

Gender Inequality and Women's Political Representation in India

Anjuma Ahmed Nargis

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Dept. of Political Science, Royal Global University, Guwahati, Assam.

Abstract:

Women's political representation is a fundamental indicator of democratic equality and inclusive governance. Constitutional equality and universal adult franchise were brought to India at independence, but women have been grossly underrepresented in legislative bodies, including Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. This study analyzes how far women have come in terms of political representation in India and the pattern of such representation, as well as understanding the institutional factors that have contributed to the persistence of gender disparities. The study is of a descriptive and analytical nature, and secondary data is collected from the Election Commission of India, parliamentary records, constitutional documents, PRS Legislative Research, and scholarly works. The research highlights the descriptive and substantive representation of women, gender quotas, women's participation in the Lok Sabha, participation in local government, participation in political-party recruitment, and the connection between descriptive and substantive representation. The results of this research show that the proportion of female representation has been growing gradually but is still significantly less than gender parity. In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, women comprised about 13.6% of the elected representatives, with 74 women elected, while they made up only about 9.5% of the candidates who contested. On the other hand, there has been a significant increase in the representation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies through constitutional provisions. However, numerical inclusion does not guarantee political autonomy or meaningful participation. The study asserts that patriarchal norms, political-party gatekeeping, inequality of resources, social hierarchy, and institutional aspects jointly create gender inequality in political representation in India. Increased representation, therefore, is not sufficient to ensure meaningful political equality and must be accompanied by institutional changes to ensure that women have effective and independent political power.

Keywords: Gender inequality; women's political representation; political parties; gender quotas; political participation

1. Introduction:

Political representation is key to democratic equality since citizenship is not just about the right to vote; it is also about the ability to access institutions where collective decisions are taken. The structure of political institutions is of significance to the legitimacy, responsiveness, and inclusiveness of governance in a representative democracy. Women make up about 49% of the population and electorate in India, but their representation in elected political institutions has been significantly lower as compared to men.

From the outset of the republic, India introduced universal adult franchise, granting women equal voting rights without a protracted struggle for suffrage. Although formal equality in voting exists, it has not resulted in equality in political office. Women have been actively involved as voters, campaigners, social organizers, and grassroots mobilizers, although they are not well represented at the party level, in Parliament, or among senior decision makers.

Women's political representation is not just about political participation, then. It's also about access to political recruitment, party nomination, electoral resources, competitive constituencies, and institutional authority. Political parties are an important determinant of who plays a crucial role in deciding who can contest elections. To account for women's under-representation, it is necessary to grasp the organizational and institutional arrangements that determine who get picked for political candidates.

The Indian experience is a fascinating dilemma. On the other hand, women have held significant political offices, including the prime minister, chief ministers, speakers, ministers, and party leaders. However, women continue to be underrepresented in Parliament and state legislatures. Therefore, we must not equate exceptional women leaders with widespread gender parity in political institutions.

But there has been a significant change at the local level in India after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992. These amendments established constitutional reservations for women to ensure their representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies. Several states subsequently increased the reservation for women to 50%. The institutional measures involved a significant change in the number of political institutions at the local level and also represented an opening for millions of women to engage in formal politics.

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, popularly known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, is another significant development. It ensures the reservation of seats for one-third of women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, including the reserved seats for SC and ST. This amendment, however, has to be accompanied by the completion of a census and its subsequent delimitation. Hence, this Lok Sabha election of 2024 was not conducted under the new parliamentary reservation system (PRS Legislative Research, 2023).

In the backdrop of this scenario, the present study looks at the representation of women in the politics of India and the institutional power that perpetuates gender inequality. It also assesses the transformative capacity and the constraints of gender quotas and states that numerical representation needs to be matched with substantive political influence and independence in decision-making.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Descriptive and Substantive Representation:

Differences between descriptive and substantive representation are key to the study of women's political representation. Descriptive representation refers to how well elected institutions reflect the demographic and social makeup of the population. When women are in legislatures, it is referred to as descriptive representation.

Substantive representation, on the other hand, addresses whether or not representatives voice, promote, and represent the concerns and interests of the group (Pitkin, 1967). Legislatures can have a higher proportion of women and yet fail to create policies on gender equality. Likewise, women representatives do not necessarily have the same political agenda, as there are different priorities that are determined by their caste, class, religion, region, education, ideology, and political experience.

