

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Participation is central to the establishment and maintenance of a democratic polity. Democratic states encourage people's participation in political institutions as the success of democracy relies on their extent of inclusiveness. It is problematic to comprehend democracy if it is not inclusionary. The participation of women in the political process and the decision making institutions is central to the proper functioning of democracy. However, women's representation was for a long time not seen as equally important to address (Phillips, 1995). As Dahlerup (2006) observes outside feminist circles, all male political assemblies were previously not considered undemocratic. This realization has led to the efforts to include women in the political process. As a result, at the international level, the United Nations has been instrumental in taking initiatives by organizing various conferences by focusing on women's issues. The Beijing Platform for Action, 1995 may be seen as important in bringing discursive shifts in relation to women in politics. It stresses that equality of women in decision making is not only a question of democracy but also a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken in to account. Similarly, Trembly (2007) also notes that women share equally with men in the decision-making process, otherwise, there is a democratic deficit.

Sikkim was governed by authoritarian rule for more than 300 years and accepted liberal democracy as an alternative political model in 1975. Sikkim under authoritarian rule saw the absence of a competitive party system, less involvement of citizens in the decision-making process. The people were not allowed to organise themselves for their rights. The establishment of democracy since 1975 opened the avenues for mass participation of citizens in public policy making. It is claimed that only in the democratic setup which provide a vast array of opportunities to the people to participate in socio, economic, cultural and political aspects of life. Similarly, the

transition from feudal to democracy brought about many changes. Realizing the importance of inclusion of women in democratic progress, the state government consciously worked towards gender parity. For instance, Sikkim endorsed the positive discrimination policy at the local level as a measure towards an inclusive democracy. The Sikkim Panchayat Raj Act was enacted in 1993 in pursuance with the Central Act of 1992 which gave effect to 33 percent reservation of seats for women in all levels of rural local bodies in Sikkim. Later on, Sikkim Panchayat Amendment Act 2011 mandates not less than half of the total number of seats for women. Similarly, for urban local bodies Sikkim Municipality Act 2007 was enacted in consonance with the provision of the 74th Amendment Act 1992 which gives effect to 33 percent reservation of seats for women in urban local bodies. The reservation for women in urban local bodies increased further to 50 percent by Sikkim Municipality Act 2015. As a result, women representation in both rural and urban local bodies has reached gender parity.

Like many other democracies, participation and representation of women in Sikkim in higher politics however remain a major challenge even after 45 years of democracy. Though women have consolidated their presence in some areas of participation such as voting, campaigning, political meetings and representation in local governmental bodies but have simultaneously disenfranchised with regard to political representation in higher decision making bodies. Women representation has always been less than 15 percent in the Legislative Assembly, which is far from 30 percent target endorsed by the Beijing Platform. The ministerial positions and the influential portfolio have always been occupied by men. Political parties are also reluctant to give tickets to women. Women constitute half of the state's population but their representation is far from satisfactory in the legislature. The problem of political representation of women is rarely examined because the question of women representation in the power process has been minimally raised. It is seen as self-evident. But today, when the success of politics and quality of democracy is defined by its inclusiveness, the problem of women representation in the legislature cannot be seen as self-evident but as a matter of concern, from which this inquiry begins.

In this chapter, the central conclusions of this study are discussed. It begins by presenting the summary of the study and then the key findings of this study. The findings are presented based on the specific issues which were analysed in chapter

five. Next, some corrective measures are suggested to increase the political participation and representation of women in Sikkim. Final section of the chapter provides direction for future research most likely to overcome these.

Summary of the Study

Participation is fundamental to the practice of democracy that it is impossible to conceive without it. The meaning and concept of democracy have changed over a period of time so is the concept of participation because they are inter-related. In the present study, the conceptual framework of democracy and political participation is presented in Chapter 2. While exploring participation in connection with democratic theories there are mainly two views; one group advocates for mass participation, another emphasised on the minimal role of people in a democracy. Minimalist views reinforced by scholars like Mosca, Michels, Schumpeter, Dahl and Sartori. They cast doubt on the possibility of the attainment of democracy through the mass participation of people. Mosca and Pareto observed that most of the citizens especially from the lower socio-economic status groups have no interest in politics therefore an increase in political participation by present non-participants could upset the stability of the democratic system. Similarly, Schumpeter emphasised on the responsible role of political leadership and expects them to make policy and law with little regard to diffuse demands made by citizens. He advocates the minimal role of citizens in the political process that is voting because they are less informed. Like Schumpeter, Dahl also contends that there is no use of stressing on a theory that requires maximum participation from ordinary people for control to take place as they tend to be disinterested and apathetic about politics. An elitist, Sartori views that apathy is not due to illiteracy, poverty or insufficient information, but it is due to lack of practice in a democracy. Therefore, he suggests that the existing state of apathy should be kept as it is and trying to change them would endanger the maintenance of the democratic method.

