

---

## **UNIT 8    WOMEN IN LEGISLATURES**

---

### **Structure**

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Learning Outcomes
- 8.3 History of Legislatures
- 8.4 Role of Women in Legislatures
- 8.5 Question of Representation
- 8.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.7 Unit End Questions
- 8.8 References
- 8.9 Suggested Readings

---

### **8.1    INTRODUCTION**

---

In this unit, we will study the role of women in legislatures. It explores the trajectory of the legislatures. The gendered nature of politics is central to this unit. Questions of patriarchy related to politics are being questioned across the globe. Patriarchy also demands an exclusive space for women. This unit will probe the role of women in legislatures. In other words, it analyses how women engage with the questions of politics. It reflects on the various dimensions of the political representation and participation of women. It also discusses the problems faced by women in the field of politics. Broadly, it revisits the aforementioned questions through some of the theoretical and empirical perspectives that emerged in the context of women in legislatures.

---

### **8.2    LEARNING OUTCOMES**

---

After reading this Unit, you will be able to;

- Understand the trajectory of the debates related to legislatures;
- Explore the role of the women in legislatures and
- Map the problems faced by the women in the field of politics.

---

### **8.3    HISTORY OF LEGISLATURES**

---

The legislature is central to every modern government. It is observed that “the legislative authority forms the major premise; the judiciary the minor; and the executive the conclusion” (Gilchrist, cited in Mahajan,2005). Before engaging with the history of the legislatures and the women in legislatures, one has to explore the debates on the political socialization and social bases of politics. Political socialization is deployed to refer to the continuation of political values across generations (Hyman, cited in Mukherjee,2015:71). It is analyzed as the process that creates spaces for political orientation and

pattern of behavior (Easton, cited in Mukherjee,2015:71). It also explained as the process of maintenance and transformation of political cultures. It is the induction of the individuals into politics as well as determining their orientation towards political objects (Almond and Powel, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:71). It is analyzed that political socialization “unquestionably meets the criterion of significance in as much as it is important to feature of every past, present and future body politic. Every community transmits with varying degrees of success the mature practices of its culture to the immature” (Laawell, cited in Renshon,1977:46). Political socialization is described as a process “to train or develop individuals that they become well-functioning members of the political society (Siegel, cited in Mukherjee,2015:70). There are direct and indirect political socialization and the family, schools, family, peer groups, religious institutions, political parties and media act as the agents of the political socialization (Mukherjee,2015:72-82). In addition to political socialization, the impact of the social bases of politics also needs to be explored to understand the complex dimensions of political representation and gender relations.

The social base of politics also needs to be understood before discussing the issues related to women in legislatures. It is observed that “the fundamental pillars of society are money, authority and knowledge. Money indicates its resources and property; authority is the legitimate recognition bestowed upon society to use power for organizing itself; and with knowledge, a society prepares for the future. The social bases of politics need to be understood in this background” (Ghosh,2015:25). Politics is also about “the transformative capacity of the social agents, agencies and institutions” (Held and Leftwich, cited in Ghosh,2015:26). Politics is also defined as the realm where “fundamental conflicts are fought out and social possibilities determined” (Shapiro, cited in Ghosh,2015:26). Thus, politics is grounded in social bases and it is carried out through culture, institutions and ideas (Ghosh,20015:32-39). Political culture too plays a vital role in the issues related to political representation. The idea of political culture stands for “specifically political orientations towards the political systems and its various parts and attitudes towards the role of the self in the system” (Almond and Verba, cited in Shaw,2015:56). It is observed that “there is an ordered subjective realm of politics which gives meaning to the policy, discipline to institutions and social relevance to individual acts” (Berger, cited in Shaw,2015:56). Culture, language and caste in Indian politics thus play a major role (Shaw,2015:65). The relations of social stratification, social change and political participation have to be explored before delving into the complexities related to the debates on the women in legislatures. Class, racial, ethnic, religious, caste and gender stratification are widely discussed social stratification. These questions are central to the debates on social stratification in the context of political sociology (Biswas,2015:110-123). Gender stratification needs to be understood in the case of women in legislatures. The stratification based on gender legitimizes the hierarchy of men over women. The fluid nature of gender also needs to be understood while discussing the larger dimensions of gender and politics. It is further noted that sexism and misogyny constrain the social mobility of women. (Biswas,2015:120-123). Demographic, economic and psychological factors determine the political participation of women as

well (Guha,2015:178-179). Thus, the political process becomes complicated due to the concoction of social, emotional, identitarian and community-related larger issues.

