

# Democratic Citizenship: From Proportionality to a Continuum Approach to Political Participation

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This paper is an attempt to explore the meaning and significance of political participation within (a) the conceptual framework of democratic citizenship and (b) debates surrounding representative democracy. It consists of three parts; the first examines the idea of representative democracy and the manner in which democratic politics may be sought to be crafted as a continuum between representation and participation; the second looks at the global experience and experiments in electoral designs and political reservation for women; and the third examines debates on women's political participation and representation in India along with election data to identify possible patterns, followed by a discussion of the ways in which civil society organisations have sought to address themselves to reforming the electoral system, in particular by addressing the voter or empowering her through specific rights.

The defining feature of citizenship, distinguishing it from subject-hood, is the sense of belonging, horizontal *camaraderie*, and full and equal membership in the political community. The latter derives not only from the equal protection of the autonomous space of the individual, but also through an ethic of participation. The ethic of participation in turn makes for *thick* citizenship as distinct from a *thin* or passive notion of citizenship. Active citizenship is embedded in a continual creation of public spaces through dialogue, deliberation, expression and demonstration within a mutually agreed framework of democratic norms. A strand within citizenship theory sees the idea of activity and participation as the crux of citizenship, giving it its historical validity as a momentum concept, and as a countervailing force against domination in all its manifestations, by foregrounding its relational and collective aspects.

While the relational aspects of citizenship are expected to unfold within a mutually agreed framework of participation comprising meta-rules like constitutions, institutions like the courts, representative/political bodies like parliaments, schools,

universities, hospitals, etc., as a principle of activity, citizenship may be seen as a framework for effecting change, or creating and sustaining an order through which its promise of equality may be made effective. Politics is integral to such a framework, since envisaging and moving towards such an order would in many cases, involve a radical rupture from existing systems of deliberation, communication, dialogue, participation, methods of representation and power sharing. In other words, democratic citizenship is integrally associated with and embedded in notions of equality and participation. Politics in turn is conceived not merely in terms of institutions through which an authoritative allocation of values is made, nor only as understanding the processes through which power permeates and makes itself manifest in society and polity. Rather, it is understood as processes through which the constitution of such power and its institutionalisation may be continually opened up for scrutiny and transformative change, in order to make its spread 'democratic', and coincident with principles of popular sovereignty and horizontal equality.

Over the years, questions pertaining to representation of groups and the relative appropriateness of specific electoral designs and systems for their adequate representation have become germane to devising ways of deepening democracy and crafting democratic citizenship. These questions have prompted animated debates around the meaning of representation, what constitutes adequate representation, and the ways in which it can be achieved. These debates have generated areas of tension around 'appropriate' and 'effective' electoral systems, compelling a more rigorous examination of the ways in which democracies have addressed issues concerning the edging out of social groups from the electoral process, and the structural and societal constraints that contribute to this.

Debates around women's representation in elected bodies and positions of political decision-making, and their visibility and participation in the political process have been particularly acrimonious. This is not surprising considering that the debates raised issues which threatened to unsettle notions of women's 'proper' roles and place in family and society. The contours of the debate have for long been framed by contests over what constitutes politics, and women's relationship with it. While feminists have differed over the definition of politics, the ways of 'doing' it, and the manner in which women can charter for themselves a more significant political presence, over the last one decade questions regarding the available choices in electoral design and their relative effectiveness in assuring women's representation have begun to be explored with greater assurance and confidence.

Debates around models of representation ultimately have at their core the issue of adequacy of the representative democracy, in particular questions around universal and differentiated/proportionality models. Apart from the conceptual framework of

citizenship, this paper will, therefore, also examine debates around representative democracy, in particular (a) the 'participatory or political deficit' that representative democracy is seen as entailing, especially when viewed in comparison with direct or participatory democracy - the elusive classical ideal for modern political systems; (b) the 'crisis' in mediated or representative democracy and the different ways in which the crisis is sought to be resolved; and (c) developing a democratic and effective system of representation so that groups are adequately represented. The focus in the examination will not only be on 'appropriate' systems of representation but also on the ways in which the system is able to translate itself into an 'effective' system, bridging thereby the difference between what Mills calls 'talking' and 'doing' systems. This focus, as the discussion in the following sections shows, will help build a case for what has been called a continuum approach, aimed at linking issues of representation with those of participation.

## **I. Representation and Participation in Democratic Citizenship**

### *Redefining Categories*

Given that modern political systems work on the principle of indirect or representative rather than direct or participatory democracy, there have been considerable debates around how to make representation just, fair and democratic, which is to say, to make it reflective of and commensurate with group-differentiated interests. Alongside concerns around developing appropriate systems of representation, corresponding anxieties around participatory deficit and passive and thin notions of citizenship, which systems of (indirect) representation necessarily entail, have persisted. Some strands have looked for a semblance of directness within civil society, envisaging it as a participatory space embodying 'a ceaseless process of political education in citizenship' (Urbinati 2000, 758). However, since definitions of civil society vary, radical democrats have exhibited a growing concern over the manner in which the public/political and, corresponding to it the idea of democratic citizenship and participatory institutions is being redefined through a preoccupation with building a strong civil society. A strong civil society focusing on participatory networks built by non-governmental organisations, they argue, may ultimately edge out 'people', as dominant groups take over, generating greater powerlessness and exclusion (Joseph 2003). The notion of the public as a democratically negotiated and, therefore, an inclusive collective space may be effaced in such a situation, increasing the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups. In the light of the above, I will examine in the following section feminist engagements with politics,

and deriving from these, the ways in which they have attempted to articulate their relationship with representative democracy.

Much of the feminist concern with 'politics' and the 'political' in recent times may be seen as embodying what Anne Phillips has characterised as a 'double movement towards both critique and recuperation' (Phillips 1998: 4). The critique may well be seen as continuing more or less with the issues raised by the women's movement during the 1960s and 1970s - of a notion of politics that grounded itself in gendered oppositional dichotomies and dualities of social life, around the private/personal and the public/political.<sup>1</sup> At the crux of the feminist critique has been the analytical worth of categories spelling oppositional duality, which it has for quite some time questioned for being consonant with frameworks of domination, viz., patriarchy, or with the ideology and practices of exploitative rule, viz., colonialism. The public and the private, feminists have constantly reminded, can exist as oppositional and dichotomous categories only in those contexts where all persons are not equally free. Moreover, they argue that taking the public and private as discrete categories without analysing the socio-historical contexts within which they are articulated is inaccurate, and also inadequate for explaining social processes since it effaces the complexities that actually exist in political and social life. Feminists have not only pointed out the exclusionary nature of these boundaries, but also the ways in which women in different historical contexts have either negotiated these boundaries to render them permeable, or dismantled them, redefining their constitutive elements and their mutual relationships. As far as recuperation is concerned - the other movement that Anne Phillips alludes to - feminists have chosen different paths, either through equal access or presence in the public-political, or, alternatively, seeing the personal and political as a bridged/breached continuum, reconstituting thereby their relationship and content. At the crux of this reconstruction, however, is not the dissolving of politics as a distinct category, but rather a 'calling back to politics', bringing in its wake a retheorisation of citizenship. In the history of citizenship the public and the private have distinctive and interrelated chronosophies, figuring integrally as Gurpreet Mahajan (2003) terms it, as 'two modes of enhancing democratic citizenship'. Conceived as two coeval and co-equal modes of enhancing citizenship, their development is no longer seen as antagonistic, but as one of mutual imbrication in an ongoing process of democratisation imbued in different historical and cultural contexts with different meanings and correlative boundaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Feminists, in particular Carole Pateman (1991), point out that the public-private divide is generally seen as referring only to the distinction between state and economy or state and civil society. Feminists emphasise that the sole allusion to this distinction occludes the further distinction that differentiates the state and civil society from the domestic sphere.

Immanent in the rethinking of the relationship between the private and the public is the 'relocation' and 'reconstitution' of the abstract citizen. The process of relocation is central to the project of building democratic citizenship, since the abstract, unmarked and masked citizen integral to liberalism is constitutive of the dichotomies of social and political life. Following again the method of 'critique and recuperation', the critique of the abstract citizen may be done on the ground that it conceives of the citizen as an unencumbered, un-embedded, disconnected self, who seeks actualisation not through political activity, but through a range of other commitments and activities that take place in diverse and loosely-connected associations. Moreover, feminists, along with multiculturalists and theorists on the left, have also criticised the 'uniformity' and 'generality' that liberal citizenship entails, since it overlooks the inequalities that exist in real life. The idea of the un-embedded and unencumbered self, the abstract citizen in the liberal framework, has been rejected for advocating a context-free and apolitical citizenship - the floating and unconnected individuality of the citizen is not seen as conducive to building relational/democratic citizenship.

Feminists have also shown how the idea of citizenship has been especially inimical to women, either excluding them altogether from the political community as in the classical tradition, or including them differentially, viz., as citizen consorts in the French Revolutionary tradition, or on the basis of their socially useful roles as mothers. Women have taken different routes to overcome their exclusion and dismantle the differential terms of their inclusion. In the process, they have subscribed to different perspectives on politics, political community and political participation. Until recently the rights discourse had been predominant, with women struggling to achieve equal rights with men in the civil, political and social spheres, considering it as crucial to their achievement of full citizenship. While recognising the importance of a rights-based approach to equality and changes in law as the means by which to achieve this, feminists see the rights discourse as limited, narrowly focused, legalistic, individualistic and 'male inspired'. There have been two main sources of feminist challenge to a rights-based citizenship, centering on (a) political participation, and (b) promoting care as a citizenship responsibility. The strand focusing on political participation sees citizenship as an aspect of public/political activity, and as embodying the transformative potential of democracy. It looks for women's inclusion in the public sphere as equals, laying emphasis on revitalising/democratising the public sphere through communication, speech and action which are seen as empowering, and through alliances for a shared common objective (Mouffe 1992). Thus it is participation in the political sphere that is seen as crucial to the full development of women's citizenship as part of what Rian Voet (1998) calls 'an active and sex-equal citizenship'. Perhaps the most forceful case for what can be seen as a feminist civic republican model

of citizenship is made by Mary Dietz (1985, 1987), who advocates a vision of citizenship which is 'expressly political and, more exactly, participatory and democratic'. It is only, she contends, when active political participation is valued as an expression of citizenship in contrast to the 'politically barren' construction of the 'citizen as bearer of rights' alone that feminists will be able to claim a truly liberatory politics of their own. Other feminists sympathetic to Dietz's vision, such as Anne Phillips (1991, 1993) and Iris Marion Young (1990), nevertheless, caution against an uncritical reading of civil republicanism, which defines the political in narrow terms and ignores the domestic constraints on many women's political participation (Lister 2003).

A second major strand of feminism is, however, sceptical of what they feel is merely an 'add women' approach, which, while looking for avenues of inclusion into the public sphere, does not question its 'maleness'. This strand approaches citizenship from the vantage point of what women do in the private realm. Questioning the patriarchal state, it argues for the inclusion of women's specific functions into the public realm of citizenship, hoping thereby to promote the suppressed private side of the public/private divide in the realm of democratic politics (Prokhovnik 1998). This has led to two distinct lines of argument – first, that the private/personal is political which implies a continuity of power between the state and the so-called private domains and submits them both to the norms of justice and equality of the public realm; and second, that of maternalist citizenship which advocates that women should value their particular skills and interests, rather than merely entering the bastions of male-defined politics on its terms. This route is in a way a continuation of a form of suffragette campaign to re-imagine citizenship and the public sphere in order to encompass 'feminine' values. By emphasising the 'public' role, maternalists like Carol Gilligan, Jean Elshtain and Sara Ruddick feel that a degradation of the 'private' role, and that of the domestic, continues. They would prefer to see the dismantling of a citizenship based on male personalities, and the development of new notions based on the 'feminine' characteristics of love and compassion. Stressing the superiority of maternal qualities of caring, responsibility and compassion as the key elements of citizenship, the maternalists dissolve in the process the distinction between male/public and female/private facets of life (Elshtain 1981; Gilligan 1982).

