Abstract

Is media really the fourth pillar of the society? How much has media changed political communications? Do media move beyond superficial coverage to grapple with the real issues in elections 2014? Is talk about the development issues in media just hogwash? How do media respond to women candidates? Do women candidates affect the electoral process? Are there significant differences between male and female candidates when it comes to promoting the development issues? How many women are fighting the national elections? What is the performance of major political parties in promoting women candidates? The study tries to answer these questions by examining the electoral process in India for the Lok Sabha elections 2014. How media is covering India elections, projecting the women candidates and also the social development issues during the election process. This study reviews the involvement of women in politics and how media sets the agenda for the political parties and issues. The media has been quiet about the significant social development initiatives that have been taking place in the country. The picture projected by the media is not always parallel to the real situation. The stakes, for a national election, are larger than “mere” local concerns. And the candidates appear to be stand-ins for other faces. The study explains the nuances of the way in which each candidate in the selected constituency conceptualises issues of social reforms. I have come to a conclusion that while the candidates have brought the social development questions onto the national political landscape, they have not addressed the vast – and sometimes conflicting – array of political and social interests that concern these issues. The data suggest that being a woman candidate works in part, many times it’s a disadvantage. However a woman candidate is more easily acceptable.
1. Introduction

Mass media in its different forms have influenced human life in the present century. The media is a very important institution of democracy. The survival and success of India’s democracy owes a great deal to the vigour and vibrancy of the media. The explosion of the broadcast media over the last 10 years has reached many voters with a surge of information and this has narrowed to some extent the gap between politicians and voters. More significant than the numbers is the change in the nature of the media—from government control to overwhelming private control. The new and hard-hitting privately owned media tends to question everything and has been a driving force behind exposing corruption (MC Quail, 2004). The media can justifiably take credit for making corruption a significant issue in the 2014 general election. At the time of elections, the media is central to modern political life. However the actual function one can attribute to the media is social change, which is highly contested.

When behaviour pattern changes in large numbers and is visible and sustained it results in a social change. Once there is a deviation from culturally inherited values, it may result in a rebellion against the established system, causing a change in the social order.

One indispensable effect of media hype is repeatedly suggesting a Modi wave. The purported Modi wave is shown on the basis of opinion polls, and not ground level reports, which are chiefly interested in guessing who would be the next Prime Minister. The focus is entirely on personalities, ignoring the larger issues involving the election. By all accounts, other factors matter more: the choice of candidates, local-level alliances, and the performance of State governments, the development issues. What often gets overlooked is that opinion polls end up making the elections a horse race and a media spectacle.

(Lazarsfeld, [et al.] 1944; Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1956; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971.)

The media’s infatuation with a single narrative is drowning out political diversity and pluralism in this election, particularly the weight of regional parties and marginalized groups and their concerns. There is a tendency to accept unquestionably the terms of debate as set by the one person, regardless of the democratic framework (Hindustan Times, 2014). Media also makes it a veritable channel for promoting women's participation in politics. However, the level of coverage given to women politicians in the media in the country is still poor and replete with stereotypes and other challenges. The limited visibility contributes to the poor showing for women at the polls, and the reluctance of political parties to have them as candidates thereby feeding into a vicious circle of low political representation for women. Several studies conducted revealed widespread manipulations of gender perceptions especially through the traditional media such as TV, radio and newspapers where women are presented as just home makers, or objects of sexual desire. Also women in executive positions are rarely promoted positively in the media while men on the other hand are portrayed as successful politicians, businessmen, and confident decision makers, among others (The Times of India, 2014).

As politics is deeply rooted in society and reflects dominant values, our discussions highlighted clearly that developing a partnership in politics necessarily depends on the degree of partnership as a social mode in general. This is undoubtedly why the Inter-Parliamentary Union asserts that what has to be developed, in modern democratic societies, is nothing less than a new social contract in which men and women work in equality and complementarity, enriching each other mutually from their differences. (...) What is basically at stake is democracy itself, (IPU Declaration, 1997).

