

Representation of Women in Statecraft: A Road to Political Empowerment

Maherukh Khan¹, Dr. ShabanaMazhar²

¹Ph.D. Scholar(JIBS, SHUATS)

²Associate Professor (JIBS, SHUATS)

Abstract: *As the world's largest democracy, India promises justice, liberty and fraternity to its citizens. The real test of this democracy however is, creation of equality of opportunity for the deprived sections of the society. A home of variety of cultures, languages and religions with a number of variations in customs, value systems and ways of life facing common problem among all the cultures and regions; that is gender discrimination. Women traditionally are considered subordinated to the male and this remained a prominent feature both in the rural and the urban areas. To begin with one cannot ignore that politics, governance and decision making are some of the key areas of focus in development. In this regard, development to be perfect and sustainable needs wider participation from all segments of the society including women who are currently uninvolved in the political affairs of the state.*

Equality in political participation is one of the major priorities for the advancement of women throughout the globe. The value of gender quotas as an important tool for moving us toward our goal of gender responsive governance, insofar as the mere presence of women can transform patriarchal frameworks. In a liberal democracy like India, reservation for different sections of the society in different political institutions becomes a very important tool to achieve the goal of equality of opportunity.

This paper discusses the measures taken by the governments in India to achieve the goal of political empowerment and participation of womenfolk in the decision making process at all levels as Women's political empowerment is not a goal in itself but it is instrumental in stimulating the society for political and social empowerment which would further stimulate the overall development and refinement in the society. The presence and participation of women in decision making process would enable them to revise the gender discriminatory policies and laws on one hand and would support equality based new laws and policies on the other.

Keywords: *Women empowerment, Political participation, Gender discrimination.*

Date of Submission: 26-07-2017

Date of acceptance: 05-08-2017

I. Introduction

The world over women are struggling to break the shackles that bind them and challenging the unequal distribution of power in society. Transforming the existing egalitarian pattern of gender relationships necessitates leadership in the state, markets and civil society—the key centers of power in the present globalizing economy. It is, therefore, imperative for women to be in the corridors of power and have the power to negotiate a better deal for themselves, if they are to influence policy decisions which have an impact upon them. Empowerment of women in all spheres, in particular the political sphere is critical for their advancement and the foundation of a gender-equal society. Women's political empowerment is premised on “three fundamental and non-negotiable principles: (a) the equality between women and men; (b) Women's right to the full development of their potentials; and (c) women's right to self- representation and self-determination”. In empowerment, the key indeed is ‘power’: it is power to ‘access’, ‘control’ and make ‘informed choices’.

Women empowerment

Empowerment has become a fashionable and buzz word. It essentially means decentralization of authority and power. It aims at getting participation of deprived sections of people in decision-making process. In other words, gives voice to voiceless. Empowerment is the process by which the disempowered or powerless people can change their circumstances and begin to have control over their lives. It results in a change in the balance of power, in the living conditions and in the relationships. Unless capacity is built in these sections in reality the power is used by others rather than the section for which they are meant.

Women's empowerment can be seen as a process of renegotiating accepted norms and expectations about female and male roles, relations, and responsibilities, opening up new opportunities for women within the household, the community, state agencies and civil society. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. According to the Jakarta Declaration, "Empowerment of women is not only an equity consideration; it is also a necessary precondition for sustainable economic and social development. Involvement of women in the political arena and in decision-making roles is an important tool for empowerment as well as monitoring standards of political performance."

Women's political empowerment

Political empowerment concerns equity of representation in political institutions and enhanced voice of the least vocal so that women engage in making the decisions that affect their lives and lives of others like them. It is the ability to speak about, as well as speak for them, gaining a right to engage in political processes.

"Women's political empowerment is a process of increasing capacity for women, leading to greater choice, agency, and participation in societal decision-making." This definition has three dimensions, capturing the three most prominent strands in thinking on empowerment: that of choice, that of agency, and that of participation: One strand of thinking on empowerment emphasizes individuals' ability to make choices over areas of their lives. Second strand of thinking on empowerment focuses on agency which is deeply entwined with voice. And A third line of thinking on empowerment stresses the role of participation. Regarding women's candidacy and election to political seats, this is a central feature of political empowerment.

