

Political Participation of Women in Local Democracy: A study of Dhubri District in Assam

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Abstract: *Democracy is a form of government that advocates equality for all classes of people, including women. But the ground reality in India is different from the ideal situation described in Indian democracy. The Assam Government passed the amendment law for introducing one-third reservations for women including Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribes (SC/ST) women. The present paper is an attempt to examine the political participation of women in Local Democracy in Assam. The main objective of this paper is to find out the involvement and participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institution. Despite many policies for women's participation in politics, however, women's political participation at the local level in Assam is unusually low. The present paper is based on Women's participation in local Democracy at three levels i.e. Gram Panchayat at the lower level, Anchalik Panchayat at the intermediate level, and Zilla Parishad at the apex level. The primary data has been collected from Development Block Agomani of Dhubri District as per the 2018 Panchayat election in Assam. Out of the 130 Gram panchayats 50% seats are reserved for women and 3 GPs have been also reserved for scheduled caste women. All the representatives are directly elected by the voters as per the government rules and regulations. The findings of the paper are to indicate that the level of women's participation in the political situation in Assam is quite low, so there is a greater need for women's encouragement and independence to ensure more speculation.*

Key words: *Human rights, Gender equality, Patriarchal system, Political situation, Reservation for women*

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I. INTRODUCTION:

To make a democracy successful woman's participation in National and local politics is very much essential. In every country women participation in politics, economy, an academic, and in the media played an important role in the world economy. A country cannot be developed if it neglects women's participation in any sphere of life, because true democracy is based on the realization of human rights and gender equality. Not only that the true democracy must be based on checks and balances and accountability of institutions that allow women to seek redress when their rights are violated.

The issue like women's identity-question or the challenges of a patriarchal system, sex oppression and sexual liberation of women, heterosexuality/homosexuality, the male biases, and the phallogocentric curriculum in education were not and still now not considered with gravity. The problems of women in India are more acute. There is a wide gap of communication or sisterhood between a small section of educated women and the group of women masses mainly illiterate, scattered and divided by caste/cast-like/religious groups. Most of the women's organizations act as a wing of a political party where gender exploitation is gaining less attention compared to social and economic exploitation. In the Vedic period, girls were looked after with care and they were allowed to learn. The widows were allowed to remarry. However, in the later Vedic period, daughters were considered as the source of grief. The practice of polygamy degrades the dignity of women. Women of the later civilization were not allowed to go to schools. In the middle Ages, thorough customs, dowry, and satirical practices were introduced, Sati and polygamy were glorified. It is thought that the right place for women to have their own home. In the middle Ages, thorough customs, dowry, and satirical practices were introduced, Sati and polygamy were glorified. It is thought that the right place for women to have their own home. In the eighteenth century, the Sati Dahan pratha began, which had been going on for almost a century. Raja Ram Mohan Roy fought against this evil practice, and as a result, this evil practice of Satidahan was finally demolished. According to the census of 2011, the sex ratio in India is from 940 females to 1,000 males. Dowry has become common. The more educated and well employed a groom is, the higher is the dowry demand, and therefore the birth of a daughter is considered a curse. The condition of any Indian woman's contribution to the house as a housewife is not recognized, Sexual harassment in the workplace is also common.

Due to these demands, multiple social laws were enacted to improve the condition of the Indian woman. Indian women can now choose any type of education and professional training which will help them to make their careers. They can pray for the highest rank in the state on equal opportunity for all appointments, provided by the Indian constitution. There are guarantees of certain rights on part III of the Constitution that specifically affect women. Women have achieved a lot in the modern age than in the past but in reality, they still have to travel a long distance. Women can leave the secure domains of their home, but a harsh, cruel, exploitative world awaits them, where women around in the world have to prove their talents.

Structures of Political participation of women in local democracy a historical analysis:

The political participation of women in India has neglected the events of independence. Although our country has a democratic government and 48.9% of the country's population is women, but their political participation is very low. Due to various obstacles they could not occupy the position of power and took the role of leadership. The participation of women is increasing rapidly but it is not satisfactory. They are also denied opportunities to participate in the administration, even in making decisions that affect their lives and well-being. However, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, believed that women had a positive role to play in the reconstruction of society and the recognition of their justice was a necessary step towards bringing about social justice. It added to the widespread participation of women in the independence movement and had a direct impact on the political and social elites, including women. Our Constitution has provided many channels for the development and advancement of women. The preamble of the Constitution, the chapters on Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, etc. are the specific objectives of this purpose. Many government and non-government organizations are working for the development of women but in reality, we see a wide gap between the empirical reality, symbolism, and reality in the legal framework between the stated social goals and the achievement. And this is why the participation of women is still very low even after this constitutional protection and legal framework.

There are three indicators to assess the political participation of women:

- Participation of voters and candidates in the political process in elections.
- Political attitudes such as awareness, commitment, and involvement in politics and autonomy in political actions and behavior.
- Their influence in the political process.

