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## Reality of Women Position in Indian Politics

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*India is one from those countries which promises equality to its citizen. When it comes to crafting laws for the society and regulating the people, the lawmaker or politician is affected to some extent by male dominance practices, old time rules, and patriarchy. Since ancient times, when the Parda system was prevalent in various parts of the country, women's status in India has faced numerous obstacles. This scenario has evolved since independence. They have been involved in politics, economics, day-to-day family activities, and voting for better governance, among other things. However, progress is gradual and uneven. In politics, women are still underrepresented. Attitudes regarding female candidates are still shaped by prejudices, and many political opponents will use these assumptions to cast doubt on women's abilities. The most difficult task is estimating real participation. The key challenge is determining the extent to which women participate in decision-making. Illiteracy is one of the most significant obstacles. Women's ability to comprehend the political system and concerns is hampered by illiteracy. Poverty is another factor that has contributed to women's poor political participation in India. Another hurdle is the institution of marriage. Once a woman marries, her family controls all of her political decisions. It has been noticed that if women's marriage power has been limited, how can we expect women to participate in politics? Apart from that, our constitution guarantees the right to vote, participate in elections, and receive a reserved seat, but they do not actually exercise these rights. There can't be a true democracy if the people aren't allowed to vote.*

**Keywords:** *political participation, status of women, equality, parda system.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Vedic Rig in India, women had a high social rank. They were in good shape. Women were given the opportunity to reach a high intellectual and spiritual level. Women's political participation in any country provides a snapshot of how women are treated in society. The equal participation of men and women in any country's growth is also essential. India's constitution not only guarantees social equality but also encourages states to provide particular measures for women. Women continue to battle for equality in society. Their difficulties and problems are often ignored and unnoticed due to their minimal representation in Indian politics. Their true desires are not brought to the attention of the decision-makers.

Women have an extremely low presence in politics in India, despite the fact that it is the world's largest democratic country. In the political arena, less powerful women are seen holding significant roles and making decisions. Indian women's political marginalization is as old as the country itself. One of the key causes for the absence of women's concerns in governance and development paradigms is their low political representation. Since childhood, they have been kept out of political discussions. Men and women have traditionally shared their commitment to the nation's growth equally. In both pre-independence and post-independence India, they worked side by side with their male colleagues. Contribution of Sucheta Kriplani, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Sawitri bai Phule, Raj kumara Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asaf Ali, Kamla Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Durga Bai Deshmukh, Nirmala Sitharaman, and Smita Irani Sushma Swaraj in India's social and political growth is momentous.

## STATUS OF INDIAN WOMEN IN ANCIENT TIMES

Vestige in ancient Indus valley civilization, validate the worship of the Mother Goddess. In Rig Vedic period, Women were bestowed with educational, economic, political, and religious rights for the development of their individuality. 20 women who composed the Hymns of Rig Veda were also spotted in ancient Indian history. Women philosophers were called 'Brahmavadinis' Gargi was Indian Sage and philosopher. She was an exponent of Vedas. She had won many Vedic debates with male philosophers. Along with her katyani and Maitri was

also well-known philosophers of that time. Gargi was honored with one of Navratnas of Janak Kings' office.

During the Early Vedic period women learn Vedic literature also treated as an 'Ardhanginis'. Divorce is not permissible and Widows can remarry on certain conditions. The practice of the Sati system & bad rituals like Dowry was not known. The concept of marriage as a Kanyadan was prevalent. They have the freedom to take part in public activities like 'Samitis'. Also selecting their life partner from 'Swayamvara'. Rig Veda also recognized the rights of inheritance of an unmarried daughter in the property of her father. But the married daughter was exempted from inheritance. Comparatively women in Ancient India enjoyed status, rights, and freedom, in society. She was Man's fellow, not his attendant. However, this freedom did not last long. But as time went on, women's affairs started degrading.

