



# Marginality To Equality: The Egalitarian Provisions Of The Indian Constitution To Empower North East Indian Women.

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## Abstract:

The North East of India is home to diverse ethnic groups and unique socio-cultural practices, some of which uphold progressive values for women. However, women in the region continue to face marginalization in political, economic, and social spheres due to a mix of systemic and cultural barriers. This paper critically examines the constitutional provisions and recent legislative reforms, particularly the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, in advancing gender equality in the North East. Analyzing the current political status of women in the region, the paper highlights the interplay between constitutional provisions, legislative measures, and socio-cultural realities in empowering women in the North East. It analyzes the current political status of women in the region and critically evaluates the potential of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, to promote substantive equality. Employing a theoretical framework rooted in marginalization, intersectionality, and empowerment, the study highlights the need for a contextualized approach that bridges the gap between constitutional ideals and regional practices.

**Keywords:** Marginality, gender equality, North East Indian women, Indian Constitution, Women's Reservation Act 2023, customary law, political representation, empowerment.

## Introduction

The Northeast of India, known for its ethnic diversity and vibrant cultural heritage, presents a paradoxical narrative regarding gender dynamics. While some tribal communities, such as the Khasi and Garo of Meghalaya, follow a matrilineal system that affords women inheritance rights and familial prominence, these traditions often fail to translate into political and economic empowerment. Structural barriers persist across the region, limiting women's participation in governance, leadership, and decision-making processes.

The Indian Constitution provides a robust framework for gender equality through Articles 14, 15, and 16, which guarantee equality before the law, prohibit gender-based discrimination, and ensure equal opportunities in public employment, respectively. Despite these provisions, the coexistence of customary laws and patriarchal norms often undermines women's rights. As Baruah (2011) observes, the dual system of constitutional mandates and customary practices frequently compromises the realization of gender equality in the region.

Women's political representation in the Northeast is a stark indicator of this marginalization. For instance, Nagaland had never elected a woman to its Legislative Assembly until 2023, when Salhoutuonuo Kruse and Hekani Jakhalu made history. Similarly, Mizoram continues to report low representation, with only one woman MLA in the current assembly. These figures highlight the systemic barriers to political participation, such as cultural biases, economic dependence, and lack of institutional support.

The enactment of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, which mandates a 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, marks a significant step toward addressing these disparities. However, as Fraser (1990) points out, legal mandates alone are insufficient; achieving meaningful inclusion requires restructuring the socio-political environment to ensure participatory parity. In the Northeast, the Act's success will depend on its ability to navigate the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and customary practices.

As Sen (1999) emphasizes, development is not solely about economic growth but about expanding individuals' freedoms and capabilities. This perspective underscores the importance of ensuring that women in Northeast India can fully access and benefit from constitutional guarantees. Situating the region's gender dynamics within the broader discourse on women's empowerment, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing efforts to transform marginality into equality.

### Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze the egalitarian principles of the Indian Constitution and their role in empowering women in the Northeast.
2. To assess the current political representation of women in the region.
3. To critically evaluate the implications of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023.

4. To propose actionable recommendations to bridge the gap between constitutional guarantees and regional realities.

### **Theoretical Framework of the study:**

This study employs four interconnected theoretical approaches—Marginalization Theory, Intersectionality, Empowerment Theory, and the Capability Approach—to examine the socio-political challenges and opportunities for women in Northeast India.

**Marginalization Theory:** Nancy Fraser's concept of participatory parity (1990) is central to understanding the marginalization of women in the Northeast. Fraser argues that marginalization occurs not only through economic deprivation but also via cultural and political exclusion. This exclusion restricts access to power and resources, as seen in women's limited political representation. For instance, patriarchal norms and customary laws often prioritize male leadership, limiting women's public participation despite constitutional guarantees of equality.

**Intersectionality:** Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality framework (1989) highlights how overlapping forms of discrimination—based on gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status—compound marginalization. In the Northeast, women often belong to ethnic communities that face systemic political and economic exclusion. While tribal customs may grant women social recognition, they frequently deny them governance roles or inheritance rights, creating dual layers of marginalization. This perspective emphasizes the need for policies like the Women's Reservation Act to address the region's unique socio-political context.

