

Electoral Participation of Women in India: Key Determinants and Barriers

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Women's participation in formal politics in India reveals that there has been a marked increase in their voting turnout and election campaigning. While there have been significant gains in these two areas, women continue to be under-represented in legislative bodies both at the national and state level and in political parties. An analysis of the factors influencing participation reveals that these differ for women in elections as voters and their involvement as campaigners. All said and done, positive affirmative action in the form of reservation in legislative bodies, greater accommodation of women in decision-making positions in political parties and in government would go a long way in addressing a serious lacuna in politics in the country.

The participation of women and their engagement in electoral process is an important marker of the maturity and efficacy of democracy in any country. It can be defined not only in terms of the equality and freedom with which they share political power with men, but also in terms of the liberty and space provided for women in the democratic framework of electoral politics. The Constitution of India promulgated in 1952 promised, "to secure to all its citizens justice, social, economic and political" and "equality of status and of opportunity" (Basu 1998:21). Despite the constitutional promulgation, women in the Indian subcontinent continue to be grossly under-represented in the legislatures, both at the national and the state levels. Female representation in the lower house (Lok Sabha) of the Indian Parliament is still much less than the world average of 20%, lower than the "critical mass" required to introduce gender parity in political decision-making and legislation. Similarly, the number of female representatives in legislative bodies in most of the states in India is also below the 20% mark reflecting a pan-Indian gender exclusion from electoral participation and quality representation.

The Indian female marginalisation from electoral participation stems mainly from political party competition, as national political parties and regional parties in the states discriminate not only in terms of seat allotments in the electoral fray, but also in the party rank and file and chain of command. This could be attributed to a large extent to the party competition structure in the Indian subcontinent that is encumbered by inherent male dominance and a patriarchal mindset that excludes women from the electoral process. In contrast to the poor allotment rates of seats to women by political parties in the electoral process and marginalisation within the party structure, female electoral participation as voters has seen a notable upsurge in the late 1990s as voter turnout figures of three general elections held in the last decade indicate.

The electoral participation of women in India is a much discussed issue with a wide range of opinions and differing views. On the one hand, some theorists argue that the electoral process in India is fraught with male patriarchy and dominance that act as impediments to women participation. The lack of political voice and poor representation of women in Parliament is a result of exclusions on gender basis (Agarwal 2006). On the other hand, there are theorists who dispute this argument and feel that the increased participation of women in electoral competition in the 1990s as voters and sharing of political power at the grass-root level reveal that electoral politics in India is no more gender exclusive but is quite inclusive.

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They feel that due to the strength and determination of women's movements in different parts of India, as well as government-regulated quotas, female presence in the political arena is increasing, particularly in terms of voting patterns and decision-making power, as well as in access to positions in public office (Lock 1998; Vyasulu and Vyasulu 1999; Ahern et al 2000; Banerjee 2003).

It is within this framework of competing and divergent arguments of the level of participation of women in the electoral process that the ensuing analysis, based on primary and secondary sources, will try to ascertain the underlying causal factors. The analysis will not only focus on levels of inclusion of women in the electoral process as party candidates and as single interaction voters but also their engagement in election campaigning and electoral activities that involves multiple interaction. It will argue that female involvement is more labour-intensive and involves sustained political interactions over a period of time. It will also attempt to determine the factors that act as barriers and impediments to women proactively engaging in electoral politics.

This paper is broadly divided into six sections. Section 1 provides the definition and markers of female participation in electoral competition in India. Section 2 assesses female participation in elections from a historical point of view to understand the beginning from limited electoral activities to more intensive participatory activities in recent times. Section 3 is about the thematic patterns of gendered interactions in electoral competition at various levels – under-representation of women in the Lok Sabha since the first general elections, systemic exclusion in allotment of seats as candidates in national elections by political parties, increasing participation of women in electoral campaigns in the beginning of 21st century and the electoral upsurge of Indian women as voters in the 1990s. Section 4 is the focal section of the paper as it tries to quantitatively find out the main determinants that lead to higher participation of women in the electoral process as voters and as campaigners, separately. It will also attempt to ascertain the best indicators that explain higher participation of women in formal politics, both as single participatory voters and as multi-participatory campaigners that is more time intensive and requires frequent negotiations outside the household. Section 5 probes factors that act as barriers and obstacles in female participation and women's issues in electoral politics qualitatively. Section 6 is the last section that concludes the paper and suggests the way ahead for enhanced participation of women in an intensive electoral process that will pave the way for correcting the present gender inequalities in Indian politics.

1 Definition and Markers

The participation of women in politics in a broader perspective involves interaction in a wide range of activities like participating in trade unions, cooperatives, women's collectives, informal and formal political processes. Political participation has been defined as a citizen's active involvement with public institutions, which include voting, candidacy, campaigning, occupying political office and/or lobbying individually or through membership in a group (Arora 1999; Gleason 2001). However in this paper it is used in a much narrower sense to cover only female participation in formal/electoral politics at the state and national level in electoral competition. Female participation in electoral politics at the grass-root

level of panchayati raj institutions has not been included in the universe of analysis here as affirmative action for reservations of seats has corrected gender exclusions and disparity at this level to a great extent.