In Post Vedic period Women's status declined they were deprived of formal education, priority to son, Polygamy, Child marriage was prevalent, Widow marriage was prohibited, and No rights to property, etc. Factors like poverty, illiteracy, social conditions, etc. introduced drastic changes in the thought process of society. That stroked the woman's freedom, prestige, and status. Gradually birth of girls was started considered a sin. She and her mother were tortured by family members and social demons. The dusk of woman's rights was observed by the world for many centuries. But with the rise of Buddhism, there came relief to women. Buddhist thought describes illiteracy as a crime. They allow to women recite, hear and learn by heart religious discourses. They gave equal status to women.

### **EARLY WOMEN AND POLITICS**

Indian ancient women played an eminent role in politics. An archaeological excavation found evidence of the worship of goddesses. The Vedic text speaks the story of the participation of women in administrative and political affairs of the state. A woman was highly knowledgeable and able to take part in the decision-making process of the state. Women from the high dynasty also engaged in making the war strategy, political approaches, and ideas for the administration. They were equally respected by men. Right to choose a partner for an

ancient woman shows her healthy position in that era. Old epic tales talk about the victory of women in dangerous wars and how they defeated the enemy.

### **WOMEN'S POSITION IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD**

As time went by, the picture of women's status in India started becoming worse. There were many factors responsible for such change. Family drama, foreign attacks, slow and poisonous change in social thought process, and socio-political factors bit the woman's position and importance in Indian society. Due to foreign attacks, many kings outside India entered in Indian Territory. With property, they started looting woman's chastity. So this introduced 'Parda system' and gradually 'Jauhar system' among women. These practices were voluntarily observed. But unfortunately, it became the evil rituals of our society.

This kind of practice had given birth to other horrifyingly wicked practices. Man always considered women as his property. So without her consent provided and took back many rights of women. As cited above priorly she had the right to choose a partner, and by introducing 'BalVivaha' (child marriage) right was taken back. 'Child marriage insinuates the woman's health issues, dowry system, Sati system, and many more. Woman education vanished by that time. She was tethered with newly adopted anti-woman freedom custom and lost her identity. Her creativity and ability got limited to household and child care. She was not allowed to take a stand on the decision of her personal matter, the nation's politics was far away from her world.

### **WOMEN'S POSITION IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE**

Pre-independence period again took a reverse turn for the freedom of women. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotiba Fule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Dada Bhai Nauroji, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Lord William Bentick, and many more have taken strong steps to overcome women from the troubles which she was facing for many decades. During this time, Sati Abolition Act, Widow Remarriage Act, Child marriage restraint act, and the right to property for the woman were introduced. The woman was given chance to take part in the freedom movement. For the strong demand for women's political rights, the All India woman's education conference was held on 1917. All these changes built the confidence of a

woman and encouraged her to participate in political activities of that time. Some of the women's active roles in politics during the freedom movement are discussed below: -

***Ammu Swami Nathan:*** Ammu Swami Nathan played a crucial role in the Constituent Assembly of India. She brought with her years of experience working as a social worker and a political activist.

***Annie Mascarene:*** Annie Mascarene was a multifaceted personality. She was a leader of the Travancore State people's movement for independence and integration with the Indian nation. She is remembered as the first woman to be part of the Travancore State Congress Working Committee, and then the first woman minister in Travancore State.

***Begum Aizaz Rasul:*** She was the first and only Muslim woman in the world to become Deputy President of a State Legislative Assembly. She was the 1<sup>st</sup> woman Leader of Opposition of a State Assembly (Uttar Pradesh, 1950-52) and Minister for Social Welfare and Minorities (1969-71).

***Dakshayani Velayudhan:*** She was the only Dalit woman member of the Constituent Assembly of India. She was among the 1<sup>st</sup> generation of people to be educated in her community. She holds several distinctions including becoming the first woman from the Pulaya community to wear an upper cloth, the first Dalit woman to graduate in India, and the first woman member of the Cochin Legislative Council.

***Durga bai Deshmukh:*** She was a freedom fighter, lawyer, social activist, Lok Sabha Member, the first woman member of the planning commission, and founder chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board. She was a feminist and a great visionary. Her mission was to work for the upliftment of socially oppressed and politically neglected masses of India.