In its recuperation mode, feminist politics concerns itself with comprehending the ways in which differentiated citizenship reproduces itself so that it does not silence or marginalise women and become a dangerous 'neutral' abstraction like the masked citizen. Guarding against this abstraction involves not only a reconstruction of the private/public distinction so that its 'recurring power' may be rolled back, but also entails taking into account the differences that exist among women – of race, class, caste etc. – that determine their specific experiences of citizenship. It is only by

comprehending these differences that the specificity of women's experiences can come together in broad political alliances, alliances that are not fragmented along the lines of differences nor forged through their occlusion, but rather as struggles that weave them together through action and engagement with specific and shared/common experiences of oppression. The association between feminism and a politics of difference is particularly marked in Iris Young's definition of a 'differentiated citizenship', which explicitly recognises differences of sex, race, class, sexuality or language in order to guarantee that all groups are fully included, and Nancy Fraser's exploration of tensions between those struggles for recognition that are most closely associated with identity politics, and those struggles for redistribution that arise in the context of traditional socialist politics. In both cases, feminism provides the tools with which to deconstruct exclusionary notions of common good, or the class-defined preoccupations of earlier struggles for social equality. It also generates the insights that clarify the importance of particular identities, while questioning at the same time the solidity of these identities. The issues that are addressed, therefore, do not simply identify a notion of 'women's politics' or a politics centering on 'women's issues'. Rather, as Philips points out, they hold out the promise of transforming the ways in which we think about any kind of politics at all (Phillips 1998: 16).

While transformative politics is central to the feminist project, it does not automatically assume a unity of women in a unified feminist politics. Feminists like Judith Butler have pointed out that as a subject of politics, or a subject of feminist politics, 'women' as a category does not – and may never – exist. Arguing that the 'unity' of the category of women is neither presupposed nor desired, Butler points out that it would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of women that simply needs to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity and sexuality in order to become complete. Problematizing a fixed 'identity' premised on unity and its relationship with feminist politics, Butler points out that identity is ambiguous and should not be treated as a normative goal. Feminist politics, too, should not be seen as emanating necessarily from some 'stable, unified and agreed-upon identity', and without this compulsory expectation of unified identity, feminist actions may 'well get a quicker start and seem more congenial to a number of "women"' (Butler 1998: 288). It is important to keep in mind, therefore, following Philips' framework of a feminist politics of recuperation that in the course of engaging in and thinking about transformative politics, the political subjectivity of women is continually constituted.

The difficulties of articulating women and 'women's interests' as a unified category cutting across the equality/difference and private/public divide, become all the more pronounced where issues of political representation are concerned. However, as Butler herself puts it, the 'political task is not to refuse representational politics – as if

we could' (ibid: 277). Following the track of critique and recuperation, it may be suggested that politics does matter, but what we understand by politics must first be transformed. While feminism provides a much-needed counterweight to the resulting cynicism and apathy towards politics, enabling us to think more critically about the exclusions still practised under apparent inclusiveness, and enables us to think more imaginatively about the many ways in which politics can still be transformed (Phillips 1998), it is also important to see how, feminism is able to weave into the 'historical present' or 'the contemporary field of power' (Butler 1998: 277) a feminist political practice that bridges the gap between the notional 'woman' with the diverse women that exist in practice.

### *Towards a continuum*

Since this paper takes up issues of representation, participation and democracy, it is important to identify first the relationship that it envisages between the three. The delineation of this relationship is important in order to articulate the position that the paper puts forth regarding women's relationship with politics and women's political citizenship within the contours of the existing debate on the relative merits of representative and participatory democracy. As stated at the outset, this paper proposes a continuum framework, which bridges the participatory and representative models of democracy. It also argues for a framework of representative democracy that brings together the agora model which consists of continually evolving multilayered activity, with agonistic politics, which subscribes to recognising difference and plurality within a dialogical framework.

While the complexity of modern societies has made it impossible for democracy to be direct, and the distance between the processes of ruling and [those] being ruled gets more pronounced as one moves up the layers/tiers of government, the participatory model of democracy continues to be influential as an ideal form, embodying an elusive state of perfection which one must constantly aspire to emulate, and, wherever possible, replicate. The shift in the paradigms of government, with direct participation in ruling giving way to being ruled through representatives, has not eroded the normative value of direct democracy, which ironically remains something the 'moderns' can never have, and yet cannot cease to want (Dunn 1993: 28). This uncritical nostalgia for directness in democracy generates corresponding concerns about the inadequacy or deficiency of modern representative forms of democracy.<sup>2</sup> These

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<sup>2</sup> Nadia Urbinati (2000) points out that nostalgia may foster resignation, but may also encourage a realistic disenchantment towards what is actual.



debates have become more pronounced with questions around the issues of equality in representation, forms of representation of groups, and the appropriate ways of achieving it having become progressively significant. The above concerns are also attended by anxieties about the thin and passive notions of citizenship that accompanied the shift from participatory and direct democracy to representative democracy. A lament of 'crisis' in representative democracy has emerged in recent years, stemming from the assumptions of deficiency and political passivity in representative democracy. Critics of representative democracy consider it a weak form of democracy, a poor substitute for self-government and active citizenship.

The concerns around indirectness and political deficit may be seen as being addressed in two ways, each approaching the relationship between representation and participation in divergent ways. The manner in which the question is addressed at each level has a special resonance for women and their engagement/relationship with politics:

(a) *The universality approach* looks at the relationship in terms of cohabitation in an inclusive model. This approach transcends/resolves the anxieties around political deficit by pointing to its moral distinctiveness and value. Focusing on the ways in which an articulated public sphere is created through and in the intervening period between elections, it points in particular to the ways in which the processes of deliberation provide a continuum between the representatives and participation, bridging the spatial and temporal gap or the absence of simultaneity between the voting and decision-making. They argue that an articulated public sphere, while filling up the temporal hiatus between 'electoral trials', also adds to the ideological content of elections by going beyond the here and the now to connect with the past and look towards the future. This approach sees both participation and representation as significant elements of democracy, and seeks to bridge the distinction between its participatory and representative forms by locating them in a framework of dialogue instead of any contradictory cohabitation, where the existence of representative democracy implies a political and participatory deficit. The framework of cohabitation is constituted by the deliberative character of democracy. The focus on deliberation allows the perception of participation and representation not as two alternative forms of democracy, but as related, and as constituting the framework of political action in modern democracies. Seen from this vantage point, the emphasis on the deliberative character of modern democracies appears to provide the institutional and socio-cultural space within which the various components of political action – from opinions and will-formation to decision-making take shape (Urbinati 2000: 759).

(b) *The proportionality or group-specific approach* sees representation and participation as distinctive, but rejects the elevation of participatory democracy as the

only 'real' form of democracy. The primary purpose of this approach, therefore, is not to devise ways by which representative democracy could as closely as possible replicate participatory democracy, but rather to make the problems and patterns of exclusion central, instead of the participatory deficit that representative democracy might entail. Thus David Plotke states that in a representative democracy, the 'opposite of representation is not participation', but exclusion (Plotke 1997: 19), and Iris Marion Young (Young 1997: 352) considers 'political representation as both necessary and desirable', concerning herself with exclusion and group-differentiated citizenship (Ibid: 1989).

Significantly, both formulations steer clear of the nostalgia for direct democracy as the only pure form of democracy, enabling participation. Moreover, both look for frameworks of inclusion with the universalist approach, locating it in public discourses and deliberations that intervene and connect periodic 'electoral trials', and the group-specific approach concerning itself with the ways in which a differentiated citizenship could make universalism commensurate with proportionality. It would be useful, therefore, to weave into the universalism of the first approach the differentiated universalism of the group-specific approach so as to address the political and democratic deficit that is seen as informing representative democracy. The concerns around passivity may be addressed by seeking a continuum between representation and participation, through seeing representation as constitutive of democracy and embodying the processes of 'comprehensive filtering, refining and mediating', which is crucial for 'political will formation and expression'. It is this process of mediation that opens up room for deliberation and a public discourse that fosters a relationship between the assembly and the people, a relationship that gets refreshed and renewed with each electoral trial. Moreover, it is public discourse that bridges the spatial and temporal gap between electoral trials, and transcends it to look forward to the future. As mentioned earlier, while the deliberative framework works with a notion of universality, bringing in more and more people within its integrative framework, the group-specific framework works on principles of differentiated universalism to make it more compatible with the democratic principles of equality and recognition of difference. One may derive from this framework a notion of politics that is founded on principles of agonism, and representation as based on the principle of group-proportionality. Yet, proportionality by itself might not bridge the relationship of verticality or the gap that exists between citizens and their representatives, a process which requires that the agonism of proportionality be wedded to the multilayered activity and dialogue that holds together the agora. Thus, both must go together, since proportionality may remain descriptive unless it makes the representative body a talking and deliberating body *and* an acting and governing body, with the purpose of

making representation effective, imbued with mutual trust and accountability.<sup>3</sup> The spatial and temporal gap opened by representation requires a speech filled or articulated public sphere, connecting the collective moments of political participation that elections embody. The structures of representation are, moreover, layered, in the sense that public speech and deliberation is also encompassed by mediated participation. The agora paradigm assumes representation as a complex institution encompassing several layers of political action that fill the interval between one parliamentary election and another. Representation becomes a 'course of action' rather than a 'simple act' – a practice of political interaction among citizens which goes well beyond voting.

## **II. Reservation for women: Frameworks for proportionality**

The effective representation of specific groups, women in particular, and the terms of their inclusion – as voters and representatives - has been a matter critical to both the theory and practice of democracy. The question of 'fair representation' in particular has been contentious, when seen in terms of parity or proportionate representation in the context of specific numbers or quota. While the demand for a parity of women and men in politics was grounded in the biological differences between them, the rationale behind a quota system is women's historical marginality in politics, and the effects it has on the political system (Hust 2004: 35; Siim 2000: 69). Manifesting the replacement of the politics of ideas with a politics of presence, certain influential strands in feminist theory have stressed the importance of women's presence in public/political/decision-making bodies in a 'critical mass'. While the notion of critical mass subscribes to the view that the presence of women as a 'critical mass' would somehow set in motion a process that would engender politics, the difference between presence as a 'critical mass' and 'critical action' has been emphasised by others, foregrounding the necessity of moving beyond numbers into the realm of transformative actions (Dahlerup 2001: 108).

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<sup>3</sup> Criticising mirror or descriptive representation, Hannah Pitkin suggests that the metaphors of descriptive representation were most commonly found among those who regarded representative democracy as a poor substitute, and who therefore looked to a more 'accurate' or pictorial representation of the electorate as a way of approximating the older citizen assemblies, instead of recognising the qualitatively new elements that entered into democracy with the development of representative institutions (Phillips 1995: 34). Pitkin argues that proportional representation, while professing equality of representation, may actually be insincere, because it can eventually become a way of using minorities' representation to legitimise the majority's decisions. It meticulously reflects the social topography but, at the same time, makes the assembly into a 'talking rather than acting, de-liberating rather than governing body' (Pitkin 1967: 86).

Concerns around enabling women's equal access to the political process and with offering technical assistance for reforming the electoral system and management of the electoral process have focused attention on gender equality relating to (a) design of the electoral systems: analysis of the implications for women's representation of different options in electoral systems (including the number of seats, the size of electoral districts, whether proportional representation is adopted, etc.); (b) voter registration: supporting approaches to registration and training of officials to ensure that women get on the list on an equal basis with men; (c) voter education: ensuring that education reaches women as well as men, and promotes respect in the community for women's equal rights to participate; and (d) access to the polls: promoting approaches that reduce risks to voting that could reduce women's participation, e.g., separate queues in polling booths for women (Schalkwyk and Woroniuk 1998).

While questions of women's representation in elected bodies and positions of political decision-making, and their visibility in the political process have been raised for a long time now, those regarding the available choices in electoral design and their relative effectiveness in assuring adequate representation for women have begun to be asked relatively recently. Different kinds of electoral designs and political and electoral procedures have subsequently been examined, so as to craft out a system that gives adequate representation to women, facilitating their emergence as a critical mass. Among these, the 'quota' system or reservation of seats in elected bodies, aiming at 'guaranteed outcome' rather than providing an equal or level playing field as in the gender parity list system for parties, has become the most contentious. While there have been divergent positions on the quota system and its implications for feminist politics, a comparative study of electoral systems has shown that in electoral systems based on the principle of First Past the Post, quota is perhaps the best way of assuring the presence of women in substantial numbers in representative bodies. The Platform for Action arrived at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 has become an important reference point for the demand for quotas by women's movement worldwide. In many ways the Beijing programme of action reflects the general shift in the way in which participation was being envisaged in different UN instruments. In the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, the United Nations emphasised measures 'to assist in the strengthening and building of institutions relating to human rights, strengthening of a pluralistic civil society, and the protection of groups which have been rendered vulnerable'.<sup>4</sup> In this context it identified as 'of particular importance',

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<sup>4</sup> The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights on 25 June 1993. The Conference was convened by the United Nations General Assembly from 14 – 25 June to reaffirm the promotion and protection of human rights as a matter of priority for the international community.

