

**Women's Representation in Electoral Politics: A
Study of Assam**

A Dissertation Submitted

To

Sikkim University



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the

Degree of Master of Philosophy

By

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I, **Rippy Das**, hereby declare that the research work embodied in the dissertation titled "**Women's Representation in Electoral Politics: A Study of Assam**" submitted to Sikkim University for the award degree of Masters of Philosophy is my original work and it has not been submitted earlier to this or any other University for any degree.

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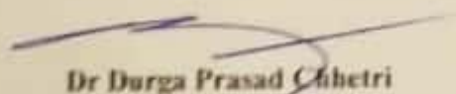
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CERTIFICATE

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All the assistance and help received during the course of investigation have been duly acknowledge by her.

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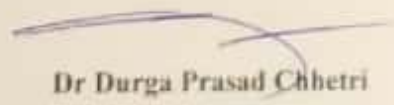
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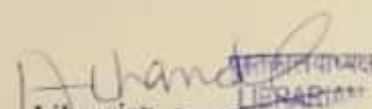

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Abstract

Women around the world in the socio-political level find themselves underrepresented in politics. Women's presence in the decision making process around the world impacting on society. Yet it became a serious challenge to access more women and make equal representation in both parliament and legislations. The presence of the gender gap in politics and public life is a failure of today's democracy. In the 21st century, women have voting rights but the representation of women in the political arena as decision-makers is in a very low position. In most of society, from developed to developing countries representation of women in politics are very low than men. In many countries, women fought to get the right to vote. India is a country which is known for the largest democracy in the world. But in reality, almost all of the states of India including Assam is struggling with many issues concerning democracy. Despite all the Constitutional mandate for providing equality to women in the public domain, let what has been seen is that the number of women representation of Assam in politics is still not encouraging compared to their male counterparts. This study is an attempt to understand the current situation of gender equality in the state of Assam especially in Kamrup (Metro) and Kokrajhar districts. It further investigated the representation of women in public decision-making and whether gender stereotyping hinders women's visible presence in politics. To assist the analysis this study employs feminist theory by focusing on the 'Politics of Presence' in the two districts of Assam.

This study has tried to answer mainly three research questions, viz,- 1) How do politicians perceive gender representation in politics in Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar districts of Assam? 2) Are the women sufficient by numbers to influence policy and decision- making? 3) What are the barriers if any that affect the performance of women in politics?

Qualitative research has been chosen for this study because the study involves with an in-depth interviews where majority of respondents are elected women members or former ministers and Member of Legislative Assembly and Member of Parliament. Both explanatory and descriptive research design has been used in this for collecting information and give details about it.

In both of the districts have very few women in politics though women contested election a few women got chances to represent in politics till now. The research design is included both explanatory and descriptive.

The study is divided into five chapters- the first chapter is delve on a general introduction and background to the research area, the purpose of the study, the significance of the research, review of literature, theoretical framework, research questions and methodology. The second chapter provides an overview of political representation of women in India in general and Assam in particular. The third chapter examined the representation and gender equality in electoral politics of Assam. The fourth chapter presents data analysis. The main aim of this chapter is to analyse the findings pertaining to women's representation, participation and barriers. The fifth chapter is the concluding chapter of the study in which major findings, conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of the study are discussed.

The findings of the study suggest that patriarchal dominance still exists in both districts of Assam. Political parties of Assam are not showing so much interest to bring young women into politics in both districts. Women are well educated still they face barriers to involve with politics. It has been found that most elected women representatives are having a political background while women who do not have political background have to wait for a longer period to get a ticket from the political parties and sometimes they do not get also. This study further recommended that party support needs to increase in the state of Assam including both districts. Reservation is one of the important mechanisms to bring more young and ordinary women into the decision-making process and also, it is highly needed to improve the working environment to make them feel comfortable in the political arena.

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Rippy Das

List of Abbreviations

AATWWF	All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation
AGP	Asom Gana Parisad
AITC	All India Trinamool Congress
AIUDF	All India United Democratic Front
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BOPF	Bodoland Peoples Front
BTC	Bodoland Territorial Council
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
INC	Indian National Congress
IPU	Inter Parliamentary Union
JNCP	Jan Congress Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
NCW	National Commission for Women
ULFA	United liberation Front of Assam
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

Women remain highly under-represented in national politics, with the average percentage of women in legislative bodies only 23.5 percent (IPU, 2019). However, this current 23 percent women's representation is a substantial improvement from previous figures. Women made up only 2 percent of world parliamentarians in 1945 and 9 percent in 1990. The presence of the gender gap in politics and public life is a failure of today's democracy. Women are seen in the excluded category from different walks of life, more visibly in politics. Currently, the political representation of women are not equal to men but the number of women voters has been increased. In recent years, women in different parts of the world have exercised political power through organising civic engagement, participation in political parties, political rallies and protests yet it is a widespread tendency to code certain forms of political conduct as male and female (Kalaramadam, 2016).

Several arguments brought up on democracy by questioning women in politics that everyone's equal right to participate in politics, to vote, candidate and participate in decision-making processes (Held, 2006). By the end of the twentieth century, women's movement was started throughout the world to secure women's rights for equality of representation. It was demanded representation in legislatures and assemblies for their presence that challenged political arrangement and sought to insert women's interests into policy-making by ensuring they were amongst the policy-makers (Lovenduski, 2005). When arguments for democracy are brought up it is usually about demands on what Anne Phillips has called 'politics of presence'. This implicates that all parts of society should be able to participate in politics to ensure that all opinions are represented in the decision-making process. This politic of presence includes the equal representation of men and women (Phillips, 2002). In the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women or Beijing conference (1995),

more than 180 governments agreed to reach the aim of making a balance in the decision-making process and strengthen democracy by increasing equal participation of both genders (UN,1995). The Platform for Action was adopted and for the first time, women's political empowerment took the centre stage of the global debate at the conference.

Different new strategies have been adopted worldwide to increase the participation of women in politics such as the quota system. There has been an increased demand for quotas globally over the last decade. In Asia, quota regulations are also being adopted in several countries, and people there even talk about a new 'quota fever' (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). The IPU report shows that electoral quotas for women have now spread to all regions of the world with more than 130 countries adopting quota policies (IPU, 2019). There are lots of arguments for women's greater presence and participation in politics and arguments for and against a quota system to get them there. Debates about quotas for women in political bodies can be located in wider debates around the idea of a 'politics of presence' which challenges the traditional understandings of representation through a 'politics of ideas' (Phillips, 1995: 5).

Arguments for and against quotas are the conflicting concept of gender equality and gender difference. Equality or sameness and difference have been always been at the heart of debates concerned with gender issues (Blomgren, 2010). Tinker (2004) points to the contradictory nature of the argument for quotas based on the desire for equality. Equality or sameness and difference have always been at the heart of debates concerned with gender issues (Blomgren, 2010). All debates are related to equality where the argument is concerned with women's right to political participation in institutions of governance. Tinker argues that 'after all women are seldom a minority of citizens; why do they need distinct treatment?' (Tinker, 2004: 532). However, if the argument rests on equality then surely all people should have equal access and special access goes against the principles of equality. Quotas are also simply seen as the most effective way of ensuring women's presence if not their genuine participation. Menon (1999: 28) furthers this point raising the argument that quotas lead to a large increase in women's presence in one go and therefore help to overcome 'their inhibitions' leading, in turn, to effective participation. It is also true that women representation does not mean political equality because even if we increase the number of women in parliament through mechanisms such as the quota system, equality is far away from an as a small percentage of women can't define equal political representation.

Political representation of women is necessary to change the political practices in society, to make institutions more gender, class and caste representative and to empower individual women to negotiate both formal and informal institutions (Kalaramadam, 2016). In reality, political presence can be seen as an analytic tool towards improving both participation but especially political representation towards a viable democracy; “guarantee political equality is not possible, but considering politics of presence is playing safe” (Philips, 1995). In the light of the above mentioned fact, this study aims to examine the representation of women in the legislative assembly and party structures and the various factors that contribute to the persistently low representation of women in politics in the districts of Assam viz. Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar districts.

Statement of the Problem

Although the number of women in politics is growing, women are still systematically under-represented in the more influential positions in the political hierarchy. According to the Gender Gap Index, 2018 India is ranked 108th in ‘Women in Parliament’. The representation gap remains substantial though there are high electorates, increased voting numbers, and improved candidature. Over the years, the degree of gender equality in legislative representation has improved marginally but largely women’s share in legislative bodies remains low. Women are far behind to achieve 33 percent, which is considered as the critical mass for women to exert a substantial influence on politics. The high gender gap in representation for the legislative bodies over a long period of time also reflects the degree of political democracy which affects the women’s chances of winning seats in a democratic election. The study is therefore examined the current situation of gender equality in politics in the Kamrup (Metro) and Kokrajhar districts of Assam and investigates the various reasons that hinder women’s visible presence in politics.

