



JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC LETTERS
www.jslsci.com

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
WITH REFERENCE TO PANCHAYATI RAJ IN PURBA BARDHAMAN,
WEST BENGAL**

Binapani Datta

Research Scholar, Political Science, Eklavya University, Damoh

Dr. Shyam Sunder Pateriya

Supervisor, Eklavya University, Damoh

ABSTRACT

Women since ages have been dominated and suppressed. They were confined to the domestic sphere and not allowed to enter into political field. However, as time passed by, women got reservation in the form of seats into the political parties. They were also provided leadership roles for creating influence on the communities. However, some orthodox believers in the patriarchy made it difficult for the women to exercise the provided roles. Challenges also increased in the form of limited representation, misrepresentation, proxy leadership among others. As a result of this, women's individuality formation development was at stake. This contradicts the empowerment, which women were to receive through exposure to politics. Reference to Panchayati Raj helps in basing the aspects in an authentic manner, increasing trust, reliance and dependence of the readers.

Key words: Women, empowerment, politics, participation, Panchayati Raj, Purba Bardhaman, west Bengal

1. INTRODUCTION

Structured discussion on women's empowerment through political participation, with special reference to *Panchayati Raj* in *Purba Bardhaman*, West Bengal, blends general context, legal-institutional framework, and local relevance.

1.1 Panchayati Raj & its importance for Women's Empowerment

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India includes Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad, which acts as the bedrock of grassroots democracy. According to Akhtar and Gaurav, (2025), these bodies intend to de-evolve decision-making power as applicable in the rural communities. Their functions enable civic participation, local planning, and delivery of services directly to the service users at the village level. Constitutional and legal basis are detected from *73rd Constitutional Amendment Act* (1992), which made reservation of women (at least one-third) in all tiers of Panchayati Raj, mandatory at Institutions across India. This was a turning point enhancing women's political voice and leadership from grassroots level. Many states have extended enforcement of this act further. Evidence of this lies in 50% reservation, which amplifies opportunities for women's political participation (PIB Delhi, 2024). This reservation is a crucial structural tool, empowering and extending beyond symbolic representation. This representation ensures formal, electoral roles and decision-making power for women.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Women's Political Participation & Empowerment in the context of West Bengal

As per the arguments of Hazra, (2017), representation gains are reflected in the context of West Bengal. In these arguments, expansion has been done for reservation in regular PRI elections. This regularity has increased women's presence in Panchayati Raj bodies. These records are significantly more as compared to the pre-1990s era. Academic studies report that women's representation in Panchayat councils in West Bengal has increased from one-third. This was minimum with figures around 35% or more which was projected in many instances. As a result of this, local governance prioritized community needs such as public health, education, sanitation,

water supply, and welfare services. As compared to the earlier situation, Edukemy Team, (2024) argued that governance agenda transitioned to issues that deeply affect households and families. Despite these gains, scholars recorded persistence for social and structural barriers. These barriers are family dominance, traditional gender roles, limited access to resources, political party control, and literacy challenges. Sometimes, the challenges also include limitation in the autonomy and effective leadership expressed by women acting as agents of PRI members.

2.2 Harsh realities in Purba Bardhaman District

Detailed research on Purba Bardhaman covering women's political empowerment is limited. The representation in public academic reporting has been contextualized for unleashing the general patterns within the district's PRI framework. Chakravorty and Ansary, (2025) stated that localization in Purba Bardhaman is reflected from vibrant rural governance structure, controlling Gram Panchayats and community development blocks. These blocks operate under the PRI systems. Achievements and initiatives have been undertaken for organizing women under Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Collective action is also initiated for improving livelihoods of rural women. These initiatives have been undertaken for asserting agencies in the domains of economics and social. Burdwanzp.org, (2014) argued that these domains are keystone for ensuring empowerment, complementing their political roles.

Notable local leaders are contemporary politicians from Purba Bardhaman like Shampa Dhara (former chairperson of East Bardhaman Zilla Parishad and MLA). These leaders are representatives, who illustrate leadership avenues to be undertaken from PRI leadership to higher political office. For these women, Dey et al., (2024) argued that PRI acts as a nurturing ground for enhancing their political engagement.

