

## Political Participation and Women: A Study of Assam

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### Abstract

Democracy can be considered to be a fundamental part of human development. It is the indicator of human development and fundamental for it. Democracy meets the goals of wider development of the society. In Democracy people including all man and women have an active role in choosing their representatives in a free and fair manner. It is in the democracy that people enjoy equality, equal opportunity all over and can participate in the affairs of the government and give a society which free from discrimination. However, as against this basic notion of democracy it is found that in a country like India women are excluded from different walks of life, more visibly in politics. Though consist of almost half of the total population of the country women are still remaining away from the policy making and decision-making process. Even after seven decades of Indian independence participation of women at the national, state and even local level politics is very miserable. Assam, a north-eastern state of India is of no exception in this regard. Keeping this in view an attempt has been made here to explore the extent of participation of women in political activities as well as the factors that prevent them from participating in the politics. The findings of the study are reflecting the nature of participation of women in Assam and to conduct the study data has been collected from secondary sources like articles, research papers, newspapers, internet etc. The study observes that the participation of women in the political activities is not satisfactory as compared to men. Though the reservation facilities extended by the government at the grassroots level have improved the participation of women, but such participation is not voluntary rather most of the women elected representatives are regarded as substitute to their male counterpart. The male members of their family are actually regulating their decisions as well participation. Along with this low level of literacy and income are also contributing to their exclusion. The involvement of the non-governmental organizations to aware women, mandatory training of the women elected representatives and above all government initiatives can only boost the participation.

**Key Words: Political Participation, Women Reservation, Policy making**

## Introduction

Democracy can be considered to be a fundamental part of human development. It is the indicator of human development and fundamental for it. Democracy meets the goals of wider development of the society. In Democracy people have an active role in choosing their representatives in a free and fair manner. It is in the democracy that people enjoy equality, equal opportunity all over and can participate in the affairs of the government and give a society which free from discrimination. Participation of the people is an essential ingredient for the success of democracy. It is observed that to develop a country like India it is pertinent that all the people both men and women should come together and actively participate in the political process of the government. Political participation is the hallmark of a democratic setup. Success and effectiveness of democracy largely depend on the extent to which equal, effective and actual participation is provided by the system to all its citizens both men and women. As women comprise about half of the population, this section of society requires due attention in the system and a due share in process. Women's along with men active participation in political affairs in a democracy is crucial and necessary because it provides legitimacy to the system and also strengthens the democratic fabric.<sup>1</sup> Democracy will fail in its objectives if women citizens lack equal opportunity to participate in the governmental decision-making process. They are to be equal partners in the nation-building and political development. Women's participation in politics of any country gives a strong message globally not only in terms of equality and freedom of liberty but also in the space provided for women in the democratic framework of electoral politics. There cannot be a real democracy if the voices and issues of women that constitute half the population of the country are ignored or sidelined. The participation of women and their engagement in electoral process is an important marker of the maturity and efficiency of democracy in any country. So, it means that in developing the society women play a pivotal role and they

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<sup>1</sup> Archana Sarma, 'Development and Women in the Functioning of Political Parties: A Case Study of Assam in Global Context' retrieved from [http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/paper\\_5184.pdf](http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/paper_5184.pdf) on 15th Sep 2016.

should participate more in the decision-making process of the country. But unfortunately it is seen in our country that women are not given equal status with men. They face many constraints in participating in the affairs of the government<sup>2</sup>. So, it is in this context the objective of the present study is to explore the extent of participation of the women in the political activities in the state of Assam and also try to find out the factors that prevent them from participating in the affairs of the politic in the state of Assam. For conducting the present study data has been collected from secondary sources like articles, research papers, journals, internet etc.

**Political Participation:** Political participation has been defined in various ways. Political participation means not only exercising the right to vote, but also active involvement in the decision-making process at all the levels of governance. It is an essential ingredient of human development. It refers to the people's active involvement in particular projects or programmes that are adopted for the benefits of the society. Active participation enables people to gain access to a much broader range of opportunities. It also refers to the voluntary involvement of all the people in the formulation as well as implementation of various governments' policies and programmes for the benefit of the society. Political participation does not only mean to casting votes during election rather it includes wider range of activities like participating in election campaign, having membership in various political parties, contesting election etc. Participation helps the individual to be effective and associates him with the political system. It is an essential element for the success of democratic form of governance. It provides the people with ample of opportunities to take active part in the functioning of governance and also make the government responsible for their act of omission and commission. The International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences defined political participation as the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled. It signifies such proceedings like voting, seeking information,

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<sup>2</sup> Ira Das, 'Status of Women: North Eastern Region of India versus India' in International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Volume 3, Issue 1, January 2013 1 ISSN 2250-3153, retrieved from [www.ijsrp.org/research-paper-1301/ijsrp-p1322.pdf](http://www.ijsrp.org/research-paper-1301/ijsrp-p1322.pdf) on 15th Sep 2016.

discussing and proselytising, attending meetings, contributing financially and communicating with representatives. Many writers have rightly argued that political participation of citizens is the distinguishing mark of modern states. More than anything else, the modern state is distinguished from the traditional ones by the extent to which people participate in politics.' High levels of political participation are usually associated with democracy, which is beneficial both to the individual and to the society. Political participation has been considered as a 'sine qua non' of democracy.<sup>3</sup>

