

Gender and Politics

Dr. Arundhati Bhattacharyya

Professor, Department of Political Science, University of
Burdwan, Burdwan

Gender and politics studies the intersection between gender studies and political science. Gender and politics scholars are becoming important in the wider community of political science. They focus on the aspect that women were excluded as political actors. Women's underrepresentation needs to be corrected. The feminist political scientists were aware of the 'gendered' nature of political mechanisms and activities. The study of gender and politics is broad and impartial. It is diverse, rich and substantial in nature. "The presence of the 'critical mass' of women in the legislature expresses the legislative attention to women's issues" (Sarah Childs, Mona Lena Krook, 2016). The approach provides a platform to scientifically study the impacts of patriarchy on representation in various contexts. It is a field which also helps us to understand the reasons behind the less representation of women historically in formal and informal politics.

The present paper has provided a broader view of the relation between gender and politics. Gender and politics examines how gender shapes political institutions and actions, the processes by which the historical dominance of men in politics has aggravated the unequal power structure. Historically, gender has been the basic determinant of the manner in which resources were distributed, the ways the policies were set and the means of participation in decision-making. It has to be kept in mind that the interaction is intersectional.

The keynote lecture had been categorized into three segments: The Part I focusses on the concept of gender and politics. Part II concentrates on the role of the women members in the Indian Constituent Assembly and Part III delves into the role of Indian women in peacekeeping under the United Nations. The paper tries to show that the contribution of Indian women is very positive and they had well-grounded role, whether in the Constituent Assembly of India and in the United Nations peacekeeping force.

Part I

Gender plays a very important role in sketching the political landscape in the world, including India. Be it representation, policy making, reservation or governance, gender is applicable everywhere. Sustainable Development Goal 5 supports achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Gender and politics' area of study has broad scope. It studies the interaction between gender and formal and informal politics. It provides a platform to scientifically examine the impact of patriarchy on political participation and voting behaviour in different situations. This field helps us to understand the tools to understand the reasons behind less representation of women in politics. The whole idea of democracy and citizenship was centered on men. Historically, women were excluded from the positions of power. Their voice was suppressed. They were marginalised against in covert and overt forms. Since the 1970s, the concept of gender and women became significant. Traditionally, political participation of women was devalued and thought to be undesirable. Even now, according to Ranjana Kumari, physical presence in decision-making structures is still not the same for women like men. To Drude Dahlerup, more women in role models lead to greater encouragement of women to enter the political sphere.

S. Tharu and T. Niranjana have stated: "For all those who invoke gender.....'women' seems to stand in for the subject (agent, addressee, field of inquiry) of feminism itself.....". Again, in India, "women" as a category cannot be classified as they are very much influenced by other identities, like religion and caste (Menon, 2004). To get to understand the whole terrain of the subject is a difficult job. According to John H. Bayes, the subject tries to unmask the "male bias in political concepts and practices"; "adding women" to the current political structure which focuses on political representation and participation in the state and in reconceptualising the political framework (Bayes, 2012). Deborah Carr has observed that women prefer issues relating to the private space, instead of national defence and international relations. Women mostly remain outside national and international politics or are engaged in local politics. Women are 'risk-averse' than men, according to a section of the 'preferences' camp. Many also support the view that women remain out of politics due to their family responsibilities. Compared to men, women have less financial independence (Carr, 2008). There are certain issues that have kept women behind, but they have showed their mettle, wherever they are placed, whether as members of Indian Constituent Assembly or as peacekeepers in the daunting terrain.

Part II

India attained independence in 1947. The Makers in the Constituent Assembly were all stalwarts in their own ways. However, most of us are not aware that there were fifteen women Constitution Makers. They were equally important for the making of the Indian Constitution. Their number was small compared to the male members of the Constitution, but the women members had intellectual, moral and political influence. They did not have token presence in the

Constituent Assembly in India. They were freedom fighters, intellectuals, social reformers, lawyers, educators etc. They raised issues like equality, education, rights, reforms etc. The fifteen members in the Constituent Assembly stated that the disadvantages of history required the policy makers to provide greater opportunities for women. They reiterated the view that political independence is incomplete without “social emancipation” of women. The women members had knowledge about the realities of life. They had their voices heard among the great intellectual leaders in the Constituent Assembly. They asserted their voices in the debates in the Constituent Assembly, which became a precedent for future women leaders of India engaged in constitutional governance. The contribution of the women members laid the moral foundation for feminist jurisprudence in India.