The political process in India has a distinct tenor. It is observed that “the claim is that parliament as institutions not only represent different constituencies, identity groups and interests within a nation but also that they mirror society and that nation at large. (Their) authority and legitimacy are derived from this claim of representativeness, which in turn has to be underpinned by institutional norms and performed by its members-legislators, the representatives -and accepted by its citizens” (Johnson and Rai, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:4). The idea of citizenship thus is linked to many social and political factors and related transformations. The question of gender relations has a particular space within such political articulations. It is noted that “the roles that women and men play dramatize the political moment, the discursive power as well as the gendered social order operative in specific historical contexts and in doing so reveal for us the underlying social tensions which point to the palimpsestic nature of political institutions”(Rai, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:15). There are issues related to inclusion, policy-making and politics of appeasement. Political representation through affirmative action has created lots of debates in India. For instance, Dakshayani Velayudhan, the first and only Dalit woman to be elected to the constituent assembly argued that “As long as the Scheduled Castes, or the Harijans or by whatever name they may be called, are economic slaves of other people, there is no meaning demanding either separate electorates or joint electorates or any other kind of electorate with this kind of percentage. Personally speaking, I am not in favor of any kind of reservation in any place whatsoever” (Velayudahn, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:9). Social movements of the marginalized sections have created political spaces based on their assertions as well. However, such assertions related to the political representations need to be analyzed in the context of the pan-Indian perspectives and political assertions related to the issues of the women in legislatures. The next section discusses the various shades related to women in legislatures.

---

## **8.4 ROLE OF WOMEN IN LEGISLATURES**

---

The role of women in legislatures needs to be understood in the larger social and political developments. The status of Indian women, for Shirin Rai and Carole Spary, was central to the digressive and political mobilization of Indian nationalism. Indian nationalists and the British deployed the imagination of the Indian women (Sangari and Vaid, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:37). It further led to the pruning of the gendered discourse and related social transformation. Colonizers positioned themselves as the ones who save the brown women from brown men (Spivak, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:37). The women's question became key to the project of the colonizers. It also impacted the nationalist's interest in the struggles of women. Middle-class women, for Rai and Spari, in the late nineteenth century exhorted organizations and social groups related to social reform. For

