

DOES GENDER BASED REPRESENTATION MATTERS IN FOSTERING POLITICAL INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS? A CASE OF INDIA

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Abstract: *How does the legally established gender quota in local self-government bodies affect the level of representation of women in power? How does the representation of women in power increase effective political participation? Previous studies were devoted to studying the consequences of gender quotas in the authorities and management, but the issue of the model of gender political participation remained neglected. The introduction of gender quotas as a mechanism for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women in politics and the decision-making process increases women's political participation and political leadership. The success or failure of planning and decision-making largely depends on the level of political participation. The issues of this work correspond to Goal 5 of Sustainable Development, which provides equal opportunities for women's leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. The paper analyzes the representation of women in the authorities and management in different regions of the world. The study's main goal is to determine the relationship between the representation of women in rural local self-government bodies and the consequences of this representation. The data sources were the results of local elections, reports of government ministries and agencies, United Nations reports on gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as surveys of women representatives of political power in three Indian states (Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra) — state election data analyzed over the past three decades. The results of this study show that the level of female representation increases annually, although this is not entirely related to political participation. Women's electoral participation indicates that despite growing women's participation in local elections, the expression remains unchanged within the established gender quota of 33 to 50 percent. Addressing the gender imbalance in the political environment of three states in India is a result of the introduction and enforcement of gender quotas in politics. The results of this study have practical value for local self-government bodies when developing state gender policy.*

Keywords: representation, political participation, affirmative action, rural local governments, India.

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Introduction

Understanding the nature and extent of interactions between gender based representation and participation have been emerged as important aspect of examining the effectiveness of participation of women in democracy. With the increasing focus on the realisation that Local Governments are important instruments of deepening gender based political participation, there has been some systematic efforts to explore and document those issues and suggest appropriate policies and practices of deepening gender based political participation. Further, women's representation in Local Governments based on Legislated Gender Quotas (LGQ) has given a new twist to the discourses of political participation of women notwithstanding continuation of gender based cleavages in political participation. This scenario in many ways contends to understand why do examining gender based political participation important? In recent years, some systematic efforts have undertaken to unearth the interactions between representation and political participation of women in Local Governments, as it is observed that the Local Governments have emerged as important space and sites of proliferating participation through the strategy of representation (for example Duflo 2004; Nagarajan et.al 2014; UN Women 2021). In the recent years many countries have introduced the procedure of explicit quotas to effectively implement political representation of disadvantaged groups such as women or ethnic minorities (Duflo, 2004) in local levels (in case of urban and rural local governments). These have been evolved as a system in ensuring participation of these groups in the Local Governments through the strategy of quotas.

In India, the Rural Local Governments otherwise known as the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been institutionalised and are involved in administration of local public goods, supervising the works of local level functionaries and are responsible for identifying beneficiaries of various development programmes (Duflo, 2004, Mohapatra, 2019). At the same time these institutions have been instrumental in strengthening representation of women through the policies of affirmative action. Experience suggests that gender based reservations have added an additional layer in the existing policies of seat reservation and encouraged many women to actively involved in the functioning of the Local Governments. Women's rights to equal political participation at all levels of government (from national to local levels), as emphasised in the 2030 agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have also been widely acknowledged in India through ensuring their representation in working of the Rural Local Governments. The significance of equal political participation of women at all levels of government is quite important as it is realised that ensuring women's full and effective participation at all levels of decision making with equal opportunities for leadership at all levels may redress gender inequality in representation" (UN Women, 2021).

India's initiatives of ensuring women's participation in Rural Local Governance system over a period of nearly 30 years after passing of the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, has been evolving despite the initial hiccups. The role of women in these bodies both as Chairpersons and Members has been emanated some positive results. The Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) performance in the PRIs and ULBs is mixed story until now. Some women have performed well while few others' performance was dubbed as dismal in nature. Various reasons such as Patriarchy, caste and gender biases stood in the way of the EWRs pathways of working as leaders. However, the gender based quota system have been ongoing since last three decades after the constitutional reforms through the 73rd and the 74th amendments. The LGQ has been instrumental in increasing the representation of women in Local Governments. It is strongly believed that, in the contemporary era of democratisation and representation, the Rural Local Governments as unit of decentralised governance can play a vital role in ensuring the representation of women since these institutions have devolved necessary powers to foster representation of women through the policies and programmes of affirmative action. However how these have been improved participation and addressed political inequality?

