INTRODUCTION

Political participation is a necessary ingredient of every political system. Although political process in some societies is monopolized by only a few incumbents of political authority, every system is found to be quite keen on ensuring some amount of political participation by the people. By involving the many in the matters of the system, political participation fosters stability and order through the re-enforcement of the legitimacy of political authority.\(^1\) A society in which a substantial part of the population is denied any right to participation whatsoever, is likely to be highly explosive. The idea of this participation naturally assumes greater importance in a democratic system which, indeed, demands it. After all, participation is the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled.\(^2\)

Explaining the importance of participation in politics, Milbrath and Goel argue that the citizens must at least


participate in the choice of their public officials in order to keep public action responsive to the wishes and desires of the people.\(^3\) They further observe that "participation in politics and in public debate helps to build a better and more noble character in the people. . . people would be better human beings if they so participated."\(^4\) Thus, the role of political participation has been emphasized not only as a means to understand the nature of the political system and to control the functioning of the system, but also as a means to build up the character of the people. Relating political participation with the mental make-up of the citizens, Nie and Verba argue that it gives some sort of satisfaction to the citizens, satisfaction with the government and satisfaction with one's own role. They further hold that if one does not participate in the decisions that affect one's own life, one's self esteem is seriously damaged.\(^5\)

McClosky also expressed the same view when he said participation benefits the participants as well as the larger


\(^4\) Ibid, p. 149.

community. It ennobles men by giving them a sense of their own dignity and value, alerts both rulers and ruled to their duties and responsibilities, and broadens political understanding. According to N. D. Palmer, participation helps the individual to be effective and it associates him or her with the political system. The higher the rate and levels, the more varied the forms of participation, the healthier is the democratic system. Particularly in a society where certain groups are traditionally behind the others, where they can be categorised as 'weaker sections' or 'disadvantaged groups', wider participation and mobilization at higher and higher levels would be necessary for their uplift and that in turn would be healthier for the democratic system. On the whole, a more developed society is a more participant one. Political participation has also been viewed as the process, through which the citizen can communicate to the government the goals which they think will maximize their benefit.

It was also been maintained that political participation has some role to play in nation-building, since it represents

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6 Mclosky, loc. cit.
8 Idem.
9 Nie and Verba, loc. cit.
a means of orienting loyalties and a new feeling of national identity.\textsuperscript{10}

Indicating the importance of the citizen's participation in a democracy, several theorists of democracy emphasize the presence of an active participant citizen as an essential condition of the successful working of the democracy. Almond and Verba hold that a successful democracy requires that citizens be involved and active in politics. "Democracy is characterized by the fact that power over significant authoritative decisions in a society is distributed among the population. The ordinary man is expected to take an active part in governmental affairs, to be aware of how decisions are made, and to make his views known."\textsuperscript{11}

Berelson and his associates argue that an ideal democratic citizen should be interested and ... participate in political affairs, have the capacity for and practice of (political) discussion, possess a strong motivation for participation in political life, be well informed about political affairs, cast his vote on the basis of principles, and exercise rational judgment in coming to his voting decision.\textsuperscript{12}


In the literature on political development it is commonplace to speak of changing participatory patterns in the new nations. Myron Weiner says,

the process of modernization itself creates conditions for increased political participation; and if modernization continues to take place in the developing areas, we can expect both authoritarian regimes and representative governments to be challenged by new participants who want to share power. 13

Lerner distinguishes traditional societies from modern societies on the basis of participation. 14 Almond and Verba declare that the new world political culture will be a political culture of participation. 15

"Participation" can be of different types, as defined by different people. Anthony M. Orum defines political participation as the variety of ways in which people try to influence the political process. He has sought to identify the channels through which citizens attempt to influence the leaders as well as to isolate the kinds of citizens apt to use these channels on a regular basis. 16 According to Verba, Ahmed


and Bhatt, participation is not a single, undifferentiated entity. There are alternative modes of participation that differ significantly in the ways in which they relate the citizen to his government. Besides, voting is accepted almost without exception as the standard political act. They mention three other modes: campaign activity, co-operative activity, and citizen initiated contacts.\footnote{17}

Political participation is a complex phenomenon liable to be influenced by different variables. It denotes a series of activities which have a bearing on the political process. To be more specific, these activities mainly are (1) voting at the polls, (2) supporting possible pressure groups by being a member of them, (3) personally communicating directly with legislators, (4) participating in political party activity and thus acquiring a claim on legislators, (5) engaging in habitual dissemination of political opinion through face-to-face communication with other citizens.\footnote{18} However, it is to be noted that more people discuss politics than vote, and many more vote than join parties or work in campaigns.

\footnote{17} Verba, S., Ahmed, B., and X. Bhatt, A., Caste, Race 

Lester Milbrath brings these activities under three categories: 'Gladiatorial activities', 'Transitional activities', and 'Spectator activities'. Gladiators represent that small number of party workers whose active association with political parties keep them engaged in a series of direct party activities like holding party offices, fighting the election as party candidates, raising party funds, attending party meetings, and joining the party campaigns. Transitional activities include attending party meetings as party supporters or party sympathizers or just as neutral but attentive listeners, making contributions to the party funds and coming in contact with public officials or party personnel. Spectator activities, on the other hand, include voting, influencing others to vote in a particular way, making and joining a political discussion, exposing oneself to particular stimuli, and wearing a button or showing a sticker. In a study in America, it was found that only about 1 to 3 per cent of the American population are the gladiators, some 60 per cent play spectator roles and about 7 to 9 per cent are engaged in transitional activities. About one-third of the American population have been found to be apathetics. Robert Dahl argues that in most political systems those who display great political interest, concern, information

and activity do not constitute a large majority of adults; generally, no doubt, they are a minority.\textsuperscript{21}

