

REPORT

**SAMVAD
CONVERSATION**

**GENDER IN
GOVERNANCE:
PATHWAYS FOR
WOMEN'S
POLITICAL
LEADERSHIP**

9 DECEMBER 2021

5-7 PM



PRIA@40
SHAPING OUR TOMORROWS, TODAY



Making the gender leap



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- **Women's leadership is a democratic agenda** – In the sense we recognise gender equality as a societal agenda, similarly we need to recognise women's political leadership as a democratic agenda to enable political representation of women from all sections of society.
- **Women learning to trust women's leadership** – Women can be better leaders in politics as they have varied experience and the power of empathy and sensitivity, which are often considered as negative or weak emotions by society.
- **Support women's mobility from local to national** – There is a need to support elected women representatives by political parties to make them capable enough to mobilise them from local to state and to national-level politics rather than subjecting them to character assassination.
- **Never give up** – It is a possibility that state or national level is actively fencing women from politics or maybe politics being heavily guarded by the patriarchal system, however, we should be unwavering and understand that this is a demonstration of a changed reality, and a younger generation of women leaders can lead



Ms. Leena Rikkila Tamang is the *Director for Asia and the Pacific, International IDEA*. Leena joined International IDEA in 2002 to work on the South & Southeast Asia program, including work on Burma/Myanmar. She started her career as coordinator of the 'Nelson Mandela Reception Committee' in Finland. Tamang has been teaching at the University of Tampere in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, from where she graduated.

Dr. Ranjana Kumari is the Director of Centre for Social Research as well as Chairperson of Women Power Connect. Dr. Kumari has dedicated her life to empowering women across the South Asia region and is also a prolific writer of many well-known publications. Some of her most passionate causes have been the participation of women in democracy and governance, the termination of dowry practices and dowry-related violence, and the abolition of female foeticide.



Dr. Amruthraj R.M secured a Ph. D in Women's Studies from Pondicherry Central University. As a Specialist in Women's Studies, he is conducting trainings, meetings, and consultations regarding Gender and Development, and Women Empowerment. He designs modules, identifies resource persons and handles training sessions. He designs modules, identifies resource persons and handles training sessions.

Ms. Andi Timo Pangerang is a Member of the Constitutional Study Commission of the People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia. She has also been a regional political leader, as a Member of the South Sulawesi House of Representatives, and Chairperson of Commission C., of the Regional House of Representatives. Andi Timo Pangerang has had vast experience in different positions in the Democratic Party of Indonesia.

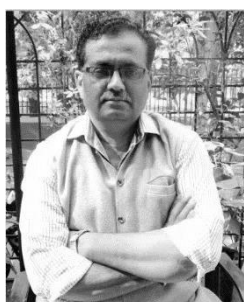


Ms. Namgyal Dolkar Lhagyari is a current Tibetan parliamentarian and has successfully completed her Master of Arts (MA) in English Literature in 2012. As a parliament member of the exile Tibetan government, her work and commitment towards the welfare of the Tibetan community has led her to visit several settlements wherein she has taken active role and engagement in understanding, exploring and working on the problems of community and has used her platform as a parliamentarian and also as an individual to advance the cause of the community.



Adv. Rina Parvin is a political leader from Bangladesh. She currently serves as the elected Chairperson of Gazipur Sadar Upazela and was elected in the year 2019. She is also currently the president of Gazipur Zela Mohila League and was elected to this position in 2016. She was the president of Zuba Mohila League in Bangladesh from the year 2003-2016. She was elected as the Women Vice-Chaiperson of the Gazipur Sadar and served from the year 2009-2014.

Ms. Ritu Jaiswal has served as the Mukhiya of Gram Panchayat Raj Singhwahini, Sonbarsha, Sitamarhi, Bihar. She has studied Bachelor of Arts (Economics) from Vaishali Mahila College.



Mr. Bhim Raskar is the Director of Resource and Support Centre for Development, which is an NGO in Maharashtra working with other NGO's, CBO's, and PRI women members. His vast experience of ensuring pathways for women's political leadership include his memberships in LoGIn (Local Governance Initiative and Network, Asia), Women and Child Department. He served as a Member of the Task force on Women in governance appointed by HLC – High Level Committee, Govt. of India, New Delhi.

