

“Political Participation of Women in the First Three BTC Government”

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Abstract:

In this study analyse the political participation of women in the First Three Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Government since 2005. The women participation especially in this area still remained very low and negligible in politics. To bring light on them, the political participation of women has the potential to change our society; it can have impact on outcomes for women and children especially in the distribution of the community resources; their participation in the peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction, decision-making power, political processes is to ensure the safety and protection of children and the vulnerable sections of population. On the basis of the Secondary data, the study discourse the status of women in terms of political participation such as contesting election, receiving MPs (Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha) Seats, receiving Executive Members and decision-making power used in the BTC Legislative Assembly. There is a need to create acts for improving the gloomy picture of women empowerment and active political participation in the BTAD.

Key Words: Women, Bodo, BTC, Politics, Executive, Political Participation, Women Representation

Introduction:

Democracy gives the value of equal political participation and opportunities for both the men and the women; it is argued that women are equal citizens and therefore should share equally with men in public decision-making. The Constitution of India also provides equal political participation for the same (both men and women). In India the root of Political Participation of Women can be traced back to 19th century reform movements. Social reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Mahadeva Govinda Ranade, Behramji Malabari believed that the Social Evils could be eradicated by raising consciousness and educating women. Women constitute a marginal proportionate of representatives in the World's legislative bodies. India has imposed electoral quotas to improve the political empowerment of women. The main purpose is to raise their status in Society, Economy, Polity and Education against the male dominated in politics. Despite many efforts still a large segment of the women population is deprived of its basic human rights, that is, the right to participate in the politics. Till today, in some countries women are not able to vote or stand for Election. India was one of the first democratic nation to grant women to vote and significantly under the Constituent Assembly of India was formed in 1946 and 14 women were got included as the members of it. They were *Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Malti Chowdhury, Kamala Chaudhuri, Sarojini Naidu, Ammu Swaminathan, Dakshayani Velayudhan, Durgabai Deshmukh, Hansa Mehta, Sucheta Kripalani, Purnima Banerjee, Begum Aizaz Rasul, Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz and lila Roy (Kiran Devedra: 1985)*. Indian women had been asking for the franchise and the Indian Constitution gave it to them willingly. This brought women on an equal footing with men.

In India the Status of women has seen many ups and downs since ancient times. Women in Post-independent India have been participating in almost all types of economic activities, day-to-day house-hold chores, voting for better governance and also in active politics. The Independence India brought gender equality in the form of Constitutional rights, but historically women's political participation has remained low in comparing with other countries. In recent times, women's involvement in political parties is tied to increasing demand for equal rights. Despite of high profile women leaders including *Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Pratibha Patil, Annie Besant, Vijaya Raje Scindia, Sushma Swaraj, Jayalalithaa, Smriti Irani, Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati, Alka Lamba, Kiran Bedi, Nirmala Sitharaman, Sheila Dikshit, Priyanka Chaturvedi, Vasundhara Raje, Uma Bharti, Supriya Sule, Priyanka Gandhi, Agatha Sangma, Dimple Yadav, Angoorlata Deka, Ramya, Sumitra Mahajan, Maneka Gandhi, Brinda Karat, Ambika Soni, Meira Kumar, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Mehbooba Mufti Sayeed, Pramila Rani Brahma* the representation of women in Assemblies and Parliament is miniscule. An increase in women's participation is seen only in the Municipal and Panchayat level elections, especially since the reservation in the 1990s.

India after her Independence adopted the representative democratic system and it is well known that the success of a democratic system greatly relies on the active participation of its people in all level. Democracy is that form of government where people can participate in its decision-making process without any distinction. The Indian Constitution has to ensure participation of people in its politics guaranteeing to its Citizens' Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity assuring dignity of the individual and Unity and Integrity of the Nation. According to Articles 12-35 of the Indian Constitution ensure the people's right to participate in its politics without any distinctions. Articles 325 and 326 of Indian Constitution provide of the political equality and equal right to participation in political activities and right to vote respectively. Hence, it is clear that the Indian Constitution provides for a greater opportunity to participate in its political process as well as socio-economic sphere and it does not matter whatever his or her sex is. The Election play important

role in a Democracy and it is the Instrument of the people through which they can participate in the giant decision-making process of its Government and for the Country. And again, it is the political right of every citizen. Through the active participation in the elections as electors or competitors women can bring a fair and equal treatment for them. At this backdrop, this paper examines the women in politics in the First Three Bodoland Territorial Council Government, Assam.

