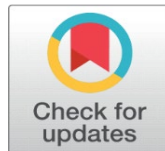


# SOCIAL CHALLENGES TO WOMEN IN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS OUR REGION AND COUNTRY: AN ANALYSIS

Gajendra Adhikary<sup>1</sup>, Munin Borah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor, H. O. D. Centre for North-East Studies (MSSV), India

<sup>2</sup> Research Scholar, Centre for North-East Studies (MSSV), India



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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** There are lots of challenges in the way of participation of women in politics not only in our country but also in the entire globe. Primarily they have to spend most of their time in maintaining family members and domestic works. Women are recognized as symbol of wealth for the family. During the British period the Women were given to right to vote and contest election under the India Act of 1935 and emphasized the participation of women in political life. The significance of women's roles in the decision making process in the society may be understood from the number of participants taken part in the political activities. The first Lok Sabha election was held in 1952 and only a few women contested the election. In Assam only two women were there in the fray. Since 1952 to present only nine women were elected to the Lok Sabha in spite of the constitutional provision of 33% of reservation for women, the number is counted at a very negligible number.

**Keywords:** Women, Politics, Challenges

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are lots of challenges in the way of participation of women in politics not only in our country but also in the entire globe. Primarily they have to spend most of their time in maintaining family members and domestic works. Women are recognized as symbol of wealth for the family. During the British period the Women were given to right to vote and contest election under the India Act of 1935 and emphasized the participation of women in political life. The significance of women's roles in the decision-making process in the society may be understood from the number of participants taken part in the political activities. The first Lok Sabha election was held in 1952 and only a few women contested the election. In Assam only two women were there in the fray. Since 1952 to present only nine women

were elected to the Lok Sabha in spite of the constitutional provision of 33% of reservation for women, the number is counted at a very negligible number.

### **1.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER: THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY ARE**

- 1) To find out the social challenges to women in participation in politics.
- 2) To examine the main social barrier for women.
- 3) To highlight some of the circumstances of social challenges to women and its remedies.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The approach of this study is exploratory in nature. To serve the purpose of the topic, descriptive, conventional and analytical methods of investigation are followed. An attempt has been made to analyse the data on historical context. Besides, data are also collected from the secondary sources. Some informations are also collected from edited books, journals, internet files.

## **3. DISCUSSION**

The participation of women in active political life is depending on her family position and support. The problems of women participation in political activities may be discussed from different perspectives. Religious belief, working environment, gender inequality and legal framework, lack of promotional activities and non encouragement of political parties are assessed as a social factor in this regard. Religious belief, working environment, gender inequality and legal framework, lack of promotional activities and non encouragement of political parties are assessed as a social factor for women in politics. These may be discussed as follows.

Among the social factors, religion first attracts our attention. It is the idea and accepted tenet of any religion relating to women. Women are vital part of a religious body but not the whole of it. A religion has practices some cultural rituals which its followers adhere to common belief in God, miracles and supernatural power, prayer, scripture reading and participation in religious activities. Religion plays a powerful role in modern politics and the relationship between the two is ever changing. The governance of a state cannot be separated from the religious views of its people that affect the leaders and lawmakers of a country. Religion has the power to affect individuals' day to day decisions which in turn affect as to how they act politically, economically and socially. Robert Swierenga said "People act politically, economically and socially in keeping with their ultimate beliefs. Their values, morals and actions whether in the polling booth, on the job, or at home, are an outgrowth of the god or gods they hold at the centre of their being". [Dickler and Yen \(2018\)](#) Uma Bharati, Sadhvi Pragya, Sadhvi Rithambara, Sadhvi Prachi are the name of women politicians who had strong religious belief in political life. Uma Bharati, the former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and former Cabinet Minister of Atal Bihari Vajpayee government was a strong believer of Hinduism and joined BJP at a young age which helped her to emerge as a successful leader in Indian politics. Her name was associated with the demolition of Babri Masjid on 6th December, 1992. Uma Bharati was the women leader of Ram Janma bhoomi Movement of 1980 and 1990 which was organised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad. When she was convicted by CBI inquiry on the demolition of Babri Masjid, she said- "I take moral responsibility" [The](#)

[Hindu \(2009\)](#) . Sadhvi Pragya, an Indian politician of BJP party and former Member of Parliament from Bhopal constituency is a strong follower of Hinduism since early life. During her college days she was actively associated with Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and later she was prompted to be a politician. She is basically famous for the incident of Malegaon bombing incident took place in a mosque on 29th September 2008 where 10 people died and many injured. She was accused as a prime suspect as her bike was found in the blast site of Malegaon. [The Hindu \(2023\)](#) In the Lok Sabha Election 2019, she contested from Bhopal constituency and defeated heavy weight congress party leader Digvijaya Singha, two times Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. So, sometimes religious beliefs particularly the strong religious believer of women politicians have to lose their public image that led to declining their political carrier such as Uma Bharatiand Sadhvi Pragya.