**Empowerment Theory:** Naila Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as the expansion of individuals' ability to make strategic life choices, particularly in contexts where such options were previously restricted. For women in the Northeast, empowerment entails addressing structural inequalities, such as limited educational access, economic dependence, and political underrepresentation. Legislative measures like the Women's Reservation Act must go beyond numerical representation to foster leadership capabilities and agency among women.

**Capability Approach:** Amartya Sen's capability approach (1999) provides a holistic framework for evaluating and enhancing women's freedoms and opportunities. According to Sen, true equality lies in creating an environment where individuals can realize their potential. For Northeast Indian women, this involves addressing structural barriers such as discriminatory customary laws, lack of mentorship, and economic vulnerabilities. Policies should focus not just on representation but on building the capacities of women to lead effectively and independently.

### **Significance of the Framework**

These theoretical perspectives collectively illuminate the complexities of gender inequality in Northeast India. Marginalization Theory highlights the systemic exclusion of women, while Intersectionality underscores the compounded impact of gender and ethnic identity. Empowerment Theory provides a roadmap for enhancing women's agency, and the Capability Approach emphasizes creating substantive opportunities for equality.

As Fraser (1990) asserts, "Justice requires both redistribution and recognition." This principle underscores the importance of addressing intersecting factors of economic disparity, social exclusion, and cultural marginalization. This study utilizes these frameworks to critically evaluate the potential of constitutional and legislative measures, such as the Women's Reservation Act, to transform the socio-political landscape of Northeast India and achieve substantive gender equality.

### **Methodology:**

This research adopts a qualitative approach to examine the constitutional, legislative, and socio-cultural aspects of women's empowerment in the North East of India, with particular emphasis on the implications of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023. The methodology is designed to provide a holistic understanding of the barriers and opportunities for women's political participation and representation in the region. By integrating doctrinal and empirical methods, the study ensures a robust analysis rooted in theory and contextual realities.

### **Constitutional Provisions of Gender Equality: A Critical Analysis**

Adopted in 1950, the Indian Constitution is regarded as one of the most forward thinking legal frameworks globally, particularly in its provisions for ensuring gender equality. It lays a strong foundation for the protection and promotion of women's rights, reflecting the nation's commitment to justice, equality, and the advancement of marginalized communities. Despite these constitutional guarantees, the practical realization of gender equality, particularly in the diverse socio-cultural context of India's regions, including the North East, remains fraught with challenges. This section critically examines the constitutional provisions related to gender equality, including reservation policies, and evaluates their effectiveness in empowering women, especially in the North East, where socio-cultural complexities hinder the realization of constitutional ideals.

### **Fundamental Rights and Gender Equality**

- **Article 14: Equality Before the Law:** Article 14 guarantees equality before the law, ensuring that every individual is entitled to equal protection under the law. In theory, this provision promises equal treatment for all citizens, irrespective of gender. However, its practical application often faces limitations, particularly in regions where traditional customs and cultural practices dominate. In the North East, tribal customs and customary laws, though deeply ingrained in society, may restrict women's

participation in decision-making processes, even though the Constitution mandates equal protection. In such cases, the legal equality enshrined in Article 14 becomes a challenging ideal to fully realize.

- **Article 15: Prohibition of Discrimination on Grounds of Gender:** Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on sex and empowers the state to make special provisions for the advancement of women. This provision is central to promoting women's welfare, particularly in areas like education, employment, and health, where gender-based disparities are pronounced. The Constitution, through Article 15, facilitates affirmative action policies such as reservations, aimed at improving women's access to public institutions and resources. However, while reservations in educational institutions and job markets have improved women's opportunities, the persistent gender gap in political representation and economic participation suggests that these provisions, while progressive, have not eradicated deeply entrenched societal biases. The Women's Reservation Act, 2023, which mandates a 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, is a step forward but faces challenges in its effective implementation, especially in areas like the North East, where political and cultural barriers remain.
- **Article 16: Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment:** Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in public employment, ensuring that no citizen is discriminated against based on sex. (Constitution of India, 1950/2021) While this provision theoretically supports equal participation in the workforce, women remain significantly underrepresented in higher-level positions, especially in leadership roles. In the North East, patriarchal norms and limited access to education and employment opportunities for women exacerbate these disparities. Despite the constitutional guarantees of equality, the lack of socio-economic resources, gender-based violence, and cultural restrictions often impede women's access to public employment, particularly in sectors where power and decision-making lie.

