

Women Beyond the Politics of Presence in Urban Local Governance: Exemplifying Purulia in West Bengal, India



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1 Introduction

Governance has several aspects. It is related to politics, administration, leadership building, and infrastructural development (Pierre 1998; Bovaird and Loffler 2002; Harpham and Boateng 1997). It can be said that governance is the process by which public institutions, representatives, and people or civil society can interact with each other to achieve the greater goal of development (Paproski 1993; Pierre 1998). Hence, it is of utmost importance for the public institutions, representatives, and general people to participate in the governing process, maintaining accountability and transparency among several stakeholders, especially between the elected representatives and the local inhabitants (Baud and Wit 2008; Slack and Cote 2014). So, governance is a sociological exercise rather than a technical one as it is rooted in the society in which it grows (Chakraborty and Pandey 2019).

The average proportion of women local councillors worldwide is 20%, whereas fewer than 5% of the world's mayors are women (UCLG 2020). So, better political participation of women is the need of the hour for the attainment of true democracy.

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Political participation constitutes the first and foremost step in that direction (Narayanan 1999). Women's political representation is the core element of gender equality and good governance at the local level (OECD 2014; Araujo and Tejedo-Romero 2016). The international organization promotes gender equality (EC 2013). Some countries make efforts to promote gender equality through laws, quotas, and constitutional amendment (OECD 2014; Araujo and Tejedo-Romero 2016). Such as 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in India, which is considered as a yardstick for urban governance as it reforms the local urban structure by enabling some provisions in the governing process. One of the important provisions of the amendment is the women candidates' reservation in the local-level politics, which ensured one-third seats for the women in the urban local bodies, e.g. municipalities and municipal corporations. Women got a chance to enter the political arena, which was far away from their comfort zone. Reservations only ensured presence in politics, i.e. a certain number of seats for the women, but the nature of participation is totally dependent on the awareness of the candidates or representatives. The role, interaction, and decision-making capability of the representatives are considered as the aspects beyond the politics of presence that made them empowered. There are several factors that influence the nature and degree of political empowerment.

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (2000) defines empowerment as a strategy to help the disadvantaged and the marginalized to gain the power to change the quality of their lives (Women UN 2013). For that, active participation in decision-making is needed. Women are one of the target groups for such an empowerment strategy, which strives to eradicate all forms of exclusion they generally face in the patriarchal society.

The term 'political empowerment' is, to a larger extent, collective, including the authority to attain specific goals not for the self but for society. To be politically empowered, a person needs the support of other people of the community (Zaman 2012), and also, their political socialization is needed, which increases their level of political awareness.

By examining specifically the women's political participation, the present paper seeks to identify the nature of women's political empowerment, women's political awareness, and most influencing factors of empowerment from a municipality perspective in India.

2 Prior Works in This Domain

Half of the population of the world is women, but they do not have a significant role in the governing process, specifically policy formation and decision-making process (Prasad 2014). So, women have the least participation in governing process. Some international organizations like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have played an influential role in the participation of the citizens in twenty countries of Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean, where women have

been marginalized from the mainstream of politics (Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2009). United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) recommended increasing women's proportion in the leadership position at 30% by 1995 and equal representation of male and female by 2000 (Equal Opportunities Commission 2003; Prasad 2014).

One of the important steps is the allocation of 33% seats in local government in South Asia (Mahmood 2004). For instance, in Bangladesh, there are three articles that are related to the women entrants in the political arena. Those are Article 10, which ensures women's participation in national politics, Article 65 (3) ensures women's reservation in the Parliament, and Article 9 gives the chance to enter into the local-level politics (Zaman 2012). In India, there is no such constitutional rule which ensures women entrant in national- and state-level politics, but there are 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act which provides 33% reservation for the women in local-level politics, i.e. panchayats for rural areas and municipalities for urban areas, respectively (Government of India 1992). Quota plays an important role for the women participants as it gives a chance and grows the interest towards politics which extends the empowerment possibility in the near future (Mahmood 2004). Women's participation in local government is comparatively higher; the reasons behind this high participation are because it is easier to access the responsibilities as both a family person and a public representative, reserved seat and less competition in the local government, and the extension of responsibility for the local community and the women representatives practise transformative leadership in the form of rising different issues, style of leadership, and equity concern (Drage 2001). For strengthening the democracy at both the local and national levels, women's participation is essential (Islam 2002). Several initiatives have been taken for the local governance in both the rural and urban areas, but there is still discrimination after entering into the arena of politics. Reservation is an important factor for women's political participation but what is required more is effective representation in the policy formation. It has been identified that social and economic connections are the influential factors for getting a chance in politics (Ghosh and Lama-Rewal 2005).

