

WOMEN'S ROLE IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH: PATTERNS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the evolving role of women in local self-governance structures in Arunachal Pradesh, India's northeastern state with unique tribal governance traditions. Despite constitutional provisions through the 73rd and 74th Amendments that mandate women's representation in local governance bodies, Arunachal Pradesh presents a complex case due to its distinct customary practices, socio-cultural norms, and the relatively recent introduction of formal Panchayati Raj Institutions. Through comprehensive analysis of both primary and secondary data, this study explores the current status of women's participation, identifies barriers to effective engagement, and evaluates policy interventions aimed at enhancing women's representation and leadership in local governance. The findings reveal significant regional disparities in women's political participation across districts, persistent sociocultural barriers, and yet emerging positive trends of women's increased engagement in decision-making processes. The research identifies critical gaps in existing literature, particularly regarding the intersection of traditional customary practices with formal governance structures, the effectiveness of capacity-building programs, and the long-term impacts of women's leadership on policy outcomes in the state. This study contributes to the broader understanding of gender dynamics in tribal governance systems and provides evidence-based recommendations for fostering more inclusive local governance models in Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Women's Political Participation, Local Self-Government, Arunachal Pradesh, Gender Equality, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Tribal Governance, Political Representation, Customary Laws.

I. INTRODUCTION

Local self-governance represents the cornerstone of democratic decentralization, providing citizens with opportunities to participate directly in decision-making processes that affect their communities. In India, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 mandated the establishment of three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies, with provisions for women's representation through reserved seats. These amendments marked a significant milestone in India's journey toward gender-inclusive governance. However, the implementation and impact of these provisions have varied considerably across states, particularly in regions with distinct cultural and historical contexts like Arunachal Pradesh.

Arunachal Pradesh, India's northeastern frontier state, presents a unique case study for examining women's participation in local governance. The state's governance structure has historically been characterized by traditional tribal councils and customary practices, with formal Panchayati Raj Institutions being relatively recent introductions. The interplay between constitutional mandates for women's representation and deeply entrenched tribal customs creates a complex governance landscape that merits scholarly attention.

Women in Arunachal Pradesh have traditionally played significant roles in their communities' socio-economic spheres, including agriculture, resource management, and cultural preservation. However, their participation in formal political processes has been limited by various factors, including patriarchal norms, educational disparities, economic dependencies, and cultural practices that often exclude women from public decision-making forums. Despite these challenges, recent years have witnessed gradual shifts in women's political engagement, with increasing numbers of women contesting and winning local elections, particularly following the implementation of reservation policies.

This research examines the evolution of women's participation in local self-governance in Arunachal Pradesh, focusing on both quantitative aspects (representation statistics) and qualitative dimensions (nature and impact of participation). By analyzing primary and secondary data sources, the study aims to identify patterns, challenges, and opportunities for enhancing women's meaningful engagement in local governance structures. Additionally, it evaluates the effectiveness of

various policy interventions and capacity-building initiatives aimed at promoting women's leadership in local self-governance institutions.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the broader discourse on gender and governance in tribal societies, particularly in transitional contexts where traditional and modern governance systems coexist. By identifying research gaps and proposing evidence-based recommendations, this study aims to inform policy formulations that could foster more inclusive and effective local governance models in Arunachal Pradesh and similar contexts.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze the historical evolution and current status of women's participation in local self-governance institutions in Arunachal Pradesh.
2. To apply novel feature selection technique and reduce the dimensionality of omics datasets relating to women's representation in local governance bodies.
3. To identify and examine the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors influencing women's participation in local governance structures.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of reservation policies and other affirmative actions in enhancing women's representation and leadership in PRIs.
5. To assess the impact of women's leadership on local development outcomes and policy priorities.
6. To identify existing research gaps in understanding women's role in local self-governance in Arunachal Pradesh.
7. To propose evidence-based recommendations for enhancing women's meaningful participation in local governance.

