

## **A Review Study on Women's Political Awareness and Participation in West Bengal**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Women's political awareness and participation are vital indicators of democratic development and gender equality in society. In India, women have played a significant role in political movements and electoral processes; however, their active involvement in political decision-making and leadership positions has often remained limited due to social, economic, and cultural constraints. In the context of West Bengal, women's political engagement has gradually evolved over time, reflecting broader changes in education, socio-economic conditions, and political mobilization. This review study examines existing literature on women's political awareness and participation in West Bengal. The main objective of the study is to analyze and synthesize previous research findings related to women's knowledge of political rights, voting behaviour, involvement in electoral processes, and representation in political institutions. The review draws upon various secondary sources such as books, academic journals, government reports, election data, and scholarly articles to understand the trends, challenges, and progress associated with women's political participation in the state.

***Keywords:*** *Challenges, Analyse, Mobilization, Electoral, Utilization.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to 2019 statistics given by the Indian Election Commission, India is the largest democracy in the world, with 900 million voters, of which 48% are women and 52% are men. Initial voters between 15 million people are between the ages of 18 and 19, making about 34% of the total population by 2020. The women in this nation have had a godlike status, and the nation is known as Bharath Matha. Women have played an important role in the productivity and growth of the nation. Despite the fact that the number of women voting has increased over time and that they now outnumber men in the majority of Indian states, they remain underrepresented in national and state politics as well as in the arena of political decision-making.

Several well-known women have had accountable positions in the government in recent years as central ministers and chief ministers. However, the contribution of ordinary women to modern Indian politics is minimal despite these well-known posts, and not inspiring. Women are still sadly underrepresented in India's political candidate pool, 78 years after the country's independence. Women make up little more than one-twelfth of the candidates for parliament, although making up

almost half of the nation's population. Women have made significant efforts to advance to participate as voters and frequently as candidates in local body elections, despite their underrepresentation as politicians in India's highest echelons. Due to the establishment of seat reservations for women, there are relatively more women elected to Panchayats. However, they frequently merely serve as proxy members and are not the ones who make decisions. Although the number of female candidates has increased without significant influence, female voter turnout has advanced dramatically and swiftly (Milan & Jamie, 2019). With a history of feminist movements and progressive laws like women's reservation in Panchayats, West Bengal offers a complex picture of women's political space. However, recent "Reclaim the Night" protests calling for structural and societal changes for gender justice also highlight the state's ongoing problems with patriarchal dominance, gender-based violence, and unequal decision-making power. Even while the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme and other government programs seek to promote economic empowerment, it is still very difficult to guarantee fair representation and secure access to public areas.

The Preamble of the Indian Constitution enshrines the idea of gender equality. Equal rights, fairness, and freedom of expression are made possible by the Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles for all of its citizens. In addition to granting women equality, the Constitution gives the government the authority to enact laws that discriminate favourably against them. India has also committed to ensuring women's equality by ratifying a number of international accords and human rights instruments. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified in 1993, is a crucial one.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Sambalaxmi, T. (2024)** In the past several years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of the participation of tribal women in local administration, which has become a significant problem. Throughout the course of history, these women have been subjected to a variety of types of marginalization and discrimination, which have significantly impeded their ability to fully participate in the decision-making process. In response to the increased emphasis placed on women's rights and gender equality, there have been efforts made to improve the role that indigenous women play in the governance of their communities. These individuals' participation guarantees that their opinions are taken into consideration during the formulation and execution of policies, as well as that their voices are heard. As an additional benefit, the engagement of tribal women encourages increased accountability, openness, and responsiveness to the requirements of groups that are previously marginalized. Women from tribal communities frequently confront severe social, cultural, and economic restrictions that restrict their ability to participate in local governance, notwithstanding the progress that has been made. Examples of these obstacles include insufficient educational opportunities, restricted access to resources, restrictive cultural norms, and discrimination based on gender and ethnicity. As a consequence of this, tribal women are usually excluded from decision-making processes, which leads to their viewpoints being underrepresented in the outcomes of policy decisions. Increasing the number of indigenous women who are involved in the governance of their communities has been the focus of recent initiatives. In spite of this, gaining equal representation for women who belong to tribal communities continues to be a difficult objective, which is the main focus of this study.

**Karia Dhruvi (2024).** In our modern day, we defend the concepts of equality and justice as fundamental characteristics. In spite of this, there has been a disproportionate amount of progress made in terms of the representation of women in politics around the world. When it comes to entering political arenas, women continue to face tremendous obstacles, regardless of whether they are in the peaceful nooks of rural areas or in urban areas. The bustling streets of metropolitan areas or the communities nearby. The persistence of discriminatory laws, cultural norms, and structural biases all work together to make it more difficult for women to realize their full potential as leaders and agents of change. The United Nations Women's Organization estimates that it will take 130 years to establish gender equality in the highest positions of power if things stay as they are as they are. Starting from the time of the colonial era, women have been actively participating in politics, both with and without the right to vote. In spite of the fact that they have been active in both supporting and opposing the revolution by their words, actions, and labor, it is alarming that they are underrepresented in the political landscape of today. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to analyze women's political leadership in both the lower and upper houses of parliament, as well as the percentage of women voters across the country and women's political awareness. This will be accomplished through the utilization of qualitative research methodology.