Profile of the Study Area:

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) is a territorial council in Assam State of India which have jurisdiction in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. The Schedule Tribes Amendment Act 1976 specifies nine plain tribes of Assam in which the Bodos are also significant among others. The Memorandum of Settlement (MOS, 2003, signed by the three parties- Government of India, Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers) of the BTAD is the culmination of the Bodo Movement for autonomous self governing territory within the State of Assam. The BTC which was created on 10th February, 2003 comprising the four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri – curved out of eight existing districts- Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. The study area focuses of the four districts of BTC. The area under the BTC jurisdiction further Subdivided into 10 Civil Subdivisions and 40 Development Blocks, some of which are partly in BTC area and partly outside of it. The provisional geographical area of BTC is 8,795 Sq. Km. The BTC constitutes 35 percent of marginalised Tribal groups like Bodos, Garos, Rabhas, etc. The major religions of the area are Hindu, Muslim, Christian and others. The region falls within the geographical map of least developed region in India. The agro-based economy is the only source of livelihood of the people in the region. The industrialisation and other employment opportunities are scant.

The status of women politics, participation, receiving representation and in decision-making process in the running of the BTC Government including of the four districts- Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri is the central area of this study.

Key Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of the paper is being done keeping in the following:

- To show the participation of women from under BTC area in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, in the State Legislative Assembly and the Bodoland Territorial Council Legislative Assembly (BTCLA) since the creation of BTC in compare to male participation;
- To create awareness about the role of women in politics;
- To bring light on women the political participation has the potential to social change of our society;
- To encourage active participation in the elections under BTC area;
- To highlight the present day political status of women in the four districts of BTAD;
- To enquire into the factors responsible behind the poor participation of women under BTC area of the study area in brief;
- To inculcate political education in the area;
- To recognise the importance of women's equal participation in political activities;
- To suggest the leaders of major political parties' to bring forefront the women leader in politics;

Methodology:

In order to make an analytical study follows the descriptive method. In this study data have been collected by using secondary sources. Secondary data and information have been collected from different published books, journals, internet sources, Election Commission reports of Assam, Statistical Handbook of BTC, Bodoland Diary, published research papers and articles, etc.

Population Strength of Women:

The total strength of the women population plays important part in the politics. Democracy provides the opportunity for both male and female to vote or stand in the election. The population size of the BTC area is quite satisfactory to hold the democratic election in comparing with other districts of Assam. The four districts of BTC's geographical boundary lies between 260 7'12"N to 260 47' 50"N Latitude and 890 47' 40"E to 920 18' 30"E Longitude and is in the North Western Part of the Assam State. The table 1 shows the total population of BTC area:

Table1: Total Population of BTC in four Districts (2001 - 2011):

District	Persons		Male		Female		% to total population of the state Assam	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Kokrajhar	843,243	887,142	433,360	452,905	409,883	434,237	3.16	2.85
Chirang	433,061	482,162	222,364	244,860	210,697	237,302	1.62	1.55
Baksa	857,947	950,075	438,345	481,330	419,602	468,745	3.22	3.06
Udalguri	758,746	831,668	388,690	421,617	370,056	410,051	2.85	2.65

Sources: Population Census 2001 & 2011 (India), Assam

As per the population census 2001 reports the BTC has 2,892,997 persons including of all its inhabitants. The highest population could be seen in Baksa district of 857,947 of which 438,345 were male and 419,602 were female. Kokrajhar district had population of 843,243 of which male and female 433,360 and 409883 respectively. Udalguri district had a population of 758,746 of which male were 388,690 and remaining 370,056 were female. Finally, in 2001 census report the Chirang District had have received a population of 433,061 of which 222,364 were male and remaining 210,697 were female. Among four districts of BTC area in the population ranking Baksa, Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Chirang comes in 1th, 2nd, 3rd and 4th position. It is seen that the Kokrajhar forms 3.16 percent,

while districts such as Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri are having population of 1.62 percent, 3.22 percent and 2.85 percent respectively of the total population of Assam State.

