

Chapter 2

Women's Presence/Absence in Politics and the Influence of Patriarchy

This chapter is an attempt to analyse the presence/absence of women in political process and the extent to which patriarchy influences this position. The position of women in Indian political process is very uncertain. On one hand, equal political and civil rights ensures that women have the same opportunities as men to participate in political process. On the other hand, the discouraging number of women in representative institutions indicates that these opportunities have not been fully utilized. Fair representation is a feature of democracy and till now women's representation in political process is far from being fair. Through this chapter I make a modest attempt to understand what exactly constitutes as fair representation for women in India and whether the proposed mechanisms of fair representation weaken patriarchy or not.

As I analysed the history of women's presence/absence in political process, I observed that women's contribution in the political process is quite impressive. Before independence of India, women in India were active political participants. The contribution of women in political protests and demands for freedom during the Indian National Movement is undeniable. After independence, women's contribution only increased as the Indian Constitution ensured equal civil and political rights. Women form a prominent number of voters in the political space and contribute greatly to the interest aggregation and articulation process, yet they are mostly absent from the decision-making process in India. On the surface, legal conditions to make women an integral part of political process are included within in the Indian political system. Yet it seems that women are left in the margins of political process, only relevant as part of the electoral or as interest aggregators. They are mostly ignored as the decision makers.

We need to acknowledge the fact that after nearly 75 years after obtaining political rights the number of women in the parliament have been dismissal. During the 2019 elections only 78 women were elected in the Lok Sabha which constitutes as the highest ever recorded number of women in the lower house.¹ Somehow the increasing democratization of the country has not made a visible impact women's representation within formal institutions. At least not the manner in which the members of Indian Women's Movement and Constituent Assembly members envisioned. Due to the guarantee of political rights, women are not legally excluded

from the political sphere like they were before independence, but are they fully included in the political process?

It seems as if women are both present and absent in the political process at the same time. They are present as voter in formal political process due to the guarantee of equal rights but at the same are also absent from the political decision-making process. Political equality for women is not an afterthought but rather forms the core of equality in the Indian political sphere. India happens to be one of the very few countries in the world which gives women equal political rights from its inception. Despite this, women and their specific demands are barely visible within the political process in India. As the High Level Committee on the Status of Women In India states, 'As the history of the political participation among women shows, there is a huge gap between men and women in political activities beyond voting.'² In national and state legislatures women rarely get elected as representative. Women are not given the same space as men in political process to articulate, aggregate and campaign for their interests as women. They are mostly relegated to political work which does not expose them to leadership positions. Most of the time women are not even given tickets to contest elections as political parties consider their chances of winning to be low.

In local governance, where women's seats are reserved, we observe the numerical presence of women due to one third reservations but their presence in actual decision-making process is not as envisioned. Even though women have political equality and are significantly voting their participation and representation in political process specifically for their issues and demands is rarely seen. As voters for political parties, women are very much present in political process. But as citizens who have unique demands and experiences, women seem to be absent in the political sphere. Women's interests and demands, their experiences of being oppressed and discriminated are rarely considered within political process. If empowerment is the 'strengthening of capacities',³ then is the guarantee of political equality doing so?

Are women present in political process, till the extent that they are capable of representing their specific demands and issues? Without the presence of women can their demands be properly articulated. If not, then should we be looking into increasing the presence of women representatives in political institutions? If empowerment is a process that changes the status of women through political and legal institutions and mechanism, then should women not be at the centre of decision-making process for women empowerment? Or can empowerment be delivered to women without their contribution in the law-making process? Do the popular

notions of women's representation and empowerment challenge the continuous patriarchy or not?

In this chapter I will answer the above questions and analyse to what extent the process of empowerment relates to women's presence in politics. I make a modest attempt to contribute to the ongoing debate on women's representation and empowerment in India.

2.1 The Process of Empowerment and the Politics of Presence:

In this section I try to analyse if women's presence/absence in representative institutions impacts the process of empowerment of women in India. The focus of Indian Constitution has always been social and economic transformation of marginalized sections of the society. But this commitment seems only half-hearted when we observe the lack of marginalized sections in political process. This also includes women who are one of the most marginalized and underrepresented sections in India. If transformation of women's position is the goal of political system, then perhaps women should be more visible in the political process. This is why it is important for my research to analyse the politics of presence for women in Indian political process.

It is a well-known fact that since independence women in India have acquired equal civil and political rights. They are recognized as political actors and play an important role in the political process of the country. At a first glance, it seems that the Indian political system has given women equal opportunity to fulfil their political demands. But when observed carefully, women are only recognized as political actors in terms of voters, members of political parties and interest groups. They are not completely included within the decision-making sphere of politics or formal political institutions like legislatures.

Women have been historically discriminated due to the influence of complex patriarchal system which are found in India. India's social and cultural system is based on the patriarchal hierarchy which subordinates women to men and allows for their discrimination to continue. This same discrimination is also seen in the economic sphere where women are not given the same opportunities as men. The political space also resonates the same condition. This is despite the guarantee of Fundamental Rights of equality and freedom which ensures that political and legal framework in India treats women equal to men. But does this difference mean that women's contribution to Indian political process is not needed?

The presence of women in political process plays an important role in sensitizing the government of the many exploitative and oppressive experiences which women face in their day to day lives. Many laws and policies are made specifically as a result of these demands which are articulated in the public sphere. But are these laws and policies efficient in addressing women's issues especially when women perhaps made the least contribution in the framing of these laws? I keep thinking about the under representation of women and how it impacts the process of women's empowerment. The reason I highlight this is because after seven decades of independence women barely hold positions in representative's institutions. The Indian democracy may have recognized women as political participants, but this same recognition does not extend to women as representatives. How is it that nearly half of the citizens in India are not adequately represented in political institutions? Can laws or policies for women which are made without adequate representation of women actually be effective for their empowerment?

Empowerment is an instrument through which there is a change in the position of the marginalized. Certain policies and laws are formulated to either distribute opportunities fairly or to prevent the influence of discriminatory practices⁴. Let us take for example the empowerment of marginalized classes in India. Many programmes, policies and laws are made to redistribute resources in such manner that the extreme difference in class is reduced. This is a challenging task but for decades the government has committed itself to poverty alleviation and distribution of economic resources for development purposes. These policies and plans differ in rural and urban area because the economic challenges are different. This class-based empowerment framework aims towards removing marginalization by eradicating poverty and economic discrimination in both rural and urban India. By availing these policies and programmes a poor person can change their economic condition and shift from their marginalized position. As less and less people remain within marginalized classes, eventually the issue of unfair distribution would be resolved. Here empowerment can be interpreted as an activity to change the both the identity and position of people.

But the same cannot be interpreted in empowerment for women or for marginalized castes. The policies and laws cannot change their identity which is the cause of marginalization and oppression in the first place. Women cannot become men to be empowered. Women will retain the identity of being women along their specific experiences of oppression and subordination. the task of the empowerment hence aims at eradicating constant oppression which women

experience. The laws and policies for women's empowerment especially deals with the complex nature of women's discrimination. This is why it is essential to include the lived reality of women's oppression within the realm of political sphere. The reality is that women are constantly excluded and marginalized in the political process. It is imperative that the current schemes of political empowerment acknowledge this.

There are many assumptions available for women's exclusion from political process. The most articulated one is that women just have less interest and knowledge in political process than men. Except voting they are not interested in formal politics and would rather stay within the realm of the private, especially household where they feel comfortable. This narrowed minded assumption ignores the fact that the formal political space is neither constructed nor modified to address women's demands due to which women are unable to articulate their demands efficiently. There is a certain disappointment which women experience within formal politics which barely accommodates their interests. As Wilkinson and Diplock state, 'Since the agenda of politics is defined and articulated primarily by men, many women are bound to be disconnected from traditional politics.'⁵

This disconnect discourages women from participating in formal political process to specifically address women's issues and concerns. The women who are or have been representatives stand for broader national goals and development agenda's rather than representing women's issues. Let us take for example, the election of the only female Prime Minister in India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi who rose to power due to her government's commitment towards poverty alleviation programmes, aggressive foreign policy and development goals. She represented the set of national goals and not women's demands which were going unaddressed⁶. The same can be said for regional leaders like Mayawati or Jayalalitha who have represented caste based or region-based agendas over women's issues.⁷ Even when women are elected in formal political institutions in important decision-making positions, their focus is on goals which are defined by men which may or may not accommodate women's issues. So, then who represents women?

In most cases, men represent women, their demands, and their experiences in political process. The entire political system is constructed to support the goals as determined by men. As Squires highlights, '...public sphere has been cast as male and defined in opposition to private of women.'⁸ It is not too farfetched to say that men and the experience of masculine in the centre of political process. Political equality has brought women into the political process, but this

inclusion is limited. Women are included in political process as long as their goals and demands are similar to men's or have a national agenda. Women's different experience and demands are not fully considered, and many times not even recognized within the political system. As mentioned above, the routine forms of exploitation which women face are rarely recognized as a major political issue.

To understand this better let us take the example of skewed sex ratios in India. According to the UNFPA's State of the World Population 2020 report out of the 142 million a total of 46 million girls are missing in India due to sex selection both pre and post-natal⁹. This means that female foetus and infants are being killed in India because our society is entrenched in patriarchal norms and considers women as a burden. To address this pathetic condition, there are laws like Preconception and Pre Natal-Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994 which bans the identification of gender before birth, and policies like '*Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*' which discourage the murdering of female infants and foetus and encourages families to treat girl child equally.

The laws and policies may condemn skewed sex ratios, but this practice continues even today. We can observe that there is an absence of a regular national level debate on such a sensitive issue. The continuous debate and deliberations which is required for raising awareness against skewed sex ratio is missing from legislative bodies. Missing female children are reduced to being a number which is presented in reports very year. The practices, structures and beliefs systems which led to female infanticide and female feticide are rarely questioned by representatives. While I accept that laws and policies have a positive impact on preventing female feticide, I do not believe that this is enough. The fact that 46 million missing girls are not at the centre of political debate in the Parliament and state legislatures shows the extent to which women's issues are side-lined in India. It is situations as urgent as this that form a strong case for politics of presence in India.

It is clear that women and women's issues do require more representation in formal politics in India. Yet the demand to increase political presence of women is strong met with strong opposition. The only time women's issues are deliberated over seriously is when it coincides with issues of national or state importance. This leads to the inadequate representation of the various forms of discriminations and inequalities which women experience routinely in their daily life. I must ask this question, does political equality as enshrined in the Constitution provide women with the space to represent their issues or participate in political activities

which highlights their experiences? Is it possible to challenge the patriarchal barriers which exclude women from political process without having a proper mechanism to represent them?

We must keep in mind that Indian Constitution focuses on social transformation, and this is done through slowly changing the political agenda by bringing in the issues of the marginalized sections like lower class, backward castes, tribals, women and others. The shift in political agenda is important. This shift is possible when representative institutions recognize the issues of the marginalized sections of the society. But who represents these issues? Should there be a reservation of seats in legislatures for marginalized sections or should the popularly elected representatives continue in hopes that one day they will change the political agenda for social transformation? When this question was posed in front of the Constituent Assembly, the women leaders held more faith in democratic process than reservation for women¹⁰. But as the '*Towards Equality*' report highlights, the democratic process was not able to represent women's issues as it thought it would¹¹. This is perhaps why increasing more women in representative institutions has become such an important issue for women's organization in India. If women issues are absent in mainstream political agenda, or if their issues are represented in a cosmetic manner, then women continue to remain marginalized and disempowered. There is a need to rethink the manner in which we imagine representation of women in political institutions.

