

The Women's Question: Representation in Rural India.

Ilona Moore
University of Minnesota Morris

Introduction

“Representation” of all citizens, however it may be defined is crucial for effective democratic governance. The relative lack of women in elected legislative bodies has been noted worldwide, with women’s presence in national legislatures varying from around five to ten percent, and leveling off around fifteen percent, except in Nordic countries, where women constitute up to forty percent of the legislatures.¹ Cross-culturally electoral systems with a high number of seats in multi-member constituencies seem to better facilitate women’s participation² than do systems composed only, or mainly, of single member districts. Part of the problem is that the predominant view of citizenship is too often limitedly defined solely in terms of rights with active and engaged participation in the political process disregarded. This is a problem because it denies the significance of a legislature’s composition and its impact on minority groups in particular. Feminist critiques recognize the importance of broader definitions of citizenship and political participation that encompass and emphasize women’s active involvement because the political process is both a test of the applicability of these rights as well as a determinant of them.³ Regardless of the theorist’s position on causes of women’s limited participation or the proper remedy to increase their involvement all agree that there needs to be active and increased involvement of women in politics. The question then is how to best accomplish this in a manner that is conducive to and helpful for women. It is a question of whether reservations actually change the status of women, or only their perceptions, and to what degree. Clearly, more women are elected to political office because of reservations, but more important than the number of women elected is who the women elected under reservations are. It is necessary to examine how interested in and aware of women’s issues the elected woman is, why she was elected, and how familiar and comfortable she is with the political process as a means of affecting

¹ Chowdhury and Nelson.

² Squires page 367.

³ Such as those of Carol Pateman and Susan Okin.

change. This paper attempts to address the issues of how to most effectively achieve successful incorporation of women into the political system through an analysis of women's participation in local elected institutions of rural India.

I. Democratic Theory and Questions of Representation

Traditional representation theory recognizes two main opposing schools for representation of a particular group. The first recognizes a representative as a sort of trustee, someone who is sent to a decision making body as a symbol not necessarily holding or propagating the views of those he is "representing." In fact, the representative thinks or acts on what he considers best, even if it goes against the electorate's wishes. The second view of "representation" deems such symbols oligarchical, maintaining a representative is a delegate of the people, and as such must literally *represent*, advocate for, and support the particular views of those he is delegated (and thus supposed) to.⁴ This distinction and interpretation of what exactly a representative should be is dependent upon how the term or concept is defined. For use in this paper, "representing...means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them,"⁵ and a legislature is "an institution in which individuals gather with the primary purpose of making laws."⁶

This distinction between symbolic and issue representation relates to proportionalist and identity or standpoint concepts of representation, which state that likeness is necessary for members of minority groups to be properly represented, and that they must be represented by someone who is a member of their social group. This stance fits with traditional proportionalist theorists who see a legislature as a reflection of the people; John Adams wrote that a representative legislature "should be an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, feel, reason and act like them."⁷

This view of identity based representation contrasts with concepts of "politics of ideas," which see physical identity as basically irrelevant, as long as a representative is accountable to his or her constituents with such accountability reached through dialogue between the representative and the constituents.⁸ Concepts of minority group representation comply more with the "politics of presence," which has similarities to proportionalism, in that it sees the descriptive similarity of the representatives to their electorate as vital. That is, shared social group identity is necessary to the ability of a given

⁴ Pitkin.

⁵ Pitkin.

⁶ Lawson page 331.

⁷ Pitkin page 60.

⁸ Squires page 369-370.

person to “represent” a particular group⁹. A system dependent upon emphasis of such similarities and differences can be divisive and reinforce social divisions, which could result in an institutionalization of group identity, or even resubordination of the group they are designed to benefit. Such essentialist treatment of groups can also decrease accountability, as it is harder to define what a social group wants than what an interest group wants and a representative from a social group has an assumed legitimacy in speaking for the group, even if her opinion is contradictory to the majority’s.

The “politics of group assertion” emphasizes the importance of oppressed group’s representation and group consciousness because groups must develop a sense of their own interests and place clearly articulated demands reflecting specific interests upon the system or government if their desired changes are to be recognized and accomplished.¹⁰ The clearer the group lines and goals are drawn, the clearer their interests will be, regardless of the representative. While group consciousness and identity is the most crucial factor to their effective representation, it is important that representatives be informed members of their social groups, thus “women would seem to be best placed to advocate for the interests of women.”¹¹ The politics of group assertion evades the main plagues of other attempts at increasing the representation of under-represented groups through its emphasis on the importance of dialogue within groups, group consciousness and cohesion, related clearly defined and articulated interests, and representation by an informed member of the social group whose voice is kept in check by the group’s clearly defined mandated interests.

