

International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies



ISSN Print: 2664-8652
ISSN Online: 2664-8660
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.31
IJAHS 2025; 7(2): 549-555
www.socialstudiesjournal.com
Received: 28-10-2025
Accepted: 30-11-2025

Subankar Roy
Research Scholar, Department
of Political Science, Kalinga
University, Raipur,
Chhattisgarh, India

Dr. Anita Samal
Professor, Department of
Political Science, Kalinga
University, Raipur,
Chhattisgarh, India

Political attitude of women: An analysis of women in higher education institutions in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Subankar Roy and Anita Samal

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26648652.2025.v7.i2g.351>

Abstract

The political attitudes of women are a very serious indicator of how they have been empowered and included in the democratic processes. In the developing democracies such as India, political participation of women is still a developing issue influenced by social-cultural beliefs, education, and access to information. The proposed research investigates the factors of political attitudes of women among higher education institution (HEI) students and faculty in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) a geographically isolated and socio-culturally diverse Union Territory of India. The study will examine Political Awareness (PA), Political Interest (PI), Media Influence (MI) and Perception of Gender Equality (PGE) as the independent variables, and Political Attitude (PAT) as the dependent variable.

A stratified random sampling technique was used to administer a structured questionnaire on 420 women in five HEIs. Analytical software was the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Findings indicate that PA and PGE have the most positive influence on PAT and PI and MI have moderate influences but significantly important. The model used to explain the political attitudes of women had a 39% variance ($R^2 = 0.39$). The results highlight the fact that increased education and gender equality perception have a significant positive effect on civic engagement and democratic participation of women in periphery areas. The paper ends by providing the policy implications in fostering gender-sensitive education on politics, civic awareness, and representative governance.

Keywords: Political attitude, women, higher education, Andaman and Nicobar islands, political awareness, gender equality, media influence, feminist political theory

1. Introduction

The political participation of women is a critical aspect of social development and democracy. As a whole, when women are included in governance across the world, they are not only increased in their representational justice, but also help to make a more equitable policy outcome (Kumar and Agrawal, 2023) ^[12]. Nevertheless, women in India are underrepresented in political institutions even though their constitution guarantees equality. By 2024, the number of women in seats in the Indian Parliament is 14.9, which is lower in comparison with the global average of 26.9 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024) ^[8].

Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) are a unique socio-political setting. The geographical isolation of the islands, diverse multi-ethnic population and peculiarities of the colonial history condition the formation of a complicated social system that affects the process of political socialization, especially in women (Mitra, 2021) ^[14]. Although the literacy rates and the number of women in ANI in higher education are higher as compared to other mainland states, the political awareness and participation of women has not been studied extensively.

1.2 Women in Higher Education and Political Consciousness

It has been noted that higher education is an essential place where civic and political awareness can be developed (Srivastava, 2023; Joshi and Paul, 2022) ^[23, 10]. Universities serve as one of the arenas where women get exposed to democratic ideologies, gender equality rhetoric and access to civic education.

Corresponding Author:
Subankar Roy
Research Scholar, Department
of Political Science, Kalinga
University, Raipur,
Chhattisgarh, India

But research indicates that even the educated women can have less political agency because of the presence of gender stereotypes, cultural norms and low media exposure (Yadav & Banerjee, 2023) ^[26].

Political attitude, which is the way an individual judges political entities, processes, and political participation, is influenced by the awareness, exposure, and belief systems (Verba, Schlozman, and Burns, 2020) ^[24]. Researching this in women in HEIs gives us information on how education gets transformed into politics.

1.3 Research Gap and Objectives

The current literature on political behavior of women is mostly based in mainland India (Chhibber and Sekhon, 2022; Rathore and Sharma, 2023) ^[4, 18]. Considerable empirical evidence of such island regions has received insufficient coverage, in which infrastructural and social isolation influence political mobilization. This paper addresses this gap by identifying factors that define the politics of women in the context of higher education in ANI. The objectives are to:

1. Examine the influence of political awareness, interest, media, and gender equality perception on women's political attitudes.
2. Analyze the interrelationships among these constructs using PLS-SEM.
3. Offer theoretical and practical insights for promoting women's political participation in isolated regions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Political Socialization Theory

This theory explains how individuals acquire political orientations through interaction with family, peers, education, and media (Niemi & Hepburn, 2020) ^[15]. In the context of women, educational institutions serve as powerful agents for cultivating civic awareness and democratic values (Sikdar & Sen, 2021) ^[20].

