Beyond the Mainstream: ***Studying North-East India***
Gender, Environment and Sustainable Development in North-East India
A Multilingual Peer Review Annual Journal
Volume: I, Issue: I, 2026.

A pragmatic analysis of women's political participation in India

Joyshree Kagyung

Guest Faculty, Department of Political Science

Jhanji Hemnath Sarma College, Sivasagar

Email ID: joyshreekagyung04@gmail.com

Abstract

Women's political participation is an essential part of democratic governance and social justice in India. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and a range of legal reforms, women face considerable obstacles in accessing political power and decision-making positions. The paper deals with the status, problems, and significance of women's participation in Indian politics from a pragmatic point of view. It speaks about the historical background of women's participation in political movements and their representation in institutions like Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and State Legislative Assemblies.

The study finds several reasons for women's failure to play an active role in politics, such as patriarchal social structures, gender discrimination, lack of education, financial dependency, criminalization of politics, and lack of political parties' support. At the same time, it studies the positive effects of women's representation on democratic development, policy-making, social welfare, and gender equality. Reservation of seats for women in local self-government institutions has greatly increased the political awareness and leadership of women at the grassroots level.

The study also emphasizes the need for reforms like reservation for Parliament and State Assemblies, educational empowerment, leadership training, economic independence, and awareness programs to empower women in politics. The study concludes that inclusive governance, balanced decision-making, and overall progress of Indian democracy need more participation of women in politics. Women's empowerment in politics is not only good for democracy but also good for national development and social transformation.

Keywords : Women , Political participation , Decision making, Development ,Empowerment, Gender Equality, Awareness.

Introduction

Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. ------Mahatma Gandhi

Women's political involvement is a pillar of democratic representation and gender equality. Politics involves representation, policy, power and position with Government as its area. Political participation refers to the participation of individuals in the political process. It ensures that individuals are able to take part in deciding the common goals of the society and the best ways of achieving it. Political participation means not merely exercising the right to vote, but also power sharing, decision making, policy making at all levels of governance of the State.

The participation of women and their involvement in electoral process is an important marker of the maturity of democracy in any country. It can be defined as equality and freedom with which women share political power with men. This is a major contributor to the party competition structure in the Indian politics that is ruled by inherent male dominance and a patriarchal mindset that excludes women from the electoral process.

According to the famous philosopher Aristotle, "In the differences between sexes, men are considered better and more in nature, while women are underestimated." The gender quota is being implemented at a remarkable rate throughout the world. It is seen as an important policy measure to increase the reach of women in decision-making bodies. The basic purpose of the quota system is to promote participation in women's government. Many developing countries in the world have ensured quotas at the national or subnational level so that gender can be ensured.

Women will get empowerment in politics only if women get reservations in politics. Social barriers can also be overcome when the roots of women are raised and activated in politics. For the participation of the Women's Organization, the Government of India has not taken any concrete steps. This change of political development is visible in the form of political power. Instead of women, the place is reserved for political parties. The political uplift of women is not

the basis of women's economic status. Women have long waited for politics to come because the majority of parties do not give a chance to women in politics.

Objectives of the study :

1. To examine the role of women's political participation in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.
2. To identify the challenges faced by women in politics
3. To suggest measures for increasing women's participation

Literature Review :

Sumanto Chakravarty , Political participation of women in India, problems faced and how it can be solved. In this article the author discussed about the various aspects to deal with political participation in India. They also talk about various problems faced by women in getting equal participations' men. It also addressed the various contributing factors such as each of education, and awareness and the mindset of the people.

Anuradha Chadha, Political participation of women: a case study in india. In her article they discussed about women issues, women's political empowerment was at the of all the discourses, but still, in any political system, participation of women is very low as compared to men right from the developed to developing countries. No doubt, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

Bijoi prasad Das , Empowerment of women in India:The changing scenario and it's implications. In this article the author described about the Empowerment of women involves the improvement of their status in the family, community and society. It ensures women's accessibility to modern development facilities and extends their participation in social, economic and political process and decision making.

Research Methodology :

The present study is primarily based on secondary data. The relevant secondary data has been

collected from Election Commission of India's report, newspaper articles, and research article and from various Government websites and reports.