Ms. Nandita Pradhan Bhatt is the Director of Martha Farrell Foundation, where she's responsible for programme delivery and management of the Foundation. She also heads the gender programmes in PRIA (Society for Participatory Research in Asia). Nandita has trained over 20,000 employees across more than 40 national and international organisations and has been working with women domestic workers to train and support their advocacy efforts to strengthen institutional responses to tackle the issue of sexual harassment in their world of work.



Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder President, Participatory Research in Asia, India, is currently a UNESCO Co-Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibilities in Higher Education. He serves as chairperson of the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research (GACER) network, which facilitates the sharing of knowledge and information worldwide to further community-based research.

As Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) completes its 40 years, it recommits to continue institutional strengthening and capacity development support to civil society and non-profits with a special focus on new-generation civil society and non-profit groups. Between August and December 2021, PRIA will be convening [PRIA@40 Conversations](#) with communities, partners, associates, supporters, experts, investors and colleagues, drawn from civil society, government, business, media and academia, to share ideas and experiences that can help 're-imagine' PRIA, its interventions and the world in the coming period.

In this context, PRIA convened a **Conversation (Samvad)** on [Gender in Governance: Pathways for Women's Political Leadership](#) on 9th December 2021 in collaboration with [Martha Farrell Foundation](#), [Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance \(IDEA\)](#) and [Kerala Institute of Local Administration \(KILA\)](#). The virtual conversation was attended by 60 participants, was moderated by **Ms. Nandita Bhatt** (Director, Martha Farrell Foundation).

The webinar began with a short presentation by **Ms. Purna Barua** on PRIA's journey of the past four decades with a special focus on its various interventions on the theme of gender training. The long history of building women's leadership, training trainers, mainstreaming gender in organisations was discussed. PRIA's use of participatory methodology to bring in the gender lens has focused on issues that emerged within women's groups. The inter-linked processes of organising and learning with women were introduced in the participatory community which paid heavy attention to monitoring and evaluation. PRIA's trainings have largely focused on changing the power structures and making the focus groups question hierarchies present in their world. [Read more...](#)

Next, **Ms. Bhatt** gave a short presentation on PRIA's work on the theme of Making a Gender Leap. The Government of India launched its first National Adult Education Programme in 1978, linking learning of literacy with awareness of entitlements. While building the capacity of literacy instructors, and later in mid-1980s of State Resource Centres (like Deepayatan in Bihar), it became clear to PRIA that individual focus on hitherto ignored women does not 'motivate' them to learn. They need a collective space and process for changing themselves. PRIA developed training methodology and practical support to government and non-government efforts after the launch in India of the first separately designed national public programme for women's development (DWCRA under IRDP in the mid-1980s). Focusing on use of participatory research and social learning methodology, PRIA demonstrated how women's agency for personal and social change can be facilitated.

Responding to the emerging attention to women's work and income-generating programmes for women, PRIA's experiences demonstrated how deeply entrenched gender division of roles were in policymaking, as well as society. PRIA began to advocate for their inclusion in development schemes. PRIA's efforts in mainstreaming gender in the workplace go back to 1992 when it was invited to design and [facilitate gender sensitization programmes for officers and sailors of Indian Navy](#). To take forward gender mainstreaming institutionally after a decade, PRIA decided to initiate such a process for itself first, to learn as well as practice on its own before training others. PRIA was one of the first civil society organizations to prepare itself to implement the Supreme Court's injunctions concerning the Vishakha Guidelines. Within a year, PRIA had set up its Governing Board-mandated Committee Against Sexual Harassment (CASH), and formulated policies for the prevention and redressal of sexual harassment at its workplace. In keeping with the spirit of the law, in 2001, PRIA CASH was reconstituted and renamed as the [Committee for Gender Mainstreaming and Awareness in PRIA \(CGAMP\)](#) that moved beyond the limited role of only addressing

complaints of sexual harassment against women to focusing on mainstreaming gender institution-wide. To know more about PRIA's work on making the gender leap, [click here](#)

In this context, the conversation (samvad) explored the following questions:

1. *Why is it that the strong representation of women at the local governments has not transformed to increased representation at the state/national level?*
2. *Which approaches, models and methods have been effective in supporting independent and strong leadership of women in governance institutions? Any lessons learnt from other countries?*
3. *What further actions may be needed to broaden and increase women's mobility from local to province and/or national arena?*

Following **Ms. Bhatt's** presentation, **Ms. Leena Rikkila Tamang** (Regional Director, International IDEA) and **Dr. Ranjana Kumari** (Director, Centre for Social Research) were invited to set the stage for the discussion.

