



# Women's Participaton In Politics: With Special Reference To Timona Gram Panchayat, Dibrugarh District, Assam

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## Abstract

This study explores the nature and extent of women's participation in the political processes of Timona Gram Panchayat in Dibrugarh dist, Assam. Despite constitutional provisions and local self-governance systems, women's political engagement in this rural panchayat remains limited. Traditionally, women have been confined to household roles, with limited political awareness and exposure. Although younger generations show improvement, significant gender disparities persist. The study identifies key barriers to women's political involvement, including patriarchal mindsets, limited education, economic dependence, and lack of political training. These factors often prevent women from participating meaningfully in panchayat meetings or decision-making bodies. Field-level interactions with elected women representatives, local leaders, and community members reveal that while constitutional reservations (as per Article 243(D) of the Indian constitution) have improved women's numerical presence in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), their participation often remains symbolic. It argues that true empowerment requires moving beyond quotas to ensure active and informed participation. The paper highlights the need for political capacity-building programs, awareness campaign and support networks to strengthen women's roles in grassroots democracy. Ultimately, the study contends that meaningful political participation by women is not only vital for achieving gender equality but also essential for the effective functioning of democratic institutions at the grassroots level.

**Key words:** women empowerment, political participation, grassroots democracy, proxy representation

## INTRODUCTION:

Traditionally, women in India have faced various social challenges such as sati, dowry, rape and harassment etc. However, with the passage of time, a significant change in this situation has been observed. In a vast democratic country like India, women's participation in politics is essential. This highly populous nation can only be truly democratic when women participate equally alongside men in the political sphere without any external barriers. Such equality will only be meaningful when women at the grassroots level become active and aware participants in political decision-making.

Although India has witnessed powerful women leaders like Indira Gandhi in the political domain, the current political landscape shows a lack of such strong female leadership. Women constitute approximately 48% of the total population in India, yet their political participation remains significantly limited. In the Lok Sabha, women hold around 14% of the seats, in the Rajya Sabha about 16% and in state legislative assemblies only 9%. However, women's representation is comparatively higher in local governance. In this context, the role of women in the political domain of Timona Gram Panchayat has been critically analyzed. The panchayat consists of 14 wards, with a majority populations belonging to the Assamese and tea tribe communities.

The areas under the Panchayat are largely underdeveloped and a large portion of the population is uneducated. The primary means of livelihood are agriculture and daily wage labourer, with few individuals in govt. employment. Because of low literacy, political and social decision-making participation is quite limited. Although there is some level of involvement, many people especially women are easily manipulated. Women's influence is minimal and during elections, they vote under the influence of male family members or neighbours. Recently, with some development in some areas, a slight increase in women's participation has been observed, but it still remains comparatively low.

Therefore, this study highlights the role of women in politics within Timona Gram Panchayat, which represents a grassroots democratic unit located in one corner of India. The study aims to present a detailed account of women's political involvement and their role in local governance. The main objectives of the study are- a) To examine the extent to which the 33% women reservation, as mentioned in the article 243(d) of the Indian constitution, is currently applied in the concern Panchayat. b) To assess the current significance of women in the decision-making process within the Panchayat and to examine the obstacles they face in this regard.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY:**

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- a) What types of challenges or obstacles do elected women representatives (EWRs) face?
- b) Do women face interference or restrictions from their husbands or other elder family members in political decision-making, such as casting their vote and similar activities?

### **HYPOTHESIS:**

H1: Elected women representatives give more importance to issues related to women in society.

H2: In the sphere of societal decision-making, the decisions of EWRs are often given less importance, mainly due to the lack of strong women leadership.

### **STUDY AREA AND SAMPLING STRATEGY:**

The research was conducted using a cluster sampling method among a homogeneous population. Out of the 14 wards under the panchayat, data was collected only from the villages of **Dhariyatoli, Timona, Jiliguri, Nunpuria, Bhimpara** and **Agnipathar gaon**, through surveys. A total of 60 samples were taken for the study, with 10 respondents selected from each of the surveyed villages using the cluster sampling technique.

