



Women's Representation and Political Participation in Jammu and Kashmir: Challenges, Democratic Governance and Gender-Inclusive Politics

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received	24-07-2024
Revised	29-10-2024
Accepted	19-11-2024
Published	30-12-2024

ARTICLE ID

TPAS0202005

KEYWORDS

Women's Political Participation, Political Representation, Gender-Inclusive Politics, Democratic Governance, Women's Empowerment.



ABSTRACT

Gender representation and participation in politics are at the core of democratic governance, gender equality and inclusive development and are well known and accepted as a measure of these goals. The participation of women in electoral politics has been increasing in India, along with redrafting the constitution to include provisions on their representation, the participation of women in legislative and executive institutions is still limited. The issues under consideration are distinctively analyzed in the context of Jammu and Kashmir, which has a very unique history of political conflict, constitutional transition and developing democratic institutions. In this study, political participation and representation of women in Jammu and Kashmir are explored with respect to electoral politics, legislative institution, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Urban Local Bodies and political decision making. A qualitative research design with secondary data from scholarly literature, government reports, Election Commission publications and policy documents, the study examines the impact of socio-cultural norms, patriarchal structures, political party recruitment, educational opportunities and governance reforms on women's political empowerment. The results show that many structural and institutional obstacles still hinder women's participation in elections and grassroots governance, despite their growing presence in these processes, particularly in the political institutions of senior electoral and governance bodies. To achieve gender-inclusive governance, democratic accountability, and sustainable development in Jammu and Kashmir, the study recommends institutional reforms, political party responsiveness and commitment towards women's political empowerment, leadership development, effective implementation of constitutional provisions for women, and more.



1. INTRODUCTION

Political participation and representation of women are integral parts of democratic governance, justice and inclusive development. Under a democratic political system, legitimacy is based on the equal involvement of all citizens in political decision-making, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status. Political participation is more than just voting; it involves contesting elections, holding public office, influencing public policy, joining political parties, joining civil society groups, and contributing to governance at local, regional and national levels. Hence, the level of representation of women in political institutions has been widely acknowledged as one of the most important signs of democratic maturity, gender equality and good governance (Pitkin, 1967).

There has been a significant shift in the world over the last few decades in respect of women's political participation, with constitutional amendments and electoral quotas, affirmative action measures and international commitments including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive institutions). Yet, in many democracies women are still underrepresented in national legislatures, in executive bodies, and in political leadership. The under-representation of women in decision-making bodies is one of the main issues in modern political science and gender studies (United Nations, 1995).

Several constitutional and institutional measures have been taken in India to enhance political participation of women. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were a landmark step in recognizing the potential of women to become a part of the decision making process at the grassroots level, by reserving seats for them in the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023 (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) provided a constitutional framework for ensuring one-third reservation in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies of the States, which is to be implemented subsequent to delimitation. Such initiatives reflect India's evolving and enhanced commitment for gender-inclusive governance. However, the participation of women in legislative and executive bodies has not yet reached the

proportionate level that is in line with their demographic strength and the democratic expectations they have (Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, 2023).

In this larger national scenario, Jammu and Kashmir has a unique situation to look into the political participation and representation of women. It is a region of protracted political conflict, constitutional changes, security concerns, and institutional transformation and changes that have had a profound impact on democratic processes and opportunities for women's political participation. The reorganization of the erstwhile State into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in 2019 also fundamentally changed the governance landscape and brought new discussions around democratic participation, political inclusion and institutional accountability (Government of India, 2019).

Women in Jammu and Kashmir have been active in political mobilization, social reform, education, peace-building and community development activities, among other fields, in the past. They have been seen in electoral politics, local governance institutions, self-help groups, civil society organisations and democratic processes at grassroots. Their representation in the Legislative Assembly, Parliament, political party leadership and senior executive positions, however, has been somewhat low. Women's political participation and leadership remains limited by a host of factors, including patriarchal social norms, lack of access to education and economic resources, political violence, security-related concerns, narrow space within political parties, and traditional gender norms (Rai, 2017).

