

## **Abstract of the Thesis**

**Title of the Thesis-** Empowerment through Political Representation - Patterns of Reservation for Women in India

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Women form half of the Indian population and electorate. Yet, the data of women members from the lower to upper levels of political representative bodies reveal that representation of women is grossly inadequate as they are far less in numbers and in proportion than men in these political bodies. The low status of women as a political 'decision-maker' is a global phenomenon. Political representation for women is still low not only in India, but also in the political systems of most of the developed countries, including the United States of America, which is the oldest democracy in the world. Empowerment of women in all spheres of life has been a long-standing need and demand of women. Political empowerment of women is considered especially essential for the advancement of women and the creation of a gender-equal society. Though increasing numbers of women began to actively engage with the issues concerning the welfare and development of women, representation of women in political and decision-making bodies like the Parliament, State Legislatures and local Self-Government institutions such as Panchayats and Municipalities remained low for long. Even though women played a major role in the freedom movement, their representation in the first Lok Sabha (1952-57), the lower House of the Indian Parliament, was just 4.4 percent. In the sixteenth Lok Sabha elected in 2014, their representation rose to 11.2 percent, which is an increase only of 6.8 percent over the first Lok Sabha. In between, during the period of the sixth Lok Sabha (1977-80), their representation was as low as 3.5 percent. It was in recognition of the low representation of women in political and decision-making bodies that the Seventy-Third and Seventy-fourth Amendments of the Constitution passed by the Indian Parliament in 1992 provided for 33 percent reservation for women in the positions of elected members and Chairmanships of the Panchayat Raj Institutions, which has

three levels, namely, village or gram panchayats, block-level panchayats or parishads or samitis and district-level Panchayats or Zilla Parishads, and the Municipal bodies, which has also got three levels, namely, Nagar Panchayats, Municipal Councils and Municipal Corporations. The present study attempts to trace the representation of Indian women from the upper to lower levels of the Indian political system. An attempt is made to understand the status of women as policy-makers and decision-takers by analyzing the changes in the political representation of women at different levels, namely, the Lok Sabha, State Legislatures & Local Self-Governments.

The study tries to comprehend the various factors that contribute to the low representation of women at the national, State and local levels. This study gives separate focus on the rural and urban women politicians. It also makes an attempt to understand the views and thinking of male politicians regarding the role of women as decision-makers in the political area and how they approach women's reservation. There is a strong view that the males both in rural and urban areas are yet to start understanding the meaning and importance of political empowerment of women. They need to respect and encourage women as political representatives, and also give their suggestions to increase women's participation in politics. It is a general perception among many that, women members and chairpersons in local level political bodies do not take decisions on their own, but act as proxies of the males in their family, be it her husband or father or any other male kin. The present research also delves into this aspect to see the actual realities of this situation and understand the underlying socio-economic and cultural factors. The study also looks into the relationship between women's empowerment & their political representation, to see how political representation of women leads to general empowerment of women and vice-versa.