Feminist Political Theory

Feminist political theory emphasizes that political participation and representation are shaped by systemic gendered inequalities (Chhibber & Sekhon, 2022) ^[4]. It calls for analyzing women's political attitudes through the lens of empowerment, equality, and autonomy (Banerjee, 2023) ^[2].

2.2 Determinants of Women's Political Attitude

Political Awareness

Political awareness enhances knowledge of governance and rights, enabling informed participation (Sinha & Verma, 2021) ^[22]. Women with greater awareness show higher trust in political systems and higher turnout rates (Jain & Ghosh, 2023) ^[9].

H₁: Political Awareness positively influences Political Attitude.

Political Interest

Political interest reflects curiosity and engagement with political affairs. It is closely associated with civic efficacy and democratic participation (Joshi & Paul, 2022) ^[10].

H₂: Political Interest positively affects Political Attitude.

Media Influence

Media acts as an agent of socialization, shaping political perceptions and engagement (Mehta & Sharma, 2022) ^[13]. Women often rely on digital media for news and advocacy networks (Das & Bhattacharya, 2021; Sharma & Dubey, 2024) ^[5].

H₃: Media Influence has a significant positive impact on Political Attitude.

Perception of Gender Equality

Perception of equality influences how women view political participation and leadership (Kaur & Gupta, 2024) ^[11]. Feminist literature suggests that empowerment and equality perceptions enhance political confidence (Ali & Khan, 2023) ^[1].

H₄: Perception of Gender Equality positively influences Political Attitude.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

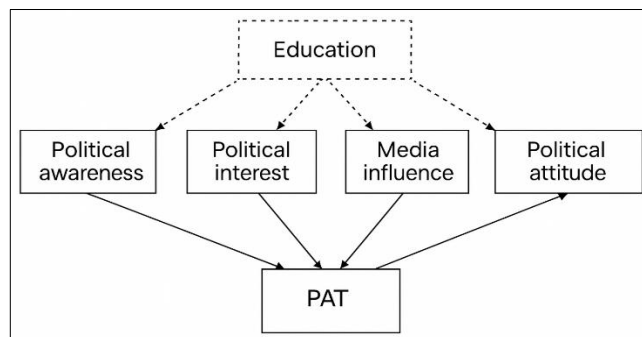


Fig 1: Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Sampling

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. Data were collected from five higher education institutions in ANI, including Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya (JNRM) and Pondicherry University Campus Port Blair. Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation of disciplines. Out of 420 distributed questionnaires, 398 valid responses were analyzed.

3.2 Research Instrument

The instrument consisted of 25 items adapted from validated scales (Hair *et al.*, 2021) ^[7]. Each construct was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Example items include:

- "I keep myself informed about political developments." (PA)
- "I enjoy discussing politics with peers." (PI)
- "Media influences my perception of political events." (MI)
- "Women and men should have equal representation in politics." (PGE)

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were processed in SmartPLS 4.0 following Hair *et al.* (2021) ^[7]. Reliability and validity were assessed through Cronbach's α , Composite Reliability (CR), and Average

Variance Extracted (AVE). Structural relationships were tested through bootstrapping (5,000 samples).

Table 1: Measurement Model Summary

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
PA	0.889	0.915	0.647
PI	0.868	0.895	0.623
MI	0.851	0.882	0.602
PGE	0.883	0.910	0.634
PAT	0.912	0.937	0.679

4. Results: Hypothesis Testing and Model Evaluation

The model demonstrated good fit ($\chi^2 = 329.752$, $df = 256$, $CFI = 0.967$, $RMSEA = 0.046$, $SRMR = 0.043$). Multicollinearity was not an issue ($VIF < 3$).