In her popular work *The Politics of Presence*, Anne Phillips provides a case for increasing representation of women in legislatures. She highlights that there is difference between 'politics of ideas' and 'politics of presence'. She states that most of politics depends on 'politics of ideas' which focuses on developing policies set by dominant political parties¹². In this case, the political agenda is mostly set dominant social groups who already hold a lot of political agenda. This is due to the fact that dominant social groups usually also prevail over the political debate and discussion which determine policy and certain groups do not get represented at all or are severely underrepresented. There is a need to promote groups who can 'mirror' or depict the issues and demands of the marginalized sections. This is possible only if there is a shift from 'politics of ideas' to 'politics of presence'.

The idea of politics of presence relies on the notion that experiences of marginalized groups cannot be ignored within political agenda. The articulation of the experiences of oppression and discrimination play a fundamental role in policy making. This experience can only be represented by those who are part of the marginalized group. This is termed as 'mirror

representation' which depends on the belief that certain issues and demands can be better represented by those who have experienced it.¹³ As Meena Danda explains, 'Collectivities such as of women and *dalits* have been excluded from political decision-making bodies for so long, that 'what' their interests are, from their point of view, is not clearly articulated.'¹⁴ A voter may know what their interests are but may not be able to transform it into a systematic political demand. In the same manner, the electoral in India may understand the necessity for women's issues to be represented but may not be able to properly articulate their demands.

For example, after The Central Goods and Service Tax Act, 2017, when tax slabs were being determined, sanitary napkins were tagged as luxury items and taxed at 12%, despite sanitary napkins being an essential commodity for the health and hygiene of many women and girls in India.¹⁵ It is funny that sanitary napkins are already unaffordable to most women and girls, yet the Goods and Service Tax committee decided to tag it as a luxury item. One must note that the Goods and Service Tax council did not have even one woman in it. This shows the importance of representation through experience. There was a higher possibility that if women representatives had been a part of the meeting, they would have pointed out the folly in recognizing sanitary napkins as a luxury item. They may have also pointed out how this taxation caused a major setback in many state governments policies to encourage distribution of subsidized or free sanitary napkins to young school going girls.

Even though all women do not have the same experiences of inequality, women do share some similar experiences which have shaped their political goals. The under representation of these women centric goals and issues have to be corrected. In India the easiest way to correct underrepresentation is through setting quotas for women in all representative institutions. I would like to emphasise, that 'politics of presence' focuses on fair representations for increasing political inclusion of groups which have been historically excluded from political process. In India 'politics of presence' is translated into setting reservations for groups who have been historically marginalized, like women. The idea here is that for women to be empowered they need to be numerically present in political institutions. It is assumed that increasing number of women will automatically lead towards better representation of women's demands and interests which in turn would lead to more access to political empowerment.

Anne Phillips highlights four main arguments why 'politics of presence' is important. First is the argument of roles models, that is, more women in representative institutions will encourage more women to participate in politics. The second argument is that of justice, that the equal

number of women and men in political institutions will lead to gender justice.¹⁶ The third argument is that women's interests, that more women will lead to more representation of women's interest. The fourth argument is that women will revitalize democracy as they engage with politics differently from men. Despite giving these reasons Anne Phillips states that the only reason 'politics of presence' is relevant in a political system is due the gross underrepresentation of women.

In India, all these arguments work in favour of 'politics of presence'. The demand for increasing the presence of women in representative institutions is not a new one. And all these demands have been supplemented by at least one of the above reasonings. In my observation political parties assume the argument of 'role models' and 'revitalization of democracy' while women groups assume the arguments of 'interest' and 'justice'.¹⁷ Most political parties state that the increase in number of women will encourage them to act as role models for young girls and aid in their participation in political process. Political party narrative also talks about the need to include women as a means to make democracy more representative. Local self-governments for example were proposed to achieve the twin goals of democratic decentralization and increase in leadership. Women's groups have promoted the idea of politics of presence so that those interest which are specific to women can be better represented. They also question the underrepresentation of women as unjust and believe that increasing presence of women in representative institutions will aid in achieving justice. Whichever argument we choose to justify 'politics of presence', we cannot deny its importance. Yet, the concept of 'politics of presence' has been prone to extensive criticism in Indian political narrative.

The popular argument against 'political of presence' is that women do not need special representation as they are not excluded in the first place. Women extensively participate during elections especially as voters and political party members, so their usefulness as contestants is not as urgent. They consciously take the decision to vote for contestants who highlight their demands irrespective of the gender or issue. The second major contention is that politics of present of women would fragment the nation's unity as the national goals and objectives will be divided on gendered lines. Anne Phillips calls this 'balkanization' of polity which will harms the process of social cohesion.¹⁸ While the threat to national unity seems like a very important argument, we must keep in mind that this social cohesion is androcentric in its nature. So, men's experiences and demands favoured over women's experiences. The idea of politics of

presence would recognize women as a different group whose demands should not be merged with the demands of men.

Political equality assumes that men and women are equal. The idea that women should be included in political process as they are not different from men is what led women to attain political equality in the first place. 'Politics of presence' on the other hand would argue that women are different from men and hence require special frameworks to ensure their representation and participation in the political sphere.

The idea of political equality in India is implicit in the context of political participation but not clearly implied in the context of political representation.¹⁹ Political equality in India is more related to the process of political participation. This is true especially for women's political presence in India which has focused on increasing participation rather than representation. One can claim that after Independence, women enjoy political equality because of their increasing participation during the election process. Whenever the need has risen, women's groups have actively participated in the political sphere so that their demands are addressed. The anti-dowry protests, anti-price rise protest, protest against sexual assault, protest for change in the personal laws, illustrate that in the past few decades women have actively participated in political process through protests to highlight their demands. The idea of political equality through participation has given women and women's groups the ability to articulate women's demands and bring in their experiences within the political space. Yet political equality in terms of representation is still a struggle for women within political institutions. It seems as if political equality in India is only meant for participatory purposes rather than representation. But this is a very narrow way of analysing political equality. I have to ask, what is the point of equality, if the political process does not acknowledge the specific challenges which women experience? Is the legal guarantee of equality enough or should political space be more responsive to women's demands? Can political space be responsive to women issues without the representation of women in legislative institutions?

The fact is that political equality is a very slippery term and needs to be deliberated more. The idea of equality of sameness would reject the notion of special recognition to women in political process. It would assume that as soon as equality was guaranteed, all forms of discrimination in political process which excluded women would collapse. It would assume that after equality is guaranteed, women become equal to men and hold the same position as men. But this would be true only if women's position is compared to those of men. Women's separate interests and

demands would be either excluded or subordinated to the more popular androcentric demands within the political space. 'Politics of presence' challenges this logic of sameness. It states that women's experiences are different from men and political process must recognize this difference within the realm of political participation and representation. After all women's empowerment depends on recognizing the discrimination and oppression which plagues women specifically and working towards eradicating them. For the sake of women's empowerment, women need to be recognized as different political actors from men.

If women and their demands are to be represented adequately then the idea of politics of presence seems inevitable, especially for the sake of empowerment. After all, as Hanna Pitkin states, 'representation is acting in interest of the represented in a manner which is responsive to them'²⁰. If political sphere wants to empower women, there is a need to represent their specific demands within representative institutions. To assume that only the legal claim to political equality amounts to empowerment is an illusion. If the legislatures want to truly empower women, then they have to work towards increasing women's presence in political process. They need to realize that women's political position does not become equal to men just because equality was granted. There is also a need to realize that women on their own are not a single category. To say that legal guarantees of political equality have undone the inequality and disempowerment which women experience is to perpetuate a myth. Legal guarantees only provide an opportunity to access political equality which was denied before. For a long time, we have been believing the myth that political rights have made women equal to men in India. But the underrepresentation of women in political institutions has proven the desperate need for politics process to be more sensitive to women's demands. But why should we be increasing the representation of women in legislatures?

It is necessary to address the under representation of women in political institutions as the unequal political representation after so many years of attaining political equality indicates that there are many patriarchal barriers which have prevented women from accessing equal political power. It is imperative to create frameworks which include women within political institutions and also represent their demands. This will aid in reversing the exclusion of women from decision making process. The greater number of women in the Parliament and state legislatures may increase the chances of women's issues which are otherwise side-lined due to underrepresentation, to become the centre of political debate. While this may seem to be symbolical in nature, it challenges the assumption that women are less suited to govern in

comparison to men. It also brings down the stereotype that women cannot govern the same way as men. This inclusion will make the legislature more legitimate and visibly more representative of women.

Another reason for including more women in representatives is that there will be a greater chance for women's demands to be represented in political institutions. As Judith Squires mentions, 'the needs and interests peculiar to women will be differently represented by other women.'²¹ At the moment, there are women's issues are only represented when there are widespread protests by interest groups or women's organization or when their issues suit the agenda of a political party. In 2011, the country saw a large-scale protest after the brutal rape of a young woman in Delhi. Women's organization, non-government organization, members of political parties and even citizens came on the streets to protest against the inadequacy of institutional mechanism for the safety of women. They also protested against the problematic rape laws. This led to a change in consciousness of the legislature who immediately sought to modify the laws. The large-scale protest sensitized the law makers to respond to the violence which women faced in the public space. For a few years, women's safety was a paramount concern of the political parties, but as the protests slowed down, political parties also abandoned this concern even though the institutional mechanism for women's safety continues to remain weak in India. Similar to the condition of 'missing girls', the legislatures interest in deliberating over women's experience with violence and assault lasted only if the uproar did.

Sometimes political parties use women as a disadvantaged group to forward their own agenda. Let us take for example 'The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019' which makes divorcing by saying 'talaq' three times illegal. This law divided the opinion of people, as many celebrated it to be a landmark law, others believed that this caused the unnecessary criminalization of the Muslim man. It is claimed that the criminalization of the Muslim man was not for the empowerment of women but rather to present a distorted view of the minority group. Women's rights were used as a tool to forward the political party's own discriminatory communal politics.²² When the question of women's rights to access temples like *Sabrimala*²³ were raised, the same government vehemently opposed women's access to the inner sanctum of the temple. The rule of oppression and empowerment differ according to the ideology of the political party. The contrasting views towards women's rights indicates that political parties do not have a clear goal towards women's empowerment. They are only focussing on issues which helps in forwarding their own agenda or are sporadically raised in

the civil society. Hence it is believed that presence of women in representative institutions may help in articulating the interests of women outside of the political party's own agenda.

It is often argued that since all representatives are elected by citizen, there is no need for special frameworks for women. The mandate of citizens showcases the political preferences of the country. If citizens prefer representatives who prioritizes women's demands, then they would have voted for such representatives. If they have not done so, then women's issue may not be of importance. But to use the mechanism of vote as a tool to decide what the government should, or should not do, is very limiting. It condemns large sections of the society, especially the marginalized sections, to absolute political subordination. If people do not vote for candidates who campaign for women's issues, then does that mean that women's experiences of discrimination and inequality is not of political importance? Political preferences are not neatly divided and so it is very difficult to determine which issue is of political importance. For women's issues to be adequately represented it is essential that women form a substantial number of elected representatives. This will allow legislature to be more representative of the variety of issues which are not given due importance otherwise. It may also help in creating space for women to challenge the dominant patriarchal beliefs which are presented in the political process as conventional.