Political empowerment involves active engagement by individuals and groups with the governmental processes that affect their lives. This encompasses both involvements in decision making and acts of opposition. Acts of active engagement include conventional political participation (such as voting, standing for office and companioning for political party) and unconventional acts, which may be legitimate (such as signing a petition and attending a peaceful demonstration), or illegal (such as violent protest and refusing to pay tax). The term Political empowerment has a very wide meaning. It is not only related to 'Right to Vote', but simultaneously relates to participation in: decision making process, political activism, political consciousness, etc. Women in India participate in voting, run for public offices and political parties at lower levels more than men. Political activism and voting are the strongest areas of women's political participation.

II. Review of Literature

Ibrahim (2012) said that "Women's political empowerment means the autonomy of women to cast vote according to their consent, contest election, political participation, political expression and political demonstration, power politics, authority, decision-making and implementation regarding their actions, needs and priorities."

Malhotra (2005) describe "the term empowerment as a process by which women obtains larger command over intellectual and material resources, which help them to raise their self-dependence and increase them to laid stress on their rights and dare the philosophy of patriarchy and the gender based prejudice against women."

Singh J.P. (2000) stated that "Political participation has been defined in various ways. Political participation means not only exercising the right to vote, but also power sharing, co-decision-making, co-policy making at all levels of governance of the state."

Rajaput P. (2000) concluded that until gender parity is reached in governance, women cannot reach full equality with men in any sphere.

Beijing's World Conference on Women (1995) discussed "women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision making is a demand for simple justice and necessary condition for women's interest to be taken into account".

III. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is-

1. To know the need of Women Political Empowerment.
2. To analyze the Factors influencing the Political Empowerment of Women.
3. To suggest different remedial measures for strengthening the Political empowerment of women.

IV. Research Methodology

This paper is basically descriptive in nature based on Secondary data to analyze the Political empowerment of women in India. The data used in it is collected from different published books, working paper, periodicals and websites on internet.

V. Findings

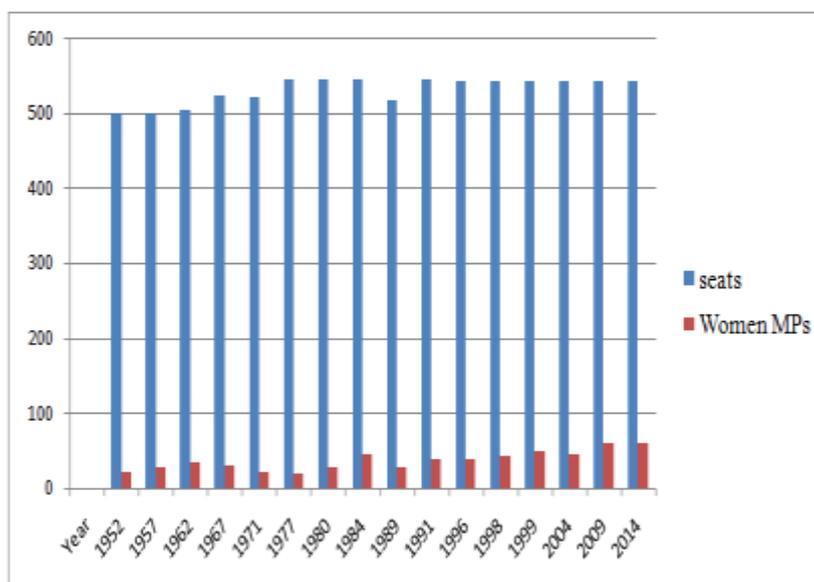
The 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Indian Constitution in 1992 and 1993, provided 33 per cent reservation for women in panchayats and urban local bodies. These amendments, as a strategy of affirmative action, served as a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in political power structures.⁵ Thus, women are making significant gains in the political sphere where increased participation is rapidly empowering women, boosting their confidence, changing perceptions regarding their contribution, and improving their status and position in society. For instance, political participation and grassroots democracy have been strengthened considerably by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments that have created new democratic institutions for local governance. The last 20 years of panchayati raj in India have seen women go from strength to strength in terms of their political participation.

Presence of Women in the Lower House:

Women have, however, not found adequate representation in the Lok Sabha. The percentage of elected women Lok Sabha members has never exceeded 12 per cent. Table 1 shows representation of women in Lok Sabha since 1952. Average number of women representation in Lok Sabha works out to only 36.87 and average percentage of women representation in Lok Sabha is not more than 6.91 per cent.