***Hansa Mehta:*** She was a freedom fighter and a follower of Gandhi. She was not only a social activist but an educator, who served various institutions and translated books from English to Gujarati. Like her many other women contemporaries, she was too helpful that equality in the constitution will result in equality of opportunity for women in free India.

***Kamala Chaudhary:*** She was a great freedom fighter and a follower of Gandhi. And an eminent architect of the Constitution of India. She played an active role as a member of the

Provincial Congress Committee and the City Congress Committee. She was also elected as a senior vice chairperson of the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the All India Congress Committee.

**Leela Roy:** She was an indomitable fighter, a dauntless leader, a fore-ranked revolutionary character of the age and our country. She was a radical leftist Indian Politician and reformer and a close associate of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

**Malati Devi Chaudhary:** Maltidevi Chaudhary, fondly called Numa and nicknamed Toofani by Mahatma Gandhi for her fierce pace of work. She was at the forefront of all the struggles of the oppressed downtrodden people of Orissa throughout her life while fearlessly confronting not only the colonial state and feudal rulers but also authoritarian regimes and forces of exploitation in independent India. Her commitment to the democratic rights of the poor made her acclaimed mother warrior the activist of the agrarian and tribal struggles.

**Purnima Banerjee:** She was born in 1911 as Purnima Ganguly was an Indian freedom fighter best known for offering the Individual Satyagraha in 1941. She also worked as secretary of the Indian National Congress committee in Allahabad and actively took part in the Salt March and the Quit India Movement.

**Rajkumari Amrit Kaur:** She was the health minister in the Indian Cabinet for 10 years after India's Independence. She was an eminent Gandhian, a freedom fighter, and a social activist. She championed the cause of universal suffrage and testified before the Lothian Committee on Indian Franchise and constitutional reforms, and before the Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament on Indian Constitutional reforms.

**Renuka Ray:** She was a noted freedom fighter, social activist, and politician. She was a descendant of Brahmo reformer, Nibaran Chandra Mukherjee, and daughter of Satish Chandra Mukherjee, an ICS officer, and Charulata Mukherjee, a social worker and member of the All India Women Conference.

**Sarojini Naidu:** Sarojini also known by Sobriquet as The Nightingale of India was an Indian Independence activist and poet. Naidu served as the first governor of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh from 1947 to 1949. The first woman to become the governor of an Indian State. She was the second to become the president of the Indian National Congress in 1925.

**Sucheta Kriplani:** She was the first woman chief minister of Uttar Pradesh from 1963 to 1967. She had a reputation for being a film administrator, a great freedom fighter, and a firm politician. Her tenure was marked by a visible sense of fairness and transparency.

**Vijayalakshmi Pandit:** Vijayalakshmi Pandit, or Swarup Kumari Nehru as her maiden name, was an active political leader and diplomat and lead the Indian Delegation to the United Nations. She was the first woman to be elected as President of the United Nations General Assembly.

## **RIGHTS OF WOMEN UNDER THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION**

### ***The preamble of the Indian Constitution:***

The preamble of the Constitution promises equality of opportunity, status, freedom, Justice Etc, to all its citizens. Citizen includes woman, men, child, and old aged person. So woman development and empowerment are guaranteed in the preamble of the Constitution<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Article 14<sup>2</sup> - Equality before Law:***

This Article contains two terms i.e. Equality before the law and Equal protection of the laws. Equality before the law means everyone whoever high authority or common person is, will be treated equally before the law. Equal protection of the law means the law will uplift those citizens who were deserted from basic rights and equal opportunities. As the result, this woman has been given special opportunities in the various educational, occupational, governmental, and political fields.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Reservation Bill for Women:***

One-third of all seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies would be set aside for women under the Constitution 108th Bill, 2008 proposal. The authority specified by Parliament shall decide how to distribute the reserved seats. The Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies shall reserve one-third of the total number of seats for women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Rotational allocation of reserved seats is an option for several state or union

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of India, 1950, Preamble

<sup>2</sup> Constitution of India, 1950, art.14

<sup>3</sup> Prof. M P Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law* (8<sup>th</sup> edition, Lexis Nexis 2018) 856

territory constituencies. One-third of all seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies would be set aside for women under the Constitution 108th Bill, 2008 proposal. The authority specified by Parliament shall decide how to distribute the reserved seats.

