joined the army leaving their families behind. However, despite having higher percentage of women voters, Satara has never elected a woman either to the Lok Sabha or the State Assembly. The lone but unsuccessful attempt was made in 1980 by Shalinitai Patil, former Revenue Minister. Similarly, despite the number of women voters being larger than men, the three districts of Konkan (Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri and Raigad) comprising 18 assembly seats have returned only one woman contestant. The one woman to win an assembly election from these districts was the Peasants and Workers Party's Meenakshi Patil, who is the sister of Jayant Patil, the chief of PWP. She won the election from the Alibag Assembly constituency and joined the Vilasrao Deshmukh's Democratic Front coalition government in 1999 as the Minister of State for Cultural Affairs and Fisheries.⁽⁶⁾

While the efforts of various women's organisations are continuing unabated, an intensified action has become the need of the hour. With this in mind representatives from Action India, All India Women Conference, Jagori, Joint Women's Programme, Guild of Services, Women Political Watch, Women Power Connect, Mahila Dakshita Samiti, Muslim Women's Forum, Suakriti, YWCA of India, etc have come together in greater strength to form an Alliance to develop a common strategy for lobbying and mobilising support to build momentum towards this much overdue issue. The fight has to be intensified and should not stop with organisation of seminars and workshops. Unless the women's movement turns into a Tsunami, male politicians are not going to part with political space to women.

6. She was one of the members of the group formed by MLAs belonging to smaller parties in the coalition, which was complaining that the smaller parties were not given adequate share in decision making.

Conclusion

According to the 2008 Global Gender Gap Report released by the World Economic Forum in Geneva, India ranks 25 out of 130 countries in the matter of political empowerment of women. India's overall ranking in the report, which also looks at the gender gap in health care, education, economic opportunities and participation, however, was 113th. The nation ranks 125th in economic participation and opportunity, 116th in educational attainment and 128th in health and survival. The Report observes that "India (113), Iran (116), Nepal (120) and Pakistan (127) continue to hold some of the lowest positions in the Asian rankings, but on average all four countries post gains relative to their own performances in 2006 and 2007, signifying a positive trend." ⁽¹⁾

Ranking in the category of Political empowerment is based on mainly measures taken to reduce the gap between men and women in political decision-making at the highest levels as evidenced by the ratio of women to men in minister-level positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions.

The major impediments women face vis-à-vis their political participation emanate from the social and economic disadvantages that continue to confront them in many ways. If political participation of women has to become a reality, it has to be preceded by social and economic empowerment. Vina Mazumdar writes:

"A critical mass of women is a pre-requisite for the effective political participation of women. Hence, demanding immediate implementation of 33 per cent of reservation for women at all levels of governance cannot be delayed any further. This demand, over a period of time has to extend to 50 per cent of reservation, to effect equality in numbers. The women's movement should have to necessarily monitor and lobby with the one-third

1. Available at http://www.newsindia-times.com/ArticleText.aspx?article=05_12_2008_007_001&mode=1#

representation of women in decision-making bodies. Except for the Gandhian interlude, the first three phases of the women's question had focussed entirely on the issues of women's familial status, their access to education and better legal rights as the instruments of reform. In the fourth phase, after independence, the question was deemed to have been solved, with the adoption of the principle of equality in the Constitution, and throwing open to women the rights to education, the vote and entry into professions, public services and political offices. This phase, which I prefer to describe as the hey-day of the middle class, benefitted a large number of women from this class, breeding in them a complacency and support for the status quo. Women's organisations which had fought militantly for women's rights during the 30s and 40s settled down to perform needed welfare services for the people with grants provided by the Government. For all practical purposes, the women's question disappeared from the public arena for a period of over 20 years. This was reflected in the decline of both research and writings about women during this period. (2)

To induce more women into the hitherto male dominant arena of politics, legal and political awareness need to be consciously promoted amongst women. To facilitate this process, there is a need for more and more political resource centres for women, which could undertake the responsibility of information dissemination and political training for women to exercise their political rights as voters and as political candidates. Another significant effort in this regard is to encourage women to take leadership positions in political parties, for which support structures has to be set up so that their familial and other social responsibilities can be met with.