2.3 Translation of political participation to empowerment

Key empowerment pathways are reflected from the political roles which have been offered to women. Women's political roles are *Pradhan/Sarpanch*, *Ward Members*, or *Zilla Parishad leaders*. From these roles, women's individuality is transformed in terms of individuality and

community upliftment. For describing this, decision-making power can be taken. Elected women get the power of resource allocation, development planning, addressing public service priorities. Edukemy Team, (2024) was of the view that these priorities amplify voices which are directed towards traditional underrepresentation of rural political processes. Here, arguments of Hazra, (2017) is also relevant as it reflects social recognition and mobility. In public offices, efforts are taken for strengthening women's visibility in societal leadership. These efforts challenge socio-cultural patriarchal norms which confined women to domestic spheres. Benefits of these efforts was engagement with village committees, providing SHGs, and PRI platforms to women. Also, the platforms ensured proper livelihood programs for women. SAGGU, (2024) argued that these programs were to cause social entitlements, nourishing broader socioeconomic empowerment.

2.4 Persistence in challenges

Reservation policies and increasing representation did no good for women. Research points ongoing barriers which are proxy representation and limited access to training and resources. Evidences are strong which reflects that in some rural contexts, male relatives exert influence as compared to "reserved" women leaders. As a result of this, Tiwary, V. (2025) suggests that exertion of independent authority by women is problematic. Limitations are also reflected in accessing training and availing resources. Effectiveness is represented in governing, which requires administrative and financial knowledge. However, PIB Delhi (2024) was of the view that many newly elected women leaders initially lack these knowledge and skills. Social and patriarchal norms are also there as traditional gender roles often constrain public engagement for women. Sustained political activism for women, at the village level, adds to the complexities in including women into the political fields.

From these reviews, it can be concluded that women's empowerment through political participation in Panchayati Raj of Purba Bardhaman, is both significant and transformative. Legal provisions, such as reservation, have enabled women to have a base for gaining political involvement. Bauri and Basu, (2024) argued that increased participation of women has translated their individuality into stronger voices in local governance. These transitions have yielded

responsive development outcomes, giving societal recognition to women as leaders. However, to provide proper empowerment, there's a need for enhancing capacity building, socio-cultural change, and institutional support for ensuring women to exercise influence much beyond traditional structures. According to Sarkar and Gupta, (2024), improvements on these domains would strengthen grassroots democracy from foundation, which could even break traditional stereotypes and biases on women's empowerment through exposure to outside world.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research, conducted through explorational research design, is justified in terms of exploring the unexplored realms of women's contribution into politics. Specifically, cases, narratives, and themes related to these issues is considered for analyzing the collected data. In this context, ethical considerations are acknowledging the sources used, and not considering the sources which has been published for more than 10 years old. Here, positivism philosophy is apt for developing scientific, objective, real, and epistemological knowledge related to women's exposure to political sphere in the context of Purba Bardhaman, west Bengal. Deductive approach is beneficial and comes in sequence after literature review. This is because reviewing the literature and analysis, for developing the key points which leads the discussion towards conclusion on women empowerment through the field of politics.

4. CONCLUSION

After reviewing the aspects, it can be concluded that exposure to politics, is somewhat related to empowerment for women. Evidence of this lies in better decision-making skills and community need fulfilment, in which women are better as compared to men. Along with this, men are more related to patriarchy, suppressing women, confining them to domestic chores. Apart from this, men sometimes demean the power exerted by women, while in leadership roles. In spite of reservation of seats for women in politics, challenges persist in the form of misrepresentation, proxy leaderships, and manipulation among others. Need of the time is increase in education, which could help in altering the perceptions on the capability of women to deal with complex aspects like in the field of politics. This increase could reduce the gender-based stereotypes considering women's

confinement into domestic spheres more than exposure to outside world especially into political events.