'assistance [to be] provided upon the request of Governments for the conduct of fair and free elections, including assistance in the human rights aspects of elections and public information about elections' (Vienna Declaration Part II, para 67). The provision of conditions ensuring fair and free elections was envisaged within the broad framework of basic human rights, and democracy was seen as the condition in which these rights can be realised, while assisting in the election process was seen as helping the process of democratisation. Democratisation in turn was seen not only as ushering in political democracy, but also as broadening and deepening it through the inclusion of vulnerable groups. The United Nations booklet 'Human Rights and Elections', part of its professional training series, lay down the legal, technical and human rights aspects of elections, emphasising non-discrimination and inclusion. While emphasising equal, universal and non-discriminatory suffrage as a basic element of fair elections, the booklet also highlighted instruments providing for non-discriminatory and positive measures, e.g., the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Article 4[a] and [c]), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Article 7[a] and [b]) and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (Articles II and III) (United Nations 1994).

Like the Vienna Declaration, which stressed the importance of rolling back discrimination and structures that generate group-vulnerability by strengthening institutions, the Beijing Platform of Action suggested a discursive shift from women to structures and institutions. The justification of reservation is mostly made with reference to some kind of historically experienced or inherent group disadvantage, vulnerability, inadequacy or weakness. In the case of women's representation, while previously the focus was on women's lack of resources or lack of will to participate, the Beijing platform talked about structures of exclusion - 'discriminatory attitudes and practices' and 'unequal power relations' that have led to the under-representation of women in arenas of political decision-making. Importantly, in the new discourse the responsibility for promoting change has shifted from the individual woman to those institutions that are expected to take action to identify and correct the causes of women's under-representation. While suggesting affirmative action as a possible means of attaining the goal of women's equal participation in political decision-making, the Beijing Platform recommended that governments use 'specific targets and implementing measures...if necessary through positive action'. Moreover, the platform attempts to expand the discourse on critical mass by focusing on equal representation rather than insisting on any minimum representation. It demands a commitment from governments to 'take measures, wherever appropriate, in electoral systems that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same level and at the same levels as men', and directs political parties to

'consider examining party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women'.<sup>5</sup>

Theoretically and historically, two kinds of tracks have been considered for increasing women's representation in elected bodies, viz., the incremental track and the fast track. The two tracks are identified with two distinct discourses. The incremental track recognises the existence of social prejudices and the fact that women do not have the same political resources as men. Following a linear view of progress, it assumes that as society progresses, with the increase in its resources and people's access to it, *gradually* women's representation in decision-making and other public bodies would increase. The fast track rejects gradualism and even the assumption that an increase in resources might lead to equal representation. It sees exclusion and discrimination as the core of the problem, and believes that equality will not come by itself and will have to be pushed.<sup>6</sup> The fast track and the fast track policy constitute an important part of the new direction set out in the Beijing platform.

Reservations or electoral quotas are fast tracks to the equal representation of women. In the debates on gender quotas, the high representation of women in Scandinavian parliaments is commonly used as an argument in support of the introduction of gender quotas. Drude Dahlerup, however, considers these examples misleading, since the trajectory of women's representation in these countries may be seen as having followed the incremental track. The representation of women in Denmark, Norway and Sweden occurred in the 1970s and in Iceland in the 1980s, all before the introduction of quotas. Moreover, gender quotas in these countries was voluntary and never a legal requirement, and used only by some political parties at the centre and the left. It took approximately 60 years from women's enfranchisement for Denmark, Sweden and Norway to cross the 20 per cent threshold, and 70 years to reach 30 per cent. This means that the Nordic countries, in spite of the high level of women's representation, can no longer be considered the model, or at any rate the only model for increasing women's representation (Dehlerup 2006).

At present only 16 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are women, and according to the feminist movements as well as feminist theory, this shortage of women in political institutions may have serious consequences for the articulation of women's interest and for the legitimacy of democratic institutions (Phillip 1995; Norris 2004). Today around 40 countries have introduced gender quotas in elections to national parliament, either by means of constitutional amendment or by changing the electoral laws (legal quotas). In more than 50 other countries major political parties have

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<sup>5</sup> See, for details, Drude Dahlerup (2006).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

voluntarily set out quota provisions in their own statutes (party quotas). Even if quota provisions are often controversial, the use of the quota tool to make historical leaps or jump starts in women's representation is becoming a global trend. In 2003 Rwanda surpassed Sweden as the number one country in the world in terms of women's parliamentary representation – women received 48.8 per cent of the seats as opposed to 45.3 per cent in Sweden. Rwanda has come to signify a new trend in world politics, i.e., the use of gender quotas as the fast track to gender balance in politics, through which countries as disparate as Argentina, Uganda, South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France and Costa Rica have attempted to rapidly change women's historical under-representation in political institutions.

The following table shows parliaments with more than 30 per cent women in rank order.

Country	Women in national parliament (%)	Quota type	Electoral system
Rwanda	48.8 (2003)	Legal quota (Constitutional)	List PR
Sweden	45.3 (2002)	Party quota	List PR
Norway	37.9 (2005)	Party quota	List PR
Finland	37.5 (2003)	No quota	List PR
Denmark	36.9 (2005)	No quota	List PR
Netherlands	36.7 (2003)	Party quota	List PR
Cuba	36.0 (2003)	No quota	Two Rounds
Mozambique	36.0 (2004)	Party quota	List PR
Spain	36.0 (2004)	Party quota	List PR
Costa Rica	35.5 (2002)	Legal quota (law)	List PR
Belgium	35.3 (2003)	Legal quota (law)	List PR
Argentina	33.5 (2003)	Legal quota (Constitutional)	List PR
Austria	33.3 (2002)	Party quota	List PR
South Africa	32.8 (2004)	Party quota	List PR
Germany	31.8 (2005)	Party quota	MMP
Burundi	30.5 (2005)	Legal quota (law)	List PR
Iceland	30.2 (2003)	Party quota	List PR

Key for Electoral Systems:<sup>1</sup>

Proportional Representation: List PR

Mixed Member Proportional: MMP

Source: International IDEA and Stockholm University (2005) cited in Dahlerup (2006)

A question that may well be asked here is - to what extent do electoral quotas fit or accommodate into, rather than challenge dominant conceptions of citizenship? Electoral quotas or reservations for women clearly involve a demand for women's

increased participation in public-sphere activities. An influential strand within feminist theory challenges the norms of 'public' citizenship and questions the 'passivity' ascribed to non-political and non-economic/productive activity. While the active or participatory model which associates rights and entitlements to performance or practice of citizenship, drawing from the civic republican model, is dominant among American feminist theorists, prioritising as it does women's public-ness or their public roles to their domestic activities, other forms of citizenship have focused attention on social and cultural rights, the associated welfare regime and responsibilities of the state, and claims for the recognition of women's contribution in the domestic sphere (Bacchi 2006).<sup>7</sup> There is, therefore, a degree of ambivalence among feminists, particularly from Eastern European countries where the strategy of electoral quotas is concerned. Feminists have sought to overcome the dichotomies structuring the contours of the debate by arguing that depending on the context, specific forms of citizenship may take precedence. While the notion of context-based or context-sensitive citizenship may facilitate the alleviation of the debate to a level of co-existence of contrasting arguments, on the issue of quotas feminists have insisted, that it actually cuts across the entrenched dichotomies that have inhibited women's claims to citizenship, irrespective of their form. First, they straddle the public/private divide by insisting that women, because they are women, deserve representation; second, they draw attention to the importance of having a voice in defining the nature of citizenship rights and responsibilities (Bacchi 2006: 42). The suggestion that quotas cut across the public/private divide challenges the dichotomy of the mind/body implicit in the 'politics of ideas', which was challenged by the counter-argument of a 'politics of presence'. The insistence on presence in critical numbers, or a 'critical mass' to set in motion significant change, has led to yet another measure of transformative change – 'critical act' – put forth by feminists in the context of Scandinavian politics, where women have a substantial presence.<sup>8</sup> While the critical

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<sup>7</sup> Western European feminists contrast welfare regimes, using as their chief point of differentiation whether or not a male breadwinner model of social organisation is in place (Orloff 1993). Some Scandinavian feminists (Hernes 1987; Siim 1990) insist that 'an adequate account of contemporary citizenship' must grasp the interplay between material rights, multi-level participation, and political identities' (Lister 2003:40). In Eastern Europe where the dismantling of communism has meant the reduction of social rights and increasing reliance on the family, women are trying to establish a claim for recognition in the domestic sphere (Havelkova 2000). In Latin America, Virginia Vargas (2002: 215), a prominent feminist activist, argues that '[t]hose who campaign for political rights while neglecting or ignoring social or cultural rights...sustain and legitimize the exclusionary character of existing democracies and formations of citizenship'. See for a discussion on these issues Carol Bacchi. 'Arguing for and against quotas' in Dahlerup (2006).

<sup>8</sup> In nuclear physics, a 'critical mass' refers to the quantity needed to start a chain reaction, an irreversible take-off into a situation or process. By analogy, the presence of women in substantial numbers is required for the possibility of change.



mass theory may be inhibited by its reference to minimum and relative numbers, weakened in turn by expectations of a turning point, the theory of 'critical act' put forward by Drude Dahlerup hopes to diminish weakness, by shifting attention to actions rather than numbers, actions which involve men as well as women, for transformative change.<sup>9</sup>

### III. Frameworks of women's political participation in India

#### *Debates on women's vote and representation*

Despite a political consensus on women's equal political rights publicly articulated through the Karachi Declaration in 1931, a sense of anxiety over the impending havoc this would perpetrate in the family and society was clearly discernable in the debates on women's franchise in India. References to the *bazaar* women and prostitutes - the 'creatures' on the streets - were frequently made to dissuade public expressions of women's political equality. Concerns about the potential hazards that awaited women from the *zenana* in the cloistered voting booths were similarly expressed. Colonial officials, apart from wishing to stay clear of the 'internal' matters of the Indians and apprehensive of provoking 'religious' sentiments, were sceptical of the administrative feasibility of the task of registering women as voters. *Purdah* was cited as a reason that would impede their inclusion in the list of voters.

The issue of franchise became important in the context of the promise for constitutional reforms made by the British government towards the close of World War I. Montagu's announcement in the House of Commons on 20 August 1917, promising the gradual development of 'self-governing institutions' and the 'progressive realisation of responsible government', was instrumental in shaping demands for broadening the existing contours of franchise. Organised activism by women for the right to vote and for representation in the promised self-governing bodies emerged in this context, in a peculiar relation of collusion and conflict with a nationalist demand for voting rights.<sup>10</sup> It gained

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<sup>9</sup> Drude Dahlerup defines a 'critical act' as one which would change the position of the minority considerably and lead to further changes in policies. Critical acts would involve increasing the representation of women through quotas, while simultaneously developing gender-sensitive platforms for change (Dahlerup 2001).

<sup>10</sup> The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed some results of the dissemination of education to women, however restricted, and the impact of the ideas of reformers in the changes taking place in the status of women. This was manifested in the emergence of women's organisations, when women entered public life in larger numbers than ever before. This period saw the birth of organisations such as the Women's Indian Association (this was later merged in the All India Women's Conference), the National Council for Women in India and The All India Women's Conference. It also opened a new chapter in the women's movement for equality. All these organisations agitated for reforms to broaden the eligibility criteria to

pace with subsequent reform declarations, and all but withered away in the 1940s. The decline in the 1940s was symptomatic of the unyielding primacy that the issue of political independence had assumed. It is important to point out at the outset that, while a small percentage of men could vote on the basis of a property qualification, women in India had no voting rights. While the removal of sex disqualification formed the basis of women's demand for voting rights, it is significant that women's organisations which took up the issue with the colonial government, placed it within the larger agenda of universal franchise. 'Fair field and no favours' was the preferred slogan.

For a long time in the course of the struggle for political rights, women activists had steadfastly refused to endorse the idea of a 'community' of women with special needs and interests distinct from men, and requiring, therefore, special provisions. A difference among women became apparent, however, on the issue of reservation of seats for women in provincial legislatures. Begum Shah Nawaz and Radhabai Subbarayan, who were appointed by the government as representatives of women at the first Round Table Conference at London, in a departure from the professed position of women's organisations, expressed their support for special reservations, though as a temporary measure.