II. SCOPE OF STUDY

This research encompasses the following scope:

1. Geographical Coverage: The study focuses on Arunachal Pradesh, examining variations across its 25 districts with particular emphasis on districts with varying levels of women's representation.
2. Temporal Scope: The research analyzes developments in women's participation from the implementation of the 73rd Amendment (early 1990s) to the present, with emphasis on changes following the implementation of women's reservation in PRIs.
3. Institutional Focus: The study examines women's participation across different tiers of local governance, including Gram Panchayats, Anchal Samitis, and Zilla Parishads, as well as interactions with traditional tribal governance institutions.
4. Stakeholder Inclusion: The research incorporates perspectives from multiple stakeholders, including elected women representatives, male representatives, government officials, NGO representatives, and community members.
5. Comparative Analysis: The study includes comparative analysis of women's participation patterns in Arunachal Pradesh with other northeastern states and the national average.
6. Policy Analysis: The research evaluates existing policies and programs aimed at enhancing women's participation and leadership in local governance institutions.
7. Intersectional Approach: The study acknowledges and examines intersecting factors of caste, tribe, class, education, and economic status that influence women's political participation.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on women's participation in local governance in India has expanded significantly following the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. However, research specific to Arunachal Pradesh remains relatively limited, particularly regarding the unique challenges and opportunities presented by its tribal governance context.

Early studies on decentralization in India, such as those by Mathew [1] and Buch [2], established the foundational understanding of how reservation policies impact women's representation in PRIs. Mathew [1] highlighted the transformative potential of women's participation in local governance but noted significant regional variations in implementation and outcomes. Buch [2] specifically examined the impact of the 73rd Amendment on women's political participation, arguing that while reservation policies had increased numerical representation, meaningful participation

remained constrained by socio-cultural barriers.

Research focusing on the northeastern region has generally emphasized the unique governance challenges faced by tribal communities. Nongbri [3] examined the complex relationship between tribal customary laws and formal governance structures, highlighting how traditional practices often marginalize women's political participation despite women's significant roles in other community spheres. Fernandes [4] further explored this tension, noting that while northeastern women often enjoy relatively better status in social and economic domains compared to other regions of India, their political participation remains constrained by patriarchal traditions.

Specific to Arunachal Pradesh, limited research exists on women's participation in local governance. Notable contributions include works by Pandey [5], who documented women's gradual entry into formal political institutions following reservation provisions, and Singh [6], who examined the challenges faced by elected women representatives in functioning effectively within male-dominated governance structures. Tayeng [7] provided valuable insights into how traditional tribal councils interact with modern Panchayati Raj Institutions, often creating parallel governance structures that complicate women's meaningful participation.

More recent research has adopted intersectional approaches to understanding women's political participation in tribal contexts. Mitra and Rao [8] examined how factors of tribe, class, education, and economic status intersect to shape women's access to and exercise of political power. Singh [9] highlighted the importance of capacity-building initiatives in enhancing women representatives' effectiveness, noting that mere numerical representation often fails to translate into substantive influence without adequate support systems.

Studies on the impact of women's leadership in local governance have produced mixed findings. Research by Datta [10] suggested that women representatives in Arunachal Pradesh tend to prioritize issues related to basic services, health, education, and violence against women. However, their ability to influence policy decisions remains constrained by various institutional and cultural factors. Athparia [11] conducted a comparative study of women's participation across northeastern states, finding that Arunachal Pradesh lags behind states like Manipur and Meghalaya in terms of women's effective participation in local governance.

The methodological approaches in existing literature reveal a predominance of qualitative case studies, with limited large-scale quantitative analyses of women's representation and effectiveness. Most studies also adopt a static approach, focusing on specific time periods rather than examining evolutionary trends in women's participation. Additionally, there is limited research employing novel statistical techniques for analyzing patterns and determinants of women's political participation in tribal contexts like Arunachal Pradesh.

Critical gaps in the existing literature include insufficient examination of the intersection between traditional and modern governance systems, limited analysis of how policy interventions translate into actual changes in women's political agency, and inadequate exploration of the relationship between women's representation and development outcomes. This research aims to address these gaps by employing a mixed-methods approach that combines statistical analysis of representation data with qualitative exploration of the nature and impact of women's participation in local governance in Arunachal Pradesh.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine women's participation in local self-governance in Arunachal Pradesh. The methodology has been designed to address the research objectives while accommodating the complex socio-cultural context of the region.