REFERENCES

Akhtar, M.S & Gaurav, N. (2025). Empowerment of Women Through Panchayati Raj Institution: A Study of Malda District, West Bengal. *International Journal of Social Science Research (IJSSR)* Volume- 2 (4) [ISSN: 3048-9490]

Bauri, A., & Basu, A. (2024). Women's political participation and empowerment in urban local governance in West Bengal, India. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 59(1), 142-158. [10.1177/00219096221100979]

Burdwanzp.org (2014). Success stories of women in East Burdwan Zilla Parishad. Retrieved 3rd Dec 2025 from <https://www.burdwanzp.org/district-success-story>

Chakravorty, T., & Ansary, S. (2025). Political Culture and Democracy: The Indian Context. *Democracy and Tolerance: Reflections on Political Ideas and Emerging Debates in India*, 209. [https://books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=pFOfEQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA209&dq=Women+empowerment+through+political+participation+with+reference+to+Panchayati+Raj+in+Purba+Bardhaman,+West+Bengal&ots=7BgVXgxMp_&sig=4leXsjDhQVCs3LR5L4QKqVs96xY&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false]

Dey, S. M., Choudhury, S., Chatterjee, S., Ghosh, P., Ganguli, D., & Ghosh, S. R. C. (2024). *Breaking Barriers: Exploring Gender Dynamics in Education*. Notion Press. [https://books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=OErrEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT7&dq=Women+empowerment+through+political+participation+with+reference+to+Panchayati+Raj+in+Pu]

rba+Bardhaman,+West+Bengal&ots=6bRJC5ASUI&sig=qOywP4rBTS_nhn3jsvjXLF2Ju_U&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false]

Edukemy Team. (2024). Women in panchayats. Retrieved 23rd Dec 2025 from <https://edukemy.com/blog/women-in-panchayats-upsc-social-justice-notes/>

Hazra, S. (2017). Women Participation in Panchayat Raj in West Bengal: An Appraisal. Economic Affairs, Vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 347-351 [10.5958/0976-4666.2017.00019.5]

PIB Delhi (2024). पंचायतों में महिलाओं की भागीदारी. Retrieved 23rd Dec 2025 from <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2003275>

SAGGU, D. M. S. (Ed.). (2024). *India at G20: Governance & International Organizations*. INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTITUTE OF HUMAN SECURITY & GOVERNANCE. [https://books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ww_sEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA73&dq=Women+empowerment+through+political+participation+with+reference+to+Panchayati+Raj+in+Purba+Bardhaman,+West+Bengal&ots=WJFd26annA&sig=Uh_dtsCd6eCdExiZ9rAmJZNI0g0&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false]

Sarkar, A. K., & Gupta, S. D. (2024). NGO Activism and Women's Empowerment. *Understanding Women's Empowerment in South Asia: Perspectives on Entitlements and Violations*, 49. [books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=bscWEQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA49&dq=Women+empowerment+through+political+participation+with+reference+to+Panchayati+Raj+in+Purba+Bardhaman,+West+Bengal&ots=A-Rzi09ytp&sig=19zv_ESODGBPJU-2vLOErBBMoiE]

Tiwary, V. (2025). Panchayati Raj: पंचायती राज में महिलाओं की भूमिका सुनिश्चित करने के लिए विशेषज्ञ समिति ने सुझाए उपाय. Retrieved 23rd Dec 2025 from <https://www.prabhatkhabar.com/national/panchayati-raj-role-of-women?>

Author's Declaration:

I/We, as an author/authors of the above paper/article, hereby declare that the content of this paper is prepared by me/us for publication in this journal is completely my/our own genuine paper and if any person having copyright issue or patent or anything related to the content, I/we shall always be legally responsible for any issue. If any data or information given by me/us is not correct, I/we shall always be legally responsible. With my/our whole responsibility legally and formally have intimated the publisher that the paper has been checked by guide or expert or supervisor to make it sure that paper is technically right and there is no unaccepted plagiarism. If any issue arises related to plagiarism or any issues, I/we will be solely/entirely responsible for any legal disputes or legal issues. I/we declared that if publisher finds any complication or error or anything hidden or implemented otherwise, my/our paper may be removed from the website. I/we also aware that the publication fees is not refunded further in any circumstances. Even if anything is found illegal publisher may also take legal action against me/us. I/we also declared that this journal/publisher will not be held responsible any legal issues in future regarding this paper publication in this journal.

Binapani Datta

Dr. Shyam Sunder Pateriya