The effectiveness of seat reservations for women through affirmative action has been contributed towards increasing representation of the women (Patnaik, 2005), to reduce agency costs and achieve efficiency in governance (Natarajan et al 2014), improving service delivery (Burchi and Singh 2020) and ensuring quality in local governance system (Jha 2019) in various ways. The impact of women's representation on political

participation through the system of seat reservation has also received much attention because of increasing representation of women in the Local Governments. Many research studies in recent years have evidenced that the effective interactions between representation and participation can effectively contribute towards reducing political inequality, maintaining equity in decision-making and addressing gender bias in political participation. For this purpose, quota based representation may be effective than any other kind of arrangements. In the case of Indian system of Local Governance, the gender based quotas (33 percent to 50 percent) have been implemented for increasing representation of women in the Local Governments. As a result, despite the initial hiccups, representation of women in Local Governments have been increased over the years based on the policies of seat reservations. This trend motivated many scholars to examine various dimensions of women representation and how impacted on participation of these representatives in local politics.

This paper presents the case of representation and participation of women in Local Governments in India through presenting the case of rural local government in three India States (Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra). Analysing with a brief historical overview of the rise of the women representation in India's Rural Local Governments or the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), it then highlights the representation of women in three states of India such as Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Based on the elections conducted for the PRIs during last three decades (from the year 1992 to the year 2022) in the states, it presents pattern and trends of participation through the process of representation and the seat reservation policies of the respective states that supports the electoral representation of women. This paper examines few important issues such as (I) how does seat reservation (as part of legislated gender quotas) creates better chances for women's representation? (ii) what are the key dimensions and trends in political participation of women in the PRIs and how these are connected with representation (does better representation guarantee effective political participation?) (iii) how effective participation through electoral representation has been reduced gender based political inequalities at the local levels? This article seeks to answer these questions and make empirical contributions to these questions drawing on the elections data presented by the State Election Commissions (SECs) of the states.

This paper is broadly divided into six sections. Section 1 reviews the important literatures of the topic and discourses associated with these literatures. Section 2 elaborates the objectives and research questions of the paper. Section 3 is about methods and data used for the paper. Section 4 presents the key issues emerged from the discussion with a summarisation of primary and secondary data. Section 5 based on the research issues of the paper which are the focal points of discussion. Section 6 concludes the paper and suggest the way ahead for strengthening the political participation of women at the local levels through the process of representation.

Interactions between Women Representation and Participation in Local Governments-A Review of Literature

The concepts of 'representation and participation' of women have gained significant scholarly attention in the recent years and these have been explored and documented through various empirical studies (for example Deshpande 2004; Duflo 2004; Patnaik 2005; Deshpande 2009; Rai 2011; Mohapatra 2018; UN Women 2021). It is noted by many scholars that ensuring participation of women through the process of representation has been an essential component of maintaining equity in local democracy. As a result of this, there have been a rise of studies on this issue and 'participation through representation' has been a focal point of discussion in these studies. Drawing on surveys carried out in various parts of the world, some scholars have documented the case of representation and participation in the national parliaments and provincial assemblies (for example Deshpande, 2004 & 2009; Rai, 2011), while others have discussed the cases of 'representation and participation' of women in case of the Local Governments (for example Duflo 2004; Patnaik 2005; Nagrajan et al 2014; Mohapatra 2018; Jha 2019; UN Women 2021). The results of these studies have been highlighted some important issues associated with the forms of local level representation and participation. In particular, the cases of inadequate representation, ineffective political participation and local settings that determine or influence the level of political inequality and level of motivation of women representatives in a complex socio-political system have examined. However, few important issues such as how representation has been influenced the level of participation and how participation

influenced correcting the gender-based political inequality frequently overlooked while examining the case of representation of women in local governments.

Further, in the context of working of local democracy, there has been an increasing interest among the scholars to understand the case of representation through the ‘Legislated Gender Quotas’ based on the policies of Affirmative Action. The importance of gender quotas for ensuring equitable representation of women for effective political participation since it is argued that equal participation and representation women are critical for prioritising women’s practical needs and issues. The key determinants and important barriers of women’s participation through affirmative action policies also received wide academic attention (for example Rai 2011; Mohapatra 2018). Some authors have also pointed out a strong relationship between women’s participation and local democracy (Lupien 2020) since effective participation of traditionally marginalised groups ensures equitable access to local goods and resources. Further, the local conditions that are created through improving the contexts and practices also discussed to understand nature and extent of women’s participation in local democracy.