Focus area: six wards under **Timona Gram panchayat, Dibrugarh, Assam.**

**About the Panchayat:** Timona Gram Panchayat is located in Dibrugarh dist. Of Assam, lies approximately 6.45 KM from Dibrugarh Air port and 5.35 KM from Lahowal Railway Station. According to the data of 2011, the Panchayat has a total population of 8,792 with 4,435 males and 4,357 females. The Panchayat

comprises 14 wards and the majority of the residents belong to the Assamese and Tea tribe communities. The panchayat comprise of total 14 wards are-

**Population under Timona Gram Panchayat as per census 2011 data-**

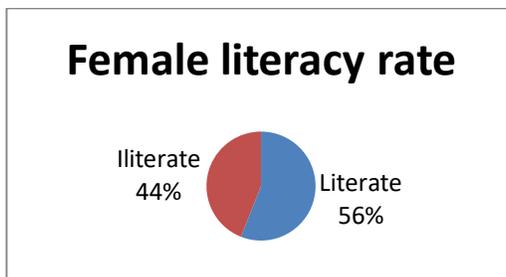
Wards	Total population	Male	Female
Timona	814	405	409
26 no. F.S. Grant	357	176	181
Bhimpara	149	83	66
Jiliguri	946	481	465
Tamulbari T.E.	1181	597	584
Tamulbari T.E. 43/46 Nlr	777	387	390
Kath Gaon	194	102	92
Agni pathar gaon	860	464	396
Chenglijan	1690	825	865
Nunpuria	567	288	279
Tamulbari T.E. 40/43 Nlr	260	129	131
Tamulbari T.E. 90/93	562	274	288
Dhoriatoli gaon	135	76	59
Palonia gaon	300	148	152

**DATA ANALYSIS:**

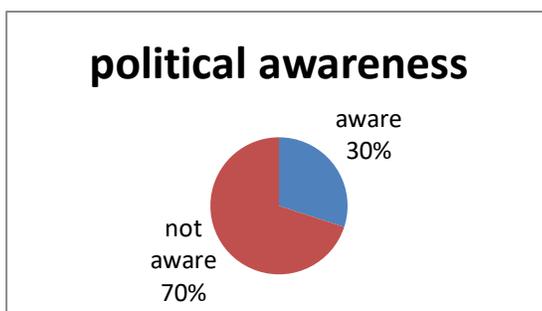
The overall population in the panchayat is 8,792 where 4,657 individuals are literate, among them 1929 are women. This means the overall literacy rate across all the wards under the panchayat is 52.97%, while the female literacy rate stands at 21.94%. Therefore, the male literacy rate is 9.09% higher than that of females, indicating a significant gender gap in education.

The total female population in the panchayat is 4,357, accounting for 49.56% of the total population. Among these women, 56.41% are illiterate, and 44.27% are literate, showing that the illiteracy rate among women is 12.14% higher than their literacy rate.

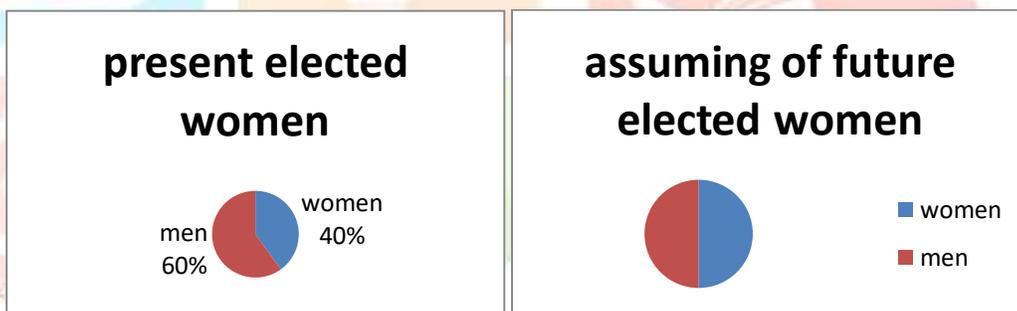
The total population of the six wards studied was 3,471, which accounts for 39.47% of the entire panchayat’s population. Among them, the total number of women was 1,674, making up 48.22% of the population in those wards. The female literacy rate was found to be 56%, while the illiteracy rate stood at 44%. This indicates that the proportion of literate women is 12% higher than illiterate women in the studied wards.