**Dulhanty Annabel (2024).** In spite of the fact that a substantial amount of research has been conducted to investigate the effects of self-help groups (SHGs) on women, insufficient attention has been devoted to the intricate relationship that exists between SHGs and politics, which extends beyond the concept of political "awareness." This study, which is based on qualitative research conducted on the ground in West Bengal, demonstrates that the relationship between politics and self-help groups (SHGs) is extremely complicated. This is due to the fact that political activity in SHGs can lead to conflict and division among communities, but it also has the potential to offer women opportunities that are not available anywhere else. This article makes the argument that politics is essential to comprehending the functioning of self-help groups (SHGs), specifically the manner in which political exclusion through SHGs contributes to the escalation of ostracism and conflict within communities. It does so by drawing on theories of social exclusion and feminist literature on the public/private binary relationship.

**Babu, Swati Sinha (2024).** Achieving gender equality and fostering women's empowerment is the focus of Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Concerns pertaining to the social, economic, and political empowerment of women are essential to each of the 17 goals, given that women make up fifty percent of the total population. The government of the The Self-Help Group (SHG) model was first established by India in its Ninth Five Year Plan (1997–2002) as a major strategy for the empowerment of women. Since that time, the SHG model has developed into one of the most extensive and rapidly expanding microfinance programs in the emerging globe of developing countries. The purpose of this study is to investigate the operation of self-help groups (SHGs) as well as the perceptions of SHG group members regarding their empowerment in terms of education, economics, social issues, and political issues. The research was conducted in Surulia village, which is located in the Purulia District of West Bengal. One hundred members of the SHG participated in the study. Eighty-two percent of respondentss agreed that their reading and writing skills had improved as a result of their participation in the SHGs. Ninety percent of women agreed

that their family income had increased as a result of their participation in the SHGs, and forty-six percent of women reported that they had become more knowledgeable about women's rights regarding property. These women's political empowerment has not significantly improved as a result of their participation in SHGs, despite the fact that these achievements have been achieved.

**Miah Nur Alam (2024).** If women are left behind, a nation will not be able to move forward toward its goals. Swami Vivekananda is the name. When it comes to the political engagement of the people in the country, democratic decentralization plays a critically significant role. Consequently, it affords the opportunity for men and women in a state and in a country to take part in the political system. " The political engagement of men and women from all groups is also crucial for the achievement of democratic decentralization, which is the opposite of what is being discussed here. The women's political participation in the state of West Bengal is the primary topic of discussion in this article. There are a number of reasons why women in this state do not have a high level of political consciousness, and we are aware of this fact. However, with regard to the growth of the state and the nation, their political consciousness is absolutely necessary. In this paper, I investigate a number of factors that contribute to the low level of concern that women have for their participation in political processes, as well as some potential solutions, particularly with regard to the state of West Bengal.

**Suresh Babu, Thummaluru (2023).** Assessing women's participation in politics is a necessary first step in having a fruitful discussion about gender equality. Social justice, independence, and feminism are just a few examples of non-traditional political movements in which women have participated throughout history. However, because they are underrepresented in traditional electoral politics, they still confront substantial obstacles to rising to positions of political leadership. Several factors contribute to the low level of engagement, including the criminalization of politics, cultural and patriarchal limits, financial challenges, the high cost of entering electoral politics, and the negative social esteem associated with female political activity. It is essential to consider the socio-cultural context while discussing women's political participation. Prior to 1991, the emphasis was on women's development; however, with the advent of economic liberalization and meritocracy, the emphasis moved to women's empowerment. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was pivotal in the fight for gender equality at the grassroots level. When it comes to advancing women's political equality, NGOs and feminist groups must keep working together. Legislative safeguards are insufficient; advocacy organizations and citizens alike should do more to assist women in developing the political savvy and social capital necessary to win elections. There has been a lack of public support for women's empowerment efforts, even as economic liberalization has paved the way for more women to hold positions of authority. Allocating reserved seats can be a first step in increasing the representation of women in parliament. However, in order for more people to get involved in politics, the state and society must collaborate to eliminate social and psychological barriers.