The policies and programmes of affirmative action have seen as important instruments of reserving seats for women on the basis of quota and received adequate attention by the scholars. According to Blair (2000), the major promise of democratic decentralisation (as a key component of participatory democracy) is that it brings popular participation and accountability to local governance, and therefore, makes local governance more responsive to citizens’ desires and more effective in delivering services. Affirmative action policies have instrumental in supporting effective participation at the local level as a part of commitment of democratic states for ensuring popular participation in local governance system (Patnaik, 2005). However, the problems or shortcomings of the policies and programmes of affirmative action have also documented by some scholars. (for example Duflo 2004; Patnaik 2005; Nagrajan et al 2014; Mohapatra 2018).

The concept of representation is central to the discussion of working of Local Democratic Institutions or Local Governments and their success and failures in promoting political participation through representation. Since the dawn of the era of representative democracy, the concept of representation has been discussed and debated among the academic circles. Gazaria (1968) conceptualise representation as a relation between two persons-the representative and the constituent (represented), where the representative ensures the implementation of various actions of the constituent through the authority. Representation can be conceptualised as the process through which citizens indirectly control the process of governance through electing their representatives. Political representation is complex and relational (Rehfeld, 2011). The broad array of representations has been touched upon various key dimensions and trends of participatory democracy such as (i) participation (ii) accountability (iii) inclusion of the left-behind communities or groups and (iv) public control over democratic institutions and practices (Tornquist 2009). However, because the issue of public control over democratic practices is intrinsically related to that of representation as argued by Tornquist (2009) any discussion of democracy should focus on practices of representation. Considering these discourses, the study of representation in local democracy has moved squarely into the centre of studying Local Governments and political participation. However, how the concept of representation asserted considering the representation of women in Local Governments and how the concept of participation of women embedded for undertaking a meaningful analysis of essential dimensions and trends of women participation?

Research on the impact of affirmative action on representation of women has shown that specific dimensions of women’s representation such as participation, inclusion and equity in decision-making processes achieved effectively through the policies of affirmative action. According to Lindsay (1997), affirmative action concepts, policies and programme have been used by many countries to redress social inequities. Affirmative action policies emerged as a means of increasing representation of women which has been observed by many scholars as a result of which representation through affirmative action has been a means of reinforcing participation of women. Policies of affirmative action has been an important component of reinforcing popular participation in local governance (Patnaik 2005). Further, transition from the representative forms of democracy to its inclusive forms has been examined through highlighting the promise and pitfalls of affirmative action. This transition mostly

happens in the case of Local Governments due to the implementation of quota based seat reservations system. Increasing women's political participation through reserving a share of seats by means of quotas have attained great popularity as a matter of which many countries are reported to practice this system (gender quotas) (Nagarajan et al 2014).

The promise of effectiveness of participatory democracy in a given society depend largely on the processes of inclusion through which people from the marginalised groups can get opportunities to involve them in the local level decision-making. The representation of women in local governments as noted by many scholars, is higher than in parliament, but still not on equal terms with men. Though some countries have achieved gender balance in local democratic institutions and decision-making bodies; in the majority of countries still facing the under representation of women which is severe in some countries (UN Women, 2021). Further, the electoral quotas are not uncontroversial (Nagarajan et al 2014) and the failures of the elected representatives to properly articulate and exercise their powers and authority in decision making have brought out the very notion of representation of marginalised groups into forefront. (Patnaik, 2005).

In India, representation and participation issues of women in national and local governments discussed much with a wide range of opinions and differing views (Rai, 2011). The elections to the PRIs held in various years have created a unique opportunity to understand the patterns and trends associated with the issues of representation and participation of women in local governments. Accordingly, conceptual and theoretical issues of representation and connecting these issues with participation (in local level politics and decision-making) of women in the Rural Local Governments or the PRIs have received much academic attention in the post-local democratisation era. The enactment of the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, otherwise known as the post-democratisation era, draws attention of scholars to delve on issues of representation and connecting this with the issues of political participation via working of the Local Governments. The provisions of one-third seat reservations through the policies of affirmative action (as mentioned in the constitutional provisions) has created a new era in the history of representation of women in the Local Governments. However, after three decades of implementation of affirmative action for reservations of seats, still gender-based exclusions and disparities continued and abated gender-based representation (Rai, 2011). Considering these issues, attempts have been taken to delve on this issue more systematically and critically, though many of the previous studies, despite spatial and temporal variances, resulted largely similar outcomes. In these studies, (for example Patnaik; 2005, Rai, 2011; Mohapatra & Reddy, 2016; Mohapatra, 2018) the representation of women have been measured as the proportion of elected seats held by them in various bodies of the Local Governments such as the Local Councils or Assemblies. In few cases, women's political participation through seat reservation has been covered two key issues such as (i) representation of women in office of the PRIs and (ii) participation of women in electoral processes through voting and in the process of decision-making.