Another group of theorists which advocates for wider people's participation in a democracy are Rousseau, Mill, Dewey and Barber. Rousseau views that actual freedom of individual increased through participation in decision making because it gives him a real degree of control over the course of his life and structure of his environment. He sees participation as the increasing value of freedom to the individual by enabling him to be and remain his own master. Like Rousseau, Mill

also observed that it is only within a participatory institution that an individual character being fostered. He views that if an individual is concerned solely with his own private affairs and does not participate in public affairs then their capacities for responsible public action remain undeveloped. Dewey reinforced that the success of democracy depends upon the expanded opportunities for participation. Like Dewey, Barber also views that politics is something done by citizens in a strong democracy. It extended the responsibility for decisions to everyone and it would develop individuals' political competence, thereby increasing the quality of decision making.

The debate on democracy and participation reached its pinnacle during the 1960s when theorists like Benjamin Barber and Carole Pateman made strong normative arguments for greater citizen involvement. The new social movements arose during the 1960s including the American civil rights movement and the women's movement, championing groups that were excluded from the representative institutions. Initially, women suffragettes argue it is not good enough that women to be represented by their fathers, husbands and sons. They believed that with the vote, the condition of women will change positively. However, in the late twentieth century, Anne Phillips (1991) sees inclusion beyond just political rights like voting and argues that it requires more. She contends democracy does not necessarily mean to provide an opportunity to vote in periodic elections and the equal right to stand as candidates, but it involves a more substantial degree of participation and openness regardless of sex, class or race.

However, a substantial degree of women's participation would impossible unless certain measures are positively taken in this direction. The initiative of positive discrimination measures taken to correct the under-representation of women in politics is seen as democratizing space for democratizing democracy. The study on positive discrimination measures as a wider project of democratizing democracy is incorporated in Chapter 3. This chapter is an attempt to address the question that how have positive discrimination strategies have been adopted, used, and implemented to reach gender equality in the political landscape in India in general and Sikkim in particular. The central argument of the chapter is that unless the issues of exclusion and gender parity are taken seriously, the wider question of democratizing democracy cannot be satisfactorily answered. Quotas, as a positive discrimination policy, endorsed by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 for achieving parity in women's representation in policy-making bodies. Positive discrimination in the form

of quotas or reservations is seen as measures to address the under-representation of women. The ‘feminization of legislatures’ through positive discrimination is an important measure of democratizing democracy. Democratizing and deepening of democracy helps in creating new democratic spaces for maximum participation and representation of women in public offices.

The factors that influence the presence of women in politics is categorised as socio-economic, political and cultural or ideological factors. Besides, political parties have rarely assigned priority to gender issues or promoted women as candidates for without being formally obliged to do so. Moreover, where positions in parties are determined by patronage there will be little scope for women to speak for gender equality. On account of the under-representation of women in decision-making bodies, nations sought to address through certain forms of positive discrimination labelled ‘reservation policies’ in India. In India, there are no quotas or reservations at national and state levels but quotas are used very effectively at the local level. Therefore, the proportion of women in the Indian legislature is not very impressive even after 72 years of Independence. The women representation has not reached even 15 percent in Lok Sabha. In Rajya Sabha, 11.8 percent is the highest to date. The Indian Constitution, however, has implemented gender quotas for rural and urban local bodies via constitutional provisions. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, enacted in 1992, mandated India’s state governments to reserved one-third of the seats in these local bodies for women. This has resulted in historic leaps in women’s representation from a mere 10 percent to 33 percent after the introduction of gender quotas in local bodies. There is a remarkable improvement in the proportion of women representation in local bodies due to positive discrimination strategies in Sikkim. Similar initiatives or political reform such as political party quotas or reserved seats for women needs to be adopted at the national and state level to democratize democracy in India. Furthermore, such measures facilitate the creation of new democratic spaces to redress the issue of gendered inequities and inequalities. And above all, it has made democracy more inclusive, participatory and engendered.