Some other empirical studies also show that most people are just not especially politically oriented and political participation is not a "natural" concomitant of citizenship.\textsuperscript{22} As Eakin's study, based on survey research, shows that only small percentages, probably fewer than 10 per cent in all democratic countries, belong to a political class\textsuperscript{23} Milbrath suggests that the various forms of political involvement fall into a hierarchy or continuum according to the cost in time and effort that each demands. But other variables, such as political articulations, saliency, and interest which can only partially be reckoned into the 'costs' - also affect the frequency of the various forms of participation.\textsuperscript{24}

Political participation is a complex phenomenon in the sense that its various forms vary from country to country, from era to era, from one type of people in a society to another.


\textsuperscript{23} Idem.

Some of these variations are surely due to the familiar determinants of participation (education, access to information etc). In this context, attention must also be paid to the differing situational factors in individual countries - tradition, history, access to the governing institutions, and the peculiar forms of political competition. Researchers have shown that the generalizations derived from research in western countries may not hold equally true in India. It has been pointed out that to exercise political influence is a special kind of political involvement in which female citizens, no matter where they live, or what their level of education is, find it very hard to engage in. Women's roles are such in which political passivity is perceived as the norm. Women in political systems are heavily dominated by men.

Today women are connected directly or indirectly to the operation of society at every level, and at the same time

occupy the aggregate position of outsiders. A study of their experience could offer an incomparable window on the internal dynamics of social history. In developed as well as in developing economy, it is perfectly obvious that the part played by women in various spheres of life today is constantly on the increase. But it is no less obvious that still women remain subjects of inequality and oppression. This has a harmful effect both on their own status and on the social climate of the society in which they live. Few people would deny today the fact that the degree of women's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation. 28

The equality of men and women in the matter of right has been established by a large number of the Constitutions, codes and laws. The real question is: to what extent the legal declaration of equality of the sexes has been accompanied by equality in real life. Constitutional provisions do not mean automatic enjoyment of the rights conferred therein. Mention may be made in this connection of the study made by Jean Mann of the women in British Parliament. This study stresses that women are still second class citizens in spite of the equal rights conferred on them. 29 William Henry Chafe

in his two well known studies\textsuperscript{30} tried to examine the social, economic and political roles of women from 1920 to 1970. His studies point out that discrimination against women was deeply rooted in the structure of society, in the roles women played and in the sexual division of labour which restricted females primarily to the domestic sphere of life. Whatever it accomplished, the suffrage did not alter the structure.

In India, the dawn of the 19th century ushered in a new era in the history of women's emancipation. The impact of British rule, capitalist economy, and modern western culture produced here a great awakening - particularly in Bengal - which sought, among other things, to end social oppression perpetrated on women. A new life was brought to the movement for the emancipation of women, when the stream of the social reform movement merged with the struggle for political independence of the country. Vast masses of women participated in the freedom struggle, and it became clear even to women in the remote villages that independence was an essential precondition for the emancipation of the women.\textsuperscript{31}

In India, the early fifties constituted, apparently, the period of women's triumph. Middle class women from a background of restricted lives, confined to the roles of wives and mothers,

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entered administrative, professional and political fields as equal of men. Women from aristocratic families, both Hindu and Muslim, began to abandon "purdah" and sought public offices. Women were elected to Parliament and State legislatures. They became cabinet ministers, governors of states, ambassadors, vice-chancellors of universities, and judges. Women exercised their votes in increasing numbers in successive general elections. Institutions of professional education, law and technology, which had till then barred women's entry, were compelled to admit them. Women entered new occupations in the modern sector in increasing numbers. Local self-governing bodies in both urban and rural areas were asked to include a few women on their panels by nomination if they did not come through election channels.32

The Preamble to the Constitution of India resolved to secure to all its citizens "Justice, social economic and political, equality of status and of opportunities." To attain these national objectives, the Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights. Indian women were to be the beneficiaries of these rights in the same manner as Indian men. Article 14 ensures equality before law, and Article 15 prohibits any discrimination. There is one specific provision in Article 15 (3) which empowers the state to make any special provision

32 Editor's note in V. Mazumdar (ed.), Symbols of Power, op. cit., p. XIV.
for women and children. This provision has enabled the state to make special provisions for women, particularly in the field of labour legislation like the Factories Act, the Mines Act, etc. Article 16 (1) guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens, in matters relating to employment, or appointment to any office under the state. And article 16 (2) forbids discrimination in respect of any employment of office under the state on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, etc.

