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Women's Empowerment, Education And Political Involvement, With Special Reference To Assam

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Abstract

Women's empowerment has emerged as a global concern. As we know that women comprise up half of the world's population, there is an unbreakable link between the advancement of women and the success of a nation. The indispensable component of any civilization is its women. Any society's ability to flourish and undergo social change has been acknowledged as being largely dependent on education. Therefore, it is impossible to think of harmonious growth without educating women. Women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of Women. In the context of Assam, despite having a glorious history of the women of Assam, they could not occupy good position in decision making process and leading role in party politics. This paper is an attempt to highlight women's involvement in education and politics to empower themselves in the context of Assam.

Keywords: Women, politics, education, empowerment.

Introduction:

Women's empowerment is a process that helps women to gain confidence, self-control, and autonomy in an oppressive culture. The key to empowering women is economic autonomy and self-reliance. Some fundamental barriers to women's empowerment include lack of confidence, inferiority complexes, and various sorts of deprivation. It puts gender security at risk.

In the current context, women's empowerment has emerged as a global concern. As we know that women comprise up half of the world's population, there is an unbreakable link between the advancement of women and the success of a nation. If women are not given their rightful place in the development process, no society can prosper. It is impossible to advance in fields like the political, social, cultural, educational, and economic without the assistance of women. Women's rights and empowerment are recognized as critical

milestones in understanding the global well-being, as seen by the widespread voices raised in favour of women's freedom and the protection of human rights.

Objectives

1. To study women's involvement in education
2. To study women's participation in politics

Methodology

The proposed research paper is undertaken with the help of analytical and interpretative methodology. To carry out this project help has been taken from both primary and secondary sources.

Women and Education

The indispensable component of any civilization is its women. Any society's ability to flourish and undergo social change has been acknowledged as being largely dependent on education. Therefore, it is impossible to think of harmonious growth without educating women. Furthermore, it is true to say that educating a woman educates her family as a whole. As is well known, women's education plays a major role in the development of future generations. It is now acknowledged that women's education is crucial to the advancement of society. It aids all mothers in providing their kids with a suitable education, preparing them to manage the home effectively and participate actively in society. The years grow trees, if you wish to plan for 100 years educate your women. This indicates the importance of women education. Napoleon said that, "Give me an educated mother, I shall promise you the birth of a civilized nation. By educating the women we can educate the whole nation, because a country can never rise without the contribution of 50% of its population." Swami Vivekananda once said that, "It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing." The fortune of a nation depends upon the educational system of that nation. So it can be said that without the empowerment of women we cannot think about the overall development of a country.

The history of the global movement to improve women's status emphasizes education as the most important tool for transforming women's subservient positions in society. If we look back in time, we can observe that women's education in India originated during the British regime. In 1854, the East India Company recognized women's education and work. Initially, this instruction was limited to the primary school level, and only wealthy families could afford it. During this time, we also read about Indian social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar advocating for women's empowerment by abolishing bad traditions such as sati, child marriage, and polygamy. They also worked towards giving rights to Muslim women and the widows as well. It was Jyotiba Phule who was the pioneer in establishing a girls' school in 1863. Apart from that after independence the constitution of Republic India guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens irrespective of race, sex, caste and communities and directs the state to "Endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years". However despite these step in

respect of women's education, the education status of women is still far from satisfactory due to various reasons. (Anita Arya 2000).

Empowering women in India is not easy. Because our country's various communities have a long history of injustice and prejudice against women in general. The fight for women's empowerment in Assam is nearly as old as the region's freedom movement. In 1926, some women attended the Dhubri session of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, led by Chamdraprabha Saikiani, and announced the foundation of the Asom Mahila Samiti. Later, it became known as the Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti. The Tezpur Districts Mahila Samiti was created three years after its inception. Under the banners of these two samitis, a movement for women's emancipation began.

Despite these, majority of women are living in a position of deprivation, ignorance, exploitation, negligence in Assam. Assam has significantly higher gender inequalities in work participation, which is comparable to Bihar and Orissa. Women in Assam have a lack of economic empowerment due to a lack of awareness about their rights, benefits, and opportunities. Though educated women in the middle classes are growing more aware of their rights and amenities, women in the lower classes and rural areas continue to be unaware of their rights. So, it is very much important to awaken the womenfolk of our society and make them aware of their genuine rights for their empowerment. For that female literacy rate in Assam must be increase. Though the increasing rate in female literacy is satisfactory, still it is not equal position with the male counterparts.

Table -1
Literacy rate in Assam 1951-2011

Year	Person	Male	Female
1951	18.53	28.01	7.58
1961	32.95	44.28	18.62
1971	33.94	43.72	22.76
1981	---	----	----
1991	52.89	61.87	43.03
2001	63.25	71.28	54.61
2011	73.18	78.81	67.27

