

## **Political Theory and Citizenship Discourses: Cast(e) in the Periphery: Understanding Representation of Dalit Women and Politics in India**

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### Summary

Indian society is deeply gendered in that women have fewer opportunities to participate in public life. The gender division of labour that exists lays a disproportionate burden on women to fulfil the tasks of social reproduction. The care and nurturance of children, the sick and the old, household maintenance and provision for basic needs form a major part of women's work burden, especially in the case of rural women. Women are not perceived as 'public' persons in the same way as men, nor are their associational activities seen as being for the common 'public' good. Women's community participation continues to be perceived as 'outside' the planning and development process. In order to change this, in 1993, the landmark 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution mandated formation of local government councils in which 33% of the seats were to be reserved for women. This led to a remarkable number of women (over a million) joining mainstream politics at the grass-roots level. This act of women coming out of their homes led to a social and political revolution that has captured the attention of the world at large. However, in India this has also led to the assertion of new political identities at the grass roots, especially for Dalit women. This paper attempts to understand the way caste and patriarchy interact and entwine to restrict and deny women mobility and the right to political participation. It aims to understand the processes of how women are posited as the bearer of caste honour and purity, and how their political participation and assertion of political identities are challenging centuries of deep-rooted prejudice.

Manuscript received on 2010-04-15, accepted on 2010-07-20

Keywords: women, political participation, India, Dalit, intersectionality, local government councils / affairs, quota reservations

### **Introduction**

The idea of citizenship has been in the domain of intellectual discussions for many centuries now, primarily derived from Western liberal concepts of universal citizenship, as opposed to the earlier concepts, which were based on exclusivity on certain grounds (e.g. gender, property ownership, etc.). The present notion of citizenship has come to be focused on the 'universal citizen' – an individual with rights, who engages with governance institutions or the state in the public arena. This is exemplified by the following definition by T.H. Marshall, one of the most