Review of Literature

There are number of scholars who have made their contribution in the field of political representation and participation of women. Therefore, for proper understanding of this field, data has been collected through the review of literature written by different scholars.

Alok Kumar Gupta and Asha Bhandari (2010) in their book “Women’s Political Participation: Researching the Past and Designing the Future” presented a cross-section of opinions related to the need towards enhancing women’s political

participation. They highlighted the history of political participation; how Indian and western political philosophers have viewed the importance of political participation; the issues on the reservation bill; the scenario of gender equality. Authors also highlighted the different constitutional and legal provisions towards enhancing women's political participation and examine the institutional mechanisms to enhance women's political participation in India.

Ameer Sultana (2015) in her book "Gender and Politics: Role Perception and Performance of Women Legislators" examines on the women in politics in overall such as- the initiatives taken by international level to improve the women representatives, how nationalist movement influenced women to entry in the political field. It also further gave details about women representation in local and urban governance. However, the main focus of this study is the legislative elite of north-west India. It attempted to assess the socio-economic background of the women legislators, their entry in the political field and how their family tradition influences them on it and also their motivations for their role perception and performances. It concluded with the suggestions with the possible solutions to increase women's participation in politics and decision making.

Anne Phillips (1995) in her book "The Politics of Presence" examines the distinction between the politics of ideas and the politics of presence. The book is composed of seven different chapters where it addresses the concern that the case for political presence could encourage essentialist understandings of group identity or group interest. She argues by comparing both the concept of the politics of ideas and the politics of presence. The 'politics of presence' is to understand the importance of increasing the number of women, but also challenges the embedded institutionalized norms that deny women the legitimacy to political office. The politics of presence is the participation and inclusion of those who have been excluded. The under-representation of women shows injustice and argues for fair representation.

Anuradha Dutta (2006) in her book chapter "Political Parties and Women: Aspects of the Issue with Reference to the Situation in Assam" examines the women's role in the decision-making process since independence in Assam. She mainly highlighted how much the political parties are making a serious attempt to mobilise women in the political ground; the manifestos which are taken by the different political parties of Assam but never be seen as reality and different factors which are creating barriers for women to enter into the politics.

Azza Karam and Joni Lovenduski (2005) in their book “Women in Parliament: Making a Difference” examines how can women expand their impact in the parliament through decision making process, possible actions which can increase their effectiveness and experiences of women MP’s which can be lesson for other women who wants to enter into political arena. At the same time, they also focuses on the ways which have women impacted on political processes.

Drude Dahlerup (1998) in her book chapter “Using Quota’s to Increase Women’s Political Representation” examines the status of world by using the electoral quotas for women and the ways in which quotas can lead to increase the number of women’s political representation in both national and local levels. She also highlighted the different pros and cons of the quota system, the implementation of quotas and about special quotas in Nordic countries which has highlighted women representatives in the world.

Drude Dahlerup (2005) in her article “Strategies to Enhance Women’s Political Representation in Different Electoral Systems” examines various strategies for enhancing women’s representation in formal political institutions; it also gave some results on the new global trend to introduce electoral gender quotas. She further argues that any choice of strategy must begin with a diagnosis of what are the causes of women’s under-representation and the importance of various electoral systems for women’s representation and for the choice of strategy.

Farida Shaheed (2004) in her article “Politics and Power: A Gendered Perspective from South Asia” examines how women have traditionally been (and continue to be) largely denied from formal office and power and struggles of women in daily life. She further highlighted the framework of nation-states, women activism, women and electoral process in the South Asian context and NGOs working for increasing women's political empowerment. This paper ignores the fact that the exercise of authority permeates all spheres of life, extending well beyond the processes of government, at whatever level.

Joni Lovenduski (2005) in her edited book chapter “Introduction: State Feminism and the Political Representation of Women” highlights the women’s access to political institutions, the effects on the access of policy and the theory of state feminism. They investigated the descriptive and substantive representation of women as concepts that enable to compare the extent to which policy processes in democratic regimes are inclusive of women and also discussed briefly though women’s policy agencies are

able to represent any feminist movements. In this chapter, it is questioned that how government is concerned to make policies based of women's issues or whether women are included in the day to day life policy-making processes and discusses the women's movement characteristics. The chapter overall highlighted the women's issues with the influence of policy-making and the applicability of the theory of state feminism.

Madhu Kishwar (1998) in her article "Women's Marginal Role in Politics" highlights on the people's response in women's participation in politics by focusing on some real experiences which Indian women have to face in the society because of gender and how the society is changing slowly as many women leader became able to show the power in the politics. Most of the time women have to prove themselves stronger than men over and over again in political life. She also highlighted how post-independence politics has changed. This paper overall presented the real scenario of Indian women in politics.

Madhvi Lakshmi Kondreday (2011) in her book chapter "Construction of Gender: Deprivation of Women from Politics in India" examines the deprivation of women in politics of India and how different factors like class, caste and religion are related with gender when the issue of Indian politics comes up. The chapter has divided into three parts where the first part explained about some theoretical aspects on gender and explained general views on gender by different theories, the second part discusses the deprivation of women from Indian politics and the third part highlighted on the strategies for engendering politics.

Mamta Narzary (2013) in her article "Women's Marginal Role in Politics with Special Reference to Assam" examines the marginal role of women in the mainstream of politics. Since ancient times women of Assam were active in politics even they participated actively in the freedom struggle but after independence, they are in politics in limited numbers. This paper is an attempt to focus on the role played by the Assamese women by participating in politics in the post-independent period.

Naila Kabeer (2005) in her article "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the third Millennium Development Goal" highlights on the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG), gender equality and women's empowerment. She also highlighted the concept of women's empowerment and the ways in which the indicators associated with the millennium development goal on employment,

education, and political participation can contribute to it. She also discusses the different dimensions of empowerment.

Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar (2001) in their book “Women in Indian Society” examine the present situation of Indian women, the changing perceptions of the status and role of women in society. They highlighted the Indian women’s journey towards gender equality in the context of political-economic background and analysed the situation from women’s perspectives. It has seven chapters where in the first chapter, gives an overview from pre-independence to post-independent period, in the second chapter-they examines the complex issue of women’s work by presenting data on women’s participation in organized and unorganized sectors of work and pointing out on the policies, the third chapter-gives an overview of women’s education, in fourth chapter-women in the family points out the distinction between household and family, in the fifth chapter-discusses on women’s political participation where this book examines the approach of political parties to women, obstacle women face, reservation of seats, in the sixth chapter-examines women’s position under law in the historical context through various judgments affecting her life and last chapter-examines women’s status in the context of political events and economic policies, especially from 80s’.

Niroj Sinha (2000) in her book “Women in Indian Politics” examines the concerns for the marginal presence of women in Politics. The concern through voice has been raised among the women’s group of both the international and national levels. For having a healthy democracy, the involvement of women in politics is now regarded as one of the important factors. The term healthy democracy cannot be used if half of the population does not involve and participate in the political process. It has been realised that the participation of women as only voters is not enough to improve the status of women in politics. For that, women need to become out on a large scale to participate not as voters but as a candidate in the decision-making process. In this book, the author made an attempt to examine the problems of political participation which women face in India.

Niru Hazarika (1978) in her article “Role of Women in State Politics (Assam)” highlighted the picture to indicate the progress that women made in politics in the state of Assam. She examines the situation from the Government of India act, 1935 and how women got defeated by the male members after having some women popularity as a social activist or from the political background and only a few women

got elected till the sixth legislative elections. She further added the role of women in state assembly was not significant and their representation in the legislature was not in proportion to their population strength.

Nivedita Menon (1999) in her book “Gender and Politics in India” highlights the present picture of Indian politics and view of feminist theory and politics in India by identifying some key issues in terms of opposing or at least, differing positions on them from within the movement. She highlighted on Women’s movement refers not just to specific intervention in politics but also to women’s participation in politics in general, which challenges various forms of patriarchy and gender injustice. The movements include the issue like-environment, ecology, civil rights, sex, violence, representation, caste, class, work, wages, allocation of basic resources, consumer rights, health, religion, community, and individual and social relationships. She further added on the rich, complex and contentious debates that range within the women’s movement. In this book author, an attempt has been made to explore some of these issues.

Pippa Norris (2006) in her article “The Impact of Electoral Reform on Women’s Representation” examines in the first section by summarizing the normative arguments why socially inclusive legislatures are thought to be desirable. She compared the records of women’s representation of Netherland parliament with other countries of the world. The second section analyses the impact of electoral systems on gender representation, confirming that substantially more women are usually elected in systems using party-list proportional representation, which has a large district magnitude, compared with majoritarian electoral systems using single-member districts in the Netherlands. She focuses on the implementation of positive action strategies. In the conclusion part, the author summarizes the main findings and arguments surrounding electoral reform in the Netherlands.