Source: Provisional population. Census of India, 2011

Women and politics

Political participation depends on the political system. Apart from that education plays the key role in the entry of women in politics. Education remains as a determining factor of any kind of role to be played by man or women in the outer world. Lack of education and awareness always stands as barriers to political entry of women (Rani Mudiari Deka 2013). In a country, women's participation in mainstream political activities makes the system more democratic and has broadened the arena of governance (Mamata Narzary 2013). Women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of Women. In the context of Assam, despite having a glorious history of the women of Assam, they could not

occupy good position in decision making process and leading role in party politics. But, as a voter Assamese women showed a remarkable progress in the recent year. Almost 65% voters turn out. Assamese women have shown their faith on Indian democratic traditions. A nation's march towards progress and prosperity remains a dream, its aspiration unfulfilled and unrealized unless women actively participate in all developmental activities of that country. Thus to emphasis the importance of women's participation and their role in politics is to emphasis the obvious. If proper facilities and encouragement are given, Indian women can participate efficiently in all the national activities on an equal footing with men. The empowerment of women could be brought about only if it is based on granting them basic economic rights, Educational rights and political rights. Thus, it is an imperative necessity to provide opportunity to women in the decision-making processes at all levels to make empowerment of women a meaningful reality (Gangeswar Kalita 2012). To make women aware about politics, there is need of mass literacy program for the eradication of illiteracy. Furthermore, an awareness campaign regarding women's political and legal rights should be held twice or thrice each month, primarily in rural areas. Women leaders should encourage women to engage in political rallies, election campaigns, and meetings, which will promote women's involvement in politics. Political training should be provided to both male and female legislators. Aside from that, women must be allowed to participate in decision-making. If we look at the current state of women's political engagement, it is far from satisfactory. Despite playing a significant role in politics during the pre-independence time, women's participation in politics remained minimal throughout the post-independence period. From the very beginning women have become able to occupy few seats both at parliament and state legislative assembly.

Women's Reservation Bill

Women's Reservation Bill aims to reserve 33 % of seats for women in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies, was first introduced in Lok Sabha in 1996 by the United Front government of HD Deve Gowda. The objective of the bill is to motivate women to engage in all facets of government and participate in the mainstream of politics. Although the Vajpayee government pushed for the bill in Lok Sabha, it was not passed. In May 2008, the UPA-I government reintroduced the bill, but it was still pending in Lok Sabha even after it was passed by Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010, with a historic majority of 191 for and 1 against. The bill amends to provide 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies, with one-third of all seats on the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies reserved for women.

Women and Elections

Assamese woman have a long history of participation in electoral politics. As early as 1924, the Assam legislative assembly approved a resolution granting women the right to vote. In the 1937 legislative election, Miss Mavis Dunn was elected to the Assam legislative assembly from Shillong, marking an early example of women's participation in politics as both voters and candidates (Baishya, 2016). Since independence, the number of women participating in politics has gradually increased. According to estimates,

the total projected population of Assam for 2021 is 3, 66,17,242, with a female population of approximately 1,80,21,903. It can be cleared from the following table:

Table-2
Assamese Women in General Election in India

Elections	No. of seats available	Female contestants	Female Elected
1952	10	2	1
1957	10	2	2
1962	12	3	2
1967	14	2	1
1971	14	3	1
1977	14	3	2
1980	14	2	0
1984	14	1	0
1991	14	8	0
1996	14	9	1
1998	14	3	1
1999	14	9	2
2004	14	6	0
2009	14	11	2
2014	14	9	2
2019	14	14	1

Table-3:
Participation of women in Assembly Elections of Assam from 1952 to 2021

Year of Election	No. of seats available	Total no. of Contestant	Male contestant	Female Contestant	Total Elected Men	Total Elected Women	% of elected women
1952	108	458	449	6	105	2	1.90
1957	105	312	304	6	102	5	4.68
1962	105	409	405	4	101	4	3.81
1967	144	492	486	6	121	4	3.17
1972	126	522	510	12	114	0	0
1978	126	938	916	22	125	1	0.79
1985	126	1133	1124	29	121	5	3.96
1991	126	1657	1607	50	121	5	3.97
1996	122	1228	1183	45	116	6	4.76
2001	126	916	861	55	116	10	7.94
2006	126	997	927	70	113	13	10.32
2011	126	981	896	85	112	14	11.11
2016	126	1064	973	91	118	8	7.28
2021	126	946	870	76	120	6	4.56

Sources: Reports of the Election Commission of India.

In Assam Assembly Elections held after independence from 1952-2021, there has been a remarkable disparity in the number of male and female contestants, with a much lower number of female candidates. Across all Assam Assembly Elections from 1952-2021, there has been a substantial gap in the number of elected male and elected female representatives. The percentage (%) of women representation in the Assam Assembly has increased from 1.90% in 1952 to 4.56% in 2021. In all Lok Sabha Elections held from 1952-2021, the number of elected female representatives is consistently lower than the number of elected male representatives. There has been little noteworthy change in the percentage (%) of women's participation in Assam Assembly and Lok Sabha Elections from 1952-2021.

The lack of education among women limits their understanding of the political system, political issues, and their own political rights. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on educating women. Women should be educated and made aware of their political rights, and encouraged to be confident in exercising them. Implementing reservation policies for women in the assembly and parliament can deliver greater opportunities to women for participating in mainstream politics. The government and civil society should work together to promote and encourage women's enhanced and quality participation in formal politics. National and state-level political parties should deliver opportunities for women to participate in electoral politics.

Conclusion

Women's political participation can bring gender issues to the forefront, so empowering women. Education is the most important component in determining the roles of men and women in society. Despite Assam's long history of political participation by women, they continue to encounter impediments to decision-making and leadership positions. Women's minimal participation in post-independence politics has been highlighted, despite their substantial role in pre-independence politics. More chances for women to participate in decision-making at all levels should be promoted in order to empower them. Both governments and society must endeavour to close the gender gap in politics. To accomplish this, mass literacy programs must be implemented to eliminate illiteracy, as well as regular awareness campaigns regarding women's political and legal rights, particularly in rural areas. Increased political engagement by women will not only confirm equality, but will also bring gender issues to the forefront, resulting in women's empowerment, progress, and prosperity.

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