**Directive Principles of State Policy:** The Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs), though not justifiable in courts, are a critical component of the Constitution, guiding the state in formulating policies that promote social and economic justice. Several DPSPs are particularly relevant to gender equality:

#### **Article 39(a) and 39(d): Equal Pay for Equal Work and Protection of Worker's Interests**

Article 39(a) of the Indian Constitution directs the state to secure equal pay for equal work for both men and women, while Article 39(d) emphasizes the importance of ensuring work conditions that uphold dignity and equality (Constitution of India, 1950/2021). These provisions are crucial for addressing the wage disparities between men and women. Despite these guarantees, gender wage gaps persist across various sectors, particularly in rural areas and in informal employment. In the North East, where informal and agricultural sectors dominate, women often work under exploitative conditions, with little access to fair wages or legal protections. Even though these articles lay a legal framework for wage equality, the lack of adequate enforcement and the persistence of gender-based discrimination in the workforce remain significant hurdles.

#### **Article 42: Just and Humane Conditions of Work and Maternity Relief**

Article 42 obligates the state to ensure just and humane working conditions along with provisions for maternity relief. This provision is significant for women, who face unique challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. However, the implementation of maternity benefits and safe working conditions is often patchy. In the North East, many women work in informal sectors and face barriers to accessing maternity leave and healthcare, further hindering their economic independence and social mobility. The absence of comprehensive support systems for working women in this region reflects the limitations of Article 42's provisions in ensuring equitable conditions for women in practice.

### **Reservation Policies: A Mechanism for Gender Equality**

The Indian Constitution envisions affirmative action through reservation policies to address the historical disadvantages faced by women, particularly those from marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). These policies are designed to ensure representation in educational institutions, public employment, and legislative bodies, providing women with opportunities they would otherwise be denied due to structural inequalities.

One of the most significant developments in recent years is the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, which mandates a 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. This legislative intervention seeks to enhance women's participation in political decision-making and has the potential to transform the political landscape by ensuring that women are represented in governance. However, while the Act aims to increase the number of women in legislative bodies, its implementation faces challenges due to the prevalence of gender-based discrimination, societal attitudes toward women in politics, and the underdeveloped political infrastructure for women's empowerment, especially in rural and tribal regions like the North East.

The North East poses unique challenges for the implementation of reservation policies. In many tribal communities, customary laws and patriarchal structures often restrict women from taking part in political and leadership roles. Despite the constitutional provisions guaranteeing equality, customary laws have a significant impact on how women are viewed and treated in these societies. Consequently, the Women's Reservation Act, though promising, may require supplementary measures such as political training, capacity building, and awareness campaigns to overcome these cultural barriers and ensure effective participation.

### **Critical Analysis: Bridging the Gap between Constitutional Provisions and Reality**

While the Indian Constitution provides an extensive legal framework for gender equality, several challenges impede its successful implementation, especially in areas like the North East. First, the duality of statutory and customary law presents significant obstacles to realizing gender equality. Customary laws often dominate in

tribal areas, where they conflict with constitutional guarantees of gender equality. As a result, women's rights are frequently subordinated to traditional norms, hindering their participation in governance and leadership.

Second, despite legal provisions such as reservations and affirmative action, the socio-economic barriers that women face—particularly in the North East—remain substantial. Limited access to education, economic dependency, and gendered social norms continue to undermine women's ability to fully benefit from these provisions. Women in rural and tribal areas, often marginalized by both economic constraints and societal expectations, face compounded disadvantages that reservations alone cannot eliminate.