Chapter 4 focuses on the study of political participation and representation of women in Sikkim. This chapter is an attempt to identify a gap in participation of women, the areas where they are not participating and the reasons for their lack of participation. The recent level of political participation of women in Sikkim reveals two contrasting

views. The participation of women as a voter and their participation in local bodies have achieved gender parity. The 65.71 percent women voter turnout in the year 1979 has reached 78.38 percent in 2019. The Sikkim Legislative Assembly elections 2019 recorded almost co-equal numbers of men and women participation as voter where men voters are more than women voters minimally by 0.48 percent. Secondly, the participation and representation of women are comparatively good in local governmental bodies. The reason for this is to be found in affirmative action of the government in the form of reservation of seats for women in local bodies. However, on the other hand, the proportion of women playing real political leadership is dismal. In fact, there are very few women who actually seek and wield political power which distinguishes their political behaviour from that of men. Very few women have achieved the highest positions in the government while the majority of women have been marginalised from participation in mainstream politics. The representation of women in Assembly and cabinet position is miserably low, ranges from 0 to 12 percent in Legislative Assembly and 0 to 16 percent in the cabinet. The glass ceiling appears to remain intact for the vast majority of women in politics despite the fact that Sikkim as a whole has been undergoing a period of rapid socio-economic changes.

The aim of Chapter 5 is to enquire about the constraints as well as the enabling factors of women in politics. When the participation of women has reached gender parity where the power is relatively less and in higher power politics they are almost absent, leads to an empirical investigation to address the questions like whether women have capacity to participate in power politics, why women are rarely seek to participate in power politics, whether women differ from men in policy making and if or how the increasing number of women makes difference. Hence, this chapter incorporates findings derived from a field study conducted in four districts of Sikkim addressing the crucial questions. The women's pathways into politics have never been easy. It has been influenced by various social, economic, cultural and political factors. Therefore, this chapter is an examination of various factors and its linkages to participation and representation of women in politics. In doing so, the data from the field together with people's perception is thoroughly analyzed.

Key Findings of the Study

The comprehensive study of the issue under examination led to certain major observations. In trying to analyze the participation of women in politics, the present

study examines the respondent's electoral participation, their involvement as a member of a political party, involvement in political meetings, campaigns and protest. It has been found that women in Sikkim have made significant gains in the areas of their participation as voters. The number of women voters is the largest and now almost at par with that of men. The Assembly elections 2019 recorded almost co-equal numbers of men and women participation as voter where men voters are more than women voters minimally by 0.48 percent. In fact, in the 2014 elections, the women voter turnout percentage was 81.31 which was higher than men i.e. 80.31 percent. The voting percentage of women in the 2019 Assembly elections is much higher than the average voting percentage of women in elections to Lok Sabha, 2019. As per recent electoral data, voting percent of women of Sikkim is higher than some of the states which have the highest number of women representation in their respective assemblies such as Chattisgarh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The key to the better position of women as a voter appears to be contained in the mobilization effort of political parties. The political parties and their working members in the state, districts and ward levels have mobilized and educate the first-time voters in exercising the franchise. The general awareness among the community is significant to increase participation. Secondly, the use of social media by different groups has been instrumental in mobilizing people to exercise their rights. The social media has been popularly used by political parties, politicians and supporters for reaching out general public in the recently held assembly election. Therefore, the growing use of social media is becoming a popular trend in sensitizing people to vote in a particular direction.

Besides voting, the participation and representation of women are comparatively good in local governmental bodies. The reason for this is to be found in the positive discrimination policy of government in the form of reservation of seats for women in local bodies. This institutional set up has emerged as a powerful instrument for the removal of gender imbalance in the lower level of government. The one-third reservation of seats of women was made applicable at the level of members as well as in the posts of Presidents/Chairmen. Although 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act provide for only one-third reservations for women in local governmental bodies, Sikkim raises reservation to 50 percent in both rural and urban local bodies. As a result, gender parity has been achieved at all levels of local bodies.

