

# WOMEN AND THE CONCEPT OF GLASS CEILING IN THE LIGHT OF THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS

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## I. Introduction

This paper aims at determining the role of women in world politics with special emphasis on the phenomenon of glass ceiling in their political rights. Throughout history, the claim has been made that women and men are fundamentally different from each other. Masculinity is the attribute attached to the term 'power' when a single generic term 'man' is used for both man and woman. Since the time immemorial there had been the gender groupings of different attributes like superiority, strength, rationality, power and independence had been associated with the man and weakness, inferiority, emotionally charged and dependence is associated with the woman.<sup>23</sup> The participation of the women in different aspects of competitive elections is an indicator of the efficacious growth of democracy in any country of the world.<sup>24</sup> But

the women are absent from the politics, policy making functions and power positions because the women are being considered weaker than the man. Men are considered to have more physical strength, rational judgment, and power as compared to women. Thus they consider having an inherent right to protect and dominate the women. When feminists think about the 'gender' they think about the ways in which the world is organised according to gender categories such as 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and they think about the ways in which those categories work in terms of hierarchy, and in some ways institutionalize and perpetuate certain kind of inequalities. Patriarchy stands for power and authority and is the prime obstacle to woman's advancement and development.<sup>25</sup> Its root lie in the myths of creation and religious world based on them and politics is also one of its aspects. "It is all about control." *Mary*

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen B. Jones and Anna G. Jonasdottir, Introduction: Gender As An Analytical Category In Political Theory (Sage Publications 1985).

<sup>24</sup> Praveen Rai, 'Women's Participation in Electoral Politics in India' (2017) 37 South Asia Research.

<sup>25</sup> Abeda Sultana, 'Patriarchy And Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis' (2012) 4 Arts Faculty Journal.

*Wollstonecraft* argues that women are entitled to education consistent with their position in the society. She declares that both men and women are endowed with inalienable right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. If woman wish to enter business or pursue professional careers or vote they must be given chance to perform all such acts. A declaration has been made by Mary Wollstonecraft that woman should be allowed to share the rights and she will mirror down the virtues of man and she will progress more when she is free from all legal, social and political restrictions. *Virginia Woolf* has also demonstrated that the society has obstructed its own potential for constructive possibilities by divesting a woman of equality in socio political affairs and bereaving her from equal opportunities of progress.<sup>26</sup>

There have been various women's movements which can be traced in the light of history of feminism. The term 'feminism' can be used to describe political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women.<sup>27</sup> Feminist and scholars have divided the movement's history in three waves viz. **first wave of feminism** (19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century), **second wave feminism**

(1960s to 1980s) and **third wave feminism** (1990s to 2000s).

The **first wave** refers to the feminist movements in United Kingdom and United States during 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women by their husbands was focused by the feminist. Basically by the end nineteenth century activism focused on gaining political power and mainly the right of women's suffrage. The suffragettes campaigned for women's right to vote and in 1918 the Representation of the People Act was passed granting the voting right to women over the age of 30 years and also only those who owned houses. However in 1928 it extended to all women above the age of twenty one years. Some of the feminist thinkers during first wave of feminism in United Kingdom are *Margaret Sanger, Voltairine de Cleyre*. The United States first wave feminism included many feminist scholars like *Lucy Stone, Frances Willard, Matilda Gage*, etc. who campaigned for women's right to vote. It was in 1919 when all women were granted the voting rights in all states by 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Jasbir Jain, *Women In Patriarchy* (Rawat Publications 2005).

<sup>27</sup> <[http://www.gender.cawater-info.net/knowledge\\_base/rubricator/feminism\\_e.html](http://www.gender.cawater-info.net/knowledge_base/rubricator/feminism_e.html)> (last visited on Nov 27, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

The **second wave** feminism focused more on social and cultural inequalities in contrast with political inequalities. *Betty Friedan* in her work *The Feminine Mystique* argued that women were victims of a false belief in the promise of femininity and urged them to look beyond their domestic situation for fulfilment. The change in the cultural attitudes on the part of men and women can bring equality between sexes. *Germaine Greer and Kate Millet* exclaimed for a sexual liberation by removing the contradictory standards applied to their sexuality and behaviour.<sup>29</sup> *Simone de Beauvoir* in her treatise on the “**Second sex**” made a detailed analysis of women’s oppression and foundational tract of contemporary feminism and she argued that the attitude that “Men should be pursued as ideal by women” should be changed. She focuses on the social construction of women as the other.<sup>30</sup>

