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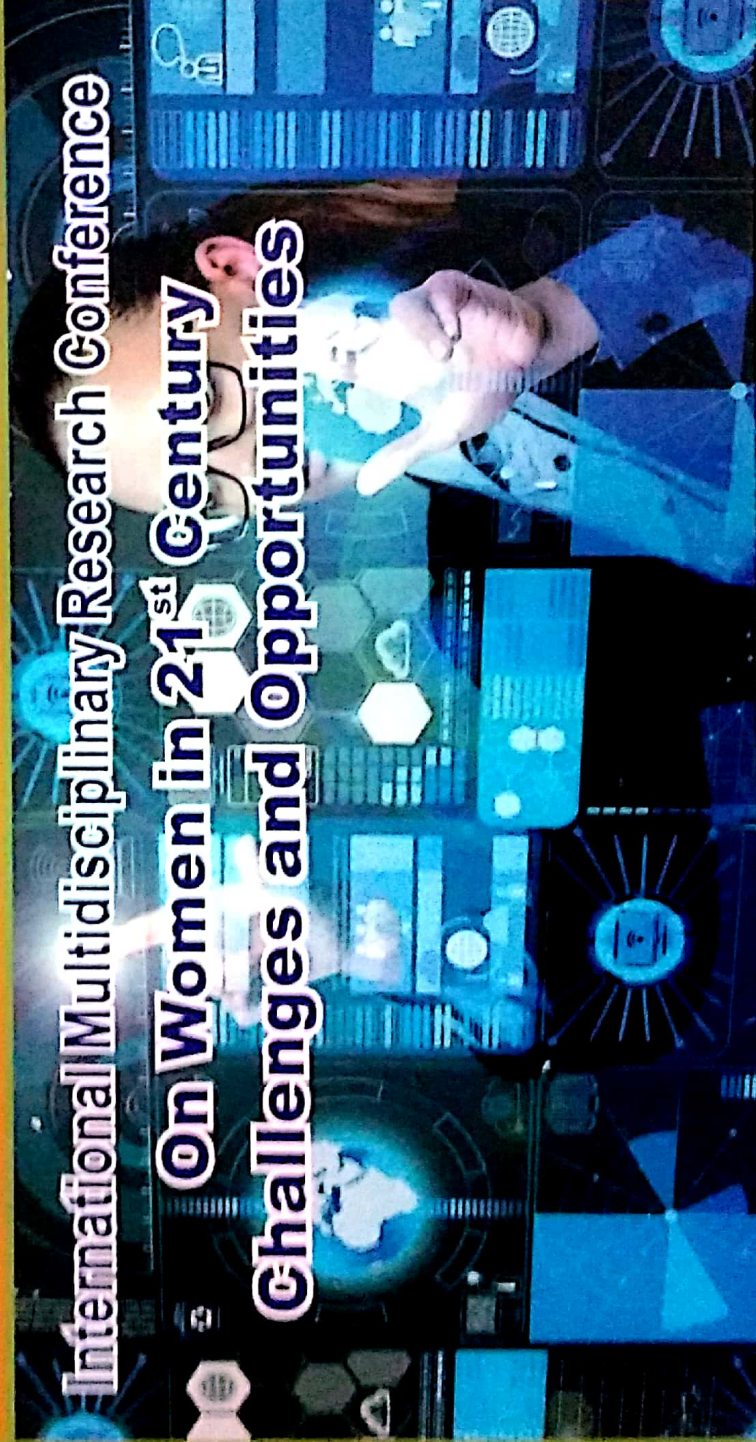
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**On Women in 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
Challenges and Opportunities**



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- SAUDI ARABIA
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### Women Role Constituent Assembly

The Centre for Women's Development Studies' 2018 calendar revolves around two women members of the constituent assembly - Dakshayani Velayudhan and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

The 15 women in the 299 member constituent assembly 18 calendar, the photographs were contributed by Meera Velayudhan - the daughter of Dakshayani - and Manjari Mehta, whose grandmother Vijaya Lakshmi was an eminent part of the assembly

Meera's mother was the first Dalit woman from Kerala to graduate from Madras University. In 1945, she was nominated to the Cochin Legislative Council that elected her to the constituent assembly. "That's the most important part about the members of the constituent assembly - the rich and diverse trajectories that existed," said Meera, whose mother played an active role in the assembly and spoke for making untouchability illegal.