Praveen Rai (2017) in his article “Women’s Participation in Electoral Politics in India: Silent Feminism” examines the women’s voting patterns and showing that there have never been collective efforts made by the national or regional political parties by concerning on women’s issue, mobilise female voters in the elections. This article determines key factors that lead to higher participation of women in the electoral process as voters and as multi-participatory campaigners. He briefly charts the engagement of women in the election process from a historical point of view to understand the beginning of women’s participation from limited electoral activities to

more intensive participatory activities in the twenty-first century and the notable electoral upsurge of Indian women as voters since the 1990s. The article concludes by suggesting ways ahead for further enhancing women's participation in electoral politics and governance.

Sujata D. Hazarika (2008) in her article "Democracy and Leadership: The Gendered-Voice in Politics" examines women's participation in the wider political process through women's role as a decision-maker at various levels. She also described the women leadership during the insurgency of Assam where it explored empowerment through political participation of women in Assam from early historic stages of Ahom state through the political mobilisation of the Assamese middle class in the Indian freedom struggle and during the Bodo movement period. She overall presented the scenario of the status of women in Assam till the present.

These previous results from other researches cover different strategies to increase women's participation, different pros and cons of quota system, role of the NGO's in women's participation, challenges women face to participate in politics, historical point of view to understand the beginning of women's participation and different hindering factors of women's participation in politics. These are important in order to understand the institutional framework for women's possibilities of participating in politics. The argument is that these findings need to be re-examined since variation across time has been a factor so the hindering factors and present status need therefore to be re-evaluated. These remarks lead over to the concrete research questions of this research.

Theoretical Framework

In all democratic countries, attainment of equality among the citizens is one of their aspirations for the smooth functioning of the political system. Democracy encourages and involves equality in participation in the public sphere mostly and not in the private sphere. Maturity and efficacy of democracy can be defined not only in terms of equality and freedom in which men and women share political power but also in terms of liberty and space provided for women in the democratic framework (Rai, 2011). If equality and liberty are the pillars of democracy, political participation by both the gender would ensure the reliability and effectiveness of democracy. Samuel P. Huntington (1991) correlates that political participation has a positive relationship to the definition of democracy as long as freedom and equality have already contributed by determining the content of the democratic form. Some theorists explain

the representation of women includes substantive representation. In *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Pateman (1970) criticized leading theorists of democracy, such as Robert Dahl and Giovanni Sartori, for justifying elite power on the basis of the perceived apathy and incompetence of the many. Those theorists, Pateman demonstrated, engaged in circular logic and promoted a vicious cycle of democratic deficit, because they failed to appreciate the causal link between political participation and civic capacity (Pateman, 1970). But in the 21st century, different countries' suffrage has allowed women to participate and also represent. All the above arguments clearly indicate that the term political participation and gender equality are bearing its importance in a democratic form of government. Democracy without the positive participation of both genders would be a vacant democracy. At the same time equality does not mean an equal number as men, but allowing women to display their qualities that women feel are needed in the public decision-making arena is crucial (Fairio, 2014).

In her classic work of feminist political thought, Iris M Young (2000) argues for an elaborate system of representation in which all oppressed groups, including women, would have a guaranteed role in policy formation. Phillips (1995) provides an alternate view to explain the low number of women in representative offices. The 'politics of presence' is one approach to understand the importance of increasing the number of women, but also challenges the embedded institutionalized norms that deny women the legitimacy to political office. The politics of presence is the participation and inclusion of those who have been excluded. By this, the low performance of women goes beyond formal institutions, to show that they overlap with other factors, especially cultural norms. Therefore, the under-representation of women shows injustice and argues for fair representation. Hanna F Pitkin (1967) in her seminal work, *The Concept of Representation*, identifies four types of representation but contends that only one – 'acting for' representation-is the true type. The other three-formalistic, symbolic and descriptive-are, in her view, limited.

Though this study begins by reviewing the democratic theory and feminist theory and related literature to see whether this body of literature provides insights and aids in understanding why women have had to strive so long to achieve basic rights. Most importantly why after adopting democracy by most of the countries still women face problems while it comes to political participation in the decision-making process. Later it finds that democratic theory which focuses on procedural aspects of

democracy also speaks on women's participation but does not speak to the issue of women's participation in politics. But feminism investigates that why women are marginalised and there are many divergences of views as they look at this very question from their ideological and methodological perspectives (Saxena, 2011), which is relevant for this research. To assist the analysis, this study employs feminist theory by focusing on the 'Politics of Presence' in order to spotlight the problem of women's under-representation in politics in the two districts of Assam.

Rationale and Scope of the Study

The percentage of women in the government and their political representation is quite low in the state of Assam. Though in every field have witnessed the presence of women, yet women do not occupy a position of equality with men in every profession. There is a need to create acts for improving the gloomy picture of women empowerment and political representation in the state legislative assembly of Assam. In essence, due to the scanty representation of women in the legislature, it is necessary to examine the causes behind this problem. In this context, it is important to examine the women's role in public space in the context of their performance in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Therefore, the study seeks to understand the women's representation in the legislative assembly and party structures in the two districts of Assam viz- Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar district. The key question of the research concerns women's representation in public decision making and the current situation of gender equality in politics in the two districts of Assam. Besides, this study also would enumerate the socio-cultural hindrances women face from being represented in the legislative bodies and how they negotiate those hindrances to play an effective role in public space. The study addresses key two districts of Assam and focused on women's participation and representation of state politics. The findings therefore, do not claim to be generalisation to other districts in the state of Assam and other parts of the country.

Objectives of the Study

In view of the broad research background, the main research objective includes:

1. To examine the current situation of gender equality in politics in the state of Assam in general and Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar districts in particular.
2. To investigate the representation of women in public decision-making forum and politics.

3. To consider whether gender stereotyping hinders women's visible presence in politics.

Research Questions

This study seeks to give answers to the following research questions with the starting point based on previous research and objectives of the study.

1. How do politicians perceive about the gender representation in politics in Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar districts of Assam?
2. Are the women sufficient by numbers to influence policy and decision-making?
3. What are the barriers if any that affects in the performance of women in politics?

Methodology

The purpose of the research questions is to provide an overview of the present situation of gender equality in politics in two districts of Assam, politician understanding of gender representation in politics looking into the women present in sufficient numbers as well as the socio-cultural barriers affects in the performance of women in politics. It is, therefore, appropriate to carry out a qualitative methodological approach for this study. Qualitative in-depth interviews are the empirical base of the study, which focuses on women's political representation in Assam especially in Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar district. The purpose of the interviews is to answer the three more precise and delimited research questions. The research design is included both explanatory and descriptive. With the first and third questions, the goal is to describe systematically the status of women in Assam in politics and barriers women face in politics. The second question is more explanatory nature and therefore, it has been used to give details explanation.

According to Black and Champion (1976), the sample is a portion of elements taken from a population, which is considered to be representative of the population. Rescoe (1975) said that "sample sizes larger than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research". Where Creswell (1998) suggested at least 5 to 25 participants are appropriate in the qualitative analysis. Having in mind these limitations, the sample size proposed for this study was 40. However, this could not happen in the field study work because it was difficult to get the elected women representatives. Moreover, some of them were not available due to different reasons including the death, out of station and unavailability of time during the course of field work. The study therefore

managed to meet only 17 respondents who were within the selected area of Kamrup (M) and Kokrajhar districts as well as from other part of Assam state. Majority of respondents are elected women members or former ministers and Member of Legislative Assembly and Member of Parliament. This study was carried out during ten days of field study in the two districts of Assam based on the dates of appointment given by the different representatives, between October to November 2019. The aim is to analyse their specific experiences and their perception on socio-cultural barriers women face to get into politics as well as what measures should be taken, if any, to increase women's political representation in the state legislative assembly. Based on the researcher's time and knowledge, purposive sampling method was used which entails obtaining information from specific target groups. This type of sampling confine itself to specific types of respondents who can provide the desired information required for the study.

Organisation of the Study

The study is organised under five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction- The first chapter is delving on a general introduction and background to the research area, the purpose of the study, the significance of the research, review of literature, theoretical framework, research questions and methodology.

Chapter 2: Political Representation of Women: An Overview- The second chapter provides an overview of political representation of women in India in general and Assam in particular.

Chapter 3: Representation and Gender Equality in Electoral Politics of Assam- The third chapter examined the representation and gender equality in electoral politics of Assam.

Chapter 4: Political Representation and Barriers- The fourth chapter presents data analysis. The main aim of this chapter is to analyse the findings pertaining to women's representation, participation and barriers.

