



## Engendering Governance in India

### Historical Context:

By the 1980s, issues raised by the women's movements in India led to political parties realizing the importance of female voters and women's wings became active. Mainstream political parties became conscious of women as a constituency and this was reflected in their election manifestoes and the consideration of women as candidates with potential votes. By the ninth Lok Sabha elections in 1989, one could find a conscious focus on women's issues in the manifestoes of political parties. However, this did not translate into more seats for women in the political bodies, and most parties resorted to tokenism and symbolism when it came to representation of women. Women issues were not taken up by parties in a serious manner, nor translated into programmes, policies and legislation, nor were they mandated specifically to address issues of women. Almost all political parties set up a women's cell or wing but they worked as ancillary bodies. Very few women were able to capture seats of power. The number of women in the legislatures remained very small. Very few women reached the position of party president or leader of a legislative party (Kumari & Dubey, 1994).

Article 14 of the Constitution of India, guarantees the fundamental right to equality to all women, and equal voting rights and political participation to both men and women. Article 15 guarantees women the right to equality and non-discrimination as justifiable fundamental rights, and provides enough room for affirmative action programmes for women. Equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State is a fundamental right under Article 16. The Directive Principles of State Policy stresses the right to an adequate means of livelihood for both men and women equally (Article 39a), equal pay for equal work for men and women (Article 39d), and provision for just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 39e). Directives for promoting harmony and renouncing practices derogatory to the dignity of women are also provided for in the Indian Constitution.

An important area where women have been inadequately represented is in the political sphere. Articles 325 and 326 of the Constitution of India guarantees both men and women political equality and equal right to participation in political activities and right to vote respectively. While the right to vote has been accessed, exercised and enjoyed by a large number of women, the right to equal political participation is still a distant dream. Lack of space for participation in political bodies has not only resulted in the presence of women in decision making bodies but also in the neglect of their issues and experiences in policy making.

Though voting is an important indicator of political participation and mobilization, it is not necessarily indicative of representation. Voting is a tool of political equality and it mobilizes women, but voting by itself does not result in the desired end of equality. Almost all parties vie with each other in appealing to women's votes at the time of elections but very few women get to contest in the elections.

Almost all parties hesitate to field women candidates. Hence the number of women candidates fielded by various political parties has always been very low as compared to their numbers in the population. Though a large number of women participate in voting, women are represented in low numbers in decision-making bodies including those of political parties in India. Among women who do manage to rise in the political echelons, in spite of their ability in administration and the art of political articulation, very few women reach the level of cabinet ministers. Mostly, they remain deputy ministers or ministers of state. When women reach the few ministerial positions, they are generally assigned portfolios in the social service sectors of Health, Education, Social Welfare, Women and Child Development etc (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, 2000) .

India is a signatory to a number of international agreements that support proactive state measures for women's political development:

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified by India in 1993. Article 3 discusses appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full advancement of women. Beyond this, Article 7 affirms that signatories should take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country. It recognizes that, unless countries take active steps to promote this integration, women will never be able to fully enjoy the basic human rights guaranteed in international law. CEDAW re-states that women's rights are universal human rights, both in the public and private spheres, and it reformulates problems of rights in terms of lack of access to health, education, economic assets, land, credit, employment, political representation, and decision-making power. It thus advocates a concept of equality which is both formal and substantive.

The Inter parliamentary Union's (IPU) Universal Declaration on Democracy (1997) asserts that "the achievement of genuine democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences." (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) adopted by 198 member states of the United Nations is a global agenda for women's human rights, gender equality and empowerment of women. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) provides the most comprehensive mandate for governments to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are actively addressed as core development concerns (Panda, 2008).

Shantha Mohan has highlighted the concept of engendered governance where both women and men elected representatives have brought to the forefront the marginalisation of women's interests in the process of attaining the common good of

the communities they represent (Mohan, 2008). She goes on to explain that the rationale behind engendered governance is not to bring about a female-dominated political environment. But rather, engendering of governance is an equitable process, which ensures that women's voices are heard in decision-making. And in order to bring about effective engendered governance, it has to be more transparent, accountable, equitable and inclusive to women. This would mean that men not only have to provide space for women, but also work together with them (Mohan, 2008).

### **Milestones in the Advancement of Women since International Women's Year**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Achievement</b>
1975	Establishment of International Women's Year by the General Assembly (Goals: Equality, Development and Peace) The World Conference of the International Women's Year (Mexico City) Adoption of the Plan of Action Committee on the Status of Women in India
1976	Proclamation of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) by the General Assembly
1979	The 34 <sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations Adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women supported gender mainstreaming and promoted equality between women and men which was adopted by UN General Assembly in 1979 as international bill of rights for women.
1980	World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women (Copenhagen) Adoption of the Program of Action for the second half of the United Nations Decade for Women
1981	Regional Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting for Asia and the Pacific for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for Women (Tokyo)
1985	World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for Women (Goals: Equality, Development and Peace)(Nairobi)
1990	The 34 <sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women Adoption of the first review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
1994	Second Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Women in Development (Jakarta) Adoption of the Jakarta Declaration for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific
1995	The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing) Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA). Over 30,000 women's rights advocates attended the Conference and made a substantial difference in conference outcomes. This platform focused on effective implementation of Nairobi

Forward-looking Strategies and on removing all obstacles in women's active participation in all spears of life.
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### **Present Context:**

Women in India constitute nearly half the population of the country, but they are poorly represented in the various governance and decision making bodies. The position depicted through the 14 general elections so far reflects a low representation of women in Parliament, State legislatures, in political parties and other decision-making bodies. Women have occupied less than 8% of Parliamentary seats, less than 6% Cabinet positions, and less than 4% of seats in High Courts and the Supreme Court. Less than 3% of the administrators and managers are women. The average percentage of women's representation in the Parliament, Assemblies and Council of Ministers taken together has been around 10% (UNIFEM, 2000).

Provisions have been made in the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> CAA for the reservation of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> reservation of seats for women in institutions of local self-governance. With the first round of elections in 2004, nearly three million women acquired a place in local bodies.

The roles of women elected representatives included the designation of a wide spectrum of economic and social development programmes; their responsibilities included working with an integrated approach to development, with an emphasis on community participation and long term sustainability.

The women representatives elected in the first round were faced with a conflicting set of ideas. With no previous role models, the women also lacked adequate knowledge, skills and capacities to govern. So the male members in the family began to take over and provide guidance on governance issues. As a result, women stepped back and became dummy candidates, not finding the space or opportunity to make their voices and opinions heard (PRIA International Academy, 2008).

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