



Power, Politics And Gender: Emerging Trends In Women's Representation In Assam's State Politics.

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Abstract:

The political empowerment of women remains a cornerstone of democratic governance and gender equity. Despite constitutional guarantees and global commitments, women in Assam continue to face significant barriers to meaningful political representation. This paper examines the emerging trends in women's participation in Assam's state politics, with a focus on Legislative Assembly elections from 2001 to 2021. Through a comparative and data-driven analysis of electoral outcomes, the study reveals persistent underrepresentation, disparities in party nominations, and the widening gender gap in elected positions. While there has been some growth in the number of women contesting elections, it has not translated into a proportional increase in legislative seats. The research further explores socio-political challenges, such as patriarchal norms, lack of institutional support, and limited access to resources, that hinder women's political advancement. The findings underscore the urgent need for structural reforms, targeted policy interventions, and gender-sensitive political practices to foster a more inclusive and representative democracy in Assam.

Index Terms - : Political Empowerment, Representation, Legislative Assembly Election, Women in Politics, MLA.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment may mean equal status to women, opportunity and freedom to develop herself. The focus of empowerment is equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in the process of decision-making. The Constitution of India attempts to remove gender inequalities by banning discrimination based on sex and class, prohibiting human trafficking and forced labor, and reserving elected positions for women. Women's involvement in political parties is tied to the increasing demand for equal rights. In spite of constitutional provisions of gender equality yet only a few women have been able to make decisions by themselves in legislature. Indian women are relatively disempowered and they enjoy lower status than that of men from times immemorial. Gender gap exists regarding access to education and employment. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society.

In India the political participation of women isn't spectacular compared with men. This is often the case in most of the countries across the globe. However, women's political participation now's quite encouraging compared to past times. Nowadays it remains stronger than ever. But The political scenario of state Assam had also gone some changes in the recent past. Assam had witnessed a decline of percentage of women elected members of legislative assembly (MLA) from 2016 to 2021. The proportion of women

MLA's in Assam legislative assembly is considerably lower since independence. In 2021 lowest number of women MLA's are elected in comparison to other consecutive years. Although Assam has a dignified history of women but they are not included in decision making and party politics of the state. In this Indian society the status women in Assam is higher in contrast to rest of the country. The present study focuses on the participation of women in Assam politics. Earlier some of the research studies had depicted year wise political participation of women since independence. They haven't considered political party-wise representation of women elected members in the respective studies. This study covered the period from 2001 to 2021(21st century period) because this era often called as "women era" and also this study had tried to bring percentage comparison between elected male and female representations of Assam. Further, the study had also observed difference between contested and won women candidates in Assam legislative assembly elections from a statistical analysis and will explore the various scopes for enhancing political empowerment.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

- To analyze the Women political Representation in the legislative assembly election of Assam from 2001 to 2021.
- To observe difference between the contested and won women MLA candidate of Assam from 2001 to 2021.
- To examine the percentage comparison between elected male and female MLA's of Assam from 2001 to 2021.
- To measure the scope for enhancing Women Political Empowerment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

In this present study analytical and descriptive method is used. The both qualitative and quantitative approach to the study has been undertaken in this research paper and required information were collected from different secondary sources like Government official documents ,books, research articles , e-resources etc.

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT:

Women's political empowerment is crucial for the overall progress and development of any society. It is necessary to address the existing gender inequality and promote gender balance in political decision-making forums. Women bring a unique perspective to political leadership and governance, which is often overlooked in the male-dominated political landscape.

When women are empowered politically, they can advocate for policies that address issues relevant to women, such as education, healthcare, childcare, and reproductive rights. Women's empowerment also leads to the representation of diverse voices, opinions, and experiences in the decision-making processes, ultimately leading to better governance.

Furthermore, when women are involved in politics, they often become role models for other women and girls, inspiring them to engage in public life and pursue leadership positions.

In the context of Assam Legislative Assembly Elections, women's political empowerment is essential to ensure that the voices of Assamese women are heard loud and clear in the state's political arena. It is high time to break the glass ceiling and make way for more women to take on leadership roles in the political sphere to bring positive change and transformation.

THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ASSAM LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS:

The impact of women's political participation in Assam Legislative Assembly Elections cannot be understated .Over the years, more and more women have been encouraged to join politics and actively participate in the election process. This has led to a significant increase in the number of women candidates running for office and getting elected.

One of the most significant impacts of women's political participation has been the increase in women-centric policies and initiatives. Women politicians have been instrumental in pushing for policies that are geared towards addressing the unique challenges faced by women in their constituencies. Issues such as women's health, education, employment, and safety have been given more attention since more women have been elected to office.

Furthermore, women's participation in politics has also led to a change in traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Women politicians have become role models for young girls and women in their communities, inspiring them to break out of traditional gender roles and pursue their dreams. This has also led to a change in societal attitudes towards women's political participation and leadership roles. The impact of women's political participation in Assam Legislative Assembly Elections has been positive and far-reaching. It has not only led to the creation of women-centric policies but also helped in challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Women have proven to be effective leaders and agents of change, and their contribution to the political landscape of Assam is invaluable.

RESULTS:

Table 1 Political Party-wise percentage of elected women MLA's of Assam from 2001-2021

Year	Political Party	Total number of seats won	Number of seats won by women candidate	Percentage of elected women MLA's
2001	INC	71	6	8.4
	AGP	20	0	0.00
	IND	19	2	10.53
	BJP	8	1	12.5
	NCP	3	1	33.33
	ASDC(U)	2	0	0.00
	AITC	1	0	0.00
	SAP	1	0	0.00
	SP	1	0	0.00
2006	INC	53	8	15.09
	AGP	24	2	8.33
	IND	22	2	9.09
	BJP	10	1	10.00
	AIUDF	10	0	0.00
	CPM	2	0	0.00
	AGP(P)	1	0	0.00
	ASDC	1	0	0.00
	CPI	1	0	0.00
	LKS	1	0	0.00
	NCP	1	0	0.00
2011	INC	77	11	14.29
	AIUDF	18	1	5.56
	BPF	12	2	16.67
	AGP	11	0	0.00
	BJP	5	0	0.00
	IND	2	0	0.00
	AITC	1	0	0.00
2016	BJP	60	2	3.33

	INC	26	3	11.54
	AIUDF	13	0	0.00
	AGP	14	1	7.14
	BPF	12	2	16.67
	IND	1	0	0.00
2021	BJP	60	3	5.00
	INC	29	2	6.90
	AIUDF	16	0	0.00
	AGP	9	1	11.11
	IND	6	0	0.00
	BPF	4	0	0.00
	UPPL	1	0	0.00
	CPI(M)	1	0	0.00

From table 1 it can be observed that the percentage of woman elected MLA's in legislative assembly elections of Assam from 2001-2021 is not satisfactory. National Political parties such as Indian National congress (INC) and Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) women elected MLA's are much higher in contrast to regional political parties of Assam. Further, from the table it is observed that the total seats won by women elected candidates had declined. In 2011, highest number of total seats had won by women candidates in comparison to other respective years. The elected women candidates from independent political parties are few too.

Table 2 Contested and won MLA candidates of Assam from 2001-2021

Year	Women contested	Women wins	Winning percentage
2001	55	10	18.18
2006	70	13	18.57
2011	85	14	16.47
2016	91	8	8.79
2021	76	6	13.53

From table 2 it can be observed that the number of contested women MLA's in legislative assembly elections of Assam had increased from 2001-2016. There is a decline of contested as well as won women MLA candidates for the year 2021. Further from the table, the winning percentage of women candidates had decreased from 2001-2021 assembly elections of Assam.

Table 3 Percentage of Male and Female elected MLA's of Assam legislative assembly from 2001-2021

Year	Percentage of elected Male MLA's	Percentage of elected Female MLA's
2001	92	8
2006	89.68	10.32
2011	88.89	11.12
2016	93.65	6.35
2021	95.23	4.76

The table 4 shows the percentage of elected male and female candidates in Assam legislative assembly elections held from 2001-2021. It can be observed that the percentage of women elected candidates has declined from 2001 to present legislative election in comparison to male elected candidates. However, it was increased from 2001 to 2011 and there was sharp decline for the next consecutive years of elections respectively.