Hence, it is imperative that the representation of women not be judged solely by numbers. It also needs to be considered in relation to other aspects of legislative power, including influence, agenda setting, policy priorities, accountability, and the ability of women representatives to exercise independent political power.

2.2 Critical Mass Perspective

The critical mass view proposes that a higher proportion of women in political institutions could provide opportunities for more political influence. If women are a marginal minority, they may feel isolated, have little power, and feel pressured to adhere to dominant institutional cultures. The more one is there, the more opportunities for collective voice, agenda setting, and institutional change (Dahlerup, 1988) (Kanter, 1977).

But just because there is a number doesn't mean there is a result. The role of women representatives varies with the party structure, committee appointments, institutional rules, political resources, leadership, and autonomy.

2.3 Institutional and Gatekeeping Perspective

In representative democracy, political parties are significant gatekeepers. Political parties control the selection of candidates for office, nominations, campaign funding, campaign support, and access to winnable districts. Therefore, the under-representation of women isn't due to their preferences and interest in voting alone.

The number of women nominated by political parties is not sufficient, and their representation is limited to electorally weak constituencies, which limits the likelihood of winning elections. Even if institutional practices and organizational cultures are publicly in favour of gender equality, they still perpetuate inequality.

2.4 Intersectional Perspective

Women cannot be treated as a uniform political group. Gender intersects with caste, tribe, class, religion, region, education, rural and urban situation, political family background, etc. These are the factors that shape their experiences. There is thus a need to analyse inequalities between women, as well as political exclusion, and to take intersectionality into account instead of considering all women as politically excluded in the same way (Crenshaw, 1989).

An intersectional approach is particularly appropriate in India because gender exclusion is linked to caste oppression, tribal marginalization, class difference, minority status, and regional disadvantage.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Gender Quotas and Political Experience

Bhavnani (2009) explored if women's reservations in local bodies have long-term impacts once female and male candidates are included. The study revealed that women were significantly more likely to be elected in the previously all-male reserved seats in Mumbai, using a natural experiment. The results indicate that temporary quotas can generate political experience, political networks, and political visibility and familiarity, which persist after the quota period (Bhavnani, 2009).

This study indicates that quotas can have repercussions that go beyond mere numbers. As women acquire expertise in reserved constituencies, they can better compete in future elections and build careers in politics.

3.2 Quotas and Political-Party Behaviour

Turnbull (2019) investigated whether there is a gender quota effect that prompts women's participation in non-reserved votes. The study revealed that while the quotas contributed to greater women's presence in reserved wards, they did not guarantee general female candidacy in non-reserved wards. Political parties remained hesitant in contesting in non-reserved seats (Turnbull, 2019).

This finding is significant because it shows that political party behaviour partly influences the impact of quotas. While party organizations can limit women's progress in non-reserved political areas, institutional reservations can open up space for women.

3.3 Women as Policy-Makers

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) found that the representation of women in politics matters for the policy priorities in a case study of a randomized policy experiment in India. Women leaders were more likely to invest in public goods that met women's preferences and needs, including drinking water, roads, and public services (Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E., 2004).

The study provides useful evidence of the potential of descriptive representation to shape substantive policy outcomes. It takes on the assumption that the presence of women in the institutional arena is symbolic.

3.4 Exposure to Women Leaders and Social Attitudes

Beaman et al. (2009) investigated whether women's contact with women political leaders decreases gender bias. They concluded that exposure to women leaders can positively affect perceptions of women's leadership competence and boost younger girls' aspirations (Beaman et al., 2009).

This indicates that the women's representation can have a wider impact on society through breaking gender stereotypes and normalizing women's role in political power.

3.5 Women's Representation in Assam

Kakati (2024) revealed that the reservation did not usher women into local political structures in a formal sense, although it did so in more tangible ways; however, patriarchal relations within households and communities remained potent influences on the effective participation of women in these (Kakati, 2024). The study is relevant to the current study, as it shows that representation and political agency are not the same thing. A woman could be elected but still be restricted in terms of mobility, public speaking, information, control of resources, and independent decision-making.