Ms. Tamang said that in the countries where there is a gender quota at the local level, the local quotas do not necessarily translate into an increased or significant representation of women at other levels. The very purpose of the local gender quotas was to bring women into politics at the local level, nothing more, nothing less. Women's availability or their interest in politics was never an issue – there is interest and there is capacity, but the participation is still low. Various studies have been published on the positive impacts of women's participation, especially in India. An example outside of India is of the state of Vanuatu in the Pacific Islands that has zero women representatives at the local and the national level. There is a need for gender quotas for national positions as opposed to quotas for individuals.

Based on the countries that **Ms. Tamang** studied, this pathway from local to national did not translate for men too. The very expectation of local gender quotas working as pathways to national politics was never realistic or even possible. However, it doesn't take away the importance of gender quotas at the local level. However, there are exceptions, like the Scandinavian countries that are amongst those few countries where there are no quotas but there is *almost* parity at local and national level politics. The emphasis is on the word *almost* because politics is not an isolated part of society. The greater the societal democracy, the greater is the gender equality in politics.

We need strong and capable leaders at all levels. In terms of skill development, the mentoring approach and peer support have been crucial. Mentoring approach signifies mentors don't act as experts but shadow women's everyday work, advise women when needed, meet them in their own houses, and speak to them in languages that women understand. The mentors need to be well prepared and trained to mentor the women. The mentors could be young graduates who work with the right attitude. The peer support between the local level women leaders of the same or different district/ province has proven very effective. They need to communicate with each other, be it about seeking advice or at times venting out their frustrations. This channel of communication is significant. Gender quotas coupled with overall democratisation and transformation of society have been effective when supported by approaches such as mentoring, facilitating peer support, networking, and so on.

Speaking of Australia, she said that the impact of online campaigning for women in the 2020 local council elections in Victoria, Australia, was such that it was less expensive and attracted younger women who were well versed with technology and social media, etc.

However, we need to be careful because social media is a double-edged sword. They are also about to launch a report which aims to look at how Facebook is treating women politicians in Fiji, while Facebook gives a lot of visibility, it can also be a vicious platform. An increasing number of countries have adopted the policy of gender parity as opposed to that of gender quotas for example countries such as Bolivia, France, Mexico, and others. Unlike gender quotas, gender parity is not a temporary social measure but instead, it is a permanent necessity of a democratic government. Gender equality and the related quotas should be considered as a democratic mechanism, like adult suffrage and hence they should be permanently entrenched in democratic constitutions.

“gender quotas coupled with overall democratisation and transformation of society is essential for strong women leadership”

Dr. Kumari said that in the Indian context, recently women voters have emerged as a potent electoral force. The turnout of women voters is also rising exponentially. In the period between 1952 to 2019, the voter growth rate for women shot up exponentially by nearly 20%. In the 2019 election, it was for the first time that women voted more than men. Women have only one way to express themselves in democracy and that is through a vote, in the context of India. This massive turnout of women is evidence of a heightened voice of women as voters. It is an outcome of a long rather strenuous effort by women actively engaging in the political society of India. In contrast, women's representation in law-making bodies, both at state and national levels, has been strikingly poor.

The other major impetus has been the 73rd and 74th amendment of the constitution which has given women 50% reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. But even with 50% reservation, women do not emerge in national politics. The politics is caught in the prism of democracy, it starts from the very elitist then comes to the common. After the 1960s and 1970s, we saw that a lot of people from the marginal communities and caste entered the political mainstream. For example, we have witnessed the upper caste control over politics to OBC politics to Dalit politics. This has been a huge turnaround in politics. This is one reason that even men local level leaders hardly transition to become a national level leader. It is due to deep-rooted socio-political norms that there is a limited representation of women in all governance systems. How do we expect women's numbers to increase? While democracies around the world are making some progress, Indian democracy has somehow not worked towards creating any space, despite almost 28 years of consistent struggle on getting more women in Parliament.