This study helps dispel the myth that positive discrimination policies necessarily result in losses in women's access to power. On the contrary, the reservation of seats facilitates the promotion of women, which can, in turn, have tremendous symbolic and practical consequences. The findings of the study show that these policies can help women of Sikkim attain political leadership positions.

Women have though consolidated their presence as a voter, but have simultaneously disenfranchised with regard to political representation in higher decision-making bodies. Very few women are able to reach the top echelon of party positions. It is claimed that as the power goes up the number of women decreases substantially. The claim has been proved true as the present study found that women are invisible in the top leadership of the party positions. When women respondents were asked about their position held in the party hierarchy, only 13 percent is found to be the main office-bearer of the party. Moreover, the major state parties seem to be reluctant to give power positions to women. This is clearly reflected in the fielding of party candidates for the electoral competition. In the 2019 Assembly elections, the SDF party had fielded four women candidates which is the highest number as compared to other political parties. The representation of women in Assembly is dismally low, ranges from 0 to 12 percent. There are no women cabinet ministers in the present government formed in May 2019.

In trying to analyse the motivating factor of women entering politics, the study makes certain remarkable observations. It is claimed that women are generally motivated by male members of the family to enter politics. The claim is partly right when the women of elected bodies express the presence of close family members - most of them have husbands/fathers in politics. It suggests that politically active husband or father makes a route for women to enter politics. However, the expanded response is drawn from respondents indicates, they cannot assume proxies - the housewives of the male politicians without any real power - as also found in the study of Nanivadekar, 1997. But they are the women who actually are motivated to contribute for social welfare (see Table 5.15). The women in elected bodies are found to be active and making difference by focusing on issues like water, roads, poverty alleviation and addressing various problems related to women. In this regard, the findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Mohanty 1999; Jayal and Nussbaum 2003. Their studies suggest that women are bringing about change in decision making

process by shifting the focus of development policy by highlighting the need of people like water, roads, footpaths, poverty alleviation and also become effective to address women's interest.

This study reaffirms that membership in organization or association has been the stepping stone on the way to politics. As many as 80 percents of women elected to local bodies was the member of one or the other associations and most of them have 5 to 10 years of experience. Their memberships in organizations prove to be one of the determinants of political effectiveness. The experiences and confidence built from their membership in civil society associations and other formal and informal arenas help women to built political skills which itself build a pathway into politics. The findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of Verba and Nie (1972) that voluntary organizations increase the propensity of the individual to be a participant because they provide him an opportunity for training in participation within the organization that can be transmitted to the sphere of political activities.

The previous research suggests that increasing women's representation in politics would have a substantive impact on politics and policies. Enhancing women's participation in electoral competition improves the quality of policy making by increasing competition and by highlighting different views and experiences (Darcy et al. 1994; Kahn 1996). The attempt to analyze the impact of women on policy making process and the underlying factors that hinder their effective participation lead to certain interesting observations. Numerous studies on women and politics found that the way women works or deal with the situation is different from men. Phillips (1991), Mansbridge (1999), Thomas (1994) and Gilligan, (1982), Burrell (1994) and Thomas 1994 observed that women bring different interests, values, experiences, perspectives and talents into policy areas. Similarly, the present study on Sikkim corroborates the finding of the previous studies. It has been observed that women are honest towards their duties, therefore, whatever task assigned to them they try to solve it efficiently without wasting any time. This approach of women makes a huge difference in the process of policy decision making. Furthermore, some respondents and interviewees have highlighted that women are less involved in 'dirty politics' and believed that if more women come to politics the incidence of violence would decline, the political sphere would be peaceful and less corruption. Therefore, the values, expertise and approach of women towards politics would enrich public policy in

direction of more caring and compassionate society. Moreover, the differences between men and women in politics can be explained by virtue of their own lived experiences. Men and women have different life experiences which are basically rooted in socialisation process and their upbringing. Women experience of being wife and mother and taking care of children and elderly, managing household activities is different from men's experience of fatherhood and husband and looking after matters related to not private sphere. Therefore, the life experience of men and women respondents reflects in performing their duties.