For a holistic assessment of electoral participation of women and status vis-à-vis men in India and factors that act as barriers and obstacles in efficacious participation in formal politics, the following parameters will be used:

(i) Participatory Levels in Electoral Competition: This can be estimated by analysing the turnout of women as voters and the representation of women in the lower house of Parliament over a period of time based on time series data from the Election Commission of India's archives. This would be supplemented by a comparative analysis of seats allotted to women by national political parties during the last three general elections in India.

(ii) Electoral Behaviour and Attitudes: The level of political awareness, commitment and involvement of participation of women in electoral politics, their autonomy and independence in electoral behaviour and choices and barriers that act as impediments in participating as active campaigners during the elections. As will be discussed in the relevant section, the data for analysis is drawn from the Data Unit of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi.

(iii) Efficacy of Women in Electoral Process: An assessment would be made of women's roles and efficiency in the electoral process and society's attitude to new political roles of women. This is indicated by the success of women candidates in elections, the efficiency of women's movements, the nature of leadership and women elected in government and political parties and the effectiveness of campaigns for women's mobilisation, particularly on issues that directly concern them. Since quantitative data is not available to ascertain the efficacy of women in electoral process, it will be more qualitative and based on gender analysis.

Since empirical data for women's participation in electoral competition in India is mostly available for state and national level elections, grass-roots electoral participation will be analysed in a qualitative manner so as to provide a holistic picture about levels and patterns of participation in electoral competition.

2 An Overview of Electoral Participation

A brief sketch of the historical background of female participation in electoral competition provides a backdrop both chronologically and thematically.

The Swadeshi movement in Bengal (1905-08) marked the beginning of Indian female participation in nationalist activities and also brought to the forefront the question of suffrage and voting rights.

Tracing the origins of the female suffrage movement in India, Forbes (1979) stated:

the firm insistence of organised women that they be treated as equals of men on the franchise issue emerged not from the perceptions of the needs of the women in India, but as the result of the influence of certain British women, in the case of the first demand for the franchise,

1917, and as a response to the nationalist movement, in the case of the second demand for franchise, 1927-33.

Thus the movement for female suffrage in India in the early 20th century was initiated and replicated on the model in Great Britain and the work of British women reformers living in India. But eventually the suffrage movement came to terms with nationalist concerns and suffragist ideals had to be justified in Indian terms and linked to the nationalist issues of political rights and colonial status that dominated public discourse in the 1920s and 1930s in India (Southard 1993).

As a result of the movement, limited suffrage rights were extended to women in different provinces of India between 1920 and 1929. However the suffrage rights granted were to a very narrow section of Indian women based on property qualifications. The Government of India Act 1935 provided a wider section of women suffrage rights but it was still limited and encumbered by qualifications like literacy, property ownership or marriage to propertied men. The Act enfranchised one woman for every five men enfranchised (Visram 1992). In spite of the movement's opposition to reservation of seats on a gender basis, the 1935 Act granted 41 reserved seats for women in the provincial legislatures as well as limited reservations for them in the central legislature, leading to cleavages in the movement on gender and religious lines. However, women took advantage of the seats reserved for them in the elections held in 1937, as 80 women won the elections to become legislators. Thus, India had the third highest number of female legislators in the world in 1937, after the United States and Soviet Union (Visram 1992). After India gained independence in 1947, the new Constitution adopted did not reserve seats for women in the legislature. Though reservation of seats for women in the legislature in the waning days of the colonial era was quite short-lived and subdivided along religious lines, it gave women a foothold in legislative life and set a precedent which women could draw on decades later (Jenkins 2003).

Though the foundation for electoral participation of women was laid down during the freedom movement, the post-Independence period did not witness any concerted or united effort to create inclusive electoral spaces for women. By and large, participation after Independence was constrained by social norms shaping not only opportunities for but also perceptions of female involvement in politics – perceptions that were sometimes unique to men, at times shared by women (Arora 1999; Gleason 2001; Nair 1996). Overall, the mass participation of women in the political field during the freedom struggle seemed to decline after Independence. Their involvement in politics and electoral competition was confined to familial connections rather than based on interest and societal encouragement to actively participate in politics. Also, political parties that were reflecting the prevailing societal ethos systematically excluded women from electoral participation (Baseline Report 1998). However, as a token of appreciation for their contribution in the struggle for India's Independence, political parties allotted them a few seats in the general elections. This becomes evident from the first Lok Sabha Elections held in 1952 where women could win and occupy a paltry 4.4% of the seats in the lower house of Parliament. Even

now, despite the constitutional provisions guaranteeing equality of sexes, electoral participation of women in terms of legislative or decision-making bodies is quite low and they continue to remain marginalised and under-represented.