3.6 Women in Urban Local Government

Kumar and Ghosh (2024) did a retrospective study on the role of women in urban local self-governments in India. Their analysis reveals that constitutional reservation has increased women's representation in political institutions in cities. But women remain disadvantaged in various ways, such as poor training,

lack of administrative skills, lack of a male perspective, lack of resources, and lack of institutional autonomy (Kumar, S., & Ghosh, A. K., 2024).

In their research, they demonstrate that institutional access for urban local governments has increased at a greater pace than substantive political equality in rural governance, just as it has in rural governance.

3.7 Women in Indian Politics

Spary (2024) points to the irony of the situation as women become more relevant as voters, yet they are relatively underrepresented in legislative institutions. The study, however, also highlights the intersectoral aspects of women's political interest and the ongoing relevance of party structures, leadership routes, and institutional obstacles (Spary, 2024).

The literature as a whole indicates that a quota system can raise the proportion of women in parliament, but political parties, traditional gender norms, unequal resources, and social divisions remain a factor in determining how women actually gain political power.

3.8 Research Gap

Existing studies have examined gender quotas, local governance, women's political participation, policy outcomes, and political leadership. However, there remains a need for an integrated analysis connecting:

1. Long-term trends in women's parliamentary representation;
2. The candidate-selection and political recruitment process;
3. Political-party gatekeeping;
4. The difference between descriptive and substantive representation;
5. The intersectional nature of women's political experiences; and
6. The implications of the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining women's representation across different institutional levels and analysing the relationship between institutional design and political equality.

4. Research Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the extent and pattern of women's political representation in India.
2. To analyse the institutional factors contributing to gender inequality in political representation.
3. To examine the role of political parties and candidate selection in shaping women's access to political office.
4. To assess the impact and limitations of gender quotas in local and higher political institutions.
5. To distinguish between descriptive representation and substantive political influence.

5. Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based exclusively on secondary sources. The data and information have been sourced from ECI, Parliamentary records, Official documents, PRS Legislative Research, Official Government documents and appropriate peer reviewed academic studies.

The study considers the political representation of women in Lok Sabha from the inception of the first Lok Sabha in 1952 up to the 2024 general elections and focuses specifically on the representation of women.

It also takes into account the involvement of Women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies to evaluate the impact of constitutional reservations.

The analysis uses the following indicators:

- Number and percentage of women elected to the Lok Sabha;
- Number and proportion of women candidates;
- Women's representation in local government;
- Political-party nomination and gatekeeping;
- Effects of gender quotas;
- Evidence of substantive political influence;
- Institutional and socio-cultural barriers; and
- Intersectional inequalities among women.

The study is in the form of a combination of longitudinal comparison with an interpretation of the existing empirical studies in a qualitative manner. Since the study is based on secondary sources, it does not claim to establish original causal relationships. Rather, it draws on existing evidence to uncover general trends, institutional factors, and policy implications.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Women's Representation and the Democratic Equality Gap

The democratic equality gap is examined as it relates to women's representation. Despite achieving constitutional equality of the sexes, proportional representation in legislative bodies remains elusive. Women could have equal voting rights and be active in elections without being represented in the number of candidates or elected representatives.

This engenders a "citizenship-representation equality gap." The central question is thus not whether women are involved in democracy, but whether they are afforded equal opportunities to become decision makers via political institutions.

In the Indian case, women have seen significant representation at the electorate level, but the numbers drop significantly at the stages of party nomination, electoral candidacy, and election to public office.

6.2 Historical Development of Women's Parliamentary Representation

Women's representation in the Lok Sabha has shown some improvement over the years, although this progress has been gradual and uneven.

Table 1: Women's Representation in the Lok Sabha

Lok Sabha	Women Members	Approximate Share
First Lok Sabha, 1952	22	4.5%
Ninth Lok Sabha, 1989	29	5.3%
Fourteenth Lok Sabha, 2004	45	8.3%
Fifteenth Lok Sabha, 2009	59	10.9%
Sixteenth Lok Sabha, 2014	62	11.4%

Seventeenth Lok Sabha, 2019	78	14.4%
Eighteenth Lok Sabha, 2024	74	13.6%

Source: Election Commission of India and parliamentary data.