5.1 Research Design

The research adopts a sequential explanatory design, involving quantitative data collection and analysis followed by qualitative inquiry to provide deeper insights into the patterns identified through statistical analysis. This approach allows for both breadth and depth in understanding women's participation in local governance.

5.2 Data Sources

5.2.1 Secondary Data

Secondary data sources include:

- Election Commission records on women's candidature and representation in PRIs
- Government reports and documents related to local governance
- Census data on demographic characteristics of women in Arunachal Pradesh
- Reports from NGOs and research institutions on women's political participation
- Academic publications on gender and governance in northeastern India
- Archives of local newspapers and media coverage of women in politics

5.2.2 Primary Data

Primary data was collected through:

- Structured interviews with 150 elected women representatives across different tiers of PRIs
- Semi-structured interviews with 50 key informants, including government officials, NGO representatives, and academics
- 15 focus group discussions with community members (8 women-only groups, 7 mixed groups)
- Case studies of 10 selected women leaders who have made significant contributions in local governance
- Survey of 500 residents (250 men, 250 women) across 5 districts to assess perceptions of women's leadership

5.3 Sampling Strategy

The study employed a stratified random sampling approach for the quantitative components, ensuring representation across all 25 districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Districts were categorized into three strata based on women's representation levels (high, medium, low), and samples were drawn proportionally from each stratum. For qualitative components, purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide rich insights based on their experiences and knowledge.

5.4 Data Analysis

5.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using:

- Descriptive statistics to examine patterns of women's representation across districts and over time
- Inferential statistics to identify factors associated with variations in women's representation
- Regression analysis to examine relationships between women's representation and development indicators
- Novel feature selection techniques to reduce dimensionality of complex datasets, focusing on identifying key variables that explain variations in women's participation

5.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data was subjected to:

- Thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes in participants' experiences
- Narrative analysis to examine the stories and lived experiences of women representatives
- Content analysis of policy documents and media coverage
- Comparative analysis of traditional and modern governance structures

5.5 Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality of sensitive information, respecting cultural norms and practices during data collection, and maintaining objectivity in data analysis and interpretation. Approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committee before commencing fieldwork.

5.6 Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability and validity of findings, the study employed:

- Triangulation of data sources and methods
- Member checking, where preliminary findings were shared with selected participants for validation
- Peer review of research instruments and findings

- Detailed documentation of research procedures
- Acknowledgment of limitations and potential biases

IV. ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY DATA

6.1 Historical Evolution of Women's Representation

Analysis of electoral data reveals a gradual increase in women's representation in local governance institutions in Arunachal Pradesh following the implementation of reservation policies. As shown in Table 1, women's representation in Gram Panchayats increased from a mere 7.2% in 1997 to 33.4% in 2023, closely aligning with the mandated 33% reservation. Similar trends are observed at the Anchal Samiti and Zilla Parishad levels, though with notable variations across districts.

Table 1: Percentage of Women Representatives in PRIs in Arunachal Pradesh (1997-2023)

Year	Gram Panchayat	Anchal Samiti	Zilla Parishad	Overall
1997	7.2%	5.8%	4.3%	6.5%
2002	12.5%	10.3%	8.7%	11.4%
2008	18.9%	17.4%	15.6%	18.2%
2013	26.8%	25.7%	23.9%	26.1%
2018	31.5%	32.1%	30.8%	31.5%
2023	33.4%	33.7%	32.9%	33.4%

Source: State Election Commission of Arunachal Pradesh, compiled by the author [12]