Chapter 5: Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations- This chapter dealt with the summary of findings and conclusion. The research questions that are intended to pervade the entire study is also reconnected to the main results. It also gives the concluding remarks with the possible solutions of the findings of research work.

Chapter 2

Political Representation of Women: An Overview

Introduction

Ensuring equal representation of men and women in the decision-making process is one of the main challenges of a democratic state (Darbaidze, 2018). From the developing countries to developed countries in almost all political system the number of women representations in politics is very low compared to men. Understanding the women's representation in politics starts by admitting the fact that except for a few, most of the countries do not make 50 percent in the national legislatures. Women as voters are contributing to the election process but their involvement in politics by representing them still not near to equal to men. They are far away to make an equal share in the parliament and legislatures. The gender-balanced representation which implies men and women equal representation in politics is absent in today's societies. While examining the political representation, it is of higher interest to look at representation in legislative bodies than in other political bodies since it is elected by the people and considered the most influential (Blomgren, 2010).

Political representation is the means to realize the democratic idea of giving people a voice in large states (Lama-Rewal, 2016). It is a cross-sectional relationship between citizens and parties/government based on the results of a single election or at a single point in time (Dalton, Farrell, & McAllister, 2011). In a modern democracy, the most significant feature is the selection of political representatives by citizens in free and fair elections, in combination with universal suffrage (Rosema, Aarts, & Denters, 2011). The democratic process relies on an effectual relationship between representative and represented (Dalton, Farrell, & McAllister, 2011). The necessity of political representation are matters for negotiation, and subject to change. Debates on political representation are part of process by which democracies evolve (Lovenduski, 2005). It includes examine the nature of political institutions, the processes of decision- making and the quality of policy implementation. Political representation

highlights the inclusion and exclusion of social groups or individuals. The demand for representation is part of the process of claiming membership of a polity (Lovenduski, 2005). Different thinker defines the political representation differently with the different meaning, concept, and types.

Political Representation: Meaning, Definition, and Concept

The word 'political' is the adjective of politics. In a traditional sense, it means relating to state and government. In a broad meaning- Political means, all activities concerned with the state, government and Political relations/ power relations in society (Ghai, 2011). Whereas the word 'Represent' means "to hold someone's place, to be in possession of their authority." The word representation defined as someone who represents, in a public office, an absent person who is supposed to occupy it and someone who, for an inheritance, is summoned in the place of individuals whose rights have been bestowed upon him (Chartier, 2014).

The concept of political representation has been defined in various ways by different authors or researchers. In simple words, Political representation occurs when political actors speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on behalf of others in the political arena. In short, political representation is a kind of political assistance (Dovi, 2006). Cotta & Heinrich (2007) defines political representation as an institutionalised system of political responsibility realised through the free electoral designation of certain fundamental political organisms. Pitkin in her work "The Concept of Representation" (1967) provides perhaps one of the most straight forward definitions of political representation. To represent is simply can be understood as to "make present again." In this way, political representation is the activity of making citizens' voices, opinions and perspectives "present" in the public policy-making processes. A general theory of representation has been offered by Andrew Rehfeld (2006), which simply identifies representation by reference to a relevant audience accepting a person as to its representative. However, Rehfeld's general approach to representation allows for undemocratic cases of representation. Iris Marion Young (2000), in her book *Inclusion and Democracy* said that the representative should not be treated as a substitute for the represented. Consequently, Young recommends reconceptualising representation as a differentiated relationship, which has two meanings at first; her understanding of representation encourages us to recognize the diversity of those being represented. Second, her analysis of representation emphasizes the importance of recognizing how representative institutions include as well as they exclude (Dovi,

2006). Young provides an alternative explanation of democratic representation. Specifically, she explained democratic representation as a dynamic process, which make a move between moments of authorization and moments of accountability (Dovi, 2006). Suzanne Dovi (2009) has argued that we should not conceptualise representation simply in terms of how we bring marginalised groups into democratic politics; rather, democratic representation can require limiting the influence of overrepresented privileged groups.

Different Types of Representation

There are different types of representation identified by different political theorists. Some identify the representation, by classifying ideal-types, views, forms, or conceptions, among others. Other types are classified as the behaviour that stems from representation, such as performances, presentations, or re-election behaviours (Brookhart, 2015). There are twelve common divisions of representation found in the literature (Saward, 2014) and which are presented by a different political theorist or author. These are mentioned below:

1. Trustees and delegates (and politicians)
2. Functional roles played in government systems
3. Promissory, surrogate, gyroscopic (Mansbridge, 2003)
4. Descriptive and substantive representation (Chelis et al., 2008)
5. A politics of ideas and a politics of presence (Phillips, 1995)
6. Liberal and republican models of representation (Bellamy and Castiglione, 2013)
7. Conceptions of roles of the “good representative” (Dovi, 2008)
8. Formal or positional government roles (Prime Minister, Member of Parliament, etc.)
9. Principals and agents
10. Likeness and distinction (Chabal and Daloz, 2006)
11. Indicative and responsive (with the latter category divided into “directed” and “interpretive”) (Pettit, 2009)
12. Modes of “informal” representation: e.g. stakeholder (Macdonald, 2008), advocate, champion.

The list gives a good sense of types of representation. But there are mainly three types of representation discussed widely among the scholars and ideologists which are Burke (1986), Pitkin (1967), Mansbridge (2003). Burke’s division of trustee and delegates is a historic and miserly understanding of representation. Pitkin’s work was a

monumental point in the conceptualization of representation, bringing together previous work into a unified type. Like Pitkin, Mansbridge's concept of representation was a pivot point in understanding representation types (Brookhart, 2015). These three different views on types of representation by the political ideologist are discussed below:

Burkean representation divides into two modes: delegate and trustee Representation. Burke describes the delegate representative as one inspired by a desire to provide for the local electorate. Constituents vest delegates with authority to re-present their interests in the most straightforward sense: the representative acts as a mouthpiece for the will of the people and the representatives cannot exercise their own opinion and decision on people. In contrast, those are trustee representatives uses their own judgment and ideas to make decisions in the best interest of the nation entire or in the long-term benefits of a constituency. In this case, the representative can also take decisions by using his own desire against the wishes of his electorate. Representatives can use their knowledge, experience, and intelligence upon a certain field on behalf of others. The trustee model focuses on the institution in which the representative will serve; the delegate model focuses on the body from which the representative was elected (Burke, 1986). With the Burkean two model of representation Eulau et al. (1959) argued that the ideal-types of delegate and trustee were really a continuum of behaviour, over which a representative could be more like a trustee or more like a delegate. Eulau called the middle ground of this continuum the "politico" which is the hybrid of the two models: Delegate and Trustee. However, Pitkin (1967) argues that there are theories of representation outside of the delegate and trustee models and mentioned about four types of representation.

Pitkin's further described the four different dimensions of representation. These are descriptive, substantive, formalistic and symbolic representations. To examine the representation each view provides a different approach. Her four views of representation are: (1) Descriptive representation- here the representative refers to a group which resembles similar kind of features such as race, sex, ethnicity, or residence; (2) Substantive representation- in this case representative looks to advance a group's policy preferences and interests; (3) Formalistic representation, where a representative is legally empowered to act for another; (4) Symbolic representation, where a leader stands for national ideas. While there are important differences among

the four, she maintains that the different dimensions are properly conceived as integral parts of a coherent whole (Kurebwa, 2015).

Jane Mansbridge (2003) in her important article "Rethinking Representation", Mansbridge have identified four forms of representation in modern democracies. These are- Promissory Representation, Anticipatory Representation, Gyroscopic Representation, and Surrogate Representation. Promissory representation is known as the traditional model which follows the classic principal-agent format. It works normatively through the explicit and implicit promises that the elected representative makes to the electorate. Anticipatory representation flows directly from the idea of retrospective voting: representatives focus on what they think their constituents will approve at the next election, not on what they promised to do at the last election (Mansbridge, 2003). So, they try to please future voters. In gyroscopic representation, voters elect representatives who can be expected to act in ways the voter approves without external incentives. The representative looks within, as a basis for action, to conceptions of interest, "common sense," and principles derived in part from the representative's own background (Mansbridge, 2003). Surrogate representation is a representation by a representative with whom one has no electoral relationship-that is, a representative in another district. Mansbridge (2003) further argue that for judging these identified forms of representation are systematic. All four forms of representation are ways that democratic citizens can be legitimately represented within a democratic regime.

By analysing the different types of representation and by looking into the nature of representatives it can say that rather than engaging in only one kind of representation, all Members of the different Houses, mix the types of representation and changing their communicated relationship to the constituents on the basis of strategy and nature of the situation.