According to 2011 census reports the total population of BTC area is found 3,151,047 persons where Baksa district top with the total population of 950,075 and lowest seen in the Chirang district with total population of 482,162. Kokrajhar district has total population of 887,142 and Udalguri has 831,668. In 2011 census, out of total population Kokrajhar has 452,905 male and 434,237 female respectively, Chirang 244,860 male and 237,302 female, Baksa 481,330 and 468,745 and Udalguri male 421,617 and 410,051 female. The above table also shows the comparative size of districts in terms of population of the districts of Assam. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri are having population of 2.85 percent, 1.55 percent, 3.06 percent and 2.65 percent respectively of the total population of Assam.

The above data have shown that the women population size is not negligible in BTC area with compare to the male. The half of population is women in the area and its important symbolic connotation for the future of women's politics. But the problem is bringing them to the forefront in a party that comprises mostly men. More women are lure contesting elections now but because of men too are contesting in large numbers; the rise of women is low in BTC.

Women Literacy:

The high level of literacy rate is also the important part of the women participation in politics. Low progress rate of women literacy is another reason underlining the need of the women participation in politics of BTC area. The literacy rate of BTAD is not satisfactory comparing with other districts of Assam. According to the Census Report of Assam the literacy rate of BTAD of 2011 & 2001 is as under the following table:

Table 2: Women literacy rate of four districts of BTAD (2001 & 2011):

District	Persons		Male		Female	
	2001 (%)	2011 (%)	2001 (%)	2011 (%)	2001 (%)	2011 (%)
Kokrajhar	52.29	66.63	61.01	73.44	43.06	59.54
Chirang	52.61	64.71	61.82	71.35	42.87	57.87
Baksa	59.57	70.53	70.32	78.55	48.33	62.23
Udalguri	56.40	66.60	65.94	73.79	46.34	59.17
Average	55.21	67.11	64.77	74.28	45.15	59.70

Source: Statistical Handbook BTC 2011, Population Census (India), Assam

The above table indicates that the literacy rate of BTAD is seem to be improvement but this improvement is not up to the mark in compare to other districts of the Assam State. According to the 2001 and 2011 census report with the female literacy rate of 45.15 percent and 59.70 percent of all four districts of BTAD area is too lower than male literacy rate of 55.21 percent and 67.11 percent respectively.

In 2001, the literacy rate of Kokrajhar had 52.29 percent, Chirang 52.61 percent, Baksa 59.57 percent and Udalguri 56.40 percent. The district wise rate of literacy and their rankings where Baksa was top in the list and the Kokrajhar district in the bottom list in 2001 census report. According to 2001 census report, the female literacy rate in four districts of BTAD were as: Baksa districts in 1st place, Udalguri in 2nd place, Kokrajhar in 3rd place and Chirang in 4th place respectively as the table show.

According to 2011 census, the districts under BTAD, Baksa is in the highest among the 4 districts with the literacy rate of 70.53 percent and Chirang in the lowest position with the literacy rate of 64.71 percent, and Kokrajhar in 2nd position with rate of 66.63 percent and Udalguri in 3rd position with rate of 66.60 percent. There could be seen a little improvement of female literacy rate the four districts under control of BTAD in comparing with previous 2001 census. Baksa district has recorded in the highest female literacy rate in the 2011 with the literacy rate of 62.23 percent and Chirang district in the bottom list with the literacy rate of 57.87 percent, as well as Kokrajhar district in 2nd place with the literacy rate of 59.54 percent and Udalguri in 3rd place in the list with the literacy of 59.17 percent.

It is impossible to development in the field like economic, political, educational, social and cultural area without any cooperation of women. Education has been recognised as an essential agent social change and development in any society. Every educated woman can think well about her future and her aim in life. In BTAD the lower rate of women influences in their socio-economic and political life in the entire study area. According to the 2001 and 2011 census report, more percent are living in the rural area and the educational status of women is more backward than male in the area. It is clear that the political participation of women will not be active in BTC area until and unless they are equal to male in education.