instance, the Ladies Society in Calcutta was formed by Swarnakumari Devi, sister of Rabindranath Tagore in the year 1882. It was formed to provide education and skills to empower widows. It was also formed to kindle the economic autonomy of poor women. Arya Mahila Samag in Pune was formed by Ramabai Saraswati. A women's wing of the Indian National Congress, Bharat Mahila Parishad was formed in the year 1905. It is noted that social reform was the first political interest of the women who organized the women around the issues of patriarchy, education, self-reliance etc. It is also noted that leaders such as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Sarojini Naidu resisted the patriarchal stereotypes related to women. In addition to these political and social transformations, the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was formed in the year 1927 (Rai and Spari, 2019:38-39). It is also noted that "...the Women's Indian Association had been established in 1917 when Indian women had first demanded the vote (Liddle and Rai, cited in Rai and Spari, 2019:39). Trajectory of the nationalist movement and the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms due to the democratic struggles in India led to the the Government of India Act of 1919 and it was made on the Minto-Morley reforms started in 1909. It is noted that "this act provided for a Central Legislature and bicameral system with two houses-the Council of State and Indian Legislative Assembly". However, it is critiqued that "seventy per cent of the members in the provincial and legislative councils now came to be elected by less than 3 per cent of the Indian population, comprising mainly propertied males... Women and the so-called "depressed" classes were silently disadvantaged in the matter of representation" (Jayal and Chiriyankandath, cited in Rai and Spari, 2019:42). It is also analyzed that women's movement between 1917 and 1945 addressed the issues of political rights for women and reform in the personal laws (Basu, cited in Rai and Spari, 2019:42). Irish women suffragists such as Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins and Dorothy Jinarajadasa founded The Women's Indian Association in the year 1917. It is noted that "they were joined by Malati Patwardhan, Ammu Swaminathan and Mrs Ambujammal . WIA was ...the first all-India women's association with the clear objective of securing voting rights for women" (Basu, cited in Rai and Spari, 2019:42). Twenty-three women signed a memorandum from different regions from India demanded votes for women equally like that of men was submitted to Montague and Chelmsford. Sarajini Naidu played a vital role in sending a delegation of women to the secretary of state of India in England in the year 1917 for the franchise for women. It is noted that "...the demand was ignored in the secretary's state report and rejected in the subsequent franchise report, and also excluded from the 1919 Government of India Act. It did, however, allow future Indian provincial legislatures to grant or refuse the franchise to women; many did, making it possible within a short span of time for women to be represented, in however limited a manner, on par with men" (Rai and Spari, 2019:42). Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya contested from Mangalore in Madras Legislative Council elections in the year 1926. Kamaladevi lost the seat by a narrow margin (Rai and Spari, 2019:43). It is further noted that "The Government of India Act of 1935 introduced quotas for a range of minorities and a series of separate electorates for differing religious communities to ensure their presence within the legislatures... The Act also increased the number of enfranchised women and

removed some of the previous qualifications to gain a franchise. All women over 21 could vote provided they fulfilled the qualification of property and education. Women had to wait until after the independence to get a universal adult franchise (Basu, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:47). Mainstream parties also mobilized women under their parties and Indian women's movements engaged with the larger questions of state practice, citizenship and law. It is critiqued that the women's movement questioned the gendered parties but it could not change those parties based on their critiques. There were contradictions as well. It is criticized that "while there was discussion of quotas for women in the constituent assembly, this was rejected by women members representing the AIWS as demanding for women struggling for equality with men in all spheres of life(Rai and Spari,2019:52).

The social composition and political legacy of the women leaders is core to the political history of India. It is noted that "some women MPs from across the ideological spectrum have closely associated with the institution of Parliament due to their leadership, contribution and enduring parliamentary careers-Najma Heptulla(six terms), as the long-serving Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha(and longest-serving Rajya Sabha MP among both men and women), Meira Kumar(five terms) and Sumitra Mahajan(eight terms) as the first and second women speakers of the Lok Sabha respectively, and long-serving-serving MPs such as Vijaya Raje-Scindia(eight terms), Mamata Banerjee(seven terms) and Maneka Gandhi(seven terms) (Rai and Spari,2019:10). There are interlinkages between social stratification, gender and caste. It is analyzed that "others, however, including some with substantial parliamentary careers, have been less remembered due to a lack of memorialization of women's presence in the Indian parliament, particularly of female politicians from lower caste and regional or religious minority backgrounds and with the passage of time, many have faded from public memory" (Rai and Spari,2019:10). At the same time, women from diverse communities are marginalized from the political process in multiple ways. It is observed that "they hardly form a majority of the membership and do not very often participate in parliamentary debates to take up visible institutional roles, or indeed sustain their participation over time" (Rai and Spari,2019:3-5). Gendered political spaces impact the mobility of the women leaders in various ways. It is analyzed that "...gender as an axis of power (not just in India but in all societies and politics) is particularly fraught within the context of democratic institutions and practice. Given the claims that it makes for representation as well as the democratic practice where all are formally considered equal ... Parliament is particularly productive space to study these contradictions" (Rai and Spari,2019:4).