A solidification of women’s interests is necessary for this type of group assertion politics because women constitute an uncohesive social group. It is difficult to delineate what “women” want beyond even the most basic platforms because of the diversity of opinion, background, and social location. The feminist struggle for women’s political equality and active participation in government needs to be a struggle against defining women as an “empirical group, with a common essence and identity...a struggle against the multiple forms in which the category ‘woman’ is constructed in subordination.”¹² Accomplishing this requires adopting “an approach that permits us to understand how the

⁹ Squires page 369-370.

¹⁰ Squires page 369-370.

¹¹ Squires page 368.

¹² Lister page 331.

subject is constructed through different discourses and subject positions” rather than one “that reduces our identity to one single position – be it class, race, or gender.”¹³

Proportionalist theories of representation seem to offer more potential to women’s advancement and opportunity to exercise their own agency than symbolic theories of representation do. Delegate and proportional theories are more effective and capable of representing women’s interests because trustees deny the legitimacy and independent value of these groups, depriving them of agency, the ability to determine what they see as in their best interest, and to articulate what course they would like to take.

II. Electoral Systems: Which Works Best for Women

Stemming from both the relative lack of women in politics and the awareness that increased representation would be normatively good, many country’s governments or political parties have taken concrete action to try to encourage increased involvement of women in the political process. For a political system to be effective or function in a truly representative manner it cannot exclude half of its population from its ranks, or claim they are fairly represented when it does not even attempt to incorporate them into representation structures. Some of the methods used to accomplish this goal include government requirements for political parties to maintain parity between men and women, government enforced reservations of a certain percentage of the seats in an elected body for women, or government imposed restrictions on certain seats for only women contestants, thus guaranteeing the election of women.

The first of these, parity, is the concept that the electoral lists of political parties are the place that should maintain certain percentages of candidates from given social groups; that is party lists, be they national or local, need to meet the reservation for a particular gender or caste. There are different ways parity could be enforced depending on the political context. In France, parity has been enforced through financial penalties; there is a reduction in government subsidies proportional to a party’s lack of compliance with the parity mandate.¹⁴ In India, the “*Alternative Women’s Reservation Bill*” has suggested that parity be enforced by penalizing the male candidates of any given political party: “...for the shortfall of every single woman candidate, two male candidates of the party shall lose the party symbol and affiliation and all recognition-related advantages.”¹⁵

These efforts aimed at increasing the number of women in legislatures stem from the assumption that women bring a different perspective, will act differently, and will propose and support different forms of legislation than men will. Because gender is

¹³ Lister page 331.

¹⁴ Haase-Dubosc page 3859.

¹⁵ Kishwar page 4153.

assumed to be a factor determining one's political position, "gender balanced representation is expected to alter development priorities, perspectives, and concerns and thereby increase accountability."¹⁶ It is generally assumed that women in the legislature will be concerned with and push for "women's issues."

Parity stems from the idea that political parties and socio-cultural factors deny women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes¹⁷ the opportunity to run, and assume that if they were given equal opportunity to run, they would be elected at the same ratio as upper caste men. Since society has a basically equal gender ratio, the ratio of women to men on representative elected bodies should be basically equal as well. Thus political parties would be required to post the same number of women as they do men, a consistent fifty-percent for all bodies from Parliament to Gram Panchayats, while also reserving seats for members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes based on their population in any given area. Women and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes should not be massed at the lower levels with upper caste men dominating the top of the list; this can be accomplished by requiring that every other name on the ballot (or some ratio near that) be a woman, such ratio restrictions would also prevent minorities from being nominated only to areas where the party would lose. Even without parity, higher percentages of women present in upper levels of party hierarchies have been found to have a positive correlation with the willingness of parties to address women's issues, or ensure that women are in elected positions.¹⁸

Desires for political parity achieved through any means including reservations stem from the value a society or government places on and where it sees its role in terms of guaranteeing a degree of social justice and equality of opportunity for citizens of traditionally non-dominant groups through positive, protective, or compensatory discrimination. When a society is trying to achieve these values through implementation of reservations in its legislature it is crucial that it assess whether, and how, the steps it is taking alter power relations, and if the goals of equality of opportunity are actually being realized. These questions need to be examined because if a society is committed to these values, it cannot afford to support ineffectual policies.

