

Women's marginal role in politics with special reference to Assam

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Abstract:

Women's participation in mainstream political activities makes the system more democratic and has broadened the arena of governance in the country. Women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. The evolution of Indian democracy through the 15th general election so far has reflected a low representation of women in Parliament, state legislature, local self Govt., political parties, and other decision making bodies. Demographically according to the 2001 census, total population of the country was 102.70 corers. Out of this half of the population 49.5% were female. But the women have been politically marginalized in our country and most of them live restricted lives.

In the context of Assam, despite having a glorious history of the women of Assam, they could not occupy good position in decision making process and leading role in party politics. But, as a voter Assamese women showed a remarkable progress in the recent year. Almost 65% voters turn out. Assamese women have shown their faith on Indian democratic traditions. This study tried to highlight the marginal role of women in mainstream of politics.

Introduction:

Most of the countries in the world have failed to give due space and representation to women in politics. Even in societies where women enjoy more freedom in day to day living, they remain politically marginalized. The issue of women's political empowerment came to the forefront of the global debate for women's right at the time of the Fourth-World conference on woman held at Beijing in 1995. It declared "women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women equal participation in decision making is a demand for simple justice and necessary condition for women's interest to

be taken into account". Women's participation is important to strengthen democratic tradition, because, the success of a democratic system relies on the active participation of its people.

Hence, the constitution of India has provided equal rights and equal protection to all its citizens and prohibits discrimination on the basis of its gender, religion, race language class and cast. But the political participation of women is very low compared to men. Politics at every level of participation is dominated by men. Women have not been regarded as significant part of the political arena. The evolution of Indian democracy through the 15th general election so far has reflected a low representation of women in Parliament, state legislature, in political parties, and other decision making bodies. Demographically according to the 2001 census, total population of the country was 102.70 corers. Out of this half of the population 49.5% were female. But the women have been politically marginalized in our country and most of them live restricted lives. They are not allowed to have much of a voice even within their own family and communities decision making process. Women who consist of almost half of the population were remain away from the policy making and decision making process in different political institution. This is because of the fact that the male dominated society does not favoured their participation in politics. But it does not mean that they do not have interest in it. Women who are able to acquire decision making power are mostly from urban and elite groups. Today many women are well educated and are now into different profession. They have their leadership qualities, have the capacities to manage the team and handle the problems tactfully. Even the women are more honest descent, and less corrupt in comparisons to male politicians. In this modern society the women now began to compete with man in every sector. This change has brought up new light in the life of women. In Universities and colleges the percent of women enrollment has increased over the decades and this shows the change in the mind set of the parents in educating their female children. But, they are marginalized in political participation. Political participation is not just casting of vote , it includes wide range of other activities like membership of political party, electoral campaigning, attending party meeting, demonstration, communication with leaders, holding party position, contesting election, membership in representative bodies, influencing decision making and other related activities.

By the 73rd and 74th amendment of the constitution parliament had implemented a new law to reserve one third of the total number of seats for women at the panchayat and zilla parishad level in rural area and municipalities in urban area. The United Front govt. in their “Common Minimum program started its section entitled ‘social justice’ with the declaration that one third (33%) of the membership in parliament and state legislature’s will be reserved for women. By this, different national parties like B.J.P., Congress, Janata Dal and even two communist parties also included in their election manifesto with promising to give 33 percent reservation seat for women(1996).

Objectives:

The main objective of this paper is to highlight the marginal role of women in representation and decision making process of politics,

Secondly, there has been made an attempt to observe the role of the Assamese women in political participation in the post independent period.

Methodology:

The study tries to cover the role of the women of Assam in post independent politics as a decision maker, contestants and voters in M.P. election, State Assembly election and Panchayat election. Most of the data is based on secondary data. The data was collected from books, journals, magazine, status report and election commission records. The historical analysis and observational method are employed to analysis the role of women in Indian politics with special reference to Assam.

Political participation of women in pre-Independent period:

The struggle for liberation marked beginning of a political awakening among women in India. The participation of women in politics initially began with the joining of Gandhian swadeshi movement in Bengal (1905-08). Thousands of women joined in Salt Satyagraha which generally remarked as the first time ‘masses of Indian women’ got involved in the struggle for independence. In 1917 a delegation of Indian women submitted a memorandum to British govt. demanding the right to franchise for them. Finally the British Govt. provided right to vote to

women only for the propertied and educated classes. They again demanded 5% reservation for women in the legislature and by the Govt. of India Act 1935, it increased the number of women legislator. During independent movement the independent leaders like Sarojini naidu, Vijoy Lakshmi Pandit, Rajkumary Amrit Kaur and Aruna Asaf Ali were played a decisive role in the freedom of struggle. The Women of Assam were not far behind than their counterpart. Women leaders like Hemanta Kumari Devi, Nalini Bala Devi, Chandraprova Saikia, Sumitra Bhattacharya, Kiranmayee Agarwalla, Shrijuta Rajabala Das, Swarnalata Barua and so on took a great role in the struggle of Independent India. Kanaklata, Bhageswari Phukan, Khahuli Nath also displayed an unimaginable state courage in the independent struggle.