While politics of presence is an important notion in the current debate of women's empowerment in India, this theory comes with its shortcomings. The most important challenge to the politics of presence is the fact that 'women' can almost never be identified as a single category in India. In India, women's experiences are defined by her membership and status within community, religion, caste, ethnicity, class, race and among other identities. It is not too farfetched to say, that women's experiences are influenced complex socio-cultural arrangements which they are a part off. This means, that the experiences of discrimination and oppression are too affected by these same structures and arrangement. Therefore, there cannot really be a singular manner of resolving women's issues and guaranteeing them empowerment.

When political equality was guaranteed to women in India, it was assumed that all women are equal among themselves. They were unequal only when compared to men. But is this really the case? Do all women in India enjoy equal access to political rights? Are all women in India so similar that they can be represented as unit/category, like reservation policy would assume? Does politics of presence mean the absence of social and community identity of women?

These questions have disturbed even the staunchest believers of politics of presence, as women cannot be identified separately from their class, religion, caste, race or ethnic identities. All women experience discrimination and oppression differently as their position in the social, economic, and political structure changes. For example, the difference between able bodied woman and differently able woman is very clear. But when provisions or policies are made for women, these differences are not considered. The discrimination which differently abled woman face is coming from their identity of being differently abled and a woman. They face a multi-layered discrimination which does not get acknowledged when making policy.

Differently abled women have to choose if they want to be represented as women or as differently abled. Their lived reality of facing inequality because of their identity is rarely talked about, let alone represented. Other factors, like class, caste or race can also affect the level of inequality which differently abled women face. A reserved train ticket or subsidized air flight means very little to a differently abled person belonging to lower income households as they may never have an opportunity to travel. It is meaningless to a differently abled woman, as she would be too restrained by social and economic barriers to access these provisions. This form inequality which is combination of women's identity as women and as a member of a certain marginalized section of the society is the reality for many women in India. Who represents them and their experiences in the political sphere?

As Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan asks, 'Empirically, where are the 'women' to be found?'²⁴. 'Women' has become a problematic category to feminists, especially during the discussion of reservations. When women first demanded political rights, they stated that there was no difference between them and men. In order to be equal to men, the difference between women was ignored. Pateman highlights that in politics, 'Women is natural and timeless category, defined by certain innate, biological characteristics.'²⁵ Women became a homogenized and essentialized category who were upper or middle class, educated, heterosexual women. The difference between women was sacrificed so that women could be considered as equal to men. But the reality is that there are differences within women which change the extent of discrimination which women face. The project of fair representation is a project of fixing the identity of women which is assumed to be equal to men. Such a notion of fair representation actually legitimizes discrimination of all women who do not come under this homogenised identity.

Women who were guaranteed vote during the election of 1937 in pre-independent India belonged to this category. The poor, uneducated, lower caste, unmarried woman was completely ignored when the privilege of voting was distributed. And this was not problematized enough considering the contribution of women from all sections of the society during the freedom movement. Of course, once we got independence these differences collapsed on paper, but unfortunately remained in political practice. The experiences which were included in politics, were mainly experiences of upper or middle class, educated, heterosexual women. Those who were chosen to represent women also mostly, belong to this category. The experiences of women, who are lower caste, lower class, differently abled, minority, homosexual barely got recognized in political sphere on their own. Even when it did, it is mostly lip service. This issue continues even today.

Let me highlight the *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna* which was introduced by the government in 2016 for poor women living in rural areas. Under this scheme women would get subsidized LPG connection so that they can utilize gas cylinders instead of cow dung or coal which causes many health problems to them. This scheme is supposed to revolutionize the lives of women in rural areas. But it makes to very prominent mistakes.²⁶ Firstly, it stereotypes women as people working in the kitchen and upholds the discriminating traditional role of women within the household. Secondly, it forgets the women living in rural areas usually do not have income to afford a gas cylinder, even when given at subsidized rate. The below poverty rate in rural areas is Rs.33 per day, so it is nearly impossible that people can afford expensive fuel for daily consumption. I have to ask, who exactly benefits from this policy? Poor women definitely do not get much benefit from this. Considering how this policy celebrates stereotypes, women in particular gain nothing from this policy. Since women whom the policy is meant for do not benefit much, it seems the policy was made so political parties can appear sympathetic to women's demands without really doing anything. I come back to same question, who is the 'woman' who is being represented?

I would like to bring in Rajeswari Sundar Rajan deliberations over the notion of 'women' in her book *The Scandal of the State*. She highlights that mostly the terms 'women' and 'gender' are mostly considered as stable terms.²⁷ 'Women' is regarded in binary opposition to men, as if everything which is 'non-man' is 'woman'. Such a definition of women ignores the social construction of gender identities and also rigidly fixes the ideas of men and women. While feminists reject this definition, unfortunately, this is the definition which is mostly used in

formal politics. 'Women' that is not man, is a group which requires specific laws and policies for them. Most of the time, the difference between 'women' based on class and caste. Race, ethnicity, religion are identities which are ignored. In formal politics, women are mostly recognized as an empirical group, as an interest group or as a category. So, they are usually seen as sexed individuals who vote, as a group with similar interests or as a category in opposition to men. This means that the multiple identities of women are ignored in the political process.

She states that it is important to deconstruct the idea of 'women' in India as women cannot form a single category. The influence of class, caste, and religion on women's lived experiences is too great to ignore. Women in India face discrimination due to their gender, but this discrimination may or may not be similar in nature. From the social and community structures that they are a part of to the economic conditions they live in women's experiences of marginalization changes. The State has to take cognizance of this and create laws and policies which include the multiple identities and experiences which frame women political goals and interests. Unfortunately, the current scheme of politics of presence does not do this.

The current idea of women's representation is still focused on 'what identity' is being represented rather than 'which issue' being represented. Even though there is a lot of focus on increasing the number of women in legislative bodies, no one really thinks as to who these women are representing and what issues to consider. Politics of presence will say that elected members should 'mirror' the group they are representing. The shared issues and demands of women ought to be represented by women members in the legislative body. Here we assume that women share common experiences of oppression and inequality which needs to be addressed urgently. If women are considered as a mostly fixed category devoid of any social and community association then the 'shared' experience of women also remains fixed and easy to represent. But this is far from truth. As Vasanti Raman eloquently states,

'One needs to note that both hierarchy and diversity have never been static but are continuously reconstituted and reconstructed by the operation of historical and social processes; their intermeshing has also been characterized by a similar dynamism and historicity. Thus, the women's question has never been a women's question alone.'²⁸

Women are a part of social, political, and economic hierarchies which continue to change with time, so it is unfair to think of women as a static character. Women have a shared history of

oppression, but this oppression has changed according to the time, situation and social condition in which women live. If we assume that the experiences of all women in India can be represented by thirty-three per cent reservation, then we are suggesting a model for politics of idea's rather than politics of presence. Women through reservation are representing a set of political ideas or beliefs which they may have had no role in deciding. If women in India were truly representing women, then they ought to recognize the diverse identities which women hold in India. For fair representation of women in India, it is imperative that women from all communities, religions, caste, class race, ethnicity, disability are adequately represented.

According to me, within the realm of Indian politics, the relationship between women's empowerment and politics of presence is a close one. But at the same time for politics of presence to be efficient as a democratic tool, it has to recognize that women are not a single category. To imagine women's empowerment without their presence in political decision-making maybe a futile dream but imagine women as a single category is a nightmare. One of the foundations of political empowerment is the presence of women in political participation and representation. This is one of the reasons why women's reservation plays such an important role in political process. To overcome the absence of women in political institution the idea of reservation for women in representative institutions is proposed. It is believed that reservations act as a tool for including women in the politics and hence, aid them in their pursuit for empowerment.

The idea of politics of presence and empowerment of women may go hand in hand, but this is definitely an uneasy alliance. Underrepresentation of women is a major issue which needs to address in order to even claim that women are close to empowerment. But the process of granting representation ought to be creating a more sustainable political system rather than just reproduce inequality in a new manner. To understand this better, it is imperative to understand what exactly constitutes as women's representation in India.

2.2 Women's Representation in Indian Political Process

The representation of women or rather the lack of representation of women is a cause of much debate. Fair representation is the crux of any democratic system and that is why representation of women is such an important issue in politics. The demand for fair representation is not a new one, but as decades have passed the nature of women's representation has changed a lot. What started as a demand for equal right to vote and contest elections has today become a

demand for empowerment and representation. Women are no longer satisfied with right to vote only. Today political equality means, equal access to political positions and resources. There is a demand to increase women's participation and representation within the Indian political process as the ideas, interests and identities of women are severely underrepresented.

In order to combat this under representation, the Indian political process has focused on the twin goals of increasing women's participation and representation in political institutions. Through social and political movements, the participation of women in politics has increased substantially. The participation of women during election process as voters is also very encouraging. But this same trend of increasing participation of women is not witnessed in representation. This absence of women in representative institutions has been an area of concern for proponents of equal political rights for a long time. Even though one would wish it, is it possible for women to be elected in representative institutions in today's political condition?

If we observe Indian politics, then at the moment it appears that women participate in political process as voters but not many women participate in the formulation of laws and policies as representatives. This convenient condition seems highly unnatural considering that the demand for political equality for women comes specifically to increase women's involvement in political sphere. Pre independence women's organizations fought vehemently for political equality for women, stating that women can contribute greatly to the political process. These organization focussed on women interests and role in political process. Yet, after independence, we have rarely seen women interests and demands at the centre of India's political process. The dismissal number of women in legislative institutions and the lack of opportunities to women in electoral process seems to compromise with women's position in political process. Political equality on its own can do very little to empower women. But guarantee to political equality combined with unbiased structures of participation and representations could potentially aid in bringing in women's empowerment.

This is why it is imperative to understand why underrepresentation of women in Indian political process exists when it is not consistent with the objective of empowerment. The lack of elected representatives who are women, in national and state politics indicates women's demands and issues are rarely represented in political process. Even when women are elected, they mainly focus on forwarding generalized political issues dealing with national goals. As the 'Towards Equality' report highlights,

‘Women candidates and legislatures have rightly seen their roles as representatives of the people. Both in Parliament and State legislature they have been more concerned with problems of a general nature dealing with issues of nation and state importance’²⁹

Women who are elected as representatives are elected due to their ability to address issues of national importance which is decided by political parties. At national and state level, most women representatives usually ignore their identity as women and present themselves as members of political parties representing their agenda. So, it is important to ask, who represents women issues and demands in political process?

Despite access to political equality, there is a very evident gender gap in political process. This gender gap is seen in two ways, firstly the interest and demands of women are subordinated to those of men, and secondly, women are rarely present in decision making process. Women may not be completely absent from the political process, but that does not mean that women are present within the political process either. Women in Indian politics occupy the delicate place between legal inclusion and structural exclusion. Somehow despite all the efforts made since independence, women are trapped in this position. There is a need to include women in political decision making to shift from structural exclusion to inclusion. From political priorities to actual decision-making women and their issues are side-lined.

The manner in which political process is progressing, it seems unlikely that women will be voted into representative institutions for representing women’s issues and experiences. As mentioned above, there is a dominance of politics of ideas, which means that most voters will elect leaders on the basis of shared ideas which will influence laws and policy making. The chances the electors will choose representation for ‘who’ they are is less. The notions of ‘what’ needs to be represented and ‘who’ needs to be represented are always seen in competition to each other in politics.

Political process seeks to subordinate one idea to the other. So, whenever the demands for representation of a certain marginalized category comes up, it is assumed that the goals of the entire nation will be comprised. The assumption here is that all agree that objectives regarding the growth of nation benefit everyone while only women will benefit from their specific demands. So, if political process prefers women’s representation it is assumed that all other political agendas will suffer. In India national goals always supersede specific demands no matter how urgent and just these demands are. This is why political institutions hesitate in

distributing representation on the basis of identity. It is believed that representation of ideas is much more fruitful than representation of identity³⁰.

