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Aradhana Sharma

Research Scholar, Department
of Political Science and Public
Administration Banasthali
Vidyapith, Rajasthan, India

Political participation of women in Dehradun District, Uttarakhand: An Analytical study

Aradhana Sharma

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Abstract

Gender equality is necessary for all for the creation of a fair and inclusive society. While men and women can sometimes play different roles depending on the situation, these differences should never lead to improper treatment or discrimination. True equality means that women should have equal freedom and opportunities, which are part of every sphere of life of men, whether it is social, economic, or political, without unnecessary obstacles. Although many countries have progressed over the years, women around the world still face deep-rooted challenges that limit their full participation. These often come from long-standing cultural beliefs, old laws, and institutions that are not fully adapted to support equal rights. A clear example is the weakness of women in politics, especially in major decisions like Parliament. Addressing gender inequality requires more than offering equal opportunities-it demands significant examination and improvement of women's daily life structures. This research examines the participation of women in state elections, which focuses on their roles as independent voters and focuses on changes seen after the implementation of political reservation for women. The study also examines how political reservation has affected women's participation, visibility, and the spirit of empowerment in politics. It shows whether these measures have helped women become more involved and recognized in the roles of decision-making. Through this research, we aim to better understand the widespread impact of women involved in the political process. At the same time, we expect deeper roots to challenge the patriarchal view and show why there is a need for ongoing efforts and advocacy to achieve the right gender equality.

Keywords: Empowerment of women, political empowerment of women, participation women at state level, participation women in local self-government

1. Introduction

Women make up about half of India's population, and their contributions are essential for human resources and the progress of the nation. To be durable for development, both men and women must enjoy equal opportunities-not only as a matter of fairness, but also because the inclusive participation strengthens societies. In theory, the Indian Constitution promises equality and absence between genders; nevertheless, in practice, women often face structural, legal, institutional, and social obstacles that limit their political and social rights. Grassroot Level decisions and constitutional amendments, such as the 73rd (1992) and 74th (1992) amendments to guarantee reservation for women in rural panchayats and urban municipalities. Recently, the Women's Reservation Bill of 2023 (also known as Nari Shakti Wandan Adiyinam) has been proposed to reserve third seats for women in state assemblies and include provisions for women and scheduled castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) women. These tricks reflect important legal routes towards gender justice.

Even with supporting laws and policies, the real participation of women and representation in politics is still quite limited. For example, in Uttarakhand, the number of women's MLAs in the state assembly reached nine in 2023-the highest number since the formation of the state. While it is one step ahead, it still represents a small part of the overall seats ^[1]. In Dehradun Tehsil, the level of education is quite high, with an overall literacy rate of 88.22%. The male literacy is 92.16%, while the female literacy is slightly less than 83.88% ^[2].

Corresponding Author:

Aradhana Sharma

Research Scholar, Department
of Political Science and Public
Administration Banasthali
Vidyapith, Rajasthan, India

¹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/parvati-dass-victory-takes-female-representation-in-state-assembly-to-record-high/articleshow/103545994.cms> (September 10, 2023)

² <https://censusofindia.net/uttarakhand/dehradun/dehradun/304>

These numbers reflect encouraging progress, especially for women, but the difference between men and women in education remains-a reminder is to be done more work to achieve true equality. Construction on this background, this study checks how women in Dehradun, Uttarakhand participate in politics at local, state, and national levels; How reserved seats and other legal measures have affected their visibility, empowerment, and effects; And what obstacles remain at the ground level. When we saw the recent trend of voter participation, voter registration of women in Uttarakhand is continuously increasing. Between 2004 and 2019, the ratio of women voters in Uttarakhand increased by about 20% [3]. Women are rapidly seen by political parties as a decisive power in elections [4, 5]. Currently, we saw in Representation in elected bodies in the 2023 by-elections. Uttarakhand received its supreme female representation in the State Legislative Assembly (nine out of 70 MLAs) since its formation. However, overall female MLA still forms a small minority (about ~ 11), 12% of legislative membership. There is some progress in the local body elections: For example, in the upcoming Uttarakhand municipal wards, major parties have fielded women candidates in about 44-45% wards [6].

While voters are increasingly evidence of polling, literacy, and improvement in the legal framework, low studies provide a wide, ground-level analysis of how female leaders in Dehradun are translating reserved seats and formal rights to real empowerment and influence. There is also less information about how local political, family, and cultural dynamics help or obstruct this translation. The purpose of this study is to analyze the political representation of women in Dehradun at local, and state levels. Check out how reservation policies have affected their visibility, decisions, power, -making power and community development results. Identify the obstacles that limit women's meaningful participation. Assess the effectiveness of recent programs (e.g., Shakti Abhiyan [7]) in increasing the political agency among women.

