



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64672/IJIFR/26.03.13.07.012> PUBLISHED ON: MARCH 12, 2026

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: AN ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Dipmala Bhawal

Assistant Professor, Gangarampur B.Ed. College,
Gangarampur, Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal

ABSTRACT: *A healthy and prosperous democracy includes women's as an essential element in political sphere. It ensures that woman's voices, perspectives, and experiences are represented in decision making process. Their dauntlessly engagement in politics like voter, leaders, and policymakers, they contribute to more balanced and equitable policies that address the needs of the citizens. Although, women in West Bengal often witnesses various obstacles such as social stereotypes, limited access to resources, personal attack and institutional challenges that restrict their participation in politics. Despite all these obstacles women's are increasingly taking part in political movement, leadership roles, and governance. In this investigation the methodology followed by the researcher is analytical and evaluative. It will analyze the need of women's political participation along with the challenges in modern time faced by the women's to engage themselves in political field. The study will also evaluate the reality prospects of women's political engagement in West Bengal at current scenario. Women's political participation not only promotes gender equality but also strengthens democratic institutions and above all improves the quality of governance. Greater representation of women in politics helps to create more inclusive policies related to education, social welfare, health, finance and human rights.*

KEYWORDS: *Women; Political Participation; Challenges; Reality; West Bengal*

PAPER CITATION:

Bhawal, D. "Women's Political Participation: An Analysis of Challenges and Prospects", *International Journal of Informative & Futuristic Research (IJIFR)*, Vol. (13) (7), March 2026, pp. 887-893.

<https://doi.org/10.64672/IJIFR/26.03.13.07.012>

CC

BY-NC-SA 4.0 *This article is an open access article published under the terms and conditions of the CC- BY –NC –SA 4.0 Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial- ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License. All copyrights reserved to the Authors & Journal Publisher© Copyright IJIFR 2026.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's political participation is a crucial indicator of democratic development and social progress. In any democratic society, equal representation and active involvement of the citizen in political process are essential for ensuring inclusive governance and balanced decision making. Women constitute nearly half of the world's population, yet their presence and influence in political institutions have historically remained limited due to social, cultural, economic, and institutional barriers.

Over the past few decades, significant efforts have been made across the globe to promote gender equality in political participation. Various policies, legal frameworks, and social movements have encouraged women to participate in political activities such as voting, contesting elections, engaging in political debates, and contributing to policy formulation. These initiatives aim to empower women and ensure that their perspectives and needs are reflected in governance and public policies.

Despite these advancements, challenges such as gender stereotypes, lack of political opportunities, and limited access to resources, and societal expectations continue to hinder their full participation in politics. Historically, politics has been dominated by men, resulting in the underrepresentation of women in decision-making bodies. However, increasing awareness about gender equality and human rights has led to global efforts to promote women's participation in political systems. International organizations, governments, and civil society groups have emphasized the importance of empowering women politically, recognizing that their inclusion leads to more representative governance, diverse perspectives, and policies that better address the needs of society as a whole.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Kenyatta, G. N. (2023). Studied on 'The political participation of women in Kenya'. The study shows that the elections of 2013 and 2017 had the highest number of women in Kenyan history both in the legislature and the executive branch on the other hand most government institutions did not attain the one-third gender rule which aggrieve the Constitution. This study scrutinized both qualitative and quantitative data on the socio-political and economic factors that was contributed to the status quo in the Kenyan politics. The study concludes that the political goodwill of a country is a major contributor to women's inclusion in politics. Further, political parties must be critical reflection about their power dynamics. Also for gender equality there should be concerted efforts by both the state and other stakeholders to implement the statutory instruments.
- Chadha, A. (2014). Studied on 'Political participation of women: A case study in India'. Study was to support and encourage the enactment of the Women's Political Reservation Bill. Additionally its aim was to stimulate the initiatives for stopping corruption, criminalization and communalization of politics, for enforcing stringent ceiling of funding expenses incurred for election campaigns and creating awareness in the society in order to inculcate the values of gender equality and gender justice. The study was based heavily on United Nations reports, International norms and conventions, Indian Constitutional provisions and other statutory enactments providing favourable laws rendering special privileges for the benefits of women, Government of India reports, NGO reports and important works by modern jurists who contributed a lot towards the evolution and growth of feminist jurisprudence and studies.
- Chhibber, P. (2002). Investigated on 'Why are some women politically active? The household, public space and political participation in India'. This paper attributes the limited presence of women in legislative bodies to the fact that many women are still confined to the household. Data was collected from Northern India The analysis suggests that even after controlling for demographic factors, only those women who have an identity that is independent of the household are likely to avail the opportunity to contest elections for local bodies. The paper then extends the findings from the Indian case to other nations by analyzing the World Values Survey and finds that similar patterns exist globally.