Participation of women in general election:

Despite having the great role in politics of pre-independent period the number of participation of women in politics remained very low in post independent period. It can be cleared from the following table.

Table: 1.1 Participation of women in parliamentary general elections from 1952-2009.

Year of Election	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2009
Number	22	27	34	31	22	19	28	44	27	39	40	44	49	69
Percent	4.4	5.4	6.7	5.9	4.2	3.4	5.1	8.1	5.2	7.0	7.3	8.0	9.0	12.02

Source: Election Commission of India's

The table shows the percentage of women in Lok Sabha in relation to the total number of seat. In the first general election their strength was only 22(4.4%) in the house. It increased slightly up to 34(6.7%) in 1962, it again declined to 19(3.4%) in the year 1977 election, the lowest ever. However, in 2009 it crossed its highest level, 69(12.02%) members. This table shows very low percentage of women in representing Lok Sabha.

Political participation of women of Assam in parliament:

Despite having a glorious history of the women of Assam, they could not occupy good position in decision making process. They are still lagging behind the male counterpart.

Table: 1.2. Participation of women of Assam in Lok Sabha elections from 1952 to 2009

Yr. of election	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1999	2004	2009
Participant	2	2	3	2	3	3	2	0	0	7	9	9	4	11
Winner	0	2	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	2
Pc.	0	14.3	14.3	7.1	7.1	14.	0	0	0	0	7.1	14.	00	14.3

Source: Election Commission of India's

This table shows the percentage of Assamese women in Lok Sabha in relation to the total number of seat of Assam. Assam has 14 lok Sabha seats and 7 for the Rajay Sabha. It is clear from the data that since 1957 the percentage of the participant of Assamese women in Lok sabha is almost same. In the first general election of 1952, two ladies were contested in Lok sabha seat but both were defeated in the election. In 1957 again the two women candidates were contested in Lok sabha election and both of them were managed to win the election. In the next Lok sabha election of 1967, out of two one (7.1%) was elected. The mid-term election 1971, were contested by three ladies but only one could win the election. In 1977 out of 14 seats only 3 candidates were contested in Lok Sabha election and 2(14.3%) could manage to win the election. Interestingly from 1980 to 1989 not a single female candidate forwarded their candidature. Again, in 1991 election the number of women candidate increased up to 7 but no one got elected. Both in 1996 and 1999 election 9 female candidates contested in election, in the first one and in the second 2 were managed to win respectively. In the next election 2004 only six candidates forwarded their candidature but none could win. Women's representation increased in 2009 general election, whereas out of 169 candidates 11 were female and 2 could manage to win the election. Since 1952 not more than 2(14.3%) women candidate could able to occupy the Lok

Sabha seat from Assam which shows very low percentage of women in comparisons to male representation.

In case of representation of Rajya Sabha, the number of women candidate is very low. Both in 1994 and 1996 election, just the single female member represented in the upper House In the present Rajya Sabha not single women is there.

Political participation of women of Assam at legislature:

Assam has 126 constituencies but the participation of women in state legislature compared to its male counterpart is very low.

Table: 1.3. Participation of women of Assam in State assembly elections from 1952 to 2011

Yr.of Election	1952	1957	1962	1967	1972	1978	1985	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011
Male contestant	449	304	402	486	510	N/A	1124	242	1012	861	927	8969
Female contestant	6	8	6	9	12	20	29	7	17	55	70	85
Female winner	2	5	4	6	8	1	-5	5	6	10	13	14
Percent of female	1.58	3.96	3.17	4.76	6.43	.79	3.96	3.96	4.76	7.93	10.32	10.4