Patriarchal attitudes persist in shaping the perception and treatment of women across both urban and rural settings in India. As Radhika Coomaraswamy (2003) aptly observes, "Achieving gender equality in a society as diverse and hierarchical as India requires not just legal reforms but a fundamental transformation in cultural attitudes and practices." While legal measures, including the Constitution and the Women's Reservation Act, provide a foundation for addressing these challenges, genuine gender equality necessitates profound cultural and societal shifts.

### **Present Scenario of Political Representation of Women in Northeast India:**

The political representation of women in Northeast India is shaped by a variety of cultural, socio-economic, and political factors, resulting in a mixed picture. Despite constitutional guarantees for gender equality and legal frameworks like the Women's Reservation Act (2023), women in this region continue to face significant barriers to meaningful political participation, especially in formal governance structures. This section examines the current state of women's representation in the region, both in the state legislative assemblies and in the Indian Parliament, highlighting the challenges and opportunities ahead.

**Representation in State Legislative Assemblies:** The representation of women in the legislative assemblies of the Northeastern states of India remains limited, with significant variations across the region. Assam, for example, has six women MLAs out of 126 seats, reflecting less than 5% representation. This includes leaders like Nandita Gorlosa and Ajanta Neog, highlighting incremental progress despite systemic barriers (The Print, 2023; EastMojo, 2023).

Arunachal Pradesh has only two women MLAs in a 60-member house, underscoring the deep-rooted challenges women face in political participation (EastMojo, 2023). Similarly, Manipur and Meghalaya each have three women MLAs, with leaders such as Nemcha Kipgen and Ampareen Lyngdoh playing active roles in advancing women's issues despite being underrepresented (EastMojo, 2023; The Print, 2023). Mizoram achieved a historic milestone by electing three women MLAs for the first time in its 40-member assembly, signaling a shift in societal attitudes towards gender inclusion (EastMojo, 2024). Nagaland also made history by electing its first-ever women MLAs, Hekani Jakhalu and Salhoutuonuo Kruse, into its 60-seat legislature, marking a transformative step forward (The Hindu, 2023; EastMojo, 2024). In Sikkim, only one seat out of 32 is held by

a woman, indicating a significant gender gap in political representation (EastMojo, 2023). Tripura, with seven women MLAs in its 60-member assembly, stands out as a relatively better-performing state in terms of women's participation, reflecting increasing political awareness among women (EastMojo, 2023).

Overall, while some states like Mizoram and Nagaland have achieved historic milestones, women's participation across the Northeastern region remains well below national and global benchmarks. Societal norms, limited access to political opportunities, and structural challenges continue to constrain women's representation in governance (The Print, 2023; EastMojo, 2024).

**Women representation in Indian parliament from North Eastern states:** As of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, women's representation in India's Parliament has slightly decreased compared to 2019, with only 74 women elected, representing 13.6% of the total 543 members of the Lok Sabha (Election Commission of India, 2024; Lok Sabha, 2024). The representation of women from Northeast India remains particularly low, with several states having no female representatives. Notably, Tripura stands out, where one of its two constituencies elected a woman, achieving 50% female representation. However, states like Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Sikkim continue to have no women MPs in the current Lok Sabha (Election Commission of India, 2024; Tripura Legislative Assembly, 2024). Despite a significant female population in these states, translating this into political representation at the national level has proven challenging. This highlights the broader trend of limited female participation in Northeast India's political landscape, driven by complex socio-cultural and political dynamics, where patriarchal traditions and a lack of institutional support hinder women's access to mainstream politics (Bandyopadhyay, 2020; National Commission for Women, 2022).

The low representation of women in political structures in Northeast India can be attributed to several socio-cultural and structural factors. In many tribal societies, political authority remains vested in men, with women largely excluded from formal decision-making processes. Even in matrilineal societies, where women have high social status, patriarchal political systems often limit their formal political participation.

Women also face significant socio-economic barriers, including limited access to education, economic dependency, and a lack of political mentorship, which curtail their ability to contest elections or actively engage in politics. Moreover, political parties often do not provide adequate resources or infrastructure to support female candidates, particularly in rural and tribal areas. This lack of support further exacerbates the gender gap in political representation.