However, some studies have noted the continuation of under-representation of women in Legislative Bodies and within the rank and file of political parties which have been affected the momentous gains through the people-driven feminisation of electoral politics in India. The absence of the women's participation in policy and decision-making bodies has generated a development perspective which is male oriented and is burdened with traditional gender-role expectations (EPW,1991). Despite the implementation of affirmative action policies, it is noted by some scholars (for example Patnaik, 2005) that affirmative action in decentralisation has not been successful in ensuring proper and effective representation of the disadvantaged groups like women. Though the numbers of women representative have been increased (numerical representation) and has been successful to some extent in the actual exercise of power by these sections but in actual case, the elected women representatives have failed to properly articulate group-specific interests or to exercise authority and power in *panchayat* (rural local government) decision-making (Patnaik, 2005). Mohapatra (2018) has observed that 'though seat reservation in the Panchayats has created scope for the women, in particular women from the tribal communities to become the members of the Panchayats, but in actual case, these women representative has not been able to exercise their power and authority effectively'.

If we see the case of three states (Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra), the policies of affirmative actions have been implemented through the process of seat reservation or Legislated Gender Quotas for women. Keeping with the progressive outlook, these states have provided 50 percent reservation to women in the PRIs. However, ground reality of the representation of women in PRIs have raised the questions of effective participation, inclusion and creating better economic opportunities for women voters. How the weak or ineffective participation of women representatives have affected inclusion of women at large and restricted creating better economic opportunities for women in the rural areas?

In this context, this article is designed to expand the debates further through understanding the case of representation and participation in local governments in India with a special focus on the states of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Then, it has added the recent cases pertaining to Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra and results of these cases after 30 years of 73rd Amendment Act in the states. To understand the issue systematically, we attempted to argue that gender based representation on the basis of affirmative action policies has potential to ensure the representation of women in working of PRIs and these have far larger implications on women's participation and inclusion in Local Democracy. However, the representation need to be transformed in meaningful participation which can ultimately resulted creating economic opportunities for women. Since it is argued that the exclusion of women from political power has been more marked than exclusion from productive work or even property rights (Omvedt, 1987), based on this argument, we examine the issue more systematically, with linking representation of women members with political participation of these members for promoting well-being of women.

Objectives and Research Issues

In recent research, mainstreaming of representation through the system of political institutions has been received priority through empirical research studies. Research studies on representation have covered the extent to which women representation are encouraged through specific policies and programmes. However, the results are presented in various ways on the basis of objectives and methods. This article examines the case of women representation in Rural Local Governments or the PRIs and demonstrate the vitality of women representation as an instrument of creating more opportunities for women through the process of effective participation.

Women's representation refers to the election of women to the office of the three-tier PRIs through the system of voting. Participation refers to involvement of women in meetings and other forms of activities of the PRIs as elected representatives. Taking into account this broad objective, few particular objectives have been constructed to examine the overall issues and their empirical relevance in the study of gender based representation, participation and inclusion.

The specific objectives are

To explore the nature and extent of Women Representation in Rural Local Governments or PRIs in India in the light of three Indian States.

To examine the policies of affirmative action and implementation of those policies for creating space and sites for representation of women in PRIs

To understand the implications of Affirmative Action Policies on Enhancing the Representation of Women in the states

To examine interactions between gender based representation and political participation and overall implications of participation on women.

Considering the case of three states, this article is attempted to explore the relationship or interactions between the representation of women in Rural Local Governments otherwise known as the PRIs and representation as instrument of enhancing level of participation of women. (i) how does seat reservation (as part of legislated gender quotas) creates better chances for women's representation? (ii) what are the key dimensions and trends in political participation of women in the PRIs and how are these connected with representation (does better representation

guarantee effective political participation?) and (iii) how effective participation through electoral representation has been reduced gender based political inequalities at the local levels and created opportunities in getting leadership position in elected Local Governments of PRIs? Considering the overall issues, this paper mostly uses the case of Gram Panchayats (Village Panchayats), which are the lower tier of the three-tier PRIs in India.

Considering these issues, which are important to understand representation and participation, it is attempted to highlights few particular issues such as (i) participation in elections of the PRIs, (ii) meetings of the PRIs, and (iii) occupying office of the Panchayats and raising voices in the decision-making processes. The key research issues that raised through this paper are based on three key research issues (Problems) such as, why the women should represent? how representation and political participation are related? (relationship of representation with political participation), what are the major problems they faced in the course of representation? and what are the effects of such representation on the process of creating better opportunities for women?