Political participation of women in India :

Women's political participation is defined as the engagement of women in election processes, policy-making and leadership positions. It involves voting, standing for office, holding public office and participating in decision-making at all levels of governance. Political empowerment of women is crucial to achieve gender equality since it provides women with a platform to address concerns such as education, healthcare and gender-based violence.

Pre-Independence Period: The role of women played a very vital role in the pre independence period in order to free our country from the British rule. Women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Pandita Ramabai, Kasturba Gandhi ,Rani Laxmibai and Aruna Asaf Ali actively participated in the rallies, agitations and the policy deliberations. However, in spite of their enormous accomplishments, their political representation was minimal, because of the patriarchal standards.

Development After Independence: After the Independence of India, the most important milestone towards women's political participation was the establishment of 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) through the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in 1992. This stage is meant to ensure women voice in the decision making process at the grass root level. The impact of this strategy is the increasing female representation in the rural and urban governance, so that they can demonstrate their leadership and solve gender sensitive issues.

In the 21st century Women have enjoyed a wide range of safeguards and a significant progress in women's participation.We have got several prominent female leaders in the present time in our country who have given a lot to rule the country and participate in the decision-making process. Some of the most influential leaders, like Droupadi Murmu, Nirmala Sitharaman, Mamta Banerjee & so on.

Assembly Election, 2026 :

The 2026 assembly elections in five states reflect a different story, even as political parties attracted women voters with promises of welfare, safety and empowerment. Women's representation in political authority is minimal.Despite decades of women's political mobilization and a strong case for the Women's Reservation Bill, a few of women were able to reach positions of power in the recently ended assembly polls in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Puducherry and West Bengal.In these five states, 1,019 women sought 824 assembly seats, with only 78 winning.

Tamil Nadu elected 23 women to the Assembly out of the 443 women who contested the elections, including 13 from actor C. Joseph Vijay's two-year-old party Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK).West Bengal, traditionally one of the best performing states in terms of women's participation, elected 37 women this year. It had 385 women candidates and was in the second position in terms of number of women contesting the elections. While Kerala which has high social development indicators had eleven women contesting elections, Assam elected seven. Puducherry was different in another respect. Forty women stood for election but none was elected to the Assembly. In 2021 it elected one, a female.But the data suggest small increases in women's representation in Tamil Nadu, where the number went up from 12 to 23, and in Assam, where the number of women MLAs has remained the same since 2021. Kerala had one less. West Bengal went the other way. It had more seats this time, but fewer women were elected, down from 40 to 37.

Women were in the minority in legislatures, but they outnumbered men in voting in all five assembly elections in 2026, demonstrating their growing electoral power.
West Bengal had the highest turnout among the five states, with 93.8% for women and 92.06% for males. While in Tamil Nadu 86.2% women voted as against 83.77% males and in Assam 86.53% women voted as against 84.95% men. Kerala had the greatest margin in gender voting with 81.17% women voting against 74.9% men. In Puducherry too, women outshone men at the polling booths. Again the figures suggest women are crucial voters, but peripheral when it comes to political influence.

Findings :

To examine the role of women's political participation in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment :

Beijing Declaration (1995) stressed that women's empowerment and full involvement, based on equality in all areas of culture, including involvement in decision-making processes and authority, are essential to achieving inclusion, growth, and harmony.

- Democratic Strengthening :

Women's participation in politics enhances democracy by assuring equal representation of men and women in political institutions. Women make up approximately half of India's population, and their participation ensures more inclusive and balanced democratic governance. A democracy can never be truly successful as long as women are underrepresented in decision-making.

- Encourages Gender Equality :

Women can also attain equality in society through political participation. Women's involvement in politics goes against the typical patriarchal attitude and calls for equal rights and opportunities. It raises awareness on women's empowerment and aids in reducing gender inequality in social, economic, and political sectors.

- Safeguarding Women's Interests :

Women leaders tend to concentrate more on women's issues such as education, healthcare, maternal welfare, fair pay, safety, and protection from domestic abuse. Their involvement in the lawmaking bodies aids in the formulation of gender-sensitive legislation and policies for the betterment of women.