- Andersen, K. (1975). In 'Working women and political participation, 1952-1972' Examines the extent to which the sex differences in political participation have narrowed over the last twenty years, and finds that the change was due to a particular group of women those employed outside the home. The possibility that socio demographic changes in this group of women account for their increased participation is examined, as well as the connection between feminism and participation and the role of the 1972 election in mobilizing working women.
- Khanna, M. (2009). Studied on 'Political participation of women in India'. This article enumerates the factors which have resulted in a wide chasm between the 'dejure' and 'defacto' status of political participation of women in India. With a purpose of studying this complex situation the article has classified the factors into three categories - psychological variable, socio-economic variable and political variable. It concludes that the participation of women is essential as a demand of simple justice as well as a necessary condition for human existence. This can be achieved not just by increasing the numbers but by ensuring that women leaders perceive the problems and effectively resolve the issues by acceptance of their own equality and confidence.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the current status of women's participation in politics in West Bengal.
2. To identify the major social, cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that limit women's active involvement in politics.
3. To analyze the role and effect of gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures in shaping women's political opportunities and leadership in West Bengal.
4. To evaluate the impact of education, awareness, and empowerment programs on increasing women's political participation.
5. To discuss the potential prospects and strategies for strengthening women's participation in political decision making process.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this investigation the methodology followed by the researcher is analytical and evaluative. It will analyze the need of women's political participation along with the challenges in modern time faced by the women's to engage themselves in political field. The study will also evaluate the reality prospects of women's political engagement in current scenario.

5. DATA COLLECTION

- (i) Primary Source: Data had been collected from the interview of politically active women's in West Bengal.
- (ii) Secondary Source: News Papers, TV News, Debates, Videos, Social Media Platforms etc.
- (iii) Techniques: An open ended personal interview and Observation technique was used for collecting data.
- (iv) Population: Women's of West Bengal State refers here as population.
- (v) Sample: Politically Active Female Student's, Political Workers and Female Leaders of West Bengal.

6. OBJECTIVES WISE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Current Status of Women's Participation in Politics in West Bengal:

- The participation of women in politics in West Bengal has increased significantly in recent years, reflecting gradual progress toward gender equality in political representation. The state is led by Honorable Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, one of the most prominent female political leaders in India. Her leadership has encouraged greater involvement of women in political

processes and decision-making. Currently women hold a noticeable share of legislative positions in the state.

- In the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, about 40 women MLAs serve among the 294 members, representing roughly 13.6% of the assembly, which places the state among the higher-ranking states in India for women's representation. Women are also represented at the national level. In the Lok Sabha, 11 female Members of Parliament (MPs) have been elected from West Bengal, indicating the state's strong contribution to women's parliamentary representation in India.
- Overall, the leadership of Chief Minister and the presence of women MLAs and MPs demonstrate a gradual rise in women's political participation. However, despite these improvements, women are still underrepresented compared to men, and continued efforts are needed to ensure equal participation in higher political decision-making positions.