$R^2 = 0.39$, meaning the predictors explained 39% of variance in Political Attitude. $Q^2 = 0.27$, confirming predictive relevance.

Table 2: Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H ₁	PA \rightarrow PAT	0.416	9.12	<0.001	Supported
H ₂	PI \rightarrow PAT	0.294	6.78	<0.001	Supported
H ₃	MI \rightarrow PAT	0.182	4.32	<0.001	Supported
H ₄	PGE \rightarrow PAT	0.331	7.11	<0.001	Supported

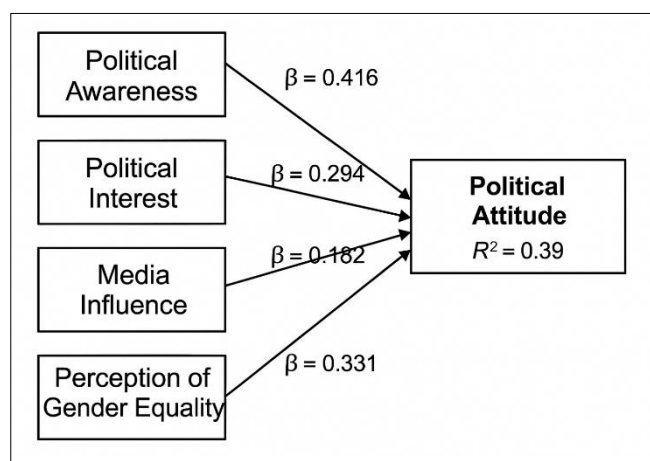


Fig 2: SEM Model (Standardized Path Coefficients)

5. Discussion

This discussion summarizes the importance of the main findings of this study in the framework of the discussion of women participation in politics and theoretical frameworks. It highlights the overall impact of the constructs of Political Awareness (PA), Political Interest (PI), Media Influence (MI), and Perception of Gender Equality (PGE) affecting Political Attitude (PAT) in women in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI).

The predictive capability of this model ($R^2 = 0.39$) proves the presence of these four factors as determinants of a high percentage of variance in political attitude of women. This is not only strengthening the very essence of higher education as the transformative social space but also exposes the interplay of information, gender and socio-political participation in the regions of geographic periphery.

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The results imply that Political Awareness (PA) and Perception of Gender Equality (PGE) are the strongest

predictors of political attitude amongst women in ANI. This indicates that education and gender-sensitive socialization have a role to play in helping women see politics as a non-distant and male-dominated sphere, but rather as a place of civic and self-expression (Sikdar and Sen, 2021; Kaur and Gupta, 2024) [20, 11].

Females with greater political consciousness have more confidence in the political institutions, and they tend to speak about the political matters and have more opinions about the governance, and engage in the practice of democracy by voting and joining student unions. These findings are in line with previous findings in mainland India, where civic awareness of women was positively correlated with participatory citizenship and empowerment (Chhibber and Sekhon, 2022; Kumar and Agrawal, 2023) [4, 12].

Equally, Perception of Gender Equality (PGE) became an important cognitive predictor of political participation. Females, who absorb the concepts of egalitarianism and see gender equality as a right to democracy, are more likely to favor the representation of women in politics and government bodies. This observation highlights the transformational role of education in disrupting conventional gender beliefs and creating the feeling of political agency (Ali and Khan, 2023) [1]. The perception of gender equality in Andaman and Nicobar Islands (the territory with the traditional hierarchies in community and with the lack of political exposure) is a psychological intermediary between individual empowerment and civic engagement.

Political Interest (PI) also showed a significant positive correlation with the political attitude which proves that interest and passion in political processes creates the increase of political efficacy. This is congruent to the study by Joshi and Paul (2022) [10], who hold that higher education women are also getting more active on both online and offline platforms in political discourse, thus challenging the conventional meaning of political participation. Nevertheless, although the interest in politics leads to awareness, at times it is curtailed by contextual barriers which include family influences, social expectations and inadequate access to political discussion in the islands.