The **third wave** feminism was a response to the failures of second wave feminism. It focuses on the micro politics and challenges the second wave feminism paradigm of what is good or what is not good for the females. The race and class were neglected in second wave feminism which found due place in third wave feminism. There is debate going

on among the scholars of third wave feminism on the issue that some argue that there is difference between sexes while others contend that there is no inherent difference but the gender roles are because of social conditioning. The third wave feminism regarded race, social class and transgender rights, glass ceiling at work place, etc as central issues. In 1991, when Anita Hill accused Clarence Thomas, an African American judge, of sexual harassment Thomas denied all her accusations and later it was confirmed by the Senate also in his favor. An article was published by *Rebecca Walker* entitled “*Becoming the Third Wave*”. She argued that racial equality should come but not at the cost of dismissing women.<sup>31</sup>

The post feminists believe that second wave goals have been achieved but they are critical towards the third wave feminism goals. *Amelia Jones* has written that post feminist texts which emerged in 1980s and 1990s and portrayed second wave feminism as a monolithic entity and criticized it using generalizations. Contemporary feminists like *Katha Pollitt, Nadine Strossen* consider feminism simply means “women are people.” Further different feminist theories also evolved over the time which shall be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>29</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, 'A Brief History of Feminism | OxfordWords Blog' (OxfordWords blog, 2018) <https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2011/03/08/international-womens-day> (last visited on Nov 27, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> *Supra* note 26.

<sup>31</sup> Jennifer Drake, Barbara Findlen and Rebecca Walker, 'Third Wave Feminisms' (1997) 23 *Feminist Studies*.

In international relations men have more opportunities than women. There are about seventy five nations which have never seen any women as its head of the State. Even India also had only one women prime minister and one woman has been elected as head of the state since its independence. The study tries to answer certain questions which are as follows:-

- Have women been able to attain equality in global politics?
- What is the role of woman in global politics?
- What are the factors responsible for the apparent absence of women from politics, policy making functions and power positions?
- What is the status of women's participation in the politics of India?

The term politics comprises of interactions in elections, participation in trade unions, cooperatives, women collectives, informal and formal politics but the present paper deals only with the political rights of the women in respect of their right to vote and their right to contest elections and how far they are able to exercise these rights on different levels of government and their role in policy making functions of the government. The authors have tried to support the analysis with the statistical data. Therefore doctrinal research has been done

to analyze various international conventions entered into to protect the political rights of women and the laws enacted in India for safeguarding their political rights. As the area of study is very wide therefore the authors have confined the study to few countries of South Asia.

## II. Feminist Theories

There are different feminist theories which have evolved with the span of time while recognising the rights of women as equal to that of men. The present chapter discusses the feminist theories in brief which are as follows:-

### a) Liberal Feminism:

As the foremost feminist approach, liberal feminism is recognised as a first generation understanding of the study of gender in political science.<sup>32</sup> This approach condemns the division of labour and corresponding roles, in the public and private spheres, between man and woman since that result to an unequal distribution of rights and duties and hinders women's participation in the public domain. *Marry Wollstonecraft* in her remarkable work, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792)*, questioned the centuries-old societal arrangements which had took away the fundamental rights of the women. Amongst other things, most importantly, she pressed on women's right to

<sup>32</sup> Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations* (Rutgers University Press 1998).

sufferance and to hold political positions and offices since she believed that men and women have been gifted with equal measures of rationality and reasoning. She pointed out the importance of education in a woman's life.

Approximately after hundred years of the publication of *The Vindication*, **John Stuart Mill** postulated theoretical explanations regarding the emancipation of women. From his study, *The Subjection of Women (1869)*, it is evident that he shares the same thinking as Wollstonecraft has regarding the power of rationality and reasoning in men and women. As a champion of individual freedom, he believed that "As long as woman is imprisoned in the private sphere, she neither knows nor cares which is the right side in politics...Giving women use of their potential in occupation of their choice would double the mental faculties at humanity's service as well as stimulating men's own intellect by the additional competition".<sup>33</sup> He believed that this was the only way to liberate women from the parochial patriarchal bonding. Things changed only in the twentieth century when liberal feminist scholars raised their voice for the active involvement of women in public matters and their wielding of various channels of power, especially in the fields of leadership, defence

and statecraft. However, this approach of feminism faced a lot of criticism for being too universalistic in its judgments, for neglecting the domestic threats to a woman (while overemphasising her role in the public realm.) Here, it may be argued that Indira Gandhi and Margret Thatcher were successful in their public life but suffered in their respective private domains. Despite criticism, the liberal theory was the first to make a hue and cry for equal rights, duties and work assignments to all men and women.

