

**Why Are Women Politically Active ?  
The Household, Public Space, and Political Participation in India**

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## Introduction

Throughout history, women have generally been restricted to the roles inside the house, those of wife and mother. While major changes have occurred in the status of women in some parts of the world in recent decades, norms that restrict women to the home are still powerful in defining the activities that are deemed appropriate for women—and they exclude political life, which by its very nature takes place in a public forum. In the contemporary world, some regimes have enforced this principle most severely (the Taliban in Afghanistan for example), but it is also a powerful factor in many other countries such as Japan (where there is still a strong expectation that when they marry, women will leave full time employment outside the home)<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the impact of home-centered norms for women is not restricted to non-Western countries. The norm that “Woman’s place is in the Home” prevailed in Western societies well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, as this article will demonstrate, it still bears significant influence. In so far as this norm is accepted, it has an inhibiting effect on women’s participation in politics.

In India, a large number of women do not work and by implication spend much of their time at home. In India in 1991 only 22 percent of the women were in the workforce as compared to 52 percent of the men (Gopalan and Shiva 2000, 119). These proportions are lower than in 1961 when 28 percent of the women were in the workforce (ibid.) Many of the women in 1991, however, worked in the unorganized sector and did not have regular employment. While 28 percent of the men were employed with ‘casual

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<sup>1</sup> See Brinton (1993) for a carefully done analysis of the career patterns of Japanese women. Even in the US there is mounting evidence that women are returning to the ‘home’ especially when children need to be raised.

wages' (i.e. did not have a permanent job) 39 percent of the women were casual wage employees (ibid.). In the organized sector, where there is greater job security, the proportion of women employed to total employment was only 16 percent in 1996 up from 11 percent in 1961 (Gopalan and Shiva 2000, 344). Given that few women are in the workforce, *pace* Burns et. al., women's participation in political life is fairly limited. While a large enough proportion of women turn out to vote and the gender gap in turnout has dropped to the single digits in the 1990s from almost 20 percent in 1971, women still are not well represented in political life that requires them to be active in the public sphere – such as membership in Parliament and in State Legislative Assemblies. To redress the low level of participation by women in deliberative bodies the government of India, in 1992, amended the constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments) that would reserve a third of the seats in the *Panchayats* (local governments) including the chairpersonship of these local bodies for women. As this constitutional amendment mandates that women be elected to local office it offers us a chance to assess which women become politically active?<sup>2</sup>

This constitutional amendment has indeed brought women into local bodies (Gopalan and Shiva 2000). But, which women have been able to take advantage of their new entitlements? Are all women even aware of the changes that have been introduced by the central government? Further, are there significant inter-community differences in the whether women are aware of these developments and how they respond to them? The answers to these questions are also interesting from a theoretical standpoint. Prominent arguments, both in India and elsewhere have suggested

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<sup>2</sup> See Nussbaum (2002) for a discussion of changes in the status of women in India.

that women's participation is generally lower either because they have been socialized differently (especially as far as marriage, motherhood, employment, and property ownership are concerned), or because they have fewer resources (Burns 1994, 1997a, 1997b). An implicit assumption in these sets of arguments is that the lower levels of participation of women are mostly the result of a process of socialization that leads them to think of political activity in a different way than men. In other words, women don't take as active a part in political life because they don't think (as autonomous actors) that political participation is important. An implication that follows from this line of reasoning is that women do not think that entering political life would necessarily be advantageous for if they did, as autonomous actors they would participate.

This paper suggests that a far less benign interpretation may account for the lower levels of political participation by women in India.<sup>3</sup> It observes that women are aware of the advantages that politics brings but are still not active participants in political life. This lower level of participation is not only a consequence of the resources that women possess but also a result of the place of a woman in the family. The paper argues that those women who can negotiate independent space for themselves within the household are more likely participants in political life. This factor, the paper will argue, retains its significance, even controlling for the societal and individual characteristics that explain participation such as a respondent's socio-economic status.

The paper begins by describing the position of women in public political life in India – particularly in their virtual absence in legislative bodies – at the state and at the

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<sup>3</sup> Basu (1992) and Ray (1999) offer pioneering studies of women's movements in India. Both of them note that political parties in India limit women's participation.

national level. What is surprising about the fact that there are very few women present in legislative bodies in the Indian states is that the proportion of women in the legislature remains even in those states where women have a better quality of life in terms of access to education and life expectancy such as Kerala. Since women in India have little place in the public arena they also express less faith in the political process. The second part of the paper discusses the findings from a survey - a six-state post-election survey conducted in 1996 and a survey of women in a northern Indian state that assesses women's involvement in political life subsequent to the adoption of the constitutional amendments guaranteeing women a third of all places in local bodies. The third part builds an argument to link the level of political activity by a woman to her relationship to the household. The next part analyses a survey designed specifically to assess which women are contesting elections for local bodies seven years after the amendment giving women guaranteed seats in local bodies was adopted by the national government. This section observes that most women, five years after the adoption of the amendment, women's participation in local politics remains below that of men and that women were not even aware of their new entitlements. Further, neither a woman's caste affiliation nor socialization could adequately account for their low level of awareness of the 73d amendment. Whether women knew of the amendment or not was largely determined by their levels of education, family income, and whether they belonged to a 'political family', i.e. someone in their family had partaken in electoral politics. The more important finding relates to which women choose to contest elections. Whether a woman contests local elections or not depends, in addition to socio-economic status, on her position in the household. Women who can negotiate independent space for themselves

are more likely to be active participants in the political process. The penultimate section of the paper examines whether these findings are unique to India or similar phenomenon can be detected in other parts of the world as well. The paper concludes with some caveats and suggestions for future research.