There are two intriguing patterns in the table. First, the proportion of women has risen significantly over time. Secondly, the rise is irregular and insufficient to achieve gender balance. Progress is not guaranteed—in 2024, 74 women were elected, while 2019 saw 78.

Thus, the 2024 election is a reminder of the ongoing constraints of voluntary political recruitment. Even after decades of democratic progress, women were still a minority in the Lok Sabha.

6.3 Women Candidates and the Political Representation Pipeline:

The beginning of political representation is before the election day. It starts with the selection process of identifying, selecting, and nominating candidates and financing and allocating candidates in constituencies.

Based on election data, the number of women who appeared for the Lok Sabha elections in 2024 was around 797, and 74 women were elected in those elections. Women were only about 9.5% of the total number of candidates contesting the elections.

The representation pipeline can be shown as follows:

Population – Electorate – Party Membership – Candidates – Elected Representatives – Political Decision-Makers

Women have made significant gains as voters but are underrepresented as candidates and as elected representatives. This suggests that the obstacle that affects people more and more is no longer electoral but political citizenship.

Women's representation in elections must be limited if they are not nominated in adequate numbers. Therefore, a combination of voter preferences can solve the problem.

6.4 Political Parties as Institutional Gatekeepers

Political parties are key actors in the reproduction of gender inequalities because they determine who runs for office, who receives support, who has access to party resources, and who obtains access to competitive constituencies.

A party can show a strong interest in female empowerment by running many women candidates in winnable districts and still claim to be pro-women. This establishes a gap between symbol and practice in the organization.

After decades of local quotas, however, there were continued efforts to discourage political parties from nominating women in non-reserved seats, as shown by Turnbull (2019). This indicates that party incentives, informal party networks, and organizational cultures are important constraints on the progress of women (Turnbull, 2019).

The question to be posed is then changed from:

Why do women not become involved in politics?

to:

Why are women less likely to enter competitive political office through political institutions?

The institutional perspective is more suited for the analysis of the gender gap in India in the modern era.

6.5 Gender Quotas and Institutional Transformation:

The Indian experience is one of the most significant instances of the power of gender quotas to make a difference. There are reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies as per the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. The constitutional minimum was one-third, although several states subsequently increased reservation to 50%.

Around 14.5 lakh women were serving as elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions, according to parliamentary information, which showed that about 46% of all elected representatives were women. In 21 states, there were provisions for a 50% reservation of seats in local government bodies. There were 21 states that provided for a 50% reservation of seats in local government bodies.

This change illustrates that the number of political institutions can change quickly at the institutional level. If women were not in the public sector in the first place, they would have been mainly nominated by political parties and would have relied on family networks, social status, and gender norms.

The rationale of gender quotas thus contradicts the notion that women need to wait for changes in social attitudes to enjoy political equality.

6.6 Do Quotas Ensure Meaningful Political Participation?

Quotas have clearly been found to increase descriptive representation, but their impact on substantive participation is more nuanced.

In the case of the Tiwa community in Assam, Kakati (2024) found that the reservation of seats for women reduced the share of women in formal decision-making and increased the representation of women at the community level but did not improve their participation in effective decision-making (Kakati, 2024).

There are restrictions on an elected woman representative relating to:

- Independent decision-making;
- Avoidance of obstacles;
- Information on politics and current affairs;
- Training and development opportunities; and
- Ability to direct any available funding;
- Participation in meetings; and
- Political communication.

Thus, numerically stating empowerment does not equate to political empowerment. Presence versus power is key to assessing the impact of gender quotas.

6.7 Quotas and Political Experience:

The use of gender quotas can create longer-term political impacts if, by doing so, women gain experience and visibility. Bhavnani (2009) found that there was a significant increase in the number of women winning elections in reserved seats (Bhavnani, 2009).

Political experience of the reserved positions can generate:

- Political knowledge;
- 2. Public visibility;
- 3. Campaign experience;

- 4. Organizational networks;
- Self-assurance in election contests; and
- Voters' knowledge of women leaders.

Temporary reservations can thus impact the political supply of women candidates beyond the reserved period.

But this spillover is not guaranteed. Working out the long-term effects of quotas could still be restricted if political parties consider it an undesirable policy to begin nominating women in non-reserved seats (Turnbull, 2019).