The process of understanding women’s contribution in the social, economic and political spheres has been shrouded in mystery. Women's concerns are generally seen by planners and social
scientists as welfare rather than development, or as peripheral rather than central to the development process (Singer, 2007).
With the available literature on the topic some general observations have been made regarding the role of women in politics. It has come to the notice that the percentage of women at various levels of political activities: voting, participation in capacity of candidate, campaigning has increased formally. The general trend is that those in politics are women belonging to the younger age group 25-45. It is also revealed that women take up political career on as an extension of their domestic role. While women have been active in mass movements, there presence is not felt in decision-making. The influence of husband and close relatives is found. This tendency is due to lack of confidence. This dependency is a stumbling block in their empowerment. (CSDS Report, 2011)

Another noteworthy feature and a positive impact is the increase in female literacy rate. Many felt that lack of proper education is a bottleneck in participation and express their willingness get educated (Harris, 2005). Issues which women representatives generally take interest are drinking water supply, primary health, child care, public distribution system and environmental protection.

In this context it is worthwhile to examine the views news and ideas of women activists and development organisations having rich experience in working with women. One quality observed among women is their patience to hear the problems of the public. They also work in adverse circumstances. Women possess capacity to utilize potentials and resources hitherto unutilized. It has been observed that women representatives are honest and accurate in presenting issues to the decision-making bodies and authorities. Women would bring new ideas in governance. They believe in a sustainable development and their emphasis is on natural resource management. Women representatives also believe that communal harmony is an important element of development and they strive to achieve this objective. Another promising fact is that they do not involve in corrupt practices. (CSDS Report, 2011)

The media is a very effective channel for achieving increased women political participation and affirmative action in the 2014 General elections and needs to be positive and effective. In addition to working hands in glove with the women, in a drive for increased women's representation in political positions.

2. Media Genesis In India Election 2014

The 2014 general election was particularly important and divisive election and the role the media plays in it is very significant and needs analysis, debate and a certain amount of introspection. Never has the media’s role been more important. At the same time, never has it been so misused to set the political agenda. There is a lot of evidence about what’s played up and what isn’t and the way things have been structured and bent in the run-up to the impending Lok Sabha election. The willingness of the media to buy into the individual or party propaganda and build-up regardless of whether it was an accurate representation of real political intentions and personal attitudes is questionable. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, in their 1988 book Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, talked of the influence of ‘propaganda’ and ‘systemic biases’ in the mass media and explained how consent for economic, social and political policies is manufactured in the public mind, a result of the way advertising and media ownership is structured. (Hasan 2014).

The major changes in the media landscape evident in the new structure of ownership
can explain the phenomenon. The trend is clear: media houses have turned into big business; big business groups are buying huge stakes in the media; politicians, political parties and individuals with political affiliations own and control increasing sections of the press; media owners are entering into politics in a big way. (CSDS Report, 2011)²: Centre For The Study Of Developing Societies, Delhi conducted a study on Indian elections and did a National Election Survey for Lok Sabha elections till 2009.

The media is big business and big business is in the media. There ought to be serious concerns about the increasing concentration of media ownership and cross-ownership in the hands of large corporate groups which are strongly backing Modi as the next Prime Minister because he has pushed the political rhetoric more towards markets, reforms and investment, even though the BJP has not laid out a specific economic platform, and chosen instead to run on the general economic record of Gujarat under Modi. (The Hindustan Times, 2014). The change in coverage of the AAP is a striking example of this shift. The media’s treatment of the AAP changed diametrically once the political party started hitting at corporate corruption, through their stance on electricity tariffs, and more noticeably after AAP party leader Arvind Kejriwal went to Gujarat to ‘inspect’ and ‘assess’ the Gujarat model of development and began raising questions about crony capitalism in Gujarat.