The presence of women in the legislature is important as they represent and act for the interest of women. The 89 percent of respondents of the Inter-parliamentary Union survey also mentioned how conscious they were of their mandate to represent the interests of women, men and children alike (IPU, 2000). Contrary to previous studies, the findings of this study present conflicting views. The study reveals that in the lower level of government i.e. at the panchayats and municipalities, women representatives are more concerned and vocal in raising women issues such as domestic violence, child sexual abuse, maternal health, etc. While in the higher decision making bodies (State and National legislatures) the differences between men and women representatives get blurred. The reason for this appears to be contained in the number of the position held by women. The number of women representatives is equal to that of men at the lower level of governing bodies while in the higher decision-making bodies, the number of women is substantially low. Hence, it is observed that in order to make a difference, a certain number of women or 'critical mass' of 30 percent is important. Only the substantial number of women in the legislature can reflect on the interest of women and thereby they can improve the standards of political behaviour.

The increasing proportion of women is seen as the wider project of enhancing democracy with the hope that women would bring new and consultative practices in public decision making bodies. It is also believed that in some areas women have deeper expertise and knowledge than do most men, which will enrich the policy making. Therefore, the increasing number of women in decision making is crucial for the larger project of democracy. The women's participation in public affairs is important to the functioning and strengthening of democracy. It is claimed that the decision taken without women's perspective lack credibility in a democratic context. In the present study, although most of the respondents 'agreed' that women's

perspective is given importance in decision-making process, many women feel discriminated and insignificant. Nevertheless, women respondents remarks upon the manifest discrimination against them like the attempt by an elected male colleague to dominate, the suggestions and opinions of elected women are overlooked and prevalence of negative attitude of male members in elected office. It is evident that an increasing number of women does not mean that power relations in decision-making have changed. The response of respondents and interviewees reveals that patriarchy is dominant in the public sphere.

The present study corroborates findings of a world-wide study conducted by Inter-Parliamentary Union. Most of the survey respondents agreed that the increase in a number of women in legislature change politics and they will have a greater influence on political priorities and politics (IPU 2000 & IPU 2008). The present study on Sikkim echo this finding as around 60 percent of respondents replied affirmatively to the statement that “increase in women representation would bring changes in the political scenario”. Respondents expressed that the increase in the proportion of women in politics would change the political environment to more peaceful and violence free politics. Many respondents also point towards the possibility of cleaner politics and some other highlighted on addressing women issues.

Despite moves towards gender parity in many spheres, barriers to the entry of women into elected office still persist. Drawing from the field survey based on a quantitative and qualitative study, various factors have emerged as significant deterrent renders women to the marginal political existence. In developing countries, women may find difficult to break into the electoral office as they are generally disadvantaged by poverty, poor childcare, low level of education, and inadequate health care. A state's level of socio-economic development is therefore significantly related to its proportion of women legislators. The socio-cultural factors such as social ethos, cultural values, socialization of girls and women, etc. inhibit women in politics. Women are socialized into accepting the role assigned to her right from childhood. The dominant role of the male in family and society is considered as natural. The socially constructed masculinity and femininity result in internalization of the role: women are associated with passive, docile, irrational and emotional whereas men are associated with masculinity, boldness, rational and persistence. Politics is something which is associated with men as it demands initiative, persistence, boldness and self-

confidence thereby making women unsuited to politics. Consequently, people are still reluctant to give power to women as they are suspicious of the credibility of women in leadership positions. Besides, it is found that the traditional attitudes towards the role of women in the home and family, many women are reluctant to run and if they seek office, may fail to attract sufficient support to win. The ideological beliefs and argument against women's right to participate in politics have created a barrier to women's political participation. Because of which even after women are provided with equal legal rights at par with men, their ability to make decisions in politics continued to be questioned theoretically and practically.

The low level of education has been a deterrent factor of the effective participation of women in decision making bodies. The parliament and state legislatures as well as local bodies are designed primarily for the planning of programmes of economic and social justice and the implementation of schemes (Jayal, 2006). To perform such task requires knowledge and expertise from the part of elected bodies. The low level of education makes difficult if not impossible for women to effectively participate in decision-making that is greatly dependent on the paper works, the legal language of agenda and minutes. In the present study, it is found that many women elected to these bodies have no expertise to be able to perform these tasks. The study also reveals that most of the elected women to these bodies have education only up to the primary level. They perceive 'lack of knowledge' as a major deterrent that hampers their effective participation in policy decision-making bodies. The women themselves recognize of having less knowledge and expertise as compared to men counterparts. Their inadequacy of knowledge has also made them dependent on males and other officials in performing their duties. When asked about the way they solve problems of their constituents, over 50 percent of respondents and some interviewees said they find the remedy for problems by taking help from father/husband/brother, fellow mates or higher officials of the institution. They also stated that women cannot take decisions in many aspects as men do.