West Bengal was one of the pioneer states who followed the act beyond its provisions (Government of West Bengal 1993). In West Bengal, a ward committee has to be formed in each and every ward (Government of West Bengal 2001). It was one of the important components of urban governance. But a large majority of women councillors are economically dependent and educationally not sound, which ultimately leads to being a proxy or namesake councillors in the two urban local bodies in West Bengal (Ghosh 2010). Even family political linkage has emerged as an important factor in urban local governance (Ghosh 2010).

Some studies in India have found that though as a new entrant of politics, women representatives have faced problems, still the implementation of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act has largely increased political participation of women, specifically their decision-making power, to a considerable extent (Rao 2014). The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act has been enacted to strengthen local-level governance by seeking to ensure adequate active participation of women in municipal bodies through the mechanism of reservation of seats for women

(Government of India 1992; Ghosh 2010) and the representatives developed in different ways in the course of five years in office, some becoming significant political players in their own right (John 2007). This affirmative action has created a space for women and provided them an opportunity to actively participate and perform in the local governing structures (Sharma 2016). There are several factors (such as geographical location, educational status, social status and age) which determined the degree of women empowerment in India (Kumari 2006; Prasad 2014).

There are two objectives behind women's inclusion in urban local government; the first is the women's political empowerment, and the other is the developmental aspect of the city (Beall 1996). Women's role in urban governance is one of the most important questions for considering women's political, social, economic, cultural, administrative empowerment. Women's participation in urban governance, affairs, and decision-making is very low, and they are not participating effectively and actively in the urban governance, except few who are aware of urban governance. Without the effective participation of women, it is impossible to achieve the socio-economic and political development of the nation (Alsop and Heinsohn 2005).

3 Women's Participation in Governance: Tier-Wise Overview

The dream of joining the realm of politics by women seemed distant initially, but gradually the scope opened up, giving women a chance to compete for positions in the different tiers of the governance. Still, many countries do not have any separate provisions for encouraging women to take part in governance by giving them some kind of headspace. Several international and national organizations have given special attention to the policies, regulations, and their impact in strengthening women's participatory role in local-level politics at the grass-roots level.

3.1 Global Trend of Women's Participation in Governance

Women have been excluded from several aspects of life, especially from the political arena (Narayanan 1999). The world average of women representation as legislators is 24.5% in both houses (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019). The single or lower house has a slightly higher share than the upper house or senate (Table 1). Hence, the national-level political participation of women is growing at a slower rate because there are still some countries that do not have any reservation policy for national representation.

Table 1 Women participation in both houses across the world

Houses	Total MPs	Men	Women	Percentage of women
Single or lower	39,013	29,423	9590	24.6
Upper or senate	7205	5455	1750	24.3
Both houses	46,218	34,878	11,340	24.5

Source Women in National Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union, October 2019

Table 2 Global scenario of women participation in National Parliaments

	Single house or lower house (%)	Upper house or senate (%)	Both houses combined (%)
Nordic countries	44.0	–	–
Americas	30.6	31.5	30.8
Europe (Nordic countries included)	29.6	28.5	29.4
Europe (Nordic countries not included)	28.1	28.5	28.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	24.1	23.9	24.0
Asia	20.1	16.7	19.7
Middle East and North Africa	17.7	10.7	16.8
Pacific	16.6	43.8	19.4

Source Women in National Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union, October, 2019

The highest women representation in the lower house is found in the Nordic countries (Table 2) followed by Americas, Europe (including the Nordic countries), Europe (excluding the Nordic countries), Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, and the lowest is in Pacific (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019). But the highest representation of women in upper house is found in the Pacific (Table 2) followed by the Americas, Europe (both Nordic countries included and not included), Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa.

Though the participation of women in lower house in some of the developing countries secured top ranks (Rwanda ranks first followed by Cuba and Bolivia (Plurinational State of) (Table 3), the overall average of women representation in lower houses for the developing countries is 21.92% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020) which is lower than the share of women in Parliament in the developed country, i.e. 27.38% (May 2020). The Constitutions of several countries in the world theoretically guarantee the political equality of men and women, but matters often work out quite differently in practice.