6.2 The Major Social, Cultural, Economic, and Institutional Barriers

- In the context of West Bengal, women's participation in politics is influenced by several social, cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that limit their active involvement.
- Social barriers include traditional gender roles and patriarchal attitudes that often expect women to prioritize family responsibilities over public life. Many women face discouragement from family or society when they attempt to participate in political activities.
- Cultural barriers also play a significant role. In many rural and semi-urban areas of West Bengal, political leadership is still viewed as a male-dominated field, which reduces women's confidence and opportunities to take leadership roles.
- Economic barriers are another major challenge. Many women lack financial independence and resources needed to run political campaigns or sustain political careers. Limited access to education and employment opportunities can also restrict their political awareness and participation.
- Institutional barriers include the dominance of male leaders within political parties, limited representation in higher decision-making positions, and lack of strong support networks for women candidates. Even when women are elected, they may have less influence in policy-making processes.
- Therefore, addressing these barriers through education, economic empowerment, supportive party structures, and gender-sensitive policies is essential to increase women's active participation in politics in West Bengal.

6.3 The Role and Effect of Gender Stereotypes and Patriarchal Structures:

- In the context of West Bengal, gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures continue to influence women's political opportunities and leadership. Traditionally, society has associated leadership, authority, and decision-making roles with men, while women are often expected to focus on domestic responsibilities. These stereotypes discourage many women from entering politics and limit public acceptance of women as political leaders.
- Patriarchal social structures also affect women's access to political networks, resources, and party support. In many cases, political parties and leadership positions remain male-dominated, making it difficult for women to gain equal opportunities for nominations and leadership roles. Even when women enter politics, they may face challenges in asserting authority and being taken seriously in decision-making processes.
- The major challenging and serious problem faced by the women's currently who participate in politics is personal attacks. These include comment about their appearance, clothing, marital status, character or family responsibilities rather than their political competence. These

stereotypes are used as tools to undermine their credibility and discourage them from active political participation.

- With the rise of digital platforms, women politicians frequently experience online harassment, trolling, and character assassination. Social media amplify personal attacks, spreading misinformation or abusive comments that damage their public image and mental well-being.
- However, the political landscape of West Bengal has also shown signs of change. The leadership of women leaders has challenged traditional gender norms and demonstrated that women can successfully lead at the highest political level. Despite this progress, deep-rooted gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes still influence women's political participation.
- Therefore, overcoming these social perceptions through education, awareness, and institutional support is essential to create equal opportunities for women's political leadership in West Bengal.

6.4 Impact of Education, Awareness, and Empowerment Programs:

- The impact of education, awareness, and empowerment programs has been significant in increasing women's political participation in West Bengal, particularly at the grassroots level. Education plays a crucial role in improving women's political awareness, confidence, and ability to understand governance processes. Educated women are more likely to participate in elections, attend political meetings, and take leadership roles in local governance.
- Awareness programs conducted by government agencies, NGOs, and local institutions help women understand their legal rights, political responsibilities, and opportunities for leadership. These programs encourage women to participate in Gram Sabha meetings, local elections, and community decision-making, thereby strengthening democratic participation. Studies show that such awareness initiatives improve women's understanding of local governance institutions and their roles in committees related to health, education, and development.
- Empowerment initiatives such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), leadership training, and skill development programs also play an important role. These programs provide women with financial independence, communication skills, and leadership training, which increase their confidence to contest elections and actively participate in political processes.
- Additionally, the reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions has combined with education and awareness programs to create more opportunities for women to enter politics. As a result, women's participation in local governance has increased significantly, with many women now taking active roles in decision-making and community development.
- Overall, education, awareness, and empowerment programs have played a key role in enhancing women's political participation in West Bengal by building knowledge, confidence, and leadership capacity. However, continued efforts are necessary to overcome social barriers and ensure that women not only participate in politics but also hold meaningful decision-making power.

6.5 The Potential Prospects and Strategies:

- Strengthening women's participation in the political decision-making process in Bengal requires several strategic efforts and future prospects. One important strategy is promoting education and political awareness among women, which can help them understand their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in governance. Higher levels of political education can increase their confidence and encourage women to take leadership roles in politics.
- Another important prospect is strengthening reservation policies and encouraging political parties to nominate more women candidates for elections at local, state, and national levels. Support from political parties can play a major role in increasing women's representation in legislative bodies.