All these could suggest that the expected revolution in the status of women with the extension of their roles in the society was well on the way. But the Committee on the Status of Women in India reached a very different conclusion. The Committee reported:

... the right to political equality has not enabled women to play their role as partners and constituents in the political process. Instead these rights have helped to build an illusion to equality and power. In spite of increase in participation women's ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible. Parties have tended to see women as appendages of the males. Among women, the leadership has become diffused and diverse, with sharp contradictions in their regard and concern for the inequalities that affect the status of women in every sphere - social, economic and political ... Though women do not constitute a minority numerically, they are acquiring the feature of one by the inequality of class, status and political power. 33

Three years after the Committee's Report, a group of social scientists pointed, in an even sharper manner, to what they called "the national neglect of women"\textsuperscript{34}. It has been pointed out that unless the economic and social utility of women is enhanced in the eyes of their families and the nation by opportunities to take part in socially and economically productive roles, the national neglect of women would continue. Erosion of productive roles emphasizes women's position as consumers and bearers of children, makes their lives cheap and easily expendable through increasing malnutrition and mortality, reduces employability through inadequate training opportunities and increases economic discrimination and exploitation. Almost the same opinion had been expressed by Lenin when he delivered a speech at the Fourth Moscow City Conference of Non-Party Working Women:

\begin{quote}
Not withstanding all the laws emancipating woman, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and nursery, and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[34] Mazumder, V., (ed), \textit{op. cit.}, p. XV.
\end{footnotes}
According to the marxists, the lower degree of participation by women in politics is due to the nature of modern capitalist economy. The content of existing ideology discourages women from participation in politics, from influencing the prevailing power structure. Women have since ages been socialized to subordinate themselves and to play submissive roles in all walks of life. The rights given by the Constitution and the demands of democracy are inconsistent with their tradition. This kind of incongruent political socialization has created a conflict in their minds, due to which, it is difficult for them to accept and adjust easily to the democratic political process. It may perhaps be said that there arises a conflict between their role perception and the old content of socialization.

Women constitute half the society. They do not belong to any particular class. They are in all classes and in all sections of the people. So what is called the "woman's question" is not the question of one section only. It is ultimately the question of the entire society. On the other hand, it is an integral part of the entire social phenomenon.


Human Society cannot move forward without stirring half of its body, the women. Thus it is in the social and national interest to draw womenfolk into the social and political process.\textsuperscript{39} To quote Lenin: "If we do not draw women into public activity, ... into political life, ... then it is impossible to secure real freedom, it is impossible even to build democracy, let alone socialism."\textsuperscript{40}

The present study is an attempt to analyse the nature and extent of participation by women in the political life of West Bengal, one of India's most important states. Such a probe assumes special significance in view of the fact that a 'leftist' government has been in power in this state since 1977. The present study tries to find out whether there prevail any significant differences between the political participation and political attitudes of men and women. It is often held that the growth of education of women and their employment outside the house has led to a social change. An educated woman is more likely to be influenced by the mass media. Her understanding, developed due to education, would enable her to give a proper response to the political issues, activities and events. Thus these factors like urbanization, education, employment, exposure to mass media etc. surely have an important


impact on participation level of women and on their attitudes. The present study seeks to find out the correlation among these variables, in order to get an idea about the extent of political participation by the women of West Bengal. In this connection, it will not be irrelevant to mention some of the comments recorded in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women, published in December 1974:

Our findings indicate that women's participation in the political process has shown a steady increase both in elections and their readiness to express their views on issues directly concerning their day to day life. But their ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible because of the inadequate attention paid to their political education and mobilisation by political parties. The structures of the parties make them male dominated and... most party men are not free from the general prejudices and attitudes of the society. We are, therefore, forced to observe that all the indicators of participation, attitudes and impact come up with the same results - the resolution in social and political status of women for which constitutional equality was to be only the instrument, still remains a very distant objective. While there is no doubt that the position of some groups of women has changed for the better... the large masses of women continue to lack spokesmen who understand their problems and be committed to their removal, in the representative bodies of the state... the norms and attitudes regarding women's role in society remain traditional. In this sense, the new rights proved to be only concessional. Thus it is clear that despite certain legal and even institutional changes, the final legitimisation for a successful reorganisation of society lies in a revolution in norms and attitudes in the minds of people. The recommendations that we make are out of a desire to make political rights of women more functional as required by the needs of a democratic system.

Over a decade has passed since the publication of the report. The present study seeks to re-examine some of the findings of the Committee. The investigations of the Committee on the Status of Women in India demonstrated that many of the established assumptions about determinants of women's participation in the political process required empirical verification. Education, urbanization, caste, economic condition hitherto regarded as primary determinants of political awareness or participation have been sharply questioned by the Committee.

Review of existing literature:

The emergence of the women's movement has been accompanied by a comprehensive literature - speculative and literary, scholarly and empirical - identifying and documenting the grievances of women in the twentieth century. It is true that the problem of women had attracted the attention of scholars in earlier days also. For example
Mill,42 Engels,43 and Lenin44 wrote on the problems of women. But here, for the purpose of the review of existing literature, studies undertaken in more recent times - in the second half of this century - have been taken into consideration. Some of the studies deal with the political status and political movement of the women. Here, first a review of the literature on the political status of women of the West and other parts of the world has been undertaken. Next the Indian literature on the political status of women has been reviewed.

An important contribution to the sphere of women's studies is a collection of articles edited by Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran, entitled Women in Sexist Society-Studies


44 Lenin, V. I., On the Emancipation of Women, op. cit.
Similarly, Judith Hole and Ellen Levine edited a volume entitled, *Rebirth of Feminism*.\(^{46}\) Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone edited, *Radical Feminism*,\(^{47}\) and Robin Morgan edited, *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*.\(^{48}\) All these collections still serve as basic sources for an understanding of the issues behind the modern women's political movement. Presenting some of the same themes, but, in a more moderate tone are two studies: One is the *Changing Women in a Changing Society*,\(^{49}\) edited by Joan Huber and the other is *Women: A Feminist Perspective*\(^{50}\) edited by Jo Freeman.

