

RGICS



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RGICS BRIEF
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF
WOMEN IN ASSAM

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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN ASSAM

LACK OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The nature of society or state has a decisive impact on the extent and effectiveness of women’s political presence and participation. Notions of democracy, governance and the state are often not gender neutral constructs but result from both historical factors and experiences. The state and its organizational entities reflect the same social forces as other social organizations. It is thus necessary to examine the gender balance in women’s participation in the political process, decision making and policy formulation.i

Where women constitute half the population their lack of space for participation and representation in political bodies has not only resulted in their presence in meagre numbers in these decision making bodies but also in the neglect of their issues and experiences in policy making. The number of women parliamentarians has never exceeded 15 per cent of all seats. At the state level, their membership in the legislatures is abysmally low, lower than their numbers in the parliament.ii This signifies deep flaws in **Indian political democracy**.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN DEMOCRACY

The evolution of Indian democracy through the 14 general elections so far has reflected a low representation of women in Parliament, State legislatures, in political parties and other decision-making bodies. Less than 8% of Parliamentary seats, less than 6% Cabinet positions, less than 4% of seats in High Courts and the Supreme Court, have been occupied by women. Less than 3% of the administrators and managers are women.

Women Representation in General Elections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 1952 –1980 women’s participation increased by 12% against the turnout of men which increased by only 6%. • In the general elections of 2004, the all India percentage of women voter turnout was 48%. As regards women voters’ turnout, from 37.1 per cent in the first general elections in 1952 it increased gradually over the years to 55.6 by 1999. • The gap between female and male voters was 15.9 per cent in 1952, but it decreased slowly over successive elections and came down to 8.4 per cent in 1996. It has remained at 8.3 per cent in 2004 general elections.

Source: “Political Participation and Representation of Women in Indian Politics” by Malathi Subramanian

It is worth noting that the political mobilization of women and their participation in elections has steadily increased since the first General Elections of 1952. The percentage increase in the turnout of women in elections has however not translated into a larger number of women being represented in the legislative bodies. Competitive elections and democracy has not necessarily led to better political representation of women in Indian politics. The candidates fielded by the various political parties are still predominantly male and women account for only five to ten percent of all candidates across parties and regions.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN ASSAM

Participation of Women of In Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha						
Year	Members in Lok Sabha			Members in Rajya Sabha		
	No. of Seats	No. of Women	Percentage	No. of Seats	No. of Women	Percentage
1952-57	499	22	4.4	219	16	7.3
1957-62	500	27	5.4	237	18	7.6
1962-67	503	34	6.7	238	18	7.6
1967-71	523	31	5.9	240	20	8.3
1971-76	521	22	4.2	243	17	7.0
1977-80	544	19	3.4	244	25	10.2
1980-84	544	28	5.1	244	24	9.8
1985-90	544	44	8.1	245	28	11.4
1990-91	529	28	5.3	245	24	9.7
1991-96	509	36	7.1	245	38	15.5
1996-97	537	34	6.3	245	20	8.2
1997-98	545	40	7.3	245	19	7.8
1998-99	545	44	8.1	245	19	7.8
1999-till date	545	48	8.8	245	20	8.2

Source: Election commission of India

On the whole the representation of women in Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) and the State Assemblies remains low.

WOMEN AS CONTESTANTS					
Year	Males	%	Females	%	Total
1952	1831	97.71	43	2.29	1874
1980	4478	96.93	142	3.07	4620
1984	5149	96.91	164	3.09	5313
1991	8374	96.26	325	3.74	8699
1996	13353	95.71	599	4.29	13952
1998	4708	94.56	271	5.44	4979

Source: Women in India – A statistical Profile, 1997, Department Of Women and Child Development, New Delhi
Election Commission of India

Women Representation in Decision Making Bodies

- Women secured less than 8% of Parliamentary seats, less than 6% Cabinet positions in the 14th general elections.
- Less than 4% of seats in High Courts and the Supreme Court have been occupied by women.
- Less than 3% of the administrators and managers are women.
- The average percentage of women’s representation in the Parliament, Assemblies and Council of Ministers taken together has been around 10%.

