



# GENDER POLITICAL DISPARITY IN ASSAM: A PERSPECTIVE STUDY OF WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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**Abstract:** Nearly every woman in the northeast and in Assam experiences subordination and gender inequality. From womb to grave, bias against women is not new. In every area- social, political, economic, educational, nutritional, medical, and legal-women continue to be different and vulnerable. Given that women face oppression in every aspect of life, research on gender political disparity in the Assam is relevant. This study issue is highly pertinent to the measurement of gender political disparity in the northeast region in Assam and study the scenario of women in political participation. In addition, this study focuses on the several initiatives being implemented in this area to empower women. Women are also not active in electoral politics. This research aims to delve into the intricacies of gender disparity in politics within the context of Assam, examining factors contributing to this inequality and exploring potential avenues for improvement. The study also may provide us space to understand the women marginality in Indian society particularly in northeastregion of Assam.

**Key words:** Gender, Disparity, Women, Political representation,Empowerment, India, Assam

## Introduction:

Gender is not biological but cultural term. 'Gender' refers to masculinity and feminine and describes knowledgeable patterns. One the societal conceptions of masculinity and femininity are derived from history and culture, and once established, they gradually govern both. In 1971, Oakley used the term "Gender" to describe the distinctions between men and women. Since then, the phrase has been used frequently to describe the relationship between men and women. It is thought that gender relates to socially manufactured differences between men and women in terms of their roles, attitudes, and relationships in society, where's man and woman allude to biological differences between the two. Similar to class, race, and ethnicity, gender is a crucial component of social stratification in civilization in developing nations. As a result, gender started to contribute to social inequality.(kaur R 2018)

Traditionally women were expected to take up biologically allocated functions only while men assumed social, economic, political duties. It offered an opportunity to men for their reinforcement and development according to need and opportunities. However, the biological processes didn't need to be improved upon. Therefore, it can be claimed that sociocultural, political, religious, and economic factors contribute to gender disparities.

Power disparities that are directly related to political activities are known as political disparities. The concept is multifaceted and encompasses expression, response, and process that take place in various governance configurations, including social organizations, local councils, national governments, and international governance. Many other forms of inequality are influenced by political inequality.

The Northeast region of India particularly Assam has witnessed significant strides in various socio economic sectors. However, gender disparity continues to be a persistent issue. In most of the democracies of the world we find enormous disparity in women's formal political equality and their meaningful exercise of political power. The political participation of women for equitable and sustainable human development it is believed that greater political participation of women will full fill the aim of both equality and empowerment of women and also integrate them into the process of development. According to India's constitution, women and men are on an equal basis. Although women occupy a predominant position in social life and constitute 50 per cent of total population, their political participation in politics is very much limited in proportion to their size on every levels in a society men predominate. The gender political disparity in decision making process especially amongst the most backward regions of Northeast India and Assam in particular is marked by several challenges.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

- To examine the scenario of gender political disparity and study the level of women in political participation.
- To understand reason behind gender political disparity in Assam.
- To explore various recommendations to be taken for woman political empowerment.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A thorough review of existing literature on gender politics and regional disparities with a specific focus on Assam. The women participation in politics has face several issues, many studies have been conducted and studies are also in progress. Some of those studies are reported here.

**The National Commission on women (2001)** finds that women participation in politics had elevated the status of women inside and outside the family. Elected women representatives got weight age in the community. **Panda (2002)**, found women belonging to high socio-economic background make effective participation in politics. .

**Mahanta, Purusottam (2013)** the study shows that when it comes to gender equality, the northeast is doing better than the rest of the country. Nevertheless, despite the fact that many ethnic group in the area are predominately non-sex discriminatory, there is still gender imbalance in the area. Women in the area have a somewhat lower status and are comparatively less empowered than men, according to the study. Access to health, work, and education is all impacted by gender. There is a significant gender disparity in political participation at state and national levels.

**Baishy, Dr. Dhannesar (2016)** examined women's involvement in electoral politics and various mass movements as two ways to examine their political participation in Assam in general and the Nalbari area in particular. Throughout the history of the struggle for independence, women have been integral to several social movements. Numerous general and unique challenges have given rise to movements. Currently, women's political vote participation is likewise noteworthy. The voting record of women indicates that they are almost on par with the voting and electoral participation rates of men. But the proportion of female voters is declining. There are far more female candidates in politics than male candidates. Democracy will fail in its objective if women citizens lack equal opportunity to participate in the governmental decision making process. They are to be equal partners in the political development and national development process.

**Kaur Rajinder (2018)**. Women's participation is hindered by the general gender biased political culture. Women's lack of participation and decision-making authority, whether within or outside the family, is the main cause of the issue. As a result, political inequality appears to be roughly the same with very little variations worldwide. This study focuses on gender political inequality in South Asia. South Asia is the second lowest globally with less women in parliament.