Lack of gender perspective is conspicuous in the Party Manifestos of major political parties. While every Party offers lip service to women's empowerment, they fail to identify and promote competent women. The CWSI Report observed:

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2. Mazumdar, Vina. Emergence of the Women's question in India and the role of women's studies, *Occasional Paper*. (Available at <http://cwds.ac.in/OCpaper/EmergenceVM.pdf>.)

"There is a general consensus that the political parties have neglected their task of politically educating and mobilising women adequately. They have also tended to ignore the claims of women in nominating candidates for elections. The criticism was voiced even by successful women legislators."

When women candidates are chosen for nomination as candidates, the parties take into consideration the "winnability" of the candidate; an eye on the votes, irrespective of the competence of the women. It is for this reason that they choose film stars and actors of the small-screen. The recent announcement by Amar Singh, General Secretary of the Samajwadi Party that it will nominate filmstar Sanjay Dutt for Lucknow and if for any legal reasons he cannot be nominated, the Party would choose his wife Manyata Dutt! What special qualification is found in the Dutt remains a mystery.

It is essential that the male political leaders become sensitised to the issue of adequate representation and participation of women in political decision making and to the problems they face in the process in order to mainstream gender concerns and perspectives. It is also necessary to ensure that the electoral politics are clean, civilised and conducive to the participation of women as contestants. Election campaigns must be made more safe and inexpensive with serious government initiatives to curb expenditure, corruption, violence and malpractice. The criminalisation and communalisation of politics also have to be firmly checked.

A conscious effort should be made to bring in women from the marginalized communities like dalits, tribals and minorities into mainstream politics so that their interests are voiced. In the list of SC and ST women candidates for the various elections given above, it will be seen that no national-level party has nominated SC/ST women or even Muslim women. They have contested the elections to the Assembly either as independents or as candidates of some local parties. Women's organisations of the State have to engage in lobbying with the political parties in this regard with the help of the print and electronic media.

It is not enough if the question of women's adequate repre-

sensation in the State's/country's political life is discussed only at NGO conferences. India may be the first country to introduce Constitutional Amendments to reserve seats for women in local governance. In the absence of any progress in passing the Women's Reservation Bill for the last 12 years, it appears that the male politicians seem to send a message across that "thus far and no further" to the women. It is a shame that women have to virtually beg the male politicians to include more women in the party lists for the elections, as it happened on the eve of the 1991 general elections. Renuka Choudhary, Minister for Women and Child Welfare, who along with some other women MPs shielded the Union Law Minister when he rose to present the Bill in The Rajya Sabha in May 2008, termed the behaviour of Samajwadi Party members "shameful and condemnable". Her sentiments were echoed by Najma Heptulla (BJP), who too called the behaviour of the SP members "shameful". Renuka Chaudhary admitted: "It will not be a smooth sailing for the Bill... It can never be a smooth sailing for women anywhere in the world. But we will not be intimidated at any cost. The Bill will definitely be passed." Have the politicians forgotten that the Government of India has endorsed, without any reservations, the Beijing Declaration stating "Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace."

The National Alliance of Women (NAWO) have voiced their uppermost concerns in achieving their ends by strategically lobbying with all political parties, regardless of their ideology, to commit their efforts qualitatively and quantitatively to the cause of women. The NAWO Manifesto demanded the need for political, economic, social, violence against women, and media reforms to be addressed. All the major political parties in the country had unanimously in their election manifestos stated that the 33 per cent reservation for women introduced at the local level of governance be extended to the upper echelons of governance.