Methods and Data

In order to answer the research questions framed in this paper, it draws data from multiple sources, in particular the local election results of the PRIs of three states and presented by the State Election Commissions (SECs) in the states. Elections for the PRIs which takes place in every five years have used as an important source of understanding the timeline of elections data and use those data for illuminating the practices of representation and participation. Further, the data as presented in various government reports such as Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, State Panchayati Raj Departments, the scope of this paper covers the case of representation of women in PRIs in three Indian States- Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

So the data used for this paper are official data on elections results produced by the SECs of the states of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Further, we also used data presented by Government Ministries and Departments, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and UN Women on these issues during various years to derive few points of the discussion. We combined the data presented by the SECs of states with the data presented by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, the UN Women and various other departments of the Government to understand the overall issues. We have also documented the gradual shifts from the dominant approach to the liberal approach in political representation of women through using the three decades (30 years) of the elections data of the states.

The data comes from the secondary survey conducted in Odisha, a state located on the East Coast of India, Andhra Pradesh, a state located in Southern Part of India and Maharashtra, a state located in Western parts in India. Important demographic features of the states presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1. Important Demographic Features of the States

States	Particulars					
	Area	Population		Literacy		Poverty
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Odisha	155707	21212136	20762082	81.59	64.01	29.35%
Andhra Pradesh	162760	42442146	42138631	74.88	59.15	21.00%
Maharashtra	308000	58243000	54131000	82.34	75.87	17.00%

Source: Economic Survey Reports, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, 2021-22.

Results

The central debate of this paper is to unravel interactions between representation and participation through gauging the merits of affirmative action and how the policies of affirmative action based on reservation of seats have influenced the extent of representation. It is important to understand the promise of participation through the process of representation how gender based reservations have altered the power relations in favour of women through the system of representation and participation. Whether women’s political representation have effectively connected with performing responsibilities or participating in the decision-making processes through occupying key positions in office of the PRIs? Whether interest in politics through representation and interest in discharging

duties (as participation) through occupying important positions are based on same level of interest and motivation or different? Thus, the result of the paper is based on few particular and inter-related issues which have contemporary relevance in understanding the determinants and barriers in participation of women in PRIs through political processes.

It is also contributed to understand the contemporary relevance of identity politics of representation and the emergence and wide application of the political notions of representation on participation. Looking into the policies of affirmative action and relating those policies with the level of practices (that is how affirmative action policies implemented at the ground level and produced results and that how the contesting features of the affirmative actions and the crisis of representation can be understood and documented) it has been attempted to ascertain the level participation of women. To expand the analysis, we first look at the global scenario of women representation as presented by the UN Women in its report, then moved into the scenario of India and the case of three States-Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The strategy of zeroing down the analysis from global to local helped us to present a comparative picture between the global and local scenario.

In the case of analysis of three states, it is attempted to focus on the core issues of the paper, that is effective participation as an outcome of representation can be effectively work through the policies of affirmative action though it is not certain that such representation can ensure effective participation of women since there are other factors equally responsible for limiting the participation of women.

Global Scenario of Women Representation in Local Governments

Representation of women in Local Governments in various countries in the globe has been examined based on data presented by various countries as per the Sustainable Development Goal (SGD) indicator 5.5.1b in 133 countries and areas as of January, 2020 (UN Women, 2021). SDG 5.5 emphasises on women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. As per this, indicator 5.5.1 talks about proportion of seats held by women in local governments (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments. As far as proportion of seats held by women in local governments, table-2 as per SGD dataset presented by UN Women, it highlights that of the 6.02 million elected members in Local Governments only 2.18 million or 36.0 percent are women. Region wise status of representation of women in Local Governments shows that women's representation is better in Central and Southern Asian regions higher than other regions owing to the impact of legislated gender quotas implemented in various nations including in India. Central and Southern Asian regions alone constitute 41 percent of total women representation across the globe. However, the western Asia and north African region has less women representation than other regions.

Table 2. Representation of Women in the World

Sl. No.	Regions	Women Members in Local Governments	
		in Numbers	in %
1	Central Asia and Southern Asia	3471908	41
2	Northern America and Europe	1119000	35
3	Oceania	7894	32
4	Sub-Saharan Africa	160366	29
5	Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia	940567	25
6	Latin America and the Caribbean	149873	25
7	Western Asia and Northern Africa	156111	18
Total	World	6005719	36

Source: UN Women, 2021.