Women Presence in the Lok Sabha

Year	Seats	Women MPs	% of Women MPs
1952	499	22	4.41
1957	500	27	5.40
1962	503	34	6.76
1967	523	31	5.93
1971	521	22	4.22
1977	544	19	3.29
1980	544	28	5.15
1984	544	44	8.9
1989	517	27	5.22
1991	544	39	7.17
1996	543	39	7.18
1998	543	43	7.92
1999	543	49	9.02
2004	543	45	8.03
2009	543	59	10.86
2014	543	61	11.23
Average	531.06	36.87	6.91

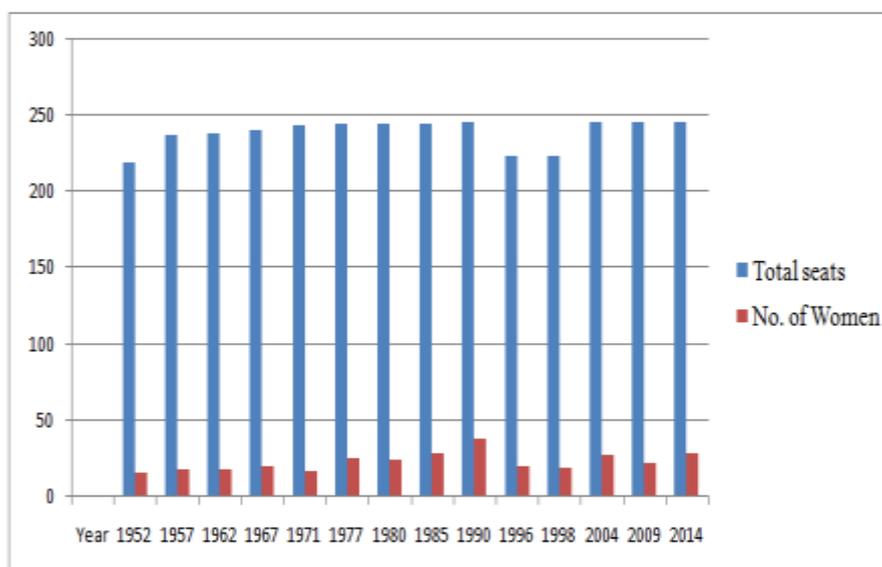


Presence of Women in the Upper House:

The presence of women in the Upper House has been only slightly higher overall, probably due to indirect elections and nomination of some women members. It was highest in 1990 at 15.5 per cent and shows a declining trend thereafter. Nonetheless, this representation does not even come close to the 33 per cent marks in the following Table 2. It is significant to note that the Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha at least for more than 25 years has been a woman, yet women face increasing competition from male politicians for nomination.

Women Presence In The Rajya Sabha

Year	Total seats	No. of Women	% of Women
1952	219	16	7.3
1957	237	18	7.6
1962	238	18	7.6
1967	240	20	8.3
1971	243	17	7.0
1977	244	25	10.2
1980	244	24	9.8
1985	244	28	11.4
1990	245	38	15.5
1996	223	20	9.0
1998	223	19	8.6
2004	245	27	11.1
2009	245	22	8.97
2014	245	29	11.83
Average	238.21	22.92	9.62



