



WOMEN IN POLITICS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract: In the contemporary democratic discourses of development, empowerment has emerged as a dominant theme. It has gained greater significance with the growing concern for decentralized and participatory development. Gender issues on social and gender equity are cross-national and interdisciplinary in nature. India is regarded as the largest democratic country in the world, where the participation of both men and women are regarded as an intrinsic part for the success of its democracy. The objective of this paper is to study the issues pertaining to women empowerment and their challenges in participation in politics. The research paper uses the historical and descriptive method of study. The statistical data on the women's representation in Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh from 1978 to 2019 shows a gradual increase in number but still there is a need to create awareness among women for their larger participation. The findings of the paper show different factors like socio-economic and cultural factors as the reason behind the poor participation of women in politics.

Keywords: Women, Political participation, Empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is an inextricable link between the politics and empowerment and both are complementary to each other. The term empowerment is politically loaded and is always related to the revolt of the oppressed. And politics itself is an area where empowerment has taken affect. There is always an element of politics and power implied to empowerment. As the feminists' advocates 'personal is political', which means whatever happens to a woman is not only her private affair but it also has an expression of her social situation. It is a political concept that connects an individual with community and with the politics in general.

Empowerment is also a political demand of the marginalized women not to confine them in their home in the existing patriarchal society. It brings forth women in politics and ignites and broadens their social understanding and bridges the gap of the later with others in the society. It also widens her horizon of rational thinking and imbues her faith in social change that accords her the ability to change herself. Women's effective and active participation in politics leads to their political empowerment. Political empowerment refers to the process where there is an equitable representation of women in decision-making both in formal and informal structures and their voices are being heard during the formulation of policies which affect the societies.

The participation of women in politics and governance is equated as the key to redress gender inequalities in societies and to bring about women empowerment. Participation in politics is a strong means to transform the lives of women from marginalization, deprivation and subordination. It brings political consciousness which is quintessential for the empowerment of the women. It can move the women from powerlessness to empowerment. Therefore, it is true that the women's participation in politics is a major yardstick for the women empowerment.

Karl Marilee said that "participation is an essential element of empowerment framework" (Marilee, " Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision-making", 87) Various international conventions and treaties, such as Convention on

the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), United Nations initiatives like- United Nations Decade for Women, United Nations Development Programmes 'Gender in Development Goal', and global conferences on women in 1975 in Mexico, 1985 in Nairobi, 1985 in Beijing etc. have encouraged the participation of women in political and economic activities and decision-making process which is quintessential for women empowerment. However, the history of women's participation in politics and governance draws quite a gloomy picture and has been discouraging. The global record shows that even in developed western societies women's political participation remained quite low.

The absence or low participation of women in decision-making and governance structure means that resources allocated are not meaningfully defined without the input from women, whose life experiences provides them a different perception and awareness of the community's needs, concern and interests from that of men. Woman's political participation in the election can be in the form of a voter and campaigner, as a party worker and as a contestant. Among these, the most important yardstick to measure the women's active political participation is by measuring the number of women contestants elected in the process of election and who becomes a part of decision-making bodies. Yet the participation becomes effective only when the elected women exercise their political rights devoid any influence. With political participation comes the question of representation and quotas for women.

The representation of women in national politics from Arunachal Pradesh is negligible even after a span of thirty-six years of statehood, there has been no women representation from the state in Lok Sabha. It was only in the year 1984, when in the vacancy caused by Rotom Tama due to his retirement on 26th may 1984, Omem Moyong Deori was elected uncontested to the Rajya Sabha. Since then, there has been no women member of the Parliament till date. She was one of the few women leaders who made it to the Parliament of India from north east. She was also honoured with Padmashri Award for social work in 1984. She even served as Vice-President of Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) and later became its President. She was also appointed as Vice Chairperson of the National Commission of SC/ST, Government of India, 1995. It is seen that a large number of women actively take part in mass meetings, as voters in election, mass meetings, processions and other political activities but were always ignored as a candidate in both in parliamentary and state assembly elections.