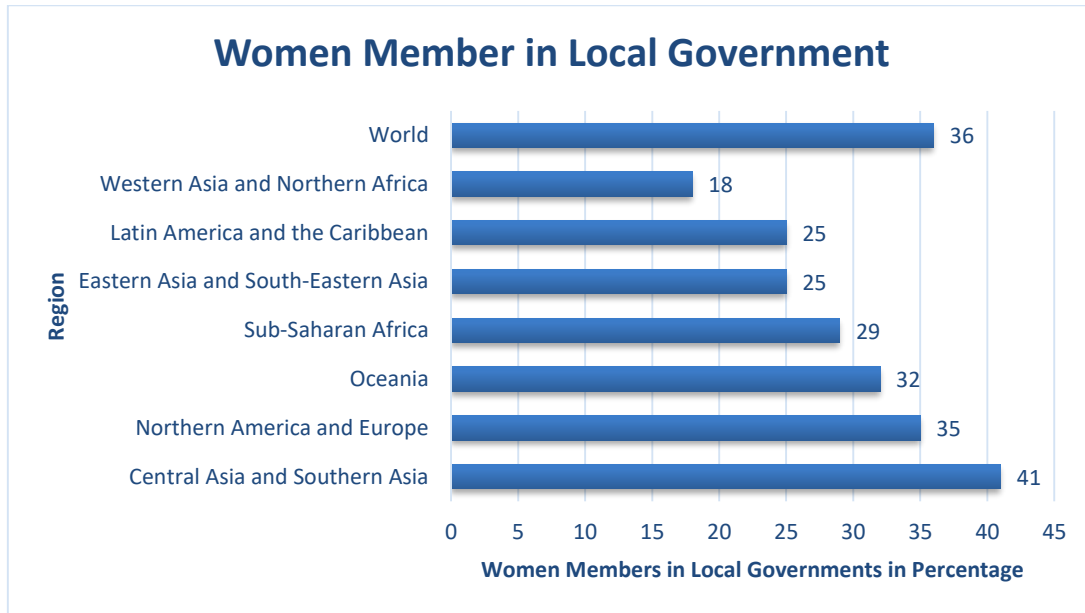


Figure 1. Global Scenario of Women Representation in Local Governments

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

Table-3 and figure 2 show position of India in the world and in Central and Southern Asian Countries as per the data presented by UN Women. The position of India with regard to women’s representation in Local Governments (Both Rural and Urban Local Governments) appears to be in a better position at the global and regional levels. In India, in every 100 members, 45 are women whereas this numbers are 41 and 36 at the regional (Central Asia and Southern Asia) and global levels.

Table 3. Global Scenario of Women Representation in Local Governments vis-à-vis in India

Sl. No.	Regions	Women Members in Local Governments	
		Numbers	percentage
1	Central Asia and Southern Asia	3471908	41.00
2	India	1453973	45.62
3	World	6005719	36.00

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

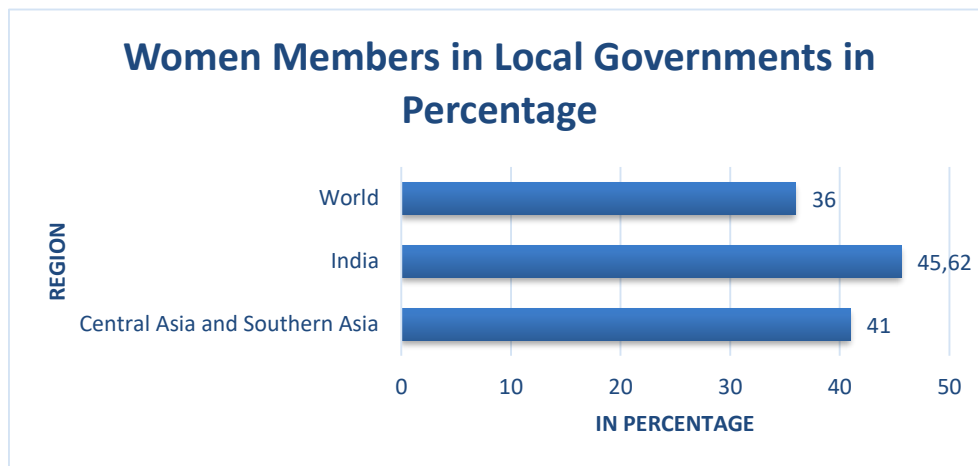


Figure 2. Women Members in Local Governments in India vis-à-vis Global Scenario

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Elections and Constitutional Provisions

Election is a key way of ensuring political participation of people in particular political participation in any kind of legislative bodies be it is National or State Legislative Assemblies or the Village Legislative Bodies like Local Governments. Participation in elections through voting and contesting in elections mostly considered as political participation. In the case of India, the rural local governments of the country have been working as per the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) and have emerged as important institutions of ensuring participation of people through the process of democratic decentralisation. India over last three decades has initiated many policy reforms for institutionalising local democratic institutions and devolving powers and authority to these institutions for ensuring participation of people. These policy reforms have initiated since last three decades are the outcomes of constitutional reforms in 1992. Article 243(D) talks about “seats shall be reserved for (i) not less than one third of total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women”.