**Working environment** is not conducive of taking part in politics for women. A working environment is the physical, social and psychological conditions in which people perform their jobs. From women perspectives the working environment is not so suitable in some contexts. Insufficient maternity leave, lack of proper family support, poor security system, sexual harassment etc, may be some of the factors. In working places women have to face many challenges. In their early stage a women in their working place, have to face some harsh treatments. In the middle stage, women face the challenges in terms of insecurity which is generally related to output required for which they are not able to deliver commitments towards family and society. At the higher stage, women face the challenges relating to tasks, accomplishment, greater responsibilities towards the organisation and their working hours. Three 'S' that is Safety, Strength and Security are needed for working women in society. [Sarma \(2015\)](#) To be cited some examples of such harassments made to the female political activists like assassination of M.P. Phoolan Devi, in front of parliament, allegation of Mira Borthakur and suicide case of Indrani Tahbilder, a BJP activist etc. Phoolan Devi, the Bandit Queen of India sexually abused by some people and suffered a very miserable life before becoming a member of parliament. She was elected as a Member of Parliament in the year 1996 as a candidature of Samajwadi party from Mirzapur constituency of Uttar Pradesh. In the Lok Sabha Election 1998 she lost the seat and again retained it in the Lok Sabha Election 1999. As an illiterate woman she was insulted and harassed by some male politicians. The rise of Phoolan Devi as a politician was not tolerated by some people for which she was assassinated outside her MP house at 44Asoka Road, New Delhi on 15th July 2001. [The Daily Telegraph \(2001\)](#) Sher Singh Rana was the main person for the assassination of Phoolan Devi who took the revenge of the Behmai massacre. Mira Borthakur was the contestant of Lok Sabha Election in Assam in the year 1999. She was a former State Secretary, Spokesperson and State Finance Committee member of the Assam BJP. She was expelled by the BJP on the charge of anti party activities. She made an allegation that the BJP activists harassed her by uploading some of her personal photographs in social media. Her contact number was put up on a pornography website by some BJP activists. They also stripped her on social media but the local media persons did not dare to carry her stories. Later she criticized the media persons too. [India Today NE \(2020\)](#) The suicide case of BJP activist Indrani Tahbildar is another example of women being sexually harassed. Indrani Tahbildar was the Secretary of Kisan Morcha of BJP party from Golaghat district of Assam. Some of her intimate photographs with Anurag Chaliha, the prime accused of her death, went viral in social media and then blackmailed her. She committed suicide on 11th August 2023. [Assam Tribune \(2023\)](#)

**Gender inequality** is the social phenomenon in which people are not treated equally on the basis of gender. This inequality is caused by gender discrimination or

sexism. The treatment of inequality may arise from distinctions as seen in biology, psychology or cultural norms prevalent in the society. The womenfolk are mostly affected by gender inequality. Gender inequality weakens women in different areas, such as health, education and economic life. In our country India and particularly in our state Assam, it is a multifaceted issue that primarily concerns with women. Although the constitution of India grants men and women equal rights but gender disparity still remains. Gender equality in politics requires equal share of women than that of men in parliamentary seats and ministerial positions. It requires that women and men coming from all backgrounds should have equal access to such positions and can subsequently participate in decision making. [\(OECD\) \(2019\)](#) When men and women participate equally in decision making activities such as Parliament and local bodies may perform better and the governments become more credible and accountable. The central and regional political parties emphasise on women reservation and gender equality so as to ensure equal participation of men and women. Naznin Faruque elected as a member of Rajya Sabha only for 33% reservation policy and Kamal Kumari Baruah became a legislator in the Assam Legislative Assembly only for Congress party reservation policy they followed on 25% seats for women.