**Women's Reservation Bill:** The Women's Reservation Bill, which proposes to reserve 33 percent of seats in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies was introduced in Lok Sabha by the United Front government of HD Deve Gowda in 1996. The main aim of the introduction of this Bill was to bring the women to participate in the mainstream of politics, to involve themselves in all the affairs of the government as well as to encourage them to contest election for both parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. According to this bill, the reservation of the seats will be on rotational basis. Vajpayee government pushed for the bill in Lok Sabha but it still wasn't passed. UPA-I government, led by Congress, again introduced the bill to reserve seats for women in Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies in May 2008. After its reintroduction, the bill was passed by Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010, but was still left pending in Lok Sabha.<sup>4</sup> Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010, took a 'historic and giant step' by voting (191 for and 1 against) to amend the Constitution, providing 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies.

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<sup>3</sup> M.V Georgekutty, Political Participation and Women in India, chapter iii, 2010. Retrieved from [shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/189/3/12\\_chapter2.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/189/3/12_chapter2.pdf) on 16<sup>th</sup> Sep 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Women's Reservation Bill: All you need to know about the bill which will bring 33 percent reservation for women in Lok Sabha., retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/women-s-reservation-bill-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-bill-which-is-yet-to-be-passed-in-lok-sabha-1653451-2020-03-07>

It is provided in bill that one-third of all seats on the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will be reserved for women.

### **Political Participation of Women in Assam:**

In the context of political participation in the state of Assam, women's role is very miserable. Though the government of India as well as the government of Assam have taken various measures to improve the participation of women in the decision-making process but unfortunately the result is not satisfactory. It has been illustrated from the study of available literatures that the representation of women in the state legislative assembly of Assam is very less. They cannot occupy a good position in decision making process and leading role in party politics of the state of Assam. They always keep themselves aside from the mainstream of politics. It has also been found that in all the legislative assembly elections and all the Lok Sabha elections in Assam from 1952 the number of female contestants is very lower in compare to male contestants. There is a wide gap between number of elected male and number of elected female. Even if some of women try to participate in politics but because of male dominance over political parties they do not get chance to participate in the political activities. They have to face so many problems and criticisms while entering the politics. Lesser women are seen in holding key positions in the political arena in the state of Assam. Similarly, in the local level of government in Assam also women's participation is very scanty. Though in some of the village panchayats in Assam, it was seen that some of the women contested election and got elected but their role is very nominal. Most of them do not know all the activities of the government because they always confined themselves to the household activities. It has also been found that though the reservation facilities extended by the government at the grassroots level have improved the participation of women, but such participation is not voluntary rather most of the women elected representatives are regarded as substitute to their male counterpart.<sup>5</sup> The male members of their family are actually regulating their decisions as well participation. Apart from political parties and Parliament,

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<sup>5</sup> Parismita Borah, 'Political Participation of Women in North-East India with Special Reference to Assam after Independence' in *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Science Society and Culture*, Vol.1 Issue.2 Dec. 2015 retrieved from [ijirssc.in/pdf/1451502078.pdf](http://ijirssc.in/pdf/1451502078.pdf) on 18<sup>th</sup> Sep 2016.

women are also seriously under-represented in other spheres of decision-making process in the state of Assam.

**Obstacles in Women's Political Participation in Assam:** There are many reasons which create hurdles in the participation of women in the politics of Assam such as patriarchal context, the existing societal value system, the private-public divide in terms of domain identification and male preponderance in political institutions. For conducting any activities they have to depend upon the male members of their family. Beside that women do not get adequate financial support from the political parties to contest the elections. Due to unequal distribution of resources they do not occupy a strong position in the politics as well as also unable to avail sufficient political training. Societal and cultural norms and customs also prevent them from participating in the politics. Similarly, poverty is another hurdle in the realisation of women's involvement in the politics. It has also been found in the study of available literature that the lack of political wills also one of important reasons for the non participation of women in politics.. Similar condition is found in case of those Hindu women elected representatives who did not attend the meetings. Their health status is also a major constraint in women's participation. From the study of **Mamata Narzary's "Women's marginal role in politics with special reference to Assam"** it has been depicted that the cause of low representation of women in politics is the well tradition of nature of their domestic responsibility and workload of women. It made extremely hard for them to spare more time for politics. Thus women are handicapped from getting all the information which man pick up easily from casual gossip with all kind of people. These result the non participation women in the politics of Assam as well as in India.

**Conclusion:**

So, from the above study it has been observed that the participation of women in the politics of Assam is not satisfactory as compare to the men. They are still remaining away from the policy making and decision-making process in the state of Assam. Participation of women in politics is an important means to overcome social maladies and also essential for the development of

the society. Women look at development in a different perspective and hence, they can play a vital role in the development process. So, the development of the society cannot be realised unless the women participate in greater extent in the affairs of the politics. So, to increase their participation it is important to give educational training programmes to the women related to politics and at the same time they should be provided with proper economic resources so that they can also contest election as per with the men. It is also suggested that the elected women in each district in the state of Assam may develop a network among them and hold meetings and discussions on routine basis about necessary measures to promote their participation and neutralize male domination in the politics. Besides, the involvement of the non-governmental organizations to aware women, women organisations and above all government initiatives can only boost the participation of the women in the politics.

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