

# A Critical Analysis on Women Participation in Modern-Day Indian Politics

Amit Kumar<sup>1\*</sup>, Prof. Somesh Dhamija<sup>2</sup> and Dr. Aruna Dhamija<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India; amit.kumar@gla.ac.in

<sup>2</sup>Head-Management (UG), Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India; somesh.dhamija@gla.ac.in

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India; aruna.dhamija@gla.ac.in

## Abstract

Women participation in politics has always been an issue concerning modern-day political experts. Traditionally, they played second-fiddle to their male counterparts for no faults of theirs. Even the most-advanced nation, the oldest democracy of the world, namely United States of America (USA), recognized their right to vote after lots of struggle. It is yet to have its first lady President (though it may change in the upcoming Presidential Election of 2016 what with Hillary Clinton claiming the nomination of the Dems). The reason for the same is not very hard to fathom despite the advances made in almost every field. The scenario is similar across every nation in the world. India is no different to the same. Political activities and their relationship with women's participation is something which has not been discussed to great extent in the Indian context, much like other democracies. The general election of 2014 defied this to an extent and acted as a breaking ground for women participation. They registered their presence in line with the male voters. The authors of this research paper would present their finding in this regard, duly supported by secondary data.

**Keywords:** Election, Women Participation, Women Representation

## 1. Introduction

The general election of 2014 saw the formation of the Sixteenth Lok Sabha riding on the largest election exercise ever. As per the report of the Election Commission (EC), 834 million Indian were eligible to cast their vote. Out of this humungous number, an equally impressive 553 million exercised their voting franchise. This election was historic in many aspects. This research paper would throw light on the participation and representation of women in this whole exercise and how it has shaped up with the passage of time as previous elections took place.

What adds even more credibility to the numbers mentioned above is the aspect that the last general election was also testimony to the highest turnout of voters (67.7%) since the first general election took place in 1952, even better than the polling percentage of 64% which was witnessed in the general election of 1984-85,

an election held in the emotionally charged environment in the aftermath of assassination of Late Indira Gandhi. This becomes even more striking when one considers the polling percentage of the 2009 election which stood at 57.6%. The difference of voter turnout percentage between the two election is close to 10% and that too when 714 million were eligible for voting in the 2009 election. To score the point further, more than 140 million voters voted in the 2014 general election as compared to the 2009 festival of democracy. When one considers that between the two general elections, a 100 million addition happened in the eligible electoral-base of the country; the extra 40 million voters do make a compelling case for analysis about the same as they could be either youth or female or even both of them together, read young female voters. This is heartening indeed and shows the shift in the voting pattern of the female population. Further, the addition of 100 million electorate as mentioned above

\* Author for correspondence

was on account of the first-time voters and if the trend is to go by, a substantial number of these would have been the female voters. Many experts believe that propelled by the high octane poll campaign by leaders of all the parties, women and youth registered their highest-ever show in a general election till date. The 2014 general election was indeed unique in terms of dizzying propaganda and it could have lead to turnout of voters in droves.

## 2. Women and Nation-Building: The Indian Story

Women have played an instrumental in the nation-building process of India since ancient times. It has been no lesser than men although the same has rarely been acknowledged by her male counterpart. They have always been sidelined from various domains thereby relegating them to the four walls of the house. Even when one talks about such advanced nations like USA and United Kingdom (UK), equality of opportunity and rights were not found no matter how strong their case was. In modern times, however, the women folk came forward demanding rights for themselves, expressing their thoughts and in the process registering their presence in the public domain, which was the forte of men-folk till then. Even their importance in terms of shaping the destiny of a country has been since appreciated and applauded. Nothing proves this better than their participation during various movements, be it freedom, cultural, social or else, during which they have matched men step-for-step and made a mark for themselves.