Prior to the 13th general elections, the National Women's Groups under the aegis of the National Commission for Women-

Political Core Group met the Chief Election Commissioner with a request that the Commission may ask all the political parties to allot more tickets to women. They also suggested that recognition of political parties by the Election Commission be linked to this requirement. They also suggested that with a view to enabling women to contest elections, the Commission may place a realistic ceiling on the election expenditure, lay down and enforce a code of conduct that disallows candidates with criminal records to contest elections and women candidates be given special police protection during the campaign phase and on the day of the polls. The basic demand that the political parties reserve certain tickets to women candidates is not within the competence of the Election Commission and needs an amendment to the Representation of Peoples Act. Of course, even the 13th and 14th General Elections did not witness any significant change in the numbers of women candidates fielded during elections or in the number of women parliamentarians.

In so far as educating women on political participation as candidates is concerned, the Mahila Rajsatta Andolan (MRA)/RSCD, a Campaign for Women in Governance evolved in March 2000 with a view of empowering Women and strengthening their participation in political processes through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) works in over 25 districts of Maharashtra, through various intervention strategies like- Advocacy, Organizing Training Programs, Crisis Support, Documentation, and Dissemination of Information to Elected Women Representatives (EWRs). It has played an effective role in network building, capacity building, and creating support systems to ensure Women's active, efficient, and effective participation in the local self-governance.

The SP Jain Institute of Management and Research (SPJIMR), Mumbai in collaboration with the Times Foundation has started a six months course which aims to train women in the political know-how and develop the skills of women candidates contesting elections. The course includes subjects such as finance and accounting, personal development and communication skills, study legal and constitutional, current issues, the group behaviour and relational skills. While inaugurating the course, Mr. Fazal Mohammed, Governor of

Maharashtra reiterated that 50 percent of representation within the polity should be reserved for women. He felt that women Politicians change the face of the political system. ⁽³⁾

When Pratibha Patil was elected President, Rajdeep Sardesai wrote:

"Was anyone really interested in questioning how the very Maharashtra politicians who were taking delight in her choice had been responsible for banishing her from the state not so long ago? And what of the ultimate irony: Mrs. Pratibha Patil made it to the highest office, not because she was a Maharashtrian (or not just because she was a woman for that matter), but because she was also married to a Shekhawat from Rajasthan, and hence could neutralize her prime opponent?"⁽⁴⁾

We may recall Durveger's definition of politics, which, he says is about the art of contending for power in its various forms. It is a continuous fight about who gets what, when, how and why? Therefore, what is involved at different levels includes bargaining, exerting pressure and influence, decision making, participation and control. This means that whoever engages in contending for exerting influence on some phenomena in practicing some form of politics. Therefore, the nature of women's struggles for gender equality, development and peace are rightfully placed in the political domain. The drive to empower women politically has resulted in making the political stage more competitive and therefore more demanding for both men and women, Men in particular feel more challenged and threatened by women since men have been in the political game for too long and "their space" is being invaded by women.⁽⁵⁾ Men have tended to be shrewed and

3. <http://news.mba4india.com/6181/6-month-course-for-future-women-politicians/>

4. *Jai Maharashtra*. June 22, 2007 (Available at <http://ibnlive.in.com/blogs/rajdeepsardesai/1/1783/jai-maharashtra.html>)

5. Ngaiza, M.K. Gender and Empowerment in the Third Millennium: A Conceptual Framework in (Eds.) B.N.Ghosh and Parvesh K. Chopra, *Gender and Development*, (Vol.I) ,Wisdom House, Leeds (UK), Pp.316-317.

to dominate politics at all levels, while women remain unrecognised, excluded and disregarded, a fact which has affected development negatively. While it is acknowledged that women's choices reflect the needs and interests of the whole society, their political stature is too low in terms of securing political space for representation. Women of Maharashtra whose representation in the Legislature is low, have to borrow the slogan of the Russian Women, who, in March 1991, came together to form an Independent Women's Forum and raised the slogan: "*Democracy without Women is not real Democracy.*" Unless women of the State make a real concerted effort, the situation is not likely to improve.

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