For instance, from 1952 to 1977 i.e., the first Indian election, there were only 5% women in India's Parliament. From 1977 to 2002, there were 7% women in India's parliament. From 2002 onwards, there was a little over 10% and at the moment there are 14.4% women in the parliament. It has taken almost 75 years to get a 14.4% representation of women in the parliament. There is active fencing of politics from women. Women have been actively kept out of politics by political parties, by men who control the parties. The instrument of democratic political power is the political parties through which one enters the power arena. Parties are controlled by extremely patriarchal men. Political parties in India are one of the tools of the patriarchy. The patriarchal mindset fences women out of the political space. It is seen that despite having a better winning rate, women candidates are refused to be given party tickets and this is serious discrimination against women in politics.

On the face of it, 73rd and 74th amendments have ensured entry of women in politics and subsequent empowerment in the policy and decision-making process. But the underhanded ways of male politicians are cutting across the system which results in the menace of proxy representation of women candidates. Despite the women's reservation policy, the women

MPs and MLAs only remain as the subordinate figures i.e., an ornamental presence, while men in their party dictate terms. On the other hand, even for the women who get to the position of decision making, there is a lack of political astuteness, awareness, gender perspective and knowledge exposure. They need to be trained to become effective leaders. Therefore, a combined effect of lack of resources and unfavourable conditions coupled with indifferent attitudes of officials and patriarchy of administrative machinery poses a challenge to women in politics and leadership roles.

In terms of strategy for promoting strong leadership, one is of course through the quota system, but the women should be allowed to come through the direct election i.e., following a democratic process. They should be given a level playing field. A woman will contest another woman. She can mobilise money, muscle, mafia, mala and mike as much against each other as men. Now we are demanding nothing less than 50% representation. 2019 manifesto of all the political parties had two priorities: one, was safety to women, especially post Nirbhaya gang rape, the safety of girls and women became an important agenda. The other agenda was the representation of women. However, it is important to note that to date there is a considerate silence across the political parties regarding the representation of women. Nobody wants to discuss this issue in parliament. This is a struggle that is going to be a long haul, but the key is to connect with women.

After the 50% reservation in the local bodies, women have performed very well. As a result, people trust women's leadership. The reason is that women have been able to deliver. We need to push for the revival of the women's reservation bill. In addition, the promotion of female lawmakers in local bodies on a state level is needed so that states can pass the bill. If we can join the forces across civil society and global institutions that are working for getting more women in policymaking, that will put collective pressure for getting more women on board.

“patriarchal mindset fence women out of the political space”

Meet our panellists...



[L to R: Ms. Nandita Bhatt, Ms. Leena Rikkila Tamang, Ms. Ranjana Kumar, Dr. Amruthraj R.M., Ms. Andi Timo. Pangerang, Ms. Namgyal Dolkar Lhagyaru, Ms. Ritu Jaiswal, Ms. Rina Parvin, Mr. Bhim Raskar and Dr. Rajesh Tandon]

Moving on to the next segment of the discussion, **Ms. Bhatt** invited **Dr. Amruthraj R.M.** (Specialist in Women's Studies, KILA)

Dr. Amruthraj said that Kerala's demography is different than the rest of India, for instance, there are more women compared to men in Kerala. In the electoral role as well there are more women than men. The infant mortality rate is low, the maternal mortality rate is low, longevity for women is high and there are more women in higher education. Owing to the quota system, Kerala has more than 50% women in their local government system. But they have not had a woman Chief Minister so far. However, it is important to note that we have 3 women ministers. In 1996 there were 13 MLAs in the legislative assembly but now we have 11. Out of the 11 women MLAs, 9 of them had local government background, 1 was the vice-president of district panchayat and the other was a municipal chairperson. We have 20 MPs out of which there is only 1 woman MP; incidentally, she was a block panchayat president before she was elected as an MP. They also have a patriarchal system where women do not have freedom of mobility, right over family assets, etc. As a result of the patriarchal mindset, there are very few women who are involved in the decision-making process.