- Leadership training, capacity-building programs, and empowerment initiatives should also be expanded to develop women's skills in public speaking, policy understanding, and political management. These programs can prepare women to participate effectively in political institutions.
- Personal attacks can discourage many capable women from entering politics. Fear of public humiliation, reputational damage, or threats to personal safety may lead women to withdraw from political activities or avoid leadership roles. To address these issues, several measures are necessary like stronger legal protections against harassment and defamation, responsible media reporting that focuses on policies rather than personal life, public awareness to challenge gender stereotypes and support networks and mentorship of women in politics.
- Additionally, economic empowerment and support networks, such as women's organizations and self-help groups, can help women overcome financial barriers and build confidence in public life. Creating a supportive social environment that challenges gender stereotypes is also essential.
- The leadership of women in West Bengal, including Current Chief Minister, has already demonstrated that women can play a strong role in political decision-making. With continued policy support, education, and social change, the prospects for greater women's participation in politics in West Bengal can become stronger and more inclusive in the future.

7. CONCLUSION

Women's political participation in West Bengal has gradually increased over the years, reflecting important progress toward gender equality in political representation. The presence of women leaders has created greater visibility and opportunities for women in public life. Education, awareness programs, and empowerment initiatives have also played a significant role in encouraging women to take part in political activities and leadership.

However, several challenges still limit women's full participation in the political decision-making process. Social barriers, gender stereotypes, and patriarchal attitudes continue to discourage many women from entering politics. In addition, issues such as sexual harassment, personal attack, intimidation, and the influence of muscle power in electoral politics create an unsafe and hostile environment for many women candidates and political workers. These factors often reduce women's confidence and restrict their active engagement in political processes. Addressing these challenges is essential for creating a fair and inclusive political environment, where women can participate and lead without facing unjust personal criticism.

Therefore, to strengthen women's political participation, it is essential to ensure a safe political environment, stronger legal protection against harassment, greater party support, and continued efforts toward women's empowerment and leadership development. By addressing these challenges, Bengal can move toward a more inclusive and democratic political system where women can participate equally and effectively in shaping public policies, governance and above all shaping the Nation.

8. REFERENCES

- [1] Andersen, K. (1975). Working women and political participation, 1952-1972. *American Journal of Political Science*, 439-453.
- [2] Banerjee, S. (2018). Women in politics: Gender, power and representation in India. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 25(3), 421-438.
- [3] Basu, A. (2016). *Women's movements in the global era: The power of local feminisms*. Routledge.
- [4] Chadha, A. (2014). Political participation of women: A case study in India. *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development*, 7(02), 91-108.

- [5] Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72(5), 1409–1443. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0262.2004.00539.x>
- [6] Chhibber, P. (2002). Why are some women politically active? The household, public space, and political participation in India. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 43(3-5), 409-429.
- [7] Election Commission of India. (2021). *Statistical report on general election to the legislative assembly of West Bengal 2021*. Election Commission of India. <https://eci.gov.in>
- [8] Election Commission of India. (2024). *Statistical report on general election to Lok Sabha 2024*. Election Commission of India. <https://eci.gov.in>
- [9] Jayal, N. G. (2006). *Engendering local democracy: The impact of quotas for women in India's Panchayats*. *Democratization*, 13(1), 15–35.
- [10] Kenyatta, G. N. (2023). The political participation of women in Kenya. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 25(2), 5.
- [11] Khanna, M. (2009). Political participation of women in India. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 55-64.
- [12] Krook, M. L., & Norris, P. (2014). *Political recruitment: Gender, race, and class in the British Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.
- [13] Naik, Z. H. (2017). Empowerment of women through political participation in India. *International Journal of Academic Research and Development*, 2(6), 728-731.
- [14] PRS Legislative Research. (2023). *Women's representation in state legislative assemblies in India*. PRS India. <https://prsindia.org>
- [15] UN Women. (2022). *Women's political participation and leadership in Asia and the Pacific*. UN Women. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org>
- [16] West Bengal Legislative Assembly. (2023). *Members of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly*. <https://www.wbassembly.gov.in>