6.8 Competence, Candidate Selection, and Elite Capture:

An important question is who benefits from quotas for women? Recent research on gender quotas in India indicates that these policies can expand political recruitment and open doors for families with little prior political experience (Mori et al., 2025).

Gender equality is a significant issue, intricately linked to class and political privilege. Women have more access to:

- Financial resources;
- Party networks;
- Political visibility;
- Campaign machinery;
- Family connections; and
- Electoral experience.

In some cases, numerical gender equality can be achieved without expanding the social representation of women, as quotas can be more advantageous for politically privileged women.

Hence, the quality of women's representation can be judged on two parameters:

Gender Inclusion + Social Diversity.

The representation of political institutions should provide opportunities for women in marginalized and less politically connected communities as well as elite women.

6.9 Gender and Intersectionality:

Women are not a political unit. They are influenced by the interplay of gender with caste, tribe, class, religion, region, education, rural-urban location, political family background, etc. in the political opportunities in which they operate.

Women from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes may face the dual disadvantages of gender discrimination and caste discrimination, along with economic challenges and weak political connections. While seats can numerically represent women from these groups, it does not guarantee that they will have equal political representation.

Opportunities for political office Class and education also influence opportunities for political office. to class and education. Economically privileged women may have resources available to fund their campaigns, travel to electoral venues, access political information, and connect with organizations. Confidence, public communication, knowledge of legal procedures, and administrative competence may be related to educational attainment.

Other inequalities include the religious dimension and region. Minority group women or those in geographically isolated communities may also experience social constraints, political networks, low party involvement, and poor infrastructure.

The case of the Assamese demonstrates the need to study the gender- and community-based dimensions of customary institutions and political participation. Furthermore, Kakati (2024) illustrates how the patriarchy within the household and community shapes women's autonomy through informal political opportunities (Kakati, 2024).

Political family background is another important factor. Women with family connections, money, name recognition, and party visibility may have an advantage. First-generation female politicians might have more challenges in accessing nominations, securing resources, and building political legitimacy.

An intersectional analysis should then also consider:

What is the number of women who enter political institutions?

but also:

Who comes in, from where, when, and with how much political independence?

6.10 Women's presence in urban Local Government:

Another pivotal dimension of women's political representation is through urban local bodies. Mandatory reservation was introduced in the 74th Constitutional Amendment to include women in urban institutions such as municipalities.

Kumar and Ghosh (2024) show that women are emerging as a significant player in urban local governance (Kumar, S., & Ghosh, A. K., 2024). However, women continue to face barriers, including:

- Limited political experience;
- Patriarchal attitudes;
- Inadequate training;
- Resource constraints;
- Disability of the institution due to inadequate resources and support.
- Difficulties with independent authority.

Urban local representation is thus a typical Indian scenario in which the access to institutions has grown faster than substantive political equality has.

6.11 Women's Political Leadership:

India has seen several women political leaders, such as prime ministers, chief ministers, speakers, party leaders, and ministers. But effective leadership isn't the same as gender equality.

Individual women at the highest level do not remove structural barriers that impact women as a social group. India has shown a paradox: women's representation is low, although they are holding high political offices.

Spary (2024) emphasizes the new significance of women as voters and the ongoing ambiguity of women's political concerns. Women's role has grown in importance on the electoral level, but there is limited access to legislative positions (Spary, 2024).

6.12 The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023:

The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, is a key institutional development in the history of Indian politics. It has been providing reservations of about one-third to women in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies, including the seats reserved for SCs and STs.

The Act adds articles on the reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. But implementation is tied up with the release of the relevant census data and a later delimitation process. Therefore, the upcoming general election in 2024 cannot utilize the reservation (PRS Legislative Research, 2023).

The bill is a significant constitutional step to gender parity in political representation. However, the effectiveness of the bill will depend on:

- Timely implementation;
- Transparent delimitation;
- Fair allocation of reserved constituencies;
- Political-party compliance;
- Chronicling of their accomplishments. They included socially marginalized women, and
- Institutional arrangements to ensure meaningful involvement.