Table 3 Representation of women in Parliament of selected countries

Rank	Country	Election year	Share of women (%)
1	Rwanda	2018	61.25
2	Cuba	2018	53.22
3	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2019	53.08
4	United Arab Emirates	2019	50.00
40	Netherlands	2017	33.33
43	Nepal	2017	32.73
50	Australia	2019	30.46
76	China	2018	24.94
99	Bangladesh	2018	20.92
105	Pakistan	2018	20.18
139	Bhutan	2018	14.89
144	India	2019	14.36
181	Sri Lanka	2015	5.33

Source Women in National Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union, May, 2020

3.2 *South-East Asian Context of Women's Participation in Governance*

South Asia, where one-fifth of the world's population resides, is one of the least developed regions in terms of human development (HDI value is 0.642, 2018). The average GDI value of South Asia is 0.828. Politics, especially electoral politics, is an expensive hobby for the women in South Asian societies, who are treated as second-class citizens. So, it is difficult for them to fight elections without the support of their family or strong political ties. Despite these facts, South Asia had the honour of having the world's first lady prime minister. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka all have been led by women prime ministers. But in general, women in South Asia are not politically socialized enough to participate in the political arena, they have strong determination, ability, and devotion; so, what they need is awareness and guidance (Zaman 2012).

An international survey conducted by Inter-Parliamentary Union demonstrates that representation of women in South Asian Parliaments is far from satisfactory; Nepal, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, India, and Sri Lanka ranked 43th, 76th, 99th, 105th, 139th, 144th, and 181th, respectively, out of 187 countries in terms of women representation in National Parliament. In South Asia, Bhutan, India, and Sri Lanka secured lower ranks in the National Parliament, whereas Nepal, China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan secured comparatively better positions. However, still, the share was below one-third. India documents a marginal representation of women in Parliament, which is even lower than the neighbouring countries such as Nepal, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Bhutan.

In the case of the upper house, the data of only 79 countries is available in Inter-Parliamentary Union, May 2020. In South Asia, Nepal has a higher share of

Table 4 Share of women representatives in upper house (senate) in selected countries

Rank	Country	Election year	Share of women (%)
1	Antigua and Barbuda	2018	52.94
2	Mexico	2018	49.22
3	Australia	2019	48.48
4	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2019	47.22
16	Rwanda	2019	38.46
17	Nepal	2020	37.93
22	France	2017	33.33
51	Pakistan	2018	19.23
61	Bhutan	2018	16.00
71	India	2018	10.42
72	Thailand	2019	10.40
78	Yemen	2001	2.70
79	Haiti	2017	0.00

Source Compiled by authors from Inter-Parliamentary Union, May 2020

women in the upper house, whereas Pakistan and Bhutan have only the least women representation (Table 4). The share of women representation in India in upper house is even lower than the neighbouring countries—Nepal, Pakistan, and Bhutan.

3.3 *Current Scenario of Women's Participation in Governance in India*

India has an abysmal track record on gender equality which is reflected through its GDI value of 0.829. According to the UNDP's 2018 Gender Inequality Index, India ranks 129 out of 189 countries with 0.501, and as per World Economic Forum's 2012 Global Gender Gap Index it ranks 105 out of 135 countries. The percentage of women in the Lok Sabha in relation to the total number of seats was 4.4% in 1952. After several ups and downs, it has increased but has not crossed 15% till date. The presence of women in the upper house was 7.31% in 1952, which was comparatively higher than that of Lok Sabha, which has increased slightly over time. India ranked 144 globally out of 187 countries in the lower house in 2019 elections (Table 3) and 71 out of 79 countries in upper house in 2018 elections (Table 4). The share of women in lower house in 2019 elections is highest in the state of Meghalaya and Tripura, followed by Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal (Parliament of India 2020) (Table 5). It is noteworthy to mention that there are some states of India which do not have women's representation at all.

Though the share of women in higher-level politics in India is very low, in the case of local-level politics, the share is reasonably high because of the provision of

Table 5 Women in Parliament in some selected states of India, 2019

Rank	States	Share of women
1	Meghalaya	50
1	Tripura	50
2	Odisha	33.33
3	Chhattisgarh	27.27
4	West Bengal	26.19
20	Telangana	5.88
21	Kerala	5.00

Source Compiled by author from Parliament of India, May 2020

the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, which guarantee women participation in local-level politics through the reservation of one-third seats in panchayats and municipalities which ultimately increases the share of women in local governance.

The act also helped to increase the share up to 50% in some urban local bodies. For instance, Purulia Municipality (2015–2020 term) is located in Purulia district of the state of West Bengal of India.

3.4 Women's Participation in Local Governance: A Reality Check of Purulia Municipality, India

After the enactment of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992, West Bengal and Kerala were the states who implemented the provisions immediately. This act has a statutory provision that guaranteed women the right to participate, i.e. one-third seat, in the urban local bodies, which drastically increased the women's share. West Bengal secured 4th rank (26.19%) in terms of women's share in parliamentary seats while the women's share secured is only 13.27% in state's assembly. (Elections in India 2020). However, when it comes to the urban local-level politics, half of the urban local bodies across the districts of the state have about 50% share of women representation. One of them is the Purulia district, which, though is less developed in terms of socio-economic parameters, has an appreciable share of the women representation in one of its urban local bodies (ULBs), i.e. Purulia Municipality.¹ Though this is a small municipality of India, the share of women representatives in this municipality has always been more than the stipulated share of 33%. Hence, it can be said that this is a classy example of the true representation of the innumerable smaller municipalities across West Bengal as well as India. The methodology which has been adopted in this case will be equally

¹The Census of India spelling is Puruliya Municipality, while it is popularly known as Purulia Municipality.