“the religious and social institutions collectively keep women away from the structures of power”

Ms. Andi Timo Pangerang (Member of the Constitutional Study Commission, People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia) stated that the resignation of President Suharto in May 1998, marked the beginning of a new era in Indonesia, namely the Reformation era. Some of the reformed actions included: freedom of speech, the opportunity for establishing a new political party, decentralisation of power and so on. With the general election, affirmative actions were taken to promote women's representation in politics. Several laws were put in place and affirmative action was refined. For instance, law 12/ 2003 stated that political parties should have at least 30 % women in nominated candidates for legislative members; law 2/ 2008 required political parties to include at least 30% women representation in establishment and management at the national level.; and law 10/ 2008 stipulated that the list of prospective legislative candidates must accommodate, at least 30% representation of women at all levels. The Zypper system was implemented which stipulated that for every 3 prospective candidates, there will be at least one woman.

Speaking of her journey, she emphasised that she engaged with politics in 2002 when she had joined The National Democratic Unity Party. In 2003, as a candidate for the provincial legislative, she began campaigning activities in three districts of South Sulawesi Province namely Bone, Soppeng and Wajo. The journey was not easy for her as she had to not only face a lot of infrastructural challenges but also struggle with the strong patriarchal culture that exists. In 2004, she was elected as a member of the People Representative Council of South Sulawesi Province for the period of 2004- 2009. As a member of the council, she had three functions – legislative function, supervision function and the budgeting function. As a newcomer, she learnt and understood these functions and became familiar with the relationship between the government and the parliament. Along the way, she began to fight for a better life for the people of South Sulawesi, especially in her constituency. During her time in the council, several policies were put in place for the infrastructural development, especially in rural areas, policies for better health care and sanitation facilities in those areas.

Women should be able to utilise their strength to grasp any opportunity that comes their way. One should always trust the process; small steps in the right direction will take us to our desired goal. She said that her experience of working at the provincial level has sharpened her knowledge, ability and intuition to become an outstanding leader at the national level. No matter how good the regulation for women is, it will be meaningless if women are still

unmindful and apathetic in politics. Politics is all about preserving one's tenacity. She urges everyone to dream big, work hard and never give up.

“starting from regional level helped me understand how to function in parliament”

Ms. Namgyal Dolkar Lhagyaru (Member of Parliament, Central Tibetan Administration and Standing Committee Member, Tibetan Parliament in Exile) said that she has been elected for the second time in the Tibetan parliament in exile. After Tibet was occupied by China; thousands of Tibetans came to India and found refuge in the country. Along with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tibetans have been called honorary guests of India. We have ensured that we use this freedom as a privilege to encompass not just our lives but especially the lives of Tibetans in Tibet. Like myself, there are thousands of Tibetan youths who were born in exile we study the essence of democracy and how we can foresee a future Tibet as a democratic, free and equal nation. During our exile in India, we are practicing democracy and learning from democracies around the world about how we can sharpen ourselves in exile for the future when we do get our freedom.

It's a very different and unique experience for us where we are not just representing ourselves, calling for freedom of Tibetans and the entire Tibetan population inside Tibet, but also ensuring that our voices in exile are being heard, not just as Tibetan youth but as Tibetan women. By using the platforms, we are trying to carry, share many voices. We are trying to ensure that not only our identity is strong as Tibetans but also if we can learn the positive things from other nations with regards to how we can go over time but making sure that our identity as Tibetans remains intact and while we're doing that, we continue to face many challenges.

As Tibetans in exile, we have been blessed with the fact that His Holiness when he came to exile, came with a vision of democracy, ensuring that the Tibetans can experience democracy. Hence, there has been an entire step where it began by electing the representatives of the Member of Parliament. Gradually, how different voices within our community whether it comes to gender, religion, are given representation within the Tibetan parliament. It was enabled through a reservation. that helped the different voices to become a part of the decision-making and ensured that the voices from the people are heard on the platform of the Tibetan parliament.

While in exile there was a redrafting of our charter, we call our constitution- charter, which ensured that these protections, these reservations are guaranteed to ensure different voices are heard. All of us need to realize that representing the interests of citizens of all walks of life is not just crucial but it enables a more robust democracy that is needed. And I think for me as an individual, I have always introduced myself as a Tibetan freedom fighter or an activist and for my identity as a woman within the platform of the freedom movement is important.