- Enhances Governance and Administration :

Women MPs are more likely to advocate for honest, transparent, people-centered governance. Many women leaders have been heading local self-government entities and have effectively implemented welfare schemes and development programs. Their leadership facilitates the smooth functioning and enhanced delivery of public services.

- Promotes Social Development :

Women politicians tend to put attention to social welfare sectors such as health, sanitation, nutrition, education, and child development. Their participation serves to raise the standard of living of poorer and marginal elements of society. That helps for the general development of the country.

- Women's Political Empowerment :

Women's participation in politics builds confidence, develops leadership skills, and empowers them to make decisions. It gives them an active voice in public affairs and policy-making. Political empowerment also raises women's consciousness of their rights and obligations in society.

- Motivates Future Generations :

Successful female leaders are role models for young girls and other women. Their achievements inspire other women to enter politics and public life. Women across India have been inspired by leaders like Indira Gandhi and Mamata Banerjee.

- Promotes social equality and inclusive development :

Women's political participation helps to lessen social inequality by giving voice to the marginalized. It guarantees that government policies are inclusive of all elements of the society, such as women, children, the rural population, and disadvantaged groups. Full participation favors balanced and sustainable development.

To identify the challenges faced by women in politics :

Women leaders face tougher issues than male leaders because they also have to deal with perceptions. Women's political participation may be facilitated or impeded by many factors including geographical location, cultural norms, political systems and social level.

- Social Structure of Patriarchy :

Patriarchy is a huge factor in Indian society and is the belief that men are more fit to lead and take decisions in the public sphere. Women are supposed to be doing housework and family things. Politics is often thought of as a man's area. Such stereotypical ideas discourage many women from seeking leadership roles or entering politics.

- Political Awareness and Education Deficit :

Education is necessary for leadership and political engagement. In rural and backward areas, a large number of women are still uneducated and unaware of their political rights and constitutional obligations and government policies. Illiteracy and political unawareness make women lack self-confidence and unable to actively participate in political activities.

- Financial dependency and economic hurdles :

Money is required for party events, travel, publicity and election campaigns. Many women are not able to run for office because they rely on their families for money. It's hard for women to compete with male candidates who are more independent financially.

- Political Parties Offer Little Support :

Political parties are essential to the process of selecting candidates and developing leaders. But women do sometimes get fewer tickets for elections and fewer prospects in political parties. In political groups men are dominant in leadership. Sometimes women are given symbolic roles, not jobs with real political power.

- The Burden of Family Duties :

Besides their profession, women are also expected to look after children, housework and family responsibilities. As well as the time, travel and constant engagement with the public that political life demands, it can be hard for women to balance this with domestic duties. The lack of family support also limits their involvement in politics.

- Political Violence and Harassment :

Women politicians are subjected to violence, threats, intimidation, harassment and character assassination. They may also be subject to social criticism and online harassment. The fear of instability and public humiliation prevents many competent women from entering or pursuing political careers.

- Gender bias and stereotypes :

Gender stereotypes often result in bias against women in politics. People in society may think women are too emotional or not able to make decisions and lead people. Some people care more about their personal lives or their looks than their skills and accomplishments. These attitudes mean that respect for female politicians and how well they are treated are diminished.

- Lack of Self-Confidence and Leadership Potential :

Many women lack confidence to participate in politics due to social constraints and limited opportunities. Women tend to have less access to mentorship, leadership development, and political networks. Thus they may be reluctant to run for office or to engage in important political debates and decisions.

To suggest measures for increasing women's participation :

To secure the woman's rightful place in society and to enable them to decide their own destiny and for the growth of genuine and sustainable democracy, woman's participation in politics is essential. This will not only uplift their personality but will open the way for their social and economic empowerment. Their participation in public life will solve many problems of society.

- Education and Political Consciousness :

Education is a huge part of empowering women. Many women don't know about their political rights and prospects, especially in rural areas. Political awareness programs, literacy campaigns, and civic education can make the women comprehend the value of voting, leadership, and participation in governance. Educated women are more confident to voice their ideas and participate in political activities.

- Reservation of Seats for Women :

Reservation is one of the most efficient means of enhancing women's representation in politics. Women's participation at the grassroots level has already been increased with the reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions. Similar reservations in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies can provide more opportunity to women to enter politics and assist in decision-making.