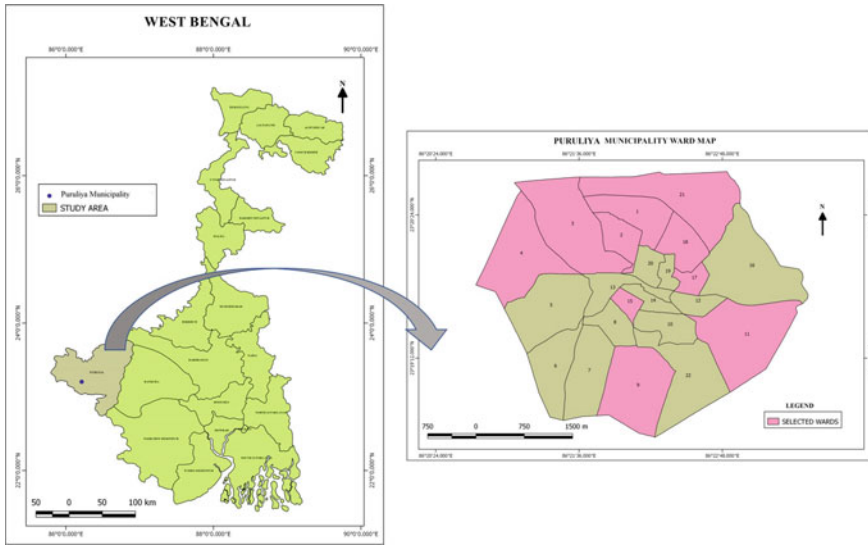


Fig. 1 Locating Purulia Municipality with special reference to wards having women representatives. *Source* Purulia Municipality, 2019

effective to gauge how much power truly a women representative wields in grass-roots democratic politics.

Purulia district (Fig. 1) is located in the state of West Bengal, eastern India having a population density of 470 persons/km². Demographically, the district is not well sound as the male literacy rate is 78.85%, while the female literacy rate is only 51.29% and the sex ratio is 957 females per 1000 males (2011 Census). It has ranked in the lower rung of the human development ladder (16th out of 17, HDR, 2008). Maximum people (87.25%) of the district reside in rural areas with only three statutory towns (Purulia, Raghunathpur, and Jhalda) and 25 census towns. The male work participation rate is 53.52%, while the female work participation is 31.29%. After the enactment of the 74th CAA, especially after the 2000s, the city council structure got changed. This change in the law accommodates women to come in the contender list of municipal elections and is expected to have their rightful role in the delivery of municipal services.

Inspite of huge socio-economic gender gap, the local level political participation in urban areas is quite appreciable. Purulia is the main city of the district, and local-level women’s participation in the city is quite high. The local governing process has been done by Purulia Municipality, which has 23 smallest units for governing, i.e. municipal wards, out of which 11 municipal wards (ward numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 15, 17, 18, and 21) are represented by women councillors in the latest term, i.e. 2015-2020 term. Among the 11 councillors, 4 (ward numbers 1, 4, 11, and 17) have contested from unreserved seats, and they got re-elected by competing with the male representatives. Even in the municipal apex body, i.e.

chairman-in-council (CIC) is also represented by the 3 women councillors (ward numbers 6, 11, and 17). Hence, the women's entrance is ensured by the act of reservation, but they have a substantial role in maintaining or running the city governance.

4 Database and Methods Involved

This section discusses in detail the data and methods which have been used to know the nature of political participation of the women in the local-level politics a glimpse from the Purulia Municipality.

4.1 Database

The study discusses the condition of women representatives in the urban local governing institutions of Purulia city. Hence, only women representatives of Purulia municipality have been taken into account. Ten women councillors have been interviewed with the semi-structured schedule to trace their level of political empowerment and awareness.

4.2 Methodology

The study is largely based on primary data collected from the councillors. An attempt has been made to analyse the political empowerment and participation of women representatives. The primary data collected has been summarized and depicted through statistical analysis and cartograms. A couple of composite indices have been constructed—Women Political Awareness Index (WPAI) and Women Political Empowerment Index (WPEI) for scrutinizing the condition of women in local governance. The 18 indicators which have been used for the construction of the indices are associated with the awareness about the local urban governance and empowerment in terms of the political sphere (Table 6).