The Constituent Assembly of India established equality in the public sphere. However, among the women members, there was difference of opinion regarding personal laws regarding marriage, divorce and inheritance. This led to a constitutional compromise. Personal laws were largely left untouched in the original Constitution of India, but gender equality was guaranteed as a Constitutional value (Shivani, 2025).

It was expected that Constituent Assembly of India would craft a democratic system, which would inspire India and other nations. The Constitution Framers in India were aware that the famous Western democracies like United States even did not include minority groups and women, so that an inclusive democratic structure can be created. Hansa Mehta supported “social, political and economic justice” in the making of the Indian Constitution, which would benefit all women. The fifteen women members supported public political life for women. These women Makers recognized the need to address the question of gender. Renuka Ray went a

step further in convincing other members of the Constituent Assembly to accept that equality provisions should be part of every personal law of every community. Renuka Ray's words were not taken seriously and she was turned down (Keating, 2007).

The fifteen Constituent Assembly women members in India had been lawyers, social reformers, freedom fighters and they were the ones who fought against the British and the male-dominated political framework. They were fifteen exceptional women members in the Indian Constituent Assembly. It is rather sad that it took so many years of India's independence that now their contributions are being praised and acknowledged. However, the positive aspect is that at least now their contributions are being acclaimed. They were stalwarts and India has been very lucky to have such progressive women as the Makers of the Indian Constitution. With other male members, they worked tirelessly to frame the Indian Constitution, which soon became a model for other Asian and African countries. The women members were, however, not members of the drafting Committee chaired by Dr B. R. Ambedkar, which would have strengthened their contribution. The women members of the Constituent Assembly were Ammu Swaminathan, Annie Mascarene, Begum Aizaz Rasul, Dakshayani Velayudhan, Durgabai Deshmukh, Hansa Jivraj Mehta, Kamla Chaudhry, Leela Roy, Malati Choudhury, Purnima Banerjee, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Renuka Ray, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani and Vijaylakshmi Pandit (Indulia, 2024). The most active women members in the Indian Constituent Assembly were all members of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC). Kamladevi Chattopadhyay, Hansa Mehta and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur were among the founding members of the AIWC. They regularly served in Standing Committees. Hansa

Mehta was the President of AIWC during her election to the Constituent Assembly while Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was a President more than once in the AIWC. Qudsia Aizaz Rasul was the Vice President of AIWC. Renuka Ray led the legal reform movement of AIWC (Chetan, 2023). Here are some of the contributions of the women framers of the Indian Constitution.

Srimati Ammu Swaminathan supported gender equality in the provisions of the Indian Constitution. She was the most vocal regarding rights of women, among all the women Constituent Assembly members. She was a social worker, who was very courageous. She was also a political leader. Ammu Swaminathan contributed to the setting up of the Women's India Association. She held up the reforms for succession, inheritance and marriage. She contributed in the debates in the Constituent Assembly regarding Part III and Part IV of the Indian Constitution.

Srimati Annie Mascarene contributed towards federalism and state integration. She was the representative of Travancore and Cochin Union. She supported the integration of the princely States. She was a lawyer. She supported and promoted the movement for independence of India.

Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul was a member of the Constituent Assembly. She was the only Muslim member who represented from a seat in the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council from a non-reserved seat in 1937. She supported secularism. She vehemently opposed minority reservation. She became the voice of the marginalised by contributing to their upliftment. She was also the supporter of inclusive national identity.

Srimati Dakshayani Velayudhan was also a member of the Constituent Assembly. She was the youngest among all of them. She was a Dalit member. She opposed untouchability

and was a staunch supporter of the rights of the marginalised communities. She stood for decentralisation of power in the governance structure of India.

Shrimati Durgabai Deshmukh promoted education of women, social welfare policies and social justice in the early days. She had significant part in leading and organising the Civil Disobedience Movement against the British. She was behind the bars, thrice. She was a staunch supporter for the rights of women. She also voiced her support for separate family courts in independent India, which was enacted in 1984, which was quite late after independence.