This belief is visible in mainstream political process, especially when answering the question of women's representation. While the stark underrepresentation of women in legislative institutions is worrisome to grant women legislative position just because of their gender is considered even more problematic. It is assumed that if women's interests are focussed upon then the political system is distracting itself from other major national issues. Here women are considered as a minority in Indian democracy, and hence any attempt to increase their political presence is looked upon as a hindrance to democratic process. But this as incorrect assumption as women is not a minority group but rather an underrepresented group.

The underrepresentation which women experience in political sphere is shaped by patriarchal values and biases. There is a deep-rooted discrimination against women in political sphere cannot be undone by simply granting political rights. There is a need to acknowledge that the political, social, and economic structure which discriminate against women and subordinate them to men. Due to this discrimination women are unable to participate in political process in the same manner as men. To solve this difference and create a more equal ecosystem for women to be considered as equal to men, affirmative action in form of reservations is suggested.

The historical exclusion of women from politics has made it difficult for them to articulate their interests.³¹ Since political sphere is androcentric in nature, all demands are automatically translated to suit this male dominated narrative. Increasing participation of women does not mean that they will be able to articulate their demands adequately in this system. It only means that now women also will speak for mostly androcentric demands. This highlights that the absence of women within representative institutions also makes the institutions extremely male centred. It is believed that through introducing reservations for women and increasing their number in representative institutions, there is a possibility to shift the male centred narrative to a more inclusive one. This is why perhaps the Indian political system is so dependent on reservations.

Reservation acts as a compensatory or protective instrument through which the State attempts to undo the historical asymmetry in representative institutions. In India, reservations are the most relied upon method for distributing fair representation in India. The idea of reservation for women has always coincided with the demand for representation for women. The issue of

women's representation through reservation has been a debate in India for nearly a century. The most initial debates for women's representation and reservation can be found after the Government of India Act, 1935 granted women the right to vote. This right to vote came after a long struggle by women's organizations who demanded that women should have the same autonomy as men. Yet, this right to vote was not without conditions. Only women who owned property or had attained a certain level of education were considered as qualified to vote.³² Despite the fact that many women from all walks of life participated in the national movement, very few women were actually involved in the process of elections as voters or contestants. This severely impacted women's representation as there was an obvious male bias in the political process.

While the major political parties, especially Indian National Congress was sympathetic to women demands for social reforms and equality, they were not very enthusiastic about women's direct involvement in representative institutions. They expected women leaders to educate the candidates about women's demands, enroll and encourage women voters and when necessary, also campaign for the candidates. But this was the extent to which political parties granted women to participate in the election process. The idea that women need to be represented for the social and political reforms was too forward for that time, where the main political goal was independence of the nation. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and M K Gandhi endorsed women's participation, but they were not too keen on women's representation. Geraldine Forbes highlights this by observing that the pre independence political process was so focused on political independence that it chooses to subordinate the demands of marginalized groups. They believed that the demands for political freedom was a concern for everyone, while the demand for women's emancipation was something which only women were concerned about. According to them the chances that the men would vote for women's demands over national demands were less³³.

The cohesiveness of the idea of freedom subordinated the demand of representation for women. Women's rights, demands and experiences were not considered as important as independence on the country. The demand for separate electoral also was not very successful as women's participation was very low. In the elections of 1937, fifty-six women entered the legislature, 41 were from reserved seats, 10 from unreserved and 5 were nominated. This made it clear that women's representation was encouraged through reservation or nomination rather than contesting elections³⁴. These seats were reserved keeping in mind that the political goal was

independence. Under no circumstance were women allowed to prioritize their demands over the demands of the nation. Once again, we see the competition between ideas and presence taking place. Between representing a unified idea of freedom and the interest of women, the political process gave importance to freedom. The idea of 'who' is represented was subordinated to 'what' is represented.

At the same time, the unity of women irrespective of caste, class and religion was shaking too. As identity politics became more obvious, women's religious, class, and caste-based identity also started emerging within the demand of representation. Most women leaders of that time were upper class, educated and related by birth or marriage to male members of Indian freedom movement. As more and more women participated in political process the fragmented nature of women's experiences also become visible. This contributed to the distrust that women had in reservation of seats in legislatures. The lack of interest in reservation was set in stone when a decade later the debate on women's reservation was revived in the Constituent Assembly.

Most members did not want reservations for women and firmly believed that through democratic process equal political rights will be given. As Renuka Ray, member of the constituent assembly states during her speech,

'We feel that women will get more chances in the future to come forward and work in the free India, if the consideration is of ability alone. With these words, Sir, I should like to support this Clause which has done away once and for all with reservation of seats for women, which we consider to be an impediment to our growth and an insult to our very intelligence and capacity.'³⁵

The idea of reservation for women was abhorrent to the women leaders of pre- independent India, as they believed that due to the availability of reserved seats most electors felt the need to ignore women when they competed for general seats. They believed that it would create a general impression that women would never be a part of political process if it was not for the forced inclusion. They treated this as an insult to the potential of women as leaders and representators. They also believed that reservation did not give men and women an equal political position but rather left women dependent of men's grace. The discourse on reservation and representation stagnated after the rejection of reserved seats for women by the Constituent Assembly.

Then in 1974, the '*Towards Equality*' clearly stated that the democratic goals of political equality were left unfulfilled.³⁶ This compelled both government and women's organizations to rethink their attitude towards reservations. While the idea of fixing reservations was uncomfortable, the absence of women was too obvious to be ignored. Women organization also noticed the silence of laws and policies regarding women. The anti-dowry protests, anti-child marriage protest, protest to reform the laws on sexual assault, among others, show cased that the legislature was not able to understand the social, economic, and political positions of women which is why it became important for women's organizations to actively participate in political process. The report also highlighted that most politics and plans for development were not accessible to women. Women were still stuck playing the traditional roles and were not able to benefit India's developing democracy. This showed that the barriers to equality were too deeply entrenched in our social, political, and economic structure. Women's issues and demands were lost among the greater demand for development of the nation. This was a strange situation considering that during the time this report was published the Prime Minister of the country was a woman.

Though the report stated the discouraging situation of women in representative bodies, it could not ignore that some women also held important position in the political sphere. Women were ministers, ambassadors, and bureaucrats yet at the same time women's issues were lost within the greater political agenda of development. Women politicians too chose not to associate profoundly with women's issues. Indira Gandhi herself announced 'I am not a feminist.'³⁷ and disconnected herself from giving preference to representing women's issues. Like her, many women politicians also sympathized with the condition of women in India, but they did not proactively challenge these conditions. This disconnect continued as the experiences of women politicians who were looked upon as political elites was very different from the experiences of masses of women. Most women politicians came from political families, who were upper class and upper caste. From their social and economic status to their political status, women politicians in power had a privilege which majority women did not have. Even if they wanted, the chances that they could represent women's issues effectively was less. This led to the creation of a new consciousness among women's organizations.

They realized that the underrepresentation of women in legislative institutions was twofold. Firstly, women were numerically absent from the decision-making institutions. The fact despite political equality women did not give the same access to representative institutions like men

was a rude awakening to most women organizations. Secondly, women's issues were also underrepresented in the political sphere. The deep-seated patriarchal beliefs made the political space male oriented. The women who were involved focused on agenda's driven by men. Women representatives were a part of a masculine State³⁸ whose intention was to protect the subordinated women rather than empower them. Women's issues were only relevant when it impacted the status or development of the country. It seemed women could not just depend on political process anymore to resolve their issues anymore. Due to this the demand for women's reservation as a means to fair representation of women in the Indian political process rose once more.

In 1988, the National Perspective Plan brought forward the suggestion of 30% formula for women's reservation in local government bodies and committees. This plan has suggested that the 30% seats could be filled through nomination or co-option as it would be difficult to fill these seats up through elections only. Women's organizations rejected this proposal stating that this would create a wrong impression of the women in political sphere. Women would be looked upon as incapable and weak in comparison to men. In the long run, this would weaken women's position in political process rather than strengthen it. The only possible solution they offered was that 30% seat should be reserved for women through election only. Women should be elected in government bodies rather than nominated. Over time, through democratic process, women would become an inevitable part of the political system. The barriers to women inclusion would collapse as women continue to participate and act as representatives. In the long run women would be more benefitted through reservation rather than nomination.

In 1993, after The Constitution (Seventy Third) Amendment Act, 1993 and The Constitution (Seventy Fourth) Amendment Act, 1993 was passed women were given thirty-three per cent reservation in local self-governments. It was assumed that this will encourage women to participate more in grass root political process, through which their contribution to the State and national political will also increase. Their presence in local governments would ensure that women's issues and demands are addressed within the social, political, and economic structures that they interact with. Reservations would also pave way for women leaders to access political opportunities. Eventually, local leaders can aim to represent at a national and state level. It was believed that in the long run the structures which excluded women would disintegrate and women would play a much greater role in the union, state and local politics. Overall, the reservation for women at local governments seemed like a good idea as it brought women into

decision making bodies. But that's all it seemed to do. The quotas for women focused on increasing the numerical presence of women and hoped that this would respond to women's demands. Nowhere are we ensured that women's representation would ensure the representation of women's issues and demands. Does the increasing participation of women in election process and representative institution respond to women's demands and issues at all?

If we pick up a newspaper or read any election analysis, we usually see the high levels of voter share of women during the election process. In recent centre and state elections, we have observed that more than fifty percent of women electors' vote. At first glance, this number shows the encouraging picture of women's participation in political process, but when the election data is analysed carefully, this picture of women's participation starts to distort a little. Let me give a brief analysis of women's participation in Union Election in the past few years to elaborate this point.

The participation and representation of women is best observed within the electoral process of the country. The participation of women as both voters and contestants act as an important indicator of the position of women in Indian political process. In 2009, women made up for a 47.43% of the total electors and 46.78 % out of the total voters during the union elections³⁹. Five years later, in 2014, women made up for a 47.80% of the total electors and 48.95 % out of the total voters during the union elections⁴⁰. In the next union elections of 2019, women made up for a 48.08% of the total electors and 47.93 % of the total voters⁴¹. In the past three terms, the number of women as electors and voters has remained almost the same. The number of women who have voted over women electors has increased significantly, as in 2009 this number was 55.82%,⁴² but in 2014 and 2019 union elections this number has been 66.44%⁴³ and 67.18%⁴⁴ respectively.

From the above data, we are able to observe two things. Firstly, women make up for nearly half of the electors and voters during union elections for the past fifteen years and this number is constantly increasing. Secondly, most women vote during union elections, especially in the last two elections, where nearly seventy per cent of the women electors exercised their right to vote. While men dominate the vote bank, women too form a substantial vote bank during election process. In the past decade, there has been a substantial growth in women's involvement in political process especially as voters. But is this growing participation of women reflected when women are chosen as representatives?

In the 2009 elections, 556 women contested out of which only 59 were elected⁴⁵. In the 2014 union elections, 668 women contested out of which only 62 women were elected.⁴⁶ While in the recent, 2019 elections, 724 women contested the elections out of which only 78 were elected.⁴⁷ If we compare the number of women who participated as voters during the election process, to the women who contested the election, we can understand the extent to which women are underrepresented in the political process. Women form such a significant number as a voter, yet the number of women contesting election is dismissal. Women as a group are barely given a chance to contest on behalf of a political party. Is it even possible for women to contest to represent only women's demand? While women's vote is as significant to men's vote, women's access to contest elections is not as encouraged as that of men. The male domination over the election process shows that patriarchal barriers still exist and prevent women from accessing equal political rights. It is also worrisome that only 10% to 15% of the total women who contest elections are elected as representatives.

