

# Bridging the Gender Gap: The Role of Reservations in Enhancing Women's Participation in Indian Elections

Moumita Mondal<sup>1</sup> and A. K. M. Anwaruzzaman

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## Abstract

Women's participation in the political process both causes and reflects their empowerment in society. Since the 1990s, there has been a remarkable increase in women's political turnout in India. The country's prevailing socio-political factors strongly influence electoral participation. The study examines trends, issues, and challenges related to women's reservation, participation, and engagement in electoral processes across various social groups in Indian states and union territories, using secondary data from the Election Commission of India's website. The findings show a tentative yet significant and encouraging correlation between women's reservation and their electoral involvement. Many socio-political factors affect women's voting behaviour. Interestingly, the success rate of women candidates has consistently exceeded that of their male counterparts since the general elections began. Despite considerable progress as voters over the decades, women remain underrepresented in Parliament, state assemblies, and political parties. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution mandate a one-third quota of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and Urban Local Bodies (ULB). Additionally, the Women's Reservation Bill, which seeks to reserve 33% of seats in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies for women, has been passed by both houses of Parliament, though its implementation remains pending. India's continued failure to fully enact the Women's Reservation Bill underscores political parties' lack of genuine commitment to significantly enhancing women's participation in elections.

**Keywords:** Electors, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, parliament, PRI

## Introduction

Following independence, with a parliamentary form of government and a constitutional democracy, India is committed to holding free and fair elections regularly. The results of

these elections determine the composition of the executive branch, the two houses of parliament, the state and union territory legislative assemblies, and the president and vice president. Since the 17th century,

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<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author

elections have been the primary approach by which the contemporary democratic process has been implemented (Manin, 1997). In a democracy, an election is a formal, participatory event in which voters select an individual to serve in public office at regular intervals. So, the voluntary participation of voters is a critical aspect of electoral processes; otherwise, the electoral system, or even democracy itself, may not be functional. Voting rights should be extended to all members of society without discrimination based on their social class, caste, gender, race, or colour. Such an arrangement in a democracy is termed 'universal adult franchise', which is practised in India. This will ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process. However, not all citizens have historically been able to vote, particularly women and other members of weaker social groups.

In colonial India, the Indian women's suffrage movement battled for the right of Indian women to vote. In 1917, Margaret Cousins collaborated with others to establish the 'Women's Indian Association' in Madras, thereby initiating the demand for franchises (Nair, 1996). The organisation focused on equal opportunities and women's suffrage rights. The women's suffrage campaign led to the granting of the right to vote to women in all British provinces and the majority of princely states, and, in some instances, the ability to run for local elections between 1919 and 1929. However, based on property requirements, these privileges were

only granted to a relatively small group of Indian women. Later, the Government of India Act of 1935 extended the right to vote to more women, albeit with requirements such as literacy, property ownership, or marriage to a wealthy man (Rai, 2017).

Women's active participation in electoral processes is a reliable indicator of the effective development of democracies worldwide (Nelson & Chowdhury, 1994; Rai, 2017; Thomas & Wilcox, 2005). After independence, the Constitution of India aims to eliminate unfair treatment among different groups in society by banning discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, and by reserving specific electoral seats for women. Elections in every state are held under adult suffrage in accordance with Article 326 of the Indian Constitution. Voter equality is protected by this provision, regardless of caste, religion, colour, or gender. However, despite 70 years of independence and the constitutional mandate to promote equality in all aspects of public life, including electoral politics, discrimination against women persists in India, including electoral politics (Rai, 2017).

Reservations are a form of affirmative action aimed at creating a level playing field or equal opportunity by addressing the slow progress of minority and female participation in areas where they have historically been underrepresented, such as employment, education, and political institutions. Reservation in the political system serves as a means

of redistributing participation among groups excluded from the political decision-making process. Having a voice in political decisions enables communities to secure social protections such as health, safe drinking water, and education. It has been observed that female politicians influence public spending decisions and tend to favour investments in social protection (Yañez-Pagans, 2014). Additionally, public goods that are more closely linked to women's concerns are more extensively financed by women in leadership positions (Chattopadhyaya & Duflo, 2004).

As of August 1, 2023, the global average participation rate of women in national parliaments was 26.7 per cent. Regional averages of women's representation in parliament also vary geographically, and this variation is influenced by factors such as the status of women in each region and government-affirmative actions. Women's representation in the Americas (34.8%), Europe (31.4%), and sub-Saharan Africa (26.8%) is higher than the global average. In comparison, Asia (21.3%), the Pacific (22.85%), and the Middle East and North Africa (16.4%) have lower average shares of women in their parliaments than the global mean. It is noteworthy that women's participation in parliament also varies across the globe at sub-regional and country levels.