Shrimati Hansa Jivraj Mehta emphasized gender justice as part of core debates regarding the Constitution. She played an important role in drafting India's fundamental rights. She was a strong social activist. She founded the Desh Sevika Dal. She was a member of several sub-committees. Fundamental Rights' Sub-committee was a very important sub-committee, of which she was a member. She was a very important supporter for women's rights. In 1946, she was the President of All India Women's Conference (AIWC). It was during this time when she supported the Charter for Women's Rights and Duties. She also handed over the national flag to the Constituent Assembly.

Srimati Kamla Chaudhry had the background and quality of story writing in Hindi. Kamla Chaudhry was part of the Civil Disobedience Movement. She was behind the bars for a number of times. Girls in villages and backward areas were encouraged by her to educate themselves. Till 1952, she served in the Provincial government after India attained independence.

Leela Roy was a distinguished social worker and freedom fighter. She had the distinction of being the only woman who

was elected from Bengal in December 1946. But, soon she left. Her resignation was to protest the partition that was taking place in India. She spent her life in serving for the refugees, their rights and their rehabilitation.

Renuka Roy was elected from West Bengal. She contributed to the minority rights and rights of women. She also supported the legislature, which would have two houses. She vehemently supported the inheritance rights of women in the parental property. Renuka Roy stated a particular and unique fact that the women members opposed the reservation of seats for female population (Rajput & Thakkar, 2023). She forcefully observed that reservation of seats “was an impediment to our growth and an insult to our intelligence and capacity” (Ray, 1947).

Malati Chaudhury was an elected representative of the Constituent Assembly from Orissa. She had the distinction of being the President of Utkal Congress Pradesh Committee. She emphasized on adult education. Malati Chaudhury was imprisoned a number of times. Her contribution to the freedom movement has been appreciated.

Purnima Banerjee was part of the Satyagraha movement. She was the Secretary of the Allahabad Committee of the Indian National Congress. She was from the United Provinces. She encouraged the farmers and trade unions to join the Indian freedom movement. She was a good singer. So, she steered the chorus of “Jana Gana Mana,” when it was adopted for the first time as the National Anthem on 24th January, 1950.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur laid the foundation of the modern healthcare system in India. She is said to be the architect of the public health policy of India. She became the first Health Minister after India got independence. She also supported social and political rights of women. She represented

the United Provinces. She participated in the Quit India Movement. She led, guided and steered protests and processions against the enemies of India. In the Constituent Assembly, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was part of minority's sub-committee (Prasanna, 2023). She had identified the concept of 'constructive citizenship'. It is the 'daily exercise of these rights and duties and in the opportunities which the state affords to the individual of developing his or her faculties' (Chetan, 2023).

Srimati Sarojini Naidu was an ardent supporter of civil liberties. She supported the innate democratic values of India. She had earlier become the President of the Indian National Congress. She supported that ladies should join the struggle for independence against the British. After independence, she became the Governor of the United Province.

India attained independence was vocal regarding labour rights and reforms of governance. After Indian attained independence, she became the first woman Chief Minister of India. She formed the women's wing in the Indian National Congress in 1940. In the Constituent Assembly, she was elected from the United Provinces. She sang "Vande Mataram" in the Constituent Assembly.

Srimati Vijaylakshmi Pandit supported the role of India in global governance. she braced up for international cooperation. She was an ambassador, a diplomat, an activist, a minister etc. She was among the first leaders who had asked to summon a Constituent Assembly to draw up the Constitution of India. It was India's pride that after India's independence, she became the President of the United Nations' General Assembly. So, she was the first lady to be the President (Allen, 2025).

The women members made positive contributions. Rosabeth Moss Kanter in her writings has mentioned that when the

number of women increases in corporations, they may form groups. They may form close alliance, refusing to turn against each other. They will have identification of the feminist cause and with other women. It is expected that there will be greater cooperation among them on feminist issues (Sarah Childs, Mona Lena Krook, 2016). The women members of the Constituent Assembly did play a very constructive role. Their cause became more important than their identity. It is the pride of Indians that they got an opportunity and framed the Indian Constitution side by side with the men.

Nivedita Menon has remarked that the early feminist works in India in the 1960s has seen the law to become the source of equal rights and emancipation for women. The society was still steeped in patriarchal values and the law was the source of emancipation for women. Later, women's movements in India reacted to violence against women. They demanded legislative action. However, it has to be remembered that even when the law is equal, it is discriminatory against women because men and women are positioned hierarchically unequally in cultural, social and political aspects. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah held that women's groups believe that law is a total transformative instrument. The Female members of the Constituent Assembly tried to create a Constitution, which is equal and not discriminatory (Menon, 2004).

