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BEYOND ONE-THIRD: THE CONSTITUTIONAL IMPERATIVE OF 50% REPRESENTATION FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

AUTHORED BY - SHANMUGA PRIYA N¹

ABSTRACT

*A just democracy demands equal representation for all its citizens; yet, in India, a persistent gender gap continues to shape the political system and limit women's participation in decision-making. Despite being active voters and campaigners, women remain underrepresented in legislative institutions where key policies and laws are framed. This paper explains that women's political representation is not a privilege or concession but a democratic necessity essential for realizing the constitutional ideals of equality and justice. The author traces the historical evolution of the Women's Reservation Bill from its introduction in 1996 to its eventual passage as the **106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023**, which mandates one-third reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. The author examines whether the growing demand for a 50% reservation is justified in a society where women constitute nearly half of the population and consistently record higher voter participation than men. This paper further analyses various government initiatives, most notably the **Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation Programme (SVEEP)**, designed to promote women's awareness, voter registration, and active political engagement. However, the study finds that structural and socio-political barriers, such as patriarchy, limited access to financial resources, lack of political mentorship, and cultural resistance, continue to restrict women's effective participation even within existing frameworks. The author explains that these challenges necessitate not only constitutional reform but also systemic measures such as leadership training, institutional capacity-building, and gender-sensitive political education. This paper concludes that implementing a 50% reservation for women, with equitable sub-quotas for marginalised and urban groups, could significantly transform India's political landscape by making governance more inclusive and representative. Yet, genuine gender parity will be achieved only when these constitutional provisions are supported by strong*

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institutional mechanisms and sustained social awareness that empower women to participate as equal architects of India's democracy.

Keywords: Representation, Reservation, Voting, Democracy, Empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

“No society can call itself truly democratic until women have equal voice in its governance.”

The question of women's representation in politics has long occupied the centre of democratic debates in India. The title of this study, *“Is 50% Too Much to Ask? Equal Representation of Women in India”*—captures both the aspiration for parity and the resistance it continues to face. Women's political empowerment is not only about granting them the right to vote or contest elections; it is about ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making and governance at every level. Equal representation implies a political system where women hold half of the seats, reflecting their proportion in society, and where their voices shape the laws, policies, and institutions that affect the nation's future. Globally, gender imbalance in political leadership persists. According to the *Women in Politics: 2025 Map* released by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women, women constitute only 27.2% of Members of Parliament worldwide and fewer than one in four cabinet ministers. Leadership positions at the highest level remain elusive, with women serving as Heads of State or Government in just 25 countries. In India, the situation mirrors these trends, despite being the world's largest democracy. Women often remain confined to the margins of political power, entrusted with portfolios related to social welfare rather than strategic areas like finance, defence, or foreign affairs. The demand for 50% reservation in political institutions raises fundamental questions: Should representation reflect population proportion? Does equal representation strengthen democracy or reduce it to tokenism? While the recently passed women's reservation law marks a significant step forward, limiting representation to 33% still falls short of parity. Equal representation would not only correct historical exclusion but also enhance the legitimacy of India's democratic project. Yet, several obstacles hinder women's full and effective participation. Structural inequalities, patriarchal social norms, inadequate education, limited access to resources, the dominance of money and muscle power in elections, and gender-based violence collectively create barriers. These challenges reduce women's political visibility and discourage potential leaders from entering the political arena. At the same time, insufficient political will and weak accountability mechanisms stall meaningful reforms.

This article interrogates the adequacy of current measures and argues that 50% representation is not an excessive demand but a democratic necessity. By tracing the historical debates, analysing existing frameworks, and situating India within global trends, it makes the case that equal representation of women is central to achieving both substantive democracy and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on gender equality.

II. HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL

The demand for greater representation of women in Indian legislatures dates back to the early years of the Republic. In 1949, several women members of the Constituent Assembly and Provisional Parliament expressed concern over the declining number of women representatives, as men largely replaced outgoing women members. Leaders such as B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya reminded the Assembly that women had already abandoned the demand for separate electorates, trusting instead that the democratic process would naturally ensure their participation. However, as subsequent decades demonstrated, this trust remained unfulfilled.²

By the mid-1990s, women's representation in Parliament was alarmingly low. In 1996, Sushma Swaraj drew attention to the fact that only 6.5% of the 543 members in the Lok Sabha were women. In response, the Government introduced the **81st Constitutional Amendment Bill** on 12 September 1996, proposing to reserve one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women. The Bill was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee of ten members, which strongly recommended its immediate implementation, though it rejected the idea of sub-reservation for women belonging to backward classes. Despite committee support, the Bill failed to secure passage in Parliament and lapsed.³

Between 1998 and 2003, the Bill was reintroduced four more times, but each attempt ended unsuccessfully due to a lack of political consensus. A renewed effort came in 2008, when the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government tabled the Bill in the Rajya Sabha, where it was passed in 2010. However, it failed to clear the Lok Sabha, leading once again to its lapse.⁴ The breakthrough finally came in 2023 with the passage of the **106th Constitutional Amendment Act**, which mandated one-third reservation for women in both the Lok Sabha and

² *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. XI, 22 November 1949, p. 933.

³ Government of India, *The Constitution (81st Amendment) Bill, 1996*, Lok Sabha Debates, 12 September 1996.

⁴ *Lok Sabha Debates*, Various Sessions (1998–2003) on Women's Reservation Bill.

State Assemblies. While hailed as a historic achievement, the Act linked implementation to the completion of the next population census and subsequent delimitation exercise, thereby delaying its practical effect.⁵

The long and contested journey of the Women's Reservation Bill underscores the deep-rooted challenges in securing gender equality in political representation. Importantly, the 33% quota was always envisioned as a minimum threshold rather than the final objective. For advocates of gender justice, the ultimate goal remains equal representation—50%—reflecting the demographic reality and ensuring that women's voices are fully integrated into the democratic process.

III. THE NEED FOR 50% REPRESENTATION

Democracy attains its true legitimacy only when it guarantees *equal and meaningful participation* of all sections of society in political decision-making. In India, where women constitute nearly half of the total population (49%) and represent about 48% of the electorate, their political underrepresentation reflects a serious democratic deficit. Despite this demographic balance, women's presence in the Lok Sabha has historically remained between **14–15%**, far below the threshold of equitable representation⁶. Such exclusion not only undermines the **principle of political justice** but also weakens the moral foundation of democratic governance, where laws are meant to be shaped by all, not by a privileged few. The continued gender gap in legislatures mirrors entrenched socio-economic hierarchies and cultural biases that have long restricted women's access to public life.

The **Constitution of India** provides both the normative and legal framework for correcting these historical imbalances. **Article 14** guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of laws, while **Article 15(3)** expressly empowers the State to enact **special provisions for women** to ensure substantive equality. These provisions recognize that formal equality alone cannot overcome centuries of social exclusion. Instead, **affirmative action and structural reforms** are essential to achieve genuine equality of opportunity. The demand for 50% reservation, therefore, is not a matter of privilege or political charity; it is a **constitutional**

⁵ The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part II, Section 1.

⁶ *Election Commission of India, Statistical Report on General Elections to the 17th Lok Sabha, 2019*, Vol. I (New Delhi: Election Commission of India, 2020) at 45.

necessity rooted in India's vision of justice, liberty, and equality as articulated in the Preamble. It reflects the spirit of *transformative constitutionalism*, which views the Constitution as a living document committed to social reform and empowerment⁷.

Empirical evidence further supports this need. Studies show that increased women's participation leads to more **inclusive policy outcomes**, particularly in areas such as education, healthcare, and local development. Greater representation also promotes transparency, reduces corruption, and strengthens accountability in governance. Thus, the author concludes that reserving 50% of seats for women in legislative bodies would not only fulfil constitutional mandates but also **revitalize India's democracy** by aligning it more closely with the principles of equality and participatory justice envisioned by the framers of the Constitution.

IV. GLOBAL BENCHMARKS

When India's performance is compared globally, the gap becomes even more evident. Countries such as Rwanda (61% women in the lower house), Nicaragua, Mexico, and Bolivia have all adopted gender quotas that have pushed women's representation beyond 50%. These examples demonstrate that parity is both achievable and beneficial, leading to more inclusive, responsive, and representative governance. Leading world powers like the USA (23.6%), the UK (32%), and China (24.9%) have a higher proportion of women representatives in their legislatures compared to India (12.6%). As the world's largest democracy, India bears a moral responsibility to match such international standards rather than settling for symbolic representation.

