

GENDER DISCOURSE IN ELECTIONS: CONSTRUCTING A CONSTITUENCY?

Dr Rainuka Dagar

In the struggle for electoral numbers in coalition politics within an identity sensitive society, gender interests have been taken as synonymous with women's reservation in Parliament. The connectivity between women's electoral performance and development outcomes remains to be established. Yet, the clamour for increasing women's political presence continues in the rarefied well of the Indian Parliament. No doubt, the national political leadership post-Independence has evolved with a select strand of women, but why do political parties want more women to stand for elections now? Is it because women will better utilise public resources for women's interests? Has the electorate become partial to women candidates? Or does women's presence increase a party's secular and diverse credentials? Are women leaders more judicious in allocation of resources, protection of citizen rights or the promotion of development? It is in the backdrop of parliamentary elections that this article will explore the linkages between the Indian democratic polity with representation of women, and that of the electoral discourse on gender with women's development and gender justice.

The gender discourse in Indian electoral politics can be traced to two broad themes: of inclusion and social equity. Both concerns relate to the protection and promotion of women as a vulnerable group. While the substantive content of inclusion remains unchanged, the changing socio-political context from pre-Independence to the 21st century shifted the stance on women's representation within decision-making bodies. The issue of social equity, on the other hand, evolved as the concepts of gender rights and equity in governance evolved globally. By its logic it amalgamated the representation of numbers to the representation of interests and the promotion of diversity within the identity-strong multicultural ethos of the Indian polity.

In the first section, women's representation in electoral politics is mapped with a focus on 2009 elections. Thereafter, the article explores the social equity issues as raised by political parties.

Within this context it locates the impact of electoral politics on the scope and limits of gender rights and justice. It traces the party commitment to gender rights and its engagement to mobilise the electorate to shape state resources for women's development. Has the electoral dialogue on gender issues made politics more gender sensitive? The last section compiles the emerging concerns for gendering the Indian democracy. Based on the inquiry into the electoral discourse, it raises issues for strengthening and gendering the democratic structures.

Political representation of women: A challenge to democratic claims?

Women's presence in proclaiming the democratic process in India has been consistent, if their voting numbers are a criterion. In each election since 1962, more than 45% of eligible women voters cast their preference for Indian leadership. Their number continues to be marginally less than male participation in elections until the present elections when women voters outnumbered the male voters forming 54.17% of the total voters in 2009 (see Table 6.1). The turn-out in percentage of women participation and share of total voters has also been increasing. In 1962, 41.38% of women voted. By the 21st century, this rose to 59%. Male participation of total eligible males was much higher at 70%, but the female presence in the electoral process has increased significantly¹. As a vote bank women are in a position to influence the selection of the party governing the country. Massive participation of women has put to rest the contentious history of women rights to vote in the country. Under the British colonial government, women were first granted the right to vote on 'wifhood qualification' in 1927. The women's movement won women's right to adult franchise from wifhood and literacy constrains in 1950 when the Indian Constitution came into existence.²

In 2009, women's representation as potential leaders as candidates of political parties has been on the rise. Both as a proportion of total candidates standing for elections and in increasing number of women candidates in subsequent elections. However, women's share in terms of leadership has been poor accounting for only 3.32% of the total candidates in 1962, with a rise to 6.89% in 2009. Women constituted less than 4% of the total candidates till 1992. From the 1996 elections women's share of candidature rose to 4.29% and attained its highest proportion of 6.89% in 2009.

Table – 6.1
Gender wise Breakdown of voters, contestants and elected candidates in India for 1957-2009

| Year | TOTAL VOTERS | | CONTESTING CANDIDATES | | ELECTED CANDIDATES | |
|---------|----------------|----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 1957* | | | 1473 | 45 | 467 | 27 |
| | | | <i>(97.04) / 2.11</i> | <i>(2.96) / 1.39</i> | <i>(94.53) / 6.75</i> | <i>(5.47) / 5.37</i> |
| 1962 | 65802050 | 46440421 | 1919 | 66 | 463 | 31 |
| | <i>(58.62)</i> | <i>(41.38)</i> | <i>(96.68) / 2.75</i> | <i>(3.32) / 2.04</i> | <i>(93.72) / 6.70</i> | <i>(6.28) / 6.16</i> |
| 1967 | 86460437 | 66264048 | 2302 | 67 | 491 | 29 |
| | <i>(56.61)</i> | <i>(43.39)</i> | <i>(97.17) / 3.30</i> | <i>(2.83) / 2.07</i> | <i>(94.42) / 7.10</i> | <i>(5.58) / 5.77</i> |
| 1971 | 87382907 | 64153895 | 2686 | 83 | 494 | 24 |
| | <i>(57.66)</i> | <i>(42.34)</i> | <i>(97.00) / 3.85</i> | <i>(3.00) / 2.56</i> | <i>(95.37) / 7.14</i> | <i>(4.63) / 4.77</i> |
| 1977 | 109609940 | 84653975 | 2369 | 70 | 523 | 19 |
| | <i>(56.42)</i> | <i>(43.58)</i> | <i>(97.13) / 3.40</i> | <i>(2.87) / 2.16</i> | <i>(96.49) / 7.56</i> | <i>(3.51) / 3.78</i> |
| 1980 | 115357604 | 87395289 | 4487 | 142 | 501 | 28 |
| | <i>(56.90)</i> | <i>(43.10)</i> | <i>(96.93) / 6.44</i> | <i>(3.07) / 4.38</i> | <i>(94.71) / 7.25</i> | <i>(5.29) / 5.57</i> |
| 1984-85 | 142339839 | 113955124 | 5320 | 173 | 498 | 43 |
| | <i>(55.54)</i> | <i>(44.46)</i> | <i>(96.85) / 7.63</i> | <i>(3.15) / 5.34</i> | <i>(92.05) / 7.20</i> | <i>(7.95) / 8.55</i> |
| 1989 | 173290798 | 135759697 | 5962 | 198 | 501 | 29 |
| | <i>(56.07)</i> | <i>(43.93)</i> | <i>(96.79) / 8.55</i> | <i>(3.21) / 6.11</i> | <i>(94.53) / 7.25</i> | <i>(5.47) / 5.77</i> |
| 1991-92 | 163132537 | 122723928 | 8420 | 329 | 495 | 39 |
| | <i>(57.07)</i> | <i>(42.93)</i> | <i>(96.24) / 12.08</i> | <i>(3.76) / 10.15</i> | <i>(92.70) / 7.16</i> | <i>(7.30) / 7.75</i> |
| 1996 | 192279757 | 151028333 | 13353 | 599 | 495 | 40 |
| | <i>(56.01)</i> | <i>(43.99)</i> | <i>(95.71) / 19.15</i> | <i>(4.29) / 18.48</i> | <i>(92.52) / 7.16</i> | <i>(7.48) / 7.95</i> |
| 1998 | 208596815 | 166844924 | 4476 | 274 | 505 | 43 |
| | <i>(55.56)</i> | <i>(44.44)</i> | <i>(94.23) / 6.42</i> | <i>(5.77) / 8.45</i> | <i>(92.15) / 7.30</i> | <i>(7.85) / 8.55</i> |
| 1999 | 207130100 | 164539004 | 4364 | 284 | 497 | 49 |
| | <i>(55.73)</i> | <i>(44.27)</i> | <i>(93.89) / 6.26</i> | <i>(6.11) / 8.76</i> | <i>(91.03) / 7.19</i> | <i>(8.97) / 9.74</i> |
| 2004 | 216628138 | 172714226 | 5080 | 355 | 500 | 43 |
| | <i>(55.64)</i> | <i>(44.36)</i> | <i>(93.47) / 7.29</i> | <i>(6.53) / 10.95</i> | <i>(92.08) / 7.23</i> | <i>(7.92) / 8.55</i> |
| 2009 | 191028997 | 225765026 | 7514 | 556 | 484 | 59 |
| | <i>(45.83)</i> | <i>(54.17)</i> | <i>(93.11) / 10.78</i> | <i>(6.89) / 17.16</i> | <i>(89.13) / 7.00</i> | <i>(10.87) / 11.73</i> |
| Total | 1959039919 | 1602237890 | 69725 | 3241 | 6914 | 503 |
| | <i>(55.01)</i> | <i>(44.99)</i> | <i>(95.56) / 100.00</i> | <i>(4.44) / 100.00</i> | <i>(93.22) / 100.00</i> | <i>(6.78) / 100.00</i> |