It has been shaped because of my background – of how my late father and mother who have all been former political prisoners, were jailed for years. My late father was jailed for more than 20 years in a Chinese prison and was subjected to torture of different forms. This I feel kind of shaped me as a person into becoming an activist. Also, the experiences of my grandmother of not just being a political prisoner, but a female political prisoner has made me stronger. These are experiences of everyday Tibetan women that we are trying to bring out and make our voices heard.

Despite the reservation, it's very interesting, how from three traditional regions of Tibet – U Tsang, Amdo and Kham, we are supposed to have 2 reserved seats for Tibetan women, and so far, this year we were able to ensure the victory of 9 Tibetan Member of Parliament. Although that is not a very impressive number for us but considering the numbers that I've

been hearing around India and other nations, we believe that we are doing pretty good but then I believe that we should be doing better because we still see that our population is 50-50. However, that leads us to think in spite of having 50% of the voter as women, we are unable to ensure the victory of 50% or more women leaders.

I think these are challenges that we need to and with the help of so many experts who are making sure that Tibetans within our community not just the leader, but from the civil community are guided with the right message in ensuring that now as Tibetan women, we can learn to trust Tibetan women's leadership, and their strong role, and their personality and their vision as a leader. This year the president of the Central Tibetan administration that is the Tibetan government in exile, is a male. Of course, we haven't had a female political leader so far, especially after His Holiness the Dalai Lama handed over the entire political authority. For me, as a women voter, we hope to see women leadership coming soon in that exile democracy and very soon when Tibet gets its freedom.

As of now or when it comes to the executive body, there are seven cabinets and off those seven cabinets, three of them are Tibetan women leaders, and I must say that it makes me very proud to endorse them, because I hear about token votes, token seats and I know how these three ladies are such personalities that they will be able to contribute very strongly. As women leaders, the power that we have is empathy and sensitivity and that is power. Because that is often looked upon as something negative and something weak. For me, because of these facts, we can be better leaders. I can say with experience that perhaps we have been doing much better, but we deserve more than what we have at the moment.

“women need to learn to trust women’s leadership”

Ms. Ritu Jaiswal (Former Mukhiya, Gram Panchayat, Singwahani) said that even if women get representation through the reservation, it doesn't guarantee leadership quality and participation. In Bihar, there is a 50% reservation for women, but their effective participation is still a challenge. The most significant reason for the inadequate representation of women in politics is the patriarchal mindset that prevails in the city. For instance, men's work is accounted for in the GDP of the country whereas women's work in the households or the fields does not get accounted for, even though women toil harder than men. The norms are such that people listen to only the earning member of the household and in the majority of the cases, it is the man of the house. In such a patriarchal setup, women either don't feel confident to voice out their opinions or even if they do, their voices are suppressed and hence go unheard.

In Bihar, female labour force participation is very low. In this light, we need to address the intense gender inequality that is plaguing the system. Right from the time a girl child is born, she is discriminated against be it about her schooling, nutrition, or share in the property and so on. They have not been given a level playing field as men. In the absence of a level playing field and equal rights, it is unfair to expect that they will evolve as strong political leaders. We need to address and fight against the societal evils that are practiced against women for them to be able to see themselves as rights bearers. We need to make them financially independent for instance; there is a 30% reservation for women in all government jobs. As a result, many women got into the police services. But it was at the same time that the crime rate had increased. The reason is that these women were not adequately trained to do their job. They did not know how to use rifles, they were not physically strong, and they did not know how to fight the goons, and so on. They were given the jobs because the system was mandated to give 30% seats to women. As a society, we all need to change our mindset around bringing up a girl child and give them an equal playing field so that they can excel in their respective fields.

“representation through reservation does not guarantee participation”

Adv. Rina Parvin (Chairperson, Gazipur Upazila Parishad) said that Bangladesh has almost 50 years of democratic journey. There are five areas in the local government system in Bangladesh. They have 50 selected parliamentary members. Now they have a reservation at the local level, earlier the members were nominated. In 1997, the quota system was introduced in the local government (Union Parishad). Each *Union Parishad* has nine constituencies and one chairperson position open for men and women to compete. Each block of three constituencies has one reserved seat for directly elected women. Thus, the reserved ratio is three reserved seats for women for every nine non-reserved seats – or 25%. There are 4665 Union Parishad and a total of 41,508 members out of which 13,686 are women members.