### 1. Women in the Indian Legislatures

As in other parts of the world few women in India find a place in the lower house of parliament – the *Lok Sabha* in India. The *Lok Sabha* in 2002 had 8.8 percent women placing India 82<sup>nd</sup> of the 180 countries for which data on women in the lower house is reported by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.<sup>4</sup> For national elections in India too there is a gender gap as in countries like the US. Women have also turned out at lower rates than men for elections to the *Lok Sabha*. As Table 1 indicates, in all elections in Independent India consistently women have consistently turned out to vote less than men though the gap has become lower in the last two decades. Similarly, the presence of women in parliament has remained remarkably stable at 5 percent until the 1990s when it averaged around 8 percent.

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<sup>4</sup> The data are available at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/clarify.htm>. India had more women in Parliament than Japan, Greece, Russia, and Sri Lanka and fewer than Rwanda, Uganda, the Philippines, Chile and Malaysia.

**Table 1**  
**Women's Representation in Parliament**  
 (Turnout differential and the percentage of women in the *Lok Sabha*)<sup>5</sup>

Year	Turnout Differential between men and women	Percent women in the <i>Lok Sabha</i>
1952		4.4
1957		5.4
1962	17	6.7
1967	11	5.9
1971	21	4.2
1977	11	3.4
1980	9	5.1
1984	10	7.9
1989	9	5.3
1991	10	7.9
1996	9	7.3
1998	8	7.9
1999	8	8.8

The smaller proportion of women who have a place in the *Lok Sabha* is replicated in the *Vidhan Sabhas* (state legislative assemblies) as well. Table 2 reports the number of women who are members of the legislative assemblies and it is clear that the proportion of women who find a place in these legislatures is low and remains in the single digits for almost every state. What is remarkable about this very low level of representation for women is that it occurs even in states like Kerala that have been hailed for their favorable treatment of gender concerns. While women indeed have achieved almost universal literacy in Kerala and are far more active in the labor force, their political presence in the legislative bodies is remarkably low. This difference, by itself, should give pause to arguments that seek to link women's education and employment to a place in public political life axiomatically.

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<sup>5</sup> Data available at the Election Commission of India web site <http://www.ec.gov.in/>

**Table 2**  
**Women's Participation and Representation in State Assemblies<sup>6</sup>**

State	Election Year	Turnout - Men	Turnout - Women	Percentage of Women in the State Legislature
Andhra Pradesh	1999	72.07%	66.24%	9
Arunachal Pradesh	1999	72.38%	73.58%	3
Assam	2001	77.23%	71.82%	8
Delhi	1998	50.89%	46.41%	13
Bihar	2000	70.71%	53.28%	6
Goa	2002	69.90%	68.23%	3
Gujarat	1998	63.34%	55.03%	2
Haryana	2000	69.97%	67.85%	4
Himachal Pradesh	1998	70.26%	72.21%	9
Jammu & Kashmir	1996	60.57%	46.08%	2
Karnataka/Mysore	1999	70.62%	64.58%	3
Kerala	2001	74.39%	70.67%	6
Madhya Pradesh	1998	66.45%	53.53%	8
Maharashtra	1999	63.62%	58.03%	4
Manipur	2002	90.09%	91.07%	2
Meghalaya	1998	74.20%	74.83%	5
Mizoram	1998	76.42%	76.22%	0
Nagaland	1998	80.65%	77.07%	0
Orissa	2000	63.63%	54.25%	9
Punjab	2002	65.92%	64.27%	7
Pondicherry	2001	69.51%	70.70%	0
Rajasthan	1998	67.45%	58.88%	7
Sikkim	1999	84.36%	79.10%	3
Tamil Nadu	2001	61.30%	56.83%	11
Tripura	1998	81.96%	79.65%	3
Uttar Pradesh	2002	56.75%	50.33%	6
Uttaranchal	2002	55.96%	52.89%	6
West Bengal	2001	77.83%	72.53%	9

Table 2 provides evidence that Indian electoral politics is still the domain of men.<sup>7</sup> Evidence from post election national surveys confirms this understanding. Table

<sup>6</sup> Data from the Election Commission of India at <http://www.ec.gov.in/>

<sup>7</sup> Women, not surprisingly then, also have lower levels of identification with political parties. In 1971, 74 percent of women did not identify with any political party in contrast to only 55 percent of the men who felt

3 reports the results of an analysis of a national post-election survey conducted in 1971. The table suggests that women were far less likely to say that elections influenced the government than men. More than half of the men, in a post-election survey, said that elections could influence the government whereas less than a third of the women thought similarly. These differences held up when respondents were asked whether voting has any effect on government action. Finally, women also felt that they had less say in the government than men.