Legal framework is far from satisfaction in safeguarding in terests of women in India though the Indian constitution provides certain clauses in this regard. It guarantees equality before law under article 14 and prohibits discrimination based on gender under article 15 of our Constitution. These constitutional provisions form the bedrock of laws for women's rights in India ensuring that every woman is entitled to equal treatment and protection under the law. Every woman should lead a life of respect, equality and decency free from any form of fear, force, violence or discrimination. In our country various Acts have been passed in parliament such as The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, The maternity Benefit Act, 1961, The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, The National Commission for Women Act, 1990, The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 etc. But in practice these laws could not safeguard the womenfolk as envisaged. Women representative Bonily Khongmen, Rani Manjula Devi and Mafida Ahmed raised their voices in the floor of parliament for women Protection Act. Laxmi Orang and Rumi Nath are the example of women politicians of Assam who were brutally assaulted by public in broad day light and law could not safeguard them. Laxmi Orang along with her Tea Tribe community started hunger strike demanding ST status for the TeaTribe. She was brutally assaulted by a violent mob in the Beltala area of Guwahati on 24th November, 2007. 1Later she joined congress party and also AIUDF seeking Lok Sabha ticket in 2011 election but she was disqualified by the returning officer because of her underage. [Times of India \(2011\)](#) Rumi Nath, two times MLA from Borkhola Assembly of Assam was physically assaulted by the public mob on 30th June, 2012. Rumi Nath and her second husband Jaki Jakir took shelter in a hotel Naksatra at Karimganj. Her first husband Rakesh Singh lodged an FIR on 22nd May alleging that his wife was missing. On 2nd June she informed that she was not missing and got married to Muslim youth Jaki Jakir. The mob found out the hotel where the newly married couple was taking shelter in Karimganj. The mobs threw stones and entered hotel room and broke the toilet door where the couple was taking shelter. They were beaten black and blue several times and injured seriously [Nath \(2012\)](#).

**Lack of promotional** activities for women empowerment may be one of the social causes for women in politics. Promotional activities mean the technique of marketing that may be used to increase awareness of a brand, product or service.

The main objective of the promotional activities is to increase sales and brand awareness and attract both new and old customers retaining the existing one. Advertising, personal selling and offering free shipping are the best examples of promotional activities. The main purpose of it is to generate positive interest among customers. Promotional activities like campaigning and brand ambassadors can catch the attention of the people and generate curiosity. Women empowerment is the process of promoting women's sense of self value, their ability to make their own choice and their right to influence on social changes. But in practice we have not 1Howeverthemiscreantsallegedthatasectionofprotestantvandalizedthemarketsafte  
rtheirdemonstration and hence to self protection they resisted the protestant. Hence there was no connection of the incident with the movement of the tea-tribes seen any promotional activities for women empowerment. In our study period (1947-2011) from Bonily Khongmen to Mandira Roy, not a single women representative was seen to do such activities. We should not blame them as most of the women representatives became MP and legislators due to sudden demise of their husbands who were at that time a sitting MLA or MP. In their personal life they never thought to be a politician. It was destiny and luck which favoured them.

Moreover, it seems that no Political party is serious to encourage women to participate in political activities. The sense of equal participation of women in public life is essential to build strong and peaceful democracy. The poor representation of womenfolk in political parties does not give them enough strength to negotiate gender issues. However, the Declaration of Women Year in the year 1975 and later during 1975-1985 as the Women Decade carried out a little change in the perspection of political parties towards women. Political parties of India gave began to promise for reservation of seats for women in political arena. The Congress party demanded 30% reservation for women in local self government institutions and CPI(M) also echoed the same in Panchayat level. National Front party on the other hand stood for 30% reservation in government jobs. BJP also uttered 30% reservation for women in jobs of certain category [Desai and Thakkar \(2001\)](#). Though the political parties advocate for women reservation in electoral politics but the actual scenery is opposite to their views. The political parties support only such women who have strong political background, otherwise the parties never want to waste their money and energy in support of a common woman. Majority of the parties in their manifestos make promises to give some place for women but the promises remain in papers only. Most of the political parties mobilise women for rallies and demonstrations but do not give place in decision making activities. [Paxton and Kunovich \(2005\)](#). All of them have same goal to attain political power and it is deeply rooted in patriarchal system where male can dominate and suppress the women. Kumari Rabi Das, Tarula Bora, Jyotshna Sonowal, Angurlata Deka etc are examples of such suppression. Kumari Rabidas won election from the Ratabari constituency as a congress candidate in the year 1985 in the midst of anti congress wave but in the later years she was not given the party ticket. She was the only women legislator from Ratabari constituency till today. Jyotshna Sonowal was the sole candidate from the AGP party in the upper Assam and only candidate of the AGP party who won the election from Sadiya constituency in 1985 but in the later days she had to contested election as an independent candidateas AGP's refusal to give her ticket. Angurlata Deka won the election from the Batadroba constituency as a candidate of BJP for the first time in the general election of 2016. But in the next assembly election in the year 2021, the BJP leader then refused to give her party ticket though she was active in politics.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion we may observed that women's participation in politics is still negligible. The working environment in political field seems to be remained static in spite of the rapid changes of socio economic activities. The gender inequality is still a discouraging factor in women participation in politics. A larger portion of the contestants as well as members in electoral politics is still male dominated or by the men folk.

#### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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