Unlike the religious minorities or special interest groups like the landed aristocracy and industry, Begum Shah Nawaz and Radhabai Subbarayan did not couch their demands for reservation in terms of a 'wider distribution of power' or a 'declaration of rights' enumerated in a way that made them 'unassailable by a majority community'.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, they stressed the numerical strength of women and framed their demands not in terms of a sharing of power, but in terms of responsibility. Pointing out that 'the political future and welfare of a great section [women]' lay in their 'bear[ing] the full share of responsibility in the new India',<sup>12</sup> they drew attention to the inefficacy of the existing franchise qualifications in enabling women to exercise their responsibility.<sup>13</sup> Significantly,

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include more women voters. The AIWC, formed in 1926, was set up by women, in order to organise themselves to pursue reforms in the system of education through linkages with other women organisations. Margaret Cousins who was involved with the organisation, issued an appeal in newspapers and wrote to over 500 women who were renowned educationists, or social reformers, or associated with relevant organisations. It entered into the struggle for the right to vote, joining hands with the WIA (formed by Dorothy Jinarajadasa on 8 May 1917 at Adyar) and the NWI formed in 1925. A demand for women's franchise was initiated in 1917 when a deputation of Indian women led by Sarojini Naidu presented to the British Parliament a demand for the enfranchisement of women on the basis of equality with men.

<sup>11</sup> See the debate in the Sub-Committee no. III (Minorities) of the Round Table Conference. See *Indian Round Table Conference*, 12 November 1930 – 19 January 1931, Proceedings of Sub-Committees, London (1931: 81).

<sup>12</sup> Deposition to the Franchise Sub-Committee by Mrs. Subbarayan, a government appointed delegate at the Round Table Conference at London 1930-31, *ibid.* (1931: 231).

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum on the Political Status of Women Under the New Constitution by Mrs. Subbarayan and

both Shah Nawaz and Subbarayan distanced themselves from the *minorities* in the meeting of the Minorities Sub-Committee of the Round Table. Speaking as women, they urged the men to be united in a common citizenship. Begum Shahnawaz persuaded them on behalf of the women of India to come to a settlement: '...as sisters we expect of you, as daughters we beg of you, as mothers we demand of you...'.<sup>14</sup> The present, they pointed out, had its difficulties and difference. It was the wonderful future – the development of a common Indian citizenship and Indian nationhood – towards which they asked the men to direct the present.<sup>15</sup>

The Lothian Committee effectively plugged the opposition of nationalist women's organisations to the reservation of seats by recommending a reservation of 2-10 per cent seats for women in the provincial legislatures for at least 10 years.<sup>16</sup> In particular, the communal award, with its provision for communally divided electorates for women, drove a wedge through the public face of unity that the women's organisations had displayed. At least three layers existed within the unity of women on this issue: (a) the nationalist patriots, deriving their identity as women from a common and equal citizenship uniting the nation; (b) women identified as a group apart, with special interests requiring special provisions; (c) minority women, as a further specialisation of interest within the category of women.<sup>17</sup> It should be pointed out that the emergence of a category of women associated with the reservation of seats was shortly overshadowed by the nationalist patriotism of women citizens after 1930, under the overriding influence of Gandhi and the national movement. The question of the reservation of seats put women's organisations in a situation where the ideal of citizenship towards which the demand for franchise worked was fractured by the demands for special provisions emanating from among their own ranks. The introduction of the minority women as differentiated-women problematised both the unitary identity of women as well as the nationalist patriotism of women citizens. In significant ways, the issue of reserved seats at this juncture also constituted a moment of contest between the nationalist men and an influential section of organised women who were against reservation of seats. The communal award of 1932 introducing separate electorates and including the provision of reserved seats for women was resisted by Gandhi as divisive. While women were strongly of the opinion that it would be difficult for them to contest elections successfully without such provisions, they supported Gandhi so that they may not weaken the

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Begum Shah Nawaz, Appendix VII, *ibid.* (1931: 290).

<sup>14</sup> Deposition by Begum Shah Nawaz at the meeting of the Minorities Sub-Committee. Indian Round Table Conference, Proceedings of Sub-Committees (1931: 290, 80).

<sup>15</sup> Radhabai Subbarayan speaking at the meeting of the Minorities Sub-Committee, *ibid.* (1931: 80-81, 290)

<sup>16</sup> Report of the Indian Franchise Committee 1932, cmd. 4086, Vol I: 86.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of these points, see Roy (2005).

nationalist demand. However, when the Poona Pact of September 1932 providing reserved seats for the depressed classes within the total Hindu constituency was accepted by Congress leaders including Gandhi as a compromise measure, the move was seen by women activists as a betrayal. The Poona Pact and other communal awards were criticised as divisive for women. The Government of India Act of 1935 gave legal sanction to the principle of group representation, giving women along with other categories reserved seats in elected Provincial Councils.<sup>18</sup>

The contest over the question of reservation of seats for women came up for examination again in the 1970s, when the *Committee on the Status of Women in India* (CSWI 1974) looked at the political status of women. The *Towards Equality* report, by which name the report is more commonly known, summarised the various positions and demands from women's groups and academic scholars on the issue of reservation. Those in favour of reservation drew attention to the deeply entrenched discriminatory structures that inhibited women's representation in political bodies, and to the fact that the number of women legislators was declining as a result of the political parties' reluctance to sponsor women candidates. While pointing at the 'force of tradition' that impeded women's 'coming into their own 'politically'', they emphasised that the improvement of women's political status was inextricably related with the 'problem of socio-economic change and broadening the political elite structure'. They recommended a 30 per cent reservation of seats in the legislative bodies as a transitional measure to dismantle the existing structure of inequalities (CSWI 1974: 302-305).<sup>19</sup> Strong opposition to the suggestion came, however, from representatives of political parties and most women legislators, who argued that reservation would be a retrograde step from the principle of equality, and would be resisted by most women for being equated with the socially backward communities, since all women do not suffer from the same disabilities as under-privileged groups. The CSWI could not agree on the principle of reservation. The majority rejected the demand for reservation, continuing with the nationalist women's arguments of 'fair field and no favours', and following what has in the earlier section been identified as the 'incremental track'.<sup>20</sup> Three members of the Committee – Lotika Sarkar, Neera Dogra and Vina Mazumdar – dissented, however, arguing that the Committee was being unwise in ignoring the need for institutionalised measures to eliminate or at least weaken the institutionalised inequalities that 25 years of universal franchise had failed to dislodge.

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<sup>18</sup> See Ghosh and Tawa Lama-Rewal (2005).

<sup>19</sup> The social scientists who undertook studies on the Committee's request came back with a uniform finding that while women's participation as voters had been increasing at a faster rate than men's, their representation as candidates – successful or unsuccessful – registered an opposite trend (CWDS 2000: 19).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

They also saw the failures on the representational front as part and parcel of the secular trends of decline and marginalisation which they had identified on the grounds of economic, educational and health.

More than a decade after the *Towards Equality* Report recommended 30 per cent reservation for women in elected bodies at the panchayat level, a national perspective plan for women issued by the government in 1988 under pressure from the women's movement recommended 30 per cent reservation for women at all levels. The recommendation was incorporated as a demand by several political parties. In 1992, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts provided constitutional recognition and status to local elected bodies in villages (the panchayats) and cities (the municipalities), respectively. Apart from putting institutions of local governance in place, and decentralising power structures, the amendments also sought to deepen democracy by ensuring that hitherto excluded social groups like women, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) were adequately represented in these bodies. The Amendments therefore provided reservations for all these social groups, with the condition that no less than a third of the seats (including those reserved for women belonging to the SC and the ST communities) be reserved for women.<sup>21</sup>

As the discussion in the next section will show, the representation of women in Parliament has been remarkably low over the last 14 general elections. While there is a degree of consensus on women's gross under-representation in Parliament, there is no political consensus on reservation for women. Yet, during the 1990s a sharp polarisation of political opinions was witnessed around the Women's Reservation Bill, which was first tabled in Parliament in 1996 by the Janata Dal led National Front coalition, and 'was mired in conflict over the demand for special quotas for women of the other backward classes and minorities'. Unlike certain countries in the West like Germany and the Nordic countries, where individual parties introduced party quotas which spread across parties through competition and the fear of punishment at the ballot box, reservation in India has been sought to be introduced not through party quotas but through the reservation of rotating single-member constituencies.<sup>22</sup> It is

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<sup>21</sup> A great deal of work has been done on the panchayati raj institutions after the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment, whereas research on the impact of the 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment and work on municipalities remains relatively frugal. A 1998 study by the Centre for Women's Development Studies has put together a bibliography of women and the Panchayati Raj. Among other works on women's participation in panchayats are Hust (2004), Mohanty (1995) and Rai et.al. (2006). A significant work on women and local politics in urban areas are Ghosh and Lama-Rewal (2005).

<sup>22</sup> See Hust (2004: 30-31). In Chapter six of her book, Hust argues that such a system of reservation is unique in political history, and leads to specific problems that are not so salient when the quota is operating through a party system. The Bill provides for reservation by rotation: every third constituency could be reserved for women, chosen by lottery and rotated after a parliamentary period of five years. Several features of this Bill were found objectionable by feminists and others for its implications for

significant that much of the opposition to the Bill has come from the backward-caste communities, which have been making significant inroads in elected bodies and fear that reservation for women would eventually lead to the erosion of their gains by middle and upper-class women.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding the differences in opinion, enhancing women's representation in the Parliament and other political/elected bodies through reservation has continued to be a significant part of the women's movement's agenda.<sup>24</sup> While there is still an absence of consensus among women's groups over whether reservation is the best strategy for increasing women's participation, some scholars and women's organisations do feel that the entry of women in the electoral process will help curb violence and corruption - in other words, that the female presence will moralise the system.<sup>25</sup> Thus the late Gita Mukherjee, a CPI member and six-time MP from West Bengal who headed the special Parliamentary Committee on the Women's Reservation Bill, repeatedly asserted that the first step was to allow women to break into politics, after which their awareness would automatically increase. The Panchayati Raj institutions were seen as nurseries for the political training of women. Poverty and violence, it was argued, could be fought against effectively if women formed a critical mass in all decision making bodies. The Forum for Democratic Reform, an umbrella organisation of women's groups, proposed an alternative Bill that would make it legally binding for political parties to present women as one-third of their total candidates and

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feminist politics, and for the political system as a whole. Rotation reservation of constituencies, it was argued, would in effect mean 'reserving' the remaining two-third constituencies for men and pit women solely against women. The political system, too, would experience uncertainty, since the system of rotation through a lottery every five years would mean constant switching and change of representatives. Both these factors would not only make their credibility in terms of their capacity to win rather suspect, and, on the other hand, make the relationship between the representative and her constituency tenuous. See Omvedt (2005: 4750)

<sup>23</sup> Parties like the Samajwadi Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Indian Muslim League and the National Conference have opposed the Bill. The combined votes of these parties, however, may not be enough to defeat the Bill if it is tabled in Parliament and supported by parties that have so far been publicly in favour of the Bill, viz., CPI(M), Congress(I), and BJP. The fact that the latter have also been emphasising the need for a consensus, rather than pushing the Bill through on the floor of the House indicates that there may not be enough effort at facilitating the passage of the Bill through parliamentary discussion and debate. See Ghosh and Lama-Rewal (2005: 14).

<sup>24</sup> For the intricacies of the debates surrounding the issue in the women's movement, see John (2000) and Menon (2000).

<sup>25</sup> The autonomous women's organisations fear that women may not be able to further the broader interests of women amidst corrupt electoral process and practices, and may be compelled to make compromises in their principles, programmes and practices, and get sucked or co-opted into the system. Moreover, it may also result in a situation where women from the elite sections, mainly the kith and kin of male politicians who are actually opposed to the women's movement and progressive principles of any kind may get elected in large numbers (the biwi-beti brigade).

give proportionate tickets to those from Dalit and Backward Classes. Gita Mukherji's associate Bidya Munshi criticised this position stating that women were likely to be relegated to seats where a particular political party was unlikely to win. While the government sought to alleviate the contest over 'reservation within reservation' by suggesting that the seats in Lok Sabha be increased to 725, the move was largely rejected for being 'cumbersome', and the demand for the original bill to be tabled was reiterated. The commencement of the monsoon session in 2006, and the months immediately preceding it, saw the demand for reservation being pushed by women's organisations with renewed vigour. While the government failed to table the Bill in the monsoon session, the Winter session of the Parliament opened amidst fervent campaigns by women's organisations and an announcement by the government that the Bill will be introduced in the ongoing session.