The demand for greater representation of women in political institutions in India was taken up seriously after the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) published its report in 1976. The CSWI report suggested that female representation in political institutions especially at the grass-roots level needed to be increased through a policy of reservation of seats for women. In 1988, the National Perspective Plan for Women also suggested that a 30% quota for women be introduced at all levels of elective bodies. Women's groups and gender politics strictly insisted that reservation be restricted to the panchayat level to encourage grass-roots participation of women in electoral politics.

The national consensus around this demand resulted in the adoption of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution in 1993 that introduced 33% reservation for women in institutions of local governance. In 1995 the question of affirmative action for women was raised again, but this time the focus was on reservations in Parliament. Initially, most political parties agreed in principle to this demand, but soon discord and dissensions surfaced. When the bill addressing this issue was introduced in the 11th Lok Sabha in 1997, several parties and groups raised objections. The objections focused on two main issues: first, the issue of overlapping quotas for women in general and those for women of the lower castes and, second, the issue of elitism. The proposed bill is yet to be passed by the Lok Sabha although it has been passed in the Rajya Sabha recently.

The following section delves into the issues more specifically.

3 Gender Interactions in Elections

The participation of women in various processes of electoral competition in India is multifarious but the levels of participation and inclusiveness are quite varied, uneven and distorted. Electoral interaction and political participation of women can be systematically analysed using a pyramidal electoral participation model stratified at four levels on a quantitative basis: (1) in the top strata is female representation in the lower house of Parliament and in legislative assemblies – which is the narrowest and most constricted numerically; (2) in the second strata are women as candidates in electoral competition participating as members and functionaries of political parties where their representation in quantitative terms is more than that at the top layer; (3) in the third strata as active campaigners for political parties where female participation is much larger in numbers than that in the second strata; and (4) in the bottom strata with the widest base of women in numerical terms as single-time voters.

The levels of female participation at the top tiers/levels of electoral competition are fairly low as compared to Indian men and the only levels of electoral participation where they have achieved some degree of parity are as voters in elections. Thus women's participation in electoral competition has been restricted to being periodic electors, something that is not only promoted and encouraged by the political parties and society but also by the state organs in India. Female electoral participation is grossly skewed and lopsided

vis-à-vis men in India when it comes to contesting elections as candidates and representation in legislative assemblies. Indian electoral politics reveals exclusionary trends in providing space to women to participate as candidates in national and state level elections that causally stem from their marginalisation within the party hierarchy and structure.

Before analysing the representation levels of women in the lower house of Parliament it would be contextual to see how they fare as compared to women in other countries of South Asia presently. The representation of women in the lower house of Afghanistan parliament is the highest (27%) among the countries in South Asia. Afghanistan witnessed its first parliamentary elections after the downfall of the Taliban rule. Apart from Afghanistan, Iraq (25.45%) and Pakistan (21.35%) are the two countries in the region where women representatives occupy more than 20% seats in the lower house of parliament. The reason for other countries being ranked higher than India is mainly due to reservation of seats for women in Parliament. Thus India (10.86) and Sri Lanka (4.89) are two countries in the region where women's representation in the Parliament is below the world average – 20% representation of women.

Women in India are still not well represented in political life as members in Parliament and in state legislative assemblies that would require them to be active in the public sphere (Chhibber 2002). Women's representation in the Lok Sabha since the first general elections reveals that they continue to be grossly excluded from electoral participation at the top even after so many years of Independence (Table 1). In 1952, they constituted 4.4% of the total members in the lower house which has increased to around 11% in 2009, but it is still below the world average of 20%. There was a significant rise in the number of women representatives elected to the Lok Sabha in 2009 as compared with 2004. Although this has important symbolic connotations for the future of women's politics, it had nothing much to do with effective political mobilisation of women in the 2009 elections (Deshpande 2009).

Reasons for Low Representation

The main factors attributed to low representation could be (a) socio-historic forces inherited from nationalist movements, current social policies and the gendered nature of citizenship in hampering women's political participation in government structures, elections and community organisations (Vissandjée et al 2006); (b) lack of reservation of seats for women in the Parliament and state legislatures; (c) the lack of national consensus and willingness among political parties to give more tickets

Table 1: Representation of Women in Lower House of Indian Parliament from 1st to 15th Lok Sabha

Lok Sabha	Total No of Seats (Elections Held)	No of Women Members Who Won	% of the Total
First (1952)	489	22	4.4
Second (1957)	494	27	5.4
Third (1962)	494	34	6.7
Fourth (1967)	523	31	5.9
Fifth (1971)	521	22	4.2
Sixth (1977)	544	19	3.4
Seventh (1980)	544	28	5.1
Eighth (1984)	544	44	8.1
Ninth (1989)	529	28	5.3
Tenth (1991)	509	36	7.0
Eleventh (1996)	541	40*	7.4
Twelfth (1998)	545	44*	8.0
Thirteenth (1999)	543	48*	8.8
Fourteenth (2004)	543	45*	8.1
Fifteenth (2009)	543	59	10.9

* Including one nominated member.
Source: Election Commission of India.

to women in elections (Basu 1992); (d) perpetuation of a patriarchal political structure together with class, caste and gender subordination acting as strong deterrents to women contesting elections (Baseline Report 1998); and (e) the lack of awareness and knowledge of electoral politics combined with a lack of support from the family and political parties in resources, severely affects women's chances to contest and win elections.