She started her political life as a student, 32 years ago. She was associated with the political parties and at the same time, started practicing law and worked with people on social justice. In 2009 she was elected for the first time and in 2019, she was re-elected. In Bangladesh, women candidates are allowed to pursue politics only to a certain level; they are not allowed at the national and provincial levels. Women face more difficulties as compared to men. They often do not get support from their families, be it emotional support or economic support. Economic independence and empowerment are essential for women to take on political leadership. There is a 30% reservation for women in the political structure. The current Prime Minister – Ms. Sheikh Hasina, is very supportive of women's leadership. Although there is a 30% reservation for women these posts have become ornamental, their functions are not well defined. She concluded, *‘We want the opportunity to get elected directly, instead of a quota system’*.

“there is superstitious and religious fundamentalism against women”

Mr. Bhim Raskar (Director, Resource and Support Centre for Development) highlighted that Section 15 of our Constitution states that reservation is positive discrimination. But our society is completely discriminatory. He emphasised that in addition to the reservation, we need to collectivise, and mass mobilise women to promote strong women leadership. This mass mobilisation needs to be followed by strong handholding support. He said that the women's wing of political parties is not strong, and the parties avoid working with the women's wing. We need to strengthen the women's wing of every political party. We need to give them a platform where they can voice their opinion.

The second important factor would be party orientation for women leaders. They need to know the history of the party and their current know-how for them to perform their roles effectively. If women are not oriented about the parties, promotional politics can never happen. Civil society organisations need to come together to understand the importance of learning politics. There needs to be a diversity of mindset. It is of utmost importance to work closely with male members of the parties. Women should not only talk about women's leadership but also include male members of the party. It is very important to work with elected male members to gauge their ideology.

“mass mobilisation and handholding support is crucial to strengthen women's leadership at the global and national level”

Ms. Bhatt requested **Ms. Tamang** to share her reflection on the way forward.

Ms. Tamang endorsed **Mr. Raskar's** remark that we cannot achieve the desired success unless we have the numbers; therefore, mass mobilisation is crucial in this aspect. This mass mobilisation needs to be followed by hand-holding support, something that civil society must do actively. Reiterating **Ms. Lhagyaru's** remark on empathy and sensitivity being a superpower of women, she said that the pandemic showed how women are better leaders in times of crisis. For instance, New Zealand, Taiwan, Finland, Norway, where the language of empathy gained currency. She echoed with **Ms. Jaiswal** about raising the girl child in a gender-equal environment. They must be given equal opportunities, equal training and equal societal status for them to become effective leaders. For this to happen, the support of family becomes essential. Women's political participation goes hand in hand with democratisation. We need to combine the quotas with elected positions within the electoral system.

Ms. Bhatt invited **Dr. Rajesh Tandon** (Founder- President, PRIA) to share his closing reflection and key takeaways.

In his closing remarks, **Dr. Tandon** said that if the purpose is affirmative action and reservation at the local government level, then it does not necessarily translate into higher tiers of governance at the provincial and national levels. This has nothing to do with the quality, competence, willingness, motivation and demonstrated the ability of women elected representatives. It has to do with the fact that we do not have mechanisms to ensure similar political mandates at higher tiers of governance. The recent amendments to the constitution have mandated the political representation of women at the local, provincial and national levels. These changes in our Constitution have been mostly incremental. they have been more accommodative than transformative. Almost all the Constitutions written in the last 25 years have explicitly mentioned *civil society* but those that were prepared at the turn of post-World War II, talk about people, nothing substantive about civil society.

We cannot look at the women's political leadership from only the women empowerment lens. It is democratic parity, mandate, and requirement that their representation is a part of a representation of all segments of society. We need to begin our campaign for women's political leadership as a democratic agenda and include men in the process. Thus, create an enabling political representation of all sections of society.