The above lines are true for the Indian women as much as they are for women from any part of the world. The role played by them during the independence struggle as well as emancipation of society and empowerment of the downtrodden is second to none. Such names as Rani Laxmi Bai, Annie Besant, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Aruan Asaf Ali, Kasturba Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Madam Bhikaji Cama, Kamala Nehru, Durga Bai Deshmukh, Savitribai Phule, Vijaylaxmi Pandit, Sucheta Kriplani, Padamja Naidu, Raj Kumari Amrat Kaur, Sister Nivedita, Amrita Shergil, Mahadevi Verma, Margaret Nobel, Kalpana Chawla, Mother Teresa, Indira Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj, Meira Kumar, Nazma Heptulla, Sonia Gandhi, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, J Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati, Nirupama Rao, Vasundara Raje Scindia, Sheila

Dixit, Kiran Bedi, Brinda Karat, Uma Bharti, Smriti Irani, Maneka Gandhi, Medha Patkar are few names who have served the cause of India on every possible front be it politics, administration, social work, emancipation of the downtrodden, literature, cultural uprising, upliftment of the weak, putting India on world map, representing the country on international platforms, the list is endless. USA is yet to have its first female president whereas India already had a female prime minister, president, vice-president, speaker, chairperson of the ruling coalition which goes on to prove that women have played as much part in the nation-building of India as men. They have been as effective at running a government, a party, a coalition as they have been in serving the cause of humanity. Many of them are able administrators who have single-handedly changed the face of their respective departments or organizations.

Then there are the likes of Chanda Kochhar, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Naina Lal Kidwai, Aruna Jayanthi, Shikha Sharma, Arundati Bhattacharya, Nita Ambani, Pia Singh, Roshani Nadar, and Ashni Biyani who have showed the business acumen of Indian women and proved their mettle in the boardroom with same aplomb as their male counterparts. Aishwarya Rai Bachhan, Sushmita Sen, Priyanka Chopra, Kiran Rao, Meghna Gulzar, Farah Khan, Zoya Akhtar, Ekta Kapoor, Deepika Padukone have taken the Indian name to the famed world of glitz and glamour globally.

The recent Olympic performances of Sakshi Malik and P V Sindhu were the only saving grace of 118-strong Indian contingent. In the past too, K Malleshwari, Saina Nehwal, Sania Mirza, Mitali Raj have won accolades for India at international events such as Olympics and World Tournaments.

Not only this, the Indian women have played a crucial role in the nation building-process since ancient times and their role has only increased in the recent years. They have made their presence felt in every domain of public life and have carved a niche for themselves and have come to be recognized as a force to reckon with. There are states like Goa where the females are as treated on par with the males be it in terms of their rights on ancestral properties, right to education or else. In some areas of the southern states, it is the female who is the head of the family instead of the male (hence the term matriarch instead of patriarch).

### 3. Success Stories of Indian Women

There is countless success stories associated with the Indian women in the ancient, medieval as well as modern times. These have paved way for the current generation who look up to them as a source of inspiration.

Politics and administration are areas which traditionally were associated with men. However, many women folks such as Late Indira Gandhi proved their mettle by holding the post of prime minister. Sonia Gandhi, her daughter-in-law, is serving as the current president of United Progressive Alliance, whose principal party is Indian National Congress. Presently, Sushma Swaraj who is serving as the Minister for External Affairs has won plaudits for her style of functioning and the work done by her in the domain of foreign affairs which has been appreciated even by her critics. Likewise, country's most-famous woman IPS Kiran Bedi has proved her worth as an able administrator time and again and is currently serving Puducherry as a representative of Indian government. Nirupama Rao is the current Indian ambassador to USA, the most powerful country in the world.