Dakshayani, who features in the first six months of the CVIDS calendar, strongly opposed reservation or separate electorates and worked towards a vision of India free of caste or community barriers. She held that the assembly should offer the people a "new framework of life"

### Constitutional and International law obligations

The obligation to provide a level playing field in terms of opportunities finds its place both in the constitution as well as in international law obligations.

In addition to the aspirations expressed in the preamble of our constitution, Article 39A says the state must ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reasons of economic or other disabilities. In addition to this, Article 46 imposes a duty on the state to protect weaker sections from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Article 14,

which established the right to equality as a fundamental right, inevitably mandates for equal opportunity as is reflected in Article 15(3).

### National Parties field the women in 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Party wise statistics

This dismal state of affairs is replicated even at national and state levels, where there is no reservation for women candidates. During the 16th Lok Sabha elections, the largest party, the BJP, gave only 1428 tickets to women candidates, while the Congress gave 60 tickets. Similarly, other national parties like Bahujan Samaj Party fielded 21 women, Communist Party of India fielded six, Communist Party of India (Marxist) fielded 11 and Nationalist Congress Party fielded four.

Political parties led by woman leaders too have been guilty of continuing with the underrepresentation of women. That is because the women representation is low in Legislatures. In the last legislative assembly elections in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress gave only 43 tickets to women out of a total of 293 seats; in UP, Mayawati's BSP gave 21 tickets to women out of 403; in Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK then led by J. Jayalalithaa gave 29 out of 234 seats to women. Given the centrality of political parties in Indian politics it becomes immensely difficult for candidates to come independently. None of the 206 women candidates who contested the 16th Lok Sabha elections independently were able to win their seats.

India is a signatory to the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which obligates states, under Article 7, to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political as well as public life and, in particular, to ensure that women are as eligible as men to contest elections to all public bodies, that they have the 'right to participate in contributing to government policy and its implementation'

Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which is binding on signatory states including India, says that "every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.

Equal participation of men and women is not only a prerequisite for justice and democracy, it is an inevitable condition for harmonious human existence as well. Effective representation of women in decision-making structures will have a bearing on the policies, vision and

structure of institutions. And that's something everyone should be fighting for

### Some prominent women Leaders in the Indian political arena

#### British Raj

- Leader of a Major Party – Annie Besant – 1917
- Member of Provincial Legislative Assembly – Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy – 1921
- Provincial Minister – Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit – 1938
- Member of Central Legislature – Radhabai Subbarayan – 1937
- Member of National Defence Council – Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz – 1942
- Minister of Health – Rajkumari Amrit Kaur – 1946

#### Dominion and Republic of India

- Prime Minister – Indira Gandhi – 1966
- President – Pratibha Patil – 2007
- Minister of Finance – Indira Gandhi – 1970
- Minister of Home Affairs – Indira Gandhi – 1970
- Minister of External Affairs – Indira Gandhi – 1967
- Minister of Defence – Indira Gandhi – 1975
- Minister of Information and Broadcasting – Indira Gandhi – 1964
- Minister of Railways – Mamata Banerjee – 2009
- Speaker of the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Parliament) – Meira Kumar – 2009
- Leader of the Lok Sabha (Upper House of the Parliament) – Indira Gandhi – 1967
- Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Parliament) – Sonia Gandhi – 1999
- Ministry of Minority Affairs – Najma Heptullah – 2014
- Ministry of Women and Child Development – Mamata Banerjee – 2006
- **Andhra Pradesh**
- Governor – Sharada Mukherjee – 1977
- Home Minister of Andhra Pradesh – Sabita Indra Reddy
- **Assam**
- Chief Minister – Anwara Taimur 1980

#### Bihar

- Chief Minister – Rabri Devi – 1997

#### Delhi

- Mayor of Delhi – Aruna Asaf Ali – 1958
- Chief Minister – Sushma Swaraj – 1998

#### Gujarat

- Governor – Sharada Mukherjee – 1978

#### Himachal Pradesh

- Governors – Sheila Kaul – 1999

#### Karnataka

- Governor – V.S. Ramadevi – 1999

#### Keral

- Governor – Jothi Venkatasachalam – 1977

#### Madhya Pradesh

- Chief Minister – Uma Bharati – 2003

#### Maharashtra

- Governor – Vijayalakshmi Pandit – 1963

#### Orissa

- Chief Minister – Nandini Satpathy – 1972

#### Punjab

- Chief Minister – Rajinder Kaur Bhattal 1996

#### Rajasthan

- Chief Minister – Vasundhara Raje – 2003
- Governor – Pratibha Patil – 2004
- **Sonia Gandhi:**