Media Influence (MI) provided a moderate, though significant, positive impact which suggests that media exposure (especially the digital and social media) has a beneficial impact on increasing awareness and shaping the political views of women. Nonetheless, the research paper also admits that media influence may be two-sided. On the one hand, the digital media makes the information more democratic, which offers women alternative storylines and various perspectives (Mehta and Sharma, 2022) [13]. Gender-biased representations and uncontrollable flows of information, on the other hand, can skew the perception and reinforce the stereotypical images (Roy and Das, 2023) [19].

All these findings, in their entirety, support the idea that education, awareness and equitable representation are reinforcing factors that cultivate informed and participatory citizenship. The role of women in HEIs in ANI is not some passive consumer of political news, it is transforming to become an active democratizer.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the research has made a significant contribution to both the Political Socialization Theory. and Feminist Political Theory.

Political Socialization Theory

The paper validates that education is one of the agents of political socialization (Niemi & Hepburn, 2020) ^[15]. It gives women the mental abilities, interpretive patterns and active authority to discern and participate politically. The results are a continuation of the theory by demonstrating how socialization via formal education can be able to defy geographic isolation and cultural conservativeness—especially in remote regions such as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This proves that universities and colleges serve an important mediating function between personal consciousness and political identity in general.

Feminist Political Theory

The conclusions also support the Feminist Political Theory, which states that the gender inequality is not only a sociological problem but a structural constraint limiting political engagement (Banerjee, 2023) ^[2]. The influence of Perception of Gender Equality (PGE) on Political Attitude (PAT) is positive which supports feminist assumptions that political empowerment is initiated by self-reported equality and ability. It shows that empowerment is not institutional, in terms of quotas or representation only, but also psychological based on self-efficacy and political self-concept (Ali and Khan, 2023) ^[11].

Furthermore, this research contributes to a dual-dimensional approach to political attitude by combining both theories, which is also a cognitive (awareness and knowledge-based) and normative (value- and equality-based) approach to the problem. The combination of these dimensions creates a greater sense of the internalization and action of political opportunities among women.

5.3 Practical Implications

The results of the research have extensive implications on policy-making, higher education change, media, and the role of civil society in enhancing participation of women in politics. It is necessary to translate the theoretical knowledge into practical ideas so that the empowerment of women in political life could become not only a theoretical ambition but also a working reality.

Education policy wise, the findings highlight the need to incorporate civic and political literacy in the main curricula of higher institutions of learning. Institutions of higher learning, especially the ones which offer a course in the social sciences, teacher education and communication studies, ought to develop organized courses which would introduce the students to the basics of governance, democratic institutions and participatory citizenship. Experiential learning can be offered through student debate forums, mock parliaments and leadership development workshops which will enable the young women to feel confident to express their political opinions. In addition to that, the integration of gender-sensitization classes into the current academic programs can aid the process of breaking traditional stereotypes by supporting constitutional ideals of equality, justice and non-discrimination. These interventions would help in transforming higher education into a transformative location of producing knowledgeable, energetic, and gender-noticed citizens.

Regarding media policy and practice, the results imply that there is an immediate necessity in more equal and inclusive communication frameworks. Gender-sensitive media reporting conventions should be embraced by media

organizations to see to it that political reportages are balanced in terms of voice and experience of women and their views. By bringing more women journalists, editors, and commentators into the worlds of political reporting, one can play a key role in changing the discourse of political narrative building and sharing. Moreover, media literacy programs among the students need to be promoted in an era that upholds an overwhelming flow of digital information. Such programs can also empower women to participate more confidently and independently in politics by training them not only to evaluate online political material more critically, but also to identify misinformation and bias online.

On a governmental level, there should be proactive measures that can enhance the relationship between education and political participation. This can be achieved through the creation of mentorship and fellowship initiatives where young women who desire to be in political leadership are taken to help bridge the gap between the academics and the real world. These programs must be local, regional, and national in nature so that they can establish continuous avenues of political participation. The government must also invest in digital participation programs especially in geographically remote areas such as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands where the technological and informational differences are still considered as major obstacles to participation. Through the enhancement of digital infrastructure and access, policymakers can make sure that women living in the peripheral places do not lose national political discourses and chances.