1. Beyond Symbolism

The existing 33% reservation for women in political institutions is often regarded as a token measure. Women remain sidelined in key leadership roles and are underrepresented in crucial parliamentary committees. A mere presence without influence does not amount to empowerment. True power-sharing requires parity (50%), ensuring that women are not reduced to secondary participants but are recognised as equal stakeholders in shaping national policies.⁸

2. Addressing Structural Barriers

Women's underrepresentation cannot be explained by a lack of capability or interest but by deeply rooted structural inequalities. Patriarchal social norms, inadequate

⁷ *K. Krishna Murthy v. Union of India*, (2010) 7 SCC 202, at 218.

⁸ Nivedita Menon, *Seeing Like a Feminist* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2012) 148.

financial resources, the dominance of male-controlled political parties, and persistent stereotypes continue to hinder women's entry into politics. A 50% quota serves as a corrective mechanism to compensate for historical exclusion, ensuring that women gain equal access to opportunities in political life.⁹

3. Lessons from Panchayati Raj

India already has evidence of the benefits of increased women's representation at the grassroots level. The **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments** mandated one-third reservation in local bodies, and many states subsequently expanded this to 50%. Studies reveal that women leaders in panchayats and municipalities have prioritised issues like water supply, health, sanitation, and education—areas often overlooked by male counterparts. These positive outcomes demonstrate that extending parity to state assemblies and Parliament could lead to more people-centred governance at the national scale.¹⁰

4. Half the Electorate, Half the Seats

Finally, women are no longer passive participants in elections; they have emerged as decisive voters. In several states, including Bihar, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, women have even recorded higher voter turnout than men. If women contribute equally in electing representatives, democratic fairness demands they should also occupy half the seats in legislatures. Anything less diminishes their political agency and undermines the principle of equal citizenship.¹¹

The case for 50% representation is thus grounded in constitutional principles, global best practices, and India's own successful experiences at the grassroots level. It is not an excessive demand but a democratic necessity that would correct centuries of exclusion, strengthen representative democracy, and inspire future generations of women leaders.

V. STRUCTURAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL BARRIERS TO GENDER EQUALITY IN REPRESENTATION

Despite constitutional commitments to equality, women in India continue to be significantly underrepresented in legislative and political institutions. Although they comprise nearly half

⁹ Nussbaum, Martha C., *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 121.

¹⁰ B.L. Fadia, *Indian Government and Politics* (Agra: Sahitya Bhawan, 2021) 479.

¹¹ Election Commission of India, *Statistical Reports on General Elections, 2019* (New Delhi: ECI, 2020)

of the country's population and electorate, their representation in the Lok Sabha has consistently remained between 14–15%.¹² This persistent gap reflects not only numerical underrepresentation but also the deep-rooted structural, cultural, and institutional obstacles that limit women's access to political power and decision-making.

1. Restricted Party Nominations

One of the most persistent structural barriers to women's equal political participation in India is the chronic under-nomination of female candidates by political parties, which effectively restricts their entry into the electoral arena. Political parties, as the principal gatekeepers of electoral democracy, play a decisive role in determining who enters the political arena. However, most major parties rarely nominate more than 10–12% of women candidates, despite women voters emerging as a critical electoral bloc in recent years.¹³ Despite women constituting nearly half of the electorate, data from recent Lok Sabha elections show that major parties field only around 9–10% women candidates, resulting in a mere 14–15% representation in Parliament¹⁴. To address this imbalance, the proposal of *party-ticket parity*, mandating that at least 50% of all party nominations be given to women within three electoral cycles, offers a practical and constitutionally consistent reform. This mechanism shifts the focus from symbolic representation to structural inclusion by targeting the supply side of candidacy rather than waiting for post-delimitation reservations under the *106th Constitutional Amendment*. *The Election Commission of India*, supported by the *Law Ministry*, could implement and monitor compliance by requiring political parties to submit gender-disaggregated candidate data, publishing public dashboards, and imposing penalties such as reduced public funding or symbol withdrawal for non-compliance, as practised in countries like France under its 2000 Parity Law. Success could be measured through transparent indicators like the percentage of women candidates fielded and their win-rate parity, thereby ensuring accountability and sustained progress. Such a reform would operationalise the constitutional vision of substantive equality under *Articles 14 and 15(3)*, democratize access to electoral politics, and lay the institutional foundation for a genuinely inclusive and representative democracy.