Source: Election commission of India

Percentages in Parenthesis are from Row (same year)

Percentages in Italics are from Column (All Year's Total)

It was in the 1996 elections campaign that all major political parties proclaimed one-third reservation of women in Parliament as part of their manifestos. If a democratic polity constitutes a proportional number of representatives to their population, then women's representation has a long way to go. In the 2009 elections, women make up 48.7 % of the Indian citizens eligible to vote, but party tickets included less than 7% of women candidates and less than 11% of the Parliament's representation is female (see Table 6.1). The leadership potential of women has been credited differentially across the states. At the level of state analysis, women leadership in terms of candidates standing for election was the highest from Delhi. Here, 11.25% of the total candidates were women in contrast to the all-India average of 6.89%. Uttarakhand (9.21%), Rajasthan (8.96%), Chhattisgarh (8.43%), West Bengal (7.88%) and Gujarat (7.24%) had a higher contribution of women candidates.³

Women in 2009, with 59 members have the largest ever representation in the Indian Parliament (see Table 6.1). This presence has, however, been inconsistently provided from the states. Interestingly, states with a higher number of female candidates did not send a higher percentage of women to Parliament. The success rate of female candidates was highest in Punjab with nearly 31%. This was followed by West Bengal (24.14%), Madhya Pradesh (20.6%) and Assam (18.18 %).⁴ Subsequently, women from these states had a higher representation in the Parliament. The numbers reveal a lopsided engagement of women with Indian electoral politics. They are active in the supportive role of democracy with high participation in casting of votes, but are on the margins of public life. Further, leadership spaces are taken as role extensions of familial and identity hegemony in politics. In South and South-East Asia, the dynastic succession of women leaders has characterised their entry into the political fray.⁵ Scholars note that within Indian politics women have gained access to the most important political posts 'because of familial ties to prominent male politicians'.⁶

Largely, the selection of women candidature is guided by their affiliation to the party hierarchy via family connections or their own elite standing. In 2009, 61% of elected female representatives belonged to political families or were themselves from an elite polity. This is in contrast to the male MPs who ranged at 25%.⁷ Of the elected female candidates the largest

number could draw upon family lineage to carve out their constituencies. The second claim for leadership was from elite standing such as film stars, erstwhile royals, or from creative arts. The emergence of leadership through the transfer of the 'cultural hero' particularly of popular film stars in South India has been successfully catapulted into populist politics.⁸ Thus, women leadership, included the blue blood of political lineage at the national level, lead by the Nehru-Gandhi family, where both daughter-in-laws of Indira Gandhi were elected to Parliament. Sonia Gandhi as leader of the ruling UPA coalition and Maneka Gandhi as an opposition BJP bencher. Women from the Scindia royalty of Gwalior are also many times Parliamentarians. Of the two Scindia sisters in politics Yoshadhra Raje won her parliamentary election. A number of women candidates from families dominating state level politics also were elected. Shruti Chaudhry as a first-time candidate was selected by the electorate on the laurels of her grand-father Bansi Lal, a former Chief Minister of Haryana. Supriya Sule was voted into power with the stature of her father Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra. Harsimrat Kaur is Prakash Singh Badal's (Chief Minister of Punjab) daughter-in-law and wife of Akali President Sukhbir Singh Badal. Jayalalitha is no longer the shadow of her political mentor N.T. Rama Rao, but is a leader in her own right.

Women candidates' interaction with the electorate followed the avenue of selection. Affiliation to the top hierarchy of party neutralised gender connotations with leadership becoming the overarching identity. Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Jayalalitha, Mayawati on the national scene, and Jayapradha, Shelja, Mehbooba Mufti at regional levels are 'viewed as leaders' with capacity to deliver to the electorate. 'She has got a bridge made in our constituency and responds to our needs'; 'she always meets us and gets our work done' is the common refrain of voters in response to these female leaders. Women candidates who were a symbol of political families were further removed from the gender lens as they remained insulated through the hegemonic leadership status of the family and at the level of conduct epitomised the typed gender standing. Head covered, respectful in appropriate appeal of daughter-in-law, or daughter and reflecting the ideal of the Indian women – to voters and media as the case may be. The symbolic capital of gender is encashed by leaders, 'reinforcing and legitimising stereotypes in exchange of political power'.⁹

The stand alone glamour of women candidates however was open to scrutiny. The most derogatory campaign was initiated by Akhilesh Das Gupta in Lucknow against the candidature of Nafisa Ali Sodhi, a part-time Bollywood actress and socialite, without a political lineage. The body politics resorted to was condemned.¹⁰ The complaint made to the Election Commission resulted in a notice being issued to A.D. Gupta and a subsequent censure. A case was also registered under a false statement in connection to an election dealing with personal character or conduct of a candidate.¹¹ While maligning of female character received few complaints (four from Uttar Pradesh, one each from Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh)¹², their incidence highlights the gender connotations underpinning women in the election fray.

Currency, however, continued to be drawn from gender symbolism. Among the most reported exchange was BJP leader Narendra Modi's dismissive comment on the opposition Congress Party as Budhiya (old women) – symbolic for a redundant liability.¹³ When this was objected to, by raising the issue of young blood within the Congress by a female leader, he retorted to the party being a Gudiya (doll) – superfluous and glamorous without content.¹⁴ Reference to women found a ready link to demeaning gendered imagery. Sanjay Dutt's gimmick to cash in the popularity of his blockbuster movie on the Bollywood version of Gandhian activism to turn the other cheek became entangled in sexist conduct. His campaigning style to label Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati as corrupt, exploitative and non-performing by wanting to act out his movie performance of giving a hug and a kiss to reform her, found him being accused as sexist. A polity so steeped in sex role placements are seen as a transgression of male-female conduct to be projected for electoral benefits.