Quota has been prescribed in order to enhance women's representation in the constitutional bodies in many countries. The aim is broader wide-ranging, women-friendly policy change. Many individual women lobby for the support from the male politicians in their own political parties (Mahbub Alam Prodip, Helen Ware, 2023). But, the women Makers of the Constitution did not support reservation for women regarding seats in the Parliament and state assemblies.

These show that the fifteen women members had a mind of their own. They were very 'modern' in their outlook. They knew that the Indian Constitution would be a milestone in history. So, they tried their best to contribute in it, so that the future Indian would have a better India to live in.

Part III

The third part of the chapter deals with Indian women in the United Nations peacekeeping force. Peacekeeping is the most visible activity of the UN. The United Nations is not the only institution conducting peace operations. However, it is the single most important institution in the field. The Women, Peace and Security Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889 and 2242 reinforced that leadership of women is very necessary in peace efforts. Adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 formalised the demand for participation of women in peace and security (Sharma, 2025). The women can prevent conflict-ridden sexual violence. Accountability is a strategic necessity. Gender balanced team has broader stance and outlook. They can challenge the conservative traditions. Women play an important role in conflict resolution. India's has high standard of the selection process of the Indian peacekeepers. It is ensured that they lead the way in their actions and direction. The peacekeepers prove their worth at the assigned appointment (Goswami, 2025).

India is among the largest contributors of United Nations peacekeeping force. For the female police forces in the UN peacekeeping force, India follows Bangladesh and Nepal regarding its number of contribution (Freese, 2018). In 2023, India received the highest peacekeeping honour of the United Nations. Since the 1960s, Indian women had started serving in the Indian Armed Forces Medical Services. They

served in Congo. The UNSC Resolution 1325 of 2000 brought in a revolutionary change. The UN peacekeeping chief has remarked, "Indian women peacekeepers are redefining peacekeeping itself". India has deployed 20.45 per cent women among the military observers and staff officers. In 2007, India became the first country to deploy all women contingent to Liberia. In this manner, India made history. The police unit played an important role by providing 24 hour guard duty. They conducted night patrols in Monrovia. They had better access to the local community. They built better trust position. They are welcomed by the local population. Their humane approach helped in connecting with the local population. Once peacekeepers are accepted by the local population, their work becomes easy (Goswami, 2025). Many young girls in Liberia were inspired seeing the Indian women in the police contingent perform. They were inspired to join the security forces. The Indian women peace keeping force organized medical camps for Liberians. In 2016, the all-women unit left Liberia. Then, the Liberian President had observed that the Liberian women and girls were encouraged with the spirit of professionalism. The then Liberian President E. J. Sirleaf stated that the Indian police officers were "role models" who encouraged "Liberian women, imparting them in them the spirit of professionalism and encouraging them to join operations that protect the nation" (On, 2017).

For their feat in the United Nations peace keeping forces, in 2023, Major Radhika Sen received the Military Gender Advocate of the Year 2023. This reflected capability of Indian women in peace keeping endeavours under the United Nations. In February 2025, India had 150 women peacekeepers serving in six critical missions, like Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Lebanon, Golan Heights, Western Sahara and Abyei. In Abyei, Indian women went

for patrolling routes. They supported the marginalised groups. They tried to create a safe environment for women and children. They inspired local women to participate in peace processes. Women peacekeepers reduce conflict and confrontation. Indian women have the ability to understand the cultural sensitivities better. In Abyei (UNIFSA), the Deputy Commander of the Female Engagement Team led by Seema Gowdhar, strengthened community trust. The Under Secretary General of the Peace Keeping operations has appreciated the role of Indians “who have risen to new challenges & continue to participate meaningfully” in the efforts “to protect vulnerable civilians”.

However, the path of UN peacekeeping for women is not easy. It is very complex and it requires physical and mental strength to conduct those operations. There is asymmetric warfare for the women peacekeepers. They face armed combatants. There are security risks and logistic barriers for women peacekeepers. The peacekeepers face the challenges of crime and serious threats while they operate in dangerous areas. There is need for gendered approach for training, which should be taught to all peacekeepers. This will increase the overall capability of the soldiers, including the lady soldiers (Angela Alchin, Amanda Gouws, Lindy Heinecken, 2018).