Economic factor has been a major challenge for women entering politics. Since antiquity, women are economically dependent on men members of the family which has become a root cause of their stunted individual growth in every aspect including the political sphere of life. Whatever may be the economic progress in general, women are not able to escape from the inconvenience of being dependent. Their

economic dependency inhibits them to enter politics as politics is all about spending an enormous amount of money. For women contesting an election is hard but it is harder when the election expenses are high. The election expenses are very high despite ceilings imposed by the Election Commission on election expenditure. Therefore, this creates harder situation for women to make an arrangement for election expenses. The present study demonstrates the worrisome condition of women in making an arrangement for electoral expenses. The respondents and interviewees expressed that their major source of election expenses is personal resources which are the funds raise from family and friends. It is observed that women do not possess any substantial resources required to be in power positions. Insufficient resources as a result of societal inequalities experienced by women are evidenced from this study. It is found that many women candidates needed to engage in the election campaign on a full-time basis and required financial support to cover the costs of running a successful campaign which made women less likely to be successful in winning the elections. Therefore, it appears the fact that without the help of the party, women cannot pursue their higher political goals as women were much less likely than men to have access to family finances.

Political parties are the gatekeepers to widening political representation and can be crucial factors in allowing women access in equal numbers. The various empirical studies find that political parties and electoral systems can enhance or limit the flow of candidates to power politics (Kunovich & Paxton 2005; Norris 1985; Rule 1987). The recruitment and selection of political elites occur entirely within political parties. Therefore, it is stated that in order for an individual to run a political office, he or she must be selected by political parties. In compliance with previous research, the present study claims that explanation to the paucity of women in politics to a greater extent to be found in the reluctance of political parties in fielding women candidates for electoral competition. Whether national or state political parties, they have fielded significantly less number of women ranges from 0 to 10 percent, which is way below the 30 percent threshold mandate. The major state political parties of Sikkim (like SKM, SDF) are even more reluctant in fielding women party candidates than many national parties of India. In every election, declarations are made for granting a certain number of seats to women, however, no party has fulfilled their commitment. All the political parties have shown interest in women's problems and make agenda

stress on women's issues in their campaigns. However, they hardly make any sincere efforts to reach out to women or to give them a position of authority. Very few women have achieved the leadership position of party. Hence, women are almost excluded from the file and position of the party hierarchy. This study shows that it is not the voters but the political leaders are not in favour of supporting women candidatures. Moreover, the lack of transparency and openness in selection and recruitment processes and procedures is also important factors for underrepresentation of women. Even the findings of the study by Norris and Lovenduski (1995) concluded that it is the shortage of women incumbents and strong challengers, not voter discrimination, which accounts for the under-representation of women.

Physical constraints are the major problem of women seeking public office. The traditionally assigned gender roles such as responsibilities relating to reproductive, child care, domestic roles, towards family and marriage prevent women from entering politics. Practices of rigidity of the division of labour, and the notion of the naturalness of males' and females' work and the perceived gender relations all contribute to the shaping of political behavior. The paucity of women's role in politics is due to social and familial impediments. Similarly, the prevalence of gender roles is found to be rooted in Sikkimese society, however, women also point towards the changing pattern in familial relationship and flexibility of roles. Women expressed the help they are getting from husbands and other family members to carry on domestic responsibilities so that they can focus on public responsibilities. Although transformation is seen in the practices of the rigidity of males' and females' work, both men and women see motherhood and marriage as the most important aspect of women's life.