The gender underpinnings remained typed and femininity-oriented. The media remained largely blanketed on gender, but responded to the colour and glamour of women. Vivid dresses of women voters splashed colour, as did constituency woes depicting urban and rural women in long lines of colourful attire filling water. And, candidature coverage fell back to draw upon the rich storyline of political lineage. Issues of domestic violence, dowry, caste and honour killings, did not find attention in the electoral speeches or as issues raised by the free press of democratic India. Property rights, feminization of poverty or the missing number of the Indian

girl child could not capture the attention of either the leadership or guardians of democracy – the media, thereby depicting people’s disinterest in gender justice.

Party commitments to gender

Women’s claim to development benefits was, however, registered in the manifestos of national political parties. Women’s concerns were addressed as part of political parties campaign to promote social justice either as part of special groups or more specifically to empower women. The CPI located issues pertaining to women under its commitment to peoples’ rights and social justice. The Congress Party placed women-identified needs along with the weaker sections. The Janta Dal (S) clubbed women and youth as groups that need to be empowered. The BJP signalled women’s empowerment as an imperative for inclusive development. The BSP also chalked a women-specific ‘Appeal’. The emphasis was on provision of economic support, followed by protection against atrocities and support for political participation.

Political parties raised the issue of women social security in terms of income generation for women. According to its manifesto, the National Congress ‘endeavours to ensure that at least half of the country’s rural women population will be enrolled as members of self-help groups linked with banks...’, ‘to reserve one-third of all central government jobs for women’¹⁵. The BJP went further ‘to adopt a national policy on women’s economic empowerment to ensure every woman has access to livelihood and to enhance the income of all categories of working women’¹⁶. The CPI (M) promised to ‘ensure equal remuneration for women workers in all areas of work... health insurance of women workers in the unorganised sector’¹⁷. The centrality to women’s economic empowerment has been a relatively recent focus of mainstream political parties. The Left parties were, however, always geared to addressing the working class women’s rights.

Historically, national parties manifestos have focused on three aspects relating to women. The first being access to basic needs of education and health, and has been a consistent theme since Independence. Secondly, provision of economic and civil participation through income support and political representation. Thirdly, promotion of equal rights for women which has

ranged from personal laws, working conditions and laws on atrocities against women. Social equity has thus grappled with the promotion of women's rights, but not yet expanded to gender justice. The gamut of rights continues to include equal rights with men in terms of access to resources – employment, education and property. The scope of rights became enlarged from the welfare measures and protections of women – nutrition, child care, legal rights against violent practices – and special needs of female gender, to more recently the inclusion in the development agenda. Women-specific rights of maternal benefits and reproductive health were addressed first by the Left parties, followed by the BJP and the Congress.¹⁸

Within this broad agreement across party manifestos to provide women developmental access to services and facilities within an increasingly rights-based agenda, political parties continue to screen women issues in accordance to their political compulsions. Firstly, electoral issues raised are in conjunction to legislation and executive policy, responsive to the global mandate on gender and the women's movement. Secondly, identity politics remains the largest filter for addressing gender issues. Thirdly, gender remains a low priority particularly in its strength to woo the electorate. Leaders' speeches did not address established normative gender unjust practices. Also, political parties drew a distinction in the manifesto claims and issues they referred to in public. In other words, electoral politics is reflective of the people's pulse where gender is concerned.

The 2009 manifestos of all mainstream parties commit to check atrocities against women, ranging from laws to check female foeticide, domestic violence and sexual harassment. While the BJP listed a number of laws, other parties were restricted to protective legislation in accordance to their positioning. The Left mentioned laws for sexual harassment at workplace, the Congress applauded itself on its achievement of Domestic Violence Act passed in its leadership. Laws protecting women from violence have been a response to women's movement and public articulations against brutality.¹⁹ Protection of women from dowry abuse was consistently raised in the manifesto of the BJP party and sporadically so in the Congress

Party. These laws were, however, raised in the political party agendas after social uprisings and even state enactments against dowry had been undertaken.²⁰

The concern for female foeticide raised by the mainstream parties, largely the under girl child rights in 2009 was first reflected by the BJP in 1989 and later by Congress in 1991 and other parties. However, State Governments such as Maharashtra had already introduced a bill to regulate the use of scientific technology for sex selection in 1988. This was an acknowledgement to the public furore and social awareness campaigns against the misuse of technology for deselecting the girl child.²¹

The Domestic Violence Bill hailed as an achievement by the Congress manifesto (2008) passed in 2007, was first raised in the manifesto of the BJP party in 1996. The party was responding to the National Perspective Plan for Women 2000 that demanded a protective legislation. The National Commission for Women in 1992 set up a statutory body to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women. The Lawyers' Collective (a women NGO) drafted and circulated a bill on Domestic Violence in 1992 and NCW came with the draft bill on Domestic Violence in 1994. It was only after the policy initiative to review laws, increasing research on violence against women that led the BJP to acknowledge the need for supportive legislation. Wife beating remained outside the preview of other parties.

The electoral party discourse on gender has been largely policy-driven rather than political parties mobilising the electorate for a policy change. It is only after the report 'Towards Equality' compiled in the backdrop of the international initiative on gender that attention to women came into the political ambit²². Prior to the International Year of the Women in 1975, political manifestos were limited to promises for equal pay for equal work, maternity benefits, health and education facilities for women. 'Special steps to remove social, educational and economic disabilities of women, so that they may fully discharge the responsibilities to the family, society and nation' (BJP; 1957); equal pay for equal work (BJP: 1957, CPI: 1962); adequate financial allocation and extra facilities for education of women (CPI, 1962).

The Indian political establishment responded to the 'first wave of official feminism' post the UN declaration of International Year for Women in 1975 with a shift from welfare to development.²³ The international development agenda started being reflected in the gender policy of the government post the Sixth Five-Year Plan from 1980. It extended women's welfare and assistance in performing 'women roles' to economic independence. The shift from welfare and protectionism to participation in the development process was notable.²⁴ In the seventh plan a separate department on women and child was introduced. It largely monitored 27 beneficiary-oriented schemes for women. By the ninth plan women were recognised as agents of social growth and kept pace with the international strategies and civil society mobilisations to promote women's development.

The enlarged plan scope from education and health sectors to participation in income generation activities started reflecting in the manifestos of the national parties. For instance, 'Special schemes for female headed households in rural areas and increasing employment opportunities for women (CPI:1998); provision of working women hostels (BJP:1991, Congress: 2004); setting up of co-operative societies in rural and urban areas to be managed by women for the benefits of women entrepreneurs, self-employment schemes (BJP:1991).