2. Women's Political Participation

Active participation of women in politics plays an important role in the overall progress of society. Decision-presence in processes helps to promote awareness, encourage social connectivity, ensure gender equality and improve accountability on issues affecting women. Despite this, even after 75 years of independence, women make only 10% of members in Parliament, as noted by the Election Commission. While women are included in their organizational structures in many political parties, they often hesitate to give them tickets to contest elections. There are many underlying reasons for this reluctance, from social prejudices to structural obstacles within the political system.

According to the World United Nations Conference on Women 1995 in Beijing [8], The initiative focused on assessing the status of women and marked a major milestone in the efforts of both activists and policy makers to size and implement strategies aimed at promoting women's development. This emphasized the value of women's knowledge and experience in all areas and its purpose was to encourage and advise the next generation to women leaders.

2.1 Political Participation of Women in Dehradun at State Level

The Legislative Assembly of Uttarakhand, which is made up of 70 members, is a single -member legislature that makes the law. It is also known as Uttarakhand Vidhan Sabha.

- **Participation of Dehradun, Uttarakhand women as representative in state elections:** In 2022 5th State Legislative Assembly election there is only 9% women are elected in Uttarakhand Vidhan Sabha and only 1 women representative from Dehradun district. According to news, there is a lack of women in Indian politics [9] in which only one woman is part of Council of Minister Smt. Rekha Arya; she holds the different ministries Women Empowerment and Child Development, Food Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Sports, Youth Welfare. The 5th Legislative Assembly of Uttarakhand was formed after the state elections in March 2022. A total of 70 members (MLAs) of the Legislative Assembly were selected. The BJP won a strong majority by winning 47 of those seats, 67%, which gave them the number to form the government. So far, the BJP holds more than two-thirds seats in the assembly. Interestingly, compared to the previous term, a large number of MLAs -41%, now there are higher educational qualifications, which shows a change towards a more educated leadership. However, women make only 11% of the current members, a figure that remains at or below this level since 2007.
- **Participation of Dehradun, Uttarakhand women as voters in state election:** In the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly election held on February 14, 2022, women voters showed great enthusiasm, outnumbering male voters by 4.6%. The overall voter turnout in the state was 65.37%, with women participating at a higher rate of 67.20% compared to 62.60% for men. According to the State Chief Electoral Officer, a total of 8,172,173 general voters and 94,471 service voters were eligible to vote. Out of these, 5,342,462 people from the general electorate cast their votes, representing a turnout of 65.37%. The voter turnout in 2022 was slightly lower, by 0.19%, compared to the turnout in the 2017 assembly elections. In 2017, the overall voter turnout was 65.56%, with women participating at a rate of 68.72% and men at 61.11% [10].
- **Political participation of women in Dehradun at local level:** In India, women's participation in public and political institutions strengthen them socially, economic and politically. For example, awareness of

³ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/20-rise-in-women-voters-in-uttarakhand-and-other-hill-states-a-significant-trend/articleshow/108631233.cms> (March 20,2024)

⁴ <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Apr/19/women-first-time-voters-hold-the-key-in-five-seat-uttarakhand-lok-sabha-polls> (19 Apr, 2024)

⁵ <https://www.pioneeredge.in/neglect-of-women-in-electoral-politics-continues-in-uttarakhand/> (28/03/2024)

⁶ <https://www.news9live.com/india/uttarakhand-ulb-polls-women-to-play-key-role-with-44-45-candidature-in-bjp-cong-2795662> (13 Jan 2025)

⁷ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/uttarakhand-congress-launches-shakti-campaign-to-empower-women/articleshow/113880716.cms> (Oct 02, 2024)

⁸ <http://www.unwomen.org>intergovernmental-support>

⁹ <http://www.thehindu.com/society/india-general-election> (April 21, 2024)

¹⁰ www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/women-voters-outnumbers-men-in-uttarakhand-assembly-polls20220217113728/ (Feb 17, 2022, 11:37 IST)

these issues increased, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 gave women an important opportunity to question the patriarchal system of Indian society by demonstrating their abilities. This enables others to see how women participate in taking political decisions and handle the positions of leadership. Gender inequality in India is still a challenge, and a woman's participation in taking political decisions can greatly affect her social status. In rural areas, people have the power to choose their own local leaders through the Panchayati Raj system-a form of local self-government. The center of this system has Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha, which plays an important role in addressing local issues and running the development of villages and in turn, as the whole country. Today, women are proving effective and impressive in social, economic and political fields, often matching or crossing men in their contribution.