¹² Election Commission of India, *Statistical Reports on General Elections, 2019* (New Delhi: ECI, 2020).

¹³ Zoya Hasan, *Politics of Inclusion: Castes, Minorities and Affirmative Action* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009) 212.

¹⁴ Election Commission of India, *Statistical Report on General Elections to the 17th Lok Sabha, 2019, Vol. I* (New Delhi: Election Commission of India, 2020) at 45.

2. Violence and Harassment

A significant and often under-acknowledged barrier to women's political participation in India is the pervasive **violence and harassment—both physical and online—that women candidates face during elections**, which severely undermines their ability to contest freely and safely. Instances of intimidation, character assassination, and gender-based trolling have become routine, especially on digital platforms, deterring many women from entering or sustaining political careers¹⁵. To address this, the Election Commission of India should establish *fast-track gender grievance cells* at the district level during the *Model Code of Conduct (MCC)* period, empowered to receive and act on complaints within 24–48 hours¹⁶. These cells must coordinate closely with state cybercrime units under the *Information Technology Act, 2000*¹⁷, ensuring swift identification and takedown of abusive online content under Sections 66E and 67, which criminalise online harassment and publication of obscene material. Additionally, the ECI could mandate *Safe Campaigning Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)* requiring political parties to provide security support and report any incidents of gender-based violence. The effectiveness of these mechanisms can be assessed through measurable indicators such as the number of First Information Reports (FIRs) registered, the average response time to complaints, and the findings of periodic candidate safety surveys. Institutionalising such safeguards would operationalise the constitutional guarantee of equality under Articles 14 and 21, ensuring that women can exercise their democratic rights without fear, coercion, or digital victimisation.

3. Educational and Economic Constraints

Another formidable barrier to women's political representation in India lies in the *educational and economic constraints* that limit their ability to contest elections on an equal footing with men. Educational and economic disadvantages further limit women's ability to compete in politics. Lower literacy levels, particularly in rural areas, reduce women's political awareness and confidence. Economic dependence on families or male relatives restricts their ability to finance election campaigns, which in India have become increasingly resource-intensive.¹⁸ Many potential women candidates lack access to financial networks and campaign resources, which remain heavily male-

¹⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Violence Against Women in Politics* (Geneva: IPU, 2016) 8

¹⁶ Election Commission of India, *Handbook on Electoral Offences and Gender Sensitisation for Election Officials*, (New Delhi: Election Commission of India, 2023) at 62.

¹⁷ The Information Technology Act, 2000 (Act 21 of 2000)

¹⁸ B.L. Fadia, *Indian Government and Politics* (Agra: Sahitya Bhawan, 2021) 482.

dominated, making it difficult to fund nominations, rallies, publicity, and compliance costs. Moreover, social expectations often restrict women's mobility and access to political mentoring, compounding their disadvantage. A viable reform measure is the introduction of state-funded campaign vouchers for women and first-time candidates, enabling them to meet essential campaign expenses through a transparent, government-regulated mechanism. This proposal aligns with the *Representation of the People Act, 1951*¹⁹, which already prescribes spending ceilings for candidates under Section 77, but does not yet provide equitable means to meet those costs. Direct public reimbursements, granted to women candidates who achieve a minimum vote-share threshold, would encourage genuine participation rather than token nominations. Tracking metrics such as the average expenditure gap between male and female candidates, the diversity of campaign donors, and candidate retention across election cycles can help assess the effectiveness of this initiative. By democratizing campaign finance and reducing economic dependency, such measures would strengthen substantive equality under Articles 14 and 15(3) and give practical meaning to women's right to political participation.