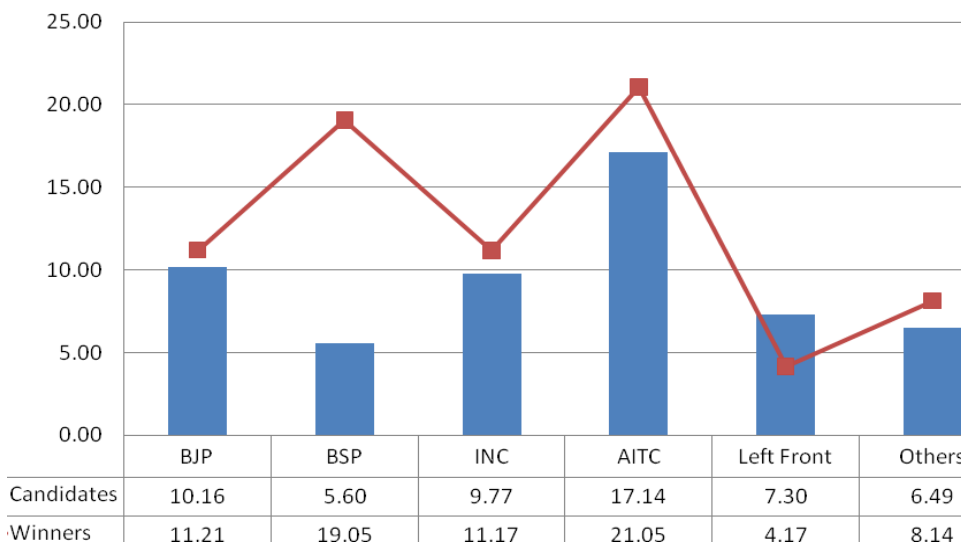
Issues raised in the manifestos of parties may not necessarily be brought to the notice of the electorate. The Congress Party claimed its protective stance towards women in its manifesto and 'has passed the Domestic Violence Bill, providing property laws to women.' Its leadership has not ventured into voicing these claims in their electoral speeches as in social domain wife-beating is considered a prerogative of the husband, and property rights the sole claim of males in a male dominated society. The BJP provides a larger space to women issues in its manifestos. Both the lead parties, however, demarcate the concerns to be raised in the manifesto and the speeches of its leaders wooing the electorate. Further, both the manifestos and speeches ignore aspects of social practice that are grossly gender unjust, with acknowledgment of this injustice likely to impinge on their vote gathering prowess.

The politics of diversity has added an identity-based advantage to the winnability of candidates. Women's quota has provided grounds for some regional parties to extend their caste support

base by demanding allocations for other backward castes (OBC) within the women reservation. Raising the banner for OBC, these parties argue that without a sub-quota OBC women will not be selected as candidates. In spite of the numbers in Parliament, the bill continues to be retabled, awaiting a political consensus. By overruling the insignificant numerical minority, parties will nevertheless accede an edge to the parties claiming OBC interests and thus want a consensus.

Historically, women’s movement has traversed a long way from political equality to affirmative action²⁵. This shift can be located in the state’s sustained approach of affirmative policy for promoting vulnerable groups. In a society that has been historically unequal, the political representation of diversity is a legitimate, even if not a sufficient factor in representation of interests. The visible placement of member representatives of marginalised groups within the decision-making forum is expected to provide a psychological spin off effect by registering the breaking of historical barriers and the hope of availing equal opportunities.²⁶ Yet, if political parties are hoping to register women as active citizens in decision-making bodies, it is expected that they will provide women’s active presence through organisational posts in their own organisations.

Graph 6.1
Partywise Female Candidates and Member of Parliament in 2009



Source: Election Commission of India

Parties can also decree that a third of their party candidatures along with party positions within respective organisations be reserved for women. In fact, party selection and financial support to women candidates has been identified as crucial to women’s occupation of political office.²⁷ The traditional authority systems are male based networks, constraining women’s capacity to translate social capital into political capital²⁸, making party networks and institutional support more relevant. However, no party has committed itself to gender rights with this devotion. Women representation in the party organisational structure and party selection of candidatures remains below 15% (see Table 6.2). Left parties and the Congress reflect a larger women presence. The BJP follows closely with a large gap reflected by the BSP – a woman-headed party. In fact, of the major political parties, the Trinamool Congress fielded the highest percentage of women candidates in the 2009 elections and has claim to the highest percentage of women MPs (see Graph 6.1). Clearly, for political parties gendering the Parliament is delinked from gendering their own party platforms.

Table – 6.2
Party wise Female Candidates and Female Office Bearers in 2009

| S. No. | Party | Female Candidates | Female Office Bearers | Manifesto Promising one third Reservation in Parliament |
|--------|---|-------------------|-----------------------|---|
| 1. | Biju Janta Dal (BJD) | 0.00 | 13.04 | No |
| 2. | Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) | 7.91 | 8.70 | Yes |
| 3. | Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) | 5.04 | 4.00 | No |
| 4. | Indian National Congress (INC) | 7.73 | 11.86 | Yes |
| 5. | Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKN) | 0.00 | 7.40 | No |
| 6. | Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) | 0.36 | 11.11 | Yes |
| 7. | Telugu Desham Party (TDP) | 0.36 | 15.38 | Yes |
| 8. | Communist Party of India (M) | 11.84 | 6.67 | Yes |

Source: Party Offices, New Delhi

Gender: A personal agenda of candidates

In the 2009 elections, women issues were raised across the election process from two voices. National level leadership from mainstream parties namely the Congress and the BJP and individual candidates, for whom gender was a personal agenda. The leaders referred to gender

issues largely as the all encompassing term ‘women’s empowerment’. It, however, translated to be a third allocation in income and development schemes for women, promotion of self-help groups and women’s education. Violence against women was sporadically mentioned in the form of female foeticide (L.K. Advani, Manmohan Singh) and in passing of the Domestic Violence Act by Sonia Gandhi. These were contextualised as a party’s concern for vulnerable groups and did not form a comprehensive gender campaign.

Table – 6.3
Perception of Teachers from Northern India on
Women Issues raised by Political Parties in 2009

| Raising issue of reservation | Girl child education | None |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 15.63 | 6.25 | 78.13 |

Source: Institute for Development and Communication (IDC), Chandigarh, Field survey 2009

Perceptions of women issues raised by political parties was taken from a sample of teachers across the northern region. 78% of these educated voters mentioned that no party raised any women related issues. According to them women related concerns if raised were confined to reservation of women (16%) and girl child education (6%) (see Table 6.3).

A more consistent voice on gender was raised by individual candidates and was more in line with the personal agenda rather than a party proclamation. For instance, the issue of female foeticide became a campaign agenda for Harsimrat Kaur, Akali Dal MP and daughter-in-law of Prakash Singh Badal, the Chief Minister of Punjab. Punjab has among the worse child sex ratios in the world since the past century. It is perhaps the most relevant gender concern in the region. It took the personal capacity of the elite Badal family member to raise a battle cry against this form of violence. But the Akali Dal only raised the issue in its 2004 manifesto, even though its ally, the BJP, has been raising it in its manifestoes since 1991. In sum, the 2009 elections marks the political parties appropriation of the term women’s empowerment, but without the corresponding commitment to unravel and undermine the social reality that thrives on gender differentiating hierarchies.