His participation in politics means his participation in all political and administrative activities that help in furthering the nation. To empower women, the government has taken meaningful steps by submitting seats for them in local governing bodies through Article 243D of the Constitution. It not only gives women a place on the table, but also gives the right to take decisions and take responsibility. These efforts are particularly seen in the Panchayati Raj system, which plays an important role in rural development across the country. This support helps women, especially from the deprived socio-economic backgrounds that cannot be fully known about their rights, they become more economical and politically empowered. Additionally, government programs, self-help groups and non-governmental organizations also play an important role in supporting women's development and leadership.

Table 1: List of Gram Pradhan in Dehradun District (Election 2021-2025)

S. No	Name of the blocks	Number of Female Gram Pradhans	Number of Male Gram Pradhans	Total
1.	Chakrata	61	55	116
2.	Doiwala	17	19	36
3.	Kalsi	58	53	111
4.	Raipur	21	14	35
5.	Sahaspur	28	23	50
6.	Vikashnagar	35	18	53
7.	Total	220	182	401

Source: ADO office, Dehradun, Uttarakhand

According to this table we can see that there is maximum number of women representation in Local level more than male members in Dehradun district, Uttarakhand. This is good, for women to take part in maximum number in political sphere to make themselves political strong and aware about their rights. By this they inspired other women in their area.

Table 2: List of Female Nagar Nigam Parshads in Dehradun District (Election 28-02-2019 to 02-12-2023)

S. No	Number of Female Parshads	Number of Male Parshads	Total
1.	38	62	100

Source: Nagar Nigam Office of Dehradun, Uttarakhand

Table 3: List of Female Nagar Nigam Parshads in Dehradun District (Election 2025-2030)

S. No	Number of Female Parshads	Number of Male Parshads	Total
1.	38	62	100

Source: Nagar Nigam Office of Dehradun, Uttarakhand

According to both the tables of Urban Local Bodies election of Dehradun District we can see that there is less number of women representations and maximum number of male members at Nagar Nigam in Dehradun district, Uttarakhand. This is show that, women participation in Urban Level in political sphere is less which is not good sign, to make themselves political strong and aware about their rights.

3. Difficulties Faced by Women

- **Lack of Political Awareness and Illiteracy:** One of the main reasons women have lower participation and representation in politics is illiteracy. Many women are

unaware of even their basic and political rights. Although some women enter politics, their ability to actively participate and fulfill the responsibilities of selected positions depends a lot on their level of education. In addition, many women join politics despite having limited knowledge about political systems or government functions. Understanding political processes and issues can be especially challenging for women who are illiterate.

- **Barriers between households and marriage:** In many Indian homes, women are often expected to focus on domestic responsibilities and are discouraged from working outside the house. Father, husband and other family members cannot support women pursuing career in public or professional areas. Traditional patriarchal beliefs see women primarily as home caretaker, which limits their participation in public life. Due to these sanctions, most women spend their time in managing domestic work. Additionally, married women often encounter social and marital obstacles that prevent them from stepping out independently of their homes. It is also common that women who enter politics come from rich families or get support from relatives, helping them to remove some of these challenges.
- **Traditional structure and sociological criteria:** Social and cultural criteria often prevent women from entering politics. They are expected to tolerate the burden placed by the society on them and follow strict rules and traditions. Many women also face poverty and should face long-lasting beliefs in their communities. These social and cultural barriers make it difficult for women to participate completely in the electoral process, whether as voters or candidates, despite the existence of measures such as universal adult franchise,

reservation and other limited opportunities to promote their participation.

- **Concern about security:** Some women still feel insecure when they go outside the homes for work due to ongoing security concerns. Because constant news telecast about rape and sexual harassment spread the feeling of fear, making them difficult for them to participate in public and professional life. The women who enter politics often face improper treatment and are not given the equal respect as their male counterparts. Instead of recognizing their skills or leadership, people often focus on their appearance, clothes or personal life. At her top, in many workplaces, women still face humiliation, prejudice and even harassment from male colleagues, it is even more challenging for them to grow and succeed in their careers.
- **Political organisations:** Women still face discrimination within political parties at national and regional levels. This bias is not only clear how seats are allocated, but also within the leadership and decision-making bodies. Political organizations often fail to identify the dedication and hard work of the women's party workers, restricting opportunities to run for office or hold elected positions. Party leaders favor those candidates who are already famous and have a proven track record of winning elections, often damaging women.
- **Poverty and Insufficient Resources:** Poverty is one of the biggest obstacles in entering politics. Girls from low-income families face many difficulties including high dropout rate from school than boys. So many women in India come from not wealthy family backgrounds, which limit their opportunities. Due to not good financial status of their families, they cannot afford or continue their education and are expected to work in manual labor instead. This deficiency of education and resources makes it difficult for them to engage in politics or participate in public life.