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A more detailed and comprehensive study, which discusses the issues on which the women's movement has focussed, is Elizabeth Janeway's *Between Myth and Morning - Women Awakening*. Barbara Sinclair Deckward's study entitled *The Women's Movement: Political, Socio-economic and Psychological Issues* presents an overview of the movement as a whole. Maren Lockwood Carden's *The Feminist Movement* is a study of the nature of feminist groups and their membership. Jo Freeman, in *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, traces the development of women's political movement and its relationship to the establishment of public policy. *Women and Social Policy* by Constantina Safilios Rothchild and *Women, Power, and Policy* edited by Ellen Bone Parth delineate strategies, social action policies and laws necessary to eradicate effectively sexism in the American society.

Some researchers attempt to go beyond the definition of the condition of women as a group which experiences powerlessness vis-a-vis men. They offer a Marxist or class analysis of the condition of women in modern society. Such studies include Juliet Mitchell's *Women's Estate*, Sheila Rowbothan's *Women's Consciousness: Man's World*, Heleith I. B. Saffiola's *Women in Class Society*, and Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism edited by Zillah R. Eisenstein.

The impact of women's changing roles on social, political and economic life around the world has been summarized in Towards the Second Decade, the Impact of the Women's Movement on American Institutions, edited by Betty Justice and Renate Pore.

The same task has been undertaken by Joyce Gelf and Marine Lief Palley in *Women and Public Policies* and by Kathleen Newland in *The Sisterhood of Man*. The two well-known studies of William H. Chafe mentioned earlier, *The American Women* and *Women and Equality* and Sheila Rothman's *Women's Proper Place* may also be included in this category.

That feminism is making a difference politically - in political attitudes and to a lesser extent, in political behaviour among the American women - is the subject which has been treated by Claire Knoche and Fulen Wider in their well-known book, *Feminism in American Politics* and J. Kirkpatrick in *Political Women*. Kate Millet indicates, in *Sexual Politics* that sex is a frequently neglected political aspect.

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Susan Moller Okin, in her *Women in Western Political Thought*, finds that there is no way in which women can be included as equals, unless the deep-rooted assumptions about the traditional family, its sex roles, and its relation to the wider world of political society, are challenged.

As researchers tried to understand the different aspects of political participation and political behaviour in greater details, the question of woman's participation in politics also received more attention. Some of these studies deal with general citizen participation, while some refer to women's participation to indicate the sex differences in political participation and the sole focus of some is on women's participation.

Some of these studies indicate that sex differences in political participation are diminishing. Mention may be made in this connection of the studies by Baxter and Lansing, entitled *Women and Politics* by S. Welch, entitled "Women as Political Animals? A Test of Some Explanation from Males Female Political Participation Differences" and by Anderson, entitled,

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"Working Women and Political Participation - 1952-1972." Due to data limitations, they confined their studies to a single nation, frequently the United States. Milbrath and Goel's *Political Participation* is also an important contribution in this field.

Some studies stress on a single type of political participation, commonly voter turnout. Such studies include Tingstein's *Political Behaviour: Studies in Election Statistics*, and Duverger's *The Political Role of Women*.

Bokkan in his study entitled *Citizens, Elections, Parties* and DiPalma in his study entitled *Apathy and Participation: Mass Politics in Western Society*. Observe that sex differences are smaller among urban, non-farming, better educated and more affluent individuals.

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The observation that sex differences are smaller among the young stimulates the speculations that generational turnover is reducing these sex differences. That was the assumption made by Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes\textsuperscript{78} in \textit{The American Voter}, by Pomper\textsuperscript{79} in \textit{Voters' Choice} and by Rapoport in "Sex Differences in Attitude Expression, A General Explanation."\textsuperscript{80}

Some recent studies, however, are challenging the assumption that economic development and generational turnover are reducing sex differences in political participation. For example, studies of cross-national variation in women's status, including political status, conducted by J. F. Aviel\textsuperscript{81} and S. L. Wolchik\textsuperscript{82} find that economic development is an insufficient explanation for such variation in Latin America and eastern and western Europe.


C. A. Christy\textsuperscript{83} directly examined cross-national and within-nation variations in political participation for the United States, Japan, and five Western European nations. Factors other than economic development and generational effects were noted to affect these variations. There are, however, several other valuable studies though not so recent as to be mentioned here.

That the women's liberation movement in America did have a marked impact on the political attitude of women has been discussed by T. W. Smith.\textsuperscript{84} Verba, Nie, and Kim\textsuperscript{85} have presented an illuminating discussion on sex differences in political participation. M. Lansing\textsuperscript{86} in a study on voting behaviour,

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has found that the women's educational level is the best predictor of politicization.

Elsa Chaney\(^{87}\) studied the political status of women in Latin America and her observation is that politics still remains a 'man's world'. The Mattelarts study\(^{88}\) found a recognition in all classes in both rural and urban areas that women should leave politics to men.

That men had a greater positive attitude towards politics than women was the finding of William Blough\(^{89}\) when he conducted a systematic survey in Mexico on the political attitude of Mexican women.


Paul H. Lewis studied the female voting behaviour in Argentina. That female participation increases automatically with modernization is the observation made by Benard Rosen and Anita La Raisa. That some established generalisations could not be applied in less developed country like Africa has been observed by M. H. Ross and V. Thadani. Likewise Komono Okonjo analysed the political status of the African women. John J. Stucker observed the maturation of women voters as political persons in American Society.

Likewise Virginia Sapiro studied the political integration of women.