**Deka Lina, "Right and empowerment of women: A study of gram panchayats of Kamrup (rural) district, Assam"**, said that like other women in the country the Assamese women do various kinds of household works of cleaning, washing, cooking and of distribution of food items. But women are more likely to engage in non-profit activities. Male member are not expected to do some of the household works except in unavoidable circumstances. Indeed, men generally avoid works attributed to women. Deka Mousumi and others article **"Constraints of Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Study in Kamrup District (Rural) of Assam"** explained that women participation in politics is most significant. But all over the world women are not able to represent in accordance with the share they have. In Kamrup district of Assam, panchayati raj is working but some factors i.e. poor education, deplorable economic condition, social norms and culture are affecting on effective participation of women there in. Due to some weakness of women "proxy representation" is continuing in manage the affairs related to panchayats by the husbands or other male family members of the elected women.

## METHODOLOGY:

The study is to identify and find the scenario of gender political disparity in Assam and perspective study of women political participation. The methodology involved is the collection of secondary data from the sources like census report, Election commission India report, Thesis, journal articles, and research paper, many online sources pbi.gov.in website Assam's, website related to gender political disparity and data was analyzed.

## Gender Political Disparity in India

Gender disparities refer to discrimination based on gender presentation. In layman's terms, this setback refers to the separation between genders, specifically male and female. India ranked 129<sup>th</sup> out of 146 nations in the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global gender Gap report. Despite the government's prohibition on pre-natal sex checkups, this issue is becoming increasingly prevalent.

Closing the gender gap in, instance, the labor force participation rate (45.9%) will be one approach to accomplish the goal. Numerous policies must be in place to achieve this, including preventing girls from dropping out of college, giving them job skills, guaranteeing their safety at work, and assisting them in maintaining employment after marriage by dividing household tasks. India is placed 124th on the education index, with a 17.2 percentage point difference between the literacy rates of men and women. Although India has improved in the political empowerment rating, there are still not enough women in Parliament. You need go no farther than the recently elected Lok Sabha for confirmation. The recently elected Lok Sabha is the only place to look. Although there were nearly 800 female candidates, there are now just 74 female members of Parliament, down from 78 (2019) of 543 members, or 13.6% in the total. Given that the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023, which seeks to reserve one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and State legislative Assemblies for women, has not yet taken effect, these figures are not encouraging. (GGG 2024)

## Gender Political Disparity in Assam Electoral politics

Despite the progressive cultural communities of Northeast India, and in Assam, the region still grapples with significant gender disparities in political representation. This study, focusing on the state of Assam, aims to investigate the underlying factors contributing to this disparity and its implication for women's empowerment and social development. The rights are guaranteed equally to men and women, there are several ways in which the structure of the family and the existence of several inequitable social customs and practices serve to deprive women of these rights. Women are viewed as dependents within the family and faced severe restrictions on mobility, which further impede their ability to gain access to education, economic opportunities, to move freely and settle anywhere, to form unions or groups and so on, which are fundamental freedom under Indian Constitution. The Northeast india region of Assam and women political participation level in the electoral politics in national level and state level less the number of elected female in compare to elected male is very low. The absolute truth is shown in the table below.

Participation of Assamese women's in Lok Sabha Election from 1952 to 2024

Year	No of Seats in Lok Sabha	Total contesting Candidate	Contesting Male Candidate	Contesting Female Candidate	No of seats Won by women
1951-52	10	40	38	02	01
1957	10	31	29	02	02
1962	12	41	38	03	02
1967	12	47	45	02	01
1971	14	78	75	03	01
1977	14	40	37	03	02
1980	14	07	05	02	00
1985	14	89	87	02	00
1989	-	-	-	-	-
1991	14	167	159	08	00
1996	14	137	128	09	00
1999	14	115	106	09	02
2004	14	116	110	06	00
2009	14	169	158	11	02

2014	14	183	164	19	02
2019	14	167	152	15	01
2021	14	142	130	12	01

Source: Election Commission India

There are fewer female candidates in Assam for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Assam more female voters than any other state, but only 12 women are running in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, down from the previous total of 14. Assam has a total electorate of 2,45,72,144 with 1,239,241 women voters and 1,23,25,293 male voters. Since the 2014 polls, when there were 16 female candidates, the number of female candidates has been steadily declining.(India Today 2024) Thus, it is an attempt to understand the nexus between framework and the women of assamese society.

#### Participation of Assamese women's in Legislative Election from 1952 to 2021

Year of Election	Total Candidates	Total Male Candidates	Total Female Candidates	No of Female winners	Percentage of Female Winners
1951-52	458	457	01	01	0.93%
1957	307	301	06	05	4.63%
1962	409	405	04	04	3.81%
1967	493	486	07	05	3.97%
1972	478	466	12	08	7.02%
1978	938	916	22	01	0.79%
1983	471	468	03	02	1.59%
1985	1133	1104	29	05	3.97%
1991	1657	1607	50	05	3.97%
1996	1228	1183	45	07	5.56%
2001	916	861	55	11	8.73%
2006	997	927	70	13	10.32%
2011	981	896	85	15	11.90%
2016	1190	1099	91	08	6.35%
2021	946	870	76	05	3.97%