Even at the second strata of women's participation in electoral process as candidates in elections there are inherent barriers and restrictions imposed by political parties that severely restrict their chances of candidature. This becomes fairly evident by numerical analysis of the number of seats allotted to women by four prominent political parties in the last three general elections (Table 2). It can be seen that the number of women candidates who contested the elections has increased and almost doubled from 284 in general elections held in 1999 to 566 in the general elections of 2004. But the number of women candidates fielded by national parties, except for the Bharatiya Janata Party, has remained almost the same during this intervening period. Thus, national parties have followed a discriminatory and gender exclusionist policy in allotment of seats to women in elections for Lok Sabha over the years and discouraged active participation in formal politics. The policy of exclusion of women in granting seats at the national and state level is not only being followed by national parties, but also by regional political parties that are in competition in various states of the country.

The political decision to not allot seats to women by political parties at the national and state level electoral has been attributed to lack of "winnability" of women (Deshpande 2004). However, an

Table 2: Seat Allotted to Women Contestants in General Elections by National Parties

National Parties	1999		2004		2009	
	Contested	Won	Contested	Won	Contested	Won
All India	284	49	355	45	556	59
Congress	51	41	45	12	43	23
BJP	25	15	30	10	44	13
CPI	4	1	2	-	4	-
CPM	5	3	8	5	6	1

Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

analysis of the success rates of women candidates in Indian general elections as compared to men reveals that it has been higher in the last three general elections. In the 2009 national hustings, the success rate for women candidates was 11% as compared with the success rate of 6% for men. This clearly demolishes the apprehensions about "winnability" that are raised by political parties in allotting seats to women in elections. The complete lack of support to women by political parties is corroborated by Kishwar who states, "In our country, even the best of women parliamentarians feel sidelined and powerless within the party. The few women leaders have not been able to facilitate the entry of greater number of women in electoral and party politics, and so remain an ineffective minority" (Kishwar 1996). Kishwar recommended that in allocating tickets for elections, parties should be compelled to give at least one-third of their tickets to women by amending the Representation of People Act in India.

The third level of electoral participation in formal politics is the role played by women in election campaigns that forms an integral and crucial part of the electoral process. Women's participation

in election campaigning is a multi-interaction activity that requires investing time and moving in public spaces outside their household. Political parties in India in recent times have engaged in intense election campaigns and have relied heavily on both print and electronic media to put forward their agenda among the voters and solicit votes for their party during the elections. But traditional campaign methods like holding rallies and meetings, distributing party agenda leaflets, door to door canvassing by party workers and supporters, and road shows by party leaders still remain the more popular methods. Women in India have been actively participating in election campaigns but their levels of participation need to be numerically estimated to get a fair assessment of their engagement in this process.

For analysing the levels and trends of women's participation in electoral competition as campaigners in the last two general elections an electoral participation index¹ was constructed on the following variables: attended election meetings, participated in rallies, door to door canvassing, donations to parties and distributing party agenda leaflets. Table 3 indicates that on the one hand the incidence of low participation of women in campaign activities has dropped by 7 percentage points in the 2004 general elections as compared to the general elections of 1999.

Table 3: Women's Participation as Voters and Election Campaigners
(1999 and 2004 General Elections)

Levels of Participation	NES 1999	NES 2004	Increase/Decrease (%)
Non-voters	44	46	+ 2
Voters	56	54	- 2
Low campaigners	87	80	- 7
High campaigners	13	20	+ 7

Source: National Election Study 1999, 2004, CSDS Data Unit, Delhi.

On the other, the number of women with high levels of participation in election campaigns has increased significantly from 13% in the 1999 general elections to 20% in the 2004 general elections. This suggests that relatively more Indian women are now actively participating in campaign activities that are not only more intensive but very much a form of active participation as compared to voting in elections. One of the main reasons for increased participation of women in election campaign activities is due to higher mobilisation by political parties by including women in their campaign programmes. It seems that political parties seem quite keen and enthusiastic in treating women as constituencies and campaigners, but run shy of allotting adequate number of seats to them in elections and in sharing political power (Kishwar 1996).

Though there has been a slight decrease in female voting in the 2004 general elections as compared to 1999, participation in the electoral process as voters has steadily increased from 46.6% in 1962 to around 55.8% in the year 2009 (Table 4). The difference in voter turnout among men and women that was as wide as 16.7% in 1962 has narrowed down to 4.4% in 2009. Despite the difference in voting levels remaining significant vis-à-vis men, there was not only a definite participatory upsurge among Indian women in the 1990s, but also in their turnout (Yadav 2000). In fact, the general elections in 2009 had witnessed the highest voter turnout among women. Thus, Indian women's participation as voters at the national level electoral competition has shown a significant upsurge.