### *The Missing Women? Exploring the gender gap in politics in India*

The presence of women in the Parliament in India, as Table 1 shows, has remained remarkably low and stable, ranging from an average of 5 per cent till the 1990s, when it increased to an average of 8 per cent. In 1999 with 8.8 per cent women, the highest so far, India was 82nd of the 180 countries, for which data on women in the lower house was reported by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In 2004, of the 498 elected representatives in the Lok Sabha, only 8.26 per cent or 45 were women. The caste-class composition of women members of Parliament, moreover, shows that class forms an important factor in the successful inclusion of women into the political system in decision-making positions.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Shirin Rai's study on class, caste and gender in the Indian Parliament makes some interesting observations. Caste has been an important factor insofar as most of the women MPs in the Tenth Parliament were members of the higher castes. There were six women who were Brahmins, constituting thereby 17.14 per cent of the women MPs, though the Brahmins comprise only 5.52 per cent of the population. Of the six, two women MPs from the CPI, were privileged in terms of class, and had a history of participation in political movements, the nationalist struggles and the anti-emergency movement. The number of women who are able to avail of the caste-based reservation system in the Parliament is small. While 22 per cent of the parliamentary seats are reserved for the Scheduled Castes, women occupy only 4.1 per cent of the reserved seats. Two women MPs were from the Scheduled Tribes. Out of the 39 women MPs in the Tenth Lok Sabha (representing 7 per cent of the total strength), 14 per cent were from the Scheduled Castes. Two women MPs belonged to the backward castes, and represented open constituencies. Class and social position were, however, equally significant. Out of the 39 women MPs in the 1991-96 Lok Sabha, 32 had post-graduate qualifications. In the Rajya Sabha 14 out of 17 women MPs were graduates. The class position of these women, points out Rai, was obviously more important to their educational levels than caste. Only one out of the seven lower-caste women MPs was not a graduate and the one Scheduled Caste woman MP in the Rajya Sabha was a postgraduate. The levels of education (and, therefore, the class position) is also reflected in the professional profiles of these

While women from all communities are under-represented, Muslim women's representation has remained especially low. As the table below shows, of the 14 Lok Sabha elections so far, a total of only 16 women from the Muslim community have been elected to the Lok Sabha, and in six elections, not even one Muslim woman was elected. On the other hand, the maximum number of Muslim women who could get elected has been three in the 1977 and 1984 elections respectively.

<b>Year of election</b>	<b>No. of Women M.P's</b>	<b>No. of Muslim Women</b>
1952	23	0
1957	24	2
1962	37	2
1967	32	0
1971	26	0
1977	18	3
1980	32	2
1984	45	3
1989	28	0
1991	40	0
1996	40	1
1998	44	0
1999	47	1
2004	45	2

Source: Sanjay Kumar, 'Muslim Women in India: Opinions, Attitudes and Participation in Politics' (unpublished paper)

The smaller proportion of women in the Lok Sabha is replicated in the state legislative assemblies as well. The number of women legislators remains low in almost every state. Moreover, the proportion of women candidates in all major political parties remained around 10 per cent of the total candidates nominated by the party. While political parties have evidently doubted their winning ability, election data shows that the success rates of men and women candidates do not differ in a major way. By implication, it means that voters are not apprehensive of women candidates (Deshpande 2004: 5433).

Following the continuum approach to politics, it may be proposed that democratic citizenship does not only entail frameworks of representation, which make

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women. Thirty per cent of women MPs in the Rajya Sabha were lawyers, and 25 per cent in the Lok Sabha were either teachers or lecturers. See Shirin Rai (2002).



it necessary that we talk about a critical mass of numbers. It rather involves, as discussed earlier in the paper, that people's representatives, the voters, electoral processes, and actors through each electoral trial, are tied in a multilayered relationship that creates a democratic agora or dialogical spaces, marked by critical action and recognition of difference or agonism. Thus when we talk about representation and the invisibility of women in political bodies, it is important that we also look at another aspect of participation – women voters – and thereafter at the manner in which an articulated public sphere bridges the temporal and spatial distance between representation and participation.

Both the Election Commission and the National Election Survey data show that women have consistently turned out to vote less than men, although the gender gap or the turnout differential between men and women has decreased over the years, steadying at 8 per cent through the elections of 1998, 1999 and 2004 (Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4; Figures 1 to 3). In an interesting analogy, Sudhir Varma, the Chief Election Officer in the Government of Rajasthan at the time of doing his study, extended the category 'missing women', normally used in the context of the declining sex ratio, to women absent from the electoral rolls (1997: 79-124). Varma correctly points out that since the trend of decline in the sex ratio in India has been primarily in the 0-18 age group, which is the non-voting population, and the sex ratio of the voting population is better than the general sex ratio, the electoral sex ratio under ideal conditions should reflect this. Yet, the electoral sex ratio (ESR) is actually adverse. In the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, for example out of a total of 49.8 crore voters only 23.6 crore were women, which meant that nearly a crore women voters were left out of the voters list. While the pattern of ESR is complex, a pattern of absences may be identified in terms of differences across states, between rural and urban constituencies, between general and reserved constituencies, as well as among reserved constituencies across states.<sup>27</sup>

Election data shows that there is no correlation between women's turn-out and the number of women elected as representatives. As evident from Table 3 showing male and female voter percentage, the year 1998 showed the highest female poll percentage in the 1990s at 57.69 per cent, coming close to the two highs in the 1980s (58.59 per cent in 1984 and 57.31 per cent in 1989). In the corresponding years the percentage of women representatives in the Lok Sabha was 7.9 per cent in 1984 which was an increase from 5.1 per cent in 1980. In 1980, however, the percentage dropped at 5.3 per cent, to rise again to 7.9 per cent in 1991. For the 1990s high the corresponding percentage of women representatives was 7.9 percent, almost one percentage point

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<sup>27</sup> Sudhir Varma's study (1997) makes interesting comparisons and also goes into the reasons for women's absence from the electoral rolls and their lack of access to the ballot box, even when their names figure in the list.

lower than the highest achieved in the subsequent year at 8.8 per cent. In the same year, however, the female poll percentage dropped from the 57.69 per cent of 1998 to 55.63 per cent.

As evident from Table 2 and Figures 1 and 3, there is an overall increase in the size of the electorate and in the numbers of women and men voters over the years, alongside a consistent gender gap. Despite the gender gap, one can identify 'a definite participatory upsurge' among Indian women in the 1990s (Deshpande 2004, Yadav 2000), seen both in terms of an increase in the proportion of women voters among the total voters, and their turnout (Tables 2, 3 and 4; Figures 1, 2 and 3). While as mentioned earlier, 1984 remained the peak for women voter percentage, in 1998 the female poll percentage reached close to the landmark of 1984 and 1989. Unlike the peak in the 1980s where the increase was associated with the fortunes of the Indian National Congress in the phase of transition with the demise of Indira Gandhi, the increase in the 1990s has been explained on two counts, both of which, however, demand empirical evidence.

The increase may possibly be associated with the 'second democratic upsurge', as Yogendra Yadav termed the phenomenon, referring to the process of democratisation in the decade of the 1990s, especially the dynamism which the electoral process witnessed in the period, characterised by a hitherto unprecedented upsurge in political participation by the lower classes of the Indian electorate.<sup>28</sup> It is significant that the second democratic upsurge is also put forward by Yadav as a counterpoint to proceduralism and 'design fallacy', focusing attention on the processes whereby the democratic will of the people *is able* to make itself effectively manifest, irrespective of electoral design. Apart from the upsurge among the backward classes, the increase in women voters may just as well be attributed to the Panchayati Raj reforms, which boosted participation among women. While the increase may in all probability have been associated with the democratic upsurge and churning which the panchayat elections brought in their wake, the relationship cannot be conclusively established unless the caste-gender data for the period is examined. Moreover, the two may not be seen as exclusive and the political upsurge among the backward classes may be seen as simultaneous and intertwined. The turnout of women voters as a proportion of the total voters by States in the Lok Sabha elections for 1991, 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2004

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<sup>28</sup> The *second* democratic upsurge, the first being the phase of the 1960s, is the term given by Yogendra Yadav to refer to the 'new phase of democratic politics' in India in the 1990s, particularly in the State Assembly elections during the period 1993-95, characterised by a hitherto unprecedented upsurge in political participation, particularly by the lower classes of the Indian electorate. An average of more than 64 per cent in these elections indicated a decisive break in this period from the previous period of Assembly elections, and a sizeable 9 per cent increase over the Lok Sabha elections (Yadav 1999 and 2004).

shows that in certain states like Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, there was a jump in the proportion of women among the total voters from previous election years. In the case of Bihar, the numbers leapt from 39.8 per cent in 1996 to 47 per cent in 1998. In Gujarat, the increase was incremental, increasing from 40.1 per cent in 1996 to 45.2 per cent in 1998, climbing yet again to 48.4 per cent in 1999. In Madhya Pradesh the proportion of women voters increased from 42 per cent in 1996 to 48.1 per cent in 1998, and stabilised thereon. Like Gujarat, in Rajasthan the number increased incrementally, from 40 per cent in 1996 to 43.4 per cent in 1998, to 47.3 per cent in 1999 and 47.7 per cent in 2004.

Seen in terms of a gender gap or differential voter turn-out in men and women, the picture is more complex. In her study based on NES data, Rajeshwari Deshpande points out that after the 1998 elections, which witnessed a significant rupture in women's political participation, there occurred a plateau, which when unraveled would show that whereas for most states the gender gap in turn-out remained at 5 per cent, it widened in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Gujarat. The latter were the same states that had witnessed a significant rise in the number of women voters in the 1998 elections. If the gender gap in turnout in these states in the recent elections is explained vis-à-vis their social backwardness, the rise of women voters earlier may then be linked to the overall increase in the participation of marginalised groups in the 1990s.

The NES Lok Sabha post poll data for the years 1999 and 2004 for Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Tables 5 to 8) shows an interesting pattern.<sup>29</sup> What is interesting about these figures is that they afford a comparison among communities on the basis of the proportion of women who voted in each community. The comparison is interesting

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<sup>29</sup> The National Election Study (NES) is a nation-wide study conducted across more than 2000 locations in India by the Centre for the Study of Democratic Societies (CSDS). NES 2004, for example, was conducted at 2380 locations spread across all 29 states of India. The study is based on a three-stage stratified random sample, where the Parliamentary constituencies and Assembly segments are randomly drawn using the Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) method, and the polling stations (locations) are randomly sampled using the simple random method. In the 2004 study 35,360 respondents were randomly selected from the electoral rolls of the selected polling booths. The respondents were contacted for interview at their homes, using a structured questionnaire. Of the total respondents selected, 27,189 could be successfully contacted and interviewed. With minor variations, the sample was truly representative, with 79.8 per cent Hindus, 11.3 per cent Muslims, 17.9 per cent Dalits and 9 per cent Adivasis. The sample had 46.5 per cent women respondents and 53.5 per cent male respondents. The sample over-represented people from rural areas. Compared to the fact that India is 72.2 per cent rural, the sample had 78.6 per cent respondents from rural areas. Naturally the sample under-represented the urban respondents by nearly 6 per cent. The study was conducted after the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. The fieldwork of the survey was done with the help of nearly 1,200 field investigators after the polling was over, but was completed before the counting of votes. The description of the survey is taken from Sanjay Kumar, who is the national coordinator of NES.

despite the fact that a lesser percentage of upper-caste women voting may work out to be more in absolute numbers. In 1999 more men irrespective of caste and community consistently claimed to have voted e.g., 86 per cent of Muslim men said they voted as did 67.8 per cent of upper-caste men, and 80 per cent of others. On the other hand while more Muslim and SC women voted (both at 57.7 per cent) and 52.5 per cent of upper-caste women and 69 per cent of other women voted, in all categories the number of women who voted was significantly less than the men in the same category (Table 5). In 2004, however (Table 6), the picture changes somewhat with the percentage of upper-castes (Brahmin and Rajput) and Muslim men who said they voted showing a decline from 1999. The decline is also seen in all categories among women including the upper castes and Muslims. The picture in Bihar for the 1999 elections also shows a consistent high voting percentage for men in all caste/tribe categories averaging in the eighties, except the Scheduled Tribes. The percentage of women voting remained considerably less, with the proportion of Muslim women (56.7 per cent) who claimed to have voted again surpassing women from all other categories (Table 7). Remarkably, in the 2004 polls, the percentage of upper-caste women who voted declines, as the percentage of Yadav women claiming that they voted increases dramatically from 46.2 per cent to 61.8 per cent and the percentage of Muslim women declines from 56.7 per cent to 50.6 per cent (Table 8). The stabilisation of the turnout of women voters from 1996 and 1998 to 1999 and 2004 thus shows internal and regional differentiation.