The weights in the computation of WPAI and WPEI are determined by using factor loadings and eigenvalues from principal component analysis (PCA). The principal component analysis has been used to reduce the dimensionality of the variables but at the same time retaining the originality of the variables. The following formula is used to determine the indices.

Table 6 Selected indicators of Women Political Awareness and Empowerment Indices

Women Political Awareness Index	V1	Previous political experience
	V2	Awareness regarding ward office
	V3	Nomination criteria of ward committee members
	V4	Cognizance about ward committee meeting
	V5	Mindfulness about minute
	V6	Responsiveness towards board of councillor’s meeting
	V7	Accountability with the local people
	V8	Consciousness about constitutional provision of urban governance
Women Political Empowerment Index	V9	Responsibility of the representatives
	V10	Involvement and engagement in the ward’s activities
	V11	Interaction in the board of council meeting
	V12	Involvement in the overcoming of the difficulties
	V13	Dependency while executing municipal work
	V14	Participation in training programme
	V15	Change in awareness level
	V16	Transformation in self-confidence
	V17	Willingness of re-contesting from unreserved seat
	V18	Political aspiration

Source Computed by authors on the basis of Primary Survey, 2019

$$= \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i \left(\sum_{j=1}^n |L_{ij}| \cdot E_j \right)}{\sum_{i=1}^n \left(\sum_{j=1}^n |L_{ij}| \cdot E_j \right)} \tag{1}$$

where I is the WPAI and WPEI, X_i is the i th indicator, L_{ij} is the factor loading value of the i th variable on the j th factor, and E_j is the eigenvalue of the j th factor.

The study has also adopted a regression model where the WPEI is considered as the dependent variable, social and economic factors are considered as independent variables, and their association has been estimated. As a qualitative method, case studies have been used to analyse the state of women representatives in urban local governance.

5 Findings

Reservation has been seen as the key responsible factor which enables women to enter into politics and participate in the welfare of society. In Purulia Municipality, the women representation in the four terms (from 2000 to 2020) has always been more than one-third of the total seats and has shown an increasing trend. From the

last term (2010–2015), the representation has been increased by about 9.72% because 4 women representatives contested from unreserved seats and got re-elected. Reservations might be the main entrant factor for women in politics. However, in the present situation, it cannot be determined that it is the only factor which enables women to come into the sphere of the governing process. There is a variation with respect to the caste, age, and political view among the representatives. The middle-aged women are mainly engaged as councillor in the study area, followed by the young-age cohort. Eight women councillors are from general, while two are from the Scheduled Caste (SC) category. Maximum councillors are Hindu. Most of the women councillors are from the present ruling party—All India Trinamool Congress followed by Indian National Congress and CPIM. All the representatives are married, barring one who is a widow. Except for one councillor, all have exposure to formal education of varying extent, but most of them are economically dependent on their families. Only one councillor is involved in the teaching profession.

5.1 Women Political Awareness Index (WPAI)

Candidature is an important factor in assessing political participation as it opens up possible entry for women in politics, decision-making, and leadership. The reservation also boosts up the political participation of the women. But how efficiently one would be able to utilize the position of political power is dependent on the representative's knowledge about local governance, experience, and inherent interests towards the responsibility. Political awareness is a multidimensional concept that encompasses political representation, accountability, awareness about various types of meetings, and subordinate bodies, which can increase interaction with electorates and make the representatives aware of.

Women Political Awareness Index (WPAI) has been calculated to quantify the characteristics associated with the awareness level about the local governance. It is applied to estimate the proportion of the differences among the women councillors as they represent different socio-economic as well as political background. For that, some variables related to the awareness of the political sphere of local governance have been taken. Those are previous political experience, awareness about ward office, the nomination of ward committee members, cognizance about ward committee meeting, minutes and board of council meeting, accountability with the local people, and mindfulness about the constitutional provision of urban governance, e.g. 74th CAA, women reservation and state municipal act.