#### **b) Radical Feminism:**

It is also called the second wave of feminism, the radical approach of feminism came up to fill up the lacunae in the liberal approach and was inspired and popularised by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, as well as the students' movements of the US, North Atlantic region and Australia during 1960s and 1970s. As per this approach, women are subjected to male dominance right from their birth which then continues to marriage and public life. This leads to self-hatred, self-rejection and the acceptance of inferiority. Thus, this approach highlights the gender exclusivity between man and woman and sets out an autonomous identity for woman itself meaning thereby, it speaks about the nurturing of sisterhood, for their strategic similarities, irrespective of their class, race, ethnicity, nationality, colour

<sup>33</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, (London, Everyman, 1929), p. 298ff, quoted in Coole, *Ibid.*, p. 141.

and so on.<sup>34</sup> According to *Christine di Stefano and Carol Pateman, Hobbes* had delegitimized women in his theory while stating his metaphor of the ‘state of nature’ in analysing international relations. *J. Ann Tickner* has propounded that women do not sow distrust, as alleged by realism, but they play important role in promoting peace and restoring confidence.

Criticizing this approach, it has been said that the world cannot be exclusively of males or females since both are complementary to each other. It has also been said that this theory seeks to create an exclusive feminist alternative to patriarchy which is contrary to the present day scenario of gender equality. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that by this theory, ‘woman’ was brought to the centre-stage to nurture sisterhood so as to solve international problems.

### c) Marxian Feminism:

The Marxian school owes its origin to the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.<sup>35</sup> This school mainly focus on the economic and material bases in political and social structures related to capitalism. It focuses on dismantling capitalism to liberate women. In the current social context economic inequality, dependence, political confusion

are the reasons for the women’s oppression. Marxist considers women as a separate class and thus call for the united action for women against their oppressors.<sup>36</sup> The pre industrial society was better for women as they were on the equal footing with men but the industrialisation has divided the private and public spheres of working resulting in the commoditisation of the women and second class citizenship to them.<sup>37</sup> The property was concentrated in the hands of male which resulted in the socio-economic and political exploitation of women and denial of rights and liberty to them.<sup>38</sup> Both *Marx and Engels* considered women as “Victims of Patriarchy”.<sup>39</sup>

For later Marxist scholars like *Heidi Hartmann and Zillah Eisenstein*, patriarchy remains the reason for women’s repression and precludes them from access to social-economic and political avenues of power. Thus their views were different from the early scholars in the sense that they focused on both domestic and external spheres of women’s repression. *Juliet Mitchell* in her study ‘*Women’s Estate*’ argues that there are four situations of women’s misery viz. production, reproduction, sexuality and socialisation. She supports women’s participation in work because it would make

<sup>34</sup> Chris Beasley, *What Is Feminism?* (Sage Publications 2011).

<sup>35</sup> *A History of Socialist Thought: From the Precursor to the Present* (New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2000), pp. 136, 157-159.

<sup>36</sup> *Infra* note 42.

<sup>37</sup> Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, n. 54, pp. 157-158.

<sup>38</sup> Rinita Majumdar, *A Short Introduction to Feminist Theory* (Anustup, 2001), p. 17

<sup>39</sup> Siim, in Jones and Jónasdóttir (eds.), n. 2, p. 171.

them to earn their living which leads to women's equality in the public world.<sup>40</sup> Women work on low wages and they are unpaid workers in private sphere.<sup>41</sup> There are other agents too, except economic superiority that leads to oppression of women like race, ethnic affiliation, etc. According to the Marxists wealth and power are inter-related but this theory fails in third world countries where there is more violence against women where people are living below poverty line.<sup>42</sup> *Simone de Beauvoir* rejected the Marxist approach saying that economic condition would never help women in acquiring prestige until moral, social or cultural consequences are brought.<sup>43</sup> Although Marxist approach to feminism has been criticized on many points but it has enlightened the world with the concept of class, wealth and private property for analyzing oppression of women.