## **Discussion**

Contemporary frameworks of gendering electoral governance - comprising of initiatives by the United Nations, the NGOs, the women's movement, and feminist theorists - may broadly be described as frameworks of *differentiated universalism*. In other words, these frameworks adhere to a principle of inclusion that starts from the premise that the universal principles of electoral governance may not reflect the special needs that emerge from women's societal contexts and the specific structural constraints that women suffer. The right to vote and to be represented may then exist in law, but can be denied in practice to women. Women, moreover, may feel overwhelmingly about women's issues, especially on the question of reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies, and issues of right to higher education, to work and political participation, cultural constraints to public contact between women and men, and the manner in which the public space remains debilitating for women may place limits on their mobility. Rajeshwari Deshpande's study based on NES data shows that while there appears a consensus among women on women's issues, including

reservations in elected bodies and women's right to work, which cuts across social groups and communities, there is little to indicate that this consensus translates itself into concerted political action. On another set of questions relating to economic issues, women across social sections, along with men, share common grounds. On a set of social issues relating to inter-caste and inter-community relationships, however, women seem to cling to community ties more than men, favouring closed inter-community relationships (Deshpande 2004). Often, however, the electoral system and the management of the system may inhibit women's participation. Sudhir Varma's study shows that the exclusion of women from the electoral list and their lack of access to the ballot box produce low electoral sex ratio and gender gap in voting, respectively. Often, moreover, the increase in the number of women voters in the electoral rolls, as in 1996, is deceptive since the electoral sex ratio may continue to be worse than the sex ratio. In 1991 in particular, the electoral sex ratio fell from 938 in 1981, to 886. The fall could have been due to the fact that between 1981 and 1991, the voting age was lowered to 18, and a number of 18-year-old girls may have been left out of the voter list. Moreover, different groups seem to be showing different patterns of ESR. Thus in 1991, in certain states like Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan, constituencies reserved for SCs have a substantially lower ESR than the ESR of the state. For general constituencies also, in some states the ESR was worse than the ESR for the state (Varma 1997: 84-86).

The continuum model, as discussed earlier, seeks to bring together differentiation with universalism through the creation of a talking and doing space that bridges the hiatus between voting and decision-making, which are performed by different sets of people and different moments. It is therefore this space that needs to be strengthened for all differentially included groups. In the case of women in particular, bringing up women's issues as significant in the electoral agenda of political parties and the public space is important. Again, continuous dissemination of information on poll issues and candidates as well as programmes is important, since women too need to know in order to perform the act of voting well. While groups like Lok Satta,<sup>30</sup> Association for Democratic Reform,<sup>31</sup> Lok Raj Sangathan,<sup>32</sup> and Lok Samvad of Bihar,

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<sup>30</sup> A Hyderabad-based organisation which describes itself as a 'people's movement for better governance'. While its organisational activities are confined to Andhra Pradesh, its goals are, it argues, national. It describes its work as being dedicated to good governance, fighting against corruption and the illegal use of money power in elections.

<sup>31</sup> The Association for Democratic Reforms is an Ahmedabad-based non-political, non-partisan group of professors of the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA), the National Institute of Design (NID) and alumni of IIMA, working on 'improving governance' and 'strengthening democracy in India'. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by ADR in December 1999 culminated in a landmark Supreme Court Judgement on 2 May 2002, emphasising the right to know of the citizen voter, and an ordinance on

which is a network of organisations working on electoral reforms and Right to Information, have taken the lead in suggesting reforms for the electoral system, women's groups like Sakhi<sup>33</sup> in Kerala and Vimochana<sup>34</sup> in Karnataka have over the years campaigned to inform women about their candidates.

The following is the text of a leaflet which was published by Vimochana, for the 1989 elections, urging women voters to vote against candidates charged with crimes against women:

### **To All Women Voters**

Vimochana is not a political party. Why then do we reach out to you at the time of general elections? In 1979 when we first intervened in the political process, we did so to raise women's issues and put them on the political agenda. We had asked you then to vote for candidates who would recognise and talk about violence against women – dowry, rape, sexual harassment, exploitation in the media, shelter, fuel, water ... questions on which politicians are totally silent.

We have come some way since then. Women's issues have become more 'visible'. We are now an essential part of political rhetoric – no speech or manifesto is complete without a formula to draw women into the political and national mainstream. Why then do we need to reach out to you once again?

Perhaps because we all know that in an age of false promises and hollow utopias, this rhetoric too hides the everyday reality of a majority of the women in India. We write to you this time to ask you to expose the hypocrisy behind political promises. All parties speak glibly about giving full representation of women in politics – some have gone so far as to promise 30% reservation in these elections. How many parties have fulfilled this promise? In fact this year the number of women candidates has drastically decreased.

We ask you [to] expose this hypocrisy because we all know that most of our 'representatives' rarely practice at home what they preach on the streets – they cleverly separate private ethics from public morality. Today wife beaters and rapists can talk of equality of women; mafia dons can talk of justice;

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electoral reforms promulgated in August 2002. The Ordinance was subsequently passed as a Bill in December 2002. It partially overturned the 2 May 2002 Supreme Court Judgement requiring disclosure of a criminal background, but not of financial and educational backgrounds. ADR and two other petitioners challenged this Act. In a second landmark judgement on 13 March 2003, the Supreme Court struck down the Bill as unconstitutional and restored its earlier order. Subsequently, the Election Commission issued orders implementing the judgment, requiring candidates to fill in an affidavit giving personal details including financial.

<sup>32</sup> Lok Raj Sangathan is an all-India organisation set up in May 1998. It describes itself as a 'political organization of a new type whose mission is to vest sovereignty in the hands of the people'. It argues that the political process is being dominated by a handful of so-called recognized political parties, which are trained for the status quo and aims among other things to expand the people's role in the political process.

<sup>33</sup> Started in 1996, Sakhi, which literally means a woman friend, is a feminist documentation, training and resource centre. It describes itself as 'a space for women to come together, share their pains, anxieties, pleasures and fun'. In the recent state election in Kerala (April-May 2006) Sakhi campaigned against a candidate who was charged with molestation.

<sup>34</sup> Vimochana is a Bangalore-based women's organisation which has led a concerted campaign against torture and violence against women, in particular domestic violence.

fundamentalists can preach secularism .... As women and 50% of the electorate we have to exercise our vote to transform this degenerate political culture. Let us all take a strong stand against 'leaders' like:

- ❖ Z.R. Ansari, the Union Minister of State for forestation, who despite being directly implicated in an attempt to rape charge by Mukti Datta, a woman activist working in Himachal Pradesh, has been given a Lok Sabha ticket.
- ❖ Kalvi, a Janata Dal leader from Rajasthan who openly came out in support of the murder of Roop Kanwar, a young widow burnt alive on her husband's pyre in 1988.
- ❖ The 19 CPI(M) activists arrested in connection with the gang rape of a young woman activist of Kashtakari Sangathan, an organisation working with the tribals in Dahanu District, Maharashtra.
- ❖ Suraj Singh Deo, Bihar's Mafia king, who is the trusted Lieutenant of Chandrashekhar, senior leader of the Janata Dal.
- ❖ H.K.L. Bhagat, who has been directly named by a number of the post-Indira Gandhi murder riot victims in Delhi in 1984 as the man behind the mass killings of Sikhs and yet continues to be a Union Minister and a senior Congress (I) leader.
- ❖ R.L. Jalappa, a Janata Dal candidate from Doddaballapur, who has been implicated in the murder of a lawyer.
- ❖ Dr. Venkatesh, a former Janata Party M.P., at present contesting on a Congress (I) ticket from Bethmangala to the Karnataka Assembly, who has not only deserted his wife and child without paying any maintenance despite court order, but also has a criminal case of assault on his wife pending against him.

The list is endless ....

The irony is that none of the political parties involved i.e., the CPI(M), Janata, or the Congress (I) have thought fit to initiate any enquiry against these individuals who have all been implicated in serious crimes. The greater irony is that some of these are not even seen as crimes – deserting a wife is seen as a 'personal' domestic issue. Society too sanctions such acts with its silence and cynicism about the 'criminalisation of politics'.

--- Boycott these candidates in your constituency who get up on a public platform and speak of equality for women while denigrating and violating them in their personal lives.

---- Support those candidates who you are assured will respond positively to issues of violence against women.

---- Support those candidates who genuinely attempt to put into practice what they speak, both in their public and in their private lives.

It is a small step but the first one.

Let us vote with our conscience and bring conscience back into politics.

November 1989

Vimochana

Forum for Women's Rights

P.O.Box 4605.

Several women's groups have prepared women's manifestos, undertaken 'know thy candidate' campaigns and issued leaflets highlighting women's issues. They have also, over the years, campaigned against candidates with a criminal background or a past record of violence against women. Vimochana, for example, campaigned against such

candidates by distributing leaflets<sup>35</sup>, organising street-corner meetings, and writing in newspapers. Feminist organisations demanded 'a code of conduct' for party cadres in the context of complaints of sexual violence against CPI(M) party cadres in Kerala and Bengal. In Maharashtra, the Stree Mukti Sampark Samiti (Women's Liberation Coordination Committee), a state-level United Front of the progressive and left women's organisations, issued a leaflet before the Lok Sabha Elections in February 1990 putting forth a perspective of women's organisations of elections, and suggesting to voters the principles and programmes which should determine their choice of candidates. The issues that were highlighted in the leaflet as significant for women pertained to fundamentalism, family laws, and issues of development and ecology, identifying women's concerns that needed to be addressed, viz., fuel-fodder-water issues, electrification, dams, education, health, employment, violence against women, media's depiction of women, and rural and tribal women's struggles for survival. The leaflet also suggested that candidates should be accountable to their constituencies on these issues (Patel 2005: 43-44).

Kerala Streevedi, an autonomous network of women's groups in Kerala, including Sakhi, carried out campaigns against candidates accused or convicted in sexual violence cases in the Assembly election of 2006. The network campaigned against Neela Lohita Dasan Nadar, contesting from the Kovalam constituency, who originally belonged to the Janata Dal (U) and was part of the LDF. Nadar was convicted in two cases of sexual harassment at the workplace, and as a result of the campaign the LDF withdrew his candidature, after which he stood as an independent candidate. A similar campaign was waged against Kunjalikutty, a former minister who was commonly believed to have been involved in a case of sexual harassment, though his name was not among the accused, in Kuttipuram from where he contested.

The need to strengthen and continually recreate a vibrant political space and thereby bridge the gender gap both in voting and decision-making remains. While specific states have had experience of women participating in the political process at the local level even before the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments,<sup>36</sup> since the 1990s a concerted effort by women's organisations to appeal to women voters at the national level has also

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<sup>35</sup> See Box

<sup>36</sup> Maharashtra for example, has several experiences of women participating in the mainstream political processes. There were cases of two villages putting up an all-women panel for Panchayat elections and losing. There have also been cases of all-women panchayats getting elected and functioning in Pune district in the early eighties. The experiences of the Samgara Mahila Agadhi (All Women's Front), a broad platform created by the Shetkari Sangathan Mahila Agadhi in Maharashtra in putting up nine all-women panels for Gram Panchayat elections in 1989 have received great visibility in the women's movement. The facilitation of women to contest for elections in local self-government by Samagra Mahila Agadhi comes in the midst of struggles of peasant women in parts of Maharashtra.



emerged. Women's groups, as discussed, have put up manifestos, conducted educational campaigns, and put up codes of conduct for party candidates and cadres. In the 1990s the Forum of National Women's Organisations based in Delhi had appealed to women to vote judiciously, and articulated their intention to directly intervene in the electoral processes.<sup>37</sup> A perspective that has gained some clarity within a wide range of organisations is the relevance of influencing the decisions of those in power, and placing gender issues on the political agenda. Women's groups in different states in India have also experimented with networks to promote ideas and consolidate issues on a common platform.<sup>38</sup> An interesting development has been the setting up of the Womanist Party of India (WPI) or the Bhartiya Streevadi Paksha in 2003 which claims to have a constructive approach in politics to bring equal representation for women in Parliament through 50 per cent reservation and pursuing a development agenda that recognises and affirms women's rights over natural resources – land, water, fuel-wood, etc.<sup>39</sup>

To understand the efforts by non-party associations and women's organisations to consolidate a common platform for electoral reforms one needs to return to the point where the paper began, i.e., the imperative to bridge the temporal, spatial and ideological hiatus - between 'electoral trials', representatives and the people, and the act of voting and decision-making. Such a notion of active citizenship differs from frameworks that explain this activity within the framework of 'crisis of representation' thesis, which proposes that when citizens perceive the traditional forms of representation such as 'political parties and trade unions' to be inadequate, or face

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<sup>37</sup> Newsletter, Vol. 12, No. 2, Research Centre for Women's Studies, 1991, Bombay.