Emerging issues

The 2009 electoral discourse throws up a number of imperatives for political parties committed to a gender nuanced approach. Three overarching concerns emerge. One, political parties need to address gender rather than women. The doctrine of dismantling institutionalized discrimination and gender differentiating structures is a well-accepted and necessary directive towards gender justice. It underscores a distributive share of familial inheritance of assets, skills, status; of caste-religious social capital; of producer-reproducer relations with associated changes in roles, social processes and institutions. Yet, the political canvass limits its scope to women, without placing the gender differentiating relations historically evolved into the social ethos and identity construed India polity, at the centre of a gender discourse. Like the Scheduled Castes, who cannot be purged of the historical psyche, identity and now capital, by placing doles for individual consumption, the gender identity needs to be delinked from the hegemony of collectivity identity. Cultural markers defining gender through family, caste or religion need to be shed for the enjoyment of gender rights.

Second, the momentum on gender raised by the international development agenda, women's movement and the women entity as a coalition to secular credentials has been ruptured to accommodate vote bank identity politics. The perspective on gender issues can be placed in a context of social equity, distributive justice or gender justice as the standpoint of specific parties, rather than an instrument to placate and gather identity based ballots. Third, the reservation fervour, unless promoted as part of a systematical and holistic gender policy may only extend the politics of patronage through female agency. Reservation in decision-making bodies needs to be stacked with policy initiatives, civil society proactivism, political mobilization for gender interest aggregation and monitored accountability to the principals of gender equity.

Women rather than gender thrust

The 2009 elections have registered women issues as an entitlement claim, but gender is yet to be promoted as a right. The electoral manifestos are replete with the pledge to empower women. Leaders promise women a share of development benefits and the electoral process

gears up to safeguard women's rights. Yet the electoral discourse addresses gender as synonymous with women. It divests the historical constructed structures of gender hierarchy to a votive offering of benefits and protectionisms to women. No doubt, women are the predominant victims of the practice of gender differentiation facing the brunt of dowry exchange, domestic violence, female deselection, sexual harassment, unequal pay, disproportionate dropouts from the education system and feminization of poverty, among other discriminations. And the remedy is prescribed through the filters of dole-oriented politics. Thus, dowry or domestic violence is viewed as undesirable social practices that can be rooted out through strict legislation. Women can be educated by opening more schools and women can be provided economic independence through self-help groups, and by loaning paltry amounts of money. By allocating a third of income-generating schemes, women's independence and poverty can be alleviated.

What is the outcome of these initiatives? A female has the least chance of being born in India. According to UNICEF, every single day 7,000 girls in India are unable to take birth.²⁹ The female's chequered existence continues in her life span. In spite of systematic commitment of national parties to women's health and maternal mortality, every seven minutes a woman dies from complications related to pregnancy and child birth.³⁰ Along with malnutrition and anaemia, morbidity and differential access to basic social services³¹, women suffer violence throughout their life cycle.

More girls than boys dropout of school. Only 14 of the 100 girls who enroll pass out of twelfth class and even with universal free education up to 14-years, only 60 of these girls will reach primary level fifth class³². Women continue to have negligible access to agricultural land, credit, irrigation and infrastructure.

Access and inclusion of women in executive and legislative office has not translated into equity outcomes, particularly in developing countries. Hassim notes that state intervention in social democracies of the Scandinavian polity collaborated with a widespread women's movement to strategise the promotion of female leadership along with gender interests in policy making, to effect change³³. Thus, in the Indian context can legal rights become a standard without political

mobilisation or policy support against social markers of the Indian cultural identity? The law on Domestic Violence has been passed, but lacks adequate budgetary provisions, institutional integration and even political mobilisation. No party is campaigning on the streets against familial subjugation of a daughter-in-law or ill-treatment of a wife. Can policy allocations be utilised without civil society creating a demand for their value? Can a female's right to life be celebrated when her share in familial resources is begrudged?

The isolated approach to provide women basic needs and developmental benefits is unable to change women's marginalised status. While representative democracy in terms of female participation in elections and as elected leaders in Parliament continues to rise, so does the gender gap in women's survival rates, atrocities and poverty.³⁴ Winnability of women candidates is a function of family standing or clout of party hierarchy rather than a women vote bank. Gender mainstreaming in the electoral process continues to be wanting. The Election Commission does not refer to a gender sensitive conduct, in fact it trains police officials with conduct of elections, but there is no gender-specific training or sensitisation, in any materials of the Commission (ECI, 2009)³⁵. Even the language of Representation of People Act continues, along with its amendments as late as 2002, to refer to candidates as masculine maintaining the imagery of masculine leadership,³⁶ a clear reflection of the ad hoc interventions for gendering the electoral process.

The electoral discourse, moreover, does not link the life cycle of denial, discrimination and atrocities accruing differentially across different social placements. Patriarchy is a social phenomenon, rather than a women-specific problem. And, it is intermeshed with pervasive primordial collectivity identities. The redistribution of social and familial resources needs to be delegitimised from the hegemony of religious, caste and familial control over gender roles, norms and practise.

Gender as a leverage in identity politics

Female leadership's access to power is legitimised for a mandate and policy prescriptions to power a women's agenda. By occupying formal positions to articulate and reorganise the

exercise to transform women's placement is itself a challenge. According to certain scholars, the Indian female MPs powers are limited to the confines of party lines which they are expected to follow. And, the party priority on gender is low.³⁷ The logic that women leadership is required in the decision-making halls of the Parliament underlines that women will be promoting women interests and development. The argument presumes that the interests of all women are the same and can be promoted by a group of individual women. It also ignores that citizens can be representatives of two or more identities and women have placements across castes, class, religion and locale which may be different and even conflicting. The universalising arguments do not hold under the pressure of multiple identities. Inequalities of caste, religion and class identities in India polity intersect to hierarchise gender differentially.³⁸ The mobility of women leadership is further contained with the multiple identity of a multicultural reality.

What happens when women's interests clash with her caste group, state or religious affinity? The most infamous example of such a clash of interest is Shah Bano Case, an example of an individual's right in conflict with collective identity.³⁹ The practice of personal law, symbolically proclaims a group's distinct identity. Muslim collectivity was supported by an act of Parliament and Shah Bano became relegated to a gender unjust verdict of the Muslim clergy. The personification of women as group identity is eulogised and reflected by political parties appropriating the identity such as the BJP at the heights of Ram Rajya movement.⁴⁰ The identity driven populist politics in India 'fragmenting and destabilises the political agenda'.⁴¹ Yet female leadership is expected to overcome the religion and identity-cultivated vote banks of their political parties and forge a gender just agenda.