6.13 Lok Sabha Election 2024 as a Baseline:

The 2024 general election can offer a good pre-reservation indicator. About 797 women entered into the fray, and 74 of them won, securing around 13.6% of the 543 seats of the Lok Sabha. (NDTV India)

The data show that it is yet to translate to one-third of candidates or representation in 2024, despite the constitutional mandate for one-third representation. The failure to operate the reservation mechanism should not be taken as a failure of the constitutional amendment.

Rather, the election of 2024 highlights the ongoing challenges of voluntary party recruitment prior to the statutory quota. This can thus be used as a standard to measure subsequent elections.

6.14 Descriptive Representation and Substantive Political Influence:

The main issue is whether more women translate into greater political influence for women. Research already has identified that women's presence can impact:

- Legislative priorities;
- Public policy;
- Constituency demands;
- Political agendas;
- Citizens' view of leadership; and
- Younger women have their own political aspirations.

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) demonstrate that women leaders can shape local policy priorities, and Beaman et al. (2009) find that proximity to women leaders can help lower gender stereotypes (Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E., 2004) (Beaman et al., 2009).

But not all women representatives have the same political interests. Their political agenda can differ based on their caste, class, religion, region, ideology, party affiliation, and personal experience. Substantive representation is therefore to be interpreted as pluralist and intersectional, not as a single "women's agenda."

7. Major Findings of the Study:

The study reveals the following key findings:

- i. Although there has been a significant rise in female political representation in India over time, it is still far from reaching gender parity.
- ii. In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, 74 women were elected, making them about 13.6% of the total membership of the Lok Sabha.
- iii. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the candidate-level gap for women was quite noticeable, as they made up only about 9.5% of the contesting candidates.
- iv. Women continue to be excluded from nominations and particular constituencies, and political parties continue to control their access to campaign resources and the political arena.
- v. The most successful institutionalizations so far to increase the descriptive representation of women have been constitutional reservations, especially in local government.
- vi. Gender quotas can create political experience and visibility, networks, and longer-term electoral opportunities.
- vii. Quotas do not ensure substantive participation and independent decision-making, especially if patriarchal structures are strong.
- viii. The intersectionality of women's political representation must be contextualized, as there is a complex interaction between gender and caste, tribe, class, religion, region, education, and political privilege.
- ix. The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, is a significant institutional commitment to women's representation in Parliament and in State Legislatures.
- x. Implementation, party-level changes, social diversity, and mechanisms to guarantee women's independent political authority will all be important to the effectiveness of parliamentary reservation.

8. Policy implications and recommendations

- i. **Effective implementation of parliamentary reservation:** One-third representation under the constitution should be done transparently within the constitutional framework. The delimitation and rotation exercise should be structured in such a way that it is fair and continuous.
- ii. **Gender-Responsive Political-Party Recruitment:** Political parties should have transparent, accountable, and gender-inclusive candidate selection processes. Relying on informal political networks as the main source of nomination should not be the case.
- iii. **Avoidance of nomination in winnable constituencies and resistance to nomination in winnable constituencies:** More women candidates is not enough if parties have a skewed sex ratio when choosing candidates in weak electoral constituencies. Parties should nominate women specifically for competitive and winnable constituencies.
- iv. **Strengthening Political Training:** The representation of women should be sustained through training in:
 - Legislative procedures;
 - Budgeting;
 - Public administration;
 - Policy analysis;
 - Political communication; and
 - Constitutional and legal rights.

- v. Properly handle proxy representation situations:** Elected women should be given independent authority and not act through male relatives or political intermediaries, through institutional mechanisms.
- vi. Promoting Intersectional Representation:** Women belonging to the following categories should be provided opportunities through political recruitment: disadvantaged caste, tribal, rural, minority, and socio-economic. Promoting gender equality should not come at the expense of advancing privileged women.
- vii. Building Local to National Political Pathways:** The experience gained at the Panchayat Raj Institutions and urban local bodies needs to link to opportunities for growth and development to the State Legislature and Parliament.
- viii. Enhancing systems of political financing and security:** Women candidates need to be provided with more access to campaign funds, organizational assistance, and digital tools and be protected from political violence, intimidation, harassment, and online abuse.
- ix. Strengthening Institutional Accountability:** Political parties and elected bodies should report occasionally on gender-disaggregated information regarding nominations, campaign support, participation in committees, leadership, and legislative performance.