The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups also play an inevitable role in promoting the political empowerment of women. NGOs may be crucial intermediaries between policy and practice through organization of political education camps, leadership training and forums of community discussion designed specifically to address women. These programs will be able to build political confidence in the grassroots and create a feeling of agency. Higher education institutions can collaborate with the local civic organizations to motivate women students to engage in local government activities, including panchayat meetings and city forums. These forms of collaboration not only encourage civic participation but also introduces the young women to the actual processes of governance systems, which improves their perception of participatory democracy.

And finally, institutional collaborations are needed in making sure that these initiatives are sustainable and scalable. The universities and colleges in Andaman and Nicobar Islands ought to forge long-term alliances with national and regional institutions like National Commission of Women, Election Commission of India and policy think tanks. Such partnerships might lead to collaborative research, advocacy, and outreach activities that will constantly bring about political knowledge and gender equality in the learning institutions. Also, their establishment of inter-institutional structures may enable the replication of effective models of civic education in other regions and their increased effectiveness beyond the islands. These interventions combined can establish a culture of inclusive democracy, where women do not perceive politics as a male dominated, elite space, but as a place where women can express themselves and have a voice in society. Through a combination of educational reform, gender-

sensitive media practices, enabling government programs and the involvement of the civil society, it can be achieved that a system where women political awareness can readily translate into active participation. By doing this, India will be brought a step nearer to the democratic principle of equal representation and full involvement of women as agents of change in politics.

6. Limitations and Future Scope

Although this research is informative and resourceful to the understanding of determinants of political attitudes of women in institutions of higher education in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI), some limitations should be made to give a backdrop and a sense of direction to the research. The initial limitation is the geographical theme of the study. The research was limited to specific socio-political environment of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which, in spite of the socio-cultural diversity, is also geographically remote. Therefore, they cannot be statewide applicable to the broader Indian population, where gender norms, political engagement levels, and social organizations are very different (Chhibber and Sekhon, 2022) ^[4]. Further studies can take a comparative approach that entails mainland universities or other peripheral states like Lakshadweep and the Northeast states so that a deeper insight can be made on the mediation of geography in socialization of politics.

The second weakness is the cross-sectional design that was used in this study. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method was very useful in offering strong information about the relationships between the variables, but it does not determine causality. Political attitudes are dynamic structures which are revealed in the process of constant socialization, changes in policies, and media coverage. Thus, longitudinal research would be of value to observe changes in political attitudes among women over time and how sustained exposure to education and online media changes the civic behavior with time (Hair *et al.*, 2021) ^[7].

Thirdly, the research utilized only the self-reported data, and it is prone to social-desirability bias. The respondents are likely to have exaggerated their political awareness or gender-equality perception on how they believe they should according to perceived societal requirements (Zhou and Li, 2022) ^[27]. In order to prevent this, future studies might combine several methods of data collection, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, or behavioral observations, to triangulate the obtained results and offer a more sensitive picture of the realistic patterns of political engagement.

The other limitation is related to constructs and moderating variables scope. Despite the fact that the study investigated four major predictors using the term Political Awareness (PA), Political Interest (PI), Media Influence (MI) and Perception of Gender Equality (PGE), it failed to incorporate other variables that could have been affecting the predictors like family ideology, economic independence, peer group influence or community participation. Further, education was only taken as a contextual factor and not as a moderator. Additional studies of the interaction of variables, including education level, socio-economic class, and urban/rural origin with awareness and interest in influencing political attitudes are possible in the future.

Another significant field in which to improve is cultural sensitivity and intersectionality. The present paper considered the category of women in a fairly homogeneous manner, which might fail to acknowledge the differences among caste, religion, ethnicity, and marital status (Yadav and Banerjee, 2023) ^[26]. Political perceptions are expected to be different in terms of cultural and ethnic forms in a place such as ANI that includes Indigenous Nicobarese people as well as settlers of various backgrounds. Future studies must, therefore, be taken to assume an intersectional feminist approach which considers interacting identities: e.g. the significance of the classes, community, and lingual origin on the political awareness of the female.