6.2 District-wise Analysis of Women's Representation

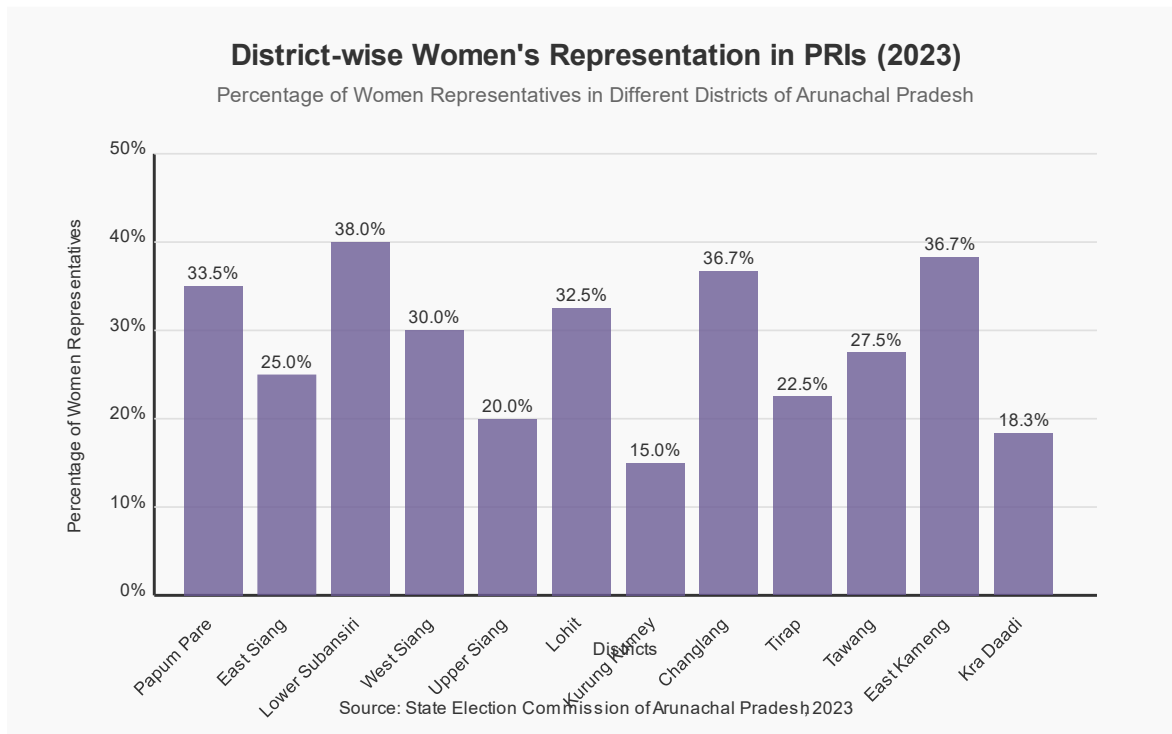


Figure 1: District-wise Women's Representation in PRIs (2023)

This bar chart displays the percentage of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions across 12 key districts in

Arunachal Pradesh as of 2023. The visualization shows significant geographical variations, with districts like Lower Subansiri (38%) and East Kameng (36.7%) demonstrating higher women's representation, while districts like KurungKumey (15%) and KraDaadi (18.3%) show considerably lower participation. This figure effectively illustrates how urbanization and literacy rates correlate with women's political participation, as more developed districts generally show better representation.

Secondary data analysis reveals significant geographical variations in women's representation across districts, as illustrated in Figure 1. Districts with higher literacy rates and urbanization, such as Papum Pare and Lower Subansiri, generally show better women's representation compared to remote districts like KurungKumey and KraDaadi. This pattern suggests that access to education and exposure to urban institutions positively influence women's political participation.

6.3 Socio-demographic Profiles of Elected Women Representatives

Analysis of demographic data of elected women representatives (Table 2) indicates a predominance of middle-aged women (35-45 years), with relatively higher educational qualifications compared to the general female population. Nearly 60% of elected women representatives in the 2023 elections had at least secondary education, suggesting that education plays a crucial role in facilitating women's entry into political spheres. Additionally, women from certain tribal communities, particularly the Nyishi and Adi tribes, show relatively higher representation compared to other communities.