**TABLE 3**  
**Gender and the Influence of Elections on the Government**

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Women answering Yes</i>	<i>Men Answering Yes</i>
Do you have a say in government	<b>23</b>	<b>39</b>
Do elections influence the government	<b>32</b>	<b>53</b>
Voting has an effect on government action	<b>38</b>	<b>59</b>

Source: 1971 Center for Developing Studies post-election survey.

The 73d amendment to the Indian constitution was introduced in 1992 with the ostensible purpose of giving women a larger voice in the political process. The amendment would reserve, not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every *Panchayat* for women and it would also ensure that a third of the chairmanships of the *Panchayats* would be reserved for women.<sup>8</sup> Insofar as the 73d

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similarly. In 1989, men too were as likely not to identify with a political party -- 70 percent of them said so whereas 79 percent of women did not identify with a party. As it is men whose identification with political parties has dropped the largest, insofar as this lack of attachment to a party is a key element of the contemporary deinstitutionalization of the Indian Party System, that deinstitutionalization emerges as gendered.

<sup>8</sup> The amendment said that "Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved . . . shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes [and that] Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled

amendment also required that states hold elections to the *Panchayats*, and as the amendment was adopted in 1992, the amendment could influence the extent of political participation by women almost instantaneously.

Has the amendment changed the gendered nature of participation in India? Evidence that this is not the case comes from a survey conducted in six states, Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh, in 1996. There is considerable variance in the role of local government in these states. In Gujarat, Maharashtra, and West Bengal, local government has been extremely important whereas it has been less significant in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, local government is almost non-existent. The position of women in these states is also different. The female-male ratio varies from 972 in Andhra Pradesh to 879 in Uttar Pradesh while female literacy varies between 52 percent in Maharashtra to 25 percent in Uttar Pradesh. The states also differ in economic indicators and party strength. Their per capita income in 1990-91 ranged from Rs. 7316 (in Maharashtra) to Rs. 3516 in Uttar Pradesh, per capita domestic product in 1986-7 varied between Rs. 1039 (Maharashtra) to Rs. 607 (Uttar Pradesh). The political landscape of the states too was different with different party system configurations in each state. The right wing Hindu party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has a significant presence in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat; the Communist Party of India (Marxist) rules West Bengal; the Congress party is still an important electoral force in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra

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Cases and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.” Further, it said that “that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women . . . provided also that the number of offices reserved under this clause shall be allotted by rotation to different Panchayats at each level.”

Pradesh, Karnataka, and West Bengal; while a regional party -- the Telugu Desam -- governs Andhra Pradesh. Within each state five to nine districts, based on the population proportions, were randomly selected and within these districts 96 assembly constituencies were picked. A total of 2850 interviews were conducted.

Respondents were asked a series of questions on their participation in the local political process whether they attended *panchayat* and party meetings; along with their neighbors participated in a protest; contacted either bureaucrats or party leaders; and took part in campaign activities. On all scores women's participation was significantly lower than that of men with well over four in five women saying that they had never partaken in such activities. Most telling, 85 percent of the women, four years after the adoption of the 73d amendment said that they had not participated in any *panchayat* meetings. Further support for the continued lack of participation by women came from the responses of women and men to their interest in local elections. 36 percent of women said that they were not interested in local elections at all, in contrast to 21 percent of men who felt similarly.

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**Table 4**  
**Gender and Local Political Participation**  
 (percent who had not participated at all)

Arena	Male	Female
<i>Panchayat</i> Meetings	61	85
Party Meetings	75	90
Campaign Contact with bureaucrats	80	90
Party Leaders	66	82
	72	87

Source. 1996 post-election study conducted by OASES.

The various participation measures were combined into one measure of participation (after a factor analysis yielded only one factor) and regressed on gender and a variety of controls. Gender retains its significance in explaining political participation even controlling for income, caste, education, age, and the state in which a respondent resided. In other words women are still not active participants in the local political process despite the constitutional amendment that requires active participation by women in the electoral process.

## 2. Being Public: Stepping Outside the Household and Political Participation by Women

This paper builds on this existing research and suggests that the lower levels of participation of women in political life can also be accounted for by their role in the household. In particular, this paper argues that women who can exercise autonomy in and from the household are more likely to be active participants in political life. Political activity takes place in the public sphere. Political participation is fundamentally a public act – for men and for women. In many parts of the world, however, the public space is

still inhabited and dominated by men. For instance, political demonstrations in many parts of the world are still the domain of men as are legislatures. Women do not have a place in the public space. For women to be politically active they need to be in the public arena. For this to happen women need to be able to “step out of the household.” Women must have an existence autonomous of the household - households, which Hartmann (1981) noted (perhaps echoing Aristotle), are still the sphere of male dominance.<sup>9</sup> As long as women are confined to the home and they do not have an identity independent of the household their levels of political participation will necessarily be lower than those of men because they cannot be in the public space. Or, to develop a theory of political participation then, *pace* Okin (1998), we need to see the place inside and outside of women in the family.

