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**EDUCATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN WEST BENGAL**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between education and political participation of the women in West Bengal using 110 documented cases of secondary sources. The data indicate that women aged 30 to 44 are the most politically active and as they grow older, they become less active in politics. The level of participation is mainly through Voting (45.45%), the second most popular way is through local activism and NGOs, but leadership roles and running as candidates are not so popular. According to the findings, education and awareness have led to the widening of the grassroots since every woman can now take part in this process. Institutional and structural impediments have set limits on the progress of the female gender towards official taking over of political leadership. According to the study, educational outreach, capacity-building, and external support to institutions in order to empower women to chair more of the committees is necessary.

Keywords: Women's political participation, Education, West Bengal, Grassroots activism, Voter engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Female political agency has become one of the most undisputed indicators of societal advancement and an agent of its further growth. In the context of West Bengal, the last few years has seen a decreasing gender discrimination in some of the crucial areas of political participation especially the voter turnout. Although things have improved greatly, there are still major differences in the leadership, membership to parties and representation in institutions. This paper aims at exploring the nature of the connection between educational attainment and the different activities engaged in by women in West Bengal with regard to participation in politics. It also seeks to establish the key issues that deter the active participation of women in politics as well as other possibilities of ensuring the role of women in the decision-making processes are increased.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Adhikari and Saha (2021) discussed the interdependence of the role of women in education and politics in the twenty-first century and stated that education had played a foundational role in driving consciousness, confidence and political participation amongst women. In their study, they emphasized the importance of greater literacy levels to enhance the women capacity to utilize their voting rights as well as facilitating greater access to opportunities to be more actively engaged in civic and community activities.

Bauri and Basu (2024) mentioned study examined the extent of political participation and empowerment of women in the field of the urban local governance in West Bengal. Their results indicated that women had gained extensive participation in the grass roots in the municipal level especially following the adoption of reservation policies in local bodies. They noted that although locals were highly involved in the local governance and decision-making process, institutional and gender-based power distribution did not enable women to affectively engage in upper political systems.

Biswas (2018) examined the rates of women partaking in work in the state of West Bengal and indicated that the economies of women were inseparably related to their social and political interactions. The research identified that the role of women in the labor market had been increasing

with the trend being taken by their involvement improving, but the cultural expectations and family needs still seem to prevent their maximum involvement.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted non-survey-based secondary data analysis mode to analyse the correlation between education and the political participation of women in West Bengal, providing a verifiable basis of findings obtained in the research.

3.1 Research Design

This paper takes a non-surveyed mixed-documentary approach to the connection between education and women political participation in West Bengal. The research is consulted on the compilation of secondary sources of data rather than based on primary data collection using questionnaires or surveys. Such a strategy is methodologically rigorous and is consistent with the purpose of the study to summarize the findings through descriptions of documented evidence.

3.2 Sample Size

The research surveyed 110 cases of the documented women political participation in West Bengal engaged in political processes ranging as simple as voting to leadership in the community. Although the sample size was not statistically representative, it was large enough to find some patterns in relation to age, education and levels of engagement.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part includes the results of 110 women through the use of tables and figures depicting age distribution and different types of political engagement, differences between generations, prevailing forms and general tendency of women participation in political life in general.

4.1 Age Distribution of Women Participants

The table below gives a breakdown of the women participants in various age groups. It will indicate both frequency (number of cases) and percentage representation of each category, as it is

made up of 110 total sample. This assists in outlining the generational trends of the participation of women in political life.

Table 1: Age group

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
18–29	30	27.27%
30–44	40	36.36%
45–59	25	22.73%
60+	15	13.64%

The politically active among the women were those between the ages of 30 and 44 (36.36%) followed by those between 18 and 29 (27.27%) also politically active, the group between 45 and 59 were also politically active with 22.73%, the least were the group aged and above 60 years with 13.64% being politically active.