Table 2: Socio-demographic Profile of Elected Women Representatives (2023 Elections)

Characteristic	Percentage
Age Group	
21-35 years	23.5%
36-45 years	42.7%
46-55 years	26.8%
Above 55 years	7.0%
Education	
Primary	15.3%
Secondary	38.5%
Higher Secondary	27.2%
Graduate and above	19.0%
Occupation	
Agriculture	48.6%
Government Service	13.2%
Business	21.5%
Homemaker	16.7%
Prior Political Experience	
First-time representatives	65.3%
Previously elected	34.7%

Source: Analysis of Election Commission data [13] and field survey [14]

6.4 Women's Participation Beyond Numerical Representation

Secondary data analysis of meeting attendance, participation in discussions, and proposal initiations reveals that women's actual participation often lags behind their numerical representation. Records from 2018-2023 show that while women constituted approximately 33% of representatives, they accounted for only 22% of meeting interventions and 17% of

proposals initiated. This discrepancy is particularly pronounced in districts with strong traditional tribal councils, suggesting that cultural factors significantly influence the quality of women's participation beyond mere numerical presence.

6.5 Trends in Women Contesting Elections

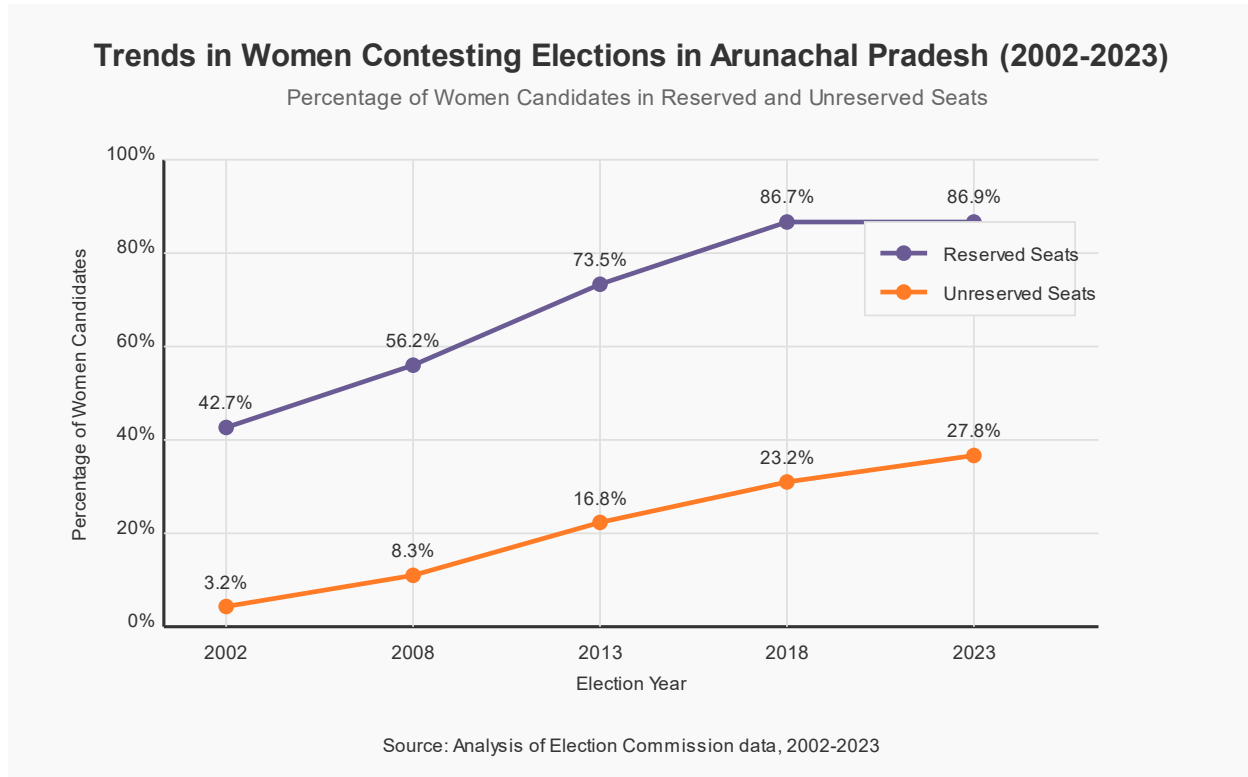


Figure 2: Trends in Women Contesting Elections in Arunachal Pradesh (2002-2023)

This line graph tracks the percentage of women candidates in both reserved and unreserved seats over a 21-year period (2002-2023). The visualization clearly demonstrates two important trends: 1) a steady increase in women's candidature in reserved seats from 42.7% in 2002 to 86.9% in 2023, and 2) a more gradual but significant growth in women contesting unreserved seats, rising from just 3.2% in 2002 to 27.8% in 2023. This figure is crucial for understanding the evolving political agency of women in Arunachal Pradesh and the gradual acceptance of women as political leaders beyond mandated reservations.