Sources: Election Commission of India

This table shows percentage of women participant in state Assembly election in relation to the total number of seat. The first assembly election was held in Assam at 1952. In the first election of independent India six women filed nomination. Out of six women only two (1.58%) were elected. In 1957 the number of women candidate increased up to 8 and five were successful. The third general election was held in 1962; six candidates contested and all of them were elected. In 1967 election there was a definite improvement in the position of women so far as the Assembly election was concerned. The nine female candidates contested in election and 6(4.67%) could manage to win the election .The fifth Assembly election was held in 1972, 12

women contested the election to the legislative assembly and 8(6.43%) could manage to win the election.. The percentage of winner slightly increased from 1.58% (2) in 1952 to 6.43% (8) in 1972. It again declined to .79% (1) in 1997 election which is the lowest ever. The number of women contestant in 1996 election increased up to 45 and 6 (4.76%) could manage to win the election. In the assembly election of 2006, out of 927 male 70 were female candidates and 13(10.32%) were elected. In the last assembly election of 2011, out of 981 candidates the total number of male candidates was 896 where as the number of women candidates was only 85, which is highest ever in the long history of state assembly election among them only 14(10.4%) could managed to win the election. This table shows very less number of female candidates in comparison to male contestants of state assembly election. They could not able to fill up the 33% reservation seat of women.

Political participation of woman in panchayat level:

India is a federal country. Article 40 of the constitution indicates the decentralization and the distribution of power between the central and state with the provision of establishment of Village panchayat. Again the 73rd and 74th amendment of the constitution provided the constitutional status to the local bodies and also empowering women with 33% reservation of seat in the local bodies. The panchayat election of 2002 witnessed a large number of women participation with 34 elected members. Out of 2,478 candidates, 821 women candidates joined as the President of Gao panchayat and out of 24,870 8 members, 8 210 women candidates joined as the member of Gao Panchayat. Out of 2,487 members were Anchalik Panchayat and 129 became the membfr of Zilla Parishat. The percentage is 33% while in the all India level it was only 31.32%. The 2006 panchayat election shown the slight increase in the number of representation of the local level of Govt. out of 23453 representations in panchayat 8977(38%) were female. In Anchalic or block level, 791(36.83%) women represented as member of Anchalic panchayat and 135(34.62%) represented as the member of Zilla parichat. Though, the number of women participant in local self Govt is better than the women representation in Assembly and Lock Saba election. In comparison to male representation it is very low; it just managed to cross the 33% quota of women reservation seat

Women as a voter:

Since the first election the number of woman voter is very impressive. According to the 2001 census report, out of 174, 43,617 the total number of women voters were 84, 31,467 and it constituted approximately 40% of the total voters. However, in the legislative election of 2006 women voters increased up to 70%,. The percentage of women voters of the 2006 assembly election was 74.96% as compared to 76.64% of male voters. The voter of national level election is also high in Assam; their average percentage is 66.80% in 15th Lok Sabha election.

Though the percentage of women voters increased considerably, still they are lagging behind the decision making power. They are still regarded as the second citizen of state. Politics at every level of participation is dominated by men.

Causes of marginalization of woman in politics:

In independent India, politics has proved to be very inhospitable for Indian women. One important reason for the extreme gender discrimination which results even veteran women politician feel by passed and ignored. For new entrance discrimination makes it very difficult for them to establish a foothold without patronage from powerful man in the party.

Another cause of low representation of women in legislative bodies is the well tradition of nature of their domestic responsibility and workload of women. It made them extremely hard for them to spare more time for politics. Thus women are handicapped from getting critical information which man pick up easily from casual gossip with all kind of people. They are handicapped in politics because they cannot cultivate close association with man without jeopardizing this position in the family. The few women who have developed an independent political base and are able to compete with man in electoral politics are mostly single or widowed, for example Uma Bharati of B.J.P, Mamta Banarjee, Maneka Gandhi and many. These women are to give their full time attention to politics because there is no man to hold them back.

Illiteracy is another reason of marginalization of women in village level politics where as the govt. has provided one third reservation seat for women in panchayoti level. Because of their inefficiency they cannot function effectively. The Sarkari panchayat also have been integrated into the vast bureaucratic net work who defined the parameter of the panchayats role. These less

educated women feel difficult for them when they need to deal with the impenetrable maze of the bureaucratic world.

Conclusion: The trends indicate women's representation in politics requires special consideration. The omissions of women from position of power seriously affect the ability to challenge the subordination of women in all manifestation. Women who consist of almost half of the population of the country need to be represented significantly in decision making bodies. They have to overcome the evil customs, traditional life style and mind set of the people to provide social justice. Gender equality is very essential to achieve the goal of development. In this regard, it can be said that the imparting of proper education, political training and awareness enable the women to face any challenges of life and to take active participation in mainstream politics.

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