Are there other factors that prevent women from entering the public arena? One set of explanations suggests that women participate at lower levels than men since there are far more demands on a woman’s time including housework and child rearing (South and Spitze 1994). Burns et al (2001) find that men indeed do spend more time on paid work and wives more on housework but both men and women have similar amounts of free time and that “leisure has no systematic impact on political participation” either by men or women (Burns et. al 2001, 257). Another reason for why women are not politically active is that they are actively discriminated against – legally or otherwise. This is a difficult topic to research since direct evidence for discrimination is not often

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<sup>9</sup> Burns et. al. examine the role of gender in terms of power relations within the household and attempt to determine who makes decisions in the household and they seek to determine whether the gender gap in participation would be linked to who makes decisions in the household. They do not find clear support for such a hypothesis.

available,<sup>10</sup> The Indian case offers an opportunity to examine what factors influence political activity by women controlling for discrimination. In India, the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment, as we noted above, reserved a third of all seats in local elected bodies for women. In other words there is a policy that *favors* political activity by women. Since the law favors women's activity in local bodies and does not discriminate against them the events following the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment offer us a chance to examine what else influence a woman's participation in political life. What we find is that not all women are politically active. Why, despite a pro-active policy to bring women into political life do only some women entertain that possibility? Is it that the only women who participate those who can step out of the household?

### 3. Stepping into the Public: Which women in India participate in politics?

While political participation by women in the state and national legislative bodies remains low and women still do not actively participate in political life almost a third of the seats in local bodies and the chairpersonship of these bodies is now with women (Gopalan and Shiva 2000, 141-142). Which women are, however, willing to take an active part in local bodies? To answer this question a survey was conducted in rural areas the North Indian state of Haryana. This geographically concentrated survey was conducted so that context specific influences on participation could be controlled for. It has been argued that the standard individual focused models of political participation are inadequate for there are strong contextual influences on participation. To control for such context effects we conducted a survey in one rural areas in one state. Since state

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<sup>10</sup> One way of determining the impact of discrimination is to examine a corollary to the discrimination argument and that is that women who do participate should do so because of a consciousness of the discrimination that they face in the political world. For this claim see (Miller, Gurin, Gurin, and Malanchuk 1981; Gurin 1985; and Young 1994.

politics is important in India and rural and urban women differ in terms of the opportunities available to them a survey conducted in the rural areas of one state allows us to control for the most salient context effects that could have a bearing on who participates in politics. A total of 980 women were interviewed by female investigators in 40 villages that fell in 5 districts (Sonapat, Kurukshetra, Rewari, Rohtak, and Hissar).

The survey revealed that surprisingly, most women did not know about reservations for them in local elections. Only 44 percent of them knew of the reservations; of these 44 percent most (almost two-thirds) did not know what the extent of the reservation was. Only a fourth could correctly identify the percent reserved for them as a third (Table 5).

This lack of awareness of the extent of the reservations for women does not mean that women are not aware of the influence of politics in their lives. A majority of them said that political participation would be good for them, participation would solve the problems faced by women, and it would also raise their social status. More importantly, most women also did not see entering political life as disrupting any other facet of their life, such looking after family and children, in a significant way. Furthermore, the voice for equality, self-sufficiency, and education was almost unanimous among the women interviewed. This unanimity persisted despite the fact that in Haryana most women still practice *purdah* and are living in an area characterized by village exogamy. The fact that women are quite expressive about equality raises doubts about theories that women are not aware of their rights and buy into the dominant male social and political discourse. Agarwal (1992) uses Bourdieu's (1990) notion of *doxa* to suggest that women in India

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accept the dominant male ideology. This way of reasoning would suggest that e implication is that rural Indian women are accepting of their position because they do not question some facets of their life, especially their relationship to men. Most women (56 percent), when asked whether men are responsible for their lack of social mobility, answered in the affirmative. This question and the response of women to the question provide some evidence that Indian women have not internalized their positions as non-participants in the political process as the exponents of *doxa* would suggest.