The fracturing of a fragile gendered polity is perhaps best reflected in the present context by the issue of women's reservation in Parliament.⁴² Not only do the national parties, but a majority of regional parties promise to provide women reservation in their 2009 manifestos. In spite of the relevant number in Parliament to pass this act since 1996, the bill awaits a democratic consensus. Like the pre-independence reservation for women seats under minority community allocation, some regional parties want an OBC quota within the women reserved constituencies. The argument that women from the backward class will be marginalised by the general category women seems misplaced given the SC and OBC representation of women in

open constituencies. 38% of total SC women candidates in 2009 fought elections in non-reserved constituencies accounting for 10% of the total women candidates.⁴³ In Haryana, in the past decade OBC women candidates formed 40 % of the elected representatives. In state assembly elections in Punjab, women leaders from the OBCs constituted 23% of the elected female leaders in this decade. These numbers are more than the representative OBC population in the states.⁴⁴

The elite women leadership in politics is certainly not caste defined. Yet the ready acceptance of mainstream parties to accommodate posturing of caste politics, relegates women as a non-entity in the political fray, at all layers – as vote banks, as leaders and in the relevance of gender interests to political parties. The assertive vote for caste is further revealed in context to honour killings sanctioned by caste institutions. The CPI in the party manifesto calls for laws relating to honour killings⁴⁵ and the Congress “reiterates its unflinching resolve to combat communalism of all kinds and deal ruthlessly with those perpetuating atrocities on weaker sections like Dalits and women” without mentioning caste violence against gender.⁴⁶

In Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh rules of brotherhood disallows marriage within the same patrilineal class. Exercise of individual rights in preference to marriage partner have led to violation of the caste code and a matter of honour resulting in violent penalties of the involved, in accordance to caste decree⁴⁷. Yet party voices have remained silent and leadership in the region sensitive to the ire of the caste panchayats. As a vote bank they hold the electoral fortunes of candidates and even parties. Violation of gender rights, including physical annihilation can be ignored, without a ripple being felt. In an identity fractured polity, competitive politics asserts the privilege of identity over citizen or other identities. Not only is gender reconstructed in accordance to the identity values, but gender rights become subordinated to that of the group identity.

Women’s representation: Gendering democratic institutions to promote gender rights

The under representation of gender in political decision-making bodies and positions of governance has been argued from perspectives of social justice, socially constructed skills and styles of management of populations in the margins, to essentialist conceptions of women

leadership. Biological leadership capacities of natural nurturance and peaceful inclinations remain outside the mainstream.⁴⁸ And, female leadership in India has been found to be no less autocratic or more equal than male leaders.⁴⁹ The dominant thrust for women's inclusion in decision-making bodies remains the gender mainstreaming in resource allocation by reshaping political priorities.⁵⁰ One-third reservations of women is expected to provide the critical push to gender interests being advocated.

Women neither exist in a social vacuum nor have a biological propensity for overcoming the norms, values and practices of a gender differentiating system. Women are as likely as men to prefer male children, demand dowry, discriminate against girl children in terms of health, education, property, employment and be party to familial violence, accept female honour to be that of family's, concede that women's primary role is that of nurturer and caretaker while that of the men is to earn, lead and protect women. Certainly the female gender is no filter for patriarchy.

Representation within the framework of existing normative standards which are the markers of masculinity may not result in better utilisation of public resources for gender interests. One, at the leadership level elected women 'act as agents on behalf of their male relations and exercise power in their interests'⁵¹. Second, the institutions are not gender responsive. The strategy of increased access to promote women's development 'tends to assume that the necessary institutions can be created relatively easily through political forces, underestimating the impact of weak and fragile institutions'. The corresponding relevance of traditional social capital, outside the formal sphere undermines the endeavours for gender equality.⁵²

To illustrate, representation in panchayats introduced almost three decades before could not build women's leadership profile as reflective of authority, socially valued attributes of power and political-cultural hegemony.⁵³ Panchayat members continue to be identified as those who possesses measures of control ranging from influence, threat, use of force and in local parlance *raub, dabka, leadri*. It is expected that the panchayat leader shall perform multifarious functions. To quote:

One has to answer calls at all times of the night – if a fight breaks out immediate attention is needed – one has to gather a number of people to intervene – difficult enough for a man, impossible for a woman – if a woman is a panch/sarpanch then these duties are carried out by her husband or a son – people respond to one who has the capacity to undertake their work – so a female remains a titleholder only – a privilege deemed by the government, she has no money of her own, no standing of her own in the community, no physical or social might to intervene and control incidents of violence.”⁵⁴

Since the standards of leadership are masculine characteristics at the panchayat level, women representation is seen either as supportive to male leadership or are represented through proxy variable. Classic instances of visitors being directed to a sarpanch’s house – the epitome of a leader – owner of a large landholding, affluent, huge house with a ready crowd of hanger-ons – eventually leads to the information that the post of sarpanch is actually held by a wife or servant (often a Dalit) in the household. Such an established pattern, while making a mockery of reservation highlights the situational requirements dictated by informal management that resides in caste and gender structures.

Women’s representation is further restricted by the predominant value of protectionism towards the weak. This continues to be the male domain and women representation is seen as legitimate to the extent it promotes masculine norms, condones values and abides by the codes of conduct of restrictive mobility. In this framework, representation becomes symbolic without reflecting the cultural ethos where value is seen as a legitimate instrument of resolution of conflicts. Local leadership is further characterised as capable in terms of providing hospitality and timely patronage.

“Being a panch is an expensive and time consuming proposition. The kitchen must continually respond to the streams of people visiting for grievances, show of solidarity or for establishing contact – petrol has to be burnt to run around for peoples work”.⁵⁵

Another important aspect of value of protection is dispensation of justice in the case of conflict and violence, land encroachment, water distribution and domestic disputes. At the micro level of governance, i.e. village panchayats, land related disputes and water distribution fall within the domain of male arbitration, whereas domestic disputes are assigned to women. In this also negotiations are done by male panchayat leaders and the lady panch is involved in counselling

the parents and womenfolk. The conduct of conflict negotiations bring out three aspects: firstly, women representatives are involved in private domain on issues relating to domestic violence; secondly, women leadership is only confined to interpersonal gender domain; and thirdly, the male leadership continue to be involved in the business of conflict resolution and interest management. These gender cultural predispositions incapacitate women to perform the required role.

“My wife is sarpanch and the work is handled by me. I don’t like that girls of Jat Sikh family should go to the BDO Office and chat with him or go to police stations to get cases sorted out. These men have to be handled in different manners and at times their hands have to be greased. Women do not understand such things and if women start doing such work what respect will be left for them.”⁵⁶

Not only are the domains gender segregated but the dealings in panchayats are through masculine concepts – use of tacit or implicit force, use of public influence, money, mobility across time and group, protectionism, exercise of control over group affiliates, inspiring reverence and awe, entertaining and hosting officials.

In a gender defined society leadership is sought and provided on the basis of gender values and subjectivities. Irrespective of the formal position, the political positioning is that of the social structure. Further, the symbolic prestige and positional aura is codified in symbols such as the Pagri (head gear), brandishing a sword, forceful voice and visible authority. National leaders like Sonia Gandhi to local leaders like Shruti Chaudhary (grasping the mantle of her grandfather legacy), were publically presented Pagris – a symbol of family head reserved for men, endorsing their leadership. Swords were also accepted by women leaders – a typically masculine symbol of power. Gender then remained a tool to be divested or used according to the need. Where public leadership demanded masculine gestures and symbolism, these were used by women candidates. Simultaneously cultural sensibilities of gender norms and conduct were cultivated through codes of conduct, style and dress.