There has been a rise in the participation of women in the governance of the Panchayat Raj Institutions, Urban Local Bodies and District Development Councils in recent years as reflected in the elections held for these bodies. The changes reflect a progressive increase in women's political power and agency in the region. But increased participation at the local level has not yet led to the representation in proportion to that participation in the higher legislative bodies, nor to the influence on public policy. This gap illustrates the difference between being counted numerically and counted politically, in terms of substantive political participation, and should be studied both in terms of descriptive and substantive (Election Commission of India, 2021).



In this background, the present study critically analyses the representation and political participation of women in Jammu and Kashmir with an in-depth analysis of historical trends, institutional developments, constitutional reforms, electoral participation and socio-political challenges. It addresses the link between democratic governance, gender equality and political participation, and examines the opportunities and constraints that affect women's participation in political processes. The study also provides an assessment of the implications of the governance reforms of the post-2019 Semester for political representation of women and suggests ways in which they might further enhance gender-inclusive democratic institutions.

This paper aims to draw on the rich literature on political change and women's political participation in conflict situations and politically evolving societies in order to contribute to a body of knowledge in this field. It is the case that meaningful democracy in Jammu and Kashmir can only be realized in terms of both the numerical representation and substantive participation of women in political institutions. Inclusive governance, democratic accountability, sustainable peace, and long term socio-economic development are also fundamental aspects of strengthening women's political leadership needed for gender justice (Sen, 1999; UN Women, 2023).

Review of Literature

Research on women's political participation has shifted from descriptive research on voter behaviour to consideration of political representation, political leadership and political influence in democratic governance. The contemporary scholarship acknowledges that the political inclusion of women is a precondition for democratic legitimacy, gender equality and sustainable development. In many democratic states, women are still underrepresented in elected and appointed legislative and executive bodies, despite the constitutional mandate and growing voter turnout.

One pioneering study in this area is by Pitkin (1967), who defines descriptive representation as the numerical representation of women in political institutions and substantive representation as the capacity of women to shape policy and promote women's interests. From this point of view, Phillips (1995) states that a "politics of presence" must be maintained in democratic

institutions, so that women's experiences of their lives can be fully reflected in their direct involvement in political decision making. International bodies like the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women also confirm that there is a positive link between the implementation of gender quotas and affirmative action policies and the overall level of women's political participation and inclusive governance.

An Indian perspective of democratic citizenship is presented by Jayal (2006) who goes beyond the voting right to include equal access to political power and public institutions. Likewise, Rai (2017) conceptualizes women's political empowerment as a multidimensional phenomenon, influenced by education, economic status, political consciousness, institutional support and effective involvement in governance. The results of these studies indicate that substantive political representation cannot be guaranteed through constitutional equality. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments had made a substantial contribution to the women's involvement in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. Research conducted by Buch (2000), Mathew (2003) and Baviskar and Mathew (2009) have found that these reforms contributed to better representation of women and their political consciousness at the grassroot level. They also pinpoint on-going issues such as representation, the fact that men are in control, poor training and low decision making power. It is observed at the national level that while there has been a steady improvement in women's enrolment and participation in the electoral process, political parties continue to field lower proportion of female candidates, thus leaving women underrepresented in Parliament and State legislatures.

The literature on Jammu and Kashmir stresses the unique political and social setting of women participation. Bose (2003) and Behera (2006) suggest that the formal political arena has been limited and new avenues for civic engagement and community leadership have emerged as a result of long-term political conflict. Ather Zia (2019) further builds this knowledge by looking at women's activism and how they have been involved in civil society despite their small numbers in formal political institutions and their involvement in conflict, identity, and resistance. The issue of grassroots governance has received greater attention in Jammu and Kashmir over the last few years. According to Hakim Singh and Nazia Tabasum



(2024), Panchayati Raj Institutions have increased the space for women's leadership but there are still certain impediments like patriarchal mindset, lack of political skill, and less political experience among women. Similarly, Wani (2024) assert socio-cultural norms, economic dependence, economic constraints and institutional weakness as significant challenges for effective political participation. They have found that there is still no real political empowerment following their numerical existence.