However, the entry of women into political arenas has to be understood in the context of reservation for women. It is analyzed that women's reservation in the legislature will challenge the patriarchal culture of Indian politics and the passage of the constitution amendment bill to introduce 33% of women in Parliament and state assemblies in the Rajya Sabha are described as a progressive and substantive step towards the political empowerment of women in India (Bose,2010:10-12). The entry and exclusion of women leaders have to be analyzed against the backdrop of the ups and downs

related to their political representation. It is noted that “The 2019 election saw a historic rise in the number of women elected to the lower house of Parliament. Seventy-eight women were welcomed to Parliament for the first time since independence when only 22 women members were part of the house of 543 members during the first Lok Sabha”(Hussain,2022:52). These facts reflect how they gradually became part of the political systems. A study conducted on the women legislatures from social and economically well of background with politically economic backgrounds from Uttar Pradesh from the first election in 1952 to 1996 has been low due to their low numerical status(Pundir and Pitam,2002). At the same time, there are contradictions related to political representation and consequences. It is analyzed that increasing the number of seats in the Lok Sabha in connection with the amending of the Constitution may impact the spirit of the 91st amendment and National Population policy (2000) negatively and it may result in the freezing of the seats until 2026(Retnakumar and Irudaya,2005)It is also observed that women's vote share has increased in the last 50 years and it is linked to women empowerment. However, there are issues in analyzing such political transformation within the confined spaces of political institutions. Therefore, it is argued that there is “... a sharp decline in gender bias in voting over time, across all states, including the traditionally backward states. This decline is solely driven by an increase in women's participation while male turnout remains unchanged over time. This is a positive and encouraging trend in Indian politics. Particularly, as this improvement does not seem to be brought about by a deliberate top-down policy action but largely due to voluntary participation of women voters in elections, that is the reason, we term this phenomenon as one of self-empowerment (Kapoor and Shamika,2014:67). This unit only focuses at some of the political changes in the case of the women leaders and women’s interventions in the context of politics. The following section revisit some of the debates on the problems faced by women representatives.

---

## **8.5 PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES**

---

The various problems faced by women representatives have to be explored in the context of larger political and institutional Parliament, for Rai and Spari, are political institutions. They are institutions with formal rules and informal norms. It is much discussed in the perspectives on politics. It is analysed as an institutional performance. It recalibrates the dominant and social-political relations (Rai and Spari,2019:12). It is analysed that “in terms of Pitkin's (1967) political triptych, parliament matters descriptively (representing constituents), substantively (making laws) and symbolically (representing democratic politics)(Pitkin, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:12). The functioning of parliament, for Rai and Spari, can be deployed to judge the nature of the democracy in India. It helps to analyze the health of the democracy. For instance, the majority of male politicians and the dearth of women politicians show the problems with the nature of democracy. Parliaments are analyzed as undifferentiated institutions that are influenced by sexuality, (dis)ability, gender, race and class. It is studied that “Parliaments are critically embedded

in the political economy of modern state systems and create spectacles of, as well as represent, a particular set of structures-in-dominance” (Rai, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:12). The nature of the disciplinary approaches may also help to understand the historical background of the perspectives on the women in politics and legislatures.

As a subfield, for Rai and Spari, Parliamentary studies are central to bringing out typologies of legislative institutions. Socialization and behavioral aspects of parliamentarians are also discussed by in the fundamental debates on political socialization. Scholars have already studied the prominence of functionalist, and behaviouralist approaches and rational choice in the debates on parliaments. According to Rai and Spari, there are three forms of post-cold War era-new institutionalism. They are sociological, rational choice and historical institutionalism. They all emphasize on the rules, conventions, norms and procedures that determine the nature of institutions. It is further analyzed that feminist institutionalism demonstrates the operation of gender norms within institutions. It also shows how institutions provide spaces for gendered norms (Krook and Mackay, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:13). It is observed that institutionalism helps to look at “(a) institutional rules about gender (b) institutional rules which have gendered effects (but are not specifically about gender) (c) the gendered actors who work with rules; and (d) gendered policy outcomes which in turn allows...to inquire into how gendered organization of political life make difference (Gains and Lowndes, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:13). What are impediments that block the political mobility of women leaders?