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92 Ross, M. H., and V. Thadani, "Participation, Sex and Social Class, Some Unexpected Results from an African City", Comparative Politics, 12, April, 1980, pp.323-34.
That the Women's liberation movement in Germany did have a marked impact on the political attitudes of the women has been discussed by Newmann Noelle. In a poll in 1971 in the U.S.A., Wilma Rule Krause observed that women expressed greater concern than men about ending the Vietnam War, poverty, drug and gun control. David Butler and Donald Stokes systematically studied the forces shaping women's election choice in Britain. Jean Mann studied the women in British Parliament and came to the conclusion that women are still second class citizens in the party.

Likewise Vicky Randall studied the participation of women in politics. Gail W. Lapidu in a study on the political status of the women in the U.S.S.R. found that although the level of mass political participation has increased as a

100 Randall, V., Women in Politics (London : Macmillan, 1982).
result of social policy, no comparable success has been achieved in drawing women into positions of political leadership.

Reference may also be made to some more recent studies undertaken in different countries during the last decade. In a log-linear analysis of Presidential candidate selection from 1948 to 1980, Kathleen M. Blee finds that marital and occupational mobility do have different effects on women’s political orientation. But the direction of political change across mobility statuses was not consistent.

Welch, and Studlar in their study entitled "British Public Opinion toward Women in Politics" tried to examine the attitudes of the British Public toward women as political leaders using data from the 1979 British Election Study. Listhug and Miller have examined the gender gap in Norwegian Voting behaviour. A Study of the Feminist movement undertaken


by Mayer and Smith implies that women will vote increasingly for political forces which support women's interests.

Shirley Nuss tried to analyse the data regarding the participation of women in elective office at local and national levels in 60 countries. On the whole the data reveal that globally, women's presence among political elites remains low.

Presley, Weaver, and Weaver examined the political attitudes and socialization of traditional, transitional, feminist Mormon and feminist ex-Mormon women.

General elections in Britain have shown interesting developments in the relationship between gender and voting. These developments have been examined by Pippa Norris.

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Jerry Perkins\textsuperscript{109} used a two stage socialization model to analyze ambition among black and white women who are active in party politics. Clark and Clark\textsuperscript{110} examined three alternative explanations for the relationship between gender and participation that focus upon (1) Childhood socialization, (2) adult role socialization and (3) structural factors of socio economic status. They found that the linkages between gender and participation are influenced by a complex set of factors.

Marshall, H. Medoff\textsuperscript{111} tried to examine determinants of the political participation of women in the U.S.A.. That gender differences are narrowed or eliminated when racism is controlled is the finding of Linda Bennet.\textsuperscript{112} Glendon Schubert\textsuperscript{113} in her study finds that there have been important

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
    
    \bibitem{110} Clark, C. and Clark, J., "Models of Gender Political Participation (in the U.S.A.)" \textit{Women and Politics} 6 (1), Spring 1986, pp. 5-25.
\end{thebibliography}
and pervasive changes in the extent of female political participation and activism, but those changes have been largest in elections and least in non-electoral activities. Barry J. Kay's study addresses questions relating to the level of women's political activity and specific obstacles that restrict it. Peter Casten Miller and Paul Dekker found that the electoral participation gap between men and women is diminishing though for activities that involve the use of conventional political channels, differences between man and women are substantially greater.

J. Ros Der Van tried to pursue the argument, in a study entitled "Class, Gender and participatory Behaviour" that gender specific explanatory models should be used in behavioral studies. Daniel Wirls in his study offers an analysis of the recent political differences between women and men. 


116 Ros Der Van, J. "Class, Gender, and Participatory Behavior; Presentation of a New Model", Political Psychology, 8 (1), March 1987, pp. 95-123.

men that contradicts the conventional description of the 'gender gap' in American politics. In a recent study entitled "The Gender Gap in Yugoslavia", Clark and Clark\textsuperscript{118} compared the levels of political participation of men and women in Yugoslavia.

Gertrude A. Steuernagel's paper \textsuperscript{119} entitled "Reflections on women and Political Participation", deals with women and political participation. In another study entitled 'Multi-member Districts and the Representation of women'. Susan Welch and D. T. Studlar\textsuperscript{120} suggested a link between multi-member district plurality elections and greater representation of women.

In India also, since the 1970s, there has been a steady growth of investigations on the political status of the women. However, certain valuable contributions made even earlier are worth mentioning. Some of them have been related to electoral participation. Kini and Tara Shastri\textsuperscript{121} found that women's

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Clark, C., and Clark, J., "The Gender Gap in Yugoslavia Elite versus Mass levels" \textit{Political Psychology}, 8 (3), September, 1987, pp. 411-426.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Kini, N.G.S., and Shastri, T.S., Women Voting Behaviour, (Mimeographed : Nagpur University, 1969).
\end{itemize}
voting behaviour is not so much determined by some inherent effiminate characteristics as by their socio-economic status.

V. M. Sirsikar, in his study entitled, *Sovereigns Without Crowns*, pays attention to women's voting behaviour in course of his discussion on the voting behaviour of the general population. He has tried to interpret and explain the emerging trends in the context of the social milieu of Poona where the study was located. Padma Desai and Jagadesh N. Bhagwati studied the women candidates in the 1962 Lok Sabha, 1967 Lok Sabha, and 1967 legislative assembly elections. They concluded that given the discrimination against women, a woman has to have exceptional ability as a candidate to be nominated and as a result, women candidates are likely to be more 'gifted' and hence are more likely to win than men candidates.

C. A. Hate in an article entitled, "Women in the Political Field" paid attention to the participatory problem.


He concluded that though India is proud of Indira Gandhi, she was only an exception. In general, women play no significant role in politics. The main reason, among others, is the inertia, on the part of women.

Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, in her article entitled "Women in Public Life" found that so long the women are not really roused to become pressure groups as voters, to demand proper service from their elected representatives, democracy would remain an illusion.

Two studies on the voting behaviour of the citizens of West Bengal were conducted by Bangendu Ganguly and Mira Ganguly. The studies were based on multi-stage sampling procedure. In both the studies, the authors paid attention to sex differences in participation. S. P. Verma, Iqbal Narain and their associates conducted a case study of the Fourth General Election in Rajasthan. In this study due emphasis was placed on participation by women and interesting comparisons between male and female participation were made.

Protima Asthana's Women's Movement in India provides a well documented story of the women's movement and participation

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125 Chattopadhyaya, K., "Women in Public Life", in Kamala Bhasin (ed), Women in India, idem.


128 Asthana, P., Women's Movement in India (New Delhi: Vikas, 197...
in India manifesting the various forces which influenced its progress from the earliest times to the present day. Vijay Agnew's Elite Women in Indian Politics provides a perceptive analysis of the role of elite women in Indian Politics.

The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women, Towards Equality, which has been referred earlier, was the first major attempt to study the existing data on the social, economic and political aspects of women's situation in India, particularly with reference to planned development since independence. The ICSSR's programme of women's studies has sought to promote research and communication on women's problem. One report under this programme deals with the political participation by women submitted by Parvin N. Seth.

The Research Unit on Women's Studies, S.N.D.T. University, established in 1974, has all along been concerned with understanding and identifying problems of women and undertaking studies pertaining to women's status and role in society.


130 Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, op. cit.

Symbols of Power, \textsuperscript{132} edited by Vina Mazumder, is the first publication in the planned series "Women in a Changing Society". The papers in this volume deal mainly with the theme: women and politics. Most of the papers indicate the failure of political rights to bring about the desired changes in women's status. Two papers of this volume deal with political participation by women of West Bengal. Survey data have been analysed in these papers, and the samples are well-balanced and spread over various regions of West Bengal. \textsuperscript{133}

Tara Ali Baig's \textit{India's Women Power} \textsuperscript{134} is a study of the position of women of India. One chapter of this volume deals with the political position of women and legislation relating to women. Imtiaz Ahmed in his article "Women in Politics", \textsuperscript{135} points out that the real obstacle to equality in the political

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132} Mazumder (ed.) \textit{Symbols of Power}, op. cit.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Banerjee, Nirmala, "Politicization of Women in West Bengal", and Ganguly Bangendu, "Profiles of Women in West Bengal", in Mazumder, V. (ed), \textit{Symbols of Power}, op. cit., pp. 140-170, and pp. 319-347.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Baig, Tara Ali, \textit{India's Women Power} (New Delhi: S. Chand and Company, 1976).
\end{itemize}
sphere lies in the division of spheres between men and women and the legal provisions have not substantially allowed this.

Usha Mehta has undertaken a comparative analysis of the voting behaviour of men and women. In an earlier study, the author examined the voting trends of men and women from 1952 to 1977.136

Inderjeet Kaur has found that women are no more behind men in the different spheres of life including politics.137 Kiran Devendra138 seeks to examine how far education, modernization and the freedom movement really helped the Indian women to participate in politics. Manmohan Kaur139 attempts to give an overview of Indian elite women's contributions to the freedom movement. The study focuses on women's active participation in extremist politics as well as in the Gandhian Civil Disobedience Movement.


Sumana Pandey, through a survey of the women of the City of Jaipur makes some valuable observations regarding the changing roles of women in political participation. N. Sharma conducted a case study among the Harijan Women of Delhi, to assess the political awareness of these women.

There are some studies which, while dealing with the women's problem in general, pay attention to the participatory problem also. Some of them deserve to be mentioned. A.R. Wadia, in The Ethics of Feminism - A Study of the Revolt Women, discusses the political participation of women. J. M. Everett, in Women and Social Change in India, found that though the institution of "purdah" discouraged public political participation of women, it made such participation acceptable within associations for women only.

Sachchidananda Ramesh P. Sinha, in Women's Rights, Myth and Reality, studied the role of women in the political

life of the country, from a historical perspective. The article by Hansa Mehta also belongs to this category.145

Aparna Basu, in her article entitled, "The Role of Women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom",146 points out that during the freedom struggle women helped in maintaining liaison between different revolutionary leaders. In spite of everything, the participation of women was limited. The prevailing ideology of the time was still too conservative to allow women to participate on an equal basis with men. B.R. Nanda147 draws our attention to the factor of family inference playing an important role in shaping the participatory attitude of the women. Where the atmosphere at home was nationalistic, women also imbued it.

Hazel D’ Lima148 found that in India after independence, the recognition of women as an individual, as a member of...


society having a place in the political system, was stimulated mainly because of women's active participation in the Independence Movement.

Kanak Mukherjee\textsuperscript{149} has examined the issue regarding the subjugation of Indian women and their awakening from a Marxist standpoint. Vimal Ranadive's\textsuperscript{150} 	extit{Feminists and Women's Movement} also belongs to this category.

Neera Desai\textsuperscript{151} and Vibhuti Patel, in \textit{Indian Woman: Change and Challenge in the International Decade}, have also paid attention to the participation problem. Arati Ganguly, in her article entitled "Women in India: Economic and Political Perspective", came to the conclusion that the status of women in India does not correspond with the political situation.

\begin{itemize}
\item 149 Mukherjee, K., \textit{Women's Emancipation Movement in India}, (New Delhi: National Book Centre 1989).
\item 150 Ranadive, V., \textit{Feminists and Women's Movement}, (New Delhi: All India Democratic Women's Association, 1986).
\end{itemize}
Madhu Kishwar, in an article entitled "The Women Voter," tries to find out why the women did in fact display greater enthusiasm for the Congress (I) in the 1985 Lok Sabha Election.