Discrimination and Religion

For a long time, women have been placed back by traditional social norms and religious beliefs. A political system dominates men on a large scale, women often face discrimination and have fewer opportunities to participate. Many times, religious customs and rituals are used to justify women to exclude public roles and decision making places, which limits their presence in society. Discrimination is also found in many other areas, both public and private. For example, women often receive insufficient healthcare, and the practice of female baby betting remains a disturbing reality. Bad health is an important obstacle that prevents many women from engaging in politics. Additionally, women have limited access to educational opportunities. Indian women face many challenges while trying to participate in the political system, roughly deepened roots due to discrimination and violence that affect women children from an early age. Discrimination is one of the biggest obstacles for political participation of women in the country.

4. Suggestions

- **Raise the percentage of women holding leadership roles worldwide:** Women often challenge traditional expectations through their leadership styles in politics

and business. Although many women contribute significantly to the economies of different countries, gender equality remains a goal to a large extent. Women are rapidly joining areas such as energy, climate change, food production, healthcare, natural resource management and entrepreneurship. However, only a few women take advantage of job opportunities and resources to move forward in high-paying careers. As the economy moves towards more inclusive financial models, women have the ability to become more impressive if they are empowered and more access to decision-making roles.

- **Through education:** Even today, in the 21st century, millions of girls around the world still do not have access to education. There are many reasons behind this, something seems that their education does not matter; some stay far away from schools, and for many people, security is a major concern. According to UNICEF, around 132 million girls are out of school globally. This includes girls of all ages-34% of primary school-age girls, 30% in low secondary, and more than 67% once educated, girls understand their value in society. A good education brings confidence, happiness and better job opportunities. It empowers people to make their choice, stand for their rights and reject harmful traditions.
- **Health and Safety:** Employers play an important role in the mental and physical health, safety and overall welfare protection of all their employees regardless of gender. For women, sexual harassment and attack experiences can lead to serious failures, including lapse opportunities, reduction in earnings, and damage to their overall well-being. At the same time, businesses face loss through decrease in productivity and increase in employee absence.
- **Conduct men and women equally without any discrimination:** Treating women and men alike in the workplace align with international human rights standards. This approach leads to practices to keep better work, greater job satisfaction, and increase in productivity and strong decision making. For a company, removing all kinds of prejudices from its policies, culture, strategies and daily practices is an important and positive step.

Providing work opportunities

Many researches suggest that the increase in employment rates of women with men can greatly boost the country's GDP, with some nations to see an increase of up to 34%. Elimination of discriminating obstacles with women can increase national productivity by up to 25%. Women often stay out of the task force until basic requirements such as social security; equal pay and safe working environment are met. Employment plays an important role in empowering women, as participation in the labor market helps in improving its situation in both home and society. When women earn income, it strengthens their economic condition and leads to more respect and positive treatment.

5. Conclusion

The political participation of women in Uttarakhand is still less than its full promise, correcting. Positive developments have been observed in recent years for example, after 2023 Bageshwar from Parvati Das's POL poll victory; nine

women MLAs now have the highest number in the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly, the highest number since the formation of the state in 2000. In addition, in the first phase of 2025 panchayat elections, voter turnout among women was 73% ^[11], which was much higher than men at 63%, showing increased engagement at the ground level. Overall, in Uttarakhand, women form about 48.2% of voters ^[12]. Despite this progress, the number still reflects the major interval. The women MLAs are only 11.4% of the Uttarakhand state assembly. Many seats are still won by men, political parties choose fewer female candidates, and often, reserved seats do not translate into real power or decision-making at the executive level. Cultural criteria, patriarchal expectations, and structural obstacles limit women's openness, freedom, and effectiveness in politics. For Dehradun, in particular, high literacy and greater electoral awareness provide a strong foundation; nevertheless, uniform representation and decision in legislative bodies remain underdeveloped. Local bodies and state assembly seats distribution, candidate selection, and implementation of reservation policies require careful monitoring to ensure that they bring real rather than symbolic empowerment. To move forward, policy efforts should go beyond reservations alone. Measures that women are necessary in winning meaningful candidature, building leadership skills, gaining visibility, and keeping the office with real effects are necessary. Equally important social change is, from home to community level-enhancing orthodoxy and enabling both girls and boys to grow under similar expectations. Only then can legal equality translate into living equality.

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