What are the reasons for the upsurge of women's participation as voters in general elections held in the 1990s? The reasons could

be, first, the liberalisation and opening up of Indian economy in the 1990s resulted in an explosion of electronic media creating awareness and educating women about their political and electoral rights. Second, the civil society and women's organisations' awareness campaigns and advocacy at grass-root levels encouraged and educated women about their voting rights and importance of vote in favour of right candidates and political parties. Third, the Election Commission's initiatives in conducting free, fair and violence-free elections in the 1990s may have contributed in larger women turnout as it inculcated a sense of safety and security among them. Fourth, the reservation of 33% seats for women at the panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) in the 1990s gave women in the country a sense of sharing power with men equally. It may have acted as a catalyst and resulted in the upsurge of women's electoral participation as voters. Finally, the dominant perception (Vissandjée et al 2006) that women generally think that politics is a dirty word and tend to stay away from it also saw a change in this period as a result of reservation and their participation in large numbers at the grass-root level (PRIs). The success stories of women in panchayats dispelled the perception among women that politics is not a domain of activity for them.

4 Key Determinants and Factors

Levels of participation of women in formal politics are determined by a host of factors some of which are universal and gender-specific in nature, while some are country-specific and localised. In India and elsewhere it has been suggested that women's participation in electoral competition is generally lower than of men either because they have been socialised differently, especially as far as marriage, motherhood, employment, and property ownership are concerned, or because they have fewer resources (Burns et al 2001). Similarly, the socio-economic demographics of women and gender-specific reasons have been mostly cited in research as factors that determine their level of participation in the electoral process at the various tiers as outlined above.

In order to assess crucial factors that determine women's level of participation in formal politics like voting and campaigning in India, this section uses data from the National Election Study (NES) 2004, conducted by the CSDS and women's electoral participation

Table 4: Turnout of Women Voters in General Elections in India

General Elections	Total Turnout	Men's Turnout	Women's Turnout	Difference in Turnout
First (1952)	61.2	-	-	-
Second (1957)	62.2	-	-	-
Third (1962)	55.4	63.3	46.6	16.7
Fourth (1967)	61.3	66.7	55.5	11.2
Fifth (1971)	55.3	60.9	49.1	11.8
Sixth (1977)	60.5	66.0	54.9	11.1
Seventh (1980)	56.9	62.2	51.2	11.0
Eighth (1984)	64.0	68.4	59.2	9.2
Ninth (1989)	62.0	66.1	57.3	8.8
Tenth (1991)	57.0	61.6	51.4	10.2
Eleventh (1996)	58.0	62.1	53.4	8.7
Twelfth (1998)	62.0	66.0	58.0	8.0
Thirteenth (1999)	60.0	64.0	55.7	8.3
Fourteenth (2004)	58.8	61.7	53.3	8.4
Fifteenth (2009)	58.2	60.2	55.8	4.4

Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

index created from NES data sets. It is again reiterated that electoral participation is used in a restricted ambit. Women's participation in election competition is restricted to covering voting and campaigning during the general elections held in India in 2004.

There has been a visible upsurge of women as voters in Indian elections and they have achieved parity with men voters in elections. One of the reasons cited has been promotion by state and society in encouraging women to participate and vote in elections. What are the other factors that determine their levels of participation and non-participation in the voting process? One of the key factors that determines their high level of participation in casting their votes is women's interest in politics. Table 5 shows that a large number of the women with an interest in politics are also the ones who participate actively in the voting process. Eighty-nine per cent of women who had an interest in politics also had high levels of voting participation in the 2004 general elections as compared with those who did not have an interest in politics in general (82%). Thus, we can assume that women's interest in politics is a prerequisite for encouraging higher participation of women in formal politics.

Individual socio-demographics including education and income, sociocultural norms and caste are also associated with women's opportunities in political participation (Agarwal 1997; Gleason 2001; Banerjee 2003). Women's level of participation in electoral politics depends on their societal background and the levels of liberty and freedom enjoyed by them. Thus women who exercise their own discretion in deciding whom to vote for show a higher level of electoral participation as voters in electoral competition than those whose decisions are influenced by family and friends. Accordingly, women with their own voting decisions show a higher voting participation (4 percentage points in the 2004 general elections) than women whose decisions were influenced by others. But the attitudinal factor that seems to drive women in India to cast their votes in elections is the perception that their vote matters in electing and running the government. Thus 87%, who felt that their vote matters in elections, voted in general elections 2004 in India as compared with the smaller number of women (78%) who felt that it did not matter for running the government and yet voted.

Location and Region

The other important factors that play a crucial role in ensuring higher participation in voting are location and region. Table 5 reveals that women living in rural areas of India vote higher as compared to those living in urban locations, as rural women are ahead by 5 percentage points in voting in the 2004 general elections. Similarly, women located in the southern and eastern region of India exercised their ballot options more as compared to

women residing in the western and northern regions of the country. Thus, more women from southern (90%) and eastern (87%) regions voted in 2004 as compared with their counterparts residing in the other two regions of India. The reason that can best explain a higher percentage voting by women in the southern and eastern regions of India is the matriarchal social structure

prevalent in these regions which allows them more freedom to access and negotiate interactions in the public sphere and in electoral competition.