In various studies it has been found that "reservations only benefited women from influential families,"¹⁹ this tendency for the well off to gain disproportionately in the political realm is not surprising, but is not beneficial to the status of women nor does it further the goals of reservations. Both reservations and Parity suffer from this criticism

¹⁶ Sharma.

¹⁷ Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the Tribes and Castes which were laid out in the constitution as the traditionally/historically oppressed Castes and Tribes.

¹⁸ Caul page 1227.

¹⁹ Samarthan page 40.

of domination by the upper class and upper caste women – the presence of women has been accused of increasing bourgeoisie power over the Panchayat system – the reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Castes should be able to counteract this, however.

A number of critics of these initiatives argue that while it is generally the case that male dominated legislative bodies ignore women's priorities and problems, the token presence of a few women will not make a qualitative difference in how such issues are addressed. There is no clear consensus on what constitutes a "women's issue," part of the challenge is the nature and diversity of women as a social group. The assumption of the subordinate status of women as a group cannot be extrapolated to say that they have universally definable interests, or that they will always fall into the same political subdivisions; representing groups as diverse as "women" can result in factionalization, as they are less able to operate off a given mandate in ways other interest groups may be able to. Women are a social, not an interest group, and their political objectives would benefit greatly from assertion of their goals and agenda, which could stem from their increased group consciousness. Such realizations and articulation could begin to compensate for the greatly disparate positions of women and aid the dialogue necessary to the process of constantly reevaluating the group's goals and methodologies in order to avoid perpetuating an assumptive pursuit of pre-defined "interests." Assuming that there are issues that women all across the spectrum, regardless of economic status, caste, or religion will inherently agree on assumes a degree of essentialism about gender that many feminists would take issue with.

A rationale based on the necessity of incorporating members of all groups of society into legislative bodies would logically be extended to all under-represented groups, which would transform the "women's question" into an issue for all classes relating to economic status, race, caste, religion, ethnic group, or other dominant social cleavage, since in all parts of the world the dominant classes tend to be over-represented in the legislature. Numerical composition is important beyond just appearances or proportional issues because a nominal or token percent of women is not going to be effective at raising women's issues or creating any real change.

III. The Context: The Situation of Indian Women in their Electoral System

The post-Independence desire behind Panchayati Raj Institutions is to “draw the masses into politics,” to let people dictate the policies which shape their lives and the development of their communities. Traditionally, it was only upper caste men who played a role in this process; the goal of reservations is to involve the perspectives of the lower castes and women. Panchayats were created with a reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) according to their population in a region, and with a reservation for Other Backward Castes (OBCs) in proportion to their population, but not exceeding twenty-seven percent of the elected body²⁰. A thirty-three percent reservation for women was instituted²¹ in each of the caste sub-sections with not less than thirty-three percent of chairpersons being women.²²

As noted earlier, the philosophy behind this was that women and lower castes need to run, serve in office, be seen, and have their voices’ heard on the bodies of local government for a change in their status to take place. It is only when these groups are given a voice that the problems they face will be addressed appropriately; the need for their presence is not the controversial part, rather, that they assume that women and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes would not be elected if they ran for a seat against a man of an upper caste is the issue of contention. However, if seats are reserved for women and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, then there is a guarantee that these sections of society will be represented on political and decision-making bodies. If the seats were not reserved, and simply a post on the ballot was, illegal or otherwise dishonest measures could be taken to see that they did not receive the seat even if the majority of the public did vote for them.

Several factors specific to the Indian case seem to indicate reservations likely usefulness cross-nationally is even more complicated than it appears. First, many “women’s issues” divide along social lines in India: wealthy women and poor women face different challenges, rural women often experience a different reality than urban women do, the social structure of the caste system has dictated issues to hold different salience for Upper, Backward, and Scheduled Caste women, the civil code has been

²⁰ RLEK page 2.

²¹ This was enacted through the seventy-third amendment to the constitution in 1993.