Gender equality and a meaningful, functional democracy are fundamentally linked to women's political engagement. The rise in women's political participation

strengthens the legitimacy of democratic institutions (Karp & Banducci, 2008). It enables women to participate directly in government decision-making processes and provides a way to ensure they are held more accountable. Women's political participation includes not only involvement in decision-making and political activism within the power structure, but also voting. Since there were no reserved seats for women in the assembly under India's post-independence constitution, women's participation in elections lagged behind men's. Gender inequalities in parliamentary representation and the smaller number of female ministers have been observed since the first general election. The percentage of women members in the 17th Lok Sabha (the Lower House of the Indian Parliament) has remained below 15%, despite the global average of 26.7 per cent for female representation in national parliaments as of August 1, 2023 (IPU, 2023). However, there is optimism that the proportion of seats won by women has increased from 4.4% in the first Lok Sabha election in 1952 to 14.36% in the 2019 general election (ECI, 2019). Particularly in the 1990s, under the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, women were granted the right to one-third of Panchayat seats, thereby increasing their opportunities to participate in local community governance and significantly increasing women's voter turnout.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, female voter turnout (67.18 per cent) not only slightly exceeded male

turnout (67.02 per cent) but also narrowed the gender gap in turnout (ECI, 2019). This indicates that women are actively engaging in political activities, which is an unquestionably positive development. However, the number of women representatives in assemblies and parliamentary elections has not improved substantially. In particular, women's participation in political elections varies considerably across regions of India. In light of various perspectives on women's participation in the electoral process, the current study analyses trends, barriers, and factors influencing women's electoral involvement.

### **Objectives**

Reservation of parliamentary seats for women is a milestone in itself, ensuring greater representation of women and combating gender inequality in politics. Women's political participation is uneven across India, especially in parliamentary (Lok Sabha) elections. The number of women who run for office and the number elected as representatives are the primary metrics used in this study to assess the level of women's political participation influenced by women's reservation. So, against this conceptual background mentioned above, the following objectives have been listed to be fulfilled in this paper:

1. To examine the significance of women's representation in politics.
2. To find out the spatio-temporal change in women's representation in Indian politics.
3. To assess the regional pattern of women's representation in the Indian electoral process.

4. To identify the factors affecting women's representation in the electoral process.

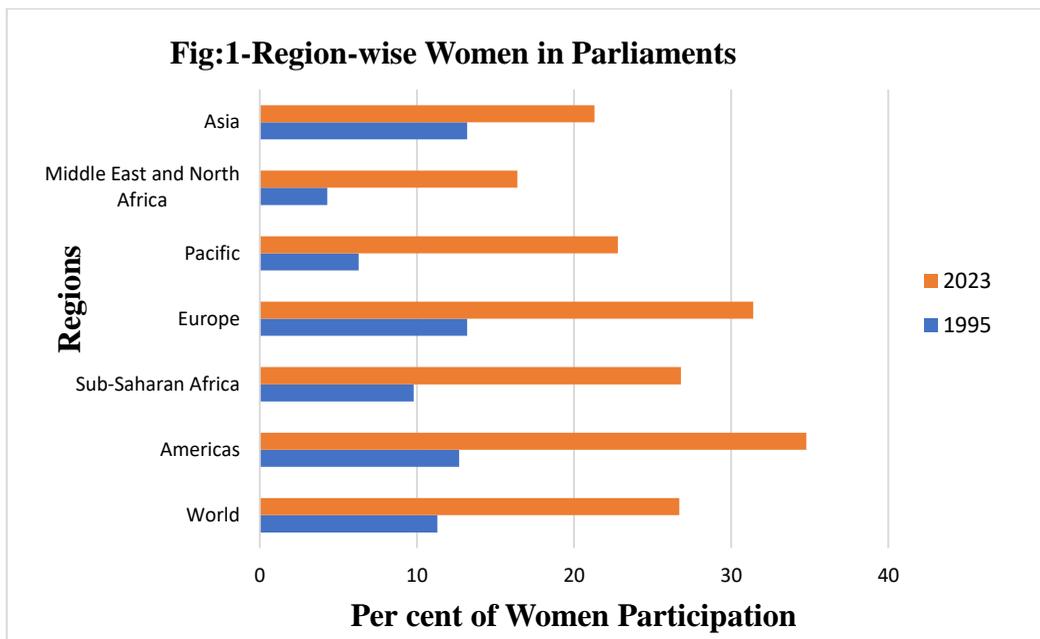
### **Methods and Materials**

Data for the present study are obtained from various secondary sources, such as the website of the Election Commission of India (ECI), a constitutional body, and social aspects-related data are taken from publications of the Census of India 2011. The ECI conducts and regulates elections in the country and maintains data on the whole affair. The result of the 17th Lok Sabha election is available on the website. It has been studied how women's political involvement is changing over time across different states and UTs. MS Excel and SPSS are used to analyse data and prepare cartograms for visual representation.