<sup>38</sup> While some of these networks have grown organically from within the women's movement, reacting to certain issues and events, the growth of others have been facilitated by funding agencies and kept alive with a certain agenda. Paradoxically, most networks have not synergised to keep networking efforts alive on a sustainable basis. By and large several networks seem to come alive to react to specific issues and relapse into inaction till another issue, sufficiently proactive, propels them into action. Classification of networks reveals certain trends. Large organisations such as AIDWA, Mahila Dakshta Samithi, All India Coordination Committee for Working Women and, Joint Women's Programme (JWP) have branches in different parts of the country with networking arrangements. The emergence of the two informal national fora – Forum for Women and Politics (FWP) and the Forum of National Women's Organisation (FNWO) - in the 1990s is noteworthy in that they reflect a trend to come together for joint action despite differences in ideology and organisational perspectives. The FNWO comprises of AIDWA, CWDS, AIWC, JWF, MDS, NFIW and YWCA. Each of these organisations has promoted lateral networks, making efforts to bring their members together through regular visits, workshops, conventions and campaigns. The Forum for Women and Politics comprising of autonomous women's groups such as Jagori, Saheli, JWP, Ankur, Action India, Sabla Sangh, Shaktishalini, Kali for Women and Purogami Mahila Sangathan have a common past in that they have been coming together for several joint campaigns (Ramaswamy 1997: 191-92).

<sup>39</sup> The details of the document laying out the position of the WPI - 'Let us Make a History' - in Marathi is available in Patel (2005: 49).

recalcitrant and unresponsive political institutions as in the case of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe in the 1980s, they 'turn their back on the political domain and form self-help organisations in civil society to solve their problems'.<sup>40</sup> The shift to organisations in civil society has taken place, the thesis argues, since traditional modes of representation such as political parties have exhausted their capacity to represent the aspirations of their constituencies, have become hierarchical, bureaucratic and rigid, have followed the political logic and impulse of power-seeking more assiduously than pursuing the task of representing the needs and interests of their constituents, and have, unlike civil society organisations, been out of touch with the exigencies of everyday life, in particular at the local levels. Examining the crisis of representation thesis in the Indian context through a survey conducted in Delhi in 2003, however, Neera Chandhoke argues that the findings showed that there existed among respondents an excessive reliance on personalised contacts to resolve problems. While the latter pointed to the fact that neither political parties nor civil society organisations inspire confidence in the minds of the citizens, it also showed the ways in which the 'profoundly undemocratic' consolidation of patron-client relationships takes place, isolating people and 'pre-empting the forging of solidarity on crucial issues that are common to all, in civil society'.<sup>41</sup> The lessons that one can draw from the study while building a case for a continuum approach, whereby a continual and concerted multi-layered activity creates an agora of democratic politics, is looking at the ways that block the consolidation of such trends.

We must at this point, emphasise yet again, the importance of revitalising/democratising the public sphere through communication, speech and action, which are empowering and conducive to building alliances for a shared common perspective, and work towards democratising participatory institutions by focusing our energies both for information about them and for purging them. Strengthening political and representative institutions will also be conducive to rolling back the influence that participatory networks forged through non-governmental organisations have come to assume as being of value by itself. As mentioned at the outset, such an approach may ultimately edge out the people as dominant groups take over the mediating and negotiating spaces, generating thereby greater powerlessness and exclusion. The notion of the public as a democratically negotiated, and therefore, an inclusive collective interest, may be effaced in such a situation, increasing the vulnerability of groups that already have a differential access to the public. It is important, therefore, and it is significant that the efforts at reforms attempted by some

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<sup>40</sup> The thesis is discussed and found wanting by Neera Chadhoke in her article 'Revisiting the Crisis of Representation Thesis: The Indian Context', *Democratisation* (forthcoming).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

of the groups mentioned above have addressed themselves to the voters, creating thereby the space where the 'talking and doing' will translate into critical action having a significant bearing on the nature of representation.

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## Appendix

Table 1

### Turnout differential and the percentage of women in the *Lok Sabha*

Year	Turnout differential between men and women	% of women in Lok Sabha
1952		4.4
1957		5.4
1962	17	6.7
1967	11	5.9
1971	21	4.2
1977	11	3.4
1980	9.5	5.1
1984	10	7.9
1989	9	5.3
1991	10	7.9
1996	9	7.3
1998	8	7.9
1999	8	8.8
2004	8	8.26

Source: Election Commission of India

Note: Data available at the Election Commission of India website - <http://www.eci.gov.in>

**Table 2**

**Male and Female Voters**

<b>Total No. of Electors</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Male Female Voters</b>		
		<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Year</b>
173212343	1951			
193652179	1957			
127719470	1962	67388166	60331304	1962
248904300	1967	129568604	119335696	1967
274189132	1971	143564829	130624303	1971
321174327	1977	167019151	154155176	1977
356205329	1980	185539439	170665890	1980
379540608	1984	196730499	182810109	1984
498906129	1989	262045142	236860987	1989
498363801	1991	261832499	236531302	1991
592572288	1996	309815776	282756512	1996
605880192	1998	316692789	289187403	1998
619536847	1999	323813667	295723180	1999
671487930	2004	349490864	321997066	2004

Source: Election Commission website

Note: Tables 3 and 4 and Figures 1 to 4 are available at the Election Commission's website – <http://www.eci.gov.in>

**Table 3**

**Male and Female Voter Percentages**

<b>Poll Percentage</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Male Female Poll Percentage</b>			
		<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Year</b>
44.87	1951				
45.44	1957				
55.42	1962	55.27	60.8	49.11	1971
61.04	1967	60.49	65.62	54.91	1977
55.27	1971	56.92	62.17	51.2	1980
60.49	1977	63.56	68.17	58.59	1984
56.92	1980	61.95	66.13	57.31	1989
63.56	1984	56.73	61.58	51.34	1991
61.95	1989	57.94	62.06	53.41	1996
56.73	1991	61.97	65.86	57.69	1998
57.94	1996	59.94	63.96	55.63	1999
61.97	1998	58.07	61.98	53.63	2004
59.94	1999				
58.07	2004				

Source: Election Commission website <http://www.eci.gov.in>

**Table 4**  
**Women Voters as a Proportion of Total Voters by States, Lok Sabha Elections**  
**(per cent)**

State	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004
Andhra Pradesh	46.1	47.3	50.7	50.1	50.4
Arunachal Pradesh	43.1	44.8	46.2	47.5	48.6
Assam	44.3	45.8	46.4	47.8	47.9
Bihar	38.2	39.8	47.0	46.9	46.4
Goa	45.4	46.3	47.8	49.1	49.4
Gujarat	40.9	40.1	45.2	48.4	48.5
Haryana	43.6	45.0	43.4	45.5	45.9
Himachal Pradesh	46.1	48.4	49.9	49.4	49.0
Jammu and Kashmir	-	37.2	38.4	45.8	45.5
Karnataka	43.8	45.4	46.3	49.1	49.1
Kerala	50.5	50.9	51.4	51.0	51.8
Madhya Pradesh	38.6	42.0	48.1	48.0	47.8
Maharashtra	42.1	43.7	44.9	47.8	47.9
Manipur	50.3	49.5	49.6	50.9	51.4
Meghalaya	46.1	49.2	50.0	49.6	49.6
Mizoram	48.1	50.4	49.9	49.8	50.2
Nagaland	45.5	46.1	44.9	47.1	47.4
Orissa	40.4	43.8	43.7	48.2	48.2
Punjab	40.2	46.5	45.5	47.2	47.9
Rajasthan	39.1	40.0	43.4	47.3	47.7
Sikkim	39.1	45.5	44.6	48.8	48.3
Tamil Nadu	47.6	48.1	47.0	49.6	50.7
Tripura	44.7	47.8	48.0	48.2	48.2
Uttar Pradesh	40.6	39.9	40.7	45.2	45.2
West Bengal	44.9	46.3	46.2	47.8	47.7
Chhattisgarh					46.5
Jharkhand					48.1
Uttaranchal					43.9
Andaman and Nicobar	41.7	42.3	43.3	41.9	45.5
Chandigarh	42.7	43.5	42.1	42.5	44.5
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	48.1	48.8	48.8	47.4	46.9
Daman and Diu	50.8	51.3	49.7	49.0	50.0
Delhi	40.5	41.8	40.3	42.3	43.4

Lakshadweep	50.3	49.4	49.7	48.2	49.0
Pondicherry	48.6	49.9	49.6	49.2	51.2
All-India	42.9	44.0	46.9	47.7	48.0

Source: Rajeshwari Deshpande (2004) (Table based on the data from the National Election Survey 2004)

**Table 5**  
**Uttar Pradesh Lok Sabha 1999 Post Poll**  
**Caste/Community/Gender**

Gender	Did you vote		Total
	No	Yes	
<b>Men</b>			
Upper caste	55 32.2% 23.8%	116 67.8% 26.4%	171 100.0% 25.5%
Yadav	33 50.0% 14.3%	33 50.0% 7.5%	66 100.0% 9.9%
OBC	88 40.0% 38.1%	132 60.0% 30.1%	220 100.0% 32.8%
SC	44 31.0% 19.0%	98 69.0% 22.3%	142 100.0% 21.2%
Muslims	7 13.7% 3.0%	44 86.3% 10.0%	51 100.0% 7.6%
Others	4 20.0% 1.7%	16 80.0% 3.6%	20 100.0% 3.0%
Total	231 34.5% 100.0%	439 65.5% 100.0%	670 100.0% 100.0%
<b>Women</b>			
Upper caste	77 47.5% 23.9%	85 52.5% 26.4%	162 100.0% 25.2%

Yadav	26	23	49
	53.1%	46.9%	100.0%
	8.1%	7.1%	7.6%
OBC	146	111	257
	56.8%	43.2%	100.0%
	45.3%	34.5%	39.9%
SC	47	64	111
	42.3%	57.7%	100.0%
	14.6%	19.9%	17.2%
Muslims	22	30	52
	42.3%	57.7%	100.0%
	6.8%	9.3%	8.1%
Others	4	9	13
	30.8%	69.2%	100.0%
	1.2%	2.8%	2.0%
Total	322	322	644
	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: CSDS data unit

**Table 6**  
**Uttar Pradesh Post Poll 2004**  
**Caste/Community/Gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Were you able to vote</b>		<b>Total</b>
<b>Men</b>	<b>Unable to vote</b>	<b>Able to vote</b>	
Brahmin	60	41	101
	59.4%	40.6%	100.0%
	14.9%	8.6%	11.5%
Rajput	17	32	49
	34.7%	65.3%	100.0%
	4.2%	6.7%	5.6%
Vaishya	17	16	33
	51.5%	48.5%	100.0%
	4.2%	3.3%	3.7%
Other Upper Caste		9	9
		100.0%	100.0%
		1.9%	1.0%

Jat	9 45% 2.2%	11 55.0% 2.3%	20 100.0% 2.3%
Yadav	46 56.1% 11.4%	36 43.9% 7.5%	82 100.0% 9.3%
Oth Peasant OBC	46 36.8% 11.4%	79 63.2% 16.5%	125 100.0% 14.2%
Lower OBC	78 56.1% 19.4%	61 43.9% 12.7%	139 100.0% 15.8%
Jatav	40 40.0% 10.0%	60 60.0% 12.5%	100 100.0% 11.4%
Other SC	17 32.7% 4.2%	35 67.3% 7.3%	52 100.0% 5.9%
ST	14 87.5% 3.5%	2 12.5% 0.4%	16 100.0% 1.8%
Muslims	49 37.1% 12.2%	83 62.9% 17.3%	132 100.0% 15.0%
Others	9 39.1% 2.2%	14 60.9% 2.9%	23 100.0% 2.6%
Total	402 45.6% 100.0%	479 54.4% 100.0%	881 100.0% 100.0%
Women	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Total</b>
Brahmin	58 64.4% 11.4%	32 35.6% 8.7%	90 100.0% 10.3%
Rajput	23 51.1% 4.5%	22 48.9% 6.0%	45 100.0% 5.1%