While existing literature offers insights into women's political participation, there are important gaps to be addressed. While the majority of studies have been on electoral participation, local governance or conflict, a very limited number of studies have looked at women's representation in legislative institutions, Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies in a single analytical framework. In addition, there is little study that has examined how the post-2019 constitutional changes will affect women's political participation in Jammu and Kashmir in the long-term. In order to overcome these limitations the present study aims to look at women's political representation from a multifaceted approach of democratic governance, gender-inclusive politics, and institutional transformation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is interdisciplinary, with a focus on Feminist Political Theory, Theory of Political Representation, Participatory Democratic Theory and Gender and Governance Perspective. These methods collectively offer a comprehensive framework to analyse the political participation and representation of women in Jammu and Kashmir and the relationship between democratic institutions, gender equality and political empowerment.

The conceptual foundation for this study is the feminist political theory. It questions historically marginalised position of women in politics and claims that inequity in political representation is because of structural, institutional and socio-cultural barriers and not due to individual choices. Feminist academics argue that the political structures of patriarchy can exclude women from positions of leadership, decision-making, and public service, and thus, from democratic participation. In her *Politics of Presence* (1995), Anne Phillips purports that women need to be clearly and explicitly represented in political institutions, as others cannot be their representatives. Likewise,

Okin (1989) argues that there should be equal opportunities for women to engage in political processes and shape public policies if there is to be true democracy. The lenses are important to consider when examining the structural factors that impact women's political participation in Jammu and Kashmir.

The study also benefits from the Theory of Political Representation by Hanna Pitkin (1967) that indicates descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation is the presence of women in elected institutions in numbers, while substantive representation is about the capacity of women to shape policies and to make issues affecting women a reality. In particular this is important in Jammu and Kashmir where there has been a gradual improvement in women's participation in elections and grassroot governance over the years, but comparatively low representation of women in legislative bodies and higher political decision-making bodies. Based on the work of Pitkin, the study can evaluate if rising voter turnout has enabled real political influence and democratic empowerment.

A third is Participatory Democratic Theory, which takes a different view of democracy as continuous process of citizen engagement, not just a periodic election. In promoting democratic legitimacy, fostering civic competence and improving the accountability of the populace to the political institutions, active political participation has a beneficial effect as posited by Pateman (1970). This is especially true in the context of the rising role of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, Urban Local Bodies and the District Development Councils in Jammu and Kashmir. They have provided greater opportunities for women's involvement in local governance, development planning and public decision making in these institutions. But it is necessary to have supportive institutional structures, access to political resources, and freedom from social and cultural discrimination for meaningful participation.

The study also takes the Gender and Governance Perspective into account, which focuses on equality, accountability, inclusiveness and responsiveness in the functioning of public institutions in the context of democratic governance. Gender-responsive governance is closely linked to democratic governance, which helps to increase the efficiency of democratic institutions, through the ability of public policies to



respond to the needs and interests of both women and men, in the sense that it empowers them to act (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016, UN Women, 2023). This focus is on the need for constitutional protection, affirmative action measures, leadership development initiatives, political party reforms and institutional measures to enable women's involvement in political decision making. It also highlights the importance of having equal women's participation at all levels of governance for sustainable development and democratic governance.

Combined, these theoretical frameworks allow for a holistic analytical approach for the present study. The Feminist Political Theory addresses institutional obstacles that constrain women's political participation; the Theory of Political Representation distinguishes between numerical and effective political representation; the Participatory Democratic Theory focuses on the value of citizen participation in democratic governance and the Gender and Governance Perspective focuses on institutional changes needed to ensure inclusive and accountable governance. These approaches allow for a holistic assessment of the political participation and representation of women in Jammu and Kashmir, and also help connect democratic governance with gender equality and political empowerment (Rai, 2017).

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the status and determinants of women's political participation and representation in Jammu and Kashmir within the broader framework of democratic governance and gender-inclusive politics.