**The Women's Reservation Act, 2023 and Its Potential Impact:** The Women's Reservation Act, passed in 2023, mandates a 33% reservation for women in both the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, with the aim of significantly increasing female participation in political processes. While this reform presents an opportunity to close the gender gap, its effectiveness in Northeast India will depend on its implementation and the region's unique cultural context. In many areas, entrenched patriarchal norms and customary laws might

hinder the Act's full impact unless it is complemented by capacity-building programs, political education, and mentorship for women (Government of India, 2023).

### Unique Challenges Faced by Women in Northeast India

The unique challenges faced by women in Northeast India are deeply embedded in the region's socio-political, cultural, and economic fabric. These challenges are often the result of complex interactions between traditional practices, governance structures, and the region's history of conflict and underdevelopment. Below are ten key factors that significantly impact the lives of women in the region:

- **Patriarchal and Customary Norms:** Despite the presence of matrilineal societies in some Northeast Indian states, patriarchal structures often limit women's access to political and social power. In many indigenous communities, traditional leadership roles are male-dominated, and women's participation in decision-making processes, whether in local governance or higher political forums, remains marginalized (Das, 2019; Rai, 2021). Customary laws, which often govern family and property rights, tend to favor men, further restricting women's autonomy.
- **Limited Political Representation:** Women in Northeast India continue to face significant barriers to political participation. In several states, such as Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur, women's representation in legislative assemblies and Parliament remains alarmingly low, despite a relatively higher female population (Hussain, 2020). Traditional political structures, combined with a lack of support from political parties, undermine women's entry into formal political spaces.
- **Barriers to Legal Justice:** Access to justice for women in Northeast India remains inadequate due to a combination of local customary laws, weak enforcement of legal rights, and gender biases within the formal legal system. Women often encounter resistance when seeking legal recourse for issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and property rights violations (Jha, 2020; Sharma & Devi, 2021). This lack of legal protection hampers women's ability to exercise their rights and claim justice.
- **Socio-economic Dependency and Inequality:** Economic dependence on male family members remains a major hurdle for women in Northeast India, particularly in rural and tribal communities. Limited access to education, employment, and financial resources perpetuates the cycle of poverty and dependency. Women often find themselves in low-paying, informal sector jobs without social security, which undermines their economic independence and ability to make autonomous decisions (Sharma & Devi, 2021; Singh, 2018).
- **Educational Disparities:** Although there has been an increase in female literacy rates in Northeast India, educational disparities persist, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas. Girls are less likely to complete secondary or higher education due to socio-cultural expectations, early marriages, or economic pressures (Singh, 2018). This educational gap limits women's opportunities for political engagement and professional growth, perpetuating gender inequalities.

- **Health and Reproductive Rights:** The health status of women in the region remains a pressing issue, with inadequate healthcare infrastructure and services, particularly in rural areas. High maternal mortality rates, limited access to family planning, and lack of specialized medical care further exacerbate women's vulnerability (Sharma & Devi, 2021). Additionally, mental health issues among women, especially those affected by conflict, are often overlooked due to the lack of psychological services and awareness.
- **Impact of Armed Conflict and Militancy:** Conflict and militancy in Northeast India, particularly in states like Manipur and Nagaland, have disproportionately affected women. The consequences of ethnic strife, military operations, and insurgency have been devastating for women, who often face sexual violence, displacement, and loss of livelihood. Women's roles as peace builders and mediators in conflict resolution processes have not been adequately recognized by both state and non-state actors (Rao, 2022; Rai, 2021).
- **Internal Migration and Displacement:** Women in Northeast India are particularly vulnerable to displacement due to economic migration, ethnic conflicts, and natural disasters. The migration of women from rural to urban areas in search of better opportunities often exposes them to risks such as human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and economic exploitation in the informal labor sector (Thakur, 2021). Displaced women also face challenges in accessing social services and support systems, increasing their vulnerability.
- **Gender-based Violence:** Women in Northeast India are frequently victims of various forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and trafficking. The prevalence of gender-based violence is often exacerbated by inadequate law enforcement and societal stigma, which prevents women from reporting such crimes (Rao, 2022). The intersection of violence with socio-cultural norms and patriarchal attitudes often leads to the normalization of these abuses, making it difficult for women to seek justice.
- **Lack of Political Empowerment and Education:** The lack of political education and empowerment programs for women in rural and tribal regions severely limits their participation in political processes. Women in these areas often lack the necessary resources, training, and support to engage in governance and leadership roles. This limitation is compounded by the absence of role models and mentors, further hindering the development of female political leadership (Singh, 2018; Rai, 2021).