Conclusion

Democracy and political participation are inter-related. The meaning and concept of democracy have changed over a period of time so is the concept of participation. Inclusive democracy demands participation from previously excluded groups such as women. The under-representation of women requires certain measures to correct. The positive discrimination measures in the form of reservation or quotas are seen as a means to correct the historically under-represented women. It also appeals to the idea that women's experience is distinct, that women are different from men and bring to governing distinct attributes that encourage a more compassionate and less corrupt

society. Today quotas are introduced in the countries in which women constitute a small minority in parliament and witness a remarkable increase of women in politics. In Sikkim, democratic government was established in 1975 and this shift from authoritarianism to liberal democracy in a way provided women, for the first time, with the prospect of moving to the public arena which otherwise is the domain of men. The Sikkim Panchayati Act 1993 and Sikkim Municipality Act 2007 mandate reservation of women in local bodies. It has served as a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in local government. Today fifty percent and more seats in local government bodies are occupied by women. The inclusion of women in decision making bodies has brought major changes in the policy making process. They are more concerned with women related issues, therefore makes difference by 'acting for' women in decision making bodies. The increasing number of women certainly brings changes in politics as they are comparatively more honest and dedicated to their duties and receptive to people's problems than men. This would contribute to mainstreaming a gendered perspective in political institutions. However, there are certain crucial factors which hold back women's effective participation. Physical constraints include responsibilities relating to reproductive, child care, domestic roles, towards family, marriage etc. limit their effective roles as representatives in governmental bodies. Secondly, socio-cultural barriers have a bearing effect on her interest in politics. The social ethos, cultural values, socialization of girls and women, religious restriction and gender roles have an impact on women's participation in politics. The people are still reluctant to give power to women as they were suspicious of the credibility of women in leadership positions.

Suggestions

The exclusion of women from public policy making bodies impoverishes the democratic values and principles and inhibits the overall development of the society. The male-centric governing institutions further the interest of men barring women from the political sphere. There range of factors which render women an inferior political status and enjoy only marginalised political existence. The gender roles and socio-cultural practices are still predominant factors which prevent women from participating fully in politics. Traditional gender roles, patriarchal norms based upon inherent belief in male superiority which expounds male domination by vesting

decision making power in the male member of the family and the view of women's role is inside house coupled with lack of education, training and resources for women, all these factors contributes under-representation of women in decision making bodies. These problems lead to outline suggestions which may go a long way in promoting women's political participation.

- Women's political participation cannot be understood in isolation from their overall socio-economic status. Women usually do not have equal access with men to the means for participation such as the enabling skills acquired through education and training. Even more, there is no equality in terms of possessing property such as land. The land is legally the property of their husbands, fathers or sons. In order to increase women's political participation, the legal measure must be undertaken to bring equality between men and women in terms of accessing the means of participation. In order to raise the social status of women, a sustained campaign against social evils like sexual harassment, violence against women etc. need to be carried on. The efforts should be made to educate the girl child and taught leadership skills and qualities in the schools and colleges.
- The women representatives should act as role models and mentor the new entrants to politics. If more women undertake visible and leading roles in politics, this will encourage other women aspirants. The women incumbent should encourage and educate other women to participate in political decision making from the very grass-roots levels.
- There are expectations that women politicians would advance the gender issues while in office, however, they do not do so. Usually, they cannot do so due to their number is very few, have not reached the 'critical mass'. Even if their number is reached for instance in local governing bodies, their alliance must be strong. Therefore, it is suggested that women representatives at all levels must be sought to form women's caucus so as to build pressure and to lobby for women's issues collectively. This would definitely facilitate the women's effective participation to bring changes in existing patriarchal norms of procedure in governing bodies.
- Given the voting participation shown by women and their involvement in local bodies a time-bound goals for achieving gender equality must be formulated.

Without timeframe governments, political parties and women's groups cannot be held accountable. Positive discrimination measure - reservation for women in legislative bodies seems to be the need of the hour and would go a long way in removing many obstacles that inhibit women's participation and thus improve the political representation of women. By looking at the cheering outcome of positive discrimination measures in the local bodies, the same measure is also suggested in the state and national legislatures.