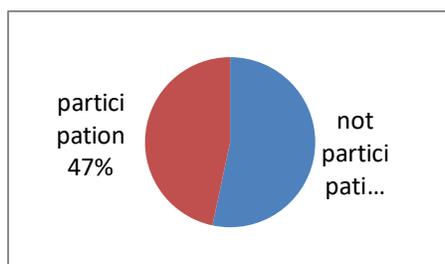
Lack of political awareness among women significantly contributes to their low representation in political institutions. Approximately 70% of women are unaware about politics. They are lack knowledge of their political rights, panchayats functions, and reservation provisions. Only 30% of women are politically aware.



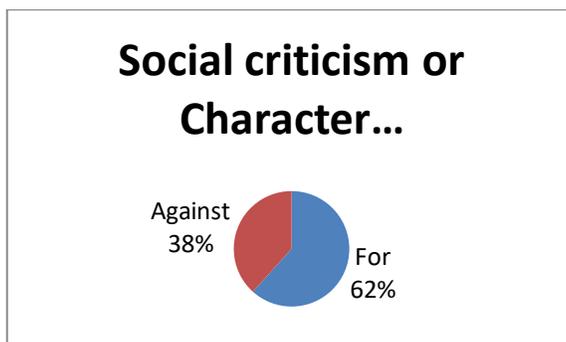
As of now, the panchayat has only one women appointed as president- Rita Ekka, who was elected in the year 2013. The total number of elected ward members in the panchayat to date is 14. According to the panchayat-level survey, in 2013, including Rita Ekka, there were a total of 5 EWRs. This number of 6 EWRs was recorded in 2025. Due to lack of adequate data prior to 2013, reliable information about earlier elected women representatives is unavailable. However, based on estimations and local assumptions, it appears that no women were elected as ward members before 2013. In 2025, even though 6 women were successfully elected, there were many other women who actively contested in the elections but did not win. This increase in participation suggests that by 2030, more than 50% of the panchayat representatives could be women.



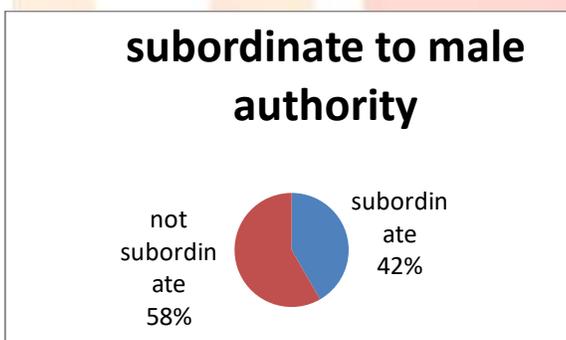
In this region, most women are seen spending their lives within the confines of the household, engaging primarily in domestic chores and giving extreme importance to family responsibilities. It has been found that 53.33% of women are engage in domestic work and daily wage labourer who are unable to engage in political domain. The majority of the women who are actively involved belong to Assamese community from Timona, Jiliguri, and Dhoriatoli villages. The main reason of low involvement of tea tribe communities are poor economic condition and lack of political awareness.



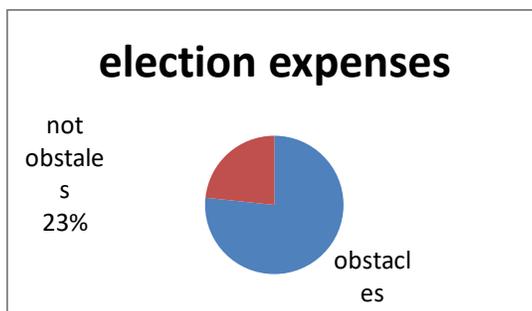
In the context of social criticism or character assassination, 61.67% of women commented that social criticism and character assassination discourage them from participating in political activities. According to these women, opposition from husbands or other male family members is another major reason that restricts their political engagement.