With the understanding of political representation, the evidence of the countries reflects that in most of the countries, representation is not per the expectation as the women directly participating in active politics is much smaller than to men and if some of the places women participate also they do not get enough votes to get involved in the decision making process. Women who get chances to be part of the decision-making process are mostly have a family political background or elite groups. There are various reasons for which a large number of women kept out from the political arena. In many countries, women fought battles for their rights. Even

after that also, they were not able to get the rights that they deserve. There was no such effort to bring women in politics.

Politics always considered men's domain subject. Rousseau who inspired people for the French Revolution by his ideas also suggested the exclusion of women from politics (Gupta & Bhandari, 2010). However, thinkers like J.S Mill advocated gender equality in every field including politics. It is argued that women of the 20th century successfully politicised their absence from parliament and challenged the legitimacy of male-dominated decision making (Sawer, 2000). An extensive project of inflaming democracy has been always related to bringing more women in public office. In the democratic project a challenge for feminists has been to develop a different political community of women, and to eloquent interest in and around gender-based injustices (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005). Feminism have made significant contribution to the reconceptualization of politics and the state (Kalaramadam, 2016). A feminist focus on the process of gendering unravels the differential effects of institutional structures, policies and practices on both women and men (Kalaramadam, 2016). Feminism believes that men are discriminating against women, therefore, women have low representation in political office and also in the male-dominated political environment women face difficulties to compete with men (Clark, 1991). Class, ethnicity, race, generation, etc, have a great impact on interests and priorities for political representation (Lovenduski, 2002). Twentieth-century democracy aimed to "make citizenship more universal" (Phillips, 1995) in a method to seize up barriers of exclusion. However, theories are far from resolving this paradox. For this reason, Philips raises her main concern for the politics of presence, with a particular focus on political mechanisms that relate to fair representation, as well as mechanisms that regard gender, race, or ethnic representation as decisive (Phillips, 1995).

Feminist argues for the politics of presence instead of the politics of ideas because not all ideas can be used for every solution. The politics of presence argues for the participation and inclusion of those who have been excluded (Phillips, 1995). However, it is also accepted that for equal representation and more accountability the presence of ideas also needed along with its presence. The politics of presence provides an alternative explanation to the problems relating to groups that demand equal representation. Iris Marion Young argues that an improvement in the inclusion and impact on under-represented social groups would benefit the society in tackling the problem of structural social inequality and to find the solution for it (Young,

2000). She further added that those political institutions are committed to political equality need to utilize some specific measures to protect the representation of those socially deprived groups which would fail to raise its voice for their interest without such measures (Young, 2000). The politics of presence is a viable mechanism and applicable model of gender equality. It offers a concrete approach towards addressing the central question of how to address the problem of fewer women in parliament or women's under-representation (Fairio, 2014). Further, it provides an explanation for the important to increase the number of women in this area, with the alternative mechanism of the quota system that has proven to be successful in some other countries (Fairio, 2014). Feminist theory revealed the existence of gender imbalances beyond legislative office which challenges democratic principles and practices. This research explains why it is difficult to elect women into the legislatures where feminist theory is used among others. In this study particular attention is given to the theory of politics of presence in the context of Assam.

Women's Representation in Electoral Politics

The fact is that the number of women as the voter has increased day over time as it is the most acceptable political action in elections. We can see the political parties encourages women to vote which helps them to get more vote but taking them into the decision process keep always as an agenda only. In reality, it remains as portfolios within the pen-paper and their lectures in the election meetings. Though women's voting rights became an issue in the 19th century and struggle first started in Great Britain and the United States till the 20th century women did not have the right to vote (Augustyn et al., 2007). After World War I only most European, Asian and African countries passed the women's suffrage. New Zealand was the first country that allowed women to vote in national elections in 1893 (Tejasvi, 2014). In 1952, The United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women provides that "women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination" (United Nations, 1953). In India, women raised the issue of universal adult franchise in 1917. Based on education and property, the Government of India Act 1935, made the women above 21 years of age eligible to cast vote. When the Constitution of India came into existence in the year 1950, it granted the universal adult franchise to all the citizens (Menon, 1999).

In the 21st century, women are eligible to cast their vote but the representation of women in legislative bodies as key decision-makers is in a very low. Women have

been demanding more places in legislative bodies. Most of the countries have failed to make equal representation or near equal representatives in legislative bodies except few countries such as- Rwanda, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. In these countries, women made it possible to take a position as decision-makers as almost half or more than half a percentage in the parliaments which is not even the presence of many advanced countries. On the other hand, few countries even have zero percent of women representatives which indicates the existence of inequalities in the society. The available data reflects that the world average of women representatives in the legislature is 23.90 percent in the lower house and 22.20 percent in the upper house which has been seen nominal rise compared to last years (IPU, 2019).

Table 2.1: Percentage of Women in Parliament in Different Regions (2019)

	Single House or Lower House (in percentage)	Upper House or Senate (in percentage)	Both Houses Combined (in percentage)
Nordic Countries	42.5	---	---
Americans	30.6	31.4	30.7
Europe (Nordic Countries Included)	28.6	28.0	28.5
Europe (Nordic Countries Excluded)	27.2	28.0	27.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	23.9	22.2	23.7
Asia	19.8	17.4	19.5
Middle East and North Africa	19.0	12.5	18.1
Pacific	16.3	36.0	18.4

Source: Inter Parliamentary Union, 2019

Table 2.1 shows that the highest number of women representatives in parliaments are in Nordic countries with 42.5 percent whereas the lowest in pacific with 16.3 percent. The statistics data (2019) shows that in individual countries Rwanda ranks first by having the highest number of women in parliament with 61.3 percent.

Table 2.2: Percentage of Women Representation in Legislatures in Various Countries (2019)

Country	Year	No. of Women Representatives in Lower House (In Percentage)
Rwanda	2018	61.3
America	2018	23.6
Bangladesh	2018	20.7
Brazil	2018	15.0

Canada	2015	26.9
China	2018	24.9
Cuba	2018	53.2
Denmark	2015	37.4
Finland	2015	41.5
Greece	2015	18.7
Germany	2017	30.9
India	2019	14.6
Indonesia	2014	18.2
Japan	2017	10.2
Nepal	2017	32.7
Pakistan	2018	20.2
Russia	2016	15.8
Sri Lanka	2015	5.3
Sweden	2018	47.3
UAE	2015	22.5
United Kingdom	2017	32.0
Mexico	2018	48.2
Norway	2017	40.8
Papua New Guinea	2017	0.0
Vanuatu	2016	0.0

Source: Inter Parliamentary Union 2019

Table 2.2 shows a very marginal representation of women in various legislatures including India. Even a few countries have zero women representatives. In comparison to our neighbouring countries with India, China and Pakistan are in a much better position with 24.9 percent and 20.2 percent respectively. The representation of Indian women in parliament is far from a satisfactory position in world rank.

Women face many problems who want to enter into politics and find that the political, public, cultural and social environment is often unfriendly or even hostile to them (Shvedova, 2005). The factors determine differently in society in marginalising women's participation in politics. It also determines the actual social status of women. Sushma Swaraj, the former external affairs minister said once in an interview

(Shvedova, 2005), which indicates how social, political and economic factors create the wall in entering into politics. It says everything about the stage's women have to cross to be part of a decision making the process and many times they do not get successful after crossing all the barriers as people do not support her.

“It is very difficult for a woman to make up her mind to enter politics. Once she makes up her own mind, then she has to prepare her husband, and her children, and her family. Once she has overcome all these obstacles and applies for the ticket, then the male aspirants against whom she is applying make-up all sorts of stories about her. And after all, this, when her name goes to the party bosses, they do not select her name because they fear to lose that seat.”

-Sushma Swaraj

International Initiatives on Women's Political Representation

It is essential to understand the international initiatives taken in the international arena by raising voices for the political empowerment of women. Equal participation in politics is internationally recognized human rights for both men and women. It is also the main character of the quality of democracy. In 1952, the United Nations Organization prepared for a convention for women's political rights. Again in 1967, the United Nations General Assembly issued the “Declaration on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women”. The world was witnessed of the First International Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, organized by the United Nations. It focused completely on women's issue including women's political rights. After the conference, the bill known as the human rights bill of women adopted on 18 December 1979 as “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (Datta, 1998). In the bill, articles 3, 7 and 8 mentioned women's political rights- to vote, to participate and to represent their governments without any discrimination. This bill came into force on 3 September 1981. It can be considered as one of the most powerful instruments in favour of women's rights. In 1980 there was a conference on Copenhagen named ‘Participation in the Political and other Decision-Making Processes and Participation in Efforts to Promote International Cooperation and Strengthen Peace’. It recommended to approve and execute legislative participation of women to eliminate inequalities including domestic and sexual violence against women (United Nations, 1980).