Source: “Political Participation and Representation of Women in Indian Politics” by Malathi Subramanian

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The lower political participation among women reduces the influence of women in the formulation of public policies, which is therefore a cause for concern. **On the basis of sex ratio which is 1000: 943 according to 2011 census** we can say that women are still fighting for their right to survival. So, there is an urgent need to create awareness among the people, particularly among the women to eradicate the evils of the society. They have to overcome the evils customs, traditional lifestyle in order to bringing socio-political changes. In this context it needs mention here that providing education to the women can change the present scenario. Lastly, the lack of interest from the political party, low status of education, low level of information, mobility, economic inequality and lack of proper training barred women to take active participation in mainstream politics despite having their interest in it.iii

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN NORTH-EASTERN STATE LEGISLATURES

Assam (2011)				
	No. of Male	No. of Female	Percentage of Female	Total
No. Of Contestants	896	85	8.66	981
Elected	112	14	11.11	126
Forfeited Deposits	629	57	8.31	686
Arunachal Pradesh(2009)				
	Male	Female	Percentage of Female	Total
No. Of Contestants	148	9	5.73	157
Elected	58	2	3.33	60
Forfeited Deposits	34	1	2.86	35
Meghalaya (2013)				
	Male	Female	Percentage of Female	Total
No. Of Contestants	320	25	7.25	345
Elected	56	4	6.67	60
Forfeited Deposits	172	10	5.49	182
Manipur (2012)				
	Male	Female	Percentage of Female	Total
No. Of Contestants	264	15	5.38	279
Elected	57	3	5.00	60
Forfeited Deposits	119	12	9.16	131
Mizoram (2008)				
	Male	Female	Percentage of Female	Total
No. Of Contestants	197	9	4.37	206
Elected	40	0	0.00	40
Forfeited Deposits	87	6	6.45	93
Nagaland (2013)				
	Male	Female	Percentage of Female	Total

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No. Of Contestants	185	2	1.07	187
Elected	60	0	0.00	60
Forfeited Deposits	46	1	2.13	47
Sikkim (2009)				
	Male	Female	Percentage of Female	Total
No. Of Contestants	152	15	8.98	167
Elected	28	4	12.50	32
Forfeited Deposits	96	10	9.43	106
Tripura(2013)				
	Male	Female	Percentage of Female	Total
No. Of Contestants	234	15	6.02	249
Elected	55	5	8.33	60
Forfeited Deposits	121	7	5.47	128

Source: Election Commission of India's Website (www.eci.gov.in)

The table clearly reflects that among the NE states in terms of women participation Assam occupied a better position. Mizoram and Nagaland have the worst performance. In the all states of NE region the politics is dominated by the male. **Meghalaya being a matriarchal society has a very low women political participation. It signifies their lack of power in decision-making process. Also despite having better education scenario, better sex ratio and higher independence, political participation of women in all states in the region is utterly low.**

Literacy Rate in the Northeastern States				
State	Literacy	Male	Female	% Change
Arunachal Pradesh	65.38	72.55	53.52	11.04
Assam	72.19	77.85	63.00	8.94
Manipur	79.21	86.06	71.73	8.68
Meghalaya	74.43	75.95	71.88	11.87
Mizoram	91.33	93.35	86.72	2.53
Nagaland	79.55	82.75	70.01	12.96
Tripura	87.22	91.53	78.98	14.03
Sikkim	81.42	86.55	66.39	12.61
India	74.04	82.14	65.46	8.66

Source: Census 2011

Sex ratio in the Northeastern States	
State	Sex ratio
Arunachal Pradesh	938
Assam	958
Manipur	992
Meghalaya	989
Mizoram	976

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Nagaland	931
Tripura	960
Sikkim	890
India	943

Source: Census 2011

The under representation of women in the political sphere is inextricably linked with the low and inferior status of women in society in India especially in the context of the declining sex ratio, increasing violence and crimes against women and their marginalized status in employment, education and health sectors.

The mechanisms to facilitate and protect women in political participation are not in place, such as:

- a strong supportive constituency particularly for women,
- increased awareness of their rights and responsibilities as elected members, training and information dissemination on governance processes,
- Gender sensitization of the male members, and so on.

In the absence of these mechanisms, women would become subject to negative experiences like no-confidence motions moved against women presidents and at times coercion. In the process, women may experience a backlash, which may act as an overall deterrent to their future career prospects and re-entry into politics.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN OF ASSAM IN PARLIAMENT:

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.