Women in parliament, for Rai and Spari, have to undergo the complexities of recruitment. They have struggled to gain access to such exclusive patriarchal political spaces. They have to survive in such antagonistic spaces as well. It is analyzed that they are not only mediated by gender but also by caste, class, religion and ethnicity. The political space is also a gendered establishment (Rai and Spari,2019:11). Gendered political spaces also are caught between the varying, patriarchal nature of the political institutions. It is noted that “...just over 11 per cent of MPs in India’s lower house of Parliament are women; the world average is 23.6 per cent and the regional average (Asia ) is 19.7 per cent. This puts India’s rank at 145 out of 193 in the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s League for Women’s Representation in Parliament (as of 1st December 2017) and also affects India’s rank 131, in the UNDP Gender Inequality Index(2017)(Rai and Spari,2019:9). It is further observed that “the increase in the women’s representation in the Indian political system has therefore been relatively small and slow. All the 333 individual women MPs ever elected to the Lok Sabha, from the 1st to the 16th, would not fill a single Lok Sabha not even two-thirds, which further underscores the historical dominance of male MPs. Rather than increasingly slowly over time, the number of women MP’s in the upper house-the Rajya Sabha -from 1952 to now has fluctuated between 5 and 12 per cent with a slightly higher representation of women in the 1980s compared to the 1990s(Rai and Spari,2019:9).

**Check Your Progress-1**

- 1) *Write in your own words about the history of legislatures.*
  
- 2) *Write in brief the role of women in legislatures .*

---

## 8.5 QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION

---

Representation in democracy is also linked to gender equality (Rai and Spari,2019:4) Critique to the representation shows its epistemic and pragmatic questions. It is analyzed that “we need to move away from the idea that representation is first and foremost a given, factual product of elections, rather than a precarious and curious sort of claim about a dynamic relationship”(Saward, cited in Rai and Spari,2019:6). There are more aspects that operate behind the political representation of women. It is critiqued that “the exclusion of women from political power has been more marked than their exclusion from 'productive' work or even property rights. The contemporary era is no different”(Omvedt, cited in EPW Engage 2019). The political entry of women has to undergo various social and political phases. It is observed that “This structural exclusion of women takes the form of both formal as well as informal exclusion. Beginning at home, women are expected to exhibit appropriate behavior by staying away from politics because of the threat of violence against them in the public domain. Structural inequality exists in the form of political parties acting as gatekeepers to keep women out of parliamentary politics and overlooking them while distributing tickets for winnable seats and membership of various parliamentary committees. It can therefore be argued that familial set-up, kinship, and the socio-economic and cultural conditions in which the socialization of women takes place has a firm bearing on how women perceive politics as a career”(Hussain,2022:58). Women across the globe are struggling for the equality across the globe. It is observed that “To be truly representative, the voices of women from different constituencies and backgrounds are needed, as they make space for a different mode of politics and new sensibilities. In addition to “lived experience,” what is needed is a belief in as well as the practice of values of democracy and feminism, and the posing of questions to forces that spread aggressive masculinity and militancy. A mere lip service to feminism or using it to enhance one’s image will not be of much help in ensuring change in attitudes. While the increased presence of women can affect attitudinal changes, the effort should also be to resist enacting the same power culture to survive in what is considered to be the “hardcore man’s domain.” (EPW editorial,2019).Women thus have to



struggle hard to achieve social and political equality.

---

## 8.6 LET US SUM UP

---

In this unit, you have studied the various dimensions of the category of the legislature. It discusses the ideas of political socialization, political culture, and political participation and the social bases of politics as its historical emergence. Those debates are analyzed in the context of the questions of gender and women in legislation. It also probes the debates on the problems of the women in legislature. Broadly, it tries to discuss the gendered understanding of the issues related to women in the legislature.