The process of political unity in the state of Arunachal Pradesh was strengthened when the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was turned into Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh in 1972. It got its first Legislative Assembly and its first Council of Ministers while converting the existing Territorial Council into Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh in 1975. The first five-member Ministry of Interim Government was formed under the leadership of P.K. Thungon, who became the first Chief Minister of the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh. The first General Assembly Election for the State Legislative Assembly was held in 1978 and the entire territory went to polls. The Janata Party headed by P.K Thungon won the election and formed the government. No women representatives were elected to the office. However, Sibokai Singpho was nominated as the first lady in the Legislative Assembly in 1978. From 5-Seppa Constituency, Nyari Welly contested from People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) but was defeated. From 23-Chowkham Assembly Constituency, Omem Deori contested as an independent candidate and lost too. In 6th September 1979, Thungon Ministry collapsed due to defection of its members. People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) came to the power and formed an alternative government headed by Tomo Riba by re-christening the party United People's Party of Arunachal (UPPA) on 18th September 1979. But due to re-defection, this ministry was short lived and it survived only for 47 days and it collapsed. Tomo Riba had to resign after recommending dissolution of the Assembly. The Lt. Governor, R.N Haldipur recommended to dissolve the Assembly and President's Rule was imposed for the first time in the state which continued till 18th January 1980.

The mid-term Assembly Election was held on 3rd January 1980 after two months of the imposition of President's Rule and Nyari Welly was elected as the first women member in the second Legislative Assembly in the state. On 24th December 1984, the third Legislative Assembly Election was held and Nyari Welly was re-elected from 5-Seppa Constituency. Now, Komoli Mossang was also elected as an independent candidate from 25-Naodihing-Nampong Constituency. Therefore, during the period of Arunachal as Union territory from 1972-87, only three women representatives came to power out of which one was nominated. On 20th of February 1987, the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh got the status of full-fledged statehood and became the 24th

state of the union of India. However, the representation of women in the State Legislative Assembly has been very low even after the attainment of Statehood.

The First General Assembly of the State Legislative Assembly after attainment of Statehood was held on 27 February 1990 with 60 Assembly Constituencies. The total number of Constituencies and contestants were more, therefore, people showed lot more of enthusiasm and active participation was seen all the state. In the Fourth Legislative Assembly, out of the total strength of 60 members of Legislative Assembly from 1990-1995, only two female representatives were elected namely Omen Moyong Deori from 48-Lekang (ST) Constituency and Komoli Mossang from 51-Nampong (ST) Constituency both from INC party. Komoli Mossang became the first women to be inducted as Cabinet Minister in Arunachal Pradesh under Gegong Apang's Ministry. Since then, there has been no female representative inducted as Cabinet Minister in the state so far.

The Fifth general assembly was held on 11th of March 1995, Yadap Apang was elected out of three female that contested. The other two defeated candidate being Komoli Mossang and Omen Moyong Deori. For the first time after a long dry spell in East Siang, a women candidate was elected. Yadap Apang is also the lone women to represent east Siang in the Legislative Assembly till date. She was the wife of former Chief Minister Gegong Apang. She represented Pasighat West Constituency from 1995 to 1999 from INC party. But during the Sixth Assembly Election held on 3rd October 1999, she lost to Dr. Tangor Tapak of INC. Komoli Mossang was also defeated by Setong Sena from INC party. However, from 8-Bameng Constituency, Mekup Dolo was elected. In the third Bye-Election held on 20th September 2001, Nyari Natung was elected from 12 Pakkke Kessang Constituency. Again, Yari Dulom got elected from 24-Daporijo Constituency on 12th December 2002 in the Fourth Bye-Election.

On 7th October 2004, the Seventh Legislative Assembly Election was held and it proved to be the worst election for women candidates who contested the election. During this election, five women candidates stood for election but unfortunately none got elected. The candidates were Mekup Dolo, Nyari Natung, Yari Dulom, Komoli Mossang and Nang Frica Namshum. Therefore, during this Legislative Assembly Session from 2004 to 2009, the representation of women was nil. During the Eight Legislative Election held on 13th of October 2009, female candidates increased to nine which is the highest number till date. However, only two females were elected, namely Karya Bagang from 9-Chayangtajo Constituency and Nang Sati Mein as an Independent candidate of 47-Namsai Constituency. The seven other female contestant, Yari Dulom, (24-Daporijo) Dakter Basar (29-Basar), Duter Padu (30-Aalo, West), Yai Mara (28-likabali), Kenyir Ringu (36-Nari koyu), Jitbo Aboh (56-Khonsa, West) and Pomaya Mithi (43-Roing) faced defeat at the hands of their male rivals. One striking feature to be analyzed here is that the female electorates in the state seem not to be in favour of the female candidates, otherwise many female contestants would have won the seats they contested. This analysis seems true observing the previous many elections held before and even in the last election held in 2014 where only two females were elected for State Legislative Assembly. Gum Tayeng was nominated from the 42-Dambuk Constituency during the 2013 Bye-Election.