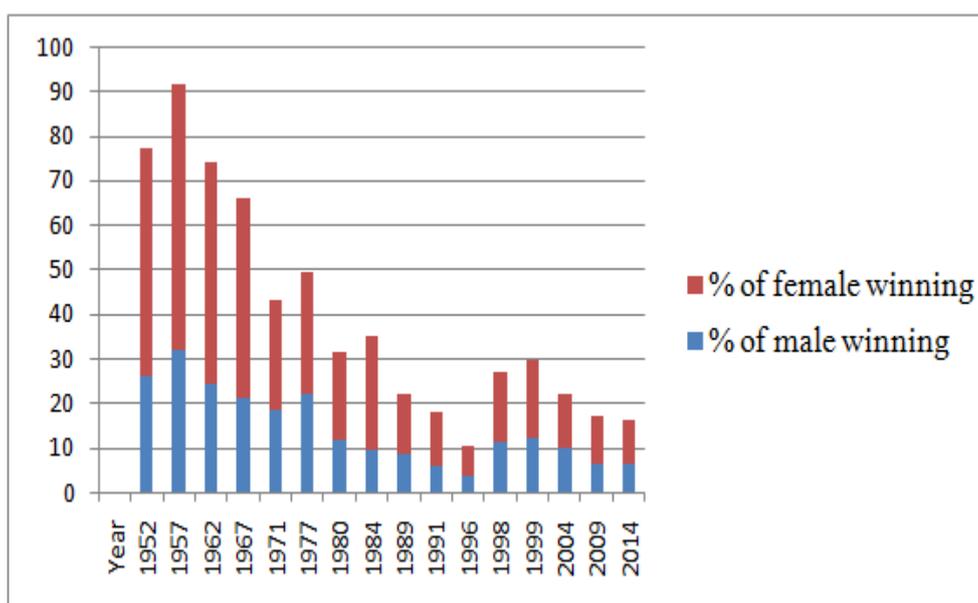
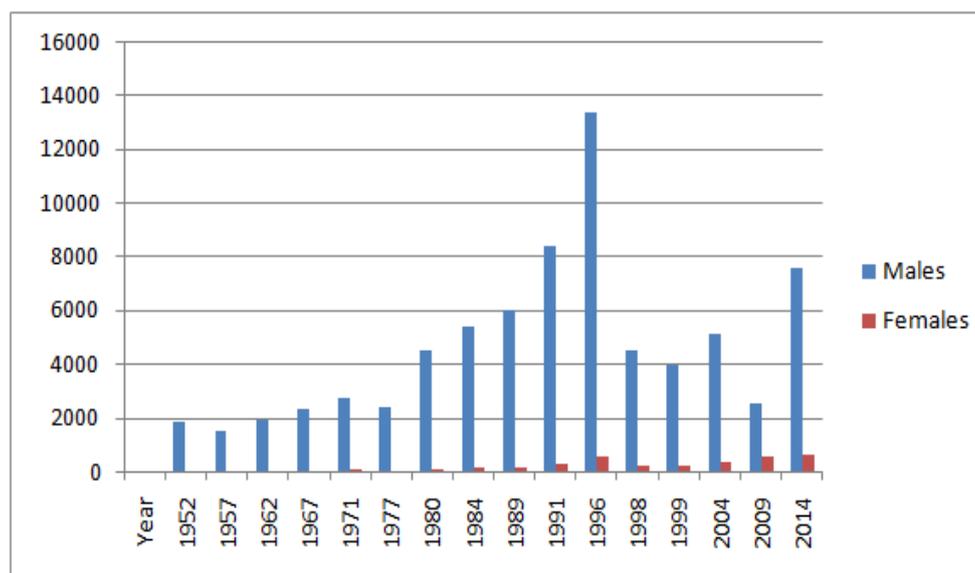
Women Contestants in Election:

The number of women contesting election has always been low, as may be seen from Table 3. The highest number of women contestants has been merely 636 in 2014, while the number of male contestants has always been in thousand, the highest being 13,353 in 1996. Yet it is encouraging to note that the percentage of winners among women has consistently been more than that of the men, notwithstanding the fact that more often than not, the losing seats are offered to women candidates by the respective political parties. This scenario is also typical at the state level. There are only a few instances of women holding portfolios of finance, industry, etc., and are mainly relegated to what are considered 'women specific' departments.

Women Contestants

Year	Males	Females	Total	% of male winning	% of female winning
1952	1831	43	1874	26.05	51.16

1957	1473	45	1518	31.7	60.00
1962	1915	70	1985	24.0	50.00
1967	2302	67	2369	21.3	44.80
1971	2698	86	2784	18.5	24.40
1977	2369	70	2439	22.1	27.10
1980	4478	142	4620	11.5	19.7
1984	5406	164	5574	9.2	25.60
1989	5962	198	6160	8.5	13.60
1991	8374	325	8699	5.9	12.00
1996	13353	599	13952	3.8	6.70
1998	4476	274	4750	11.2	15.70
1999	3976	278	4254	12.3	17.30
2004	5080	355	5435	9.8	12.30
2009	2514	556	8070	6.44	10.61
2014	7527	636	8163	6.39	9.74