The study and research on the women's movement in India is a subject of wide social importance these days. Today, more and more voluntary organizations, national agencies and government departments are taking up women's issues. Not merely are these activities expanding into new areas of action, but they are also seeking to reach out to women in the rural and remote areas. The approach to women's issues is also gradually changing from one of protection and welfare, to that of participation and empowerment. More and more universities and colleges have started Women's Studies Centres and Cells. Today there are 17 such Centres and 10 cells which are being supported by the University Grants Commission. Indian Association for Women's Studies is the mother Organization. Regional seminars on Women's Studies are taken up by the Association to spread awareness. The Third National Conference on Women's Studies was held at Waltair (28 - 31 December 1989). Eleven papers were


154 Indian Association for Women's Studies, Reports from the President, General Secretary and the Treasure, (New Delhi, Asiad Press 1988).
presented under the sub-theme "Political Institutions, Structures and Processes". 155

In fact interest in the participatory problems of women is spreading fast. New programmes of women's studies are being undertaken at different centres. So it may reasonably be expected that further additions will soon be made to the field of existing literature.


The Papers are:

1. Nikhil Desai: "Political Institutions, Structures and Process"
2. R. P. Joshi: "Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj: Demands and Dilemmas"
3. Veena Mutraja: "Women and Political Institutions in India"
4. Shefali: "Political System, Political Processes and Political Participation of Rural Women"
5. Suguna Pathy: "The Articulation of Power in Indian Social Structure"
6. Pam Rajput: "Women Leadership at the Grass Root Level in Panjab"
7. Zenab Bano: "Women's Participation in Girva Panchayat Samiti of Udaipur district"
8. Gita Upadhyaya: "Voting Behaviour of Rural Women in Assam"
9. Sneha Joshi: "Women in Politics: A Case Study of Bhavanagar District"
10. S. Girija: "The Role of Andhra Women in India's Freedom Struggle"
11. Rohini Gawankar: "Role of Women in Gram Panchayat with Special Reference to Maharashtra"
Research Gap:

A brief review of the existing literature on the political status of women reveals some significant research gaps, although there are valuable contributions by scholars and researchers. Some of these points of gap may be mentioned here.

It is generally held that in spite of the growing equality between men and women in society, political participation is taken as more natural to men than to women. It is assumed that women voters vote as the male members of the family desire and as such no separate and special effort is usually made to mobilize them as participants in the voting act. Several research projects undertaken so far have maintained that the right to political equality has not enabled women to play their expected role as partners and constituents in the political process. 156

However, some recent research projects undertaken in India and abroad show a changing trend. 157 Voting participations

156 Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, op. cit. p. XXII


Welch, S., 'Women as Political Animals' op. cit.


(1) "Indian Women and their participation in politics", op. cit.

have increased among women. They are taking more interest in those political matters that affect their day-to-day life. This role of women and their attitude towards politics can properly be understood not from an analysis of their political activities, attitudes and performances alone, but perhaps much more intimately from a thorough comparative analysis with those of men. In the West, there have been recently various research studies in that direction. But in India, a comparatively smaller attempt has been made to understand the political status of women by comparing their role and attitude with those of their counterparts. Here exists, the researcher believes, an obvious gap in the researches on Indian women.

One of the major points of political science research has been the study of the differences in urban and rural conditions and the effect these differences have on political behaviour. Larner perceives urbanization as the key step in a society's march towards the status of modern nationhood. Data collected for various research programmes in India on general political participation are no doubt well-balanced and are spread over various regions categorized according to economic development. But, in case of women's studies, little systematic attempt has been made to compare the urban respondents and the rural respondents.

It is held that the occupant of a social position ought to do particular things in specified ways and ought to hold certain beliefs instead of others. For example, the level of an individual's political activity is a function of his or her political information and knowledge which in turn are affected by the level and quality of his or her formal education and which in turn are a function of the economic level of the respondent.

Researches conducted so far, have examined the impact of socio-economic attributes and individual attitudes and beliefs on political participation, but how far the individual's attitude and beliefs are shaped by socio-economic attributes have not been thoroughly examined. Here also exists a gap in the researches on women's political participation. This micro-study attempts to bridge some of the gaps mentioned in this section.

Hypotheses

The researcher has formulated the following hypotheses for the purpose of her study.

1. As compared with men, women are less involved in politics.

2. Urbanization has a positive effect on the rate of voting turnout, and can be identified with high levels of political ambition, sense of political efficacy, financial expectation about the future, political knowledge, and a positive support for independent partisan choice by women, and with partisan preference and political participation.

3. Age, caste status, education, occupational status, family income and exposure to communication media are positively associated with the rate of voting turnout.

4. Higher levels of political ambition, sense of political efficacy, financial expectations about the future, political knowledge, a highly positive attitude towards independent decision-making by women in the sphere of partisan choice, and partisan preference are positively associated with increasing age, with higher caste status, with a higher level of education, with a higher level of family income, with occupation and with higher political participation level.