There is no doubt that social institutions of decision-making, governance, implementation of justice and enforcement of law have customarily been constructed and historically mainstreamed in accordance to male norms. It has been suggested that structural resistance to gender entitlements is now being dealt by entry of a critical mass of women to promote

redistribution of resources in the failure of exclusive agendas.⁵⁷ The quota representation continues to be promoted as a mode for pursuing legislative and policy change. The issue remains whether gender-specific agenda can be sustained in the face of institutionalised mechanisms of gender conduct codified in patterns of exchange and leadership values. 'Institutionalisation of hegemonic masculine behaviour as the behavioural norms' has led to suggestions that female leadership absorb these masculine organisational norms⁵⁸. Such organisational mechanisms and norms may make women relevant leaders, but without gendering the political culture.⁵⁹ Further, women's representation at the grassroots level faces different hurdles, as compared to those at the national level. The leadership profile and conduct of business operative at the grassroots level may not be the same as that at the state or national level, but operative gender norms are similar.

A review of women's representation in elected bodies at the grass root level, at the state assembly level and that at the national parliament reveals a different gender discourse at each level. At the grassroots level, women representation is within the domain of the typed gender roles. Women leaders are an extension of family representation and that of the collectivity. To that extent the norms of conduct, practices of engagement and leadership is defined by the dominant local gender functioning. At the state legislative level, women graduate to be the symbol of party, largely through their membership within the elite. Their role of leadership reinforces the social reality at the grassroots level since the nature of issues requiring decisions and allocation of budgets remains in the boundary of the normative gender functioning. However, at the national parliament level, women are representatives of their party and draw on the party positioning within the electorate, national discourse on democracy, justice and rights.

Conclusion

To sum up, the 2009 elections have shown following distinct trends with key finding;

- (a) Women candidature in Parliament elections has increased along with the number of elected representatives. Yet, they provided a contrasting presence. Female participation in the

democratic process was supportive with its large turnout of female voters, but even with increased numbers, the female leadership in state governance was low.

- (b) Gender issues were sprinkled by political leaders in their electoral campaign. Political parties continued to be more dole-oriented and protectionist in their promise for women rights. Party leadership of mainstream parties occasionally referred to promote women's empowerment, education and income generation in their appeal to populations on the margins. However, women issues were a casualty to the dominance of identity construed placement of women in the Indian polity.
- (c) Electoral discourse was gender discriminatory at the micro level, whereas at the macro level Election Commission, media and political parties took exceptions to sexist articulations selectively. Symbolic capital from gender stereotypes continued to add flavour to the electoral discourse.
- (d) Women participation in elections as voters has increased, but has shown no signs of its becoming a vote bank. Women electorate is not roused on women rights nor do political parties cultivate a gender support base. Raising of women right issues remains the personal agenda of candidates. Further, in a context of diversity politics and global standards of social equity women are a wild card entry into politics. Public office is sought by leveraging gender entitlements, to safeguard and extend family constituencies, and for gaining party credentials to diversity.
- (e) The electoral discourse established gender as an entitlement claim within the Indian polity. However, enabling these entitlements for the practice of rights remain unfettered. Women have poor representation in leadership – as candidates and in party positions; institutionalised mechanisms for implementing laws are lacking; as is the universal access to basic facilities and resources and public mobilisation to realise these rights remain unaddressed. Social reorganisation of gender identity with the inter-sectionality of family, caste or religious identity was accepted to promote the subordination of gender rights. There is a notable delink of the electoral discourse on women with the political discourse on gender in the country.

¹ Government of India (2009), *Statistical Report on General Elections to the 15th Lok Sabha*, Vol. I, Election Commission, New Delhi.

² Under the Government of India Act, 1935 wifehood qualifications were the main criterion of women's enfranchisement and 6 million women and 29 million men became eligible to vote.

Chattopadhyaya, Kamaladevi (1939), *Awakening of Indian Women*, Madras: Everyman's Press.

³ Only larger states with more than 10 seats have been analysed.

Election Commission of India (2009).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Richter, Linda K. (1990), 'Exploring Theories of Female Leadership in South and South-East Asia', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Winter 1990-1991) pp. 524-540.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Data collated on the basis of *Political Background which includes Relations by Blood or Marriage and Elite Class which includes excellence associated with superior social groups* by Institute for Development and Communication, Chandigarh, 2009. Women linkages to male relatives (61 %) was reported by *Outlook*, June 8, 2009. P. 8.

⁸ Hart, Henry.C. (1998), 'Political Leadership in India: Dimensions and Limits', in Atul Kohli (ed.), *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations*, pp. 18-61, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Pandian, M.S.S. (1992), *The Image Trap: M.G. Ramachandran in Film and Politics*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Banerjee, Mukulika (2004), 'Populist Leadership in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu: Mamta and Jayalalitha Compared' in Jenkins Rob (ed.), *Regional Reflections: Comparing Politics Across Indian States*, pp. 285-308, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

⁹ Spary, Carole (2007), 'Female Political Leadership in India', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 45, NO. 3, pp. 253-277.

¹⁰ Khan, Atiq, 'SP Protests Remarks Against Nafisa', *Hindu*, 19 April, 2009.

¹¹ Election Commission of India (2009), *Statement Showing the Complaint Regarding Statements Made Against Women during General Election to Lok Sabha*, New Delhi.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Indian Express*, The (2009), *Vote for Naujawan BJP, not Budhiya Cong.: Modi in UP*, 11th April.

¹⁴ *Indian Express*, The (2009), "For Modi Congress is now 'Gudia Congress'," 12th April.

¹⁵ The Indian National Congress: Lok Sabha Election Manifesto, 2009.

¹⁶ The Bhartiya Janata Party: Lok Sabha Election Manifesto, 2009.

¹⁷ The Communist Party of India (M): Lok Sabha Election Manifesto, 2009.

¹⁸ While issues of women's development and access to services and facilities has been responsive to the global mandate on gender, the promulgation of protective laws particularly in relation to atrocities against women has been more in response to the women's movement within the country.

¹⁹ The notorious Mathura Rape Case in which a 16-year old tribal girl was raped in a police station with a judgment vindicating the policemen caused a public outrage and provided the impetus for an amendment of law. Subsequent incidence involving rape by police personnel maintained the issue in public domain and intolerance of sexual abuse of women by the Indian public was strongly registered.

²⁰ Government of India (1961), *The Dowry Prohibition Act (Act No. 28 of 1961) with State Amendments of Haryana Act 38 of 1976, Bihar Act of 1976, Himachal Pradesh Act 25 of 1976, Punjab Act 26 of 1976 and West Bengal Act 35 of 1975*, Ministry of Law and Justice; New Delhi.

²¹ Forum against sex determination and pre-selection was formed in 1984 in Mumbai, Maharashtra. In 1986, number of campaigns which involved picketing in front of clinics conducting sex determination tests had taken place. The misuse of sex determination tests for abortion of female foetus was noted by the All-Indian Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in 1975. Subsequently, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) halted these tests in 1976, but by 1979 the technology had spread into private hands. By 1982, women organisations in Delhi had condemned its misuse and recommended strict enforcement against its use. The Ministry of Social Welfare sought the Union Health Minister's intervention to deal with the issue.