The specific objectives are:

- To examine the historical evolution and current patterns of women's political participation and representation in Jammu and Kashmir.
- To analyse the socio-cultural, economic, political, and institutional factors influencing women's participation in electoral politics and political decision-making.
- To assess the impact of the post-2019 constitutional and administrative changes on women's political participation and democratic representation in Jammu and Kashmir.
- To identify the major challenges to women's substantive political representation and suggest

measures for strengthening gender-inclusive governance in the region.

Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What are the historical trends and contemporary patterns of women's political participation and representation in Jammu and Kashmir?
- What socio-cultural, economic, political, and institutional factors influence women's political participation and representation in the region?
- How have the constitutional and administrative changes introduced after the reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 affected women's political participation and democratic inclusion?
- What measures can strengthen women's substantive political representation and promote gender-inclusive democratic governance in Jammu and Kashmir?

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design to examine women's political participation and representation in Jammu and Kashmir within the broader framework of democratic governance and gender-inclusive politics. The qualitative approach is appropriate as it facilitates an in-depth understanding of the historical evolution, institutional dynamics, constitutional developments, and socio-political factors influencing women's political empowerment. By integrating perspectives from political science, gender studies, democratic theory, and governance, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities and challenges associated with women's representation in the region.

The research is based entirely on secondary data collected from reliable and authoritative sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government publications, reports of the Election Commission of India, Census of India publications, policy documents, parliamentary records, and official reports issued by the Government of India and the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, reports published by international organisations such as UN Women, the



United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) have been consulted to provide comparative perspectives on women's political participation and democratic governance. Scholarly reports produced by research institutions, including the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), have also been used where relevant.

The scope of the study is confined to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. It examines women's participation and representation in key democratic institutions, including the Legislative Assembly, Parliament, Panchayati Raj Institutions, District Development Councils (DDCs), and Urban Local Bodies. Particular attention is given to the period following the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, while also assessing the implications of the constitutional and administrative changes introduced after the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019.

The collected data are analysed using descriptive, comparative, and thematic methods. Descriptive analysis is employed to examine trends in women's electoral participation and political representation across different institutions. Comparative analysis facilitates the assessment of women's participation at the grassroots level vis-à-vis their representation in higher legislative bodies. Thematic analysis is used to interpret qualitative evidence relating to socio-cultural norms, institutional structures, political party practices, constitutional reforms, and governance challenges affecting women's political participation.

The interpretation of the findings is guided by the theoretical perspectives discussed earlier, particularly Feminist Political Theory, Theory of Political Representation, Participatory Democratic Theory, and the Gender and Governance approach. These frameworks provide the analytical basis for examining the relationship between women's political participation, democratic inclusion, and institutional reform in Jammu and Kashmir. Although the study relies exclusively on secondary data, efforts have been made to ensure the reliability and credibility of the analysis by drawing upon authentic government publications, internationally recognised reports, and peer-reviewed academic literature. This methodological approach enables a systematic and evidence-based assessment of women's political representation while identifying the structural and institutional factors that continue

to shape gender-inclusive democratic governance in Jammu and Kashmir.

Historical Background of Women's Political Participation in Jammu and Kashmir

The political participation of the women in Jammu and Kashmir has been a complex phenomenon which is interwoven with various historical, political and socio-cultural factors. Political instability, constitutional reform and security concerns have had significant impact on women's access to political institutions over the years, as compared to other Indian states, where the democratic process has been relatively stable. Woman has been long involved in social reform and community development, but their participation in the formal political decision making has been limited.

Women's involvement in public affairs was limited due to patriarchal social norms, illiteracy and lack of educational opportunities during the rule of Dogra (1846-1947). Women had limited access to public leadership and governance in political decision-making, which was generally restricted to elite groups of men. However, educational reforms in the early twentieth century and the progressive development of women's social organisations in the decades that followed created a basis for increased public involvement in activities thereafter (Bamzai, 1994).