What are the other factors that determine women's participation in election campaigning and are the reasons same as those for participation in voting or different from it? Women's interest in politics emerges as the key factor that determines their level of participation in election campaigns. Women with an interest in politics had higher levels of participation (41%) in election campaigning in 2004, as compared to those who were not interested in politics and still campaigned in elections (11%). The findings are corroborated by earlier research that arrived at similar outcomes (Burns et al 2001).

It is acknowledged that educated employed women and those of a higher social standing in terms of class, and urban women are more likely to be interested as well as more active in politics (Chhibber 2002). The observations in Table 6 support this as women who are employed have a higher participation in election campaigns (22%) as compared to women who are not working (18%). The findings are supported by earlier reports (Gleason 2001). Although in some cases, the differences are not very significant, they are suggestive of the potential roles the demographic background

plays in active participation of women in electoral process.

In a pluralistic society like India, the media is the major means for political and social groups to reach out to target groups and forge strategic alliances with them. The increased participation of women as election campaigners in recent electoral competitions could be attributed to Indian media to some extent as data in Table 6 reveals. But to what extent does media exposure of women lead to their increased participation in election campaigns? To test this efficacy, a Media Exposure Index² was created which is a combination of CSDS National Election Survey 2004 data variables on newspaper reading habits and listening to news on radio and television. As per Table 6, women who had a high exposure to media also had higher political participation in election campaign (30%) as compared to those who had no exposure to the media (15%).

Social networking and regional factors also determine their levels of participation in election campaigns. Women in India are part of social networking groups like local religious organisations and other self-help groups. Thus, women with

Table 5: Key Determinants of Women's Participation in Voting

Factors	Voting Participation (%)	
	Vote	Do Not Vote
Interest in politics	89	11
No interest in politics	82	18
Own voting decision	89	11
Not own voting decision	85	15
Vote is important	87	13
Vote is not important	78	22
Rural location	85	15
Urban location	80	20
Southern region	90	10
Eastern region	87	13
Western region	81	19
Northern region	79	21

Source: National Election Study 2004, CSDS Data Unit, Delhi.

Table 6: Key Determinants of Women's Participation in Election Campaigning

Factors	Participation in Campaign (%)	
	Low	High
Interest in politics	59	41
No interest in politics	89	11
High media exposure	70	30
No media exposure	85	15
High social networking	79	21
Low social networking	87	13
Employed	78	22
Unemployed	82	18
Eastern region	69	31
Northern region	83	17
Southern region	83	17
Western region	89	11

Source: National Election Study 2004, CSDS Data Unit, Delhi.

higher social networking (21%) had higher levels of participation in election campaign activities in 2004 as compared to those with low social networking (13%). Similarly, women living in the eastern region of the country where the social structure is matriarchal reported high levels of participation in election campaigns (31%) in 2004 as compared to other regions of the country.

Table 7: Electoral Participation of Women as Voters in General Elections 2004 in India

(Logit Model – Voting in General Election as Dependent Variables)

Variables	Single Interaction – Voting in Elections	
	Coefficient	Standard Error
Interest in politics	0.276**	0.07
Voting decision	0.204**	0.06
Vote matters	0.402**	0.07
Media exposure	0.007	0.03
Social networking	0.109	0.13
Employment	0.130*	0.06
Language	0.077	0.08
Rural/urban	0.304**	0.07
Southern region	0.579**	0.10
Eastern region	0.478**	0.08
Western region	0.189	0.10
Constant	-0.045	0.23

Source: National Election Study 2004, CSDS Data Unit, Delhi.

*P < .05; **P < .01 N: 8892 Chi² 164.525
 Prob > chi² 0.0000 -2 Log Likelihood Per cent Correctly
 6647-7529 Predicted: 88

Table 8: Electoral Participation of Women as Campaigners in General Elections 2004 in India

(Logit Model – Campaigning in General Elections as Dependent Variables)

Variables	Multiple Interactions – Campaign in Elections	
	Coefficient	Standard Error
Interest in politics	1.469**	0.05
Voting decision	0.030	0.05
Vote matters	0.037	0.07
Media exposure	0.207**	0.02
Social networking	0.272**	0.12
Employment	0.227**	0.05
Language	0.318**	0.08
Rural/urban	0.485**	0.06
Southern region	-0.259**	0.08
Eastern region	0.516**	0.06
Western region	-0.268**	0.10
Constant	-5.183	0.23

Source: National Election Study 2004, CSDS Data Unit, Delhi.