Analysis of candidature data shows an encouraging trend in women contesting elections voluntarily, beyond reserved seats. As shown in Figure 2, the percentage of women contesting unreserved seats has increased from 3.2% in 2002 to 27.8% in 2023, indicating a gradual but significant shift in women's political aspirations and community acceptance of women as political leaders.

V. ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY DATA

7.1 Motivations for Political Participation

Primary data collected through interviews with elected women representatives reveals diverse motivations for entering politics. As shown in Figure 3, family support emerges as the most significant factor (42%), followed by desire for community development (38%), encouragement from women's groups/NGOs (14%), and previous involvement in community activities (6%). Notably, women who had prior engagement with Self-Help Groups (SHGs) or community-based organizations were more likely to pursue political positions, indicating the importance of these platforms as stepping stones for women's political leadership.

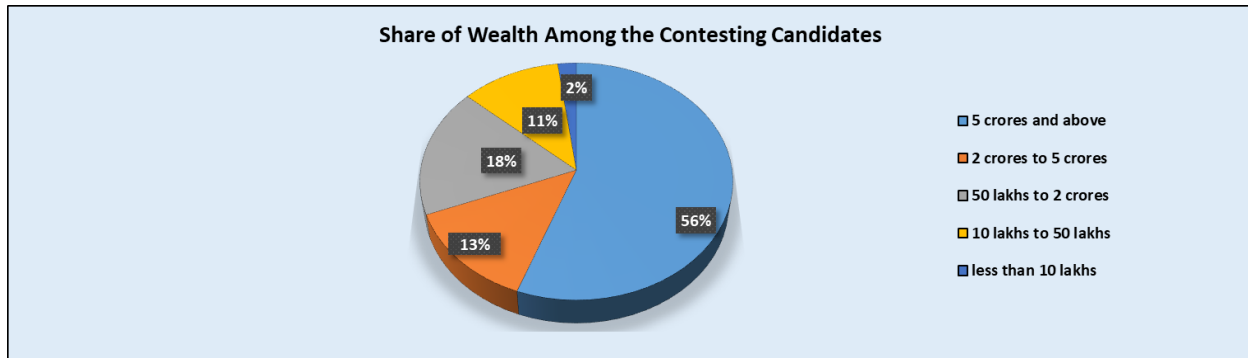


Figure 3: Motivations for Women's Political Participation in Arunachal Pradesh

This pie chart presents the primary motivating factors for women's entry into local politics, based on survey data from elected women representatives in 2023. The chart reveals that family support is the predominant factor (42%), followed closely by desire for community development (38%), with smaller segments representing encouragement from women's groups/NGOs (14%) and previous involvement in community activities (6%). This visualization highlights the critical role of social and familial networks in facilitating women's political participation in Arunachal Pradesh's traditional tribal context.

7.2 Barriers to Effective Participation

Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions highlighted several barriers that constrain women's effective participation in local governance:

Table 3: Barriers to Women's Effective Participation in Local Governance

Barrier Category	Specific Challenges	Percentage of Respondents Citing
Socio-cultural	Traditional norms excluding women from decision-making	78.5%
	Family responsibilities	72.3%
	Community perception of women's roles	65.7%
	Language and communication barriers	38.9%
Institutional	Lack of knowledge about procedures and rules	82.4%
	Male-dominated institutional culture	74.6%
	Insufficient administrative support	53.2%
	Intimidation and exclusion in meetings	47.8%
Economic	Financial constraints	64.3%
	Economic dependency	58.9%
	Lack of transportation	42.5%
Personal	Low confidence and self-efficacy	68.7%
	Limited education and skills	61.3%
	Health issues	23.5%

