

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF WEST BENGAL AFTER REGIME-CHANGE

*Mithun Majumder*

*Research Scholar, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In order to strengthen a democratic system, the need is to make way for an encumbrance free, unhindered participation process, irrespective of gender bias. There is a lack of homogeneity in the context of democratic systems across the globe. There is a trend towards increased political participation of men when compared to women, in democratic states. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, one can witness lesser levels of political participation of women in India as well as across other countries and in contemporary times, there seems to be a lack of attitude and political participation of the women. After regime-change in the West Bengal in 2011, political participation of women has increased, which is shown clearly in this study using several datas.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Political Participation, Regime Change, Women Voting Rights, Democratic States, Women Reservation*

### **INTRODUCTION**

After the Second World War, during the 1960s, the idea of political participation emerged. In order to have a distinct idea about political participation, one needs to analyze social process as well political activities. Political participation may be considered as an indispensable part of the socio-political processes and hence primarily, political participation can be defined as the participation of the people in social policy making process and their implementation. In the context of a democratic system, participation refers to the allegiance or consent of the people towards the particular political authority or its denial and the accountability of the authority towards the people. The right of peoples' participation in politics is an indispensable element of democracy. In order to strengthen a democratic system, needed to make a way for an encumbrance free, unhindered participation process, irrespective of gender bias. There is a lack of homogeneity in the context of democratic systems across the globe. There is a trend towards increased political participation of men when compared to women, in democratic states.

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### **Political Participation of Women in India from a Historical Perspective**

One needs to enquire into historical realm, in order to analyze the nature of political socialization of women in India. During the times of the Delhi Sultanate, though there was a decline in the social respect for women, there were few women

politicians and administrators who came out with their voices. Razia Sultana (daughter of Delhi Sultan Iltutmish), Rani Durgavati of Gondwana, Noorjahan (wife of Mughal Emperor Jahangir), Tarabai (wife of Maratha warrior Rajaram), Rani Ahalyabai, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi etc. Later, during the British period in India, particularly in the backdrop of the freedom movement, there are many examples of women politicians like Annie Besant, Basanti Devi (wife of Chittaranjan Das), Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani, Sushila Nayar, Begum Abdul Kadir, Shrimati Uma Neherat, Sarabhai Deshmukh, Srimati Chandravati, Saralasdevi Choudhrani etc.

It is worth mentioning in this context that, during the freedom movement, many women started raised their voices and struggled for securing their electoral rights. In 1917, Sarojini Naidu stormed the British legislature by demanding equal voting rights for women, due to which the voting rights of women in Madras was officially recognized in 1927, as a part of the Government of India Act 1919. In 1931, the demand for women's voting rights was raised vociferously, culminating in the recognition of Women's Voting Rights in India, in 1935. In the context of the above, in 1940, 80 women joined as the part of the provincial legislature. Later, in 1971, as per the recommendation of the UN General Assembly, the Women Status Committee was formed to recommend measures for augmenting the development and welfare of women in India. The Committee came out with a report – "Towards Equality" in 1974, which includes recommendations for setting up a women's commission and augmenting the process of participation of women in politics and related decision-making process, as well as setting up of several Mahila Panchayats. Besides, the UN General Assembly recommended the year 1975 to be Women's Year and 1975-85 as the decade of women's development. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts of 1993 in India were the outcome of the above mentioned initiatives, in which 33 percent of reservation for women was outlined. During the closing ceremony of the Women Development Decade in 1985 at the Nairobi Conference, a proposal was mooted requesting political parties to grant nominations for women candidates and campaign for their electoral success. The Report also recommended the UN member states to implement 30 percent reservation seats for women representatives at the UN bodies. But, India was reluctant to form a Women's Commission or implementing of the 30 percent reservation in UN bodies clause, despite signing the Nairobi declaration. But, due to the efforts of various women organizations in India, the Rajiv Gandhi Government initiated the National Perspective Plan which mentioned the clause of 30 percent reservation for women in local self-government bodies but it was not implemented. And in 1992, The Women's Commission was formed as per the Constitutional norms, for focusing on the women's rights issues.