4. Cultural and Social Norms

Deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes continue to act as invisible yet powerful barriers to women's participation in political life in India, discouraging many from contesting elections or sustaining public careers, even when constitutional and legal guarantees exist. Women are often socially confined to domestic roles, and those who step into politics face criticism for neglecting household duties. Even when they achieve political office, their abilities are scrutinized more harshly than men's, reinforcing stereotypes of women as secondary or symbolic leaders.²⁰ To counter this, long-term interventions must include gender-sensitive civic education modules in school curricula, starting in childhood, which challenge stereotypical assumptions about gender roles and political leadership, and normalize women's presence in public office²¹. Complementing this with an annual public "Women in Public Office Index" (tracking elected women across panchayats to Parliament) would make representation visible and aspirational rather than exceptional. Over time, regular attitudinal surveys could measure changes in public perception

¹⁹ The Representation of the People Act, 1951 (Act 43 of 1951)

²⁰ Nivedita Menon, *Seeing Like a Feminist* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2012) 151.

²¹ National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), *Gender and Schooling Processes*, Vol. II (New Delhi: NCERT, 2016), at 14-15.

about women's competence and legitimacy in leadership. By combining education, data transparency, and social recognition, India can gradually erode cultural resistance to women's political empowerment, giving practical life to the constitutional mandate of substantive equality under Articles 14, 15(3) and 39(a).

5. Underrepresentation in Leadership Positions

Finally, women's underrepresentation extends beyond numbers to the nature of positions they occupy. Despite decades of democratic governance, India has had only one woman Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and a limited number of women Chief Ministers across states. At the parliamentary and ministerial levels, women are often restricted to portfolios related to social welfare, health, or education, while critical sectors like finance, defence, and home affairs remain dominated by men.²² This exclusion from high-level leadership perpetuates a cycle in which younger women lack visible role models, further entrenching systemic barriers to equal representation.

Even when women successfully enter legislatures, they often encounter a persistent leadership glass ceiling that restricts their access to influential positions such as ministerial portfolios, parliamentary committee chairs, or party leadership roles. Data from the 17th Lok Sabha show that women constituted only around *10.5% of the Union Council of Ministers*, and were largely confined to social or welfare ministries, reflecting an enduring gendered division of political labour. To overcome this institutional bias, the Rules of Procedure in both Houses of Parliament and State Assemblies could be amended to ensure minimum representation of women in key committees, including the Public Accounts Committee, Estimates Committee, and Departmentally Related Standing Committees on Finance, Home Affairs, and Defence.²³ Such systemic reforms would move women from peripheral portfolios to central policy spaces, enabling them to influence budgetary priorities, fiscal oversight, and national security discourse. Institutionalizing this inclusion would thus translate descriptive representation into substantive empowerment, aligning with the constitutional ideals of equality and effective participation envisioned under Articles 14 and 15(3) of the Constitution.

Taken together, these factors, structural exclusions by parties, violence and harassment, educational and economic inequalities, cultural stereotypes, and absence in leadership

²² Shirin M. Rai, *Democracy in India: Gender and Politics* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005) 89.

²³ *Parliament of India, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha*, 18th Edition (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2023) at 214

roles, create a complex web that restricts women's political empowerment. Overcoming these barriers requires deliberate institutional reforms, strong legal protections, and a cultural shift that recognizes women not as symbolic participants but as equal architects of India's democracy.

VI. 50% WOMEN RESERVATION WITH SUB-QUOTAS IN INDIA

India's journey toward gender-equitable political representation has indeed been *incremental but transformative*, reflecting the nation's constitutional commitment to social and political justice. The *73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992)* institutionalized women's participation at the grassroots by reserving one-third of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), later expanded to 50% by several states. This reform not only enhanced women's visibility in public decision-making but also created a generation of grassroots leaders who influenced priorities in health, education, sanitation, and welfare. Building on this foundation, the **106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023**, commonly known as the Women's Reservation Act, introduced one-third reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies, symbolizing a national acknowledgement of women's political rights. However, the **delay in implementation** due to the dependency on the next census and delimitation process has raised concerns that the reform, while historic, may not yield immediate structural transformation.