- The party system has long been an impediment to women's political leadership. Women are considered as a liability in the electoral competitions; therefore, political parties prefer to give tickets to the male candidates. The parties are found to be against taking a risk of putting women candidates for electoral battle, part of the reason appears to be contained in social attitude which disfavour women's entry into politics. Hence unless there is a reserved seat party usually seek women to be in a political campaign not as the party candidate. Political parties can make a way for women's entry into politics by ensuring 33 percent reservations for women in the party leadership position at all levels and one-third party tickets should be given to women at the time of the election. The executive positions of political parties should be gender-sensitive to provide fair quota positions to women.
- In the present study, it has been observed that most of the women representatives were newcomers or they are new to policy decision making bodies. It is suggested that the orientation programme need to be initiated on a big scale to fully equip women in power politics. The programme should focus on information and training in electoral procedures, public speaking, resource management, campaign strategies, decision making, etc.
- The alliance between the various actors in the local government, national government, the private sector and civil society is recommended to improve the political participation of women. The function of the state is to enhance policies such as affirmative action for reaching gender balance. The civil society plays an important role in providing measures that will ensure the effective participation of women in politics such as training, lobby, and outreach.

- Political violence and the use of money and muscle power have been an inhibiting factor of women entering politics. The violence that is associated with politics puts a lot of fear in women who are interested in politics. Women tend to prefer less the use of money and muscle power and other forms of influence in the public sphere. The criminalisation of politics and the rampant use of violence have further discouraged women. In this context, it is suggested to make the political environment more conducive for women to contest the elections. The absence of political violence would be a sufficient ground to motivate women who are interested in politics to participate fairly as their men counterparts. It is important to impose restriction on the use of money and muscle power during election times. Wide-spectrum electoral reform both at national and state levels that will curb the role of muscles and money power in politics is needed to create a conducive environment for the effective participation of women in politics. It is important for democratizing decision making by ensuring regular and fair elections at all levels, make easy for weaker sections of the society to fight an election without seeking the patronage of party chief.
- The socio-cultural norms and patriarchal order of power structure would be dealt with by strengthening women's leadership position and building their confidence towards the effective political entity. The people's perception of women's political participation can be changed through public awareness-raising programmes, sensitization campaigns, and civic education. The general public needs to be convinced that women make as effective legislators as men.
- The physical constraints, particularly women's responsibilities towards children would be mitigated through different support mechanism such as introducing child care facilities to ease the workload for women or by building crèche adjoining office for nursing mothers as around 50 percent of women in elected bodies are in the reproductive age of 31-40 years (see Table 5.8). Secondly, the politics and family life of women can be reconciled through partnership in sharing the burden. The partnership demands the active and equal involvement of men, in politics as well as in the home.
- An egalitarian culture needs to be developed as it renders the environment more favourable for women's political representation. It has been proved that

nations with more egalitarian scores on the index are more likely to have a larger proportion of legislative seats occupied by women.

- The position of women in politics would strengthen by building up their self-confidence and morale and equipping them with information. The implementation of various central schemes or policies would be difficult unless the women are aware of them. The most important change needed is in the perception of women about their role in politics. They should realize that they are equal at par with men and should build up their confidence in their ability that their views can be an effective means to bring qualitative change in the political scenario. The perception that politics a ‘dirty game’ barred women’s confidence in their ability to confront the political process. Women are already very good campaigners, party organizers and effective mobilizers, therefore, certain cultures of fear should not prevent women contesting elections and moving forward for the highest political goals.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The present study provides the detail of political participation and representation of women in Sikkim. It draws on positive discrimination measures in the form of reservation as a means of democratizing democracy. It explores the constraints of women’s political participation and outlined suggestions. The study, however, gets limited when it comes to details and a wider discussion on some major aspects. There are some major areas that are beyond the scope of present research in which more studies could be made separately. A future research could investigate women’s poor performance in the 2019 elections and examine in detail the reasons for such a dismal showing. Secondly, the role of political parties is immense in the party-based election system. Therefore, more research is needed to examine the role the political parties and how the representation and participation of women get affected by these party-based election systems. Thirdly, separate wide research needed to be conducted to examine and analyse the electoral system and its effect on women representation in politics. Various studies endorsed that proportional representation favours the elections of women and majority voting discourages it. This relationship must be investigated. This study has opened up directions for future research which are beyond the scope of the current study. Research needs to be undertaken to expose other factors that have been identified as integral to women’s ability to enter the

public space. Thus, the story of women in Sikkim offers further opportunities for national and other researchers from Sikkim to engaged in gender and politics scholarship.