In the Indian Context, the issue of Women's political participation has often been used in a narrow sense. Women's participation in the political arena only refers to their voting rights during the elections, in utter neglect of other dimensions of effective participation in the political process. But at the grassroots level various mass movements in India that were conducted by taking the issue of effective women's political participation, as part of their agendas.

In the post-independence era, if one analyzes the issue of women's political participation, one can observe that from the year 1952 to 2019 General Elections, women's representation in legislature has been increased from 4.45 to 11.2%. In terms of Legislature seats, in the year 1952, there were only 22 women among 489 elected candidates, whereas in 2019 the figure increased to 78 out of 543 candidates.

Although the number of women's representative in the Central Legislature has increased, but the increased rate is quite low, as the following figure illustrates:

Table 1

Lok Sabha Election	Total Seats	No of Elected Women Candidates	Percentage
1952(First)	489	22	4.4
1957(Second)	494	27	5.4
1962	494	34	6.7
1967	523	31	5.9
1971	521	22	4.2
1977	544	19	3.4
1980	544	28	5.1
1984	544	44	8.1
1989	529	28	5.3
1991	509	36	7.0
1996	541	40	7.4
1998	545	44	8.0
1999	543	48	8.8
2004	543	45	8.1
2009	543	59	10.1
2014	543	61	11.2
2019	543	78	14.36

Source: Reuters.com, 24 May, 2019

The above figure illustrates that the number of elected women representatives in Parliament has continually incremented. Besides, if one analyzes the elections of the various state Assemblies, it is easily noticeable that the number of women's representatives has not even touched 100.

#### Number of Women Legislators across Various States in India

Table 2

States in India	Elected Women Members (2014)	Elected Women Members (2019)
Andhra Pradesh	3(42)	4
Assam	2(14)	1
Chandigarh	1(1)	3
Chattisgarh	1(11)	3
Gujrat	4(26)	6
Jammu And Kashmir	1(3)	0
Karnataka	1(24)	2
Madhya Pradesh	4(29)	4
Maharashtra	3(48)	8
Punjab	1(13)	1
Tamilnadu	4(39)	3
Bihar	3(40)	3
Kerala	1(20)	1
Delhi	1(7)	
Orissa	2(21)	6
West Bengal	14(42)	12
Uttarakhand	1(5)	1
Uttar Pradesh	13(80)	12
Haryana	0	1
Meghalaya	0	1
Rajasthan	1(25)	3
Jharkand	0	2
Tripura	0	1
Telengana	0	1

Total	61(542)	78(545)
Source: Election Commission of India, 2019		

Another important issue is that, besides the Central and State legislatures, a few women have managed to enter the ranks of elected members at the panchayat bodies and municipalities. Although, in terms of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts, women representative has increased at the panchayat and municipalities, still the issue of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> representative of women at the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha levels exists.

### Participation of Women in the Political Scene in West Bengal

One can envisage that in 2019, 12 women have managed to get elected out of 42 seats in the Central Legislatures.

Number of Women Legislators In West Bengal Bidhan Sabha(1977-2016)

**Table 3**

Year	Total Seats	Elected Women Candidates
1977	294	4
1982	294	7
1987	294	12
1991	294	23
1996	294	22

Source: Munshi Vaidya, 'Political Participation', in Jasodhara Bagchi (ed), The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal during 1970-2000: The Challenge Ahead, New Delhi Sage Publications, 2004, p. 88.

The above table illustrates the increment in the number of women members in Rajya Vidhan Sabha in West Bengal from 1977 till 1996

**Table 4**

States in India	Elected Women Candidates(2011)	Elected Women Candidates(2016)
Assam	14	8
West Bengal	33	39
Tamilnadu	16	17
Kerala	7	8

Source: Election Commission of India, Association for Democratic Reforms

If one analyzes the results of 2016 West Bengal Vidhansabha Elections, one may notice an increment in the number of women candidates which looks positive.