**Neogi Kuntala (2023).** The political representation of women in India has, over the course of its history, been a topic of discussion and investigation. Women's engagement in politics has been impacted by election reforms in West Bengal, a state that has a long and illustrious history of political activities and reforms. With a particular emphasis on legislative and local body elections, this study investigates the influence that electoral changes have had on the political representation of

women in the state of West Bengal. This research investigates the influence that changes in legislation, voter behavior, party strategy, and socio-economic factors play in determining the level of female representation in political institutions. In order to determine whether or not electoral reforms have had a good influence on the political empowerment of women in West Bengal, the study combines both qualitative and quantitative studies.

**Datta P. K. (2023).** In democratic institutions, gender quotas are now generally accepted as a tried-and-true method of advancing gender justice, notwithstanding certain drawbacks. The impact of reserving seats for women as elected representatives in rural local government in India has been attempted to be captured and analyzed in this article, given secondary source material and my own brief study conducted in West Bengal, one of the Indian states, with particular attention to the difficulties faced by these women. It has been maintained that women elected leaders have demonstrated their ability to manage governmental institutions and to positively impact the development and governance agenda in spite of some innate structural limitations. Additionally, it has been argued that the state should take a far more active role now that it has made room for women by a constitutional change.

**Pal Yesh (2023).** There are considerable variations in political ideas and political activity between employed women and housewives, as well as differences on psychological variables such as self-esteem, according to cross-sectional comparisons of the two groups. Using a quasi-experimental approach, this research compares the results of the National Election Study panel that was conducted between 1972 and 1976. The purpose of this study was to investigate the competing hypotheses of self-selection and socialization by analysing the data of employed women, housewives, and women who entered the labour force between the years 1972 and 1976.

**Nazma Sultana et al. (2023)** found that goal of the current study was to learn how rural Dinhata Subdivision women saw women's empowerment through political engagement. The study was carried out in the Indian district of Coochbehar's Dinhata Sub-Division. The qualitative research has a phenomenological focus. Purposive sampling was used, and semi-structured interviews with rural women in the study region were used to gather qualitative data. Following deductive coding according to preset themes, the data were subjected to thematic analysis. According to the survey, there is significant variation among rural women's perceptions of women's empowerment through political participation. While the majority of rural women (47%) believe that women should actively participate in politics to empower themselves, 29% see this negatively, and 24% have no notion of how women might empower themselves through politics. Nonetheless, 67% of women in rural areas are eager to get involved in politics. They also believe that if the family's male members actively engage in politics, they won't face any opposition. Additionally, they see certain obstacles if they become actively involved in politics, such as taking care of the family and doing housework, which are traditionally and culturally reserved for women in rural India.

**Kumari, Suman and Vasu Siotra (2023).** They explored that the women's empowerment and gender equality have been at the top of the global agenda. The United Nations has included achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls as one of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-5). To address gender inequality, numerous global, regional, and local initiatives and attempts have been made.

Because of the patriarchal mentality, women in India have faced discrimination and stereotypes since ancient times. Women have experienced societal ills like sati, the purdah system, female infanticide, female foeticide, dowry, and domestic abuse. A number of legislative and constitutional measures have been drafted to do away with these ills. Women nowadays are far more aware of their rights and have made significant progress towards female empowerment. The federal and state administrations have introduced a number of programmes aimed at emancipating women. Nonetheless, gender bias and the patriarchal attitude persist, and women continue to face discrimination in both public and private settings. The goal of the article is to examine the degree of women's empowerment in the various Indian states. The secondary data gathered from multiple government sources served as the foundation for the study. Additionally, an examination of the causes of the patterns has been conducted. The study has shown that female literacy positively impacts women's health and ability to make decisions. Additionally, government assistance in the form of programmes and infrastructure serves as a catalyst for women's empowerment. Self-help and women-focused organisations have encouraged women's economic empowerment and decision-making.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although women's political knowledge and participation in West Bengal have come a long way in the last several decades, the review study found that a number of structural and socio-cultural impediments still affect women's engagement in politics. There has been a substantial improvement in women's political awareness and engagement in election and decision-making processes, thanks in large part to rising literacy rates, more media coverage, grassroots movements, and the introduction of reservation laws in local government. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, among other initiatives, reserved seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions, paving the way for more women to participate in grassroots governance and join the political sphere.

In spite of these encouraging trends, the report notes that patriarchal norms, economic dependence, a lack of political resources, and the impact of male-dominated party structures frequently hinder women's political engagement. Proxy representation is still happening in certain municipal bodies, and women representatives still have a hard time making decisions on their own. In addition, there are still gaps in political literacy, information availability, and leadership development possibilities between rural and urban women.

While women's political awareness and engagement has been on the rise in West Bengal, the results show that more work is needed to make sure their empowerment is real and effective. Achieving an inclusive and participatory democracy requires bolstering political education, advocating for policies that are attentive to gender dynamics, empowering women to take on leadership roles within political parties, and increasing chances for economic and educational advancement. The current gender gap and the lack of a conducive climate for women to participate in state politics and governance should be the topics of future studies and policy measures.

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