During the State Legislative Election held on 9th of April 2014; six female candidates were fielded to contest election namely, Karya Bagang (9-Chayangtajo), Taba Nirmali (16-Yachuli), Toko Sheetal (13-Itanagar), Gum Tayeng (42-Dambuk), Anita Payeng (48-Lekang) and Yai Mara (28-Likabali). However, only two candidates namely, Gum Tayeng and Karya Bagang returned to the State Legislative Assembly. Therefore, till date no female candidate from East Siang came to power. Although Gum Tayeng belongs to Adi tribe but she represents Lower Dibang Valley District. Therefore, the study at the number of Adi women MLA in the district of East Siang has been negligible.

In the last State Assembly Election held on 2019, women electorates outnumbered the male voters but only three could come in to power in the 60-member State Legislative Assembly, which later increased to four due to the Bye-Election held the next year where, Chakat Aboh won the Khonsa West Constituency. She was the wife of NPP leader Tirong Aboh who was shot in 21 of May by the miscreants. The number of women candidates increased to eleven from seven in the last 2014 election. The other three winning women candidates were from BJP namely, sitting MLA Gum Tayeng, Dasanglu Pul and Jummum Ete Deori. Dasanglu Pul won the Bye-Election from Hayulaing assembly seat during 2016 following her husband Kalikho Pul's demise. It gives us a clear idea that the trend of women's participation in the arena of political decision making is still very low. Despite the fact of the Constitutional Guarantee and increase in educational level among the females, their participation in politics and

political activities are much less. This trend is reflected in the following table 1 that is given below and it also shows the representation of women in Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh from 1978 to 2019.

Table 1: Representation of Women in State Legislative Assembly

Year	Total MLA	Total Women MLA
1978	30	1
1980	30	1
1984	30	2
1990	60	2
1995	60	1
1999	60	3
2004	60	NIL
2009	60	3
2014	60	2
2019	60	4

Source: Based on data collected from the Office of Chief Electoral Officer, Itanagar

The table clearly shows that the presence of women legislators in the present political set-up of State Legislative Assembly is still very negligible. Till date, altogether there has been only eleven numbers of women legislators in the state. This is not surprising for the fact that the traditional system of tribe's barely recognizes women in political decision making. Even these few elected women could not create much impact and voice their opinions on women related issues as they were not given adequate opportunities. In many cases it was found that male colleagues refused to accept them as equals.

The role of Arunachal women has been more concentrated in uplifting the socio-economic condition of the women in particular and of the society in general and it has been commendable. In spite of the large and active participation of women as voters and in social organizations, their representations in their concerned district as well as in the state are very few and are dominated by men. The reason for low representation of women can be attributed to various factors, the most prominent being male domination and unfavorable position of women. One of the important factors may be the indifference and apathy on the side political parties and reluctance to field women as candidates by the male leaderships. Therefore, it has been hard for the women to seek tickets from various political parties.

Also, the women workers just remain as leaders of the women wing without becoming party leaders of the various political parties for lifetime. Moreover, they are not given prominent position and they usually only carry out the policies and programmes taken by the male leaders of their party. They are kept aloof and being deprived from policy formulation and decision making. The women wing leaders just act as tools to attract women voters to vote for the male candidate and organize meetings and gatherings for their respective political party. They are entrusted with the task of door-to-door campaign during the election but they excluded from the main party meetings and organizations. Thus, consequently women are not elected as candidates both in the state and Centre politics. The women wing of the apex body of different communities, also has never taken up any issue regarding the participation of women in politics. They have always remained silent on this matter since their main activity and concern are confined only to social issues. So, it could be the fact that the low level of women's representation owes to the unwillingness of the general public both the men and women to accept women leadership. Also, the main obstacles to free and fair participation of women in politics are due their marginalization, economic disempowerment, criminalized politics and patriarchy.

The study also reveals that the women representatives as well as all the contestants of the state level politics belong to well to do families or so-called elite sections. It is also found that political parties do not give party tickets to women to contest election if they had no financial back up. Therefore, it is valid to assume and to be feared that only women from elite sections would get in to politics. History tells us that from centuries, the women have borne the brunt of male domination due to the existing patriarchal values. Many instances of women breaking the shackles of this traditional value system are found but they still have no role in decision making processes. Therefore, it becomes more important to remove these constraints for the full participation of women in all decision-making processes and bodies. This could lead to development of the tribal communities as well as of the state as a whole.

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