### **Geographical Distribution of Women in Parliaments**

Women have historically been underrepresented in politics and other institutions across many nations. Despite more women being elected to leadership positions in government and state, this historical trend persists. As of August 1, 2023, the global average of women in national parliaments has more than doubled over the last 25 years, from 11.3 per cent in 1995 to 26.7 per cent in 2023 (+15.4 points). The percentage of women in parliament increased across all regions, with the Americas making the most significant strides and Asia the least (Fig. 1).

In terms of regional growth in women's participation in their parliament between 1995



Source: <http://archive.ipu.org/> & <https://data.ipu.org/> and 2023, the Americas (+22.1 points) has experienced the highest growth, followed by Europe (+18.2 points), Sub-Saharan Africa (+17 points), the Pacific (+16.5 points), the Middle East and North Africa (+12.1 points), and Asia (+8.1points) (IPU, 2023). Less than 10% of seats in the single or lower houses of parliament were held by women in 109 out of the 174 countries for which statistics were available for the year 1995, only 2.9% of parliaments, all in Europe, had women in positions of 30% or more, but in 2020, women held less than 10% of seats in lower and single houses in just 24 out of 191 countries (IPU, 2020). In 7 countries (including Rwanda, where women's representation in the lower house exceeds 60%), women hold 50% or more of the seats in the lower or single-chamber of parliament in

2023. Twenty-five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), aspirations for women's political involvement have risen. In general, parliaments are constantly progressing towards gender parity.

It has been observed that only a few States had female quotas prior to 1995; in most cases, these quotas were voluntary adoptions by individual political parties. However, by 2015, quotas were in place in more than 120 countries worldwide (IPU, 2020). Rwanda is the country that has achieved the most significant progress between 1995 (4.3%) and 2023 (61.3%) in terms of women's participation in the lower or single house of parliament, following the 30% female representation quota set in the 2003 Rwandan Constitution. (Sharma, 2022). Thus, by reserving seats for women, the number of women in parliament can be

increased, thus achieving gender parity.

An independent-samples t-test is used to assess the significance of the electoral quota for women (either in parliament or within political parties) on their representation in parliament worldwide. The test is based on data from women parliamentarians in countries with an electoral quota for women (106) and without one (77) in their lower or single house of

parliament (Table 1). The t-test is statistically significant. Women representatives in the lower or single house parliaments that have an electoral quota for women (Mean =30.40, SD =11.56) are significantly higher (Mean difference 11.30, 95% CI [7.84, 14.76]) than the parliaments that have no electoral quota for women (Mean =19.09, SD =11.89), ( $t = 6.451$ , with  $df =181$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), two-tailed test).

**Table 1**

*Mean Difference of Women Parliamentarians Between the Countries With Electoral Quota and Without Electoral Quota for Women*

		Electoral quota for women (either in parliament or in political parties)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. error mean				
Women Parliamentarians in the lower or single house		YES	106	30.40	11.56	1.12				
		NO	77	19.09	11.89	1.36				
Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Representation of Women in the Lower House or Single House	Equal variances assumed	.024	.877	6.451	181	.000	11.30142	1.75190	7.84464	14.758
	Equal variances not assumed			6.422	161.187	.000	11.30142	1.75979	7.82619	14.776

These findings suggest that seat reservations for women in parliament effectively improve women's representation.