**Table 5**  
**Women, Political Participation, and Social Attitudes**

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Percent saying yes</i>
Do you know of reservation for women	<b>44</b>
Will participation in elections solve women's problems	<b>72</b>
Will participation in elections raise the social status for women	<b>97</b>
Can women taking part in elections look after family and children adequately	<b>84</b>
Can women complete their responsibilities after winning elections	<b>55</b>
Is reservation a sham? Men will never allow equality for women	<b>60</b>
Do women participate on behalf of some man	<b>55</b>
Does the lack of cooperation of men hinder women's development	<b>56</b>
Should women stay in the four walls of the house	<b>00</b>
Are you in favor of self sufficient women	<b>100</b>
Can independent women be capable housewives	<b>92</b>
If women are given work, jobs, and education will that increase their self-confidence and self-reliance	<b>100</b>
Is there <i>purdah</i> in this area	<b>100</b>
Do you have a voice in the matters of marriages?	<b>83</b>
Is marriage mostly within your caste?	<b>100</b>
Is marriage within the village?	<b>0</b>
Do women help in purchases?	<b>47</b>
Do men and women have different wage rates?	<b>98</b>

Source: 1998 Survey of Women and Political Participation in Haryana.

Studies either of participation by women in the political process or their attitudes towards social issues in India have pointed to the critical role of caste. It has been suggested that that a respondent's caste influences the attitudes of women and that forward caste women are more likely to be conservative and adopt positions similar to those of men. Lower caste women are, on the other hand, more independent and, it is assumed that there is a freedom associated with marginality that lower caste women may enjoy. In Haryana, however, caste did not influence the attitudes of women on a whole range of issues. Women, either *dalit* or belonging to the backward or forward castes, thought similarly about whether participation would be good for them or not; what the major problems faced by women were; whether men could be held partly responsible for these problems; and their role at home (Table 6).

**Table 6**  
**Does Caste Influence a Woman's Attitude?**

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Dalit</i>	<i>Backward</i>	<i>Forward</i>
Do you know of reservation for women	35	46	48
Will participation in elections solve women's problems	75	77	68
Will participation in elections raise social status for women	96	97	97
Can women taking part in elections look after their family	78	87	84
Is reservation is a sham - men will never allow equality	60	56	61
Do women participate on behalf of some man	57	52	56
Major Problem faced by women – economic	19	10	5
Major Problem faced by women – education	66	76	75
Can men be held responsible (partly) for these problems	64	77	71
Do women help in purchases	42	49	46
Do you have as much respect in society as you expected	69	65	67
Are you busy at home all day	59	55	67
Do you have a desire to work outside of the home	69	55	47

Source: 1998 Survey of Women and Political Participation in Haryana

3. What explains a woman's knowledge and participation?

The data presented in Tables 5 and 6 provide clear evidence that despite the reforms introduced by the constitutional amendments of 1992 many women in rural areas are not aware of these reforms. Why, however, are a substantial proportion of women unaware of these reforms. Is the awareness of women a function of their caste, their socialization, their personal educational and income levels, or their family status. To determine which of these factors is important a multivariate statistical model was estimated. The dependent variable was whether the respondents were aware of the reforms or not. A number of independent variables, each addressing key theories on the participation of women in the literature, comprised the model.

The first set of variables included a respondent's demographic characteristics - the educational level of the respondents, their family income, age, and caste. A second argument suggests, in consonance with the models of participation that link income and education to political activity (Verba and Nie 1972) suggests that since men and women have differential access to socio-economic resources and since socio-economic status influences political participation women are less politically active than men. In India, women have lesser education than men and since they are also less likely to be in the workforce women may be less politically active than men (Gleason 2001). Since most of the respondents were housewives there was no reason to introduce occupation as a control. In addition a whole set of attitudinal variables that approximated socialization were also incorporated into the model. Women were asked if they were busy at home all day and we could expect those who answered in the affirmative to have lower levels of participation. A similar set of expectations could be held for those women who thought that women's participation was a sham and that women would never be made equal; that

in contesting these local elections women were really assisting a male. On the other hand women who expressed that taking part in elections would solve women's problems could be expected to be more active participants in the political process.

Another set of variables included in the model dealt with the relations between men and women. Respondents were asked whether they helped in shopping (a proxy variable for their ability to travel to the market) and if their progress was halted by a lack of help from men. In an open-ended question respondents expressed detailed reasons for how men thwarted their progress. These responses were recoded into three categories. First, those who said that the division of labor kept them preoccupied with housework all day; second, they were made to stay at home; and, third, open expression was not permitted in the household. These three sets of responses were included in the final model as dummy variables. The final variable added to the model was whether the respondent belonged to a family in which someone had contested elections prior to the local elections. Given the well-known importance of political families in India we can expect women from more active political families to be more aware of any policy changes that would affect their chances to win office or gain access to resources. Whether a respondent belongs to family with someone in political life or not has been used as an indicator of socialization by Burns et. al. (2001).

The results reported in Table 7 yield interesting patterns. The only demographic variables that seem to influence a respondent's awareness of the amendment are those related to the economic position of the respondent -- education and family income. The caste of the respondent, once controlled for education, income and attitudinal variables, did not have a significant influence on whether they were aware of the amendment or not.

The variable with the largest impact on the respondent's knowledge of the amendment was whether someone in the family had contested elections or not. Those who came from 'political families' were more likely to be aware of these changes.