Women and Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha MPs:

Women in BTC area are still not well represented in political life as member in parliament. The political participation of women in the BTC politics as representation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs has been very difficult to see since 2004. The following table shows the figure:

Table 3: Women Participation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs under BTC area since 2004:

Year	Lok Sabha			Rajya Sabha		
	Total No. of Elected MPs	No. of Male MPs	No. of Female MPs	Total No. of Elected MPs	No. of Male MPs	No. of Female MPs
2004	02	02	0	01	01	0
2009	02	02	0	01	01	0

2014	05	05	0	02	02	0
Total	09	09	0	04	04	0

Source: State Election Commission, Assam

The above table show an overview of participation of women in the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and Rajya Sabha (Council of States). In 2004 two MPs, in 2009 two MPs and in 2014 total five MPs were elected in the Lok Sabha Election under control of BTAD Lok Sabha Constituencies respectively. It is clear that out of total elected 9 MPs in the three Lok Sabha which all are male. Out of total 4 MPs of Rajya Sabha of BTC area, even single female members were not elected in the House. The participation of women in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha has never exceeded 'zero' percent since 2004 in BTC area which was found disappointing. Women's participation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha since the First Three Government of BTC that they continue to be excluded from the political participation. The main factors attributed to low representation could be low percentage of reservation of seats in parliament, lack of consensus, gender inequalities, low illiteracy, socio-economic condition and lack of willingness among political parties to give more tickets to women. So, the women are speechless and they have nothing to say in the decision-making process in both the Houses especially from the BTC area due to their poor strength or participation.

Women and State Legislative Assembly Election:

Assam has total 126 MLAs, out of which BTC area has 28 MLAs under of its control. While the women of BTAD have been taking active role in various social and political movements, there are only a few of them who have been elected to the State's Legislative Assembly. The women participation in politics is very low comparison to male. Only a few women have got elected and the very rarely have the opportunity to successfully perform their responsibilities as ministers. The following table show the figure:

Table 4: Women Participation in Assam Legislative Assembly, under BTC area since 2006:

Year	Total No. of Elected MLAs	No. of Male MLAs	No. of Female MLAs	Percentage (%) of Female MLAs
2006	28	24	04	16.66
2011	28	25	03	12.00
2016	28	26	02	07.69
Total	84	75	09	36.35

Source: Election Commission of India 2016, MLAs Election Result of Assam.

The above table show the women participation in Assam Legislative Assembly, under BTC area since 2006. The percentage of women participation in the Assembly election of BTC area and its constituencies steadily decline. The female percentage of MLAs not exceeded 16.66 in the Assembly election in BTC. In 2006 the 12th Assembly election, there were 4 women member elected. But it was decreased to 3 in the 13th Assembly election. In the 14th Legislative Assembly election of 2006, under the BTC control of Assam state the BPF political party gave tickets solely to its sitting women candidates – Kamali Basumatari from Panery and Pramila Rani Brahma from Kokrajhar (East) and they both retained the seats. One important point is that there was no significant increase in the number of female Members of Legislative Assembly elected in the State as well as in the BTC area. Interestingly the current minister of Assam Pramila Rani Brahma has been continuously elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly since 1991 for six times. She is actively participating in the decision-making process in Assam and for BTAD.

Women and BTC Legislative Assembly Elections:

The BTC has 46 Executive Members each looking after a specific area of control called 'Somisthi'. A provision is made in Para 2(1) of the Six Schedule for the increasing the member of members for BTC up to 46 out of which 30 is reserved for Schedule Tribes, 5 for non-tribal communities, 5 open for all communities and 6 to be nominated by the Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities from the BTC area of which at least 2 nominated members should be women categories. The nominated members have the rights and privileges as other members including voting rights. The election from the 40 constituencies is based on Adult Franchise and the tenure of the elected members is of 5 years. The Bodoland Territorial Area District was created for the self-rule of Bodos under the provision of amended Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution on 10th February, 2003. Subsequently, an interim council was formed on 6th December, 2003 without a single women representative. The newly formed interim council was to hold election within a year for forty elected seats the provisional functioning of the council and that was declared by the State Election Commission to be held on 13th May, 2004. After the election Hagrama Mohilary was sworn as Chief of BTC with his elected members consolidated his power. And after that the first fresh election of BTAD was held in the year of 2005 which is show in following table:

Table 5: Women Participation in BTC Legislative Assembly since 2005:

Year	Total No. of Seats	No. of Male Elected Members	No. of Female Elected Members	(%) of Female Elected Members
2005	46	44	02	04.54
2010	46	43	03	06.97
2015	46	41	05	12.19
Total	138	129	09	23.70

➤ Including Six Nominated Members of BTCLA

Source: Bodoland.gov.in

The above table show the numbers of women participation in all the BTC Legislative Assembly constituencies of four districts are less than the male participation. In 2005 out of total 46 seats only 2 members were female. As a result, no female candidates were able to win in the first BTC Legislative Assembly election, except two nominated women. Anima Bayan from Udalguri and Jamuna Rani Brahma from Gossaigaon were the two nominated women representatives of four districts in 2005. It is found that all four districts of BTCLA constituencies' male participation are dominating factor in comparison to female.