Source: Election Commission India

The percentage of women elected to the state legislative assemblies 4.76% (PBI report). In Assam Political parties provide women with limited election tickets, which contribute significantly to the low representation of women. Women made up just 8% of the candidates in the most recent election. Among the mainstream political parties, BJP gave 8%, INC 10% and AGP 7% tickets to women contestants in 2021

### Empowering Women Political Participation

Women in Assam continue to face discrimination and disadvantage on a large scale, as well as exclusion from decision making forums. The exclusion of women from the Assamese political arena is a significant obstacle in this regard. However, this issue is not exclusive to Assam; rather, it is a widespread worry among India's democracies. In addition to being underrepresented in entities that make decision, women voters and political activists in Assam are also frequently marginalized. Furthermore, women who are politically active- whether as elected officials or involved citizens- frequently experience violence, harassment, and discrimination from competing political parties, dissatisfied neighbors, or even their own families. Empowering women's political participation is of foremost importance for building inclusive democratic and equitable societies. Women's Panchayat Raj seat reservation can be in advancing women's participation in governance. To enable women to assume leadership positions, to get beyond the numerous obstacles they encounter when they decide to get involved in politics, and to enable their complete involvement in the political process, more work is necessary.

Empowering women to participate in politics would involve teaching them how to fulfill their responsibilities in an efficient and effective manner. Women from all societal levels who currently hold or want to assume leadership positions must be the focus of leadership development programs. In addition to teaching people how to be effective leaders and change agents in their communities, these training programs ought to increase their ability to

engage in governance institutions. Furthermore, the process of running for office and campaigning, as well as information on electioneering equipment.

Furthermore, measures must be developed at the governmental or political party levels to guarantee that women candidates receive 33% of the winnable tickets from all political parties. Women's organizations that strive for women's political empowerment must also get institutional backing at the federal and state levels. Lastly, initiatives should be taken to create a supportive atmosphere that encourages and makes it easier for women to fully and actively participate in politics.

## **Reason behind Gender Political Disparity**

### **Restricted Access to Education:**

Despite advancements, there are still gaps in education, especially in rural regions. Women's awareness of their rights and capacity to engage in political processes might be hindered by limited access to education.

### **Patriarchal Attitudes and Societal Norms:**

Patriarchal attitudes endure in the Northeast and in Assam, even if matrilineal civilizations are present in some areas. Women's engagement in public and political arenas is frequently restricted by traditional societal conventions, which makes it more difficult for them to participate in political activities.

### **Economic Disparity:**

Economic dependence can limit women's autonomy and their ability to pursue political career. Lack of access to financial resources can also make it difficult for women to fund political campaigns.

### **Political Structures:**

The existing political structures may not be adequately suited to allow women to participate in political activity.

### **Complex Social Structures:**

The Assam has a very diverse population, with many different tribal groups. Each group has its own social structures. This creates a very complex situation. And can lead to difficulties in implementing policies that promote gender disparity.

### **Violence and intimidation:**

In some areas women face violence and intimidation, which can deter them from participating in politics. This can create a climate of fear that discourages women from seeking political office.

## **Recommendations:**

A multifaceted strategy is required to address the gender political disparity in Northeast India, also Assam. Here are some recommendations:

**Encouraging women's Empowerment and Education:** make investments in high-quality education for women and girls, especially in rural regions. Put in place initiatives to improve women's economic empowerment by giving them access to capital and training. Encourage community-based organizations and women's self-help groups.

**Challenging social Norms and Attitudes:** run awareness initiatives to advance gender equality and against patriarchal views. Encourage women to participate in decision-making by interacting with traditional institutions and community leaders. Promote leadership positions.

**Strengthening legal and policy frameworks:** put in place quotas or reservation for women in all levels of political institutions, enforce current laws that uphold women's rights and advance gender equality.

**Increasing Women's political participation:** offer mentorship and training programs to women who want to run for office. Encourage women's political groups and networks. Boost financing for political campaigns run by women.

**Acknowledge and honor the various cultural contexts in the Assam:** collaborate with local communities to create gender equality strategies that are appropriate for their culture, and make sure that interventions are cognizant of the unique needs and difficulties faced by various tribal groups. Encourage cooperation between political parties to combat gender disparity.

**Enhance data collecting** on women's representation and political participation. Perform research to improve data gathering.



## CONCLUSION:

There are various ways that gender identity discrimination in politics might appear, including: Lack of legal protections, discriminatory laws, and underrepresentation. They may become more susceptible to prejudice and reprisals as a result. Discrimination based on gender identification in politics can have far-reaching effects on both the persons directly impacted and the larger political environment. It may result in damaging stereotypes being maintained, marginalized voices being silenced, and democratic values being undermined. The removal of gender disparity necessary in every sphere of politics which significant to transform women's life. Therefore it is the socio economic development which will help them effectively participate in the decision making process or in the process of empowerment. The reservation scenario help the women socialize politically or participate in collective work.

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