Furthermore, the geographic distribution of women's representation in parliament varies across regions. Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union as of August 1, 2023, shows significant differences in

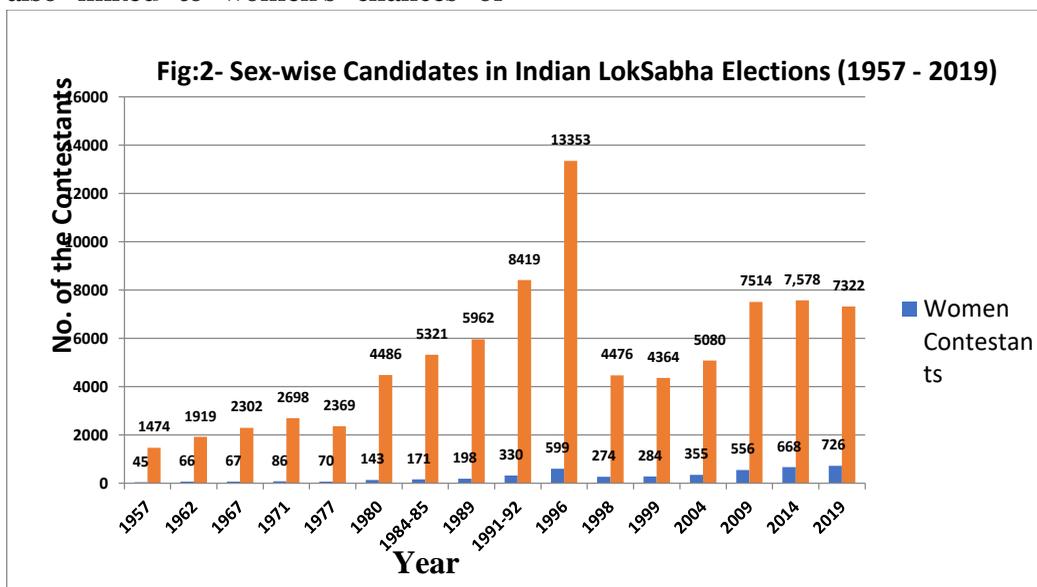
women's representation among South Asian nations. Countries such as Nepal (33.1%), Bangladesh (20.9%), and Pakistan (20.5%) have higher proportions of women in their lower houses of parliament than India does. Since Bangladesh's independence, it has reserved seats for women in parliament, with the system amended in 2011 to reserve 50 seats. Following

the implementation of affirmative action in 2007, Nepal's 2015 constitution mandated that women occupy 33% of all seats in the Constituent Assembly (CA) (Lotter, 2018; Upreti et al., 2020). The quota system is not accepted in Bhutan, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, as reflected in their lower levels of women's representation in parliament.

### Trend in Women Candidates in India

Individual socio-demographic factors, such as income and education, as well as social-cultural norms and caste, are also linked to women's chances of

participating in politics. (Agarwal, 1997; Vissandjee et al., 2006; Banerjee, 2003; Gleason, 2001). While the number of female candidates in parliamentary elections has grown over time, their proportion when compared to male candidates is still low (Fig. 2). As per data from the Election Commission of India, about 9% of the 8,049 candidates running in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections were female, which was around 3% in the 1957 Lok Sabha election. The number of women running for parliamentary seats has increased over the period, but the pace has been very slow.



It exceeded double digits after the 1980 Lok Sabha election, when 143 women ran for office for the first time. Since the beginning of the 1990s, women have been contesting parliamentary seats at a slightly higher rate than earlier.

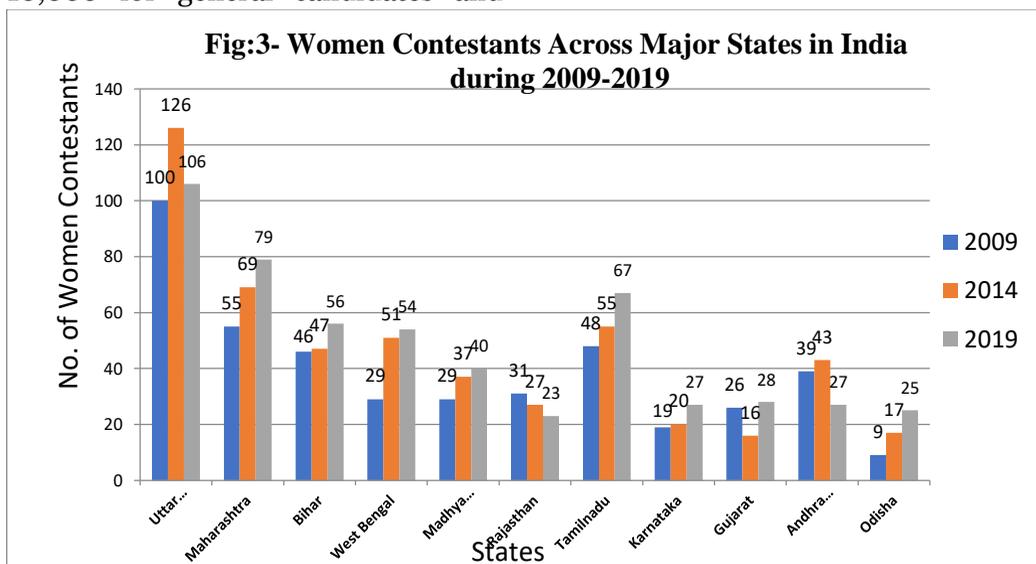
It is noteworthy that 13952 people ran for the Lok Sabha in the 1996 election. The number of candidates in this Lok Sabha election was by far the