She needs no introduction and she is a able and dynamic decision maker. The all-in-all of All India Congress, Sonia Gandhi's tenure as the Congress president has been the longest in its century-old history. She is also the chairperson of the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

- **Sushma Swaraj:**

Seven times Member of Parliament and three times Member of the Legislative Assembly, Sushma Swaraj, the BJP leader, is now the Union Minister of External Affairs of India in 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha. She is the second woman to hold this position after Indira Gandhi.

- **Vasundhara Raje Scindia:**

Rajasthan's first woman Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje Scindia is one of the most powerful female politicians in India. Vasundhara Raje was introduced to active politics by her mother Vijayraje Scindia, who was a prominent BJP leader. Vasundhara was elected to the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly in 1995.

- **Ambika Soni:**

Ambika Soni has served as the Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Currently a Member of Parliament, Soni represents the state of Punjab in the Rajya Sabha. She was introduced to the Congress party by Indira Gandhi in 1969. She is also an old family acquaintance of the Gandhi family.

- **Uma Bharti**  
The sanyasin has come a long way. She played a prominent role in Ayodhya movement. From being the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh to Hubli riot case, Uma Bharti has been everywhere.
- **Rabri Devi**  
Rabri Devi was the first woman CM of Bihar. She is Lalu Prasad Yadav's wife. She lasted three terms as the Chief Minister.
- **Mehbooba Mufti Sayeed**  
Mehbooba Mufti Sayeed is the president of the Jammu & Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party. She is the daughter of former Home minister of India and Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. Mehbooba is one of the few female politicians from Kashmir who is recognized across all India. Presently she is the chief minister of J&K.
- **Dr. Daggubati Purandharieswari**  
Dr. Daggubati Purandharieswari is an Indian politician from the state of Andhra Pradesh. She is currently the Minister of State for Commerce and Industry and Minister for Human Resource.
- **Brinda Karat**  
The wife of CPI-M General Secretary Prakash Karat and the woman's voice of the stodgy Communist Party of India-Marxist, Brinda Karat, resigned from the party's central committee once because she felt that women were not given due representation, thus proving her commitment to the cause of the weaker sex.
- **Mamata Banerjee**  
The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee has proved that patience pays ultimately. As the first woman Chief Minister of West Bengal, one of her first decisions was to return 400 acres of land to Singur farmers. She has also been credited to solving the longstanding "Gorkhaland Problem" by setting up the Gorkhaland Autonomous.
- **Sheila Dixit**  
The fact that Sheila Dixit has served as Delhi's Chief Minister since 1998 speaks volumes about her clout in Indian politics. She has been handling the barbs of the opposition and discord within her party with amazing dexterity. Although under scanner for being unable to control crime in the capital, Dixit's contribution in making Delhi metro a reality and controlling pollution by making CNG the norm for heavy vehicles, cannot be forgotten.
- **J Jayalalithaa f 15**
- Called Puratchi Thalaivi or Amma by her supporters, J Jayalalithaa, is the cult figure who has ruined the

hopes of the scam-hit DMK and its allies by winning the Tamil Nadu polls by a sweeping majority.

- **Dr Kiran Bedi**

Dr Kiran Bedi is the first woman in India to have joined the officer ranks of Indian Police Service. She served in it for 35 years and moved up to the highest rank, as Director General, Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), Government of India. Dr Bedi served as Police Advisor to the Secretary General in United Nations, in the Department of Peace Keeping Operations in New York. Assumed the Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Pondicherry on 29th May, 2016

### Women parliament in Vijayawada

The three-day National Women's Parliament, which is the first of its kind is being organised by **Andhra Pradesh** Legislative Assembly with the theme of 'Empowering Women — Strengthening Democracy', began on Friday i.e., 10/02/2017 in the state capital region Amaravati.

"One of the objectives of NWP is to make young girls realise their potential and make them aware of the canvas where they can leave their footprints. Our endeavour is to enhance the network between eminent women and girl students to enable them to take leadership roles," the Speaker added.

The vision of NWP is to enable and encourage social, political and economic empowerment of women in all strata of the society.