#### d) Psychoanalytic Feminism:

This approach incorporates psychology and its related features that help in making gender based identities that explain male dominance over females. This approach is mainly based on the writings of *Sigmund*

*Freud* and psychoanalytical discussions. According to this theory the early difference between male and female identity is developed by the role played by males and females in the early life of the child like mother has the responsibility of care taker and father is portrayed as symbol of power or authority. Similarly the girls and boys attain the attributes of males and females which can also be seen in the public sphere. *Nancy Chodorow* in her work '*The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*', analyses that psychological and emotional responses leads to the male dominance in the public sphere and female passiveness in private domain.<sup>44</sup> Females are submissive in the dominant patriarchy. Thus Psychoanalytic feminist scholars advocate for feminisation of males<sup>45</sup> and establishing equitable relationship.<sup>46</sup> *Simone de Beauvoir* criticized this approach and argued that women can only be free when they relinquish all their traditional roles and adopt male practices to become equal to men.<sup>47</sup> This approach was first in analyzing the gender identities responsible for shaping the male-female behavioural patterns.

<sup>40</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Women's Estate* (Harmonsworth, Penguin, 1971), pp. 139, 151, referred to in Coole, n. 24, p. 242.

<sup>41</sup> Jill Steans, *Gender And International Relations* (Rutgers University Press 1998), p. 19

<sup>42</sup> Diana Coole, *Women In Political Theory* (Rienner 1993).

<sup>43</sup> *Simone de Beauvoir The Second Sex*, translated by H.M. Parsley (New York, Vintage Books, 1989), p. 725.

<sup>44</sup> Nancy Chodorow, "Gender Relations and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective", in *The Polity Reader in Gender Studies* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994), pp. 41-42.

<sup>45</sup> *Supra* note 34.

<sup>46</sup> *Supra* note 44.

<sup>47</sup> *Supra* note 43.

### III. Feminism on Race, Colour And Ethnicity:

According to this theory all earlier feminist theories are based on the society of the developed countries constituting white women who rejected the ethnic difference and racism. But the situation in the third world nations was different which gave rise to this theory of feminism. Politics is extremely colour prejudiced and this theory has tried to raise voice against injustices. The concept of “situatedness” of third world women was introduced which embraces circumstantial consequences of womanhood. Early feminist theories cannot be universalised in the non European societies as they do not owe their origin in non European philosophical traditions. This theory combines the reality of personal experiences within the context of the definite economic and political overview.<sup>48</sup>

### IV. International Instruments

Numerous international instruments have been entered into to protect and promote the rights of the women. The types of rights range from right to equality, right against discrimination, right to vote, right to contest election, etc. This chapter reproduces concerned provisions of different instruments that try to protect and promote the political rights of women.

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<sup>48</sup> Heidi Safia Mirza, 'The Dilemma of Socialist Feminism: A Case For Black Feminism' (1986) 22 Feminist Review.

**Article 21 of UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, 1948** grants everyone the right to take part in the government, equal access to public service and equal suffrage irrespective of its gender.

The **CONVENTION ON THE POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN, 1953** has also been entered upon to guarantee right to vote to women on equal terms with men, and they shall be eligible to contest elections to all elected bodies and also provides that the women shall also be entitled to hold public office and exercise all public functions established by national law without any discrimination.

**Article 3 of INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, 1966** provides that all men and women shall be ensured of the equal right to enjoy the civil and political rights enumerated in the covenant by the member states. **Article 25** provides that every citizen without any unreasonable restrictions shall have the right and opportunity to take part in the public affairs, right to vote and be elected on the basis of equal suffrage and access to public service in their concerned states.

The **CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

(CEDAW) provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men by ensuring equal opportunity and access to women in political and public life including the right to vote and to contest for election as well as education, health and employment.<sup>49</sup> To provide such access and opportunities so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms state parties have agreed to take all appropriate measures including legislation and temporary special measures.<sup>50</sup>

**FOUR WORLD CONFERENCES** have been convened under the auspices of the United Nations and a further follow up is being carried forward by the member nations.

The **first world conference on women** was held at Mexico City, Mexico in 1975. The conference was the first international conference devoted solely to the women issues. The conference declared 1975 as International Women's Year and led to declare United Nations Decade for Women and also pursued to evaluate the progress made in achieving the targets fixed in the conference. The conference adopted a World Plan for Action laying down the specific targets for the nations to achieve women

empowerment. The main issues of this conference were equality of women, and their contribution to peace and development. One of the noting points of this conference is that representatives of around 6000 NGO attended the conference.