highest ever, and it still holds the record till the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha election. The first five general elections, from 1952 to 1971, at the national level led to a one-party-dominant system in which Congress ruled the roost. In contrast, general elections from 1977 onwards reveal a pattern of increasing participation with many political parties in the fray. The number of parties participating in elections

increased after 1989, as the Congress-led order collapsed and political entrepreneurs founded new parties based on social divisions rooted in ascriptive identities, particularly religion and caste (Vaishnav & Hinton, 2019). So, an increasing number of parties resulted in more candidates in the general elections at that time. The initial security deposits, set in 1947 at 500 rupees for general candidates and 250 rupees for candidates from Scheduled Castes or Tribes (SC/ST), remained unchanged for 50 years (till 1996) (Kapoor & Magesan, 2018). In 1996, candidates paid nothing in security deposits for the general elections. So, a large number of independent candidates could easily file nominations. The Election Commission of India eventually increased the deposits sharply and a variable amount, to INR 10,000 for general candidates and

5,000 rupees for SC/ST candidates, as a result of a massive influx in the number of candidates in the elections of 1996 (Kapoor & Magesan, 2018; Bhattacharya & Mitra, 2014). The participation of independents was thus disproportionately impacted by the increase in deposits in the following elections.

Women's electoral inclusion received little attention during the initial years of the post-independence period, with few concerted or coordinated efforts. As of the 2011 census, the top 11 states by population account for almost 3/4 of the total Lok Sabha seats. More than 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the women candidates in the three most recent Lok Sabha elections (2009, 2014, and 2019) came from these eleven states, as found in an analysis of the geographical distribution of candidates (Fig. 3).



Despite higher literacy rates in South Indian states, the number of women candidates nominated for the general election remains unsatisfactory. State

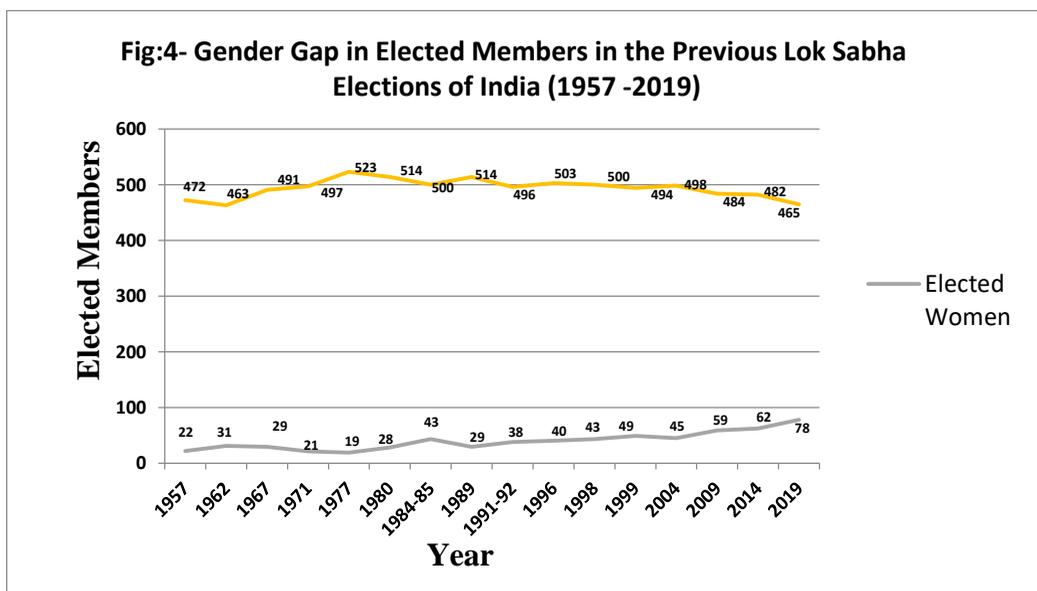
parties play a crucial role in selecting women candidates. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fielded 12.6 per cent

female candidates, while the Congress Party fielded 12.9 per cent of all candidates. However, state-based parties like AITMC in West Bengal nominated 37.1% of women candidates, and the BJD nominated 33.3% in Odisha. Conversely, YSRCP nominated 16% female candidates in Andhra Pradesh in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