The above statistical data shows that the representation of women in politics in Assam (from 2001 to 2021) has witnessed some progress in terms of contesting election. Although there has been an increase in women's participation in elections, the level of representation achieved by female candidates still falls short of that of their male counterparts. While there have been noticeable advancements in terms of the number of

women participating in politics and holding positions of power, the overall proportion remains inadequate. Despite constituting around half of the state's population, women continue to face barriers such as societal norms, patriarchal structures, and limited access to resources and opportunities. Although several initiatives have been undertaken to promote women's political empowerment, the pace of change has been relatively slow. Efforts to enhance gender equality and inclusivity in politics must continue, encompassing broader awareness campaigns, targeted policies, and structural reforms, to ensure meaningful representation and participation of women in Assam's political landscape.

DISCUSSION:

In this paper we have observed that contribution of women in Assam politics is much lower than male counterparts as only 77 women had been elected to Assam Legislative Assembly since 1951. In our study only 8.09% women (51 out of 630 MLAs) won in last 20 years (i.e. 2001-21). On the other hand, percentage of women of Assam in national politics is very low as compared to other parts of India. There are many reasons for such low representation of women from Assam in politics and decision making bodies. Some of such reasons are –

Despite the growing awareness of gender equality and women's political empowerment, women's participation in politics in Assam continues to face several barriers. One of the most significant barriers is the patriarchal mindset prevalent in society, which views women as inferior to men and unfit for leadership roles. This bias against women's political participation is reinforced by social norms that prioritize women's domestic responsibilities over public roles.

Another significant barrier is the lack of access to resources such as education, finance, and technology. Women in Assam often face limited access to education and technology, which hinders their ability to participate in politics effectively. Additionally, the lack of financial resources and funding for women candidates often dissuades them from running for office.

The lack of representation and leadership opportunities for women in political parties is also a significant barrier. Political parties tend to prioritize male candidates over female candidates, making it difficult for women to secure party nominations and gain visibility in the political arena.

Finally, the prevalence of violence against women in politics is a severe barrier to women's political participation in Assam. Women who enter politics often face harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence, which dissuade them from running for office and participating in political activities.

These barriers must be addressed through policy measures and social initiatives that promote gender equality, provide access to resources, and ensure a safe and supportive environment for women in politics. Only then can we truly break the glass ceiling and empower women to participate fully in the political life of Assam.

STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INCREASE WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN ASSAM:

Assam has been making significant strides in increasing women's political participation in the state. There have been several strategies employed to encourage women to take part in the political process and make their voices heard.

One of the most effective strategies has been the reservation of seats for women in the Assam Legislative Assembly. This has led to an increase in the number of women contesting and winning elections in the state. Another strategy that has been employed to increase women's political participation is the provision of financial assistance to women candidates. The Assam government has set up a fund to provide financial assistance to women candidates who are contesting elections. This has helped to level the playing field and encourage more women to enter politics. Additionally, efforts have been made to enhance women's political literacy through various training programs and workshops. This has helped women to understand the political process and build confidence in their abilities to participate in it.

Overall, these strategies have been instrumental in increasing women's political participation in Assam. With more women entering politics, the state is moving towards greater gender equality and inclusive governance.

CONCLUSION:

Breaking the glass ceiling and empowering women in politics is essential for a more democratic Assam. With only a handful of women holding positions in the legislative assembly, it's clear that there is still a long way to go in reaching gender equality and representation in politics.

By increasing the number of women in politics, we can ensure that policies and decisions are made with diversity and inclusivity in mind. Women bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table, and their voices must be heard in order to create a more just and fair society.

Additionally, when women hold positions of power and influence, it inspires the next generation of young girls to believe that they too can break barriers and pursue their dreams. It sends a powerful message that gender should not limit one's aspirations or abilities. In Assam, as in many other parts of the world, women have historically faced socio-economic and cultural barriers that have prevented them from entering politics. However, with initiatives like the Women's Reservation Bill and increased awareness and support for women's empowerment, we can create a more equal and representative political landscape.

To secure women's rightful place in society and to enable them to decide their own destiny and for the growth of genuine and sustainable democracy, women's participation in politics is essential. This will not only uplift their personality but will open the way for their social and economic empowerment. Their participation in public life will solve many problems.

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