Banking and finance are fields which are traditionally considered to be male bastions. Not anymore. Arundati Bhattacharya leads the largest banking brand in the country, namely State Bank of India (SBI). Naina Lal Kidwai heads the India operations of one of the largest banks in the world, *Hongkong* and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). Chanda Kochhar is at the helm of affairs of the largest private bank in the country, Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India Bank (ICICIA) bank. Shiksha Sharma heads the third-largest private bank of the country, Axis Bank. Aruna Jayanthi is the head of India operations of Capgemini. Then there is Chitra Ramakrishna who is the joint-director of *National Stock Exchange* (NSE), one of the largest security exchange boards in the world.

Then there are the business women like Pia Singh who looks after the operations of *Delhi Land and Finance* (DLF), which has carved a niche in the real-estate sector, in the capacity of director. Roshani Nadar is a member of the board of HCL, the leading IT and ITeS provider in India. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw is the founder of Biocon Ltd., one of the first bio-pharmaceutical companies of India. Indu Jain is the former chairman of Times Group, one of the largest media conglomerate in the country. Neelam Dhawan currently serves as the MD of HP-India.

Sulajja Firodia Motwani is the JMD of Kinetic Motors. Savitri Jindal, the chairperson emeritus of O P Jindal Group, is the richest women in India, her individual wealth pegged at 4.9 billion dollars. Ekta Kapoor is the mogul of Indian TV and is a successful producer as well as directors. Actors like Priyanka Chopra and Deepika Padukone have made a mark by playing mainstream roles on American TV and Hollywood thereby bringing praise for Indian talent globally. One organization which identified the power of women and harnessed to great extent is the organization behind the brand Lijjat Papad and the credit for the same goes to its president Jyoti Nayak. This cooperative did wonders for the women. Same is the case with the cooperative Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd (GCMMF) which is famous for its Amul brand. This company encouraged village folks, particularly women, to pool in their milk produce eventually resulting in major success.

Kalpna Chawla created history by going into space. Additionally, there have been such women as Sunita Williams of Indian descendant, who have made a mark for themselves despite being in a foreign nation. Likewise, Indira Nooyi, the global CEO of Pepsico is one of the luminaries to have made a mark at the global level.

Project Shakti run by *Hindustan Unilever Limited* (HUL) has been able to provide a platform to rural women thus empowering them to self-employment. The Ujwala scheme of Indian government has been a step in the right 12nation-building process. Beti bachao-beti padhao (save girl child-educate girl child) initiative of the government has helped create awareness about the significance of girl child in the family. Bharatiya Mahila Bank caters exclusively to the financial issues pertaining to women. Also, the performance of women as Sarpanch of village panchayats has been quite successful in many parts of the country.

India is considered to be the software-power nation of the world as it caters to the IT and ITeS requirement of firms from around the globe. In this industry, as much as 30% of the workforce comprises of women. On the other extreme is the field of agriculture and allied activities in the rural belt where almost 90% of the work is taken care with the help of women-folks.

### 4. Politics and Female Participation

The role played by women in politics has been

instrumental. She participated in the freedom struggle and made her voice heard to the oppressors. They were to be seen matching the steps of men during every movement which ultimately led to the usurping of the British Empire. There were many notable names as Rani Lakshmi Bai, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kriplani, Bhikaji Cama, and a host of others who were to be seen as saviors of Indian freedom struggle.

Even in the independent India, the role of women has been second to none. The first Indian to serve as the president of the United Nations General Assembly was a woman, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit. The first woman to become the chief minister of any Indian state was Sucheta Kriplani who graced this position in Uttar Pradesh. Indira Gandhi was instrumental in shaping the destiny of the country on the virtue of her position as the prime minister. The first Indian woman to be bestowed with the prestigious Nobel Prize was Mother Teresa who was accorded this prestigious award for peace. India has seen female President as well when Pratibha Patil held the post. The prestigious post of the Speaker of Lok Sabha has been adorned by Meira Kumar. In the contemporary political scenario, Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee and Mehbooba Mufti are serving the states of TamilNadu, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir respectively. In the past, Mayawati, Sheila Dikshit, Anandiben Patel has served the states of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Gujarat respectively. Not only this, there have been numerous ministers in the rank of cabinet and state who have served the central and state governments. In the later part of this research paper, female ministers who were part of the 2014 central government have been mentioned along with their portfolio.