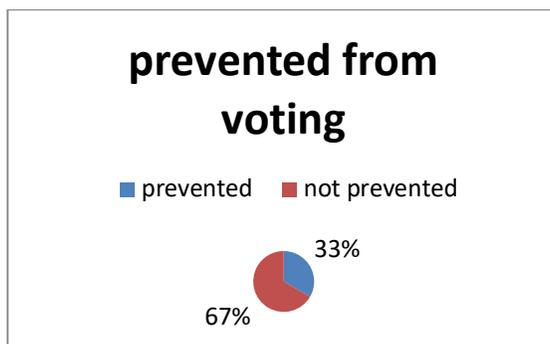
It was found that 41.67% of women remain subordinate to male authority and are required to act according to the decisions made by men. Among these women, there are some who were unable to participate in voting during the last election due to the lack of permission from male family members (husband and father in law).



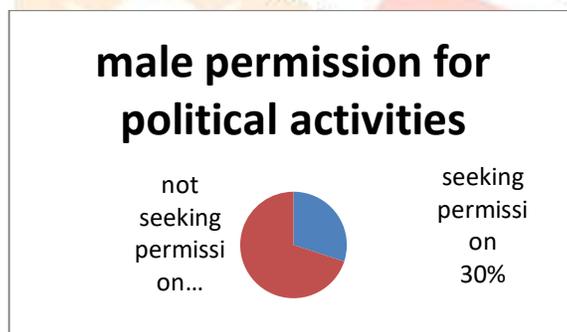
According to 76.67% of women, election-related expenses discourage them from participating in politics, particularly from contesting elections. These include nomination fees, campaign materials, transportation, meeting arrangements and lack of access to party funding etc. Women often face additional financial burdens due to their domestic responsibilities and limited control over financial resources.



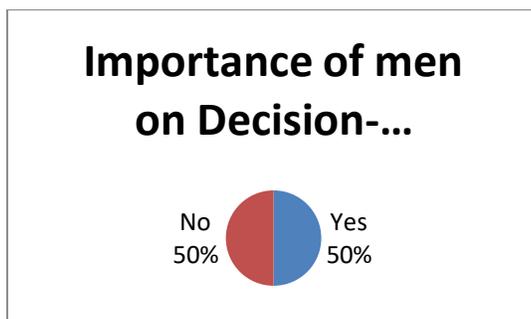
Although 33.33% of women expressed willingness to vote, they refrained from voting in the recent elections due to restrictions imposed by family members. The main reasons included children’s ill health, the need to take care of elderly parents, the responsibility of managing the household in the absence of senior family members, and, in some cases, opposition from husbands without any valid reason.



In the context of getting permission from male members of the family for political activities, 30% of women reported that they need to seek permission from male family members (such as husbands or others) to engage in political activities, while 70% expressed the opposite view.



In the context of institutional and political barriers, it was observed that earlier, during the tenure of a women panchayat president (Rita Ekka), no domination by either women or men was evident in the decision-making process. However, at present, elected women representatives have commented that greater importance is given to men in decision-making. This view was expressed by 50% of the elected women representatives.



In the context of proxy representation, it was found that 33.33% of cases involved proxy practices. Among these, in 16.67% of cases, husbands acted as proxy representatives for their wives in certain decision-making processes, while in another 16.67% of cases, women representatives acted as proxies on behalf of their husbands.