After independence, the Indian government has made efforts to promote the welfare of women. Many important government positions are held by women and they have had a profound impact on the professional workforce for national and multinational corporations. Since women make up half of the total population of the country, they should be equal partners in decision making. Women's broad-based political participation is severely limited due to various traditional theoretical factors such as castes, religion, feudal attitudes, and family position. After the adoption of democratic measures, women got constitutional rights and opportunities in the political arena. Observing these dark images, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution came to allow them to redress their grievances and take an active part in the decision-making process at the local level. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution were enacted in 1992 to provide for the autonomy of the grassroots level and to reserve one-third of the seats for women in each panchayat and municipality, to the credit of the Narasimha Rao government, less than one-third of the seats shall not be reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The origins of the Panchayati Raj in India can be traced to the Community development program initiated in 1952. Based on the recommendations of the Balwant Roy Mehta Committee, the Panchayati Raj Institution was established in India with much excitement. There are three tier structures of Panchayati Raj institution in India-

- a) Zilla Parishad at the District level.
- b) Anchalik Panchayat at the Block level.
- c) Gram Panchayat at the village level.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The prime objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To identify the involvement and participation of women in the Panchayati Raj institution in the study area.
- 2) To know the interest of rural women to participate in all the three tier level of panchayat elections in the study area.
- 3) To find out the difficulties and challenges faced by the rural women for participating in the Panchayati Raj institution in the study area.

II. METHODOLOGY:

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected from, various administrative reports, government documents, census reports, etc. and secondary data has been collected from different journals, books, websites, and articles.

Area of study:

The present study has focused on women's participation in rural Democracy with special reference to Dhubri district, which is bordered by Bhutan to the north, undivided Kamrup district to the east, Garo Hill District of Meghalaya to the south, and Coochbihar and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal to the west, and Rangpur, Bangladesh. Dhubri is the western district of Assam covering a geographical area of 2,838 sq. km. the district was surrounded by the Kokrajhar district of Bodoland in the north, Meghalaya, and Bangladesh in the south, Bongaigaon and Goalpara district in the east and west Bengal and Bangladesh in the west. The district head office is situated at Dhubri. The Brahmaputra which is the largest river of Assam is passing through Dhubri. Dhubri district of Assam is also famous for the Terracotta market of the world. There are also some famous historical places also situated in Dhubri; Netai Dhubuni Ghat, Gurudwara Teg Bahadur Sahib, Mahamaya Dham, etc. there are three subdivisions in Dhubri district namely Dhubri, Bilashipara, and South Salmara Mankachar along with eight revenue circle. The present study was conducted at the Agomani Block in thirteen Gram panchayats under the Dhubri district. The majority of the rural people in thirteen Gram panchayats under Agomani block are dependent on Agricultural farming, dairies, fisheries, tailoring and some of them are belongs to small businesses, weavings, etc.

Provisions of Panchayat Raj institution:

The 73rd Amendment Act is primarily aimed at decentralizing power and removing gender imbalances and biases in local self-government.

Article 243 (D) introduced through the 73rd Amendment to the constitution reads as under:

- a) Seats should be reserved for Schedule tribes, schedule tribes, in every panchayat.
- b) Not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats reserved under clause 1 shall include Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled castes women as the case may be.
- c) Not less than one-third of the total number filled through direct elections in each panchayat will be reserved for women and such seats may be allocated through rotation of two separate constituencies in the panchayat.
- d) The office of the Chairperson in the village or any other level panchayat shall be reserved for schedule cast, and the Scheduled Tribes and women, like the legislature of any State, may be provided by law.

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION:

This is a very positive sign that at the local level, the participation of women as elected representatives is slowly increasing as there is a reservation of seats for women as part of the 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution. The present study was based on the overall participation of rural women in the Panchayat election. The Panchayat election process in Assam was conducted in four levels, such as-

- a) Member of the gram panchayat.
- b) Councilor of the Anchalik Panchayat.
- c) Panchayat president.
- d) Member of the Zilla Parishad,

The Assam State Election Commission has announced to reserve 50 percent seats for women in panchayat elections to empower women socially and politically. One-third of the seats in the latest panchayat polls were reserved for women. There are more than two thousand two hundred gram panchayats, 188 Anchalik panchayats, and 20 Zilla Parishad in the state. The present study was based on 13-gram panchayats in Agomani Block under the Dhubri district. The total population of Agomani Block is 14, 80036, among the total population 76,635 are male and 71,401 are female.