Many states of the country such as Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tripura and Rajasthan have realized the quota of 50% for women in panchayats which is well reflected in the composition of these grass-root bodies. Entitlement of women towards one-third reservation in local political bodies has been another area which highlights their growing significance in the political scheme of the country.

EC data shows that more women turned up at polling booths than men although the difference in voting

numbers between the two genders was marginal. Ranjana Kumari, Director - Center for Social Research, asserted that the data gives two clear indications. "First, they (women) are now more aware about their rights and want to exercise it and second, they are angry," she said. This is quite an astute observation on her part. They wanted to make their voice heard and what better way than making your presence felt by turning out in droves and registering your vote! They were discontent because their issues were not even considered by the political parties, whether incumbent or opposition and they wanted to change it. Although there was gradual increase in the recognition which women were being given in the overall scheme of the political scenario, still it was not enough to comfort them about their role in the politics of the nation.

## 5. Last General Election: Trends and Female Voters

Figure 1 depicts the trends which were characteristic of the Lok Sabha election of 2014. The enhanced female participation had an interesting tale of its own. If there were such developed states as Delhi and Goa in the top with regard to registering a substantial rise in it, there were such so-called "backward" states as Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh which also came on top whilst indicating the increased trends in women participation. This goes on to prove the fact that whether it was from the advanced states or from the otherwise lesser cousins of those states, women made their presence felt in terms of turning up for voting. The women voters wanted to make sure that they are as much part of mainstream politics as their male counterparts. The urge to be recognized as a 'force to reckon with' was prevalent as much with the big city female voters as was with the small town ones. The participation of the female voter saw ascendancy in 22 of the states during the Lok Sabha election as compared to 2009.

## 6. The Female Participation

Women in India were granted the suffrage (right to vote in public elections) in 1921 by Madras government for the first time but only to those who owned property as per the British government. Post-independence, this was extended to all in 1950 irrespective of any distinction, the



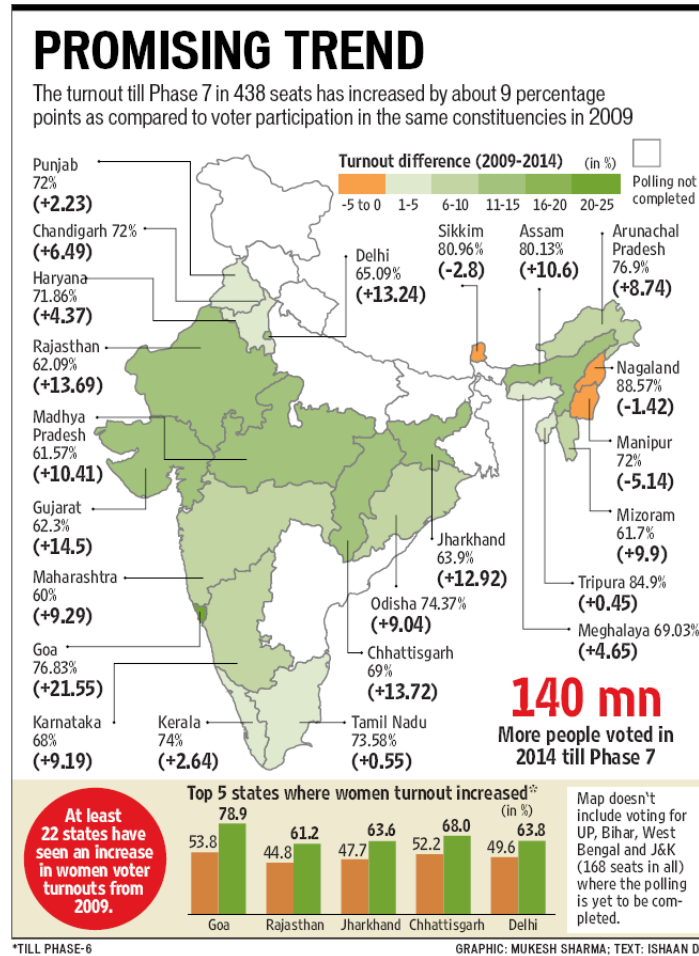


Figure 1. Voter Turnout till Phase 7, General Election, 2014.