Number of Women Candidates elected in West Bengal Legislative Assembly Elections 2016

**Table 5**

Serial No	Name of Election Centre	Name of Candidates	Party Affiliation
1	Dhupguri	Mitali Ray win	AITC
2	Dhupguri	Mamata Ray	CPI(M)
3	Kalimpong	Sarita Rai win	JJM
4	Hematabad	Sabita Chetri	AITC
5	Kurseong	Shyamta Chetri	AITC
6	Kushmandi	Rekha Rai	AITC
7	Kumargunj	Mafuza Khatun	CPI(M)
8	Ratua	Sehnaz Kadri	AITC

9	Manikchak	Sabitri Mitra	AITC
10	Mothabari	Yesmin Sabina win	INC
11	Burdwan	Pratima Razzak win	INC
12	Gazole	Dipali Biswas win	CPI(M)
13	Raninagar	Feroza Begum	INC
14	Murshidabad	Shaoni Singha Ray win	INC
15	Karimpur	Mahua Moitra win	AITC
16	Ranaghat South	Rama Biswas win	CPI(M)
17	Chakdah	Kar ratna Ghosh win	CPI(M)
18	Swarupnagar	Rina Mondal win	AITC
19	Naihati	Gargi Chatterjee	CPI(M)
20	Noapara	Manju Basu	AITC
21	DumDumSouth	Chandrima Bhattacharyya	AITC
22	Deganga	Rohima Mondl win	AITC
23	Minakha	UshaRani Mondal	AITC
24	Raidighi	Deboshree Roy win	AITC
25	Magrahat East	Namita Saha win	AITC
26	Satgachia	Sonali Guha Basu win	AITC
27	Satgachia	Paromita Ghosh	CPI(M)
28	Sonarpur North	Firdausi Begum	AITC
29	Sonarpur North	Jyotirmoyee Sikdar	CPI(M)
30	Tollygunj	Maduja Sen Ray	CPI(M)
31	Mahestala	Kasturi Das win	AITC
32	Bhowanipore	Mamata Banerjee win	AITC
33	Jorasanko	Smita Baksi win	AITC
34	Shyampukur	Sashi Panja win	AITC
35	Shyampukur	Piyali Pal	AIFB
36	Kasipur-Belgachia	Mala Saha win	AITC
37	Kasipur-Belgachia	Koeneenika Bose	CPI(M)
38	Bally	Baisakhi Dalmia win	AITC
39	Panchla	Dolly Ray	AIFB
40	Bagnan	Mina Mukherjee Ghosh	CPI(M)
41	Domjur	Pratima Dutta	IND
42	Chanditola	Sathi Khondokar win	AITC
43	Paskura Paschim	Feroza Bibi win	AITC
44	Haldia	Madhurima Mondal	AITC
45	Contai Uttor	Bonosree Maity win	AITC
46	Debra	Selima Khatun win	AITC
47	Dasapur	Mamata Bhuniya win	AITC
48	Keshpur	Siuli Saha win	AITC
49	Ranibat	Jyotsna Mandi win	AITC
50	Sonamukhi	Dipali Saha	AITC
51	Memari	Begum Nargis win	AITC
52	Ausgram	Mamata Mete	AITC
53	Raniganj	Runu Dutta win	SUCI
54	Barauli	Sipra Mukherjee	CPI(M)
55	Baharampore	Dr Sujata Banerjee	CPI(M)

Source: West Bengal Election Results, 2016 [www.elections.in](http://www.elections.in)

The above chart illustrates that, compared to 2011, in 2016 West Bengal Assembly elections more women members have been elected. Among them, Miss Mamata Banerjee have become The Chief Minister of West Bengal. But, still compared to men, women are behind.

## CONCLUSIONS

A perusal of the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and Vidhan Sabha Election results is an indicator to the fact that women's participation in the elections is continually increasing but on the low rate. Attitudinal change towards women's participation can be witnessed amongst the political parties. But the Women's Reservation Bill (108<sup>th</sup> Amendment) is yet to be enacted. In 2014, Government of India took the initiative for the formation of 'National Mission of Empowerment of Women' but it is still eluded for implementation. Hence, the government should take more initiatives for increasing the women's participation at various political levels, which can effectively lead to the true progress of the nation.

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