**Women's Representation in the Lok Sabha in India**

Membership in the parliament is a prerequisite for holding public office in parliamentary democracies like India. The data on women's representation in the Lok Sabha suggest that the proportion of women representatives has remained low relative to their male counterparts. Despite rising women's representation over time, the rate is extremely slow. Less than 15% of all Lok Sabha members were women in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the highest percentage of women

representatives in the Indian parliament till the 17th Lok Sabha election. The lack of political voice and poor representation of women in parliament results from gender-based exclusions (Kumar & Rai, 2007; Rai, 2011). A variety of factors, some universal and gender-specific, and others country-specific and localised, influence women's participation in formal politics (Rai, 2011). It has been proposed that women's electoral participation is typically lower than men's in India and other countries, either because of the socialisation that women have received that differs from men's, particularly in terms of marriage, motherhood, employment, and property ownership, or because women have fewer resources (Burns et al., 2001; Rai, 2011). Parliaments not only enact laws and hold the executive accountable, but they also assert a 'representative claim' (Saward, 2010) to speak for various constituencies, identity groups, and interests (Rai & Spary, 2019).



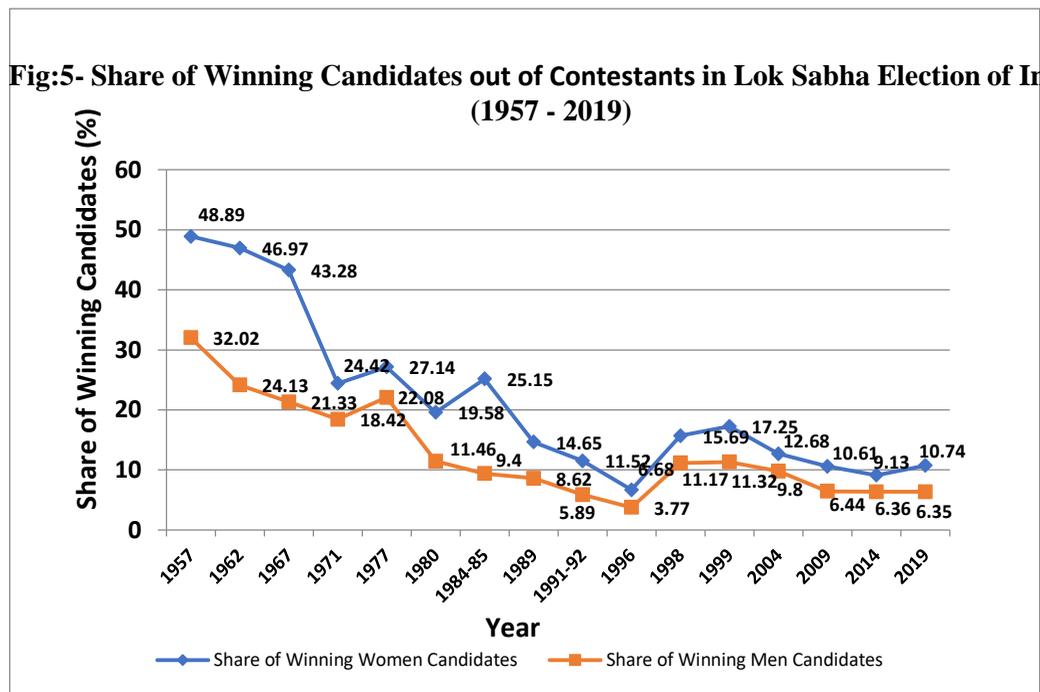
The number of women parliamentarians has remained significantly low since the first election. India achieved the highest number of female MPs (78) in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, and this number has increased very slowly since the 1989 Lok Sabha (Fig. 4).

The 72nd and 73rd constitution amendment bills (1992-1993) ensured women's participation in local bodies, but the 81st constitution amendment bill (1996) for reservation of women in Parliament failed to gain the approval of the Lok Sabha, resulting in very low representation of women in Parliament to date. The spatial distribution of MPs also varies across states and political parties. In the 17th Lok Sabha election (2019), among the eleven most populous states, Odisha had the highest percentage (33.3%) of female MPs, followed by West Bengal (26.2%), Gujarat (23.1%), Maharashtra (16.7%), Andhra Pradesh (16.0%), Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh (13.8%), Rajasthan (12%), Tamil Nadu (7.7%), Bihar (7.5%), and Karnataka (7.1%). In 2019, 41 of the 78 elected women were from the BJP, compared to 6 from the Congress party, but the share of female MPs within the BJP was only 13.50%, and within Congress, just 11.50%. From this perspective, regional parties performed much better, with the AITMC and the BJD recording 40.9% and 41.70%, respectively, in the 2019 general election. Thus, state-based regional parties are emerging as a significant force in reducing the gender gap among elected members of Parliament.