The **second world conference on women** was held at Copenhagen in 1980. The objective of this conference was to determine the progress made in achieving the goals of first world conference focusing on employment, health and education

The **third world conference** was held at Nairobi in 1985. The conference was convened for the assessment of the progress made since the first conference and also to assess the failures in implementing the goals of the earlier conferences. The forward looking strategies for the advancement of women outlining the measures for achieving gender equality at the national level and promoting women's participation in peace and development efforts was adopted by the governments.<sup>51</sup>

The **fourth world conference** was held at Beijing in 1995 earmarking twelve critical issues which requires urgent action to ensure greater equality and opportunities for everyone irrespective of their gender and one

<sup>49</sup> Adriana Di Stefano, Gender Issues And International Legal Standards (Edit 2010).

<sup>50</sup> 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women' (Un.org, 2019) <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>> (last visited on Nov 26, 2019).

<sup>51</sup> 'World Conferences On Women' (UN Women, 2018) <http://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women> (last visited on Nov 26, 2019).

of the issues is women in power and decision making. It was also decided in this conference that after every five year review shall be done determining the implementation of the Beijing platform for action and to consider future actions and initiatives.

Thus after looking into some of the international instruments it can be said that nations are conscious about equal rights of women in political arena but many nations have made reservations to the provisions of the convention and also all the conventions are not binding so we may also see that there is little political will to give equal status to women. Even the countries who have adopted the covenants the present scenario does not show that these are able to achieve its purpose and researcher can base my statement on the report according to which there are only 20 women holding the office as head of State or head of the government which is only 6.3% of the total number of world leaders.<sup>52</sup>

The **UN Commission on the Status of Women** is presently considering the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals agenda. Progress in women's representation

<sup>52</sup> '2018, Women and Political Leadership – Female Heads of State and Heads of Government' (Women in international politics, 2018) <<https://firstladies.international/2018/02/20/2018-women-and-political-leadership-female-heads-of-state-and-heads-of-government/>> (last visited on Nov 26, 2019).

and empowerment is on the agenda for attention, along with further strategies to achieve gender equality in leadership.<sup>53</sup>

## V. Glass Ceiling In The Political Arena

Before answering the question whether glass ceiling exists in the global politics or not it is likely to be more appropriate to proceed with what amounts to glass ceiling. According to the *U.S. Department of Labour* "a glass ceiling is a political term used to describe the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements."<sup>54</sup> Glass ceiling was considered as one of the reasons for the seen dominance of men in politics. Women have strong will and ambition but there is an invisible obstacle that keeps them away from going to the position higher in professions they already have. "Glass ceiling is those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management level positions."<sup>55</sup> The invisible barriers may be anything, it may be media related issues or

<sup>53</sup> Women politics, 'Women In Politics - Kuenselonline' (KuenselOnline, 2019) <<http://www.kuenselonline.com/women-in-politics/>> (last visited on Nov 26, 2019).

<sup>54</sup> Olle Folke and Johanna Rickne, 'The Glass Ceiling In Politics' (2016) 49 *Comparative Political Studies*.

<sup>55</sup> 'A Report On The Glass Ceiling Initiative' (US Department of Labor 1991).

stereotypes or any informal boundaries. Media plays an important role in perpetuating the stereotypes and setting standards for women candidates. Also the way women are seen in the position of power. There was a trend when women were linked to their family first and then to their professions. Politics was considered as masculine area of interest. Women everywhere are breaking the glass ceiling but their voices go unheard and their contributions too are not given appropriate recognition. They are given women's only portfolios or only allowed to sit in women committees and are forced to leave other committees because of their gender.