In 2010, Labita Das was only single women member who elected from the Udalguri district and Shyamali Marak from Kokrajhar and from Chirang Bipiri Ray were the two women members nominated in the BTC Legislative Assembly election. However, there was no significant improvement or increase in the number of female members of BTCLA.

Again in 2015 the Third BTCLA election, only single women candidate was elected because of the women participation in politics continues negligible. Out of the total seats a single woman was elected, it is not the good symbol of future political participation in the BTC area. Smt. Arpana Das was the single member who was elected from the Salakati (ST) Constituency and there was little enlargement in the women nominated members which was increase 4 members out of total 6 nominated members. Under the BPF rule BTC administration has announced the four nominated member to the BTC Legislative Assembly and the members are nominated from various communities which were not represented in the election which included Puleswary Devi (Salakati), Purnima Chetry (Chirang), Sabita Rubi Das (Bijni) and Gitima Das (Gossaigaon). Besides, it is important that a few brave women fought the election under the independent banner but could not win to their male counterpart.

Women and Executive Members:

The BTC was created after the signing of the Bodo Accord and it was made operational from 7th December, 2003 consisting of 12 Executive Members (E.Ms) provisionally. The overall BTC's administration is vested in the Executive Council headed by the Chief Executive of the Council. The Committee of BTC exercises similar powers and functions to that of the Cabinet at the State or at the Central level within the jurisdiction of its own. There is an Executive Council under the control of BTC comprising 14 Executive Members including the one Chief Executive Member and another one is Deputy Chief Executive Member and the other 12 members of the Executive Council are from among the 40 elected members of the BTCLA who are appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the Chief Executive Member. The following table show the figure:

Table 6: Executive Members of BTC since 2005:

Year	Total No. of Seats (E.Ms)	No. of Male Executive Members	No. of Female Executive Members	(%) of Female Executive Members
2005	12	12	0	0.00
2010	12	12	0	0.00
2015	12	12	0	0.00
Total	36	36	0	0.00

Source: Bodoland.gov.in

From the above table, out of the 12 Executive Members even single women member was not included in the BTC Executive Council since 2005. Here, it is completely hiding the women power in the decision-making process from the main political agenda. The major political parties of BTC area, State level and Central level is not paid attention about the political participation of women especially in this area, where, there is no denying the fact that greater participation of women in the political process would be pre-condition for their economic and social emancipation. However, even though a significantly large number of women voter in the area, yet only a few of them assume the politics. So, the political rights of women continue deprive by the male dominated authority.

Conclusion:

Women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and democracy and it facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women. Gender inequality leading to deprivation of power among continues to be a political reality in the country. The political participation of women of the BTC area could be increase to the act of active engagements includes voting, standing for office, joining of political party or to take part the political campaigns of the political parties and to exert influence in the decision-making process through public debate, and dialogue with the representatives they elected or through their capacity to organise themselves, or exercise public power by holding public office at different levels of administrations- local, regional, national and international. It is clear that without active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all level of decision-making, goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved and the hope for the democracy and democratisation is none sense. The backwardness is the main causes of the negligence to women power in the four districts of BTAD. Their rights have been violated frequently by the male dominated society. Initially, after the creation of BTC the ABSU and BLT jointly floated a new political party called 'Bodoland Peoples Progressive Front' (BPPF) to fight the elections. As it was Bodo people's party, it was expected that BPPF would represent both the men and women of the society. But surprisingly, the BPPF stood out only as a Men's organisation, women were marginalised once again. In the First Three BTC Government women participation in politics has been remaining in the shadows because vast majority of Bodo women are illiterate, suffer legal, injustice, in poor health, invisible in the system of decision-making, political, economic and social discrimination in walk of life. The main challenge faced by women is lack of education which hinders their political involvement. Awareness about their rights and privileges as mentioned in the Constitution of India can only be ensured once women are appropriately educated. There is need for capacity building of prospective women leaders by imparting leadership training to the female members of political parties.

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