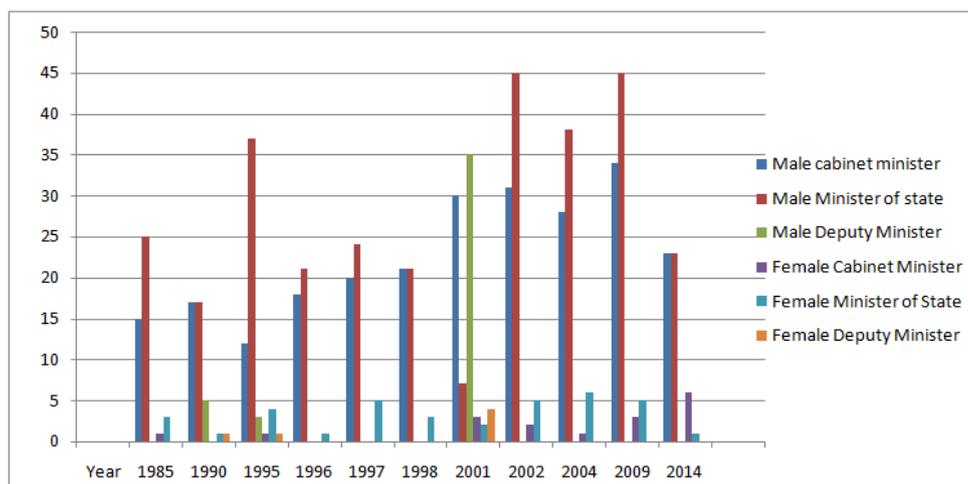


Women in the Union Council of Minister:

The representation of women in the Union Council of Ministers between 1985 and 2014 is shown in the Table 4. The data show that women have remained poorly represented in Council of Ministers.

Representation Of Women In The Union Council Of Minister

Year	No. of Minister			No. of Women		
	Cabinet minister	Minister of state	Deputy Minister	Cabinet Minister	Minister of State	Deputy Minister
1985	15	25	0	1	3	0
1990	17	17	5	0	1	1
1995	12	37	3	1	4	1
1996	18	21	0	0	1	0
1997	20	24	0	0	5	0
1998	21	21	0	0	3	0
2001	30	7	35	3	2	4
2002	31	45	0	2	5	0
2004	28	38	0	1	6	0
2009	34	45	0	3	5	0
2014	23	23	0	6	1	0



Since Independence we had so far 15 women chief ministers and 23 women governors. Only one woman so far served as President of India but so far we had no woman as Vice-President and Chief Justice of India. Only one woman has got the opportunity to serve as Chief Election Commissioner and one as Chairperson UPSC but none as CAG.

Hurdles in Political Empowerment of Women

Many factors are responsible for this state of affairs. History of freedom movement shows that a large number of women participated in freedom movement. But after that it went on decreasing. The ideology of the Nehru-Gandhi era has totally disappeared. Gender roles have become major obstacles in women's political empowerment. Traditional division of labor, illiteracy, economic barriers, the type of electoral system, lack of sufficient training etc. have been keeping women away from politics. Apart from this, elections have become a very costly affair. Women are not able to generate large amount of money required to fight elections. Centralization of powers and corruptions has become major obstacles for women to participate in politics. Following is the barriers in political empowerment of women:

- Economic empowerment is a source of social and political empowerment. As women are dependent on male members of their families economically societies so they cannot cast their vote independently. In urban areas where women are economically independent, they can participate in decision making in household and cast their vote relatively with more freedom. But where they are economically dependent they have to follow the pattern of their family affiliation in politics.
- Politics is an expensive hobby especially the electoral politics. As women are comparatively poorer so they cannot run for the elections without the support of their family or political parties. Economic empowerment is not an easy job. Women in are generally poor and rate of literacy among the women folk is relatively low as compare to men. Therefore the only mode of access to financial resources in most of the cases is the inheritance from family.
- Women lack the institutional support also. Not only the government organizations like bureaucracy and other departments are least sensitive towards women rights but the non-governmental institutions like

political parties also have the same thinking. It's a great hurdle in the women's leadership development at the provincial and national level. In the absence of support from political parties only those women can be elevated to high offices who act as a proxy to their male family members.

- Women are commonly exploited in the name of culture. Culture has a deep impact on human life but in the place of women is basically determined by social and the value system. The women in some areas of India observe "Purda System".