Level of Women political participation in Gaon Panchayat election of Agomani Block, Dhubri District:

Table: 1

SI No	GP Name	Total Seats	Male Members	Female Members	Reserved For SC
1	Baterhat	10	5	5	1
2	Kaimari	10	5	5	0
3	Chagolia	10	5	5	0
4	Halakura	10	5	5	0

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5	Sonakhuli	10	5	5	0
6	Pokalagi	10	5	5	0
7	Bidardabri	10	5	5	0
8	Agomani	10	5	5	1
9	Shernagar	10	5	5	0
10	Sinduria	10	5	5	0
11	Ranpagli	10	5	5	0
12	Bhamondanga	10	5	5	0
13	Satrashal	10	6	4	1
Total		130	66	64	3

Source: Block Development Office, Agomani.

Above table 1 has been tried to focus on the level of political participation of women in Agomani Block, which consists of 13 Gram panchayats under Agomani Block. Each GP has 10 elected members, of which 50% of seats are reserved for the women as per the government rules and regulations. Except for Satrasal GP, every GP has a 50% reservation for the women in total 130 members and they are directly elected by the people. In the above GP 3 seats which are reserved for scheduled castes women in between 130 members in Agomani Block under Dhubri district. Within the three tire systems in the Panchayati raj institution, Gaon panchayat is the village level and the key.

Level of women political participation in Anchalik Panchayat:

Table: 2

Sl No	GP Name	Total Seats	Male Members	Female Members
1	Baterhat	1	0	1
2	Kaimari	1	0	1
3	Chagolia	1	0	1
4	Halakura	1	0	1(SC)
5	Sonakhuli	1	0	1
6	Pokalagi	1	1	0
7	Bidardabri	1	1	0
8	Agomani	1	0	1
9	Shernagar	1	0	1
10	Sinduria	1	1	0
11	Ranpagli	1	1	0
12	Bhamondanga	1	0	1
13	Satrashal	1	1	0
Total		13	5	8

Source: Block Development Office, Agomani.

Table 2 has tried to show that women political participation in Anchalik Panchayat of the Agomani Block. Within 13 Gaon Panchayats under Agomani Block 8 female candidates are elected for the Anchalik panchayat members and they are directly chosen by the voters. And 1 seat is reserved for the Schedule caste category women. The middle level is called the Anchalik panchayat at the block level. In some of the other states, the Anchalik Panchayat is also called the Panchayat Samiti.

Level of women political participation as Gaon Panchayat President:

Table: 3

Sl No	GP Name	Total Seats	Male Members	Female Members
1	Baterhat	1	0	1
2	Kaimari	1	1	0
3	Chagolia	1	1	0
4	Halakura	1	0	1
5	Sonakhuli	1	1	0
6	Pokalagi	1	1	0

7	Bidardabri	1	0	1
8	Agomani	1	1	0
9	Shernagar	1	1	0
10	Sinduria	1	0	1
11	Ranpagli	1	1	0
12	Bhamondanga	1	1	0
13	Satrashal	1	1	0
Total		13	9	4

Source: Block Development Office, Agomani.

Panchayat is chaired by the president of the village who is directly elected by the voters. The term of the President is five years. Table 3 has also tried to show that women political participation as panchayat president of the Agomani Block. Out of 13 Gram panchayats in Agomani Block, female members are elected from 4 panchayats for the election of panchayat President, and they are directly elected by the voters. There is no Schedule caste reservation for the women who are elected belongs to the 4 GPs.

Level of women political participation in Zilla Parishad members:

Table: 4

Zilla Parishad Name	Total Seats	Male Members	Female Members
Dhubri	24	14	10

Source: Zilla Parishad office, Dhubri.

Zilla Parishad is the apex level of the Panchayati raj system in Assam. Members of the Zilla Parishad are directly elected by the voters from the district for a term of five years. The chairman of all Anchalik panchayats under the district is the ex-officio chairman of Zilla Parishad. In Agomani Block there are 24 seats and within the above seats 14 members are elected from the male candidate and the rest of 10 members are elected to form the female candidates, they are directly elected by the voters for the term of five years.

III. MAJOR FINDINGS:

In the study area, a lot of matters are found as findings These Areas follows---

- ❖ Women have faced several challenges in the local administration system because rural women are particularly vulnerable as a group as they maintain strong traditional values in rural areas.
- ❖ Illiteracy among rural in the study area is a crucial barrier to participate in local politics.
- ❖ The elected women in study area find to be less active in the implementations of different schemes and policies which run by both central and state government.
- ❖ Sometimes the women are not gradually supported by their family members to participate in the public domain.
- ❖ Most of the women representatives have no freedom to go alone in Panchayat meetings. They may seek help from male members saying they are unsafe and insecure

IV. CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that the provision of the reservation has helped women to increase political participation across the state and the country. It has been able to bring many positive changes in the status of rural women. It instilled in women such qualities as energy consumption, self-confidence, political awareness, and identity confirmation. But there is a long way to go to empower women and turn them into politically participative. Legislation and positive action are not solutions to empower women in every walk of life. The need for the hour is to involve people from all angles to create a barrier-free environment for women by civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, policymakers, lawyers, and most importantly family members.

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