Source : [http://www.hindustantimes.com/Images/popup/2014/5/02\\_05\\_14-metro10.gif](http://www.hindustantimes.com/Images/popup/2014/5/02_05_14-metro10.gif)

only criterion being that of age. This is as per the article 326 of our constitution.

The 1962 Lok Sabha election saw a gap of 16.7% between the male and female voters. This was reduced to 4.4% in the election of 2009. This further narrowed down in the 2014 electoral exercise. Although the voter turnout has been almost steady (in the range of 50 to 60%) in the past 50 years or so in the national elections, it is the state assembly elections which have witnessed an enhanced female participation and there have been instances when the women have outnumbered the men. Uttar Pradesh, the most-populous state of India, saw women turnout more than men turnout during the last state assembly election which took place in 2012. Women outnumbered the men 60.29% to 58.82%. Increased participation is being witnessed in both rich and poor states of India. When it comes to the gender ratio of voters, it has shown

drastic improvement over period of time from being 715 females for every 1000 males during the 1960s era; it has shown a marked improvement of 883 females for the same 1000 males during the 2000s. The improved security arrangements at the polling booths have also been cited a reason for this change<sup>11</sup>.

When it comes to the 2014 general election, 397 million females were eligible to vote. Out of this, two-third did exercise their franchise. Compared to this, 260 million male voters turned up. This number corresponded with the 437 million males who were eligible to vote. On the top of it, women outnumbered men in 16 of the 29 states during this mammoth electoral exercise. The female voter made her presence felt big time. They went all the way in the quest to be heard by the decision-makers and influence the policy-making

## 7. The Women Representation

On lines with the all-time high achieved in terms of female participation, the female contenders also showed a sharp rise. A record number of 668 females contested the Lok Sabha election. The buck doesn't stop there. The number of selected female MPs in the last general election was again a new high of 62. It is 11-12% of the total strength of the house (543), still it was a step in the right direction of giving women representatives the due which they deserved. The diagram shown below gives the percentage-wise representation of women in the preceding lok sabhas and as can be seen from the Table 1, the last 4-5 general elections have seen a consistent increase in the number of female MPs which is a healthy trend and has played a crucial role in improving the gender divide in Lok Sabha, the highest law making body in the country.

## 8. State-Wise Female MPs

When one talks about the state-wise female MPs selected during the last general election, Uttar Pradesh comes at the top with a count of 13 followed closely by West Bengal which sent 10 of its MPs from the female category. The count of UP is no surprise on the fact that it sends the maximum number of MPs to the lower house of parliament, namely 80. Almost all the major states of the country sent female MPs to the parliament irrespective of whether those states were considered economically backward or advanced. Though the proportion of female MPs left a lot to desire, still it was a step in the right direction thereby providing the half-population of the country the voice which represented it. Many of the female MPs have been vocal about the causes they support and believe in and women empowerment, child education, abolition of child labor, improved gender ratio, sensitization towards various women issues, hygiene, etc. are the topics which they support thus bringing a welcome change to the rhetoric normally followed in the parliament.