It is found that the political awareness of the female representatives is not very high in general. Maximum representatives belong to lower-rung clusters—medium to low groups (Table 7 and Fig. 2). Only one representative is highly aware of the existing rules of the local governments as the composite score is 4.43; she is more politically experienced as she is a re-elected representative from a mature age cohort and has a professional engagement as a teacher. Three representatives are

Table 7 Women Political Awareness Index (2015–2020), Purulia Municipality

Composite scores of WPAI	Status of WPAI	Ward number
>4.00	High	1
3.00–4.00	Medium	11, 17, 18
2.00–3.00	Low	2, 3, 4, 9
<2.00	Very low	15, 21

Source Computed by authors on the basis of Primary Survey, 2019

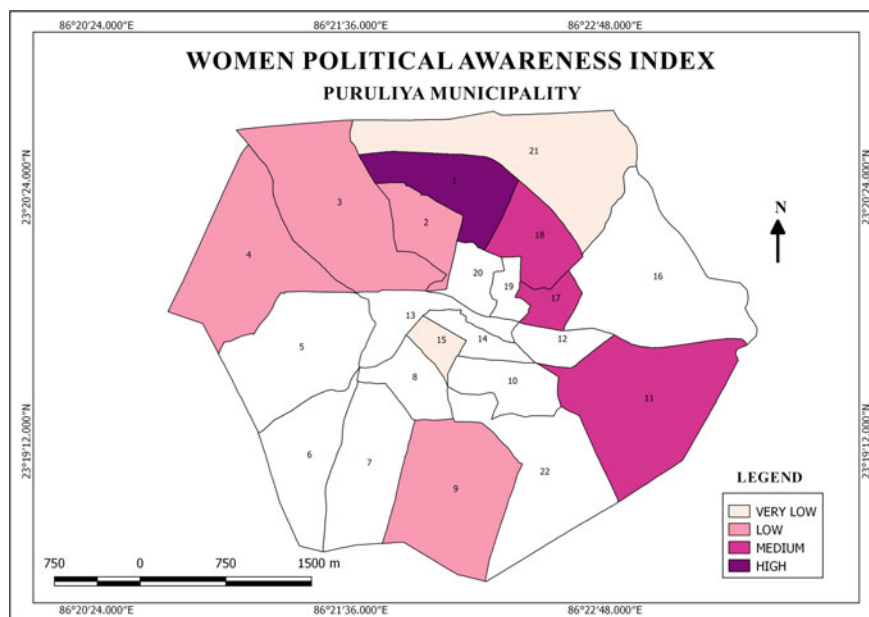


Fig. 2 Women Political Awareness Index Map of Purulia Municipality, 2015–20. Source Compiled by authors from Primary Survey, 2019

moderately aware of the existing rules of the community governance as the composite score is more than 3.0 but less than 4.0. Two of them are re-elected representatives, and one was town ‘Mahila’ (women) president and politically active much before coming to formal seat of power. They represent middle-aged cohorts and are actively engaged in the chairman-in-council (two of them), one of the urban local bodies’ apex body. The four representatives who are totally inexperienced, from the young to the middle-aged cohort, are less aware of the rules and regulations of the local governance. All of them are housewives; household responsibility and recurrent personal health issues are the major responsible factors for their inability to increase their awareness about the local governance. Hence, it can be said that experience is the utmost important factor to become politically aware.

5.2 *Women Political Empowerment Index (WPEI)*

Reservations in the urban local bodies allow the women to enter another sphere from their cozy comfort corner. Women start participating in mainstream politics, public offices, and city-level development processes. But reservation only gives power into the hands of women; but it totally depends on them how to utilize and create their own spaces in the governing system. Few studies have found that this reservation only gives birth to the token participation; women are not truly empowered with the stipulated provision; instead, they became the voice of their counterpart or any political leader who is actually working behind the reserved seat —‘the puppet and puppeteer’.

To identify the issue, Women Political Empowerment Index has been calculated with the help of principal component analysis. It has also been figured out the proportion of differences of the women empowerment within the city. It is a composite score of the parameters other than the stipulated responsibility to the representatives—involvement and engagement of the ward activities, interaction during the board of council meeting, overcoming the difficulties faced, degree of dependency in doing municipal works, participating in training programmes, changing awareness level, self-confidence, and willingness of re-contesting from unreserved and political aspiration.

It is found that only one representative (Table 8) is truly politically empowered, having a composite score of 3.08, even though she does not enjoy important posts in the municipality because of opposition party affiliation. But she has carved her own niche through the welfare of the ward residents in particular and city development in general. The rate of empowerment of the other four councillors who are not very active has a composite score of more than 2.0 but less than 3.0 (Table 8 and Fig. 3). They are experienced but still slightly dependent on the others for discharging their duties. One representative, who is in power for consecutive two terms but still has low awareness as well as a low political empowerment rate, is a classic case of token participation where the female representative is only the face for the reserved seat, but others do the work. It is also found that in a family, mostly husbands give permission to the women candidate to participate in the governing process for the sake of holding the seat for the time being, which does not satisfy the actual aim of the reservation. Hence, political empowerment of the councillor is not directly dependent on party affiliation. Prior experience, greater devoted time ward activities, regular interaction with locals, and higher political aspiration can translate into political empowerment. The rate of empowerment of four councillors is low as they are less active, with a composite score of more than 1.0 but less than 2.0. One representative is politically inactive, reflected through the composite score of 0.57. She is very ignorant about her duties, hardly attends board of council meetings, interacts with the local people, and is completely remote-controlled by her husband. This is a case of token participation, and the representative is a proxy member.