The third world conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations decade for women was held in Nairobi in 1985. In Nairobi's Forward -

Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, talked about equality in political participation and decision-making. It pointed out that governments and political parties should intensify efforts to stimulate and ensure equality of participation by women of all national and local legislative bodies. It recommended the governments to make the efforts to safeguard participation of women in the decision-making process at a national, state and local level through legislative and administrative measures. It further recommended women to encourage and motivate other women and also help them to exercise their right to vote and to be elected and to participate in the political process at all levels equal to men (United Nations, 1986).

The issue of women's empowerment came into more focus and created world debate to awake on women's issue was at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women which held in Beijing in 1995. The conference espoused the 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action'. It made a declaration to give emphasis on women's empowerment with full participation based on equality in all realm which includes participation in the decision-making process and ingress to power, are elementary for the achievement of equality, development, and peace. It also requested all governments and non-governmental organisation to promote and intensify women's participation in politics or the decision-making process (United Nations, 1996). After the Beijing conference, until now four review sessions are followed up in different sessions. These are known as- Beijing + 5 (2000), Beijing +10 (2005), Beijing +15 (2010) and Beijing +20 (2015).

Similarly, UNDP international conference which was held in 1997 recommends taking action by equalizing (increase up to 50 percent) women's representation at all levels of decision- making institutions and increase international resources for capacity-building of women (UNDP, 1997). Inter-Parliamentary Union also organized a conference in New Delhi on the title "Towards Partnership Between Men and Women in Politics". It adopted the document as the New Delhi Declaration. It shows the immediate need for actions to increase the presence of women in the decision-making process. It suggested increasing the role of media to bring a drastic change in the image of women politicians not as women but the real actor in politics (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997). Commonwealth has also taken initiatives to strengthen women's representation in politics. In 1995 adopted "Plan of Actions on Gender and Development" where it asked the member countries to increase women's participation in politics at all levels. It also adopted the "Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender

Equality 2005-2015”, highlighted the prominence of realisation of women’s rights preserved in Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Actions, the Millennium Development Goals and related to other those agreements (Commonwealth, 2005). In between also commonwealth adopted many agendas to enhance women’s representation.

The brief review on international initiatives shows that women’s political empowerment is at the centre along with all debates on the women’s issue. By getting inspired by international initiatives, there have been taken many national initiatives as well to improve the status of women’s political representation. Further in this chapter, an attempt has been made to understand the status of women’s political representation in India.

Politics and Women in India

In India, the political participation and representation of women can find very ironical (Saxena, 2011). Indian democracy is more than 70 years old now yet the ideals of democracy are far away from its destination, especially for Indian women. The Constitution of India 1950 guarantees equal opportunity for participation in politics to both men and women (Sinha, 2006). But it is incontrovertible to ask what these 70 years of Indian democracy have given to women except the marginal life in all spheres. Nothing much has done in the context of women’s marginalisation in politics. Indian women still have to protest or demand their rights, equal status, position and respect in the society. Indian population is comprised of different groups of religion, race, caste, ethnicity, language, and region. Apart from the socio-economic, political, cultural and geographical factors, these groups of variations also define the actual status of women in the society (Sinha, 2007). It differs within the country to play political roles women get affected by the environment which is following generation by generation. Even to take steps towards any developmental process or improvement agenda all factors come to an account. For a better understanding of the status of women needs to look back to the history of India.

Status of Women in Indian Society: Pre- Independence and Post-Independence

India is known for the worshipping women as a goddess but in-reality women have to face inequalities right from birth and it continues till the last of her death. Women in ancient India used to enjoy considerable freedom, privileges in all spheres of life but as centuries rolled on the situation also changed (Altekar, 1999). In ancient India, it has commonly believed by the middle classes that the Vedic period was the golden

age of Indian womanhood. It is accepted that the status of women was high and women were treated and respected equally like men during the Vedic period (Menon, 1999). In that period women were represented as the symbol of 'Shakti', and it was an accepted belief that where a woman is respected, there is the divine presence (Menon, 1975).

In the Rigvedic period, women used to enjoy freedom in their personal life and they got chances to educate themselves equal to men. They were familiar with the political and social issues and would discuss equally like men in meetings. Women were allowed to select their life partners and widows were allowed to remarry (Sharma, 2014). During the Upanisad period, the position of women was gradual. In the higher section of society, women had the right to go through a course of education. However, sending out girls to the outside home was gradually decreased during this period. Divorce was permitted during this period. Moreover, they were in a satisfactory position in this period also and they were considered as useful members of society (Altekar, 1999). If we go through the old writings it can be understood that women were in a good position in ancient times where women enjoyed equality, freedom. The communities were concerned about women. It was only with the coming of invaders, especially Muslims, in the medieval period the restrictions started on women (Menon, 1999). In the 19th century, all the evil practices such as- sati dah, purdah, child marriage, devadasi, dowry, ill-treatment of widows, etc. existed in the society which is considered as the outcomes of the time of invasions. It grinded the entire Indian society. Due to the old and evil practices women are treated like a homemaker and limit their roles as a daughter, wife or mother. Even in the 21st century, they are kept away from the public forum and as a result, in Indian politics, the women's participation and representation are visible at a very low rate.

Women in the Colonial Period of India and Reform movements

In the 18th century, the British East India Company came to India to spread their trade to the Indian territory. Later they established a colonial rule for more than 200 years. The rule of the British in India not only brought a new form of government but also new knowledge, new ideas and new technology (Desai & Thakkar, 2001). The colonial rulers criticized Indian society and the existence of the inequalities. When they examined the Indian social structure, they realized the necessity to focus on women's issues more. The newly educated people, who were inspired by the liberal views of the west understood the need to remove discrimination against women.

During colonial rule, the status of women was very low. In the nineteenth century, the central question was how women can be modernized in British India. As a result, voices had begun to be raised for women's rights in the form of reform movements. For the first time, the calm waters of Indian tradition were disturbed. There are mainly three reasons which influenced reform movements. These were- new colonial education, Christian missionaries influences and modernized traditional social perceptions (Sarkar & Sarkar, 2007). Raja Ram Mohan Roy is listed as the first among the nineteenth-century reformers who were truly concerned with the status of women in society. He is known as the "father of modern India", also called "Champion of women's rights" (Forbes, 1996). Except for Roy, many other reformists tried to recover British India from the dark side those were- Pandit Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi, and many others. There were also a few remarkable women reformers such as-Pandita Ramabai, Rashundari Devi, Dr. Vina Mazumdar, etc. Reformers showed their deep concern over the women's issues of India and made efforts to spread education on one hand and fight against the social evils. Except that some bold voices also raised such as- Jyotirao Phule raised his voices against the tyranny system of Brahmanical traditions and worked for equality and education of women and backward classes. Pandita Ramabai challenged old traditions which hindered the development of women. Thus, towards the end of the 19th century, an organized movement was started for women's rights, witnessed by modern India (Sultana, 2015).

The reformist movement influenced elite women towards the western liberal ideas of humanitarianism which made them join national freedom struggle against British colonialism. Annie Besant who was a women's rights activist encouraged women to join in the freedom struggle. Sarojini Naidu also raised her voice at the Social Service Conference for women's rights. In 1917, for the first time, the Women's India Association was formed and after ten years i.e. 1927 All India Women's Conference, non-governmental organization was established in Delhi to improve the educational status of women, supported by the British. Later these organizations also actively joined in the struggle movement (Agnew, 1979).

Women and the Nationalist Movement

The nationalist movement emerged as another powerful force that helped to change the position and attitude towards women. The nationalist struggle brought opportunity for women to participate in the public sphere and change their lives style. Mahatma

Gandhi, the leader of the nationalist movement especially inspired women for massive participation in the political movement and brought women out from their homes from all over India (Desai & Thakkar, 2001). Though the credit goes to Gandhiji for making them responsible for their rights and increased political participation but we can't deny the fact that it could not transform the reality. The traditional mentality of the people was not possible to break totally.

Apart from Dandi March in 1930 where Gandhiji himself decided to exclude women, women were active in the salt satyagraha, civil disobedience movement (1930-32) which was more intense, In Quit India Movement (1942) young, old and married women all joined in this great struggle. Women's participation changed many perceptions. Women did not bother to break their bangles which are considered as signs and beauty of married women (Narayana & Lakshmi, 2011). While the majority of women decided to join Gandhiji's non-violent struggle, some joined in the groups of revolutionaries. They participated in the works such as- carrying secret messages, smuggling of weapons, manufacturing bombs, killing government offices. Many women also joined the Indian National Army formed by Subhash Chandra Bose, Rani of Jhansi Regiment, etc. Many women went to jail along with their babies as well because of joining the freedom struggle. Before the 1930s, the government hesitated to take- action against women but looking into the increasing numbers of women participation, particularly in revolutionary activities, impelled the government to take steps against them (Sultana, 2015). Jhansi Rani Laxmibai was one of the pioneers of India's struggle for freedom in 1857. She lost her life to save the nation from the British.