All these trends indicate that women's representation in politics requires special consideration. Today, even best women parliamentarians feel sidelined and powerless within their parties except a few. Male party leaders have shown little willingness to include women in party decision making bodies or help to create a conducive atmosphere for women's participation in their own organizations. Therefore special measures are required. Otherwise our democracy will remain seriously flawed if it fails to give adequate space for women.

Suggestions to Make Environment Conducive for Change:

- The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem. Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention. Advanced education facilities and high level of literacy lead to the creation of middle class, which always help in promoting moderation and democracy.
- Political Empowerment of Women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings.
- Awareness programs need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights and Strict implementation of Programs and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society.
- Women should be allowed to participate in politics and should be provided enough safety and support to work. There is a need of 'sensitization of society' to change the mindset of people and provide equal treatment to them so that their status can be elevated in the society.
- There is a need to transform the system of politics into a fair game, so that honest, decent, competent and educated people from middle class including women should come and join. If women would be protected in all spheres of public life, it would encourage other women to follow the path. The politics would be more refined, if more women join it. In the presence of women sitting in elected bodies male politicians would not be able to use street language. Secondly as the women are hardworking and keen to learn, in their presence serious work would be done.
- Government actions are appreciated but they can be fruitful only if they will continue with a strong political will. Laws already exist but there is a need to institutionalize the gender equality as a culture at governmental and social level.

Women in India have made major inroads in various male dominated professions. In the field of business, art, medicine, engineering, law and culture, women are given opportunity to prove their skills. But they have failed to gain ground in the field of politics. Today the percentage of women as voters has increased considerably, but their political participation is not equal to men and therefore women are unable to get an equal share in organization that require decision making. Women have not been regarded as significant part of the political arena. Politics at every level of participation is dominated by men. The omission of women from positions of power seriously affects the ability to challenge the subordination of women in all its manifestation. Women have to be in politics and power to participate as women and to change the very nature of that power which excludes them. Women who consist of almost half of the population need to be represented significantly in decision making bodies. Otherwise the goal of development cannot be achieved. Gender equity is very essential for the progress of any society.

VI. Conclusions

Women exclusion from political structure and process is the result of multiple structural, functional and personal factors that vary in different social context across the countries in this modern time. Women in politics are contradictory concept which possesses limitations on women's effective participation and empowerment. Therefore, one thing is common among that is gender discrimination. Generally in Indian society women are influenced by the norms and values of the culture into which they are socialized. Their social lives status and role are also crucially influenced by dominant cultural ideology and discriminatory social structure. The real political empowerment would be achieved only if it would be accompanied by the social and economic empowerment. For that purpose, society has to be changed at large. Such change cannot be materialized only through any coercive legislation or strong state action in the blink of an eye. But the fact remains there that in societies where all the changes start from top to bottom these measures along with a strong political will can stimulate a change to improve the situation gradually. Women issues can be rightly addressed with the

considerable presence of women in the legislative and decision making institutions. Allocation of seats at the governmental level, recruitment at the political party level, support from media and civil society all are required and appreciated in this regard. To produce sustainable results there is a need to work on society as a whole. Women are not living in isolation. They are part of society. They need support of their family, especially the males. So we have to work on society as a whole to change the mindset of the people to accept an empowered women, sister, and daughters. The high level of literacy, economic opportunity, and prosperity in the society and regular workings of the representative institutions will broaden the horizon of people and they will accept the mainstreaming of women as the part of progress and modernization.

Reference

- [1]. Fourth World Conference on Women (1999) Beijing Platform for Action, ,pp.109
- [2]. Ibrahim (2012), Socio-Cultural and Economic Constraints to Women's Political Empowerment in Pakhtun Society; unpublished Mphil Thesis Department of Sociology University of Malakand.
- [3]. Malhotra A. and Schuler R. S.(2005), "Women's empowerment as a variable in international development" Measuring empowerment: Crossdisciplinary perspectives (2005): 71-88.
- [4]. Rajaput P.(2000), "Women's Political Participation in India: An Agenda for Empowerment", in PramilaKapur (ed), Empowering the Indian Women, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broad Casting, Government of India, pp. 227-228.
- [5]. Singh J.P.(2000), "Indian Democracy and Empowerment of Women", The Indian Journal of Public Administration, Oct-Dec, Vol. XLVI, No. 4, pp. 61

* Maherukh Khan " Representation of Women in Statecraft: A Road to Political Empowerment" International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI) 6.8 (2017): 27-34.