**Table 7**  
**Who Knows About the 73d Amendment**  
(Logit Model with knowledge of the amendment as the dependent variable)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>
Education	1.044**	0.12
Dalit	-0.433*	0.25
Forward Caste	0.060	0.23
Family monthly income	0.159**	0.06
Busy at home all day	-0.005	0.19
Women's participation is a sham	0.174	0.25
In competing women are helping a man	0.342	0.26
Participation is good for women	-0.036	0.19
Do you help in shopping	-0.271	0.18
Women's progress is thwarted by men	0.449	0.96
Busy with housework all day	0.650	0.97
Have to stay at home	0.152	0.98
Cannot express myself openly	1.441	0.99
Family members in politics	1.613**	0.27
Constant	-1.232	2.18

\* p < .10

\*\* p < .05

N: 820

chi<sup>2</sup> 240.29

Prob > chi<sup>2</sup> 0.0000

Log Likelihood -1104.454

Percent Correctly Predicted 75

While socio-economic status, especially income and education influence a woman's knowledge of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment do the same variables have a bearing on which women contested local elections? Do demographic variables continue to retain their significance in explaining which women contested local elections as models of participation would suggest? The results reported in Table 8 point out that the explanation for which respondents contested elections is different from whether they are aware of the amendment or not. The dependent variable in Table 8 is whether a person contested the elections (0) or did not (1). Hence, a negative sign on the coefficient of an

independent variable indicates that the variable did have a positive influence on a respondent's participation in local elections whereas a positive sign suggests that the variable had a negative impact on a woman's contesting local elections.

**Table 8**  
**Who Participates in Local Elections**  
 (Logit Model - participation as a candidate in local elections as the dependent variable)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>
Education	-0.423**	0.17
Dalit	0.501	0.34
Forward Caste	0.123	0.29
Family monthly income	0.194**	0.06
Women's participation is a sham	1.714**	0.39
In Competing women are helping a man	0.305	0.40
Participation is good for women	-0.415	0.33
Do you help in shopping	-1.183**	0.26
Women's progress is thwarted by men	-1.851*	0.99
Busy with housework all day	-2.322**	1.01
Have to stay at home	-2.349**	1.04
Cannot express myself openly	-2.336**	1.05
Constant	3.422	2.24

\* p < .10

\*\* p < .05

N: 820

chi<sup>2</sup> 166.91

Prob > chi<sup>2</sup> 0.0000

Log Likelihood 684.585

Percent Correctly Predicted 89

These results provide more support for the socialization models. They suggest, quite clearly, that demographic factors are not the only important factors in determining whether a woman contests local elections or not. Respondents with higher family income, as expected, are more likely candidates. Higher education levels while they

predict the awareness of the respondents of the 73d amendment do not explain who is a candidate. In fact, quite unexpectedly, most of the candidates were those with higher levels of education but came from less wealthy families.<sup>11</sup>

The more interesting facet of these results is the significant impact of the attitudes of the respondents on whether they were candidates or not. Candidates, quite obviously, did not think women's participation was just a show. But, those who spent less time shopping, were forced to stay at home, spent a fair bit of time working in the home, and were not allowed open expression, were not candidates for local elections. Women's socialization is important in determining whether they contested elections or not. Those who were able to disengage themselves more from household activities were more likely to be candidates in the local elections. Whether there is an expansion of women's participation or not, then, depends upon their role in the household. *If women are less constrained in the household they are more active participants in the political process.*

#### 4. Women and Political Participation: The Indian Experience Generalized

In order to assess whether constrains in the household influence whether women are active participants in politics is a phenomenon that is limited to India or not the World Values Survey of 2000-2001 was analyzed. The World Values Survey offers a unique opportunity to test whether arguments that are generated from specific circumstances have validity beyond the area in which they were first generated. The survey (Table 9) reveals quite clearly that there are significant differences among the interest shown by men and women in politics. The survey asked respondents how interested they were in politics. The responses were coded into two categories – those

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<sup>11</sup> For an indepth study of women candidates in Panchayat elections in Haryana see Arora and Prabhakar

who were interested and those who were not. There is a difference between the level of political interest shown by men and women across the globe. 39 percent of the women had an interest in politics whereas 52 percent of the men did. This difference was statistically significant. The difference in interest is not characteristic of all nations. In Argentina, Philippines and Tanzania men and women were equally interested in politics.

Men and women also participate differentially in political life.<sup>12</sup> The World Values Survey asked whether a respondent had taken part in political activities such as signing a petition, or taking part in a demonstration. Responses in the affirmative to these three questions were coded such that if a respondent had undertaken even one of these activities the respondent was considered to have participated in politics. Those who did not take part in any of the activities were classified as non-participants. Once again 30 percent of the men were participating in political life whereas only 24 percent of the women engaged in political activity (Table 9). The difference is statistically significant. In not all nations, however, do men and women participate at differential rates. In the US, Canada, Sweden, Argentina, South Korea, Israel, Tanzania, Vietnam and Egypt the differences between men and women's participation rates were not significant.