Active women's participation in the struggle movement created a new era for the nation. Women got confidence in their ability and also felt that they also played a role to make India independent. During the pre-independent period, the favorable climate was created to improve the status of women through legal reforms. Many laws were passed such as- Child Marriage Restraint Act, Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, etc. (Narayana & Lakshmi, 2011). But still, the condition and concerns for women's issues did not get that much success that it was expected to be.

Women in Post Independent India

The national freedom movement can be considered as the base of women's political participation. The power transformation from the British to India created new opportunities and hope for women to participate in the democratic system. But in the

initial years of independence, India faced the trauma of partition. The consequences of partition were affected by all the people but violence against women was at an extensive level. Women of all religions witnessed of gender-based violence. Many women were raped, killed, kidnapped, humiliated which were beyond human comprehension. Many girls or women killed herself to save her body and die with dignity while many were killed by their family to save the prestige and honor of the family. However, the constitution brought a new light of liberty and equality of both genders (Desai & Thakkar, 2001). The constitution of free India was implemented from 26 January 1950 became the vehicle of social transformation. The constitution of India granted a franchise to Indian women. It has guaranteed the fundamental rights for the equality of the sexes. It adopted the principles of social, political and economic justice. The Constitution of India tried to remove inequalities that women are facing for a long period. There are various provisions under the Constitution, which include- Article 14 talks about equality before the law and equal protection of laws. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, caste, sex, race. Article 16 guarantees equal opportunity to all for employment. Article 39 talks about adoption of state for equal payment for equal work of both men and women. Article 51 imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has guaranteed one third reservations of women in local bodies (Panchayats) and Article 325 and 326 promises political equality to everyone. Despite all these legal provisions, the representation of women in politics is still very abysmal.

Representation of Women in the Lok Sabha

In the independent India, the overall status of women has been improved than before but the participation of women in political process and legislative bodies still have long way to go. After the independence movement also, women could be traced in various other movements such as- environmental movements, student movements, tribal movements, women's movements. But very few women till now are able to cross the boundaries by breaking all barriers and become active in politics. There is wide gap between the constitutional guarantees and actual representation of women. Table 2.3 and 2.4 shows the representation of women in the two houses of parliament.

Table 2.3: Representation of Women Members from First to Seventeenth Lok Sabha Elections (1952-2019)

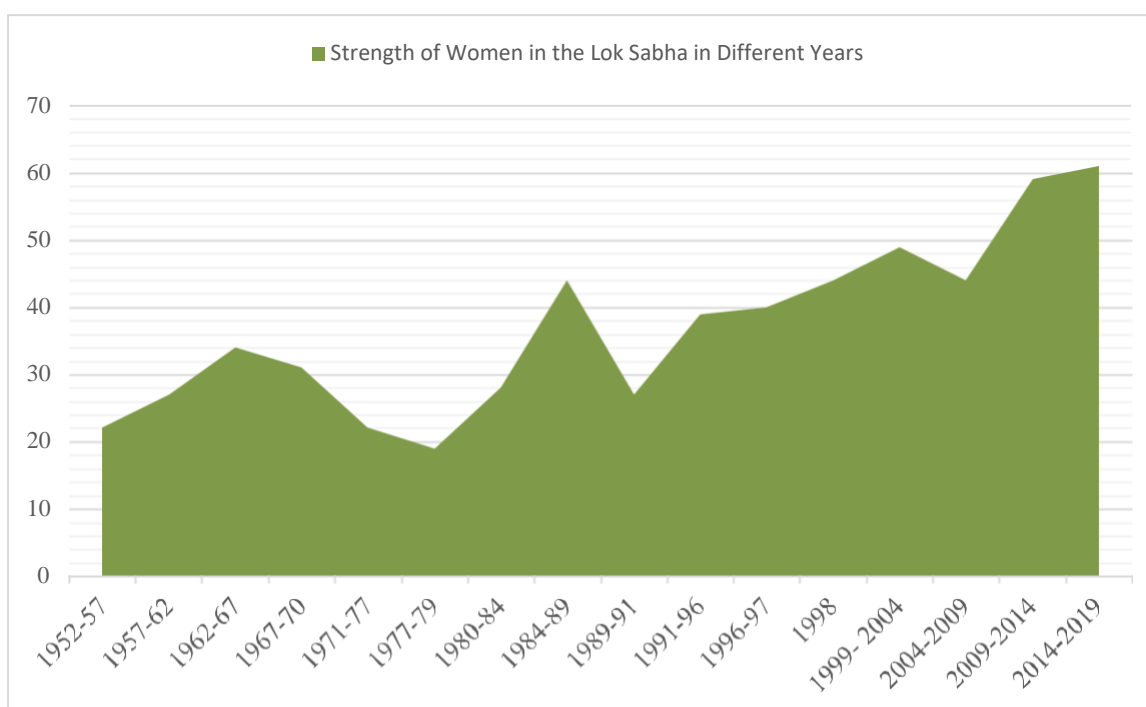
Lok Sabha (Year)	Total number of Members	No of Elected Women Representatives	Total Percentage
First (1952-57)	499	22	4.4
Second (1957-62)	500	27	5.4
Third (1962-67)	503	34	6.7
Fourth (1967-70)	523	31	5.9
Fifth (1971-77)	521	22	4.2
Sixth (1977-79)	544	19	3.4
Seventh (1980-84)	544	28	5.1
Eighth (1984-89)	544	44	8.1
Ninth (1989-91)	517	27	5.2
Tenth (1991-96)	544	39	7.2
Eleventh (1996-97)	544	40*	7.3
Twelfth (1998)	544	44*	8.1
Thirteenth (1999-04)	543	49	9.02
Fourteenth (2004- 09)	539	44	8.16
Fifteenth (2009-14)	543	59	10.87
Sixteenth (2014-19)	545	61	11.19
Seventeenth (2019-24)	541**	78	14.44

Source: Election Commission of India

**One member nominated by the president; **Without nominated members*

Table 2.3 shows the data of women representatives in the Lok Sabha or lower house of the Parliament. In the first election (1952) women were able to occupy only 4.4 percent seats. It increased slightly till the third election (1962) up to 6.7 percent but fall again in fourth (5.9 percent), fifth (4.2 percent) and sixth (3.4 percent). Then it increased in seventh and eighth election up to 8.1 percent. But it decreased in the ninth election (5.2 percent). However, the percentage has increased in the seventeenth election where women have occupied 14.44 percent seats which are the highest number ever in history. The graph has not been the smooth curve, witnessed several ups and downs since 1952 to 2019.

Figure 2.1: Women in the Lok Sabha



Source: Election Commission of India

Representation of Women Members in Rajya Sabha

Unlike the Lok Sabha, the representation of women also has not increased. It has also witnessed ups and downs. In comparison, women's representation are more in the Rajya Sabha than the Lok Sabha. Table 2.4 shows that since independence the highest number of percentage women have received is 15.5 percent. Women still have to go far long to achieve 33 percent seats without reservation in the parliament.

Table 2.4: Representation of Women Members in Rajya Sabha

Year	Total Seats	Number of Female Members	Percentage of Women
1952	219	16	7.3
1957	237	18	7.6
1962	238	18	7.6
1967	240	20	8.3
1971	243	17	7.0
1977	244	25	10.2
1980	244	24	9.8
1985	244	28	11.4
1990	245	38	15.5
1996	223	20	9.0
1998	223	19	8.6
2004	245	27	11.1
2009	245	22	8.97
2014	245	29	11.83

Source: Election Commission of India

Women Representation in the Council of Ministers

From the above table, it is clear that both in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, the number of women representatives is much lower in a country like India which has the largest democracy in the world. Like the Parliament, women representation in the council of ministers always considered a trifle. In Jawaharlal Nehru's first cabinet, India introduced to its first women cabinet minister- Amrit Kaur who was allocated in charge of the health ministry in 1952. Afterward, for many years India did not have women representatives in cabinet minister. During Lal Bahadur Shastri's tenure, not even single women were able to get cabinet rank. In Mrs. Indira Gandhi's cabinet who was the first woman prime minister of India, surprisingly did not allocate even single women in cabinet rank. In fact, in Rajiv Gandhi's cabinet only, one-woman member Mohsina Kidwai was included in the cabinet rank. In the thirteenth Lok Sabha, India received the highest number of women in the union council of ministers since its independence (Sultana, 2015). It had nine ministers where four were in cabinet rank. It is also a fact that most of the time women are offered in the department like-women and child development, health, education, social welfare, etc. In a very few occasions, they get offers in the important portfolios like - defence, finance, external affairs, etc. However, under the Modi Government, the condition had been improved in comparison to previous years. Women also appointed in some challenging portfolios. In 2014, out of ten women ministers, six were in cabinet rank. They were-Nirmala Sitharaman (first Commerce and Industry and later Defence Minister), Sushma Swaraj (External Affairs), Smriti Irani (Information & Broadcasting, Textiles), Uma Bharati (Drinking Water & Sanitation), Harsimat Kaur (Food Industry) and Meneka Gandhi (Women and Child Development). Dr. Najma Heptulla has also appointed in minority affairs portfolios in cabinet rank but later she has been dropped from her post. There are six women ministers under the Modi government's second stint. Out of six, three are appointed in the cabinet rank- Smriti Irani, Harsimat Kaur, and Nirmala Sitharaman. As like the number of women ministers are less, the number of women in cabinet position also are remained less in various cabinet governments of India. The below list has been shown the number of women ministers since independence-