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#### **ARTICLE 15(3)<sup>4</sup>- FORBIDS DISCRIMINATION**

Discrimination on the basis of race, caste, sex, place of birth, or any of them is prohibited by this article. This article gives the state the ability to enact unique safeguards for the interests of women and children. This Article gave rise to Maternity Benefit Act, 2017. Hindu Succession Act, 2005, etc.<sup>5</sup>

#### **ARTICLE 16<sup>6</sup> - EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

In situations pertaining to employment for any post under the state, this provision guarantees equality of opportunity for all people. No citizen should be disqualified from holding any office in the government solely on the basis of their religion, race, caste, sex, ancestry, or place of birth.<sup>7</sup>

#### **ARTICLE 39<sup>8</sup>**

This article focuses primarily on the policy elements that the government must implement to ensure that all citizens, regardless of gender, have the right to appropriate means of

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<sup>4</sup> Constitution of India, 1950, art.15(3)

<sup>5</sup> Prof. M P Jain (n 3) 907

<sup>6</sup> Constitution of India, 1950, art.16

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 933

<sup>8</sup> Constitution of India, 1950, art.39

subsistence and equal remuneration for equally hard work. Additionally, this article instructs the State to advance justice on the basis of equal opportunity and to advance free legal aid by appropriate laws or programs or in any other manner to ensure that no citizen is denied the opportunity to pursue justice.<sup>9</sup>

#### **ARTICLE 51 - A<sup>10</sup> - FUNDAMENTAL DUTY**

Article 51 - A (e)<sup>11</sup> instructs every citizen to leave practices disparaging to the dignity of women. This article was added in 1976 in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act. Here we can say that Constitution has attempted to create unafraid conditions for a woman.<sup>12</sup>

**Article 243<sup>13</sup>** - Special provision for Reservation of seats for Women in Panchayat and Municipalities

**Article 243 (D)** and article **243 T (3)**<sup>14</sup> provide for “reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats in Panchayat and Municipalities for women to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies.”

**Article 243 D (4)** provides that “not less than one-third of the total number of officers of chairperson in the Panchayat and Municipalities at each level to be reserved for women.”<sup>15</sup>

#### ***Voting rights / Electoral law:***

The number of seats set aside for women must be at least one-third. Such seats in a Panchayat may be distributed through rotation to several constituencies. The position of Panchayat chairperson at the village level or any other level must be reserved for SCs, STs, and women in accordance with any legal provisions made by the state legislature. In municipalities, there are seats set aside for women.

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<sup>9</sup> Prof. M P Jain (n 3) 1363

<sup>10</sup> Constitution of India, 1950, art.51A

<sup>11</sup> Constitution of India, 1950, art.51A(e)

<sup>12</sup> Prof. M P Jain (n 3) 24

<sup>13</sup> Constitution of India, 1950, art.243

<sup>14</sup> Constitution of India, 1950, art.243(D) and art.243T (3)

<sup>15</sup> Prof. M P Jain (n 3) 99

## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACED BY WOMEN IN TODAY'S POLITICS

### CULTURAL FACTOR

Culture and development are linked, especially as both progress and equality for women in society increase. It's crucial to start by discussing how women are seen in India in terms of their traditional duties as well as how those roles are evolving. The treatment of women in Indian society is among the worst; it is a patriarchal, repressed society with a harsh caste system founded on religious belief, typically safeguarding masculine <sup>16</sup>dominance, malnutrition, illiteracy, violence, and discrimination against women. However, there have been developments in the law, attitudes, and norms during the past few decades that had an impact on Indian women's status, roles, and development in society. Women now actively contribute to the economic and social development of the country by seeking employment and occupations outside the house. However, this does not imply that they have strayed from their traditional roles as mothers and wives. They still have to take care of their husband and in-laws at home. This indicates that women are still not regarded as political figures even though they are accepted to pursue careers and positions of responsibility. They are still primarily associated with jobs for women, such as teaching and nursing.