Women at every socio-political level are under-represented in national parliaments and far removed from decision making levels. Although each country has different political scenario but one thing is common among them this is uneven representation of women. The political, public, cultural, social environment is unfriendly to them.<sup>56</sup> In regards to the women representation there were no women ministers at all in 48 countries at the cabinet level in Asia-Pacific region and Eastern European and very little progress has been achieved with the proportion of women ministers being less

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<sup>56</sup> Nadezhda Shvedova, *Women in Parliament : Beyond Numbers* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995,p.32

than 5%.<sup>57</sup> In regards to representation at sub- ministerial level, women held no position in relation to economy in 136 countries and only 2% of economic ministries were occupied by women in Asia-Pacific region. Only 9.9% of the sub-ministerial positions were held by women. But the statistical data shows that women are making their way in political arena. They have accounted for 10% of the members of legislative bodies in 1995 but in 2004 they constituted 15.6% of parliamentarians worldwide according to the Inter Parliamentary Union. Women constituted 16.3% of legislators in world parliament which shows 5% increase in comparison of the last data collected. It has been reported that if the women representation rates increases at this scale then an average of 30% of women in parliament would be reached in 2040 instead of 2025. So it can be said that women are making progress moderately but this needs more than moderate progress in political arena.<sup>58</sup>

## **VI. An Analysis of Women in Politics in South Asia**

A brief data of South Asian nations is provided below providing an overview of the status of women regarding their political

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<sup>57</sup> Data compiled by the Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations based on January 2004 information from the World wide government directory 1996, Bethesda, Maryland, U.S.A.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

rights. Women's participation in politics in India will be dealt in next chapter. Here the researcher has given a brief analysis of other six nations.

**BHUTAN-** Women were allowed to vote in 1953. According to the reports there are only 19 women out of 188 candidates in 2018 National Assembly primary elections. There is a decrease from 31 candidates in 2013.

**BANGLADESH-** The country has achieved the political stability in last two decades and quota has ensured women's presence in local government and national parliament. Money plays a vital role in the politics of the country because of which the women are pushed back from their participation in politics.<sup>59</sup> Women constitute 19.83% in the national parliament in Bangladesh.<sup>60</sup>

**NEPAL-** Patriarchy has been one of the factors for the powerlessness of the women in the political arena. In Nepal also, because of the dominance of the patriarchal value system women are discriminated and treated as second class citizens. The constitution of Nepal provides special provisions to give political support to women.<sup>61</sup> 12 seats (5.9%)

out of 205 held by women in the lower house, 9 seats (15%) out of 60 in the Upper House. 20% seat reservation in local political bodies has brought more than 39000 women in local bodies.<sup>62</sup>

**MALDIVES-** The role of women in politics in the country had been quite high due to the existence of four Sultanas. In contemporary times women hold positions in government but they are under-represented. Women constituted 3 out of 14 government ministers and 5 out of 85 law makers in 2016.<sup>63</sup>

**SRI LANKA-** The universal suffrage was given to citizens of Sri Lanka in 1931. Despite of the statutory freedom, women's participation in the country's politics is the lowest as compared to other South Asian nations. Only 4% seats in provincial councils and 1.9 % in local government had been held by women till 2012. Inter parliamentary Union ranked the country 180<sup>th</sup> out of 190 countries in its ranking of female representation in parliament as in June 2017. Remarking the country has introduced Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No. 1 of 2016 which provides 25% of quota to

<sup>60</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299636440\\_Women's\\_Political\\_Participation\\_in\\_Bangladesh\\_Rhetoric\\_and\\_Reality](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299636440_Women's_Political_Participation_in_Bangladesh_Rhetoric_and_Reality) (last visited on Nov 26, 2019).

<sup>61</sup> Prativa Pradhan, 'The Status Of Women In Political Participation In Nepal' (2005) 35 The Himalayan Review.

<sup>62</sup> 'Money, Power And Muscles: Women In Nepalese Politics - Australian Institute Of International Affairs' (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2018) <<http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/local-elections-womens-participation-nepal/>> (last visited on Nov. 28, 2018)..

<sup>63</sup> 'Female Candidates Win Majorities On Four Island Councils' (Maldivesindependent.com, 2018) <<https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/female-candidates-win-majorities-on-four-island-councils-130572>> (last visited on Nov 28, 2019).

women by one-third increase in the total number of seats at the local government level.<sup>64</sup>

**PAKISTAN-** In Pakistan 17% of the seats are reserved for women in the general elections. 13 women were elected on the unreserved seat in the year 2007.<sup>65</sup> in 2013 elections 36 women acquired nominations by political parties, 108 women were contesting elections on 272 National Assembly seats in 2013.<sup>66</sup>

However the South Asia has powerful women politicians than any other set of countries in the world. They had been the Head of the State, Prime Ministers, leader of political parties and regional governments. But overall representation is very low. The reasons for such inequality are the socio-cultural patterns. Most of the countries are influenced by the patriarchal society. Another reason is competitive nature of the politics itself. It is often equated with violence; many politicians have criminal records, etc. so in this kind of setup women are at the disadvantageous position. Thus the more women friendly South Asian country,