## 9. Female Nominations by Various Political Outfits

Almost every party gave tickets to females in the lead-up to the general election. In Many instances, the female

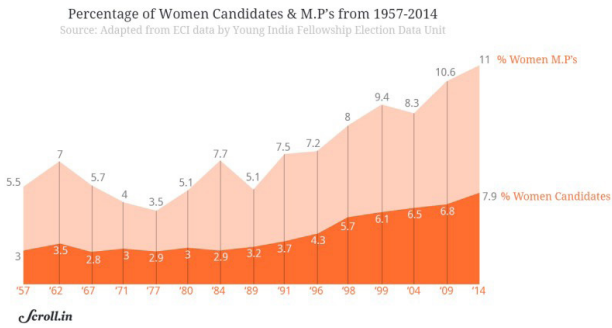
candidates were a healthy proportion of the male ones. The highest number of such nominations was fielded by INC at 59 as against 462 male nominations whereas AAP fielded 58 female candidates as compared to 428 male candidates. BJP paved way for 38 female nominations as against 501 male nominations. The highlight of this nomination was Shiv Sena, whose stronghold is in Maharashtra. It fielded 94 female candidates as compared to 58 male candidates for the lok sabha election, the highest amongst all the parties.

Next, if we compare the female candidates fielded by the two major parties, namely INC and BJP, since 1984, it reveals some interesting trends. INC has always fielded more female candidates than BJP and this includes the Lok Sabha election of 2014 as well. It was only in 2009 that both these parties fielded an equal number of 43 candidates. However, the number of female candidates fielded by BJP rose consistently since 1984. It was only in the 2014 election that the count of fielded female candidates came down from 43 in 2009 to 38 in 2014.

Next in line is the party-wise analysis of female candidates as fielded by the major political outfits of the nation and their winning proportion? Top of the line was BJP. 29 of its female candidates succeeded in becoming MPs. Next in line was TMC. The party sent 10 of its MPs in the lower house who were females. Congress was able to send four female MPs. Half of the female candidates (4 out of 8) of Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) got the nod from the electorates in Tamil Nadu. Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), Democratic Action (AD) and *Lok Janshakti Party* (LJP) fielded just one female candidate and that too won.

## 10. Women Representation: Then and Now

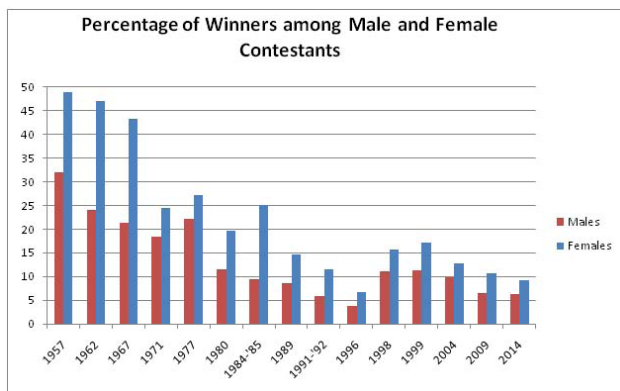
When one talks about female representation in Lok Sabha since the first general election took place till the last one, it has increased in terms of both number and percentage as shown in Table 1. 3% candidates of the elected candidates were women in the first Lok Sabha. This trend went upon almost with every general election, both as percentage of candidates as well as the MPs selected. The notable exceptions in terms of percentage of female MPs occurred in the lok sabha elections of 1977, 1989 and 2004.



**Table 1.** Percentage of Women Candidates & MPs from 1957-2014

Source : [https://s3-ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/scrollstorage/1401681726-652\\_23.jpeg](https://s3-ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/scrollstorage/1401681726-652_23.jpeg)

Next, if we look at the percentage of winners among male and female contestants over the past general elections, as shown in Table 2, an interesting point which comes to the fore is the fact that during the first few lok sabha elections, the number of contestants, either male or female was not much higher as a result of which winning percentage for both the genders was on the higher side (as high as 45+% for female candidates in the 1957 general election). There was a consistent downfall in the winning percentage of female candidates (as well as male candidates) on the virtue of more nominees vying for the 543 seats. It slid below 10% in the last general election. Next, a trend which could be spotted from Table 2 is the fact that the winning percentage of male candidates had always been less as compared to the female candidate on the virtue of more men contesting the election in proportion to the women.