²² RLEK page 2.

structured in such a way that Muslim and Hindu women also face different challenges. There are definitely some issues that supercede these divisions, but there are other issues that do not travel across divisions to other groups. Without intra-group dialogue, determining whether a woman acts for “women’s issues” is a challenge and arbitrary. Whether she sees herself as doing so is not necessarily relevant, as without group assertion or articulation there is no clear consensus of what these issues even are. Research by an Indian NGO estimates that less than twenty percent of the current female members of Parliament are interested in women’s issues.²³ Other theorists have a problem with the assumption or framing of “women’s issues” in a male hierarchy, because it views women as perpetually trying to catch up with men, while there is debate as to whether women’s demands even can be integrated into the political system, or whether the inclusion of equal numbers of women effectively pushing women’s issues so threatens male society’s basic structures and power base that it would not occur.

The second factor is that South Asia has a history of women in powerful positions, at heads of state and major political parties; however, this fact has not directly improved the lives of women in that region. The women were generally “placed” in these positions, rather than “achieving” them. They were placed there not because of their commitment to change or based on their merits, but because of their relation to an important, renowned man. While not all of these women have necessarily been placed in their positions solely as tools or proxies, none of them have articulated or demonstrated a commitment to helping the oppressed status of women in her nation.

"Most of these women have been widows and daughters thrust into power by dynastic imperatives when there was no male heir. They govern by rules they learned growing up at a father's knee, a husband's side ... More often than not, they are throwbacks to the past in a region that has been short on enlightened leadership from whatever sex, rather than harbingers of a more egalitarian future."

Throughout history India has experienced series of similar types of women leaders whose presence has made little difference on the lives of women in India. The fact that none of these women were elected with the intent or commitment to help the status of “women” is also demonstrated by the fact that they did progress as far politically as they did, something which requires both a political shrewdness and compliance with vested interests, not a commitment to women. While Indira Gandhi is often cited as an example of Indian women’s political mobility, it is equally, if not more commonly,

²³ Yadav [estimate from Dr. Mira Shiva of the Delhi based NGO VHAI].

acknowledged that she was placed in office by men who considered her easily controllable. While she may have proved them wrong in this regard, her actions were of no benefit to “women” as a social group. A transformation of women’s position in India will not come from one woman at the top of the political system, no matter how powerful or committed she may be; Indian women have to enter politics across the spectrum, from involvement with grassroots concerns, to becoming Members of the Parliament. Contemporary Indian feminist political groups have demonstrated a growing emphasis on women’s representation in elected legislative bodies and appointed government positions. Many hold the belief that a reservation, or parity of some form is not only necessary, but also appropriate in this situation in order to bring more women into elected positions.

Finally, critics of the reservation system note the validity of the goal, but maintain that it is political parties that hinder women’s participation, not legislatures. Because politics has not traditionally been women’s domain some say that the reservation system is necessary, as otherwise women in India would not be elected. It is not necessarily that voters wouldn’t elect women, but that parties would not post women – or at least not an equal number of women to equally high positions – without being required to. Others say that the majority of Indian women do not have the self-confidence, the background or the interest in politics to post themselves unless they know that only a woman can fill the particular seat. The commonly used argument for reservations over parity is that a woman would not be elected in her own right if she were running against a man. The lottery system of reservations, however, is arbitrary and not the product of a thoroughly thought out plan designed to empower women. Since the area reserved for women alternates every five year term, reservations have been accused of encouraging unaccountability, and undermining both the relationship which representatives build with their constituencies, and the position of the area’s current representative. Because the reservation alternates every term, legislators do not have the same constituency for more than one term, thus they do not have the incentive to act in the interests of their constituents that they would if they would be up for election again.

Reservations in India are an attempt to increase women’s participation based on the recognition of strong gender roles, which imply that women hold a different underrepresented perspective, and that once elected women will take different action than men will, aiding both to reform politics and to improve the position of women. In taking this step, the government is recognizing the difference in status between men and women and is attempting to compensate somewhat for the discrepancies through measures which include having a government composed of members from a cross-section of society. Reserving seats is not the only means a government has to achieve these goals; the government can require all recognized political parties to maintain parity on their party lists between men and women. While such means holds definite advantages over reservations, it cannot be automatically assumed that political parties are going to be more beneficial or friendly to women than the government. A study conducted in Kerala,

for example, found that women Panchayat members felt party leaders and representatives exercised considerably more control over their actions and decisions than they would have liked. Women found they were unable to vote independently and felt the inflexibility of the Party institutions (especially on the Left) hindered their actions and ability to make independent decisions, limiting the effectiveness of the reservations.²⁴

Without group awareness and assertion, it is arguably even more important to have members of minority groups in the legislature, as their issues and experiences are functionally invisible otherwise. Since identity or social groups often don't have this level of cohesive consciousness, having substantial numbers of capable members of that group in a legislature is an alternative.