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(1997).

<sup>12</sup> The concept of political participation was limited to "activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government activity" (Burns et. al. 2001, 4). Strikes were not included as only women who work could strike and that would limit the range of political activity for housewives and the self-employed.

**Table 9 – Political Interest and Political Action by Gender**

Country	Political Interest			Political Action		
	Female (Mean)	Male (Mean)	Significance Level	Female (Mean)	Male (Mean)	Significance Level
Spain	.2353	.3648	.000	.3007	.4032	.000
USA	.6168	.6927	.006	.8292	.8020	.224
Canada	.4260	.5454	.000	.7350	.7384	.867
Japan	.5656	.7159	.000	.5802	.5719	.756
Mexico	.3068	.3762	.004	.1356	.1915	.003
South Africa	.4313	.5835	.000	.3059	.3577	.003
Sweden	-	-	-	.8961	.8700	.196
Argentina	.1800	.1874	.731	.2646	.2644	.992
South Korea	.3943	.6010	.000	.5017	.5265	.390
Puerto Rico	.3890	.4803	.018	.2009	.3098	.001
Nigeria	.4429	.6062	.000	.1192	.2723	.000
Chile	.2061	.3028	.000	.2124	.2947	.001
India	.2806	.5640	.000	.1746	.3993	.000
China	.6232	.7879	.000	0	0	-
Turkey	.3172	.4855	.000	.1147	.1953	.000
Peru	.4314	.5233	.000	.2552	.3315	.001
Venezuela	.2104	.2777	.007	.1563	.2264	.002
Zimbabwe	.2552	.3786	.000	.0341	.1134	.000
Philippines	.4839	.5138	.302	.0732	.1662	.000
Israel	.6459	.7658	.000	.4294	.4519	.437
Tanzania	.7183	.7127	.836	.3340	.3441	.718
Bangladesh	.2304	.5484	.000	.0745	.1944	.000
Indonesia	.2954	.4465	.000	.1080	.1520	.000
Vietnam	.7186	.8753	.000	.0553	.0777	.157
Uganda	.4140	.6032	.000	.1591	.3107	.000
Serbia	.3103	.4587	.000	.2853	.3958	.000
Montenegro	.3510	.5536	.000	.1962	.3486	.000
Egypt	.3029	.5433	.000	.2082	.1896	.202
Morocco	.1289	.2676	.000	.1195	.2145	.000
Iran	.5116	.5989	.000	0	0	-
<i>All</i>	<i>.3909</i>	<i>.5327</i>	<i>.000</i>	<i>.2482</i>	<i>.3058</i>	<i>.000</i>

Source: World Values Survey, 2000

What accounts for the fact that some women are interested and active in politics are others are not? Can the argument developed from the Indian case be applied to other circumstances? In other words are those women who have an active life outside the household more interested and more active in politics even when controlling for their

demographic characteristics and other explanations for participation. To assess whether women who are more active outside the household are indeed more interested and more active in politics two logit models were estimated – one to determine why some women are interested in politics and the other to assess why some women are more politically active (Tables 10 and 11). The women in the sample were isolated and the analysis conducted only for female respondents.

The World Values Survey does not offer the same set of questions to assess a woman's role outside the household as the survey of women in India. It does, however, ask respondents how often they met their friends. It can be assumed that those women who meet their friends more often are more likely to have a life independent of the household than those who do not. This variable – meeting with friends becomes the key independent variable in the analysis and if women who have a life outside of the household are more interested in politics and more politically active this variable should be significant even when controlling for other factors that could influence whether a female respondents is interested in politics and politically active. In the Indian state of Kerala it has been found that women who contested elections to the local bodies often said that they did so at the urging of friends (Sooryarmoorthy 2000).

A number of other factors too could influence a woman's interest and participation in politics. First and foremost as Table 9 reveals there are significant inter-country differences between the level of interest and participation in political life by women. 71 percent of the women interviewed expressed an interest in politics in Tanzania and Vietnam whereas only 12 percent of the women in Morocco felt similarly. Similarly large variances can be found in the extent of political participation by women –

89 percent of the women in Sweden were participants in political life whereas only 3 percent of the women took part in some political activity in Zimbabwe. The logit models had, therefore, to control for the country of a respondent. In addition to the national origin of the respondent other demographic factors too could influence participation. It is well acknowledged that more educated women, those who are employed, women of higher social standing (social class), and urban women are more likely to be interested in politics as well as more active. Similarly, those women who belong to any secondary association could be expected to be more active politically while housewives should be less politically active.

The World Values Survey had data on all these attributes. The socio-economic status of a respondent was determined from the survey questions that ascertained a respondent's education as well as their self-reported social class. Whether a person was a urban resident or not was ascertained by whether the interview was conducted in a city or not. Women who worked – either for themselves, part-time, or full-time were categorized as employed. The survey also asked respondents whether they belonged to a number of organizations or not (respondents were asked whether they belonged to any of thirteen associations). If a respondent said that she belonged to even one of those organizations she was coded as belonging to an organization and those who did not belong to even one were coded as non-members. Finally, respondents were asked whether they found being a housewife fulfilling. Those who agreed strongly or agreed were grouped together and differentiated from those who did not think so.