Buddhist spiritual leader Dalai Lama, Union Ministers M Venkaiah Naidu and P Ashok Gajapati Raju, AP Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Puducherry Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi, Bangladesh Parliament Speaker Shirin Chaudhury, Gandhian Ela Bhatt, actress Manisha Koirala and many other dignitaries attended the inaugural event at Pavitra Sangamam here.

"The conclave will be a common platform for women from diverse backgrounds like politics, arts and culture, sports, education, industry, media, cinema, judiciary and social sector to share their knowledge and research in the area of women's social, economic and political empowerment."

### Women Reservation in Local Bodies

In order to ensure adequate representation of women in local bodies, parliament passed the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in 1993, reserving one-third of the seats in all local bodies for women. In addition, some legislative bodies, like Bihar and Delhi, Punjab have reserved more than one-third of the total seats for



women. Notwithstanding the object and purpose of the above-mentioned amendments, there has hardly been any improvement on the ground. This was reflected in the recently-held local body elections in Mumbai and Delhi.

Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar are some of the states that brought in 50 percent reservation for women in local bodies much before constitutional amendment demanded it to be implemented in the whole country.

"Reservation for women in panchayats will facilitate more women to enter public sphere and it will empower them and strengthen country's parliamentary democracy at the grass-roots level."

The 73rd and 74th Amendments passed in 1993, which introduced panchayats and municipalities in the Constitution, reserve one-third of seats for women in these bodies. The Constitution also provides for reservation of seats in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their number in the population. However, the Constitution makes no provision for reserving seats for women in Parliament and the state legislatures.

### Women's Reservation Bill

Women's Reservation Bill was first introduced in Parliament in 1996 by the H D Deve Gowda government but no government has passed it yet. The current version of the bill, the 108th Amendment, seeks to reserve 33 per cent of all seats in governing bodies at the Centre, State and Local level. For reservation in the Lok Sabha, one-third of all constituencies will be reserved for women on a rotation basis, such that a constituency will be reserved for one general election and not reserved for the following two elections.

According to [prsindia.org](http://prsindia.org), a similar bill was introduced in 1996, and examined by a Joint Committee on the Constitution (Eighty First Amendment) Bill, 1996 (Chairperson: Smt Geeta Mukherjee). Whereas many of its recommendations have been included in the current Bill, recommendations on reservations for OBCs and in the upper Houses have not been included.

### Highlights of the Women's Reservation Bill

The Constitution (108 Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies.

The allocation of reserved seats shall be determined by such authority as prescribed by Parliament.

One-third of the total number of seats reserved for SC/ST shall be reserved for women of those groups in the Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies.

Reserved seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the state or union territory.

Reservation of seats for women shall cease to exist 15 years after the commencement of this Amendment Act

### Progress in Parliament so far

The Rajya Sabha passed the bill on March 9, 2010. However, the Lok Sabha never voted on the bill. The bill lapsed after the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha in 2014. The bill has polarised the political class whenever attempts were made to introduce it later. Not only has it faced resistance from the national parties, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress and the Left, but also from regional outfits.

Many leaders across the political spectrum believe that such a law will give an advantage to women who are better educated and come from upper castes. Leaders like RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav and former Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav have opposed the bill bitterly and have also demanded that the quantum of reservation must be less than 33.33 per cent and also that the quota must include reservation for women from minorities and OBCs.

However, in September this year, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to introduce the bill passed in the Lok Sabha by taking advantage of the BJP's majority in the House. In the present Lok Sabha, out of 545 members, only 60 are women, i.e just 11 per cent.

Out of these, 69.7 per cent have relatives who are already in politics, reports [lokniti.org](http://lokniti.org). However, many in the ruling BJP believe that passage of Women's Reservation Bill can boost its prospects ahead of the upcoming 2019 General Elections.

### Indian women political Empowerment position in the world

The figures on the representation of women in parliament reveal an appalling state of affairs. According to a study conducted by Inter-Parliamentary Union, India ranks 149th in a list of 193 countries in terms of women's representation in the lower or single house of parliament (Lok Sabha, in the case of India) as of July 1, 2017.

The average percentage of women's representation globally stands at about 22%, whereas in case of India it is a mere 11.8%. Countries like Rwanda, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Fiji and Ghana rank higher than India. In South Asia, Nepal (48), Afghanistan (54), Pakistan (90) and Bangladesh (92) rank much higher than India. Even in the Rajya Sabha, the representation of women stands at a meagre 11.1%.