Sri Lanka, has a low participation rate of women in governance.<sup>67</sup>

## VII. Women's Political Participation and Representation in India

Our constitution has given equal rights to women in all respects but then also their political participation in decision making does not conform to their share in male dominated society. During the independence movements they participated with great enthusiasm and courage in the freedom struggle. Most of the women were from educated and liberal families. It was only Gandhiji's call to women to join the freedom struggle as he realized that true freedom cannot be achieved unless all sections of society are fairly represented. Gandhiji said in the non-violence struggle women have an advantage over men in the non violence struggle because women are superior to men in their religious devotion. Silent and dignified service is the attribute of woman. She can move a mountain if she does anything in the right spirit.<sup>68</sup> Post independence women are participating in almost all types of activities from agriculture to business and are also voting for better governance. After 61<sup>st</sup> amendment, every citizen above the age of 18 years is eligible for voting. Constitution has fixed the

<sup>64</sup> The Politics, 'The 25 Percent Quota & Women In Sri Lankan Politics' (Colombo Telegraph, 2018) <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/the-25-percent-quota-women-in-sri-lankan-politics/> (last visited on Nov 27, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> Muddassir Rizvi, *Women in Record Seats, But Not Activists Hearts* Inter Press Service, Pakistan, 2001.

<sup>66</sup> Muhammad Ali Awan, *Political Participation of Women in Pakistan Historical and Political Dynamics Shaping the Structure of Politics for Women*, Frankfurter For schungszentrum Global Islam (2016)

<sup>67</sup> A. Thanikodi and M. Sugirtha, 'Status Of Women In Politics' (2007) LXVIII Indian Journal of Political Science.

<sup>68</sup> Bhawana Jharta, *Women and Politics In India* (Deep & Deep Publications 1998). P.58

minimum age for contesting the elections which is 25 years.<sup>69</sup> Citizen below 25 years of age cannot be a candidate in Lok Sabha elections and similarly same limit applies to elections in the state assemblies.<sup>70</sup> India has seen only one woman Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and one woman President, Mrs. Pratibha Patil since independence. At present there are six women cabinet ministers in the cabinet of twenty seven ministers which constitutes around 22%.<sup>71</sup> There are sixty two woman member of parliament which constitutes 11.8% of total number of Member of Parliament.<sup>72</sup> In the last 4-5 general elections there has been a consistent rise in the number of woman Member of Parliament which is a progress and has played an important role in improving the gender divide in the highest law making body. At the Panchayats level women have significant representation because of 33% quota given to women in local level elections.<sup>73</sup> On the same model, it was tried to reserve the seats for women in Parliament also by 81<sup>st</sup> amendment but the Bill was rejected in the Parliament.

<sup>69</sup> Article 84 (b) Constitution of India

<sup>70</sup> Article 173 (b) Constitution of India

<sup>71</sup> 'Cabinet Ministers Of India - Full List Of Narendra Modi's Ministers With Their Portfolios - Testbook Blog' (Testbook.com, 2018) <<https://testbook.com/blog/updated-cabinet-ministers-of-india-gk-notes-in-pdf/>> (last visited on Nov 28, 2019).

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.mapsofindia.com/election/women-members-of-parliament> (last visited on Nov 28, 2019).

<sup>73</sup> 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of India

More representation of women in decision making has been sought because of their low political participation despite of constituting 49% of the total population. In a survey it has been found that domestic responsibilities, cultural attitudes regarding women's role in decision making and lack of family support are the main reasons responsible for women not entering into politics. Lack of confidence and finance were other reasons responsible that prevents women from entering the politics. However their representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is significant. The same survey shows that there are 13.72 lakh elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions which constitute 44.2% of the total elected representatives as on December 2017. Women Sarpanchs constituted 43% of the total Gram Panchayats in the country which shows active leadership of women in local government.<sup>74</sup>

The women participation as voters has also increased as compared to past years. The gender ratio of female voters over male voters accounted for 883 females over 1000 males which shows increase in trend as compared with the data of 1960s (715 female voters over 1000 male voters). In 2014 general elections 397 million women were

<sup>74</sup> <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/womens-political-participation-in-india-low-need-more-economic-survey/articleshow/62696726>> (last visited on Nov 28, 2019).

eligible to vote and out of these two-third turned up for voting as compared to 437 million male voters out of which only 260 million turned up for voting. This can also be put in this way 66.6 % female voters exercised their franchise as compared to 59.6% of male voters who turned up for voting.