Since women form such a large group number of voters, it is sensible that women also act as representatives. The lack of women as contestants and representatives is a very problematic situation in a democratic political process. If representation is about being responsive to the demands of the citizens, then it is very clear that women are not being represented properly. Even after many years of reservations at local level, the imagined change in political position of women is not realized. It almost indicates that women are not regarded as a group who have specific interests which needs to be represented in legislative institutions. It also indicates that women's different identities and experiences are not represented in the political process. Therefore, the debate over fair representation of women and the need for reservations continues even today.

The data pertaining to women representation is worrisome considering that number of women participating in political process. Women in India have specific demands especially with regards to equality and safety. The political, social and economic inequality which women experiences on a daily basis rarely gets represented in the legislatures. The issues of safety of women from violence both within and outside their homes is also a major issue influencing women's specific demands. While male candidates can easily represent these demands, they mostly do not do so. I refer once again to the understanding that is it very difficult to articulate women's issues within a male obsessed political system. This also means that when representatives are elected, they are elected to represent mostly these male centred demands

only. On its own, women's representation is dismissal and so we once again fall back of the idea of reservation which has been applied at the local level

Under the Seventy Third Constitution Amendment Act, 1993 and Seventy Fourth Constitution Amendment Act, 1993 women are granted minimum one third reservation in local self-governments at rural and urban areas. In some states this reservation goes up to fifty per cent. The sole purpose of this reservation is included women into political decision making. At local level, especially in rural regions, women are politically marginalized and mostly do not get the opportunities to articulate their demands. They are also isolated from the political process which is considered mainly as a male activity. Through reservation more women and their interests will be added in the political process. This would do two things; firstly, women's demands will be represented better and secondly, more women will be encouraged to participate in politics as leaders and decision makers. The numerical presence of women is supposed to challenge the male centred political process and decision making.

The reservation of women in local self-governments is hailed as a great achievement for women's empowerment. More representation of women at local level has reduced the extreme gender gap in decision making institutions. But does this mean that women are being represented better? Do reservations act as an instrument to empower women or do they only create an illusion of empowerment? Is it possible that the politics of presence through fixing of quota's does not challenge the patriarchal influence in political process but rather facilitates it?

I admit that through reservation women participation as voters has increased substantially. Political parties today propose policies and plans for women's benefit specifically to garner their vote. Many women also support political parties based on the number of pro women policies which they announce. Mobilizing women as voters has become a very important part of political process. But mobilizing women as representatives, is still uncommon. And why should it not be? Who is this 'woman' who needs to be represented? How do we identify with her? Is 'woman' a single category who can be represented in isolation from her social and community identities?

But is this the aim of reservations in the first place or are reservations a tool to continue patriarchy in India? In the next section I deliberate over this question by critically analysing the proposed bills for women's reservations in Parliament and state Legislatures.

2.3 Women's Reservation as a Site for Patriarchy:

As women got more involved in the political process, the gross inequality which women experienced in political, social, and economic life could no longer be hidden and there was a need to take steps to reduce the huge difference between women and men in all spheres. It was women's organizations which came forward and rallied for women's interests. They participated greatly in anti-price rise protest, protest against violence on women, protest for better laws for women among other. Women's organizations and women became a prominent part of the political system. From interest aggregation to interest articulation, women and women's organizations contributed greatly to the development of the new political system. This is one of the reasons why women's representation also became such an important mode of empowerment. The more women contributed to the political process the more inevitable they became in representative process.

Women's organizations and women political leaders started demanding reservations for women. Considering there was already reservation of Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe and Anglo-India (in terms of nominations), the absence of women's reservation was frowned upon. The National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988 suggested reservation for women as a means to encourage women's empowerment. Very soon reservation for women was adopted under The Constitution (Seventy Third) Amendment Act, 1992 and The Constitution (Seventy Fourth) Amendment Act, 1992. After applying reservation at grassroots level, political parties assumed that reservations are a convenient tool for increasing the political presence of women in legislative bodies.

Nivedita Menon highlights that granting reservations for women in local self-governments generated a debate around it⁴⁸. Those who supported reservation stated that through reservations, the patriarchal character of political parties will be challenged. They believed that reservation would create a strong lobby of women in the parliament and presence of women would lead to a change in the direction of debates. Those who argued against reservation stated that reservation would counter the principle of equality as women are not a homogenised group. Women's political interest cannot be understood in isolation from their social and economic interest. The major contention against reservation was that if women are granted special privileges, then all groups will demand so, threatening national unity⁴⁹.

While there are many arguments for and against women reservation it is better to analyse the proposed bills for the same. Through this section, I attempt to critically analyse the idea of reservation for women as promoted in the political process through the Constitution Amendment Bills. I deliberate if an increase in number of women can actually increase the representation and responsiveness towards women's interests? Are these bills intending to make a difference on women position in political space or are they just rearranging the legislature seats to suit certain political parties? Do women benefit from representation or does representation become a site for continuing patriarchy?

To answer these questions, let me start by critically analysing the bills presented to facilitate women's reservation in legislative institutions. The women's reservation bill was for the first time presented in 1996 as The Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill but lapsed due to the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. The same bill was presented again in 1998 and 1999, but they also lapsed. All these three bills were exposed to major criticisms by both members of parliament and feminists' groups when presented in the Lok Sabha. The huge amount of criticism made parliamentarians, political parties and women's organizations realize that the concept of women's reservations was extremely complicated and required more assessment and investigation than given at the moment.

The first bill to be presented The Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1996 was perhaps the most debated of them all. The bill sought to use reservations to include more women in Lok Sabha and state legislatures using a format which was similar to Constitution (Seventy Third) Amendment Act, 1993 and Constitution (Seventy Fourth) Amendment Act, 1993. The significant provisions that this bill is listed as under:

1. Not less than one third of seats in House of People and Legislative Assemblies ought to be reserved for women in a rotating system.
2. It also suggested that of all seats reserved for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe, one third seats ought to be reserved for women belonging to Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe under clause (1) of article 330 and clause (1) of article 332 of the Constitution.
3. If any state has less than three seats in Lok Sabha, then reservation for women is not mandatory
4. If any state has less than three seats reserved for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe in Legislative Assemblies of state, then reservation for women belonging to Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe is not mandatory

5. The seats should be reserved through rotation in manner laid down by parliament.
6. There would be no time limit for reservations
7. It did not provide any reservation for women belonging to Other Backward Classes
8. It did not provide any reservation to Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils of States.

After many debates and deliberations, a Joint Committee of parliamentarians was set up to provide suggestions to modify this bill. The significant suggestions were⁵⁰:

1. The words, 'not less than one third' should be replaced with 'nearly as may be, one third'
2. The National Capital of Delhi should be included in the Bill
3. Nominations should be allowed under Articles 331 and 333 with the provisions of reservation
4. The provision of reservation will end after fifteen years of applying this amendment
5. Applying reservation for women of Other Backward Classes should be considered
6. Applying reservation for women to Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils of States should be considered.

The recommendation was presented but before a decision could be taken, the Lok Sabha dissolved, and the bill lapsed. The debate over women's reservation continued with political parties and women's organizations having very different opinions about it. While these debates were going on, the Lok Sabha again introduced women's reservation in 1998 as The Constitution (Eighty-Fourth Amendment) Bill which lapsed and then again in 1999 as Constitution (Eighty-Fifth Amendment) Bill which could not be pursued due to lack of consensus among political parties.⁵¹

Nearly a decade later, in 2008 Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha. The aim of the bill was to eradicate gender inequality and discrimination against women by providing political empowerment to them.⁵² As highlighted in the statement of objectives of the bill, 'The issue of empowerment of women has been raised in different forms in the country from time to time. Political empowerment of women is rightly perceived as a powerful and indispensable tool for eliminating gender inequality and discrimination'⁵³. This bill presented some new recommendations but mostly stuck to the older provision provided in The Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1996. The major provisions which it suggested were:

1. Reservation of women must be as nearly as may be, one third of the present strength of the House of People and Legislative Assemblies of every state.
2. It also suggested that of all seats reserved for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe, one third seats ought to be reserved as nearly as may be for women belonging to Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe in House of People and Legislative Assemblies of every state.
3. It suggested to add women's reservation in form of nomination to Anglo-Indian community in House of People and Legislative Assemblies of every state.
4. The provision of reservation will end after fifteen years of applying this amendment
5. It also stated that the rotation of reservation of seats would be decided by the parliament.
6. If any state has less than three seats reserved for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe in Lok Sabha, then reservation for women belonging to Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe will not be applied in the third elections
7. If any state has less than three seats reserved for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe in Legislative Assemblies of states, then reservation for women belonging to Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe will not be applied in the third elections.

Overall, The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 stuck to the recommendations provided by the Joint Committee on The Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1996. This bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha on 10th December 2010. Till now, no progress has been made in Lok Sabha and the notion of reservation for women is at a standstill. The many bills on reservation for women has a very unfortunate history of never being passed in any of the houses in the parliament. These bills are heavily criticised by women's organizations and political parties. Even the recommendations of the joint commissions could not win over women or feminist groups. Most feminist groups looked at these bills as a cosmetic solution to political inequality of women. Almost no one was convinced that women's reservation was meant for women's empowerment.

The most popular dissent was the low number of seats reserved for women. As Madhu Kishwar asks, 'To begin with, why a 33 per cent quota? What is the significance of this number? Why not 13 or 43 per cent or even 73 per cent?'⁵⁴ In India reservation positions are demarcated based on the population of that group. This policy was not followed during the division of women reservation. Even though women are nearly fifty percent of the total population, they are stuck within the thirty-three per cent bracket. There really is no logic behind fixing such a low number of seats for women who form such a huge population. As shown in the above section,

women make up almost forty nine percent of the electors. From these more than sixty give percent vote during elections. As participants, women form a huge number of voters which is not reflected during reservations. Thirty three percent reservation does not do justice to the population of women who participate in political activities.

Another major criticism is that all women are not represented within this scheme of reservations. Only women from general sections, Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes are given representation under women's reservation. Women belonging to Other Backward Class and minority women were completely ignored in this bill. Though the recommendation advised the government to include reservations for Other Backward Class it was not made mandatory. Minority women were ignored from the idea reservation even in the recommendations because it was believed that minority reservation was against the notion of secularism⁵⁵.

The Women's Reservation Bill includes women as a category with uniform set of interests. They do not consider the fact that economic, social and community linkages influence the patriarchal oppression which women experience. This bill assumes that women can transcend their identities and unify as a category for the sake of women's reservation. As argued in the above section this is an extremely problematic way to understand the experiences of women in India. If Women's Reservation Bill is truly concerned with empowerment of women and wants to change their position from the marginalized, it will have to represent the various identities through which patriarchal oppression is perpetuated on them. Otherwise, this bill is reduced to mere tokenism, as it gives opportunities to upper class, upper caste, urban and educated women, who are close relatives or aides of prominent male politicians.

This tokenism becomes more entrenched due to the provision of rotation of seats. The Women's Reservation Bill states, that the seats which are reserved will be rotated through a lottery system in every general election. This means that women representatives will not be able to continue to represent the same constituency under reservation and secondly, women representatives cannot represent their constituency for the long run. This is extremely unjust as many representatives have been winning from constituencies which have been in their families for generations. Most candidates belong to the constituencies they represent, or they have spent sufficient time there to win elections. They are able to stay in the same constituency for a long time and nurture the constituency through long term policies and development plans. Due to this many candidates have a strong voter base and can grow as popular representatives⁵⁶.