5. With a higher mobilization of women voters, gender gap is diminishing.

6. There is growing representations of women in the representative bodies.
Delimitation

This study covers women in the urban and rural areas of West Bengal. Calcutta has been selected as the representative of the urban region and Hooghly district as the rural region. These selections were made on the basis of the lottery method. For each stratum only one parliamentary constituency was selected, again by the lottery method. The constituencies selected were South Calcutta (urban region), and Hooghly (rural region). Two Assembly Constituencies were selected again by the lottery method from each of these constituencies: Ballygunge and Dhakuria from South Calcutta Parliamentary Constituency; and Chinsurah and Dhaniakhali from Hooghly Parliamentary Constituency. Applying the lottery method again, two polling stations from each of these Assembly Constituencies were selected. They were Sebak Baidya Street, and Lansdowne Place of Ballygunge Constituency, Babu Bagan and Selimpur Lane of Dhakuria Constituency, Bankim Kanan and Kamarpara Duttagali of Chinsurah Constituency and Kharnabazar and Mahalla of Dhaniakhali Constituency. From each of these polling stations, 50 individuals were selected. The selection was made from the electoral roll by using Tippett's table of random numbers.

As the researcher had intended to interview 300 individuals a sample of 400 was taken at the initial stage. Attempts were made to select approximately an equal number of representatives of both the sexes.
The following table shows the genderwise and regionwise break-up of the 300 respondents ultimately interviewed.

Table 1.1
IDENTIFICATION OF THE SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Region</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Region</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

This study is based primarily on the data collected through a survey conducted just after the 1982 Assembly election. Elections constitute the most exciting of all political events bringing political reality into a sharp focus. A voter is viewed not as a totally subjective and autonomous individual, but one whose voting preference is dependent on the various social and environmental factors, and the organized pressures working on him. Election as such is treated as an alchemy of socio-economic factors, forces, and processes in which each one of them acts on others and also gets reacted by them.  

As such, the post-election period was considered to be an appropriate time for collecting data on participation. Data have been collected through structured interviews with the respondents on the basis of an interview schedule which had 60 questions and statements. In some of the questions the respondent was asked to indicate his or her preference. The field version of the interview schedule was written in Bengali, the respondent's language, so that an effective communication might be developed between the interviewer and the respondent.

The interview schedule was pre-tested, both in the urban and in the rural areas, and the necessary changes were made.

In fact, the researcher has also here been engaged in what may be described as multiple operationism 161 for data collection. Instead of relying only on survey data, the researcher has also collected data from several other sources. The researcher has used data published in Commission reports, Journals, Statistical Abstracts and from the records kept in Home (C and E) Department of the Government of West Bengal, and Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government of West Bengal.

Political behaviour is a function of several variables. As it was observed by M. G. Kendall "The variates are dependent among themselves, so that we cannot split one or more from the others and consider it by itself. The variates must be considered together".162

For the purpose of analysis, the survey data have been analysed through several variables. These variables, have been divided into two groups: (1) those relating to the socio-economic characteristics of the voters, and (2) those covering the psychological dimensions of the voters.

The researcher then tried (1) to determine the association between each of one of the socio-economic variables and the decisional variables of the respondent, (2) to find out the correlation between the socio-economic variables and the attitudinal variables and (3) to correlate the attitudinal variables and the decisional variables.

The Chi-square test was applied to measure the association between the socio-economic variables and the decisional

variables and the association between socio-economic variables and the attitudinal variables. For the purpose of this study the .05 level of probability (P) was accepted as the standard of significance. The null hypothesis was retained in each case, where P was greater than this level.

In social science research there are many situations in which the observations are coarsely grouped in the criterion or the prediction variables or both. Discriminant analysis can be fruitfully used for the analysis of such data.

A discriminant function, originally developed by Fisher, may be used in ascertaining appropriate weights for a series of variables yielding the maximum separation in two groups each of which is assumed to be normally distributed. Modification of the discrimination has to be made only to the extent necessary to agree with the assumption that the distribution in which the dichotomy exists, is a single normally distributed variable. In the present study, the researcher has used discriminant analysis in ascertaining appropriate weights for a series of 6 psychological variables and 1 decisional variable like political participation yielding the maximum separation between male and female respondents (in the fifth chapter).

The data collected through structured interviews were processed at the Regional Computer Centre, Jadavpur University, Calcutta.

This study has been divided into seven chapters.

The first chapter deals with the statement of the problem of women's participation, review of existing literature, research gaps, hypotheses rested in the present study, delimitation of the present study and the pattern of data collection and of data analysis. The second chapter tries to determine the association between socio-economic variables and the electoral participation by women. The third and the fourth chapters seek to correlate the attitudinal variables and socio-economic variables. The fifth chapter examines the association between the attitudinal variables and the decisional variable like Political Participation. In the sixth chapter, the researcher has tried to analyse the data from Election Commission reports, Journals, Statistical Abstracts etc. to find out whether with higher mobilization of women voters, the gender gap has been diminishing, and whether there is growing representations of women in the representative bodies. In the last chapter the researcher summarises her findings.
Every study has some limitations. The present study is also no doubt, no doubt, make the study more meaningful.

As the researcher had to conduct the whole survey individually, it was not possible for her to adopt a larger sample. A wider sample would, no doubt, make the study more meaningful.

Moreover, there is the risk of memory errors whenever questions about the past are asked. While planning the research survey, the researcher has tried to anticipate the likely sources of error, and has taken precautions to minimize them. The researcher has tried to anticipate the likely sources of error, and has taken precautions to minimize them.

Inaccuracies may enter through the interviewing, the questions, the editing, the coding, the tabulating and the analysis. Moreover, there is the risk of memory errors whenever questions about the past are asked. While planning the research survey, the researcher has tried to anticipate the likely sources of error, and has taken precautions to minimize them.

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Limitations of the present study