IV. Methods

The research for this paper was conducted between January and May of 2001. An informal conversation style interview structure was utilized, with translators and basic questions pre-decided. I interviewed eight women in all, centering on questions involving issues I wanted answered that weren't addressed or discussed in much of the reading I'd done. I read extensively on issues related to the subject of Panchayats in almost any way, in order to help formulate a functional understanding of the institutions, their challenges and potential, which was necessary in order to carry out this project. While interviews, especially across language barriers, cannot be perfect or completely accurate for determining the status of women, they do have definite and recognized importance and value as a means of attaining information.²⁵

V. Interviews

I found that across the board, women would not have run for election had it not been for the reservation. I spoke with women who were relatively well educated, confident and articulate, and even they would not have contested if there had not been this requirement for women because gender roles are so strongly inscribed on their daily lives and actions. While they were unsure initially of what to do, what their goals were, and how to accomplish their objectives, over the five year period of their first term they gained confidence and skill, learning to speak their minds in front of men and work for what they and the women of their communities wanted to see happen. The women I spoke with reported initial strong gender divisions – all the women would sit in the back of the room, if the even came, they would not speak, question, or add their opinions to any of the proceedings, and often did not fully understand what was going on. Men dominated and women were functionally non-existent in the proceedings of these bodies,

²⁴ John, M.S.

²⁵ The methodology I used complies with Bogdan and Taylor's Qualitative Research Methods.

however, five years later, at the end of their terms this is no longer the case. Each of the women I spoke with commented on both her own development as well as the changes that her fellow women Panchayat members experiences over their terms. All of the women I spoke with and many other women who were elected in the first term plan to contest election again without the reservation, indicating that some of its effects are already manifesting – women are becoming increasingly involved in politics at their own initiative.

While the vast majority of women elected under reservations initially sought office for reasons other than their own initiative, such as family pressure to do so, or as a name for their husband to run under, the presence of reservations also provided the necessary push or motivation for women who were already interested in politics to contest election and become involved. Reservations also substantially neutralized the restrictive social norms which were one of the strongest forces working against women's participation. The incorporation of women, which reservations has brought about, has altered the lines of the public-private split, and while women are still not as active or involved as men, it has become clear that women's presence is only going to increase in this realm.

However, while there women are elected to and involved in Panchayats, women who did the Panchayat work themselves instead of handing it over to their husbands were breaking social norms. Women elected from seats or districts that were not reserved for women faced increased harassment for taking what is seen as a man's seat; much of this harassment was merely meant to intimidate, however, and women who did not respond to or let themselves be intimidated did not face continued treatment.

While reservations could be seen as valuable in that they at least nominally get women from across the economic and caste structure involved, economic and time constraints accompanied by the familial and household pressures on these women's lives are so great that only the economically stable women, who usually are either well-off enough that they don't have substantial household duties or are somewhat older or are mother-in-laws, and thus bear less of the household burden, have the time and energy to be able to actually be involved in and tend to the Panchayat duties. These sorts of family, household and agricultural responsibilities often keep even the women who have been elected to Panchayati Raj Institutions from being able to take advantage of their position. Most of the women on Panchayats have many other obligations to their family, the household, animals, and agriculture. When the women are busy, and have too much work around the home to do, their husbands take over their Panchayat duties for them. When I asked why women's husbands take on the Panchayat's work and not the women's other work, the women would just laughed and say men would never do the daily work.

Illiteracy and lack of basic numeric skills severely limit women's involvement and force dependency on men, because without these skills women can be easily manipulated, since they don't know what they are signing and have limited means of verifying what they are told. They are constantly reminded of and degraded by their sense of inferiority stemming from this illiteracy. "Women's independent standing often corresponded directly with comparatively high education. This in itself was a proxy for better socio-economic position. The illiterate women tended to be doubly cut off – from the world of knowledge and information as from the public sphere."²⁶ Even for women with some education, the Panchayat system can be very daunting. The complete lack of training available regarding the Panchayat structure, logistics, and functioning is one of the biggest problems which women face. Even a simple training would affect the status of women immensely by giving them functional knowledge of how to accomplish basic tasks, which would reduce their dependency on males. While there have not been revolutionary changes in Panchayati Raj Institutions since the election of women, many slow and steady changes are occurring. Being able to take the reins and control the Panchayat requires a sureness of self and a sense of empowerment that does not happen overnight. When change is brought about by women's demand, or exercising independent agency, it will be far more effective and reflective of their needs.