The majority of people still operate in a patriarchal environment, which makes it challenging for women to embark on tasks like campaigning, running for office, engaging in community service to build support, travelling with male party members to pick up tips, etc. The presentation of themselves as the "real Indian traditional lady" vs a woman who can affect change for the betterment of the community is a challenge for many women who have worked in politics. To be respected by voters, one must be both a good politician and a role model woman who maintains the family unit. People still prefer to see a woman laboring in the field while wearing her mangalsutra and a sari pallu to cover her head. Making a name for herself as a politician is extremely difficult if she doesn't appear to be adhering to the local culture or religion.

### **Domestic responsibilities:**

Specific behaviors or activities that are gendered for males or females are known as gender roles. Men predominate in politics, create the rules of the game, and establish the benchmarks for success. Additionally, male conventions, ideals, and sometimes even male lives are used to arrange political life. For instance, rather than on respect for one another, cooperation, and reaching an agreement, the political paradigm is founded on the concepts of "winners and losers," competition, and confrontation. Women find this setting to be foreign to their natures and experiences. Women either reject politics altogether or reject male-style politics as a result of the male-dominated model's existence. As a result, when women do get involved in politics, it's usually in small amounts.

### **Traditional Gender Role:**

The gender stereotypes frequently associated with women are one part of traditional gender roles. In our nation, for instance, many female councilors would refrain from speaking out if land concerns were being discussed because traditionally, men manage these matters. Another example is that it is not socially acceptable for women to talk as much as men do. Men can be chatterboxes and occasionally hurl insults while remaining casual, but it is not socially acceptable for women to behave in that way. I'm not saying it's okay to insult people in a council meeting, but doing so certainly attracts attention, makes you automatically listened to, and confers power.

### **"Impure" politics:**

Death threats and character assassination are not uncommon for many women who have crossed customary cultural boundaries. Domestic duties, a lack of financial clout, an increase in the criminalization of politics, and the possibility of character assassination are a few examples of the elements making it harder for women to participate in politics.

### **Lack of ambition and confidence:**

Women face discrimination not only because of their gender but also because they belong to other castes, different religions, and isolated communities. This results in low self-confidence, which causes them to hesitate before accepting higher positions. It is also true that women lack

ambition for political careers. At times, it is necessary to coax strong women into running for office. They appear to prefer leading a routine existence. Another issue is that they lack knowledge, education, and the necessary abilities and training about the advantages and disadvantages of such political participation. In reality, however, it is the systems' fault.

## **POLITICAL FACTOR**

### **Party ideologies:**

On one level, a party's philosophy itself may be discriminatory toward women, as is evident in various Indian political parties, while on the other hand, as in the case of the Indian National Congress, its ambiguity in a traditional society may provide sufficient room for discrimination. Women still face prejudice in political parties with gender equality as one of their main agenda items. Within the party, men's attitudes toward women are not consistent throughout India. This might be a problem at the individual level. However, the party does not make an effort to influence the behavior of both men and women who attend. In addition, female politicians note that even inside political parties, women are infrequently found in positions of leadership. As the late Sushma Swaraj, an MP with an extensive political background put it "Making the decision to enter politics is extremely difficult for women. After she decides for herself, she must next get her husband, kids, and family ready. Once she has conquered all of these challenges and applied for the ticket, the male applicants she is competing against will start to spread all kinds of rumors about her. And after all of this, the party bosses do not choose her name because they are concerned about losing that seat ". The political nomination and selection procedure is gender biased.