### VIII. Conclusion

Gender discrimination exists in all societies although there can be difference in its degree that varies from society to society. The feminist theories discussed itself give an idea that women are not only discriminated only in the political sphere but also in many other aspect of life. Accordingly different feminist scholars talk about freedom to women in different areas. Liberal feminist scholars have advocated for education for woman considering it as a means to change. According to Marxist approach to feminism, primary source of female oppression is capitalist economic system so they considered oppression of women through the economic glass meaning thereby they advocate for equal participation of woman in the economic production process. Radical school of feminism has argued that patriarchy is the main source of women oppression thus social change is necessary for the progress of woman in public sphere. They gave a phrase “personal is political and the political is personal. According to the

psychoanalytic feminist scholars the women are discriminated because of the identity role they have been assigned since time immemorial. Thus they argue that women can only be free when the traditional roles assigned to them withers away and an equitable relationship is established between men and women. Feminism on race, colour and ethnicity approach have focused their study on the women of the third world countries and according to them race, colour and ethnicity plays a vital role in determining the rights of the women.

World community had been conscious of the unequal treatment given to women at all aspects of life. Thus various international instruments have been entered upon by the states to recognize the rights of the women which have already been discussed. But at some points double standards of the world community is shown when they make reservation to the provisions of the conventions. For example Kuwait made reservation on the right to contest for elections to women, however later it was withdrawn. Similarly Maldives also made reservation regarding the political rights to women which was later withdrawn by the State on the objection raised by Germany.

The phenomenon of glass ceiling exists at all levels of public life and politics is also not left untouched. Although almost every nation have guaranteed equal political rights to

women in the country of their origin but then also women's participation and representation in politics is not upto mark. The report of world economic forum 2013 (covering 115 countries) shows that only 15% of the world women are politically empowered at the highest level of the government. About 97 countries have gender quota system but then also women constitute only 17% of Parliamentary seats and 14% of ministerial level seats in the world.<sup>75</sup> The reason for such disparity is mainly lack of support and gender stereotypes. The women were considered as nurturer, mother, peace keeper and negotiator but leaders like Margaret Thatcher, Condoleezza Rice, Golda Meir, and Indira Gandhi have broken these stereotypes. The increase of women participation in politics is necessary not because it will lead to world peace but because women have been discriminated since a long time and had been excluded from the formal places like government for the mere fact of being women. Thus higher freedom and more space is the global need. Democracy will also be strengthened by the participation of women in politics as they would be able to represent their problems more adequately and negotiate in a better way. For just and equitable society women

empowerment is vital in political sphere.<sup>76</sup> The women in politics will also pave way for the laws and policies which would be more directed towards improving the status of women in respect of health, education, livelihood, property rights and providing equal opportunities to women. Women have broken the glass ceiling to some extent but it needs more determination and support from the society to achieve the end.<sup>77</sup>

As the analyses has shown that countries in the global South are committed to promote women in leadership by making pro-women policies and laws. It has also been realized that sustainable economic development is only possible only when women have a say in decision making process but this is not possible until patriarchy is removed from the society that restricts the support to women in political institutions. Women politicians take decisions through their male counterparts who reject their legitimate right of decision making.<sup>78</sup> Participation of women is a pre-requisite for the political society. They should participate in all functional, political and social processes of the state. However the participation of women in Indian politics cannot deny the fact that they have the administrative skills and political insights which were only attributed to men only. The

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<sup>75</sup>'Women Grossly Under-Represented In International Politics' (SAIIA, 2018) <http://saiia.org.za/research/women-grossly-under-represented-in-international-politics/> (last visited on Nov 28, 2019).

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<sup>76</sup> *Supra* note 52.

<sup>77</sup> <Women in politics DAWN.COM, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1401914>> (last visited on Nov 28, 2019).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

reservation given to the women by 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendment is a step towards the progress in the political rights of women. But no consensus has been made to reserve the seats for women in Parliament. It is hoped that women will get rightful place in the highest law making bodies very soon. The sense of relief is that India's position as compared to other developed and developing countries is far better though it is not satisfactory in itself thus it cannot be called dismal.

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