The lack of 'winnability' of women has been cited as a political reason why political parties do not allocate seats to women in national and state elections (Deshpande, 2004). As Figure 5 shows, women's share of winning candidates has remained higher than men's since the 1957 general election. However, women's winnability has decreased over time as more female candidates participate in the parliamentary electoral process. There were three female candidates for every 100 male candidates in 1957, but by 2019, the number had increased to 10, which is still very low but a significant improvement. Although the number of female candidates has increased, actual female representation has not improved. Compared with the 1960s, when there were significantly fewer female candidates, but they had a better chance of winning, this success rate has dropped significantly. One factor behind the declining success rate among women can be explained by the nature of the parties from which candidates contest. In the 2019 general election in India, out of 726 women candidates, 272 candidates were from registered (unrecognised) parties, followed by 226 independent candidates, and 171 candidates of national parties and 57 candidates of state parties. Of the 78 female candidates who won, 58 came from national parties, 17 from state parties, two were independent, and one came from a registered but unrecognised party. The percentage of female candidates from national parties who won the election was 33.92, followed by state parties at 29.82, independent candidates at 0.88, and registered

(unrecognised) parties at 0.37. As a result, more women are running for office, but their low success rate has

reduced the proportion of successful candidates.



**Issues and Challenges**

The women's movement in India has raised awareness of the discrimination and marginalisation that women experience throughout the nation and has made a strong case for their inclusion in the political sphere after independence. Target 5.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life (SDG, 2015). One of the indicators of this target is the proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments. Women's reservation was introduced at the

local government as early as 1993 by the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India. It mandated that at least 33 per cent of the seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) be reserved for women through direct election. As of 08.09.2021, 22 states in India have implemented a policy reserving 50% of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) (MoPR, 2021). Indeed, several states have surpassed the 50% threshold for female representatives in PRIs, suggesting that women are increasingly securing seats in areas that were not designated for them. But the upsurge in women's representation in the national parliament has not been seen even

after 75 years of independence. Even though women comprise 48.46% of India's population (Census of India, 2011) and 48.09% of those who are registered to vote (ECI, 2019), they currently hold only 14.94% of the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha and 14.05% of the Rajya Sabha, while in the state legislative assemblies, women on average constitute about 7.5% of total members (MoLJ, 2022). The central issue of the reservation of seats for women in parliament is whether it can be a highly beneficial tool for their empowerment. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts have been enforced across all Indian states without provoking any animosity or resistance from male politicians or society at large (Kishwar, 1996). This 1993 amendment served as a stimulus, propelling more than 14.5 lakh women into positions of leadership in local governance and administration throughout India (MoPR, 2020). Under the reservation policy, women elected to leadership positions invest more in public goods that are more directly related to women's concerns (Chattopadhyaya & Duflo, 2004). One significant influence of women in local politics has been their role in curbing alcohol-related dominance in numerous rural communities (Outlook India, 2023). Thus, reducing disparities in political agency also helps resolve imbalances in other domains (Sen, 1999).

The IPU (2023) has observed that chambers with reserved seats for women, or those combined with voluntary party quotas, produce a

significantly higher proportion of women than chambers without such measures. Therefore, parliamentary reservations have played a crucial role in advancing women's representation. Another issue related to reservations in the Indian political system that is often overlooked is the reservation of women within political parties. This could also be a decisive factor in increasing women's representation (IPU, 2023). Several countries lack laws mandating women's representation in their parliaments, yet many parties reserve seats for women (Table 2). These initiatives are also highly effective at enhancing women's political representation.

The political, cultural, and social environments are frequently unwelcoming or even hostile to women's involvement in politics (Shvedova, 2005). Due to a variety of structural, functional, and individual factors that vary across social contexts in different countries, women have historically been marginalised in political structures and processes (Bari, 2005). Women are disadvantaged and excluded from decision-making forums because of India's extremely discriminatory and hierarchical social and cultural structures. Since they do not participate much in Indian politics, their struggles and issues are frequently disregarded and unacknowledged (Alam, 2015).

### ***Political Environment***

The political approach is based on male norms. It emphasises the ideas of "winners and losers," competition, and confrontation rather than

empathy, cooperation, and consensus, thereby risking the outright rejection of women's participation in politics (Shvedova, 2005; Thanikodi & Sugirtha, 2007).