Table 8 Women Political Empowerment Index (2015–20), Purulia Municipality

Composite score of WPEI	Status of WPEI	Ward number
>3.00	High	1
2.00–3.00	Medium	3, 11, 17, 18
1.00–2.00	Low	2, 4, 9, 21
<1.00	Very low	15

Source Computed by authors on the basis of Primary Survey, 2019

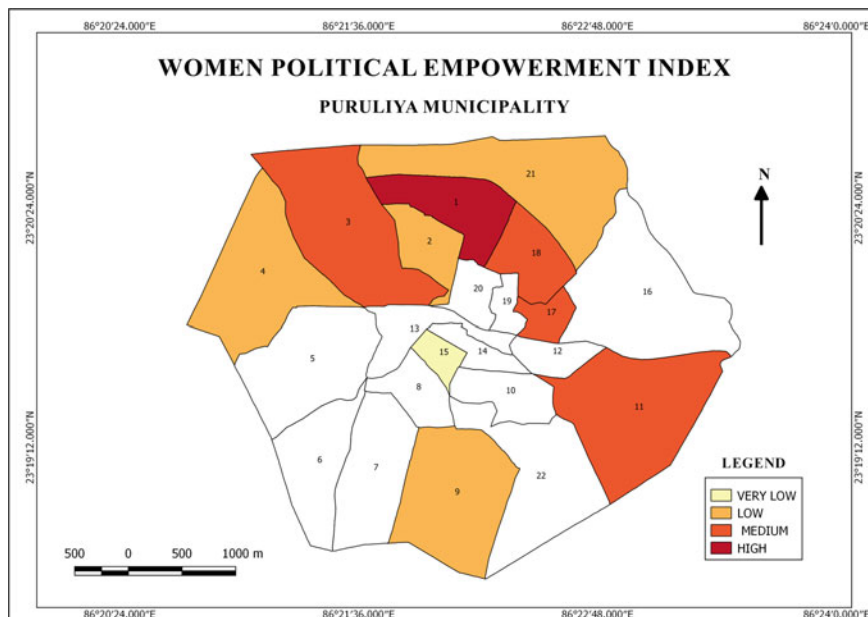


Fig. 3 Women Political Empowerment Index Map of Purulia Municipality, 2015–20. Source Compiled by authors from Primary Survey, 2019

5.3 Hypothesis Testing: Applying Regression Model

To evaluate the impact of social and economic factors on the rate of political empowerment, the focus here is on two sets of regression models in which the relationship between WPEI and socio-economic factors is shown. The former model estimates the impact of social characteristics (e.g. age, social group, religion, level of education, and marital status) on the nature of political empowerment, and the latter estimates the impact of economic characteristics (e.g. occupation and monthly income) on the degree of political empowerment. For the particular model, the null hypotheses are

Table 9 Relationship between WPEI and social and economic factors

WPEI	Coefficient	Standard error	Adjusted R ²	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i> > <i>t</i>	95% confidence interval	
Social factors	0.3610	0.1031	0.5556	3.50	0.0081	0.1231	0.5988
Economic factors	0.3266	0.0964	0.5377	3.39	0.010	0.1041	0.5489

Source Calculated by the authors

- H₀: WPEI is not influenced by social factors.
- H₀: WPEI is not influenced by economic factors.

The coefficient is calculated with the help of the following equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 \tag{2}$$

The value of *p* is 0.0081 (Table 9), which is less than 0.05. So, the null hypothesis is rejected at 95% confidence interval (as, *p* ≤ 0.05). Hence, WPEI is dependent on social factors. The aggregates of seniority, social group, religion, level of education, and marital status have a positive relationship with the WPEI though the coefficient is quite less, i.e. 0.36 (Table 9), and the adjusted R² is 0.5556 (Table 9), which indicates 55.56% variability of WPEI is explained by all social factors.

The economic factors also have a positive relationship with the WPEI as the coefficient value is 0.33 (Table 9). This model is also statistically significant as the *p*-value is 0.0010 at 95% confidence interval. Hence, the null hypothesis is also rejected, which indicates that the WPEI is influenced by economic factors, e.g. occupation and monthly family income. The economic factors explain only 53.77% variability of WPEI as the adjusted R² is 0.5377 (Table 9). Socio-economic factors aggregately explain 77% variability of the WPEI.