- Encouraging Women's Support for Political Parties :

Elections are important for the political parties. But several parties distribute fewer electoral tickets to women candidates. Political parties need to promote equal chances for women by nominating more women candidates, promoting women leaders in the party structures, and fostering women's leadership at all levels.

- Financial and Economic Assistance :

Election campaigns call for a lot of financial resources that many women cannot afford because of economic reliance and inequity. Women running for office have more effective ways to get the financial support, campaign funds, and training programs they need. Women candidates might also get financial assistance from government schemes and political organizations.

- Training of skills and leadership development :

Many women lack the self-confidence and leadership experience to go into politics. Leadership training programs, seminars and workshops, and political education can allow women to enhance communication skills, decision-making skills and information about government and public administration.

- Safety and Security :

Women in politics suffer harassment, abuse, discrimination, and character assassination. These difficulties deter many women from entering political life. Creating a secure and respectful atmosphere for women lawmakers requires strict regulations, stronger security measures, and effective legal protection.

- Changing Social Attitudes and Gender Stereotypes :

Traditionally, Indian society has considered politics a domain dominated by men. Women's engagement is sometimes constrained by patriarchal views and gender stereotyping. Society must foster the notion that women are as capable of leadership and governance as men. Educational institutions, media, and social activities can contribute to changing the public attitudes about women in politics.

- Family & Community Support :

Family supports participation of women in politics. Many women are also restricted by family commitments and social expectations. Families and communities should encourage women to participate in public life and support their political aspirations. Sharing household chores also allows women to juggle family and political careers.

- Media & Technology's Role :

Media and internet platforms promote awareness and motivate women to participate in politics. Television, newspapers, and social media can highlight the achievements of great women leaders

and inspire young women to become involved in politics. The digital channels are also a way for women to express views and reach out to voters.

- Developing women's organizations and NGOs :

Women's organizations, self-help groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can play a vital role in persuading women to join in politics. These groups provide training, legal awareness, leadership opportunities, and support networks that enable women to be empowered politically and socially.

Conclusion :

Without equal participation of women in the political process, the hope for democracy and democratization is nonsense. Thus, the democratic process is able to grow and develop effectively when all people are given equal encouragement to exercise their democratic rights and when women can experience benefits equally with their counterparts. The active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace, and democracy, and the inclusion of their perspectives and experiences into the decision-making processes can result in solutions that satisfy a larger number of society, which have social benefits and better and more appropriate social, political, legal, and economic solutions for their problems. For the emancipation of women and ensuring them equality, the educational, economic, and political independence of the women is of paramount importance. This can lead to total development of the women. Therefore, it becomes important and necessary for the women's organizations as well as the government of India to search for remedies to improve the political status of the women.

References:

1. Chadha, A. (2014). Political participation of women: A case study in India. *International Journal of Sustainable Development, 7*(2), 91–108.
2. Chakravarty, S. (n.d.). Participation of women in India: Problems faced and how it can be solved. *Journal of Contemporary Issues of Law (JCIL), 4*(9).
3. Kumar, P. (2017). Participation of women in politics: Worldwide experience. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 22*(12), 77–78.
4. Kusuma, A. (2024). Women in politics in India: An analytical study. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research, 11*(1).
5. Political empowerment and participation of women in India. (2018). *International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics, 120*(5), 4721–4736.
6. Ritu, & Rathi, A. (2020). Women's political participation in India: Barriers and remedies. *International Journal of Business Economics and Management Research, 11*(12), 17–24.
7. Sarda, B. (2023). Political participation and women empowerment. *[Journal name not provided], 8*(3), 133–140.
8. Vajiram Editor. (2026, January 5). *Women in politics: Status in India, challenges, measures*.
9. Varghese, T. (2020). Women's political participation and leadership in India: Examining the challenges. *Public Policy and Administration, 18*(2), 111–123.
10. Vijayakumari, R., & Rao, K. G. (2014). Women's political participation in India. *Global Journal for Research Analysis, 3*(8).
11. Bhatt, U. (2026, May 2). *Report on women's political participation in India: Structural and societal*.