**Table 2**

*Political Representation of Women in Different Countries (as of September 2023)*

Country	Per cent of Elected Women	Quota in Parliament	Quota in Political Parties
Sweden	46	No	Yes
Norway	46	No	Yes
South Africa	45	No	Yes
Australia	38	No	Yes
France	38	No	Yes
Germany	35	No	Yes
UK House of Commons	35	No	Yes
Canada	31	No	Yes
US House of Representatives	29	No	No
US Senate	25	No	No
Bangladesh	21	Yes	No
Brazil	18	No	Yes
Japan	10	No	No

Source: Compiled from Inter Parliamentary Union data

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2023-03/women-in-parliament-2022>

The main political barriers that women face are a lack of party support (such as limited financial aid for female candidates), limited access to political networks, a lack of well-developed educational programmes for women's leadership generally and for assisting young women in pursuing political careers, and the fundamental dimensions of the electoral system, which favour men (Shvedova, 2005). Another obstacle to women's political participation is the dominance of men in politics, political parties, and formal political structures. The low proportion of

women in India's political party structures further hinders women's efforts to gather support and secure resources to grow their political constituencies, as well as to mobilise the human and financial resources needed to satisfy their demands and ambitions within those constituencies (Rai, 2011). The parliamentary work schedule is another manifestation of the male-dominated work pattern. It is frequently marked by a lack of structures that support working mothers in general and female MPs in particular (Shvedova, 2005).

### ***Socio Economic Environment***

Women's participation in political institutions and elected bodies is directly affected by their social and economic standing. The socio-economic barriers affecting women's participation in parliament, aside from a lack of sufficient funding, are: (a) illiteracy and restricted access to education and career options; and (b) the combined weight of household responsibilities and work commitments (Shvedova, 2005). Women spend far more time caring for their homes and children than men do due to the ongoing unequal distribution of family care responsibilities (Shames, 2015). This means that men are more likely to run for office despite their families' discouragement, while only women with supportive families can do so. Women's political engagement is also significantly impeded by poverty (Sharma, 2019). At the turn of the millennium, media systems that aim to boost advertising revenue have operated in a political climate that welcomes large inflows of capital, leading to an increase in commercialisation (McAllister & Applequist, 2015). The 'commercialisation' of politics has serious consequences, such as the dominance of advertising in politics, the use of branding and marketing strategies by professionals, extensive campaign financing and moneyed influences (McAllister & Applequist, 2015). Additionally, women's access to and ownership of productive resources is restricted, which limits the range of work that can be done in politics (Bari, 2005) and the

opportunity to participate in politics as well.

### ***Cultural Environment***

Culture constitutes a multifaceted lens through which political issues can be discussed and addressed (Melucci, 2013). Gender is an element of a complex matrix of social hierarchies that make up political power in most cultures. But regardless of their group, men are always better equipped to participate in the political process than women (Thanikodi & Sugirtha, 2007). Patriarchy uses the 'ideology of gender roles' as an ideological tool to place men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere of the home as spouses and mothers (Bari, 2005). This is one of the key factors influencing women's political participation worldwide. Women are far less likely than men to show ambition in running for public office and to perceive an equitable political landscape (Lawless & Fox, 2008). Women's ability to engage in politics is also significantly hampered by the threat of violence (Nussbaum, 2006).

### ***Conclusion***

The sluggish yet steady rise in women's electoral participation reflects a broader commitment to democratic inclusion in India. This paper critically examines the idea of establishing a quota or reservation for women in parliament or other supportive environments to boost women's representation. However, before women's representation at higher levels of government, where it

remains disproportionately low, can be guaranteed, there are still challenges to be addressed, including entrenched gender biases, resource scarcity, and barriers arising from the political, social, and cultural environment. A multifaceted strategy is needed to address these problems, including societal transformation, legal reforms, and ongoing efforts to remove the obstacles to women's equal participation in politics. Since women make up nearly half of the population, having more women in politics could improve women's status in society and the efficiency of government.

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## Authors

### Moumita Mondal

Assistant Professor,  
Department of Geography  
Rammohan College,  
Kolkata-700009, West Bengal, India.  
Email:  
moumitamondal@rammohancollege.ac.in

### A. K. M. Anwaruzzaman

Professor, Department of Geography  
Aliah University (Park Circus  
Campus), 17, Gorachand Road,  
Kolkata-14, West Bengal, India.  
Email:  
anwaruzzaman.geog@aliah.ac.in