5.4 Empowerment Condition: A Qualitative Study

The qualitative techniques will add to the detailed study on the political empowerment of women in governance. The authors undertook detailed personal interviews to uncover the reality of women’s empowerment in Purulia Municipality. The study explains that there are few honest, confident, and diligent representatives who have brought out changes in their area, while there are many representatives who are just namesake representatives because the seats were reserved for the women they were merely occupying the seats for their husband or family on their wish for the time being. Two cases are cited below.

5.4.1 Case Study 1

Rita Paramanik (name changed) is a re-elected councillor from an unreserved seat in Purulia Municipality. The graduate councillor is from a middle-aged cohort and a teacher by profession belonging to a joint family with a retired government employee husband. She is famous in the town as 'Aunty'. She has chosen the party as her ancestors were members of the same. She narrates – 'in the changing political circumstances, I have been re-elected that too from the unreserved seat as a candidate of a party which is not even in power, only because of the people for whom my door is always open'. She entered into politics in 2010 from the reserved seat for the sake of local area development; later, she contested the election from unreserved seat competing with male candidates and still won by a huge margin. She followed the provision of the ward committee formation and is comfortable working from home. The respondent is very active with regular ward visits, tries to resolve local issues, attends frequent board of council meetings, raises questions, places her demands, and implements welfare projects as per the local needs. She attended the training workshop organized by the state government in 2015, which, admittedly, has increased her level of confidence. Though she is very active, she does not harbour any higher political aspirations as she is not very optimistic about the general anti-incumbency trend and is not eager to switch loyalties for that. Her case is an example of true political empowerment.

5.4.2 Case Study 2

Roma Saha (name changed) is a councillor from a reserved seat in Purulia Municipality. She is from a middle-aged cohort and a widow. She does not have any formal education and knows only to sign. She lives in a nuclear family with her two sons. She has been suffering from some health issues. She was not involved in politics prior to the municipal election, but when the ward was declared as reserved for woman representation, being with a good connection with an affluent political leader was persuaded to contest and won by a narrow margin. She narrates, 'I contested the election as 'he' asked me to do that'. She does not know anything about the urban local bodies' provisions though she used to attend the board of council meeting and inactively participate in the discussion. But still, she has been given an important responsibility in the municipality as Accounts Convener too whose duty is mostly discharged by her son acting on the order of the 'godfather'. But she asserted that she listens to local people's demands, tries to solve them, and implements welfare projects accordingly without much problem. Though she did not attend the training workshop, her self-confidence has increased with the four years of experience as a councillor. However, still, she is not confident about working independently. Even she does not want to contest from an unreserved seat in the following term, and her son is slated to contest. Her case is an example of token participation.

6 Conclusion

Women's representation in national politics across the world is quite low; it has failed to reach the total population's first quartile. Though developed countries in general have performed better than the developing countries, some developing countries are performing commendably, whereas few are in the lower rung of the ladder. In South Asian countries, there are several provisions to strengthen women's representation in politics. Political socialization is an essential factor to be a representative in national-level politics, while local-level politics does not demand it where constitutional provisions enable them to enter into the arena of politics.

In India, the national representation of women is also very low, while at the local level, it is quite high. The main reason behind it is the support from reservation policy. For local urban governance, there is the reservation of one-third of seats for women according to the 74th CAA, unlike national-level politics.

From the case of Purulia Municipality, it becomes clear that due to constitutional provisions, the number of women entrants in politics has increased, but the number is not sufficient enough to make an impact on the policies and decision-making in the urban governing process. Women Political Awareness Index (WPAI) indicates that the awareness about the state's rules and regulations among the local representatives is deficient. There are very few representatives who enter into politics by choice. Maximum representatives entered to hold power for the time being as the seats were reserved. However, after coming into power, most of them are still ignorant about the rules and regulations. In the case of the Women Political Empowerment Index (WPEI), there is only one representative who is truly and highly empowered. Few are empowered, but their awareness level is deficient. It was also found that being experienced does not ensure active participation as it can be a proxy representation. Social background, especially education, seemed to have a stronger influence than economic factors for political empowerment. If the situation continues, the future trend of the participants will stay the same. Political awareness and empowerment will be ignored continuously. The only way out of the situation is to sensitize them about the local government's provisions through different training programmes; workshops and the governing process should be transparent and well monitored.

Hence in the case of other smaller ULBs across the state or India as well as the world, the number will not ensure the actual goal of the true democracy or the broader aspect of political empowerment of the women. For wielding true political power, political awareness and active participation are the need of the hour, which determine the space of activities of the representative and enable them to tackle any situations at the grass-roots level with élan.

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