---

## 8.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

---

- 1) Analyze the issues of women in the legislature.
- 2) Do you think gendered inequality exists in the context of women in politics? Substantiate your arguments with suitable examples.

---

## 8.8 REFERENCES

---

- Almond ,Gabriel and Sydney Verba (1963 )*The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* , Little:Brown Boston
- Almond,Gabriel A and G.B.Powell(1966) *Comparative Politics:A Developmental Approach*,Boston:Little Brown
- Almond,Gabriel and Sydney Verba(1989) (edited) *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Sage.
- Biswas,Payal Bose(2015) “The Social Stratification”, In PradipBasu(edited) *Political Sociology*, Kolkata:Setu Prakashani,pp.110-123
- Bose,Prasenjit(2010) “Women’s reservation in legislature”, *Economic and Political Weekly*,Vol.45,Issue no.14,10-12
- Easton, David(1968) “The Theoretical Relevance of Political Socialization”,*Canadian Journal of Political Science*,Vol.1,No.2,pp.145-146
- EPW Engage(2019) “Where are the women in Indian Politics?”  
<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/where-are-women-indian-politics>
- EPW Editorial (2010) “Women’s Representation in Politics”  
<https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/18/editorials/edit-2.html>
- Ghosh, Sujay (2015) “Social Bases of Politics “,In,PradipBasu(edited) *Political Sociology*, Kolkata:Setu Prakashani,pp.25-41
- Guha, Maitrayee(2015) “Political Participation”, In,PradipBasu(edited) *Political Sociology*, Kolkata:Setu-Prakashani pp.168-181
- Husain,Sadia (2022) “Performance of Women in Parliament A Quantitative Study of the Questions Asked by Women Members in Lok Sabha (1999–2019)” *Economic and Political Weekly* ,Vol.57,Issue

No.31.pp.52-59

- Hyman, H H (1959) *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behaviour*, New York: Free Press
- Kapoor, Mudit and Shamika Ravi (2014) "Women voters in Indian Democracy: A Silent Revolution", *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. XLIX, No. 12, pp. 63-67
- Johnson, Rachel E and Shirin M Rai (2015) "Introducing Democracy in Practice: Ceremony and Ritual", In, Shirin M Rai and Rachel E Johnson (edited) *Democracy in Practice*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Kumar, Retna and Irudaya Rajan (2005) "Women's Reservation Bill", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, Issue. 39, pp. 4190-4192
- Mahajan, V.D (2005) *Political Theory*, New Delhi: S Chand & Company
- Mukherjee, Siuli (2015) "Political Socialization: Nature, Types and Agencies", In, Pradip Basu (edited) *Political Sociology*, Kolkata: Setu Prakashani, pp. 83-70
- Pundir, J K and Pitam Singh (2002) "Women legislators in UP", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No. 37, Issue number 10, pp. 923-928
- Rai, Shirin M (2010) "Analyzing ceremony and ritual in parliament", *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 16(3), pp. 284-97.
- Rai, Shirin and Carole Spary (2019) *Performing Representation: Women Members in the Indian Parliament*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press
- Renshon, Stanley (1977) *Handbook of Political Socialization: Theory and Research*
- Saward, Michael (2006) "The Representative claim", *Contemporary Political Theory*, 5(3) pp. 297-318.
- Shapiro, Ian (1999) *Democratic Justice*, New Haven: Yale University Press
- Sigel, Roberta (1965) *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Philadelphia, Vol. 361
- Shaw, Shilpa (2015) "Political Culture", Pradip Basu (edited) *Political Sociology*, Kolkata: Setu Prakashani, pp. 56-69

---

## 8.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

---

- Rai, Shirin M (2010) "Analyzing ceremony and ritual in parliament", *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 16(3), pp. 284-97.
- Rai, Shirin and Carole Spary (2019) *Performing Representation: Women Members in the Indian Parliament*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press
- Renshon, Stanley (1977) *Handbook of Political Socialization: Theory and Research*