Media can be used in diverse ways to either directly or indirectly engage women in ‘political’ discourse. It is essential for media projects to listen to and value their end users. Media tools provide immediacy to action which is useful for women, often allowing women to act when angered or interested in an issue. Media tools are essential in helping organisations to build their support network and power base. (Hall, 1997)

When female candidates are running for elections, is the media coverage different? According to several studies conducted the gender of the people running in an election influenced newspaper articles and TV coverage about the candidates. Articles about female candidates included more discussion of character traits than articles about male candidates. Media focus more on the personality traits of female politicians than of male ones -- and the presence of a female candidate in a political race brings personal characteristics to the forefront. It's not only female politicians' personalities that disproportionately interest the media. Coverage of female candidates' appearances and clothing choices is widespread. There has been conflicting research on the extent to which this focus on appearance hurts women politicians more than men. Without the active participation of women and an equal incorporation and projection of women's perspectives through media and communication, the goals of equality, development, peace and democracy cannot be achieved, adding "women's equal media projection is a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account in politics. (Mail Today Bureau, 2014). Women need to make themselves available and accessible for media coverage. The media should be more gender sensitive, women politicians should pay courtesy call to the management of media houses, and women politicians should make a budget for media coverage. Women politicians should be networking between journalists and the politicians should have contacts of journalists in different media houses and involve them in their meetings and activities and media should keep track of women achievements, in their regular reportage. (The Network of Women in Media, 2014). How do the media frame gender within the election paradigm? How are women located, and what’s their vantage point in the vast repertory of election reportage by the media?

The Network of Women in Media in India initiated a gender blog initiative called ‘Gender and Media Watch — General Elections 2014,’ to look at the way the media covers women candidates, women voters, and how women are located in the larger political narrative of elections. It explored
the media’s template while reporting gender, and the positioning of women as active agents or passive voters with equal stakes in the election outcomes.


The participation of women in various processes of electoral competition in India is multifarious but the levels of participation and inclusiveness are quite varied, uneven and distorted. Electoral interaction and political participation of women can be systematically analysed using pyramidal electoral participation model stratified at four levels on a quantitative basis:

i.) in the top strata is female representation in the lower house of Parliament and in legislative assemblies – which is the narrowest and most constricted numerically;

ii.) in the second strata are women as candidates in electoral competition participating as members and functionaries of political parties where their representation in quantitative terms is more than that at the top layer;

iii.) in the third strata as active campaigners for political parties where female participation is much larger in numbers than that in the second strata; and

iv.) in the bottom strata with the widest base of women in numerical terms as single-time voters.

(Data Unit of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi.)

For assessment of electoral participation of women and status vis-à-vis men in India and how women candidates respond to the development issues, the following parameters will be used:

I: Participatory Levels in Electoral Competition: This can be estimated by analysing the turnout of women as voters and the representation of women in the lower house of Parliament over a period of time based on time series data from the Election Commission of India’s archives. This would be supplemented by a comparative analysis of seats allotted to women by national political parties during the last three general elections in India.

Table 1: Women Representation in the Indian Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term Of Lok Sabha</th>
<th>Total Seats</th>
<th>Number Of Women Members</th>
<th>Percentage Of Women Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952- 1957</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957-1962</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962-1967</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967- 1970</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970- 1977</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977- 1979</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984- 1989</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-1991</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1996</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-1997</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-1999</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2004</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2009</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2014</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://parliamentofindia.nic.in](http://parliamentofindia.nic.in)
Table 2: Turnout of Women Voters in General Elections in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Elections</th>
<th>Total Turnout</th>
<th>Men’s Turnout</th>
<th>Women’s Turnout</th>
<th>Difference in Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First (1952)</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second (1957)</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third (1962)</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth (1967)</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth (1971)</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth (1977)</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh (1980)</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth (1984)</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth (1989)</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenth (1991)</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleventh (1996)</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelfth (1998)</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirteenth (1999)</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourteenth (2004)</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifteenth (2009)</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India, Delhi

Table 3: Seat Allotted to Women Contestants in General Elections by National Parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All India</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>congress</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPM</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://parliamentofindia.nic.in

II: Electoral Behaviour and Attitudes: The level of political awareness, commitment and involvement of participation of women in electoral politics, their autonomy and independence in electoral behaviour and choices and barriers that act as impediments in participating as active campaigners and voters during the elections. This would be discussed with the help of a survey with the women voters and also an interview with the campaign planner for a women candidate.