### **Electoral systems:**

India has a wide variety of election systems, which is the cornerstone of a functioning democracy. Following British administration practices, India has maintained a majoritarian electoral system in which the winner is determined by a majority of the votes cast, sometimes even if that majority is only 30% or less. Parties are more likely to nominate men as their candidates under the majoritarian election system because voters are less likely to support women, which is generally perceived as an institutional barrier. Suggest getting more seats

and so having more power. In addition to setting up specific goals for women's representation, actions were taken to elevate the status of feminism as a political issue. Previous research has found that political systems significantly influence the recruitment of more women into parliaments, at the very least. The PR electoral system has produced a four-fold increase in the representation of women. A major step toward increasing the representation of women in India will be the adoption of a proportional voting system.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS**

### **Access to politics through family ties:**

For instance, 1/3 of women MPs in India with a sample size of 15 women have "family support" in the background. The motivation for adding women may have something to do with a party's concern over the levels of representation of particular groups within its ranks and the implications for the legitimacy of the party among the underrepresented groups. However, these women frequently have easier access to political venues and attention, which helps them advance quickly in politics. The Gandhi family, one of India's most powerful political dynasties, will serve as a constant example. If they are a Gandhi, they have been in charge of the country for many years; they were destined to lead the country.

### **Education:**

For women, talking, arguing, and pressing their concerns are all quite challenging? How can we get more women to speak up and be expressive? The woman in the hut may have a lot to say, but we need to encourage her to talk about her difficulties, her life, and the things that matter to her rather than politics. The answer is education. Many women in my community have become politically active as a result of their education. The most effective way to encourage women to speak out is through education, which is also the first step in helping them understand the kind of social issues they encounter and how to address them.

How far a woman may advance in politics is frequently determined by her educational background. These women's class standing may have a greater impact on their educational attainment than their caste. The lone lower caste woman MP in the upper house had postgraduate training, and just one of the seven lower caste women MPs lacked a degree. The

career biographies of these ladies also demonstrate their educational backgrounds. For instance, 25% of female MPs in the lower house were either lecturers or teachers, and 30% of female MPs in the upper house were attorneys. Not just women's confidence, but even other people's confidence in them, can be impacted by having little or no education.<sup>17</sup>

**Financial constraints:**

Poverty, a lack of education, and limited information access further restrict women's ability to participate in politics. It must be acknowledged that it is challenging for women to participate in political life when survival is their first priority and they are forced to spend a large portion of their time attempting to meet the fundamental necessities of families. However, some women may also work full-time jobs as mothers and wives in addition to other full-time employment (e.g., as teachers, lawyers, doctors). In these circumstances, becoming a member of parliament might be viewed as a third full-time job. The unequal distribution of resources, including money, time, and information, is emphasized by feminist views. Women are not given enough resources, such as money, etc.

**SUGGESTIONS**

- The literacy ratio of women is changing now. But practical education in occupation and political affairs is not possessed. She needs to get more acknowledged with the functioning of government affairs and national and international political concerns.
- Transparency in government affairs is needed. Due to less confidence in government, common people have less faith in it. It has been observed that now a day's people are avoiding voting. This is not a good picture of democracy.
- Malpractices in politics also discourage qualified women to take part in politics. Government should eradicate malpractices in politics.
- Care should be taken for the woman engaged in political affairs should not be controlled by any other authority.

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<sup>17</sup> Sumonto Chakravarty, 'Political Participation of Women in India – Problems faced and how it can be solved' 4 (9) JCIL, 169 <<https://jcil.lsyndicate.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/16.-POLITICAL-PARTICIPATION-OF-WOMEN-IN-INDIA.pdf>> accessed 05 May 2022

## CONCLUSION

Thus, it may be inferred that women did not have a lower status in Vedic India; rather, they held an honorable position. They enjoyed extensive rights in the social and religious spheres but few in the political and economic ones. They were considered equal to men rather than inferiors or subordinates. Our nationalism grew out of the mantra "Vande Mataram," and we have revered our homeland as our Motherland, or "Bharat Mata." The status of women in society serves as a barometer for the quality of the social structure. From time to time woman has proved her potential to do any kind of duty. She requires fair opportunity and fair competition to make her political career. The political growth of women will automatically be helpful in nation-building. In short, let the woman think and grow naturally. Her fearless initiative in politics will change the Indian scenario.