## FINDINGS:

1. A significant proportion of women remain confined to domestic responsibilities, which limits their active participation in political and public life.
2. Economic constraints and high election-related expenses discourage women from contesting elections, with a large majority of respondents identifying financial burden as a major barrier.
3. Patriarchal family structures continue to influence women's political participation, as many women are required to seek permission from male family members to engage in political activities.
4. Family responsibilities such as children, elder care, and household management prevent many women from participating in voting and political processes despite their willingness.
5. Lack of political awareness regarding rights, Panchayat functions, and decision-making processes contributes significantly to low women's representation.
6. Social criticism and character assassination act as strong discouraging factors, creating fear and hesitation among women to participate in politics.
7. Incidents of male dominance in decision-making processes were reported by elected women representatives, indicating persistent institutional and political barriers.
8. The existence of proxy representation was observed, where either husbands acted on behalf of elected women representatives or women acted as proxies for their husbands, undermining genuine participation.
9. Community-specific disparities were observed, with women from economically and social disadvantaged groups showing lower levels of political engagement.

Despite these, Women Representatives have also their individual weaknesses, such as-

- 1) Illiteracy and low education levels of the majority of women elected members. Thus proxy representation is prevalent.
- 2) overburdened with family responsibilities introversion due to lack of communication skills.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) **Community level social accountability forums:** Establish local forums involving elders, women's groups, and civil society to publicly discourage character assassination and social criticism of women.
- 2) **Performance-based recognition for active women leaders:** Introduce non-monetary incentives such as public recognition, certificates, or leadership awards for women who actively participate in panchayat meetings and decision-making processes.
- 3) **Gender sensitization and Awareness for the Younger Generation:** The present generation should be made aware of all forms of inequality and domestic violence faced by women. Detailed discussions on women's rights, legal protections, and gender equality should be promoted so that future generations can avoid and prevent such problems.
- 4) **Use of Audio-Visual media for women's political awareness:** Periodic organization of women-focused audio-visual programmes, such as film screenings and documentaries, should be encouraged to motivate women, build confidence, and increase awareness about women's rights and political participation. Film highlighting women's struggles and empowerment help women relate to real-life situations. Such programmes promote discussion, collective learning, and confidence among women. Films like *Queen (2013)*, *Mardaani (2014)*, *Pink (2016)*, *English Vinglish (2012)*, and *Gangubai Kathiawadi (2022)* can serve as powerful awareness tools.

- 5) **Women-Centric institutional response to Gender-based violence:** In case of violence against women, it is essential to ensure that women police officers and women-led support mechanisms take the lead to enhance trust, safety, and confidence among victims. In such system, women victims feel more comfortable reporting cases to women police officers. Female-led investigation units reduce fear, hesitation, and social stigma.
- 6) **Collective women's networks and peer support systems:** Formation of women's collectives or self-help political groups at the village level. Educated and politically aware women should regularly engage with and support uneducated or marginalized women through collective platforms to promote political awareness, leadership, and mutual support.

In a country like India, where violence against women persists from East to West and North to South, merely talking about freeing women from such oppression is not enough- ensuring protection and justice is what truly matters. The root solution to all these problems lies in focusing on grassroots level women and launching extensive awareness campaigns. Only then can we truly move toward the vision of a developed India by 2047.

## CONCLUSION:

According to the *National Sample Survey Office* (NSSO) of India, a person is considered literate if they are able to read and write a sentence in any language with proper understanding. However, in the context of political decision-making, literacy alone is not sufficient. One must be an enlightened citizen, capable of making decisions based on independent reasoning and critical thinking, rather than blindly following others' opinions.

Although the survey conducted in the six selected wards shows that the literacy rate among women is comparatively higher than in other regions, a lack of politically enlightened women was still observed. Therefore, the initial hypothesis of a positive correlation between literacy and political participation proved to be incorrect. The number of EWRs in the panchayat is low, and even those who are elected often struggle to assert strong opinions in decision-making processes and tend to be sidelined due to lack of their strong viewpoints and a few EWRs.

However, over the past few decades, there has been a noticeable increase in women's participation in panchayats, particularly in roles such as ward members, compared to earlier times. Although many women have not yet been able to win elections, their willingness to contest and actively engage in the electoral process has significantly grown. Additionally, the rate of girls' education in the region has also been steadily rising. Based on these developments, it can be assumed that by the year 2030, women's participation in local governance will continue to grow progressively, and their role in politics will become increasingly prominent and impactful.

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