The political movements of the 1930s were an important step towards the democratisation of Jammu and Kashmir. The call for representative government led to more widespread popular mobilization and women more and more took part in political gatherings, social campaigns and education. Their contribution was mainly supportive rather than leadership oriented, but it was a beginning of the organised political involvement of women in the region (Korbel, 1954).

Since the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India in 1947, the principle of universality, equality and non-discrimination set a trend for women to have more space in electoral politics. But the guarantees of the constitution did not mean equal political representation. Women continued to be limited in access to legislative institutions due to social conservatism, lack of educational and economic opportunities, and male dominated political parties. Consequently, women's role was limited to the realm of voting, grassroots activism

and community based development and not to legislative leadership.

The events in the late 1980s, when the political conflict intensified, contributed to changing the course of women's political involvement. Armed violence and displacement are a major challenge for democratic participation, as are institutional disruptions. Concurrently, women became significant players in peace building, humanitarian work, civil society organisations and local development programmes. While these experiences expanded women's public participation, they had little effect on women's representation in formal political institutions (Behera, 2006).

There was a significant change when the democratic decentralisation was extended in the form of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. Local governance institutions were inspired by the goals of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments and provided new avenues for engagement of women in public decision making. Reservation systems facilitated the entry of a larger percentage of women into local governance roles and they were increasingly involved in rural development, education, health, sanitation and social welfare. While there were difficulties with proxy representation, limited administrative

experience and patriarchy, grassroots institutions started to play a vital role in fostering women's political leadership (Mathew, 2003).

The recent reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 was a major development in the democratic progression of the region. This expansion of the Constitution of India and the reorganisation of governance institutions also raised new debates about political inclusion and representation and democratic accountability. Although the comprehensive impact of these reforms are yet to be fully understood, it has generated new institutional possibilities to enhance the engagement of women in electoral politics and public administration (Government of India, 2019).

In general, the political involvement of women in J&K has seen a gradual shift from social exclusion to democratic involvement. Women's suffrage has developed in a steady manner, especially at grassroots level. But there has been no corresponding representation in the higher legislative and executive bodies. History then provides a clear picture of the lack of correspondence between participation and representation, which points to the ongoing power of structural inequalities and institutional barriers to political representation.

Table 1: Major Phases in the Evolution of Women's Political Participation in Jammu and Kashmir

Period	Major Development	Impact on Women's Political Participation
1846–1947	Dogra Rule	Limited participation due to patriarchal social structures and low educational opportunities.
1930s	Political mobilisation and demand for representative government	Initial involvement of women in political and social movements.
Post-1947	Constitutional democracy universal adult franchise	Expanded electoral rights but limited representation in elected institutions.
Late 1980s onwards	Political conflict and civil unrest	Greater engagement in civil society and peace-building, but reduced access to formal politics.
Post-73rd & 74th Amendments	Democratic decentralisation	Increased participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies.
Post-2019	Reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir	New institutional framework with evolving opportunities for gender-inclusive governance.



Comparative Assessment of Women's Representation

Women ratio in different democratic institutions in Jammu and Kashmir suggests much variation between higher bodies of the Legislature and local self government institutions. Women's participation in legislative and parliamentary institutions is low, although there is noticeable progress at the grassroots level. This contrast points to the still-existing disparity between voting and representation.

From the data, it is found that over the years there has been little change in the number of males and females elected to the Legislative Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir. Three women (3.33 per cent) were elected to the 90-member Assembly in 2024 Assembly elections. Similarly, in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha from Jammu and Kashmir, the representation of women has been limited, due to lack of statutory reservation, and lack of desire or willingness of political parties to field women candidates in winnable constituencies.

Table 2. Women's Representation in Legislative and Parliamentary Institutions in Jammu and Kashmir

Institution	Total Seats	Women Representatives	Percentage
Legislative Assembly (2024)	90	3	3.33%
Lok Sabha (2024)	5	0	0.00%
Rajya Sabha*	4	0	0.00%

Source: Election Commission of India, Statistical Reports on General Elections to Lok Sabha; Rajya Sabha Secretariat.