9. Limitations of the Study:

The study relies on secondary sources, which rely on the availability, accuracy, and comparability of existing data. The study does not include primary interviews with women politicians, party officials, voters, and local representatives. The analysis provides a descriptive and analytical overview, as it does not establish the original cause-and-effect relationships.

There is also a differential availability of consistent data at the Parliament, State Legislature, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and urban local bodies. In addition, numerical data do not fully capture political autonomy, informal influence, proxy representation, and substantive policy impact. The limitations of this study could be addressed in future research by conducting field studies, interviews, analysis of the constituencies, and comparative research among states and social groups.

10. Conclusion:

The political participation of women in India has improved since Independence but was not uniform and satisfactory even in the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. The results indicate that the lack of political participation or public attitudes of women is not the sole reason for gender inequality, as the inequality is reinforced by the presence of patriarchal norms, political-party gatekeeping, unequal access to resources, and institutional obstacles.

Women are active as voters, campaigners, and grassroots organizers but have limited access to party nominations and to elected office. Gender quotas have successfully increased political visibility and women's numerical representation, particularly in local self-government institutions. However, reservations alone do not guarantee substantive representation, autonomy of decision-making, or meaningful political authority in the presence of proxy leadership, social constraints, and economic vulnerability.

An intersectional perspective also illustrates that caste, tribe, class, religion, education, region, and political family background have differential effects on women's political opportunities. Thus, it is

necessary to pay attention to the diversity and autonomy of women representatives and their true influence to ensure numerical growth.

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, is an important milestone to improve the representation of women but will only be effective if implemented on time, political parties are committed to it, institutional accountability is observed, and protection measures are in place, like training women to become leaders, providing financial support for women's political candidates' campaigns, and protecting women from political violence.

Women's political participation extends beyond mere political representation, and social attitudes do not automatically lead to political representation. It is significantly influenced by institutional norms, political recruitment practices, unequal networks, social norms, and electoral opportunities. Rather than simply having more women in the political arena, the central challenge for Indian democracy is to change the institutional environment in which women are recruited, elected, and empowered to wield independent political authority.

REFERENCES:

1. Amin, R. (2023). Political participation of women in the char areas of Barpeta district, Assam. ResearchGate. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373832475>
2. Amin, R. (2023, January). A study on political and institutional barriers to implementing sustainable fiscal policies in the North Eastern states and its possible solutions. Prag Consilience. ResearchGate. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386076086>
3. Amin, R., & Nath, H. (2024). Role of freedom movement to promote gender equality in India. In the Seminar Proceedings of 'Indian Freedom Struggle in North East India: Acknowledging Unsung Heroes' (pp. 214–221). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378103589>
4. Beaman et al. (2009). Powerful women: Does exposure reduce bias? The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 124(4), 1497-1540. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1162/qjec.2009.124.4.1497>
5. Bhavnani, R. R. (2009). Do electoral quotas work after they are withdrawn? Evidence from a natural experiment in India. American Political Science Review, 103(1), 23-35. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409090029>
6. Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India. Econometrica, 72(5), 1409-1443. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0262.2004.00539.x>
7. Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1), 139-167.
8. Dahlerup, D. (1988). From a small to a large minority: Women in Scandinavian politics. Scandinavian Political Studies, 11(4), 275-298.
9. Kakati, B. K. (2024). Can reservation ensure women's participation in local governance: A study among Tiwas. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 59(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/2277436X231192278>
10. Kanter, R. M. (1977). Men and women of the corporation.
11. Kumar, S., & Ghosh, A. K. (2024). The state of women's representation in urban local self-government in India: A review. Observer Research Foundation.
12. Mori et al. (2025). Who becomes a politician in a gender quota system? Evidence from India. World Development, 188. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2024.106911>



13. Pitkin, H. F. (1967). The concept of representation. University of California Press.
14. PRS Legislative Research. (2023). The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023: Bill summary and issues for consideration. PRS Legislative Research.
15. Spary, C. (2024). Women in Indian politics. In S. Ganguly & E. Sridharan (Eds.). The Oxford handbook of Indian politics, 305-326.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198894261.013.20>
16. Turnbull, B. (2019). Quotas as opportunities and obstacles: Revisiting gender quotas in India. Politics & Gender. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000877>