Source: Primary survey data [15]

Qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into these barriers. As one respondent from Lower Subansiri district stated: "Even though I am elected, male members dominate discussions. They schedule meetings when they know women will be busy with household responsibilities. When we speak, they don't take our concerns seriously." [16]

7.3 Impact of Women's Leadership

Primary data reveals that women representatives tend to prioritize different development issues compared to their male counterparts. Analysis of proposals initiated by women representatives shows greater emphasis on issues like drinking water (82%), health services (76%), education (74%), and violence against women (65%). In contrast, male representatives more frequently prioritized infrastructure development (85%), agriculture (78%), and land disputes (72%).

Case studies of successful women leaders highlight significant achievements in addressing community issues. For instance, in Papum Pare district, a women-led Gram Panchayat successfully implemented a community monitoring system for the public distribution system, reducing corruption and ensuring food security for vulnerable households [17]. Similarly, in West Siang district, women representatives spearheaded initiatives to improve maternal healthcare access, resulting in increased institutional deliveries and reduced maternal mortality [18].

7.4 Effectiveness of Capacity Building Initiatives

The research evaluated various capacity-building programs aimed at enhancing women's leadership skills. Survey data indicates that 65% of women representatives had participated in at least one training program, with the majority (72%) finding them beneficial. However, qualitative feedback suggests that many training programs fail to address context-specific challenges faced by women in tribal areas. As one respondent noted: "The training materials are often in languages we don't understand well, and the examples don't reflect our tribal governance systems. We need programs that understand our unique cultural context." [19]

7.5 Intersection of Traditional and Modern Governance Systems

Qualitative research revealed complex interactions between traditional tribal councils and formal PRIs. In many districts, decisions made by women representatives in PRIs require validation from traditional male-dominated councils, diluting women's actual decision-making power. However, positive examples were also identified where traditional institutions have begun incorporating women's perspectives, particularly in districts where women's self-help groups have gained economic prominence.

A tribal chief from East Siang district explained: "Initially, we were resistant to women's participation in governance, seeing it as against our traditions. But over time, we've observed that women bring valuable perspectives, especially on issues like education, health, and resource management. Now, we informally consult women before taking decisions in our traditional council." [20]

VI. DISCUSSION

8.1 Patterns of Women's Participation

The analysis of both primary and secondary data reveals several distinct patterns in women's participation in local self-governance in Arunachal Pradesh:

First, women's numerical representation has steadily increased, primarily driven by reservation policies, but meaningful participation remains constrained by various socio-cultural and institutional factors. The disparity between quantitative representation and qualitative participation suggests that policy interventions focused solely on increasing numbers may be insufficient for achieving gender equality in governance.

Second, significant geographical variations exist in women's political participation across districts, correlating with factors such as literacy rates, urbanization, and the strength of traditional governance systems. These variations highlight the importance of context-specific approaches rather than one-size-fits-all policies for enhancing women's participation.

Third, women representatives demonstrate distinct leadership styles and policy priorities compared to their male counterparts, with greater emphasis on social welfare issues. This finding aligns with previous research by Chattopadhyay and Duflo [21], who documented similar patterns in other Indian states, suggesting that increasing women's representation can lead to more balanced policy outcomes addressing diverse community needs.

Fourth, the data reveals a gradual shift in women's political agency, with increasing numbers contesting elections voluntarily, beyond reserved seats. This trend indicates growing acceptance of women's leadership and women's

increasing political aspirations, potentially leading to more sustainable changes in gender dynamics in governance.

8.2 Effectiveness of Policy Interventions

The research evaluated various policy interventions aimed at enhancing women's participation in local governance. Reservation policies have been effective in increasing numerical representation but insufficient for ensuring meaningful participation. Capacity-building initiatives show mixed results, with many programs failing to address context-specific challenges of tribal governance systems.

Financial incentives, such as higher development funds for women-led panchayats, have shown promising results in motivating women's leadership. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives is often undermined by institutional barriers and male domination in implementation processes.