There are also specific measurement weaknesses that should be mentioned. Though the constructs employed in the study have a high internal consistency (Cronbachs 0.80 and above), the scale items were, in most cases, modified to fit the mainland Indian or international research. This way, minor semantic or contextual nuances that the environment of the island has may have been missed. To allow a more accurate reflection of local political realities, future researchers need to focus on the creation of context-specific scales that have been linguistically and culturally proven to be reliable within the peripheral and island populations.

Irrespective of these shortcomings, the research creates several promising avenues of the future research. An especially helpful addition would be the behavior of longitudinal and generational research to follow the formation of political attitudes among women throughout the cohorts, depending on the changes in exposure to education, access to the Internet, and feminist discourse (Srivastava, 2023) ^[23]. On the same note, comparative regional studies may be conducted to determine whether women in geographically remote regions as ANI behave differently in politics than their mainland counterparts. Additional research in the cross-national design in South and Southeast Asia would also be useful in determining how cultural and institutional influences mediate the participation of women in politics (Ali and Khan, 2023) ^[1].

Another area that future researchers can consider is the emerging trend of digital political activism whereby online platforms are becoming important in influencing civic engagement. The emergence of feminist activism, such as the movement of Women Lead India and other social media campaigns, underscores the fact that virtual space has been used as a platform to express and mobilize politics (Waghmare, 2024) ^[25]. The research on the translation of digital interactions into offline participation may contribute to the further insights on the topic of contemporary socialization of young women in politics.

Furthermore, intersectional feminist approach can also enable one to see the stratification of the political experiences of women through quantitative modeling and qualitative insights. Ethnographic fieldwork combined with other methods of data collection would be especially useful in facilitating the voices of deprived women, such as tribal or economically disadvantaged women (Banerjee, 2023) ^[2]. Studies of experimental and policy evaluation could also be conducted to determine the effect of particular interventions, e.g., civic education modules or mentorship program on improving political effectiveness of women. Academic-civil society-government institution partnerships would assist in implementing such findings to policy actionable recommendations (Kaur and Gupta, 2024) ^[11].

Lastly, the combination of the study framework with proven behavioral models, including the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba *et al.*, 2020) ^[24], would provide a better picture of the interaction of intention and motivation with structural factors to impact women political participation. As the theoretical integration and scope gets expanded, future studies will not only be able to enhance our knowledge of how women think about politics but build the empirical support of gender-inclusive policy-making.

To conclude, it is important to note that such limitations are what makes this research more methodologically transparent and academically sound. The recommendations presented here, ranging longitudinal exploration, digital activism, intersectional analysis, and experimental intervention, provide ample opportunities of refining future knowledge on gendered political behavior. Further studies in this field are also necessary to create a more comprehensive political science where women in the periphery areas are no longer seen as passive recipients of developmental work but as actors of democratic change and nation-building.

7. Conclusion

The study offers strong proofs that education, political awareness and the perception of gender equality are the combined factors that influence the political attitudes of women in institutions of higher learning in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. These findings validate the hypothesis that political awareness is used as a cognitive background to be engaged and that the perception of equality is used as a motivating factor to be involved.

The paper brings to the fore that HEIs are transformative spaces that produce informed, critical and empowered citizens. In such institutions, women do not only learn but also the political power to challenge, to discuss and to be in charge. The results thus contribute to the body of knowledge that the political attitudes are not static qualities but dynamic products of the learning environments, exposure to the media and gender experiences.

Amplification of civic education, enhancing digital literacy, and promotion of equality-based pedagogy are necessary measures in improving women participation in political life. Implications of the study are also the necessity of the further policy interventions and capacity-building programs that should be implemented beyond urban centers and to the peripheral boundaries of the territory such as ANI.

The role of digital political activism, intersectional identities, and regional differences in influencing political involvement of women should be investigated in future. Longitudinal research can also be used to investigate the impact of changing media environments and generational shifts on the political identities of women in the long run.

Finally, this paper concludes that political empowerment of women is not just a question of representation but the corner stone of the democratic stability and inclusive governance. Andaman and Nicobar Islands as the microcosms of diversity and change are very potent lenses through which the bigger project of gendered political empowerment in India can be rethought.

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