Participation of Women of Assam in Lok Sabha Elections from 1952 to 2009														
Year 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	0	14.3

Source: Election Commission of India

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 Rajya Sabha seats. Following are the major observations:

- Between 1952 and 1980, the percentage of the participation of Assamese women in Lok Sabha remained almost same. Since 1952 not more than 2(14.3%) women candidate were able to occupy the Lok Sabha seat from Assam which shows very low percentage of women in comparisons to male representation.
- In the first general election of 1952, the two ladies who contested in Lok Sabha seat were defeated. In 1957, the two women candidates who contested in Lok Sabha election managed to win.
- 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. In 1996, 1 out of 9 contestants won. In 1999, the corresponding figure was 2 out of 9.

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- In the next election 2004 only six candidates forwarded their candidature but none could win. Women's representation increased in 2009 general election, where out of 169 candidates 11 were female and 2 could manage to win the election.
- In case of representation in Rajya Sabha, the number of women candidates is very low.^v

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.

Participation of Women of Assam in State Assembly Elections from 1952 to 2011												
Year 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
% of Female	1.58	3.96	3.17	4.76	6.43	0.79	3.96	3.96	4.76	7.93	10.32	10.4

Source: Election Commission of India

This table shows percentage of women participant in State Assembly election in relation to the total number of seats. Following are the major observations:

- While the percentage of female elected representatives was only 1.58% in the first assembly election of 1952, it increased to 10.4% in 2011. The number of female contestants has also increased greatly from 6 in 1952 to 85 in 2011.
- While the percentage of female elected representatives was 6.43% in 1972, it suddenly dropped to 0.79% in 1978. The following years witnessed a gradual increase in the percentage of female elected representatives.
- 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.^{vi}

REPRESENTATION THROUGH RESERVATION

Various strategies have been proposed to augment political representation of women in India. Apart from reservation of 33% seats at various levels including the Parliament, it has also been suggested that political parties reserve 33% of their seats for women in the elections. However, it has been questioned whether women constitute an undifferentiated category and whether collective identification and mobilization of women as a 'disadvantaged' group in general on the basis of gender is a viable proposition in the politically accepted sense of the term particularly in view of caste and class differences among them.

Mere presence of women in Parliament irrespective of numbers will not mean much unless they are truly representative of women's concerns across all categories. In the ongoing debate about reservation of seats for women in the Parliament it has been pointed out that an undifferentiated reservation for women will reinforce the existing inequalities in women's access to positions of power.^{vii}

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Those in favour of reservation, argue that there is no doubt that democracy and representation will be strengthened with compulsorily more presence of women through reservation. This is evident from the impact of the implementation of 33% reservation of seats for women in the local bodies (panchayats) in India by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment as a result of which the representation of women in the formal structures of governance at the local level has recorded a steady increase.

Women's presence at the decision making levels will bring a different, explicitly female perspective to the political arena. The recognition of the right of every citizen to participate in public decisions is a basic element of democracy, which, to be effective, requires that the needs and interests of all members of the society are respected and represented. Even if others might claim to represent them, there is no guarantee of justice and equity if half of the population is consistently excluded from taking part fully in decision making as is the case with women in Indian politics and governance. There is therefore need for more inclusive processes of achieving representation.viii

Prepared By:
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ⁱMalathi Subramanian , Political Participation and Representation of Women in Indian Politics
http://www.du.ac.in/fileadmin/DU/Academics/course_material/hrge_08.pdf

ⁱⁱBaseline Report on Women and Political Participation in India , Prepared by NIAS et al and coordinated by IWRAW Asia Pacific,
http://www.iwraw-ap.org/aboutus/pdf/FPwomen_and_pol_pax.pdf

Dipankar Saikia, "Political Participation of Assamese Women" accessed from <http://www.articlesbase.com/womens-issues-articles/political-participation-of-assamese-women-4652363.html>

^{iv} Baseline Report on Women and Political Participation in India, op.cit.

^v Women's marginal role in politics with special reference to Assam, <http://www.grmglaranya.com/Journals/8th%20issue/6.pdf>

^{vi} Women's marginal role in politics with special reference to Assam, <http://www.grmglaranya.com/Journals/8th%20issue/6.pdf>

^{vii} Political Participation and Representation of Women in Indian Politics, op.cit.

^{viii} Political Participation and Representation of Women in Indian Politics, op.cit.