The Table 2 reveals that women's representation in the higher legislative institutions of Jammu and Kashmir remains extremely limited. Although women constitute an active segment of the electorate, they currently hold only 3.33 per cent of the seats in the Legislative Assembly, while no woman represents the Union Territory in either the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha. This stark disparity demonstrates that increasing electoral participation has not translated into legislative representation. The findings suggest that political party nomination practices, the absence of reservation in Parliament and State Legislatures, and persistent socio-cultural barriers continue to restrict women's access to higher political office.

In contrast, local governance institutions have created substantially greater opportunities for women's political participation. Reservation policies introduced under the Panchayati Raj system have enabled thousands of women to enter elected office, strengthening their role in local planning, rural development, and community decision-making. Although women representatives continue to encounter challenges such as limited administrative experience, financial dependence, and patriarchal interference, local institutions have emerged as important platforms for developing political leadership.

Table 3. Women's Representation in Local Governance Institutions

Institution	Women Representation	Key Observation
Panchayati Raj Institutions	33% (Reservation)	Significant increase in women's participation
District Development Councils	Moderate	Growing participation, though representation remains below parity
Urban Local Bodies	Higher than legislative institutions	Improved participation through reservation policies

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj; Government of Jammu & Kashmir; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.



Women's participation in local governance institutions is significantly higher than in legislatures as seen in Table 3. Reservations have been essential in facilitating the grassroots political engagement by women, providing institutional space for women's engagement. But despite these advances, the move from local to higher chambers of government is still restricted, which suggests structural and institutional obstacles persist in limiting women's political progression.

The comparative evidence shows the importance of institutional design in creating conducive environment for women's political inclusion. There has been a significant improvement in the representation of women where reservation is provided under the Constitution or Act. In contrast, those that rely entirely on political party nominations have comparatively low participation of women. The results of this study indicate that, besides constitutional changes, there is a need for more political party commitment, more leadership development programmes, and less structural barriers to women's political participation in order to increase the opportunities for women in higher legislative institutions.

Impact of the 2019 Constitutional Changes on Women's Political Participation and Democratic Governance in Jammu and Kashmir

The political history of Jammu and Kashmir witnessed one of the most significant developments of political change in the country on 5 August 2019 when the Government of India published the constitutional and administrative changes which were followed by the enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. The reorganization of the erstwhile State into Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh caused a significant change in the constitutional, administrative and political framework of the region. The changes have inspired a lot of academic and policy discussions on the implications of these changes for democratic governance, federalism, political representation and gender equality (Government of India, 2019; Noorani, 2019). The constitutional amendments opened up new possibilities for women's involvement in politics, but also posed ongoing obstacles. One of the significant achievements was that the full applicability of the Constitution of India and many Central laws was extended to Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. This was an extension of constitutional rights and welfare legislations such as

the laws on gender equality, social justice, education, labour protection, and political inclusion, argued by the Government of India. The law harmonised women's rights and welfare issues in the policy areas that were previously covered by different laws.

The organisation of democratic institutions also happened after 2019. The local democratic processes and the elections for the District Development Councils (DDCs) in 2020 opened up opportunities for women to contest elections and to get involved in decentralised governance. Women participated in the elections for District Development Councils, Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies, increasing their presence in democratic governance at the grassroots. These changes reinforced women's role in various aspects of district planning, rural development, public service delivery and community decision making (Election Commission of India, 2021).

Another major development was delimitation of Assembly constituencies and holding assembly elections to the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory. These institutional changes allowed for a return of democratic political competition after the many years of non-functional Assembly and brought new possibilities for political participation for women. However, the low participation of women in the Legislative Assembly means that institutional changes are insufficient to address and eradicate entrenched barriers to women's political leadership.

Gender-inclusive governance was also returned to the spotlight, thanks to the constitutional amendments. The implementation of the central laws on women's rights, social welfare, education, domestic violence and workplace rights can reinforce the institutional structure behind women's empowerment. Likewise, the constitutional amendment for reservation of one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women (popularly called the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam), after the required constitutional process, could have a significant impact on ensuring women's representation in the future in Jammu and Kashmir (Government of India, 2023).