**Table 2.** Percentage of Winners among Male and Female Contestants

Source : <http://pib.nic.in/archieve/others/2014/may/images/img2014052108.jpg>

## 11. Rise of the Female Minister

In all, seven female ministers were inducted in the cabinet of the government formed after the historic 2014 election. They were

- Smt. Sushma Swaraj – Cabinet Minister for External Affairs .
- Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani – Cabinet Minister for Human Resource Development (now shifted to the Textile Ministry).
- Dr. Najma A. Heptulla – Cabinet Minister for Minority Affairs.
- Smt. Maneka Sanjay Gandhi – Cabinet Minister for Women and Child Development.
- Smt. Harsimrat Kaur Badal – Cabinet Minister for Food Processing Industries.
- Sushri Uma Bharati – Cabinet Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.
- Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman – Minister of State for Commerce and Industry (Independent Charge) and Finance Corporate Affairs.

As can be seen, it is no mean feat to have women at such powerful posts and making them the public face of the gender-balance which this government successfully achieved by projecting them as icons of women empowerment and making their presence felt at a never-before scales. The prime posts which were held by these women ministers were an indication of how the modern women have successfully balanced personal roles with professional commitments.

## 12. Conclusion

To conclude one can say that the role of Indian women in the nation-building process of India has been as important as the men. They have played a crucial role in every possible manner be it politics, social work, welfare of the downtrodden, supporting a cause, running business, handling administration, literature, you name it. This research paper highlighted how they have gone about shaping the destiny of this country and their participation and representation in various political exercises.

The outcome of the Lok Sabha election of 2014 was unprecedented in many ways. One such aspect was the rise of the female, as a voter and as a representative. The

female electorate made its presence count by coming out in droves to vote thereby registering the highest female turnout, both in terms of absolute number and percentage. Not only this, the first-time female voters showed lot of interest in exercising their franchise and took it upon themselves to send the message that the half-population of the country wants the other half to listen to it. The female voter set many new trends and broke old ones.

The participation as well as representation was good enough though they could have been better but as they say, 'Well begun is half done'. Further, the newly-elected central government showed its commitment towards the female gender by allocating key portfolios to as many as seven female MPs. This went on to prove the rising stature of female, both as a participant and elected representative in the Indian democracy. In essence, this research paper talked about the various interesting trends and patterns which formed during this election and how they were different from the predecessors.

## References

---

1. Bridges, F., Appel, L., and Grossklags, J. (2012). Young adults' online participation behaviors: *An exploratory study of web 2.0 use for political engagement*. *Information Polity*, 17, 163-176 doi: 10.3233/IP-2012-0271.
2. Chopra, S., (2014). *The Big Connect: Politics in the Age of Social Media*, Random House India.
3. Enemaku, O.S., (2003). "The Role of Political Parties in A Democracy: A Communication Perspective" in *UNILAG Communication Review*, 1.
4. Steger, W.P., Kelly, S.Q., and Wrighton, J.M., (2006). 'Campaigns and Political Marketing in Political Science Context', *Journal of Political Marketing*, 5(1/2), 1-10.
5. Stromback, J. (2007). 'Political Marketing and Professionalized Campaigning', *Journal of Political Marketing*, 6(2/3), 49-68.
6. <http://eciresults.nic.in/>
7. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/women-youth-power-push-up-turnout-by-140-million-over-2009/story-YTpic0acgqbhFhxkyUA24O.html>
8. <http://her.yourstory.com/women-ministers-narendra-mo-di-india-government-0527>
9. Raj .S. R., (Jul-Dec 2015). Is The Era of Coalitional Governance over in India. Retrieved from :<http://scroll.in/article/666049/everything-you-need-to-know-about-lok-sabha-verdict-2014-explained-in-40-charts>
10. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\\_political\\_participation\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_political_participation_in_India)