Conclusion

While women want to make a difference in politics, they are stopped to do so in many situations (Sarah Childs, Mona Lena Krook, 2016). Women have still not achieved their due, according to many experts. In order to overcome worldwide injustices, “fast-track” approach of gender quotas can be adopted. There is a need to sensitise men that they need to share power with women for overall development. Women’s equal representation in the power elite would sooner or later

transform the power relationships in the public sphere and it would have its implications in the private sphere also. It would soon correct the social and economic inequalities. When there would be an equal number of men and women, it would gradually transform the patriarchal values that are rooted in discrimination and violence (Nanivadekar, 2010). By participating in the UN peacekeeping forces, Indian women have shown that they are being idealized by the local girls and community. The United Nations has also played the role of women peacekeepers. However, Nitin Pai and Sushant Singh in *Indian Express* have remarked that participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions is not commensurate to its result of obtaining permanent seat in the UNSC, on behalf of India.

References

Allen, S. (2025, 3 8). *Launching of the Book-The Life and Contributions of the Women Members of the Constituent Assembly*. Retrieved 1 28, 2026, from Ministry of Law and Justice: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2109365®=3&lang=2>

Angela Alchin, Amanda Gouws, Lindy Heineken. (2018). Making a Difference in Peacekeeping Operations: Voices of South African Women Peacekeepers. *African Security Review*, 27(1), 1-19.

Bayes, J. H. (2012). Gender and Politics: Mapping the Terrain in the Age of Empire. In J. H. Bayes, *Gender and Politics: The State of the Discipline* (pp. 135-174). Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Carr, D. (2008). Gender Politics. *Contexts*, 7(4), 58-59.

Chetan, A. (2023). *Founding Mothers of the Indian Republic: Gender Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Freese, J. J. (2018). *Women, Peace and Security: An Introduction*. Taylor and Francis.

Goswami, M. G. (2025). *75 Years of India's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping*. Pentagon Press.

Indulia, B. (2024, 11 26). *The Founding Mothers of the Indian Constitution: The 15 Women who shaped the Indian Republic* by Shireen Moti . Retrieved 1 28, 2026, from SCC Online Times: <https://www.sconline.com/blog/post/2024/11/26/the-founding-mothers-of-the-indian-constitution-the-15-women-that-shaped-the-indian-republic/>

Keating, C. (2007). Framing the Postcolonial Sexual Contract: Democracy, Fraternalism, and State Authority in India. *Hypatia*, 22(4), 130-145.

Mahbub Alam Prodip, Helen Ware. (2023). Role of Women's Organizations in Promoting Women's Political Participation in India and Bangladesh: A Historical Exploration. In E. V. Shabliy, D. Kurochkin, G. Y. Ayee, & T. Wall, *Gender Diversity and Inclusion: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives* (pp. 119-146). Lexington Books.

Menon, N. (2004). *Recovering Subversion: Feminist Politics Beyond the Law*. Permanent Black.

Nanivadekar, M. (2010). Overview: Women's Leadership in the Global Context. In K. O'Connor, *Gender and Women's Leadership: A Reference Handbook* (pp. 293-303). Sage.

On, I. (2017, 5 16). *India Calls for Raising Women's Role in Conflict Prevention and Resolution*. Retrieved from The Wire: <https://thewire.in/136174/raise-women's-role-conflict-prevention-resolution-india/>

Prasanna, S. (2023). *A Landmark on the Indian Constitution*. Institute of Legal Education.

Rajput, P., & Thakkar, U. (2023). *Women in State Politics in India: Missing in the Corridors of Power*. Routledge.

Ray, R. (1947). *Constituent Assembly Debates vol. 4*. Government of India.

Sarah Childs, Mona Lena Krook. (2016). Gender and Politics: The State of the Art. *Politics*, 26(1), 18-28.

Sharma, C. K. (2025). Women Peacekeepers in United Nations Peace Operations: Critical to Mitigate Gender-Based Violence in a Mission Area. *U.S.I. Journal*, CLV(639), 32-42.

Shivani, N. (2025). *Social Justice and Women under the Indian Constitution*. Chyren Publication.