As far as elections to the PRIs concerned, the states of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have been following the constitutional mandates vested under Article 243K and 243ZA of the Constitution of India. The State Election Commissions (SEC) have been devolved powers of conducting elections for the local governments. The States Election Commission Rules of the respective states (Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra) have been framed for the institutional arrangements of the SEC in the states as a result of which they have been instrumental in conducting elections for the PRIs in the state in various years starting from 1992 to recent years. If we consider the territorial reforms through the process of elections, data in table 4 highlights the territorial reforms conducted in the case of PRIs and number of rural local bodies or PRIs in each state created through territorial reforms. Territorial reforms is a process of deciding the number and size of each tier during various years through considering the size of population and territorial jurisdiction of the PRIs.

It is revealed that the territorial reforms have enhanced the number of PRIs in the states. Population in a village panchayat ranges from 2204 persons in a GP in Maharashtra to 5142 persons in a GP in Odisha. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, it is 4362 persons in a village panchayat/GP.

Table 4. Territorial Reforms in Local Governments/PRIs in the States

States	Particulars			
	Districts Panchayats	Blocks/Intermediate Panchayats	Gram Panchayats	Average Population per GP
Odisha	30	314	6798	5142
Andhra Pradesh	13	664	12940	4362
Maharashtra	36	355	28813	2204

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, 2019.

Policies of Affirmative Action and Gender Based Seat Reservations

In recent years, many countries have been implemented seat reservation policies through reforming their political systems. In India, explicit quotas through the system of reservations have been implemented to ensure political representation of left-behind groups, in particular for women as per 73rd amendment provisions. The Act when implemented in 1992 created exclusive provision of one-third of seats reserved for women at all levels. For reserving seats for women, the system of rotational strategy has been implemented on the basis of a random method.

Keeping with the progressive outlook, the states of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra in recent years have provided have increased the quotas from 33 percent to 50 percent for women in the PRIs in the states. This is also the case of many other states in India. In these states, 50 percent seat reservation policies have been implemented. A key objective of seat reservation is to increase the level of representation of women in local governments for ensuring their effective participation. This policy has been a key factor behind ensuring more representation of women to the PRIs in the states. Taking the advantage of this system, many women members have been contested and women elections of the PRIs held during various years. This has been resulted a sharp increase in the number

of elected women members in PRIs in the states as per data presented in Table-6 and observed by other scholars (for example Patnaik 2005; Duflo 2005). As a result, women’s political participation via representation has been numerically increased in panchayats in the states which can be considered as the successful implementation of the policies of affirmative action.

Elected Women Members in PRIs in States

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) has been provided one-third reservations for women in PRIs. This Legislative Reform has been ensured effective representation of women and their greater participation in PRIs through the process of elections. As a result of this, since 1992 with the passage of the 73rd CAA, the representation of women in the PRIs has been enhanced over the years. Few other legislative policies (for example increasing level of reservations from 33 percent to 50 percent) made in recent years have also paved the way for the greater participation of women in PRIs. However, the structural constraints and operational bottlenecks have prevented women from actively participating in the works of PRIs. The data presented in Table-5 reveals that there were 13.75 lakhs Elected Women Representatives in PRIs out 31 lakh total representatives in all tiers of PRIs in India. (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, 2019).

The distribution of women representatives across various tiers of the PRIs revealed that there are 46.16 percent of women members in District (upper level) Panchayats followed by 42.01 percent in Intermediate Panchayats and 44.51 percent in Village Panchayats or GPs. The position of elected women representatives increased to the level of 50 percent due to implementation of gender based quota system implemented in various states. However, still some states have not implemented the 50 percent seat reservations.

Table 5. Women Members in PRIs in India

Elected Members	District Panchayat	Intermediate Panchayat	Village Panchayat	Total
Total	17527	180000	2903277	3100804
Women	8091	75620	1292203	1375914
% of Women Members	46.16	42.01	44.51	44.37

Source: Authors’ own compilation based on the data presented by Ministry of PR, 2019.