²² United Nations (1996), *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women 1945-1996*; The United Nations Blue Book Series, Vol. 6, New York.

²³ Patel, Vibhuti (2007), 'Gender Budgeting in India', *Paper presented at national workshop on 'Gender Budgeting – An Effective Tool for Achieving Women's Empowerment*, by Equity Foundation, Patna.

²⁴ Hasan, Zoya (2009), *Gender, Religion and Democratic Politics in India*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, Switzerland.

²⁵ Pre-independence, as the Indian Constitution makers finalised the terms of Indian democracy, women's reservation was rejected by women leaders on grounds of political equality. Sharma, Kumud (2000), 'Power and Representation for Women in India'; *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*; Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 47-87, Seoul: Ewha Women's University. According to Sarojini Naidu a Congress Party President, "The demand for granting preferential treatment to women is an admission on her part of her inferiority and there has been no need for such a thing in India as the women have always been by the side of men in council and in the fields of battle..." Sarojini Naidu Presidential address to the All India Women's Conference. All Indian Women's Conference (1930), 'Proceedings of the Fourth Session of the AIWC,' unpublished, Bombay.

²⁶ Government of India (1980), *Mandal Commission Report of the Backward Classes Commission*, Vol. 1, Chapter XIII; New Delhi.

²⁷ Norris, Pippa (1993), 'Conclusions: Comparing Legislative Recruitment' in Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris (eds.), *Gender and Party Politics*, pp. 309-330, London: Sage Publications.

Kaushik, Susheela (1996), *A Study of Women Candidates for the Eleventh Lok Sabha 1996*, New Delhi, National Commission for Women.

²⁸ Spary, Carole (2007) op.cit.

²⁹ United Nations Fund for Children (2007), *The State of the World's Children, Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality*, New York, USA.

³⁰ UNICEF (2009), *The State of World Children, Maternal and New Born Health*, New York, USA.

³¹ Committee of Feminist Economist (2007), *Towards Inclusive Growth: The Gender Dimension*, Planning Commission, New Delhi.

³² United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2007), *Education for All, Global Monitoring Report: Early Childhood Care and Education*, France.

³³ Hassim, Shireen (2009), *Rethinking Gender Politics in a Liberal Age: Institutions, Constituencies and Equality in Comparative Perspective*, UNRISD, Geneva, Switzerland.

³⁴ Women are facing increasing atrocities and lower life chances with increasing female foeticide. Government of India (1997 & 2007), *Crime In India*, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi. Crime against women in ten years from 1997 to 2007 increased by 68.06 %, according to Crime in India. Also, child sex ratio (0-6 years) has decreased by 42 points i.e. 969 (1961) to 927 (2001) according to Census of India. GOI (1961 & 2001), *Socio Cultural Tables, Volume I, Part II-C(i) and C-Series*, Census of India, Office of Registrar General, New Delhi.

³⁵ Government of India, Election Commission (2009), *Training of Police Officials Associated with Conduct of Election*, No. 464/INST/2009-EPS, dated 9 January, New Delhi.

³⁶ Government of India (2002), *The Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance Act*, Ministry of Law and Justice, New Delhi.

³⁷ Basu, Amrita (2005), 'Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia', *Occasional Papers* 5, July, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, Switzerland, p. 31.

³⁸ Bose, Sunita, Desai, Manisha, Purkayastha, Bandana and Mangala, Subramaniam (2003), *The Study of Gender in India: A Partial Review, Gender and Society*, 17(4), pp. 503-524.

³⁹ Shah Bano, as a divorced woman, had the right to demand maintenance under Indian Civil Law, which the Muslim Personal Law did not provide. Resorting to the Indian Civil Law was perceived by certain sections of Muslims as interference in undermining the Muslim identity.

⁴⁰ The demand for uniform civil code by the BJP is claimed as necessary for gender justice. In 1967, their manifesto mentioned "A uniform civil code will be enacted to govern the laws on marriage, adoption, inheritance etc. of all Indian citizens. By 1996, it had specified a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), that will give women property rights, ensure women's rights to adoption, guarantee women equal guardianship rights, remove discriminatory clauses in divorce law and put an end to polygamy." Parties projecting a secular image or outright seeking Muslim votes denounce the uniform civil code as undermining the rights of minority groups. In fact, the Congress denouncing a UCC like other parties such as AIADMK, but have been proposing 'legal equality for women in all spheres', 'effective implementation of social legislation', yet the wording and engagement with religious groups portrays a prior religious claim according religious protectionism in accordance to the political positioning of the parties. Manifestos of BJP for Lok Sabha election for the year 2004 AIADMK and Congress.

⁴¹ Hariss, John (2001), *Populism, Tamil Style: Is it Really a Success?* London School of Economics Development Studies Institute Working Paper Series, No. 15, Available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collection/destic/pdg/wpis.pdf> (accessed 20 November, 2006).

⁴² Even state creation and maintenance of identities, in terms of reservation quotas, religious protectionism and social reform have intruded to fragment the construction of a women category. Hasan, Zoya (2009), *The Gender, Religion and Democratic Politics in India*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁴³ Government of India (2009): Election Commission, New Delhi.

⁴⁴ According to NSSO, 62nd (2005-06) round OBC population of Punjab and Haryana is 20 % and 24.41 % respectively.

⁴⁵ CPI Manifesto, op.cit.

⁴⁶ Indian National Congress: Lok Sabha Election Manifesto 2009.

⁴⁷ Chaudhry Prem (2007), *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples, Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India*, 2007. Oxford University Press.

⁴⁸ Spray, Carole (2007), op.cit.

⁴⁹ Hellmann, Rajanayagam, D. (2004), *The Quick and the Dead: The Pioneer: The Weeping Window*, Project Discussion Paper No. 8/2004. Available at [http://uni-
duisburg.de/Institute/OAWI/SS/institut/mitarbeiter/dynasties/publications.htm](http://uni-duisburg.de/Institute/OAWI/SS/institut/mitarbeiter/dynasties/publications.htm) (accessed 28 November, 2006)

⁵⁰ The Beijing Platform for action states "women in political and decision-making positions in governments and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences and provide new perspectives on mainstream political issues." [Platform for Action (PFA), 1995: 110].

United Nations (1995), *The Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action: The Fourth United Nation's Conference on Women on Action of Equality, Development and Peace*, Beijing, China.

⁵¹ Spary, Carole (2007), op.cit.

⁵² Hassim, Shireen (2009), op.cit.

⁵³ Dagar, Rainuka (2008), *Authority Systems and Construction of Masculinities in Punjab*, Institute for Development and Communication, Chandigarh.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Hassim, Shireen (2009), op.cit.

⁵⁸ Reddock, Rhoda (1982), 'Women's Liberation and National Liberation: A Discussion Paper', in Mies Maria and Rhoda Reddock (eds.) *National Liberation and Women's Liberation*, Institute of Social Studies, pp. 9-13, The Hague.

⁵⁹ Spary, Carol (2007), op.cit.