The sampling was done in following stages:

A. Selection of the constituencies from the State.
B. Selection of assembly segments from the constituencies.
C. Selection of individual respondents and covering the campaign management of the candidate.

Out of 20 assembly segments namely, Karol Bagh, Patel Nagar, Moti Nagar, Delhi Cantt, Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi, Kasturba Nagar, Malviya Nagar, R K Puram, Greater Kailash, Narela, Rithala, Bawana, Kirari, NangloiJat, Sultan PurMajra, Badli, Mangol Puri, Rohini and Mundka. Mangol Puri and R K Puram have been selected on the basis of following reasons:
Sweta Suman: Efficacy Of Media And Women Candidates In Understanding The Development Issues In Electoral Process

I: Mangol puri is a hub of resettlement colonies whereas RK Puram belongs to government officials
ii.) Mangol Puri belongs to a reserved constituency with vast residential and commercial regions, R K Puram is devoid of commercial regions
iii.) Level of socio-economic empowerment of women also varies ,
iv.) Different culture and political practice are there.
v.) Welfare measures and needs taken up by the government differ to some extent.
vi.) A comparison is also possible.

The target was to cover at least 40 women as representative sample. Therefore 2 assembly segments (both having women candidates) from each constituency have been chosen randomly. One the two chosen constituency i.e MangolPuri is reserved for Schedule Caste – woman. A field survey with the campaign planner from New Delhi constituency is also been taken, in order to make sense of the ways of reaching out to voters and dealing with issues. As a result 40 respondents in total are universe of this study.

Attempts were made to select approximately an equal number of representatives of both sexes.

Field survey was done in two modes :
A. Voters were met through questionnaires and
B. Members of campaign planning have been covered through informal interview.

Secondary data have also been used in this study to have an idea about the profile of the selected segments, constituency, state, nation and the status of women in the electoral process.

There are three levels at which the women can participate in the electoral process:

I.) As voters
ii.) As candidates
iii.) As campaigners

In this paper, I try to understand these three nuances of women in society and relate them to the development perspectives.

III: Efficacy of Women in understanding the development issues in Electoral Process:

It was seen that gender in candidates doesn’t matter much to the voters. However, the positive aspect is the response people have towards the women candidates. There is perception of voters that predict women candidates to do well with respect to development issues. However the mode of contention is no statistical data available to prove this. Neither are the women candidates fighting in the two constituencies are keen to pick up issues. It is instructive to see how few voters recognize their candidates and how little the candidates talk about grass-root issues. The stakes, for a national election, are larger than “mere” local concerns. And the candidates appear to be stand-ins for other faces, for the leaders and parties voters would like to see form a government at the Centre.

The survey suggests that female candidates have an advantage over men on issues like social programmes, education and putting the people's interest first. It was also seen that women candidates should be perceived to be aggressive and tough. However, both the candidates showed very little interest in campaigning for the causes related to the social development. The agendas for the campaigning were very much on national scene as compared to the local development issues concerning locals. The survey shows that gender in candidates doesn’t matter much to the voters. Any candidate who works for their place and help solve their basic amenities problems should win
the elections. And the voters followed a set pattern of voting where they voted mainly for their caste (especially in the North West Delhi). Among the findings, female candidates must:

- have same community and caste to relate to voters
- show an ability to be both tough and compassionate.
- demonstrate expertise in the politics and should be well-versed with the problems of the constituency.
- show an ability to raise issues and solve them, an essential factor in a high profile office.
- build a solid political career that includes demonstrating ability to work for the development of the society.
- be considered equivalent to men candidates if not better to them.