While these changes in institutions have occurred, significant issues still remain in relation to women's political participation. Political parties continue to endorse assembly and Parliamentary candidates for relatively few women. Women's representation in higher party offices remains low



and is still constrained by financial considerations, the lack of access to political networks, patriarchal social norms, and lack of women's participation in senior party roles. As a result, there has been a lack of proportional representation in legislative bodies, which has reduced the effectiveness of electoral participation. This has resulted in electoral participation not being proportional in legislative bodies, thus lowering the effectiveness of electoral participation.

The post-2019 phase is also a much-debated subject in the academic and political circles. Some scholars have said the constitutional changes have broadened the scope of constitutional rights and welfare laws, offering new possibilities for women to be empowered and participate in democracy, while others have argued that the immediate transition period, marked by political restrictions, communication closures, preventive detentions, and the extended period with no elected Legislative Assembly, had an impact on democratic participation and political engagement. These polarized views reflect the ambivalence of long-term effects of the reforms on democratic governance and political representation of women (Noorani, 2019).

Looking from the perspective of democratic governance, the changes in 2019 are stark reminder that there are two elements of political inclusion – the formal and the substantive. Although legislation and institutions have improved, meaningful participation relies on women's ability to be involved in public policy making, in holding leadership roles within political parties, and in legislative and executive decision-making. Sustainable gender-inclusive governance also needs the support of institutional practice, leadership development programmes, political training, financial support for women candidates and stronger political parties' efforts and commitments to gender balance. The constitutional changes of 2019 have turned a new chapter in the political evolution of Jammu & Kashmir. They have changed governance institutions, increased the reach of Central laws and provided new avenues for democratic engagement. Meanwhile, structural inequalities remain and show that further institutional changes will be needed, increased political interest and commitment to advancing gender equality will be essential, and continued work on addressing social, economic and political obstacles to women's representation is necessary to attain substantive representation in politics. Jammu

and Kashmir's post-August 5 government's efforts to achieve long-term success with democratic governance will hinge on more than just constitutional changes; it will also require women to be equal partners in political decision-making and public governance.

Challenges and Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Jammu and Kashmir

Although the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir guarantees equal rights for women, expands their franchise and democratic institutions, women remain limited in their effective participation in decision-making processes due to issues of socio-cultural, economic, political, and institutional barriers. The combined nature of these challenges has helped to create a persistent gender gap in terms of women's participation in elections and their under-representation in legislative and other government institutions.

Patriarchal norms are one of the major barriers for women empowerment in politics. Conventional notions of gender roles persist in putting men in positions of political leadership, and women in the roles of household management and care. These social attitudes are frequently barriers to women's political participation and reduce their political agency. This imbalance is also further aggravated by political parties who tend to field relatively few women candidates for parliamentary and Assembly elections. While women continue to be marginalised in party leadership structures due to gender bias, fewer women have access to influential political networks, and there are weak internal systems to encourage women to become party leaders.

Women's political participation is also influenced by economic and educational differences. Women have less access to financial resources, less economic independence and less property ownership, which makes it difficult for them to finance election campaigns and be competitive in electoral politics. While there has been significant progress in the education of girls and women, there are still many women, especially in rural areas, who lack sufficient political training, leadership opportunities and awareness of governance processes. This has led to a need for many newly elected representatives to receive institutional assistance and capacity-building initiatives to enable them to do their work well.



Additional complexities add to the unique political context of Jammu and Kashmir. Political conflict, security concerns and institutional uncertainty have impacted democratic participation regionally, for decades. There are often extra barriers to women candidates' mobility, public engagement and electoral campaigning, especially in geographically remote and conflict-affected areas. These factors have facilitated women's engagement in civil society and community development, but at the same time reduced their access to formal political institutions.