To bridge this gap and ensure *substantive equality*, a proposal for **50% reservation for women in all legislative bodies** is both timely and constitutionally justifiable under Articles 14, 15(3), and 16(4). This framework envisions *two internal sub-quotas*:

- (i) **35%** reserved for women belonging to **Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minority communities, and economically weaker sections (EWS)**, and
- (ii) **15%** reserved for **urban women**, primarily from general-category constituencies. The first sub-quota operationalises *intersectional justice*, ensuring that women marginalized by both gender and social hierarchy are not overshadowed by relatively privileged groups.

The second sub-quota acknowledges that *urban women*, though socially empowered in theory, remain **politically underrepresented**; their participation in municipal and metropolitan governance remains disproportionately low despite higher literacy and workforce participation rates.

This model advances the **principle of composite representation**, aligning with the Supreme Court’s reasoning in *K. Krishna Murthy v. Union of India*²⁴, which recognized the legitimacy of political reservations addressing multiple axes of disadvantage. A **Standing Parity Commission** could be established to periodically collect data, monitor outcomes, and recommend rotation schedules for reserved constituencies, similar to the “triple test” criteria outlined in *Vikas Kishanrao Gawali v. State of Maharashtra*²⁵. By integrating **gender parity with social inclusivity**, this model strengthens India’s democratic fabric and transforms political representation from a matter of tokenism to one of *equitable power-sharing*, fulfilling the constitutional vision of *“equality in fact and in law.”*

VII. IMPLEMENTING THE 50% WOMEN’S RESERVATION WITH SUB-QUOTAS: INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY BLUEPRINT

For the proposed 50 per cent women’s reservation to achieve its transformative potential, a comprehensive implementation architecture is indispensable. The following framework translates the constitutional vision of equality into concrete institutional design:

1. Legislative Framework and Policy Design

For effective implementation, the Women’s Reservation Bill must be amended to explicitly incorporate these sub-quotas. Clear eligibility criteria should be defined through caste/community certification, income-based assessments, and verification of urban domicile.²⁶ Additionally, rotational reservation should be adopted, whereby constituencies are periodically reserved for women to ensure fair geographic distribution of representation.²⁷

2. Electoral Implementation

Sub-quotas must apply not only to the **Lok Sabha** and **State Legislative Assemblies**, but also to **urban municipal corporations** and **local self-government institutions**.²⁸ In urban constituencies, where women’s representation has historically been low, a fixed 15% quota would strengthen their participation in civic governance. Furthermore,

²⁴ (2010) 7 SCC 202

²⁵ (2021) 6 SCC 73

²⁶ Government of India, *The Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Act, 2019*, Ministry of Law and Justice.

²⁷ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), *Rotational Reservation in Electoral Systems* (Stockholm: IDEA, 2020).

²⁸ Lok Sabha Secretariat, *Women’s Reservation Bill – Status and Recommendations* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2023).

separate metrics for marginalised and urban women should be maintained to measure the real impact of the reform.²⁹

3. Capacity Building and Training

Reservations alone cannot guarantee effective leadership without capacity building. Targeted **pre-election training programs** should be organised for marginalised women, focusing on legal literacy, campaign management, and public speaking.³⁰ Similarly, urban women must be supported through mentorship networks, political internships, and exposure to leadership platforms that can help them navigate male-dominated political structures. Cross-constituency knowledge-sharing initiatives can further enable women representatives to exchange experiences and strategies.

4. Financial and Institutional Support

The dominance of money power in Indian elections often disadvantages women, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. To counter this, **state-sponsored campaign financing and grants** should be made available.³¹ Urban women, though relatively better positioned, also require financial incentives and project-based grants to enhance visibility in governance. Furthermore, ensuring office infrastructure, professional staff support, and access to legal advisory services is crucial to enable first-time women legislators to function effectively.

5. Social Awareness and Community Mobilisation

Legal measures must be accompanied by **social awareness campaigns** to challenge patriarchal stereotypes. Awareness drives should focus on the importance of women's leadership, particularly in marginalised communities where resistance to female political participation is higher.³² The visibility of role models—successful women leaders from both marginalised and urban constituencies—can play a transformative role. Civil society organisations and grassroots movements must also be mobilised to provide electoral support and community acceptance.