The findings from the interview with the campaign planner for Meenakshi Lekhi, candidate, New Delhi constituency give out the reasons for a low turn-out of women in politics in every sphere? (in terms of contesting, participating, functioning…). “The reason is not that clear but women consciously decide not to take part in the political process. Being a counsellor myself I have never come across girls coming over and saying that they want to make career out of politics. We only hear men or boys talking to us about politics. We have been brought up this way. To get on to the higher level of politics one need to toil really hard. And women know this fact that their hard work may not be that worthwhile.”

The campaign planner also discussed the advantages men candidates have over women candidates. “Men candidates have a great support system from everywhere, right from family to party. Hence it becomes very easier for a man candidate to deal with the political outing as compared to the women candidates. But women have no support system from home, so they are never at advantage.”

Talking about the advantage women candidates while convincing voters, campaign planner said, “It depends on the individuals how they tackle and maintain their relations with voters. It has nothing to do with gender. But women can surely deal better with the development issues in comparison to men. As they empathize better and its nature’s gift to them.”

Talking about the strategies picked up by the New Delhi constituency candidate, Meenakshi Lekhi, campaign planner responded, “Our candidate’s agenda is to make women the real decision makers. Not just the participants and voters. Women should be part of decision making for this society.”

Policy recommendations suggested by the campaign planner include the formation of groups who list out the issues related to development. And these issues to be taken forward for implementation. However the locals admit that the candidate has hardly spend enough time addressing the issues about the constituency problems.

4. Media and Women Participants: Determinants of Development Order

Media’s coverage of the Dance of Democracy 2014 has been opaque, shambolic, inconsistent, ear-splitting, duplicitous, over the top, revealing, sly, half-true and, occasionally, exemplary. In other words, it has reflected perfectly the way political parties fought Election 2014.

Media exposure and Social networking are strong determinants of gender participation in campaign activities during electoral competition. Media and Women representations should be able to influence in such a way that their work should have an impact on society. They should be able to emphasize on issues such as girl's education especially informal education, atrocities against women, deprivation of human rights and such other related issues which are relevant to women. Women parliamentarians, in addition to be the part and parcel of legislation and decision making on
important issues, should be able to contribute for highlighting the needs and requirements of middle class women. In any society especially in the case of India being the largest democracy in the world, middle class can play a dominant role in socio-economic development and influence political process.

Thus we can conclude that the determinants of women’s participation as voters, campaigners and candidates are different and the best predictors of their levels of participation in three key electoral activities are also dissimilar.

5. Conclusion

To conclude the under-representation of women in legislative bodies both at national and state level and within political parties is a food for thought. There has been a marked increase in voter turnout and election campaigning among women in India and also significant gains among Indian women in these two areas of electoral participation. But women rarely play any role in formulating policies and strategies in political parties and are assigned the job of keeping an eye on “women’s issues” that could bring electoral benefits and dividends for the party in future problems.

The key barriers that restrict women’s proactive participation in the electoral process, that need to be addressed on a priority basis, apart from affirmative action, are more representation of women in political parties, including them in the decision-making bodies and providing them key cabinet berths in government at the central and state level. Women should be promoted and encouraged by the concerted effort of government in partnership with civil society for enhanced and quality participation in formal politics. An increased political participation by women in all spheres of political life and electoral competition in particular will not only ensure political parity and equality with men, but would also serve the larger issues concerning women, i.e., upliftment and empowerment of Indian women.

Media is mainly considered a tool for charchas rather than for political activism. Social development activism will initiate the real development in the country. It is a historic election. Many issues are discussed, Corruption, Price Rise, Black Money, Exclusive Development, Inclusive Development, Democracy, Secularism, Majority Communalism, Election Expenses, Assets of the Candidates, Criminal back ground of the candidates, Representation of Women, Autocracy, etc. We need to learn a lot to go forward, to have an all-inclusive development with distributive justice.

References