In table 6 a comparative picture presented to illuminate the status of women representatives in the PRIs in the three Indian States. It is quite evident that all the three states, the scenario of women representation shown above 50 percent because of implementation of seat reservations policies based on affirmative actions. The case of Maharashtra state is better than other two states despite implementation of same policies for all states. However, this figure not include the elected women members from non-reserved constituencies.

Table 6. Women PRI Members in States

Sl.No	States	PRI Members		% of Women
		Total	Women	
1	Odsiha	107487	56627	52.68
2	Andhra Pradesh	156050	78025	50.00
3	Maharashtra	240635	128677	53.47
4	India	3187320	1453973	45.62

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, 2019.

Does better level of education affect the size of women members in the Local Governments? Though the representation of women is based on gender quotas and level of literacy of women based on various factors such as access to education and prevailing social structure, however the cases of three states suggest that despite higher literacy level of women, their political participation via representation remain confined within 50 percent due to gender quota. It otherwise implies that though women are literate but various social factors, in particular gender stereotyping restricted their level of representation. Representation and crisis are contended features, though in this case the crisis of women’s representation is not connected with the lower or higher level of education. It is not that in Maharashtra, more women have been representative (53.47 percent) due to their better level of education (75.87 percent).

Table 7. Representation of Women vis-à-vis their Literacy Level in States

Sl.No	States	Women PRI Members	Women Literacy
1	Odsiha	52.68	64.01
2	Andhra Pradesh	50.00	59.15
3	Maharashtra	53.47	75.87

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Interactions between Representation and Participation

Exploring interactions between representation and participation and connecting these with the case of women representation in the grassroots democratic scenario have been a key aspect of understanding the overall issues. The reservation policies were aimed at correcting the gender-based political inequality through representation. However, how does representation affect the level of participation? Does higher level of representation also ensure the better level of participation? If level of representation not affect the level of participation, then there is no effect of representation on participation. The control over decision-making and role of representatives in the exercise of that control determines the level of participation. Control over decision-making is achieved through the effective participation which indicates from the cases of three states. In many cases, the level of participation has not moved beyond attending offices of the PRIs without meaningfully involved in decision-making processes. Allocation of goods and services through political decision-making which has not happened in many cases.

Discussion

The paper as stated above explores the interactions between the representation and political participation of women in PRIs in India with reference to three Indian States-Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The results of the data have noted key issues and demonstrated how representation of women in PRIs has been an important aspect of fostering political inclusion and addressing political inequality in the active working of participatory democratic systems and institutions. Starting from the global scenario of women's representation to the particular cases of three states, the results of this paper contribute to a wider debate on how representation of women in local governments developed as a system in various countries including India. In India, the increasing number of women representatives in Panchayats have been an important trend in deepening local democracy as institutions of local democracy have been emerged as important pillars of expanding the limits of women's participation from margin to mainstream. It shows that the gender centric social pathologies can be minimised through enhancing opportunities for political participation via representation.

Understanding political participation of women via representation is a key way of understanding the interactions between representation and participation. However, the interactions between representation and participation based on control over decision-making for effective management of local goods and services remained a key concern despite the increasing of the numerical strength of women representatives. Local Governments or PRIs are important institutions of promoting and ensuring participation of women since these institutions have been devolved powers on this regard. The types of goods and services to be designed and targeted to the beneficiaries depends a lot on the effective control over decision-making. But these have not been effective after 30 years of implementation of seat reservation policies.

It is also contributed to understand the contemporary relevance of gender based representation in local governing institutions and effectiveness of such representation in furthering women's participation in a complex social system where gender stereotyping has been important part of social system. It shows that the gender centric social pathologies can be minimised through enhancing opportunities for political participation via representation. Political representation of women in PRIs have been enhanced over the years in the states which in many ways affected to the issues of inclusion in a positive direction. Most prominently the results of this research has sought to explain case of three states and argues that political participation via representation on the basis of gender based quota can be a useful tool to mobilise women politically for achieving the overall goal of women empowerment.

Conclusion

The impact of women's representation on political participation is examined through addressing few specific research questions such as (i) Does seat reservation creates better chances for women's representation? (ii) what are the key dimensions and trends in political participation of women in the PRIs and (iii) how effective representation has been reduced political inequalities of women in PRIs? In general representation is not associated with improved participation. The impact of representation on participation differs spatially as ability of the elected women's representative on transforming their performance on outcomes as not same in the three states. The electoral participation of women indicates that while their participation in Local Elections increased over the years, there representation remains constant within the prescribed limits of gendered-based legislated quota of 33 percent to 50 percent. The institutional design to address gender based cleavages of political participation has been successful due to gender based legislated quota. The proximity of political participation between women as representatives and women as voters are not entirely found at the local levels.

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