6. Monitoring and Accountability

To ensure transparency, a **national digital dashboard** should be established, tracking

²⁹ Ministry of Urban Development, *Urban Governance and Women's Participation Report* (New Delhi: MUD, 2022).

³⁰ UN Women India, *Leadership Training Programs for Women in Local Governance* (New Delhi: UN Women, 2021).

³¹ National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), *Women in Politics: Financial Support Mechanisms* (New Delhi: NIPFP, 2022).

³² Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Awareness Campaigns for Women Political Participation* (New Delhi: MWCD, 2021).

the allocation of seats, performance of elected representatives, and the overall progress of women under sub-quotas.³³ Regular policy reviews should be conducted to evaluate the impact of women's leadership on service delivery, governance quality, and empowerment outcomes. Alongside, grievance redressal mechanisms must be introduced to deal with harassment, discrimination, or denial of representation.

7. Long-Term Recommendations

Sub-quotas should be applied flexibly. For example, if marginalised women are already achieving higher representation, their reserved share could be adjusted without reducing the overall 50% target.³⁴ Political empowerment must also be integrated with **economic empowerment schemes**, including self-help groups and vocational training. Additionally, political parties must not treat quotas as a legal formality but should be legally bound to **actively nominate women candidates** across both sub-quota categories.³⁵

In sum, a 50% reservation with sub-quotas ensures not only gender justice but also inclusivity across caste, class, and geography. It would democratise political spaces, break structural hierarchies, and make Indian legislatures truly reflective of their population.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The proposal for a **50% reservation for women, with 35% earmarked for marginalised groups and 15% for urban women**, represents a historic opportunity to reshape India's democratic framework into one that is genuinely inclusive and equitable. It is not merely a reform of political structure, but a *reform of consciousness*, a reaffirmation of the constitutional promise of equality, justice, and dignity for all. The author concludes that this proposal goes beyond symbolic inclusion; it directly addresses the intersecting layers of gender, caste, class, and regional disparity that have long hindered women's participation in public life. By integrating both gender justice and social justice, the model seeks to create a political culture that reflects the realities of India's diverse and complex society. The author explains that the success of this model, however, cannot rest solely on the constitutional amendment or legislative text. For the 50% reservation with sub-quotas to become effective, it must be supported by **capacity-building mechanisms, financial and institutional assistance,**

³³ Election Commission of India, *Dashboard for Monitoring Women Representation* (New Delhi: ECI, 2023).

³⁴ Centre for Policy Research, *Flexible Quotas and Rotational Reservation Systems* (New Delhi: CPR, 2019).

³⁵ National Commission for Women, *Political Parties and Women Representation* (New Delhi: NCW, 2022).

and **continuous leadership development**. Women—especially those from historically marginalised backgrounds- must be empowered with the necessary skills in governance, policy formulation, and legislative practice. Comprehensive training programs, political mentorship networks, and exposure visits should be institutionalised to help women navigate political spaces with confidence and autonomy. Similarly, adequate financial resources and logistical support should be made available to ensure that economic dependence does not become a barrier to political participation. The author further emphasises that legal measures must be complemented by *social transformation*. Deep-seated patriarchal norms that question women’s legitimacy as decision-makers must be actively challenged through education, community engagement, and media representation. Awareness campaigns highlighting successful women leaders can inspire younger generations and normalise women’s presence in public office. Moreover, the creation of *robust monitoring and accountability systems*, such as transparent data dashboards and periodic reviews, will ensure that women’s participation translates into genuine influence rather than token representation. Ultimately, the author concludes that this proposed framework is not merely about increasing the number of women in legislative institutions, but about **redefining the nature of power itself**. It envisions a democracy where women are active agents in shaping public policy, questioning injustice, and redefining governance priorities. Such a transformation would deepen the quality of India’s democracy, making it more participatory, responsive, and reflective of the collective will of its people. By embedding equality, inclusion, and social justice at its core, the proposed 50% reservation with sub-quotas offers a path toward a more just and future-oriented political order, one that transforms representation into real empowerment and ensures that the Constitution’s ideals are lived realities rather than distant aspirations.

“Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy.”

-Dr. B.R. Ambedkar