*P < .05; **P < .01 N: 8942 Chi² 1226.707
 Prob > chi² 0.0000 -2 Log Likelihood Per cent Correctly
 9574.6374 Predicted: 78

A logistic regression (Tables 7 and 8) of the number of women voters as the dependent variable by independent determinants like interest in politics, “own voting decision”, “vote matters”, “media exposure”, “social networking”, “locality”, “language” and “region” reveals that among attitudinal variables, “Vote matters” is one of the best predictors of women who voted in 2004. This implies that women who feel that their vote matters in electing a new government had the highest participation in voting. Apart from women who feel their vote matters, “interest in politics” is also an important predictor of their degree of participation in election voting. Similarly, women who decide on their own to vote went to the polls in larger numbers in 2004 elections and this factor is an important determinant in statistically predicting their higher voting participation patterns. Women’s exposure to media, social networking and linguistic differentials does not play an important role in determining their levels of higher voting behaviour as Table 7 clearly reveals.

Among demographic variables, region is the key factor that determines and explains women’s level of participation as voters in 2004. Keeping the northern region as constant, the southern region is one of the best predictors of women who voted in elections. This implies that women in southern region of India followed by women in the eastern region of the country had the highest levels of participation in voting process as compared to other regions. Women’s participation in voting is also determined by the rural-urban divide that is a significant predictor of their levels of voting in elections. Women living in rural areas voted more in 2004 as compared to the urban areas of India. The reasons could be manifold, but low participation in electoral politics is a common phenomenon among urban voters in India and urban women are no exception (Chhibber 2002).

Are the determinants and predictors of female participation in electoral competition as voters and women who participate in election campaigns the same or are there variations? A logistic regression of the number of women campaigners as the dependent variable by independent determinants like “women’s interest in politics”, “own voting decision”, “vote matters”, “media exposure”, “social networking”, “locality”, “language” and “region” reveals that among attitudinal variables, “interest in politics” is one of the strongest predictors of women who campaigned in general elections 2004. Thus women who had interest in politics had the highest levels of participation in electoral campaigning. Apart from “interest in politics” being the best predictor, “social networking” of women is the second best predictor of women’s participation in campaign activities during the 2004 elections. “Media exposure” of women is also a good predictor of women’s participation in election campaigns. Factors that determined and predicted women’s participation as voters like their “vote mattered” and “own decision” are not statistically significant in determining their participation in campaign activities.

Women in non-Hindi states participated more in election campaigns in 2004 as compared to Hindi-speaking states. The employment status of women is a crucial factor, as employed women participated more in election campaigning than those who were not. Women who have a life outside of the household are more interested in politics and more politically active (Chhibber 2002). This means working women who are more exposed to public life participate more in election campaigns than non-working women/housewives.

Different Determinants

Thus we can conclude that the determinants of women’s participation as voters and campaigners are different and the best predictors of their levels of participation in two key electoral activities are also dissimilar. The best predictor for women’s participation in voting is the “vote matters” factor, whereas for election campaign activities women’s “interest in politics” is the strongest predictor. Social networking and media exposure do not have a significant correlation with voting patterns and behaviour of women during elections in India, but are strong determinants of gender participation in campaign activities during electoral competition.

5 Barriers and Obstacles

The Constitution of India grants universal suffrage to both men and women with equal rights to participate in electoral competition, but the existing societal value system, the private-public divide in terms of domain identification and male preponderance in political institutions restrict women from exercising their electoral rights and a fair participation in electoral competition. These factors also act as key barriers and obstacles in women's active participation in the Indian electoral system and in the larger issue of women's advancement as a whole. The lack of critical and quality representation of women in key decision-making positions results in women's agenda not getting reflected and addressed in public policies and programmes (Baseline Report 1998).

The public agenda of Indian men and women elected through the electoral fray as people's representatives are quite different and their priority of public works undertaken is also not similar. While elected women representatives addressed issues of long-term benefits such as education, health, violence against women and basic amenities that affect community, men concentrated on issues that needed immediate attention such as roads, community and commercial centres, tanks, bridges, etc (Interim Narrative Report 2002-03). Thus, an exclusive men's agenda of public work tends to neglect women's issues and is detrimental towards women advancement and progress in the larger interest of the society.

On the one hand, the absence of a critical mass of women representatives reduces their bargaining and negotiating power during the allotment of key cabinet berths in India such as finance, home, defence, health, etc, which are generally allotted to men and considered "heavy-weight" ministries. On the other, Indian women are mostly allotted ministries during cabinet formation which are not only termed as "feminine" ministries like women and children welfare, information and culture, social welfare, etc, but which are perceived as relatively less important. To this extent, women in India seem to have failed in breaking the glass ceiling and have been relegated to the fringes in power sharing at the top level, which, in turn, has an adverse impact on their overall political status in the country and has acted as barriers and obstacles in higher electoral participation.

The low proportion of women in the inner political party structure of India further erodes women's efforts to lobby and garner resources and support for nurturing and building their political constituencies as well as mobilising financial and human resources required to meet the demands and aspirations of their constituencies. This inevitably results in women being perceived as weak representatives – generally unaccepted as political leaders by people in their constituency. At times, their insignificant numbers may put them in a vulnerable position resulting in seeking alliances along caste, religion and regional identities rather than along common gendered interests (Baseline Report 1998). Thus, Indian women in public life as people's representatives often become co-opted in the men-centric structure of development agendas. At the grass-root levels of panchayati raj institutions, there have been strong roadblocks and obstacles to women's entry into politics and a backlash of violence to keep them away from electoral politics (Baseline Report 1998).