VI. Concluding Discussion.

Reservations have had the undisputed effect of increasing the presence of women and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in politics. While reservations are a definite step towards improving women's position in India however they are not the

²⁶ Samarthan page 39.

most effective means of achieving this, a system of parity would be an improvement. The women who would be placed on the party list because of parity, rather than instituted through rotating reservations would be more likely to be there on account of their own competence and merits, rather than their husband's. While the rotating nature of reservations does force new women to come forward and contest every term, causing women who would not have otherwise run to realize what they are capable of, and begin to feel more empowered, parity could accomplish similar objectives; new and capable women would still be motivated to run, because political parties would be forced to involve them and would logically want their candidates to be as dynamic and active as possible. Most of the discrimination which prevents women from being elected without reservations stems from political parties not the voters or the women themselves, thus Parity would be the most effective means of increasing the number of women in office; if political parties want to win, they would have no choice but to post and support capable women. Parity also solves the problem of women being seen as simply 'filling time' until the 'real' representative, who is male, and was ousted by the reservations, is able to regain his 'rightful position.' Until this ceases to be the case, women legislators will not be seen in their own right, but merely as someone's relation, or as filling a five-year term; their presence can make a mockery of women in politics, implying that a woman is not capable of winning an election if it is not guaranteed for her. For equal and effective representation of women, it is necessary for women to be legitimate representatives, who lobby, act, pass laws, and stand up for the wishes of the people of their districts.

While parity and reservations both would increase the number of women, the candidates who would run under the two systems are not necessarily the same. Contesting an open ticket (under a system of Parity) requires a higher initial level of self-confidence; many of the women who run under reservations do not have this confidence to begin with, but they gain it over time. The women who run possessing this preliminary confidence make more effective leaders; these women are able to accomplish their objectives are less willing to allow males to dictate their decisions. One of the reasons that many of the women who initially do not possess much self-confidence run for election under reservations is because they are posted by their male relatives to serve as proxies. Many of these women participate more over time and gain in abilities and confidence,

which is extremely important, but political office is not the best place for such processes of empowerment to occur. Ideally, women could gain this confidence through involvement in local women's groups or other organizations before they enter elected bodies, and thus be able to make the maximum impact.

When women are elected for reasons other than their own merits or abilities, their presence almost defeats the purpose of reservations. They are elected to integrate women's perspectives into the political dialogue, but they cannot do this if they are silenced or ignored. Yet their controlled and restricted presence is used to argue that women are not oppressed. Because parity would have women contesting open elections, women elected would be competent and successful at making changes that incorporate women's perspectives.

The general argument for reservations over parity is that India is not yet at the stage where a woman would be elected in her own right if she were running against a man. Studies done on the subject have indicated the opposite, however – 32.53 percent of women contestants versus 26.50²⁷ percent of male candidates were elected to the Lok Sabha²⁸ since 1984.²⁹ Since it is not voters who discriminate against women, but political parties, parity would be an effective way to address this problem, as it requires political parties to put women on the ballot who can win against incumbent male politicians. Once women are on the ballot, their numbers will automatically increase, as “Indian voters have demonstrated their pro-women bias time and again with women candidates out-performing male aspirants in almost every election since 1951.³⁰” If slots on the ballot were reserved for women candidates, rather than actual seats in the elected bodies, then women would be viewed differently, they would become fully capable representatives in the public's eyes, and would be able to be more effective representatives as they would have the same constituent base and build up the benefits of increased experience and knowledge, seniority, and ability to get issues passed, which would encourage accountability, allow them to develop a longer relationship with their constituents, and do more real work for their district. Open elections not only increase competition, but also encourage representative's commitment to work for the people and the development of their district. The women elected under parity would be more capable

²⁷ Both in recognized parties.

²⁸ The lower house of Parliament.

²⁹ Kishwar page 4154.

³⁰ Kishwar page 4154.

and competent, as male politicians would not have the same incentive to nominate their wife or daughter-in-law for election. With this, the women coming to office will be doing so in their own right and there will be much less be holding them back.

While India may never achieve a unity of women or group assertion of their goals, effective representation through the incorporation of substantial numbers of women into the legislature will bring women's issues forward and increase their representation across at least caste lines, which while less than perfect would still be a substantial improvement over the current situation.

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