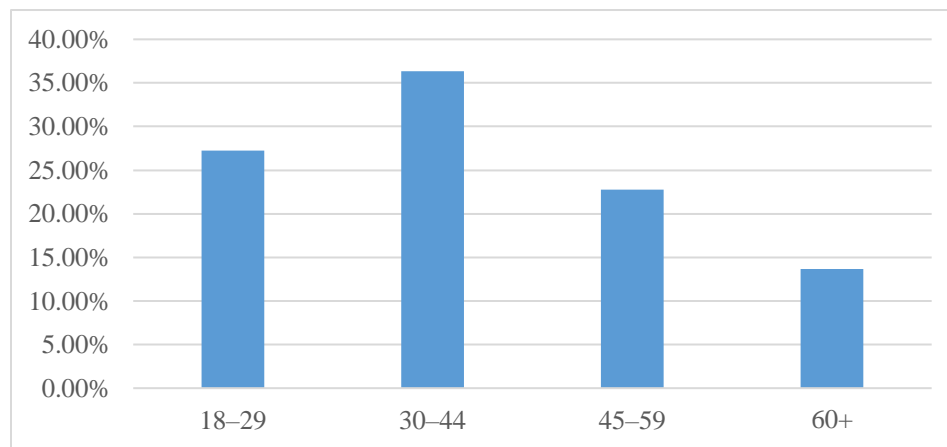


Figure 1: Graphical Representation of the Percentage of Age group

The figure 1 reveals that the age bracket between 30-44 years old was found to have the highest political participation and that which showed a significant decline as it increases in age.

4.2 Forms of Political Engagement

The table below shows the main types of political activity of the 110 women interviewed by the research. It divides their participation into five large categories: voting, local activism, joining or

leadership of a party, running as a local election or making an NGO/community organizing. The table presents the figures, on frequency and percentage, of each category.

Table 2: Primary form of political engagement

Engagement type (primary)	Frequency	Percentage
Voter only (documented voting engagement)	50	45.45%
Local activism / community meetings	30	27.27%
Party membership / leadership roles	10	9.09%
Candidate for local office (panchayat/municipal)	5	4.55%
NGO / community organizer	15	13.64%

The outcomes indicated that voting (45.45%), followed by local activism (27.27%) and NGO-activities (13.64%) were predominant types in which women took part in politics, whereas the participation in political parties (9.09%), local elections (4.55%) was low.

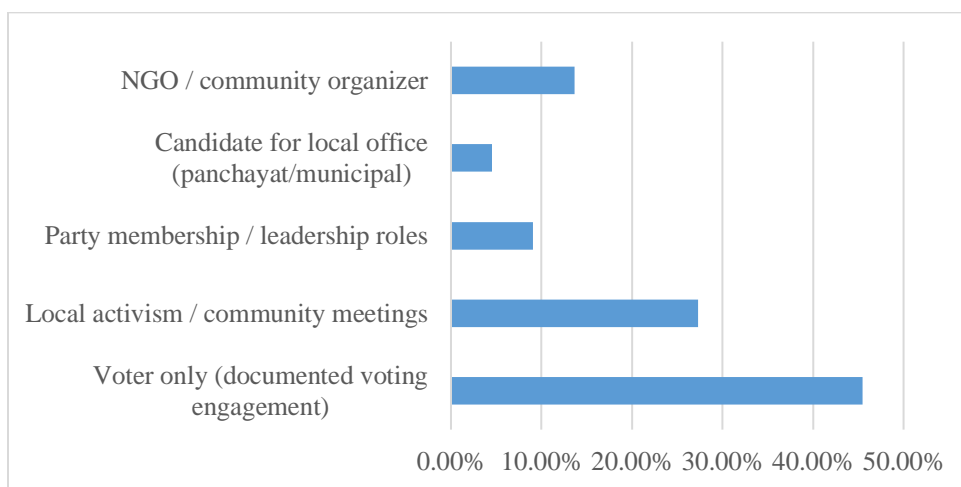


Figure 2: Graphical Representation of the Percentage of Primary form of political engagement

The prevalence of participation of women voters is shown by Fig 2 and this is followed by local activism, and low levels of leadership and candidacy. Another alternative outlet is political participation through NGOs and the community organizations.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of 110 cases demonstrates that although women in West Bengal exhibit excellent participation in politics as voters and participants in local community or non-governmental organizations, their voice in the formal positions of leadership is poor. The most active age group of women is during early and mid-adulthood, but the involvement in the program becomes lesser as they age because of traditional norms and limited access. Literacy and education have improved the capacity of women to engage in the fields at the grassroots level, but women still face structural barriers (patriarchal party systems, financial restrictions, and a lack of mentorship, among others) that impede their ability to become leaders.

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