The absence of affirmative action for 33% reservation of seats for Indian women at state legislature and Parliament is having a negative impact on women's share in the institutions of representations. However, treating women as a blanket category for the benefits of reservation would further complicate the issue of women's representation and participation in India's electoral competition. For, such benefits would largely be appropriated by those women who belong to the upper stratum of society or to those already having a political background. Hence, women from the lower economic strata, backward castes and marginalised groups would get further excluded from contesting elections and sharing political power.

Thus, the disadvantaged sections among the women in India who are already denied their political rights to participate in elections as candidates arising out of their situational deficiencies and lack of political connections would be further relegated. The absence of proportionate and qualitative representation of Indian women in top legislative and decision-making bodies is leading to a lopsided working of democracy in the country. For Indian democracy to become successful at the ground level, men and women should get a free and proportionate chance to enjoy and exercise their political rights and participate in electoral competition. The inclusion of women in the political structure and their proportionate electoral participation will not only correct the existing gender gaps in the electoral arena and remove barriers and obstacles confronting them, but also bring gender issues to the forefront leading to women's empowerment and advancement in the society in the long run.

6 Conclusions

To conclude, there has been a marked increase in voter turnout and election campaigning among women in India. While there have been significant gains among Indian women in these two areas of electoral participation, they continue to be under-represented in legislative bodies both at national and state level and within political parties. The under-representation of women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies and in crucial decision-making positions like important cabinet berths are clear pointers of their systematic exclusion from electoral competition on a gender basis. Though women head a significant number of national and state level political parties as party leaders, their representation within the rank and file of prominent political parties is not in significant numbers. Women who have made their presence felt in inner party structures are also relegated to the second rung leadership and have failed to break the "glass ceiling". They rarely play any role in formulating policies and strategies in political parties and are assigned the job of keeping an eye on "women's issues" that could bring electoral benefits and dividends for the party in future hustings.

However, the silver lining over women's participation in electoral politics in India is the participatory upsurge witnessed among women as voters in the 1990s. The difference in voting based on gender remains significant, but the participation of women as voters is clearly on the upswing at the national level as more and more women have started exercising their electoral rights and participating in electoral competition. Similarly, women's participation in formal politics has also increased in campaign activities during the election. Thus, the political

participation of women in electoral politics and activities connected with it is witnessing a definite upswing as their increased participatory trends make it quite evident.

The levels of political participation of Indian women as voters and as campaigners are determined by a host of factors as revealed by the NES 2004 such as interest in politics, importance of voting, voting discretion, social networking, exposure to media and demographics like location, educational attainments, economic class and employment status. A regression analysis of key determinants of women's participation in the electoral process as voters revealed that the factor "vote matters" in electing a new government is one of the best predictors of Indian women voting in elections.

The determinants that predict higher participation of Indian women in elections campaign during the electoral competition are different from the factors that determine their higher voting patterns. A regression analysis of women campaigners as the dependent variable with independent variables revealed that, "interest in politics" is one of the strongest predictors of women who campaign in elections.

Women's movement and gender politics in India is currently divided over the question of affirmative action for women in

Parliament and state legislatures around two main issues: first, the issue of overlapping quotas for women in general and those for women of the lower castes and, second, the issue of elitism. Affirmative action for women in legislative bodies it would go a long way in removing obstacles that inhibit their participation in election competition and bridging the existing gap in the electoral political set-up.

The key barriers that restrict women's proactive participation in the electoral process, that need to be addressed on a priority basis, apart from affirmative action, are more representation of women in political parties, including them in the decision-making bodies and providing them key cabinet berths in government at the central and state level. Women should be promoted and encouraged by the concerted effort of government in partnership with civil society for enhanced and quality participation in formal politics. An increased political participation by women in all spheres of political life and electoral competition in particular will not only ensure political parity and equality with men, but would also serve the larger issues concerning women, i.e., upliftment and empowerment of Indian women.

NOTES

- 1 An Electoral Participation Index was created from women who participated in the following activities in NES 2004 data set: women, who attended election meetings, participated in election rallies and meetings, door to door canvassing, donations to parties and distributing party agenda leaflets. The participation levels of women in election campaign were indexed into two categories: *Low*, women who participated in one or two activities and *High*, women who participated in three or more activities.
- 2 An Media Exposure Index was created from women's exposure to the following media from NES 2004 data sets: newspaper reading habits, listening to news on Radio and watching news on Television. Women's exposure to media were indexed into three categories: *Low*, women who were sometimes exposed to any one medium and never in rest; *Medium*, women who were sometimes exposed to two or three mediums and *High*, women who were mostly exposed to three or more medium.

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