Political parties also invest in such candidates, by supporting them or developing their leadership abilities. In the long run, such candidates can have a political career of decades from the same constituency. This privilege to have a strong political base, popular support and preferred constituency is denied to all women who will be utilising reservation. Women representatives are forced to choose new constituencies if they want to continue to compete. As Kiswar states, 'Such compulsory unseating violates the very basic principles of democratic representations.'⁵⁷ We cannot ignore that through this bill women have been reduced to short term politicians who are only holding the position as proxy for other more seasoned politicians. In such a case it would make sense that close relatives and aides are only given such seats.

Popularly called as the '*biwi-beti*' brigade, the chances that daughters or wives of politicians are given seat to control until they can take back the constituency. The idea that women would be encouraged to represent will be proven false if this happens. The rotation of seats provides very little incentive for women to participate in political process. If female relatives and aides of male politicians take over, will they be representing women's interests? Or will they be representing the same male centred interests? It is the latter which will take precedence. It is very clear that only the gender of the politician will change and not the issue which is represented. I would once again like to echo Pitkin's words, that representation is about being responsive to the electors demands.⁵⁸

So far, none of the bill have ensured that women will represent only women's interests or that women's reservation will ensure that women's demands are satisfied. There is no provision to ensure that women's reservations lead to women's demands being represented. Even Phillips, points out that accountability is the crux of a democracy⁵⁹. If we state that women representation will encourage women's political empowerment, then how are we going to assess the increase in empowerment? The manner in which the bills are framed, they only encourage the visibility of women in legislatures, i.e., more women should be elected in legislatures. The representation of women's issues is not really a concern. This is further highlighted by the simple mindedness in which women's reservations was arranged.

The most prominent dissent was that the representation of women was organized in a very narrow manner. The only identities considered were those of women belonging to general class, Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe. While it is commendable that the bills considered the caste and tribe identities of women, the fact that they ignored religions and class identities was surprising. The discrimination which women face in the political sphere is closely associated

with their social and community identities. This includes class and religion-based identities too. If women's reservation can be distributed among Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe, then there should be no reason to not further distribute it among Other Backward Class and religious identities. Highlighting the support for women's reservation bill, Vasanthi Raman states,

‘The near unanimous support for the Bill amongst the national level women's organizations is premised on a certain understanding of the patriarchal forms of oppression and exclusion characteristic of Indian society and the undeniable reality of declining participation of women in political life, specifically in the legislatures. Needless to say, historically, the suppression and exclusion of women has been extremely important in maintaining a Brahmanical and caste-dominated social order.’⁶⁰

All the proposed bills seem like a solution to the systematic exclusion of women from political process. It also seems to help in fulfilling the promise of political empowerment of women. Like Raman highlights, women organizations were supportive of this as they believed that women reservation challenged the historical suppression of women. She states that the main reason why women were excluded in the first place was to maintain the Brahmanical and patriarchal order. Women's reservation is a direct attack on this. It firstly includes women within the male dominated political space. Secondly it also includes women within the reservations of caste, thereby challenging the caste system. Women reservation helps in weakening the two most pervasive modes of oppression which have historically existed in India.

While this may be true, we cannot avoid acknowledging the fact that women and OBC were ignored in The Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1996. And minority women continued to remain ignored with The Constitution (Hundred and Eight) Bill, 2008. Raman highlights, that the discrimination and exclusion of women in politics has been unnecessarily generalized. Patriarchal oppression is dependent on social factors like class, caste, religion, ethnicity, race, disability among others. The proposed bill transcends these differences and unifies the experience of oppression.⁶¹

I find it very surprising that the people who made the bill completely forgot the oppression which minority women face within their religions. I also found it surprising that a few groups of women were expected to eliminate the discrimination which all women from various social

and economic backgrounds experienced. As I argued in the previous section, the greatest illusion which the political space has created is that women are an interest-based category. This means that all women have certain common interests which can be represented in the political space by anyone. If the demands are not something which women commonly agree upon, the need to represent them falls substantially.

While the Joint Committee on The Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1996 recommended that OBC quota also be considered, it was never fixed in The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008. At a cosmetic level, it seems that the reservation on the basis on class and religion was not done due to the complexity of the process. To reserve one third seats among so many groups within limited constituencies seemed like an impossible task. But if we look closely, we will notice that the reservation of women was dependent on the reservation for men. Only because the reservation for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe was available (which was mostly made up of male representatives), women were also guaranteed this reservation. To include reservation for OBC or minority women when OBC and minority men did not have this privilege is not exactly preferred. The crux of reservation is that women are given access to male privilege without actually challenging men. So, women occupy only marginal positions in comparison to men. This is evident from the fixing of thirty three percent reservation for women. Thirty-three per cent may not be a small number but it is fixed number. Almost as if to say, that it is impossible for women to go beyond this number.

I would like to highlight that change in the language on of the bills regarding the percentage of reservation. In The Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1996, it was stated that ‘not less than one third reservation’⁶² which meant that the parliament was compelled to ensure a minimum of one third representation of women. On the other hand, during Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008, the language changed to ‘be as nearly as may be, one third’⁶³ which indicates that it can be less than one third too. Within the twelve years from 81st to 108th Constitution Amendment Bills, the confidence of law makers that women will be able to sustain positions in legislatures fell drastically. Women’s groups wanted more reservation of women, at least a reservation which fairly represents the population. But lawmakers, especially Joint Committee on The Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1996 were distrustful of the ability of political parties to distribute so many seats to women across the states.⁶⁴ While women’s presence in legislatures was considered as important for political empowerment, their presence had to be controlled and fixed so as to not threaten their

male counterparts. This was also evident within the political party structure. Even though some major political parties supported the women's reservation bill, they themselves did not do much to encourage or support women in political process.

As women organizations, feminists, and political analysts pointed out the faults in women's reservation, they also started asking the dreaded question. Does women's reservation weaken patriarchy? If we look at the major provisions of the two bills, especially The Constitution (Hundred and Eight) Amendment Bill, 1996. We cannot see that any provision attempts to challenge patriarchal barriers which prevent women from being recognized as equal political representatives. According to my observations reservations for women are used to promote certain myths about the position of women in Indian political process.

The most popular myth is the idea that increasing number of women will bring radical change in the political process. Women can change their position by become numerically visible in democratic politics. The visibility of women is different from the 'presence' of women. Presence of women in political process would mean that women would actively participate and represent interest and demands which 'mirror' their electors. This means that there is a greater chance of women issues becoming a part of mainstream or rather a malestream political process. The peripheric position which women hold would be replaced with a more prominent position in politics. But as observed above the one third reservation barely allows adequate presence of women in politics, yet Women's Reservation Bill is promoted as a great foundation for giving equal political rights to women. Promoters of the bill assume that women will never be able to get one third positions in legislatures without the sacrifice of seats which their male colleagues make for them through reservations. So, reservations act as a protective legislation which is given to women for the sake of ensuring fair representation and stable democracy. The weaking of patriarchal barriers which prevent women from attaining access to fair representation is not really a concern.

The second popular myth is that elected women will always represent women's interest. Another myth which is constantly perpetuated is that women will represent women's issues. If women representatives choose to mirror their constituency, then it is possible. But here we have to assume that women form the entire constituency, and so their demands are paramount. The chances that women will only vote for women because they will represent their interests is less. The chances that women in representative positions will chose women's interests over national interest or political party agenda is also less. There is no measurement of

accountability that once women occupy reserved seats, they would represent women or work tirelessly to bring women's issues within mainstream politics. As the experience with grass root level reservations has proven, women usually stand in for male relatives and act a proxy to their male relatives. There is no provision to prevent this from happening. Hence the myth of fairness is perpetuated.

The third myth created due to women's reservation is that women have unified identity and interests. When discussing representative politics, Squires states, it plays an important role in 'perpetuating certain identities and interests, while denying other and actually creating that which does not yet exist.'⁶⁵ Reservations for women as proposed so far seems to be doing exactly what Squires states. Firstly, it declares identities of women as more victimized and helpless in the political process in comparison to men. Which is why the benevolent reservation is granted to them. Secondly, it denies the interests of minority women under the guise of 'secularism'. Thirdly, it creates an identity of a powerless abstract identity of 'women' where all members have common interests. Despite many scholars arguing that women cannot be called as a category, reservation fixes the identity of women quite rigidly.

For reservations of women to be successful in India, the differences between women and their experiences of oppression were removed. Reservation project an image of women who require representation as belonging to a certain class, caste, religion, ethnicity, and ability. Anyone who did not fit into this defined projection of women automatically were not represented. Like, uneducated women who cannot access educational subsidies, or poor disabled women, who cannot afford travel subsidies, or even women forced into prostitution who face the worst forms of patriarchal violence and oppression but are completely ignored within the project of empowerment. Unified identity and interest are the unfortunate by-product of reservations.

The myth that reservation would empower women is problematic as it reduces women's political empowerment to mere distribution of seats in legislature. As Mohanty states, empowerment is 'strengthening one's abilities'⁶⁶. Political empowerment would also mean that women are able to define their interest and demands equally in the political sphere, hence strengthening their abilities in the political process.

Yet, through my analysis of the bills presented and recommendations made so far, women realizing their potential due to reservations seems impossible. So far, reservations are only meant to distribute seats among women who fits within the ideology of political parties and

represents ideas which political decide. Women's contribution as women, whose identity and demands are different from men is rarely witnessed in Indian political process. Hence making political empowerment of women a mere myth.

The most pervasive myth which reservations asserts is that political sphere is not inherently patriarchal, and politics can easily overturn centuries of oppression. It assumes that once women are added to the political structure, the oppressions and inequality which they have faced so far automatically get replaced with empowerment and equality. Simple corrective measures like reservation can change the position of women. But I would like to assert that women's identity, interest, experiences are not easy to assimilate like reservations would like us to believe. At the same time, redistribution of seats is also not the most effective way to guarantee political equality. It seems as if, through reservations, the notion that political space is patriarchal is slowly being erased. This is where the feminist anxiety begins. Increase in representation of women is meant to weaken the patriarchal influence on politics but reservations seem to help in continuing this influence. To achieve women's political empowerment, it is important to target the patriarchal structure. The arrangement of reservation barely acknowledges patriarchal barriers to political equality, let alone challenge. The entire reservation for women agenda ignores the fact that political structures are also a site for patriarchy.

I would like to refer to Sylvia Walby who says, 'The State is another patriarchal structure.'⁶⁷ According to her, the exclusion of women from access to decision making positions itself indicates how entrenched patriarchy is within the political system. Even when women have access to decision making positions, women do not have the power to decide political agenda or process. When women are excluded from the political sphere, it is clearly patriarchal. But when women are included only marginally within the political sphere it shows that women placed within the patriarchal structure in a more complicated manner than before. Rather than just excluding, the State is constructed to limit women's access to political power. Women are present within the State, but their position can change till the extent it does not challenge the patriarchal dominance within the State.

The inclusion of women within State institutions should end the patriarchal influence, but instead the State ends up colluding with patriarchal structure. In India ever since reservations was promoted as the only solution to politically empower women, the patriarchal influence on the State has strengthened. Reservation has essentially silenced the political debate over

patriarchal influence on the State. Reservations is a tool which aids in redistributing the positions which was otherwise denied to women. This redistribution does not have to challenge the system which perpetuates discrimination in the first place. Reservation for women does not challenge the patriarchal structure, but rather repositions women within the structure. Reservations definitely given women more access to positions of power and authority. But this access to opportunity is not equal to that of men. Instead of weakening the structures and removing the modes of oppression which exclude women from democratic political process, Indian political system has decided that reservations which only makes a cosmetic change is a much better approach. It is similar to putting a band aid on a festering wound which requires medical attention. Reservations act as a band-aid for centuries of oppression and discrimination which has denied women their basic political rights. There is a need to acknowledge that the political sphere, the State, and its institutions are patriarchal and so such superficial mechanisms can do very little to empower women.