One of the other key issues is the mismatch between representation at the local level and the political institutions. Reservation arrangements have contributed to a much greater participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies, providing leadership at the ground level. But this advancement has not been observed in the Legislative Assembly or Parliament where the ratio of women is comparatively low. Women's influence on governance and policy implementation is also limited in some cases by the lack of effectiveness of their local representation, the inadequate administrative power, the lack of financial resources, and bureaucratic procedures. The media and gender stereotyping further influence public perception of women politicians. Often the media and political commentaries or debates discuss women's personal lives and families instead of their leadership skills and policy inputs. Add to this the difficulty of balancing public duties with domestic duties and many able women are reluctant to take on long-term political careers.

In the last few years, however, significant opportunities have arisen, given these limitations. Women's political awareness and aspirations have gained momentum as a result of increased access to education, digital communication, leadership development and civil society. The expansion of Panchayati Raj Institutions, Urban Local Bodies and District Development Councils has led to the emergence of a large number of women leaders with experience in higher political institutions. However, to bring grassroots participation into political representation, there is need for better political will, party-led recruitment processes, leadership development programs, funding for women candidates and enabling policies of gender-inclusive governance.

CONCLUSION

Political participation of women is crucial for inclusive development, democratic governance and gender equality, and so is women's representation. The present research study aimed to explore the current state of women's political participation, the nature of the women's political participation and its determining factors in Jammu and Kashmir in the context of democratic governance and gender inclusive politics. The results show that while women have been more active in electoral processes and in grassroots democratic institutions, their representation in higher political decision making institutions, particularly, the Parliament and political parties remains low.

The historical analysis shows that the political engagement of women in Jammu and Kashmir has been a gradual process of women's engagement from limited public engagement in pre-Independence era to their increased involvement in electoral politics, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Urban Local Bodies and District Development Councils. The newly gained political visibility of women can be attributed to constitutional guarantees, decentralisation of power and increased educational opportunities. But these developments have not been reflected in the representation in the Legislative Assembly, Parliament or in the senior political leadership positions.

The study also confirms that socio-cultural, economic, institutional and political factors act as interrelated institutions that contribute to women's political participation. Women are still restricted in entering competitive electoral politics by patriarchal social norms and unequal access to financial resources, as well as lack of political party support, and poor leadership development opportunities. Reservation policies have been effective in diversifying women's representation at grassroot level, but this is not repeated at a higher legislative level, creating a constant participation-representation gap.

The Constitution changes analysis shows that the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir has led to a new institutional framework for democratic governance. Enlarged constitutional rights, the restoration and strengthening of local democratic institutions and the extension of central legislation have created opportunities for increasing political inclusion. However, changes in the law and institutions are not sufficient to ensure substantive



political empowerment. The key factors to meaningful representation are women's capacity to shape policy, hold decision-making power in political parties and influence the legislative and executive decision-making frameworks.

One of the key results of the study is that raising voter participation for women does not necessarily lead to higher female representation in elected bodies. Results indicate that the core constraints to women's political representation continue to be political party nomination, structural inequalities and institutional constraints. The challenge is then to go beyond mere participation to substantive representation, or women's involvement in the policy process and decision making. Therefore, enhancing democratic governance goes beyond simple participation to substantive representation, or women's engagement in the policy process and decision making.

Hence, the study concludes that gender-inclusive politics in Jammu and Kashmir cannot be created with just a single measure as it needs to be a holistic approach that includes constitutional measures, institutional changes and political will. Political parties need to have more inclusive candidate selection processes, leadership development programmes need to be enhanced, and

there needs to be more institutional support, political training and policy formulation opportunities (PFPs) for women representatives. Such actions would not only result in the greater representation of women but would also contribute to better quality, responsiveness and legitimacy of democratic governance. This study adds to the existing literature on women's political engagement in conflict-ridden and politically evolving contexts by offering an integrated discussion on historical changes, constitutional changes, democratic institutions, and gender-inclusive governance in Jammu and Kashmir. It emphasizes the need to move beyond the extension of electoral participation to meaningful and equal women's participation in all aspects of political decision making for consolidation of democracy in the region. Therefore, there is a need to boost political leadership of women for enhancing democratic accountability, gender justice, inclusive governance, and sustainable socio-political development in Jammu and Kashmir.

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