Vaishya	14 43.8% 2.8%	18 56.3% 4.9%	32 100.0% 3.7%
Oth Upper Caste	6 60.0% 1.2%	4 40.0% 1.1%	10 100.0% 1.1%
Jat	12 50.0% 2.4%	12 50.0% 3.3%	24 100.0% 2.7%
Yadav	63 63.6% 12.4%	36 36.4% 9.8%	99 100.0% 11.3%
Oth Peasant OBC	197 71.8% 21.1%	42 28.2% 11.4%	149 100.0% 17.0%
Lower OBC	84 62.7% 16.5%	50 37.3% 13.6%	134 100.0% 15.3%
Jatav	29 31.5% 5.7%	63 68.5% 17.1%	92 100.0% 10.5%
Other SC	29 53.7% 5.7%	25 46.3% 6.8%	54 100.0% 6.2%
ST	6 60.0% 1.2%	4 40.0% 1.1%	10 100.0% 1.1%
Muslims	63 54.8% 12.4%	52 45.2% 14.1%	115 100.0% 13.1%
Others	14 63.6% 2.8%	8 36.4% 2.2%	22 100.0% 2.5%
Total	508 58.0% 100.0%	368 42.0% 100.0%	876 100.0% 100.0%

Source: CSDS data unit



**Table 7**  
**Bihar Lok Sabha Postpoll 1999**  
**Caste/Community/Gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Did you vote</b>		
<b>Men</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Upper Caste</b>	8	65	73
	11.0%	89.0%	100.0%
	11.3%	19.9%	18.3%
<b>Yadav</b>	10	50	60
	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%
	14.1%	15.3%	15.1%
<b>Kurmi+Koeri</b>	4	19	23
	17.4%	82.6%	100.0%
	5.6%	5.8%	5.8%
<b>Other OBC</b>	21	82	103
	20.4%	79.6%	100.0%
	29.6%	25.1%	25.9%
<b>SC</b>	6	36	42
	14.3%	85.7%	100.0%
	8.5%	11.0%	10.6%
<b>ST</b>	14	23	37
	37.8%	62.2%	100.0%
	19.7%	7.0%	9.3%
<b>Muslims</b>	8	50	58
	13.8%	86.2%	100.0%
	11.3%	15.3%	14.6%
<b>Others</b>		2	2
		100.0%	100.0%
		0.6%	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	71	327	398
	17.8%	82.2%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Women</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Upper Caste</b>	33	39	72
	45.8%	54.2%	100.0%
	13.8%	16.0%	14.9%

<b>Yadav</b>	35	30	65
	53.8%	46.2%	100.0%
	14.6%	12.3%	13.5%
<b>Kurmi+Koeri</b>	19	19	38
	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	7.9%	7.8%	7.9%
<b>Other OBC</b>	58	63	121
	47.9%	52.1%	100.0%
	24.2%	25.9%	25.1%
<b>SC</b>	45	45	90
	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	18.8%	18.5%	18.6%
<b>ST</b>	21	7	28
	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
	8.8%	2.9%	5.8%
<b>Muslims</b>	29	38	67
	43.3%	56.7%	100.0%
	12.1%	15.6%	13.9%
<b>Others</b>		2	2
		100.0%	100.0%
		0.8%	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	240	243	483
	49.7%	50.3%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: CSDS data unit

**Table 8**  
**Bihar Lok Sabha Postpoll 2004**  
**Caste/Community/Gender**

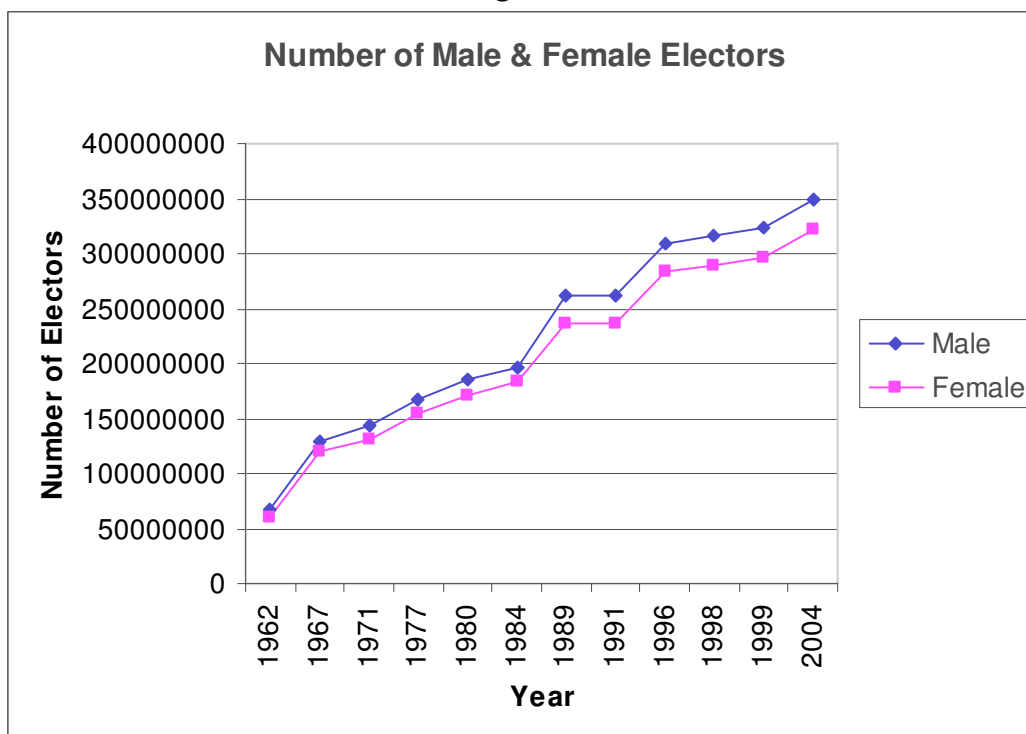
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Were you able to vote</b>		
<b>Men</b>	<b>Unable to vote</b>	<b>Able to vote</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Upper caste</b>	44	101	145
	30.3%	69.7%	100.0%
	23.4%	23.9%	23.8%
<b>Yadav</b>	11	52	63
	17.5%	82.5%	100.0%
	5.9%	12.3%	10.3%

<b>Kurmi+Koeri</b>	16	45	61
	26.2%	73.8%	100.0%
	8.5%	10.7%	10.0%
<b>Oth OBC</b>	55	98	153
	35.9%	64.1%	100.0%
	29.3%	23.2%	25.1%
<b>SC</b>	46	55	101
	45.5%	54.5%	100.0%
	24.5%	13.0%	16.6%
<b>Muslims</b>	16	55	71
	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%
	8.5%	13.0%	11.6%
<b>Others</b>		16	16
		100.0%	100.0%
		3.8%	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	188	422	610
	30.8%	69.2%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Women</b>	<b>Unable to vote</b>	<b>Able to vote</b>	
<b>Upper caste</b>	60	58	118
	50.8%	49.2%	100.0%
	19.3%	21.8%	20.5%
<b>Yadav</b>	21	34	55
	38.2%	61.8%	100.0%
	6.8%	12.8%	9.5%
<b>Kurmi+Koeri</b>	39	27	66
	59.1%	40.9%	100.0%
	12.5%	10.2%	11.4%
<b>Oth OBC</b>	87	61	148
	58.8%	41.2%	100.0%
	28.0%	22.9%	25.6%
<b>SC</b>	53	31	84
	63.1%	36.9%	100.0%
	17.0%	11.7%	14.6%
<b>Muslims</b>	44	45	89
	49.4%	50.6%	100.0%
	14.1%	16.9%	15.4%

<b>Others</b>	7 41.2% 2.3%	10 58.8% 3.8%	17 100.0% 2.9%
<b>Total</b>	311 53.9% 100.0%	266 46.1% 100.0%	577 100.0% 100.0%

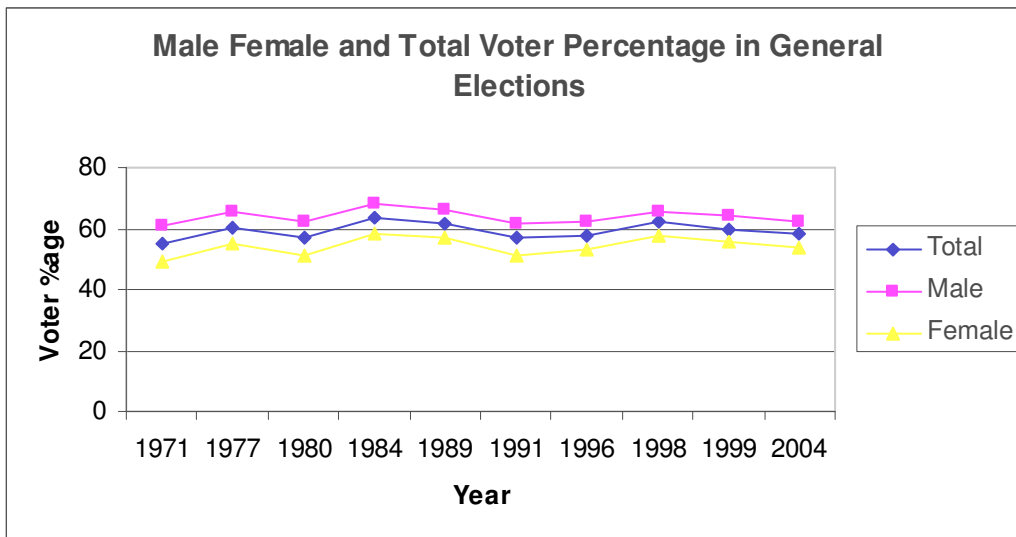
Source: CSDS data unit

**Figure 1**



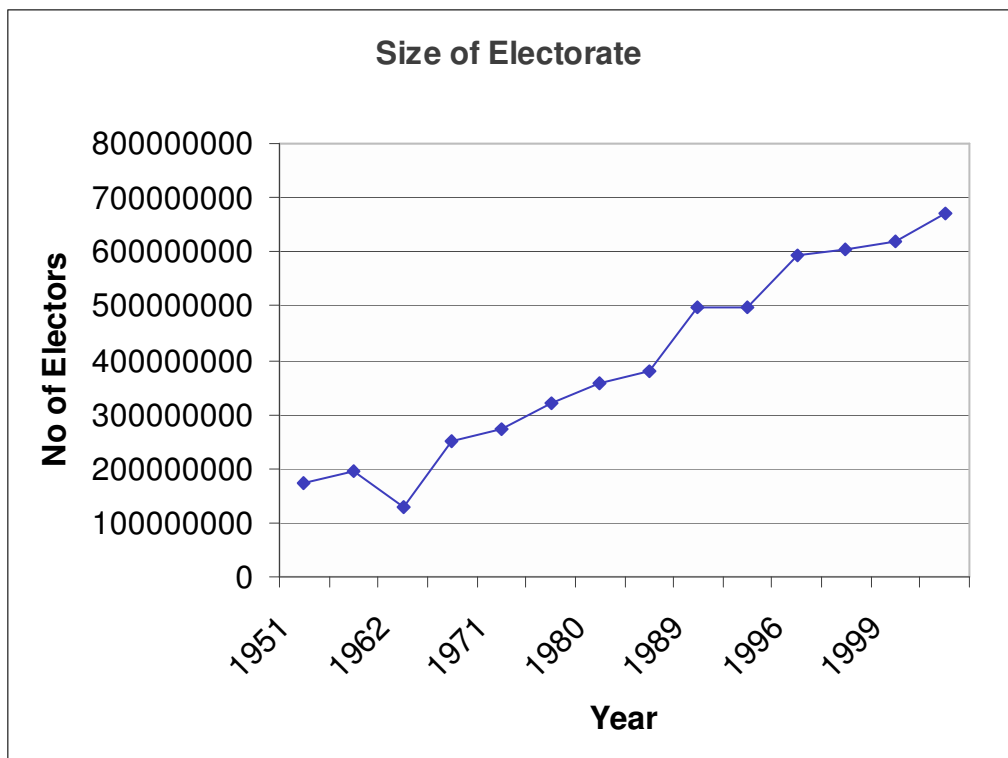
Source: Election Commission website – [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in)

Figure 2



Source: Election Commission website – [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in)

Figure 3



Source: Election Commission website – [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in)