Carole Pateman, perhaps, makes the most eloquent argument that the political sphere is patriarchal even though it does not appear as such. In her book, *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman stresses that when the social contract was signed another contract, called the sexual contract was also signed. The social contract removed paternal rights and replaced it with political rights. She states that in political sphere, we confuse paternal and patriarchal as the same. It is assumed that when the social contract was signed paternalism was removed from the political sphere and shifted to private sphere.⁶⁸ Since paternalism was removed patriarchy was too eliminated from the political system. But paternalism is the right of father over son, and patriarchy is the male-sex right. While paternalism was replaced with political rights, patriarchy remained within the sphere of politics.

As Pateman states, ‘...in the modern world, women are subordinated to men as men, or to men as fraternity.’⁶⁹ Sexual difference between men and women is still a very important part of the political sphere. Sexual difference leads to political difference which in turn is the difference between freedom and subjugation.⁷⁰ Our society is structured around the patriarchal conception of sexual differences. This is why women are subordinated to men instead of considered as politically equal. The problem is that very little attention has been given to subordination as it assumed that political sphere is free from patriarchy. This is exactly what reservation for women also does.

Reservations for women in legislatures start with the assumption that sexual difference is relevant in political sphere. It assumes that women are subordinated to men and this subordination has not allowed women to access the benefits of democracy. Through reservation women will access the benefits of democracy equal to men. In actuality reservations has very little to do with transforming the position of women. Reservations redistribute seats, so women get a little more political space than they did before. But this is done by asserting the sexual differences between men and women where women are subordinated. The only reason why reservations are proposed is because women are considered as weaker or subordinated to men. This subordination continues through the provision of 'one third' reservation of women. Here the laws makers assumes that this is the maximum that women can achieve and may not be able to go beyond it. This inherent discrimination also proves that reservations are an instrument to subordinate women. Reservation of women lays emphasis on the difference between men and women and treats women as the perpetually oppressed entity in politics. This is why I argue that reservation is a site for patriarchy to assert itself with little or no challenge.

Reservations under the guise of fair democratic representation, create a strong environment for patriarchal domination to continue. To elaborate on this point more, let me refer to High Level Committee on the Status of Women In India 2015. This report describes the status of women in India and had an entire chapter dedicated to the position of women in politics. This report highlights the necessity for reservations to politically empower women. This recommending reservation, this report highlights how reservations at local level has given women more stability in the public and private sphere. The report states,

‘In some situations, women representative's maybe dependent on their male relatives for carrying out their day-to-day official work. The nature of power relations within the household has started changing because the family members started realising that they are getting public importance because of her. This is equally true with changing relationship between husband and wife as husband started feeling he has got the chance to come to the public sphere due to wife who has won the elections.’⁷¹

The above analysis was made while responding the to the challenge of women acting as proxy to male representatives in the local self-governments. The report does not really problematize women active as proxies to men but rather it legitimizes it. The report asserts that by assuming representative positions, women are changing the power relations within the households and marriage. They are doing this by providing their family social status through their position in

the government. Even within marriage the improvement of social status acts as an important variable in changing the relationship between both husband and wife. The report sheds light on how reservation help women to achieve social status for their husband and families which they otherwise would not be able to do.

The entire argument for reservation in this report which was published by the Ministry of Women and Child Development was the benefit which husbands and family will gain through women's representation. One of the main reason women's reservations is important is because it acts to increase the pride and capability of men, especially husbands and male family members. This is exactly the scenario that Pateman highlights, that even when legal rights are distributed equally, the subordination of women continues. The focus on reservation for women in India is men themselves. Reservations is only good as long as it is supported by men, and men will only support reservations if it benefits them.

Another example is how political parties supported women's reservation to discourage the demand for reservation for Other Backward Classes men. If women's reservation is passed, then the chances of reservation for Other Backward Classes reduces. So, the competition which upper caste and upper-class men will have against OBC men will also substantially reduce. Through reservation, there will be an improvement in the gender gap which exists within the political process in India.

Reservation of women also helps in unifying the various experiences of inequality which women live into a select few by fixing the identity of women. Once the demands of women are unified by fixing women as a 'category', the need to address the various forms of patriarchal oppression is removed. The modes of patriarchal oppression are dynamic in nature and are dependent on class, caste, race, religion, and ethnic identities of women. Once again, I assert that women are not experiencing patriarchy in the same manner because the structure of patriarchy is closely related to social identities of women. In order to weaken patriarchal oppression, it is important to identify the various hierarchies through which women are subordinated to men. The 'multiple patriarchies'⁷² which women experience in their day-to-day life is ignored completely by reservations. According to reservation policy women in India can only be the homogenized 'women', they cannot be 'Muslim women', or 'Dalit women', or 'disabled women' or 'tribal women'. If they choose their social identity along with the identity of women, they are at a risk of being ignored within the realm of reservation. The only definite manner a woman can be represented is by being the 'woman' as described by patriarchal

political system. This is why reservations are proving to be an instrument to subvert women rather than empower them.

Nivedita Menon makes a very important point when she asks, 'Is Women's Reservation Bill only about women?'⁷³ It appears that women's reservation in national and state legislatures is an elite based strategy which barely empowers women in India. Political parties promote reservations as a partial measure to increase the participation of women especially, Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribe in India. Despite this, it is observed that political parties have not taken a clear position for reservation for women. While they support women's reservation at a grassroots level, they are hesitant to do the same at the national level. The fact that Women's Reservation Bill has been introduced four times without being passed in the Lok Sabha indicates, that political parties do not really support this. Actually, if women's reservation is passed, then the gendered and caste composition of political parties will be the first thing to change. So, women's reservation ends up being just a promise which is made by political parties to attract women voters. Another reason why political parties are hesitant to pass women's reservation is because this may lead to demands for reservation by other marginalized groups.

Menon states, that women's reservation can either be accepted only for women while rejecting caste or class-based reservations.⁷⁴ At the end women's reservation is a means to make sure that the elite composition of the Parliament does not change. It is very apparent that the reasons for introducing Women's Reservation Bill does not have much to do with women's empowerment. This is why, women organizations and feminists who once supported reservation as an empowering tool, look upon it with suspicion. The notion of women's reservation hence appears as 'anti women and patriarchal.'⁷⁵

Reservations also acts a tool through which women can be misrecognized in the political sphere. The logic of 'woman' as a uniform category is very problematic because it does not exist. Therefore, recognizing women's differences, and their specific experiences of oppression within the patriarchal structure is imperative. As Charles Taylor points out that misrecognition, 'can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being'⁷⁶ Reservations as proposed have unfortunately become a mode of oppression which is creating a very distorted version of women and women's interest. The fact that reservations are lauded as the only means of fair representation of women in political process, indicates that

only the 'misrecognized' women have place in the political process. This misrecognition is also a form of patriarchal oppression which asserted through reservations.

The more I analyse women's reservation the more I realize that women are not actually getting represented at all. Only those ideas and demands which help men secure their position within the political sphere is allowed. Even without reservations women play a very important role in asserting women's demands through social or women's movements. Some of the most important legislations for women and children have come through these movements. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, The Maternity's Benefit Act, 1961, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, changes in Section 375, Indian Penal Code, 1860

, have all come as result of social movements in which a large number of women and men have participated. All these movements directly targeted the patriarchal influence over the social, political, and economic structures. Some of these legislations, like Dowry Prohibition Act, have delegitimized the patriarchal practice of giving money or property to the bridegroom during or after marriages by the bride's family to the extent that asking and giving dowry is a punishable offence. This shows that even without women's reservation, women's demand can be represented in the political system.

There is no guarantee that after women are elected within reserved positions, they will be able to represent women's demands at such a scale. There is actually a risk that demands which are made through social movements maybe ignored if women representatives do not agree to them. There is also a risk that social movements will not be looked upon as a tool for representation of interests as the job will be monopolized by women representatives. Looking at the success of social movements impact on pro women's legislations which weaken patriarchal structure, it makes no sense to take such risks. If India was a country where social movements barely impacted the legislations, then maybe the demand for women's reservation would be more relevant as there is no other means of representation of women's interest. But this is not the case for India as political process in India is closely related to social movements. Hence the idea of women's reservation is not very convincing and is counterproductive to women's interests.

2.4 Some Concluding Remarks:

I started this chapter by examining the inevitable relationship between political empowerment and politics of presence, but as I progressed, I have observed that politics of presence as envisioned in India supports patriarchal domination more than challenging it. If I have to answer whether women are present or absent in Indian political process, then I would say that women are very much absent. While I do recognize that there is an increase in the number of women participants and representatives at local, state, and national political process, I also recognize that numbers have not contributed to making the political space for sensitive to women's demands.

Women are still excluded from the political process, because the political system automatically subordinates women to men. Men still dominate over representative institutions, both in numbers and in demands. The entire political system is constructed with 'men' and 'masculine' at the centre. The male preference within the political process as contributed the most to the exclusion of women. Despite equal political rights women are found only in the peripheries of the Indian political process. The patriarchal influence on the political structure in India is the main culprit for the subordination of women and women's interest in political process.

This patriarchal influence is further intensified by the misconstrued notion of empowerment. As Menon highlights. 'It has been argued that this kind of government programme aims at empowering women only to the extent of harnessing women's contribution to 'growth' – a goal which governments are under considerable pressure to achieve.'⁷⁷ The absence of women from the process of national growth and development is the issue which concerns the government. The only modes of oppression and discrimination which are addressed by the government are in relation to this growth. Women are only included in political space because it helps in achieving a predefined national agenda or goal. The aim for political empowerment is not weakening the patriarchal structure which is one of the most persistent causes of oppression against women. Rather it focuses only on those women's demands and interest which help in obtaining national goals of growth and development.

This is why we see that the proposals for women's political empowerment are inherently patriarchal. Eradication or weakening of patriarchal structures was never the objective of when political rights were granted to women. Women were included as an abstract, timeless entity who automatically became equal to men in the public sphere. It was assumed that the process

of democracy would distribute all rights and resources between men and women equally. Due to this, the immense potential which the Indian political sphere holds in weakening patriarchal system is absolutely wasted. Over a period of time, the patriarchal structure has adapted itself within the political sphere so well that it is difficult to identify the sites where patriarchal influence does not exist. Any method or mechanism for women's political empowerment no matter how well intentioned, automatically end up leaning towards upholding patriarchal norms. Even the notion of politics of presence becomes a victim to this inherent patriarchy.

Electoral politics in India is so caught within the continuous debate between representing 'ideas' vs representing 'identities' that it has forgotten its true purpose which is granting political equality which is to represent all sections of the society. The array of political issues which are a part of Indian democracy has created a strict line between who should be represented and what should be represented. But in reality, they are not separate from each other. Representatives need to represent people as much as they have to represent their issues. Both ideas and identities are two sides of the same coin. I think it is time to stop looking at the question 'what' is being represented (ideas) and 'who' is being represented (identities) as agnostic terms but rather as complimentary and compulsory needs to achieve equality and empowerment for women.