### **Bridging the Gap between Constitutional Guarantees and Ground Realities to Empower Women in Northeast India**

The disparity between the constitutional rights of women and their lived realities in Northeast India necessitates a comprehensive strategy aimed at addressing systemic, cultural, and institutional barriers. The following academic framework provides a multi-pronged approach to achieving gender equality and empowering women in the region.

- **Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks:** Existing laws and constitutional guarantees, including Article 15(3) of the Indian Constitution, which allows for affirmative action for women, must be effectively enforced. State-level adoption of the Women's Reservation Bill is critical to increasing women's representation in legislative assemblies. Policy interventions should also focus on integrating tribal customary laws with constitutional principles of equality.
- **Promoting Education and Skill Development:** Education is a vital tool for empowerment. Targeted programs should focus on reducing gender disparities in education, particularly in rural and tribal areas. Scholarships for girls and vocational training programs in areas such as handicrafts, agriculture, and information technology can enhance women's employability and economic independence.
- **Economic Empowerment Initiatives:** Economic independence is pivotal for achieving gender equality. Providing women with access to credit through self-help groups (SHGs) and microfinance institutions can foster entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the development of women-led enterprises in culturally significant industries such as handlooms and eco-tourism should be prioritized.
- **Enhancing Political Participation:** Political empowerment is essential for addressing gender inequality. Leadership training programs and awareness campaigns can prepare women to participate actively in politics and governance. Highlighting successful female leaders from the region can also serve as inspiration and a model for others.
- **Challenging Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Cultural norms and practices often perpetuate gender inequality. Engaging community leaders to challenge stereotypes and promote women's roles in public life is crucial. Media campaigns showcasing the achievements of women in leadership and entrepreneurship can help shift societal attitudes.
- **Improving Safety and Public Infrastructure:** Ensuring safety is fundamental to women's empowerment. Initiatives such as the establishment of women's help desks at police stations, improved public transport safety, and better surveillance in public spaces can address safety concerns. Additionally, access to healthcare services, including mental health and reproductive health, must be expanded.
- **Leveraging Technology:** Technology can bridge gaps in access to resources and opportunities. Digital literacy programs aimed at women can facilitate access to online education, e-commerce platforms, and information on government schemes. Additionally, e-governance platforms can provide efficient legal aid and promote awareness of rights.
- **Incorporating Women in Traditional Institutions:** Women's inclusion in traditional governance systems, such as tribal councils, can strengthen their role in decision-making. Dialogue with tribal leaders to harmonize customary practices with constitutional values is necessary for sustainable empowerment.

- **Research and Data-Driven Interventions:** Region-specific studies are essential to understanding the unique challenges faced by women in different states. These studies can inform the design of tailored interventions, ensuring more effective outcomes.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Regular assessment of the implementation and impact of women-centric policies is essential. Establishing monitoring committees can ensure accountability and continuous improvement in policy execution.

### Conclusion:

The Indian Constitution provides a comprehensive framework for gender equality, supported by legislative measures like the Women's Reservation Act, 2023. However, these measures are yet to translate into meaningful empowerment for women in North East India due to cultural, political, and systemic challenges. The theoretical frameworks of marginalization, intersectionality, and empowerment offer insights into these challenges and underscore the need for context-sensitive approaches. A concerted effort involving customary law reforms, political capacity building, and socio-economic interventions is crucial for transforming marginality into equality. As Amartya Sen (1999) emphasizes, "Development is freedom." For North East Indian women, this freedom must be realized through a combination of constitutional safeguards and localized strategies that respect the region's diversity while championing gender justice.

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