There are other institutions across the world where the representation of women and women's leadership is very low. For instance, a recent study revealed that out of 810 universities and scientific research institutions in India, less than 7% are headed by women – that is even lower than our parliamentary representation. Among the High Court and the Supreme Court judges, it is less than 12%. Recently the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court talked about 50% reservation in the judiciary. It was for the first time somebody even spoke about this issue. In corporate boards, it is less than 15%. This is even though in 2013 Company Act Amendment mandated at least one woman on the board of the corporates. Even then the representation of women is so low. So, all these major Institutions demonstrate the same cultural phenomenon. There are 48% women teachers and academicians and researchers in the country. But only 7% reach the top.

We need to find champions within the judiciary, academia, research community and business communities. We need to coalesce in terms of equitable, demonstrable, parity in leadership of all institutions of society, including the political ones. If we coalesce, we will have a broader coalition to work together and address this question of women's representation. This needs to be a continuous effort. We cannot give up. The fact that this issue is being debated in 2021 is a demonstration of the changed reality. The hope is to get a younger generation of women leaders who have grown up in a slightly more equitable and egalitarian socialisation process. They need to shatter the glass ceiling with all their strength.

“gender equality is not just a women's agenda; it is a societal and a democratic agenda”

The conversation (samvad) ended with a vote of thanks by **Ms. Nandita Bhatt**.

5.00 pm to 5.15 pm

Welcome and Introduction to PRIA@40 Programmes and Conversation

Moderator: Ms. Nandita Pradhan Bhatt, Director, Martha Farrell Foundation

5.15 pm to 5.35 pm

Setting the Stage

- Ms. Leena Rikkila Tamang, International IDEA
- Dr. Ranjana Kumari, Centre for Social Research

5.35 pm to 6.40 pm

Discussions

- Dr. Amruthraj R M, Kerala institute of Local Administration
- Ms. Andi Timo Pangerang, People's Consultative Assembly, Republic of Indonesia
- Ms. Namgyal Dolkar Lhagyari, Central Tibetan Administration
- Adv. Rina Parvin, Gazipur Upazila Parishad
- Ms. Ritu Jaiswal, Gram Panchayat, Singwahani
- Mr. Bhim Raskar, Resource and Support Centre for Development

5.15 pm to 5:28 pm

Key Takeaways and closing comments

- Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President, PRIA

6.55 pm to 7.00 pm

Vote of Thanks and Closure

- Ms. Nandita Pradhan Bhatt, Martha Farrell Foundation

PRIA@40 EVENTS

DATE	TITLE	THEME
12 August 2021	Youth Participation and Active Citizenship	Citizen Participation
20 August 2021	Planning for Urban Informalities	Sustainable Urban Future
31 August 2021	Accelerating Capacities in Civil Society and Non-Profits	Empowering Civil Society
2 September 2021	Nurturing Civil Society Partnerships in Uncertain Times	Empowering Civil Society
15 September 2021	Redesigning Civil Society Ecosystem: From Local to Global	Empowering Civil Society
28 September 2021	Unlearning Patriarchy: Expanding Impacts of Gender Training	Making the Gender Leap
30 September 2021	Investing in Civil Society Innovations	Empowering Civil Society
01 October 2021	Community-led Adaptations: Water is Life	Decentralised Community Governance
06 October 2021	Inspiring Leadership of Mayors and Councillors for Inclusive Urbanisation	Sustainable Urban Future
12 October 2021	Trajectories of Participation: From Development to Governance	Citizen Participation
20 October 2021	Scaling up Citizen Engagement for Inclusive Urban Governance	Sustainable Urban Future
01 November 2021	Gender Transformational Organisational Renewal: Towards Gender Equality	Making the Gender Leap

17 November 2021	Participation, Representation & Accountability: Strengthening the Movement	Decentralised Community Governance
23 November 2021	Making a difference: Adapting Impact Measurement	Empowering Civil Society
25 November 2021	Young Scientists Learning Open Science	Knowledge Democracy
26 November 2021	Institutionalising Online Citizen Participation in Public Policymaking in India	Citizen Participation
29 November 2021	Changing Contours of Development Cooperation: What Roles for Civil Society?	Empowering Civil Society
30 November 2021	Local Knowledge, Social Movements & Participatory Research: Indian Perspectives	Knowledge Democracy
8 December 2021	No Time to Waste! Building Resilient Urban Communities and Cities through Locally Led Climate Adaptation	Sustainable Urban Future
9 December 2021	Gender in Governance: Pathways for Women's Political Leadership	Making the Gender Leap