Anne Phillips while assessing the feasibility of politics of presence states,

'...biggest mistake is to set up ideas as the opposite of political presence: to treat ideas as totally separate from the people who carry them; or worry exclusively about the people without giving a thought to their policies and ideas.'⁷⁸

In India, both the debates and policies for women's representation mostly posits 'ideas' as different from 'identities'. In case of The Constitution (Eighty-First Amendment) Bill, 1996 and The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 the focus was too much on 'identity'. The proposed bill focused on adding women within the legislature, without caring much for their demands. It completely ignores the complexity of demands for women's empowerment and traps political equality within a very narrow framework. Women as an 'identity' carry a set of 'ideas' which is reflected in their demands.

Politics of presence does not encourage locking people into pre given or essentialized identities, it focuses more on engaging historically excluded people in political debates and decision-making. This helps in transforming the political agenda to become more inclusive and effective

which is the foundation of Indian political process in the first place. The twisted version of women's representation is actually also very exclusive, except this exclusion is more hidden than obvious. The concept of homogenization of identity is very dangerous to women's empowerment as it does not challenge patriarchal structure at all. It actually creates a hierarchy among women in terms of empowerment, so some women are more empowered than others. This problematic arrangement is further intensified by the proposal of women's reservations at national and state legislatures.

This is the main reason why reservations for women are a site for their subordination. Since the focus is only increasing the number of women within legislatures, the reason why they are excluded from politics gets ignored. The continuous exclusion which women experience despite the guarantee of political equality and the androcentric political environment, are a result of the patriarchy. The demand for representation is also a demand to undo the continuous patriarchy which is prevalent within the political process. The current idea of representation completely ignores this, and barely affects the patriarchal structure.

It is incorrectly assumed that women's representation can ensure that their demands are represented. But in reality, most of the current recommendations for reservations are not focused on women's demands. They are not focused on increasing the number of women. Reservations does not challenge the patriarchal nature of the public spheres. It actually ignores that women's oppression is a result of patriarchy. How can an instrument which refuses to recognize the source of oppression be useful for women? Through reservation patriarchy is able to adapt itself within the democratic structure.

Women position becomes more marginalized as their unique experiences and demands are silenced. Phillips has highlighted that 'politics of presence' is important for the reason of role models, justice, interest, and revitalization of democracy. But reservations as proposed in India does not achieve any of these goals. To call reservation a cosmetic arrangement is also farfetched as it means to some extent reservation weaken patriarchal barriers. But this is not true. Women reservation in India is hesitant to recognize the influence of patriarchy on the political structure let alone address it. If India limits itself to achieve empowerment through reservations, then this notion of empowerment will be narrow-minded and hollow.

Representation is not always about what or who we represent. By engaging in politics, we also develop interests and identities.⁷⁹ Through reservations we only perpetuate certain political

identities for women. We absolutely do not allow women to engage with politics freely and gain their own identities and interest. This continues the subordination of women to men in the political space. For women to be empowered it is essential that they are guaranteed the same position as men, that is, the freedom which men have to develop their own identities and interests. If this much is not given to women, then it is impossible to assert that women are empowered in India.

This is also why it is important to look for alternatives other than reservations. Squires's suggests the idea of 'gender mainstreaming' in order to encourage political equality for women. According to Squires,

'Gender mainstreaming entails a set of tools and processes designed to integrate a gender perspective into all policies at the planning stage by considering the likely effects of policies on the respective situation of women and men, and then revising the policies, if necessary, such that they promote gender equality rather than reproduce gender inequality.'⁸⁰

At the moment, reservations are mostly reproducing inequality rather than systematically bringing in equality. Through my analysis of the bills proposed for women's reservation, one observation that I cannot ignore is that these bills do not focus on integrating women's perspectives within political process. The focus of representation should be on creating policies which lead to substantive change in terms of equality. Reservations as proposed, or only reservations can do little to change the position of women in the political system. Instead of reservations, it is important to focus on creating policies and laws which include gendered perspectives within the political process for achieving sustainable equality. Gender mainstreaming also helps in bridging the gap between 'ideas' and 'identities' which the current political system can create. It also makes political parties and interest groups more accountable for their actions.

The large part of political process in India is influenced by political parties who need to play a greater role in gender equality. Political parties need to include more women candidates as well as women's demands in their political objectives. These objectives need to question the structures and practices which oppress women rather than just superficial policies. Political parties assume that introducing policies meant for women is the road to empowerment. They fail to assess the feasibility and efficiency of this policy in changing the position of women.

Increasing more women in the political sphere without including their perspectives limits the scope of empowerment. Political representatives must be held for any act of discrimination against women. I suggest three important actions which political parties can take in order to make political process more equal.

Firstly, the blatant misogyny within political parties where women are treated as subordinated to men should be addressed. The performance of reservations in local governments has made it clear that women are often used as token representatives for their male relatives. Political parties turn blind eyed to the subordination of women's representatives to their male relative. This indicates that political parties are doing the bare minimum in ensuring political equality. Since reservations already exist within local governance it is only normal for political parties to use reservations as a means to empower women and encourage women's leadership. Many cities and villages in India have witnessed an increase

Secondly, politicians who make derogatory or discriminatory remarks against the gender of any politicians should be penalized. Politicians are often observed to make problematic remarks against the gender of their opponents. Gender shaming, which according to me, is an act of either shaming a person for the gender they identify with or shaming a person for not living up to the stereotypes of the gender they identify with, is normalized during elections and also within legislatures. Criticizing the lack of femininity among female representatives and criticizing male representatives for not being masculine enough is a common form of gender shaming. The popularity of gender shaming in political process is very problematic, especially when it comes from people who are promising equality. Political parties must take strict actions on those politicians who indulge in gender shaming.

Thirdly, politicians who have been found guilty of serious crimes or have an ongoing case against them should not be allowed to contest or participate in elections in anyway. According to the report set by Association of Democratic Reforms, In 2019 elections. 43% of winner had declared criminal cases against them out of which 159 elected members which is 29% of representatives elected in Lok Sabha Elections of 2019 had declared serious criminal cases like rape, murder, attempt to murder, crimes against women among other crimes. There is a 109% increase in the number of elected representatives with declared serious criminal cases since 2009.⁸¹ Those politicians who have committed crimes against women may play a pivotal role in making laws for women. This condition is not just hypocritical but can also impair the process of gender mainstreaming.

Political parties who are inherently patriarchal, will not be able to create policies and laws for political equality for women. Achieving fair representation within an unjust political structure and patriarchal process is not possible. Since political empowerment of women is an important objective in Indian politics, it's only natural for political parties to address their patriarchal behaviour. This is an important step for ensuring women's political empowerment.

I believe an even more significant step which India should consider taking is to critically observe the patriarchal influence of the idea of citizenship in India. I would like to comment that there is an absence of debate regarding gendered construction of citizenship in India. The only reason women have the right to vote or contest elections in India is because we are granted equal citizenship. And this is a feature of Indian Constitution that it guarantees equal citizenship to all its members without discrimination. But is citizenship inclusive of women's demands? And can be address political exclusion and unfair representation of women within the current notion of citizenship.

So far, we have settled for the basic equality, but as the India develops as a strong democracy, they need for autonomy is also becoming paramount. We need to understand that citizenship is also gendered and this gendering aids in the continuation of oppression of women. Policies like reservations can do very little for empowering women if citizenship itself discriminates against women. The concern over gendered nature of citizenship has still not gained attention in India. Only a handful of scholars, like Anupama Roy, Rajeswari Sundar Rajan and Anurekha Chari have discussed the relationship between women and citizenship. This has created a gap in our understanding of representation and political process automatically subordinates women. There is a need to address the issue of citizenship when discussing the empowerment of women.

Citizenship in India grants civil and political equality for women and men in India. Yet, as observed men and women are at significantly different positions. I believe that India has designed its citizenship in a gendered manner. While writing on citizenship and women's movement in India, Anurekha Chari states, 'Women's oppression is exemplified in the way women experience citizenship rights.'⁸² According to her observation, the continuous protest of women's organizations against oppression highlights that type of citizenship which women experience is different from that of men. Men are considered to be more political presence and participation than women and so enjoy the benefits of being 'active citizens. They participate in decision making process and influence the laws and policies. This is a very different from that of women who are considered as more 'passive citizens. They are more dependent on the

State and often play the role of being beneficiaries to development policies.⁸³ This discrimination is why rethinking citizenship from a more gendered objective is important.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan highlights that ‘women have served to describe the State, primarily via the index of their status.’⁸⁴ The notion of gender equality is actually a type of measuring scale through which the State defines its democratic success. And unfortunately, this has set the limits of the State roles in changing the position of women in India. The State can at the moment only address those issues which can determine its own status. Women as passive citizens who have limited access to State funds act as an important agent which determines the success or failure of the State. Women as a political identity therefore constantly need to be in a condition in which they depend on States protection. This has led in creating policies which have further excluded women for political process. Citizenship for women ultimately suffers from insufficiency, inefficiency, and exclusion⁸⁵. This itself creates the basis for constructing a new vision for citizenship in India.

Anupama Roy, in the concluding lines of her book on gendered citizenship states, ‘Citizenship, then, may be seen as a mosaic of struggles linked together by shared language and commitment to democracy and equality.’⁸⁶ She highlights that the idea of ‘dialogical citizenship’ is essential to rethink citizenship from a feminist point of view. The current idea of citizenship exists in the comfort of uniformity and sameness is problematic as it does not consider the lived experiences of women who are also a part of different communities and groups. To treat women as a singular identity, or to treat women as a single idea is problematic as it hides the multiple layers of oppression which women experience in the public sphere. Granting of votes and reservations in seats will not target the oppression which women experience. There is a need to address the limits of the current idea of citizenship in achieving women’s empowerment and equality. Roy suggests the need to build an epistemic community which recognizes plurality of voices as the basis of citizenship. The continuous yet different forms of struggles which women attempt to overcome can only be sufficiently addressed if citizenship is able to accommodate the many ideas and identities of women. Citizenship, which is open to dialogue, and focuses on social transformation will be more efficient and inclusive.

I agree with Roy’s assessment that citizenship is indeed a complex idea and should be treated as such. The simplicity and rigidity with which citizenship in India is designed does not suit its overall objectives of equality and empowerment. Rethinking citizenship from a feminist point of view will be more beneficial in addressing inequality. While I am wary of a sudden and

radical change in the idea citizenship as it has the potential of backfiring, I believe that it is essential to at least debate of better more inclusive versions of citizenship. To achieve political equality and empowerment efficiently and to overcome the unjust political system. It is essential to undertake the difficult task of critically analysing citizenship.

Through this chapter, I can say that there is a need to include more women in political process, but reservation alone is not a solution to it. It is necessary to include women needs and demands within the political sphere. A faulty, patriarchal, and androcentric reservation policy will not give women the presence which is required. Women need to be the centre of debates on women's empowerment. For this there is a need to focus on gender mainstreaming, and rework on the understanding of citizenship in India. As political sphere is a constantly evolving sphere, the notion of representation should also be so. There is absolutely no need for us to imagine the political system as a rigid and fixed system. Through systematic changes within the political process, women's representation can be increased significantly which will aid in women's empowerment.

The purpose of the arguments proposed in this chapter was to highlight the insufficiency of the notion of women's political empowerment in India. Despite many attempts, women are still absent in political process as autonomous individuals who are able to freely engage with the political system. This is why we cannot say that women are fully empowered within the political process in India. This chapter also highlights that political sphere is developing as a safe haven for patriarchy. There is an urgent need to recognize and address the continuous patriarchal influence over the Indian political process. The current instruments of empowerment are not effective in eliminating patriarchy. In the upcoming chapter, I will attempt to analyse whether the economic sphere, specifically the workplace is a site for patriarchy or is it able to challenge the patriarchal structure.

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