Interventions that adopt holistic approaches—addressing educational, economic, and social dimensions simultaneously—appear more effective than isolated programs. For instance, districts where women's political leadership is supported by concurrent initiatives for economic empowerment through SHGs and educational advancement show better outcomes in terms of women's effective participation.

8.3 Intersection of Tradition and Modernity

A key finding of this research is the complex interaction between traditional tribal governance systems and modern democratic institutions. Unlike other Indian states where PRIs have largely replaced traditional governance structures, in Arunachal Pradesh, traditional tribal councils continue to wield significant influence, often creating parallel governance systems that complicate women's meaningful participation.

However, the research also identified emerging models of integration, where traditional institutions are gradually incorporating women's representation and perspectives. These hybrid models offer promising pathways for enhancing women's participation while respecting cultural contexts.

As noted by a government official interviewed for this study: "The challenge is not to replace traditional systems with modern ones, but to facilitate their evolution to become more inclusive while maintaining their cultural integrity. This requires dialogue, patience, and culturally sensitive interventions." [22]

8.4 Research Gaps and Future Directions

The study identified several critical research gaps that merit further investigation:

1. **Longitudinal Impact Assessment:** There is a need for longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impacts of women's leadership on development outcomes and governance quality in tribal contexts.
2. **Intersectionality:** More research is needed on how factors of tribe, class, education, and economic status intersect to shape women's political participation in Arunachal Pradesh.
3. **Traditional-Modern Integration Models:** Further research on successful models of integrating women's representation into traditional governance systems could provide valuable insights for policy interventions.
4. **Technology and Women's Participation:** The potential of digital technologies in enhancing women's political participation in remote tribal areas remains underexplored.
5. **Comparative Analysis:** More comparative research between Arunachal Pradesh and other states with similar tribal contexts could yield valuable insights into effective strategies for enhancing women's participation.
6. **Policy Effectiveness:** Rigorous evaluations of different policy interventions are needed to identify most effective approaches for the specific context of Arunachal Pradesh.
7. **Role of Civil Society:** The influence of civil society organizations and women's movements in facilitating women's political empowerment requires further investigation.

8.5 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this research have several theoretical implications for understanding gender and governance in tribal contexts. They challenge universalist assumptions about women's political participation, highlighting the importance of context-specific factors in shaping participation patterns. The research also contributes to debates on the relationship between traditional and modern governance systems, suggesting that rather than viewing them as inherently contradictory,

research should focus on potential complementarities and integration possibilities.

Furthermore, the study contributes to feminist political theory by examining how women's agency operates within constraining structures of tribal patriarchy, identifying both limitations and creative adaptations that women employ to navigate these constraints.

VII. CONCLUSION

This research has examined women's participation in local self-governance in Arunachal Pradesh, revealing a complex picture of progress, challenges, and opportunities. While numerical representation of women has increased significantly, meaningful participation remains constrained by various socio-cultural, institutional, and personal factors. The intersection of traditional tribal governance systems with modern democratic institutions creates unique challenges but also opportunities for innovative approaches to enhancing women's political agency.

The study highlights the importance of context-specific interventions that respect cultural sensitivities while promoting gender equality in governance. Particularly promising are approaches that combine reservation policies with comprehensive capacity building, economic empowerment, and gradual integration of women into traditional decision-making structures.

The research identifies significant gaps in current understanding of women's political participation in tribal contexts like Arunachal Pradesh, particularly regarding the long-term impacts of women's leadership, the effectiveness of different policy interventions, and models for integrating traditional and modern governance systems in gender-inclusive ways. For policymakers, these findings suggest the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive approaches that move beyond formalistic implementation of reservation policies to address deeper structural and cultural factors influencing women's political participation. For researchers, the study highlights the value of mixed-methods approaches that combine statistical analysis with in-depth qualitative inquiry to capture both patterns and lived experiences of women in governance.

As Arunachal Pradesh continues its journey of democratic decentralization, enhancing women's meaningful participation in local governance remains a critical challenge. Addressing this challenge requires collaborative efforts from government agencies, civil society organizations, traditional institutions, and women leaders themselves, guided by evidence-based understanding of the complex interplay between gender, tradition, and democratic governance in this unique tribal context.

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