Table 10 reports the results of the analysis for why some women are more interested in politics. As expected there are strong and significant country specific

effects. Further women who are more educated, live in cities, and are of higher social class (the variable for social class goes from upper to lower class which is why the sign is negative) are more interested in politics as are women who are members of associations. Whether a woman was a housewife or not had no bearing on her interest in politics and neither did a whether a woman was employed or not. The variable assessing whether a woman has a life outside the household or not, or a woman met with her friends often, had a significant and positive impact on the level of political interest.

What about political activity? Why are some women more politically active – are those women who have a place outside the household also more politically active. Table 11 reports the results of the analysis that seeks to understand why some women are more politically active. In table 11 one more variable – political interest – was added as a control as women with political interest are more likely to be politically active. Political interest has been used as proxy for the different socialization of men and women (Burns et. al 2001) who argue that women have lower levels of political interest hence are not as politically active

**Table 10: Why do some women express an interest in Politics?**

	<b>Logistic Regression Coefficient</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>
USA	-1.411**	.137
Canada	-.453**	.139
Mexico	-.998**	.124
Puerto Rico	-.954**	.134
Nigeria	-1.148**	.144
Chile	-.296*	.120
India	-1.735**	.141
Venezuela	-.984**	.128
Zimbabwe	-1.836**	.142
Philippines	-.504**	.131
Bangladesh	-1.502**	.141
Indonesia	-1.160**	.145
Serbia	.737**	.148
Montenegro	-1.086**	.134
Egypt	-.898**	.143
Morocco	-.844**	.109
Jordan	-1.755**	.144
Education	.113**	.010
Employed	-.015	.047
Social Class	-.109**	.024
Urban	.120*	.053
Meeting Friends	.180**	.046
Associational Membership	.552**	.056
Being a Housewife is fulfilling	-.122	.064
Constant	-.395*	.159

Dependent variable is political interest.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

N: 11488

chi<sup>2</sup> 1394.786

Prob > chi<sup>2</sup> 0.0000

-2 Log Likelihood 13219.367

Percent Correctly Predicted 68

Once again, there are clear and significant country specific effects. As expected women who are more educated, who are employed and belong to associations are more

likely to be politically active. Whether a woman lives in an urban area or not and her social class has no effect on whether she participates or not. Of course, women who are more interested in politics are more politically active. Once again, the variable of theoretical interest for this paper – the degree to which a woman associates with friends has a significant and positive impact on why some women participate and others do not. While independence from the home is significant and important for women independence from the household does not have the same resonance for political activity by men. The reason for this is, as suggested above, is the gendered nature of the household. To determine the influence of activity outside the household for the levels of participation by men an analysis exactly the same as Table 11 for women was conducted for men. It was found that meeting with friends did not have a significant influence on whether a man was politically active or not once we controlled for the other factors that could influence political participation. The coefficient was 0.065 with a standard error or 0.059 and did not approach acceptable levels of significance.

**Table 11: Why are some women Politically Active?**

	<b>Logistic Regression Coefficient</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>
USA	2.419**	.245
Canada	3.994**	.260
Mexico	3.735**	.243
Puerto Rico	1.296**	.260
Nigeria	1.162**	.261
Chile	1.041**	.252
India	1.790**	.250
Venezuela	1.964**	.247
Zimbabwe	1.177**	.258
Philippines	.093	.280
Bangladesh	.614*	.281
Indonesia	.839**	.278
Serbia	-.100	.305
Montenegro	2.055**	.247
Egypt	1.503**	.261
Morocco	2.118**	.234
Jordan	1.460**	.268
Education	.124**	.012
Employed	.242**	.057
Social Class	.013	.030
Urban	.130	.066
Meeting with Friends	.258**	.056
Associational Membership	.547**	.067
Being a Housewife is fulfilling	.053	.082
Political Interest	.710**	.056
Constant	-4.654	.284

Dependent variable is political action.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

N: 11488

chi<sup>2</sup> 3194.492

Prob > chi<sup>2</sup> 0.0000

-2 Log Likelihood 9260.987

Percent Correctly Predicted 83

## Conclusion

In examining political participation by women this paper has noted that levels of participation in India are low. The 73d amendment gave them new opportunities. Many women are, however, still not aware of the reservations made for them in local elections. While a woman's socio-economic status has a bearing on her interest in politics and political activity the impact of a woman's position in the household cannot be denied. Whether a woman can negotiate space for herself independent of the household is an important determinant of whether she is an active participant in politics or not. This claim highlights the fact that political participation is a public act and that for women to be equal participants in the public arena they need to be able to step outside the household – a sphere of male dominance in many parts of the world. What determines which women can make independent space for themselves is beyond the scope of this paper and is a task left for future research.

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