Table 2.5: Total Numbers of Women Ministers since Independence

Year	Total Number of Women Minister
1952	3
1957	3
1962	5
1967	5
1971	3
1977	2
1980	8
1984	5
1989	1
1991	5
1996	5
1998	4
1999	9
2004	10
2009	9
2014	10
2019	6

Source: Parliament of India

Table 2.5 shows that the number of women as a minister is very less. From 1952 to 2019 in the different cabinet governments, the number of women representatives was minimum one and a maximum ten in numbers. It exhibited that women in Indian political scenario remain low profile.

Women Representatives in State Assemblies

Women are under-represented almost in all state assemblies of India and also disappointing status like in Parliament. The women representatives vary from zero to twenty percent in different states. None of the Indian states or Union territories have exceptional records if we see the data till now of women representatives in their respective state assemblies. Drude Dahlerup in her paper talked about the critical mass theory which is relevant here. The concept of 'critical mass' most often used when women represent less than 30 percent. When in any political system women became politically strong that means occupies 30 percent seats in legislatures women become a critical mass. Along with Helen Mayer Hacker, Dahlerup also considered women as minority groups though it comprises 50 percent or more population. Like minority group, women also face discrimination and unequal treatment in society. However, she suggested replacing the concept of 'critical mass' to the 'critical acts' if the position of minority changes in larger amounts or 'small to large minority' that is

more than 30 percent which is now only applicable to the Scandinavian countries (Dahlerup, 1988).

In India, women in legislatures have not become a 'critical mass' as it yet has to go far to reach the efficient size (30 percent). Data on women representation of all state legislative assemblies are demonstrated in Table 2.6. Though some states have a higher number of women representatives than others. Surprisingly states like Nagaland, Mizoram, and Puducherry have zero women representatives in the last assembly elections. Nagaland since its formation as a separate state has no women representatives at all. Compared to other states of India, Andhra Pradesh has better women's representation around 20.57 percent followed by Jharkhand with 16.04 percent, Chhattisgarh and Haryana with 14.44 percent. West Bengal has little less with 13.60 percent than Chhattisgarh and Haryana. The representation of women in Bihar and Rajasthan is also better than Uttar Pradesh. In Bihar female representation is 11.52 percent, and in Rajasthan is 11.5 percent where U.P has 10.42 percent in their current assembly. The number of women in the assembly in Madhya Pradesh has been decreased than the last election with 9.13 percent. Odisha and Tamil Nadu have almost equal percentage of women representatives which is 8.84 and 8.11 respectively. Gujrat and Uttarakhand have a similar percentage of representatives with 7.14 percent. Maharashtra which is a developed state of Indian union alike Gujrat has only 6.94 percent. Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Goa have 5.88, 5.12 and 5 percent respectively women in their assembly.

Women representation in Jammu & Kashmir and Delhi is not satisfactory. Delhi which is the capital of India has the worst condition by having only 1.42 percent. Though Jammu and Kashmir has very fewer women representatives still it is more than Delhi with 2.29 percent. In the southern part of India, except Andhra Pradesh the rest of the state's condition is vile. Kerala is the most literate state of India but only represents 5.71 percent of women in the legislative assembly. The literacy rate has not affected representation yet. Tamil Nadu has more women representatives than Kerala i.e. 8.11 percent. Telangana and Karnataka have the lowest number which is 5.04 and 3.12 percent respectively. Among the North-Eastern states, Sikkim is in better condition compared to other states. Sikkim has 9.37 percent followed by Meghalaya (6.66 percent), Assam (6.34 percent), Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh (5 percent), Manipur (3.33 percent). Nagaland and Mizoram have no women in legislative. Table 2.6 shows that all of the states of India have a very small number of women in

comparison to men which shows a clear picture of gender exclusion from electoral participation and representation as well.

Table 2.6: Women Representatives in Different State Assemblies of India

S. No	Name of the States/Union Territories	Last Assembly Election's Year	Total Seats (Without Nominated Seats)	Number of Male MLA's	Number of Female MLA'S	Percentage of Women Representatives
1	Andhra Pradesh	2019	175	139	36	20.57
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2019	60	57	3	5
3	Assam	2016	126	118	8	6.34
4	Bihar	2015	243	215	28	11.52
5	Chhattisgarh	2018	90	75 (2 vacant)	13	14.44
6	Goa	2017	40	38	2	5
7	Gujrat	2017	182	166 (3 vacant)	13	7.14
8	Haryana	2014	90	69 (8 vacant)	13	14.44
9	Himachal Pradesh	2017	68	62 (2 in vacant)	4	5.88
10	Jammu & Kashmir	2014	87	85	2	2.29
11	Jharkhand	2014	81	66(2 vacant)	13	16.04
12	Karnataka	2018	224	200 (17 vacant)	7	3.12
13	Kerala	2016	140	125 (7 vacant)	8	5.71
14	Madhya Pradesh	2018	230	208 (1 vacant)	21	9.13
15	Maharashtra	2014	288	254 (17 vacant)	20	6.94
16	Manipur	2017	60	58	2	3.33
17	Meghalaya	2018	60	55 (1 vacant)	4	6.66
18	Mizoram	2018	40	40	0	0
19	Nagaland	2018	60	60	0	0
20	NCT of Delhi	2015	70	73 (1 vacant)	1	1.42
21	Odisha	2019	147	130 (2 vacant)	13	8.84
22	Puducherry	2016	30	30	0	0
23	Punjab	2017	117	109 (2 in Vacant)	6	5.12
24	Rajasthan	2018	200	175 (2 vacant)	23	11.5
25	Sikkim	2019	32	29	3	9.37
26	Tamil Nadu	2016	234	213 (2 vacant)	19	8.11

27	Telangana	2018	119	112 (1 vacant)	6	5.04
28	Tripura	2018	60	57	3	5
29	Uttarakhand	2017	70	64 (1 Vacant)	5	7.14
30	Uttar Pradesh	2017	403	348(13 Vacant)	42	10.42
31	West Bengal	2016	294	251 (3 vacant)	40	13.60

Source: india.gov.in (MLC'S/MLA'S)

In modern India, women have occupied a different position in every field such as education, corporate sectors, business, defence, politics, professional fields, civil services, etc. They are also in many respected and honourable positions like Governor, President, chief minister but their presence could be seen in marginal numbers. Strong political activism is not present in almost all parts of India (Parween, 2018). As a result, gender biases are visible mostly in politics. At the same time, male members of society also want a male-dominated political environment. Because of this mentality, women are far away in politics in numbers than the male member.

Women's Representation and Political Parties

Political parties play an important role in making successful of every democratic country. It is an indispensable part of every modern society. The main objective of political parties is to be a bridge of communication between the government and the public. It plays a significant role in the success of any candidate. In India, the sharp reality is that due to mainly male biases reflects in the choice of candidates by political parties' women are continued to diminish their legitimate share in election bodies (Dutta, 2006). Past histories show that no serious attempt was made by any political parties to increase the number of political participations which affects the political representation. Political parties of India shown neglect in appointing women in the post like a spokesperson, president, secretaries, etc. All major political parties commit in the public or include in their manifestos to increase women representation in politics but their promises do not see in action. Only a few women get chances to get the tickets when they apply to contest an election. This is true for all major political parties such as- BJP, Congress, CPI, CPI(M) and so on. It is said that to contest elections is much easier for women than getting the tickets. Previous data show that in all of the election, parties fielded fewer women candidates such as- in 1996 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress fielded only 9 percent women, while BJP and United Front (UF) fielded 5 percent and it's continuing till now (Saxena, 2011). It is,

therefore, not surprising that the highest percentage of women representation in the Lok Sabha has only been 14.6 percent in 2019. The figure of 2019 elections in Table 2.7 shows the number of elected women from different national and regional political parties.

Table 2.7: Women’s Representation in National and Regional Political Parties of India-2019

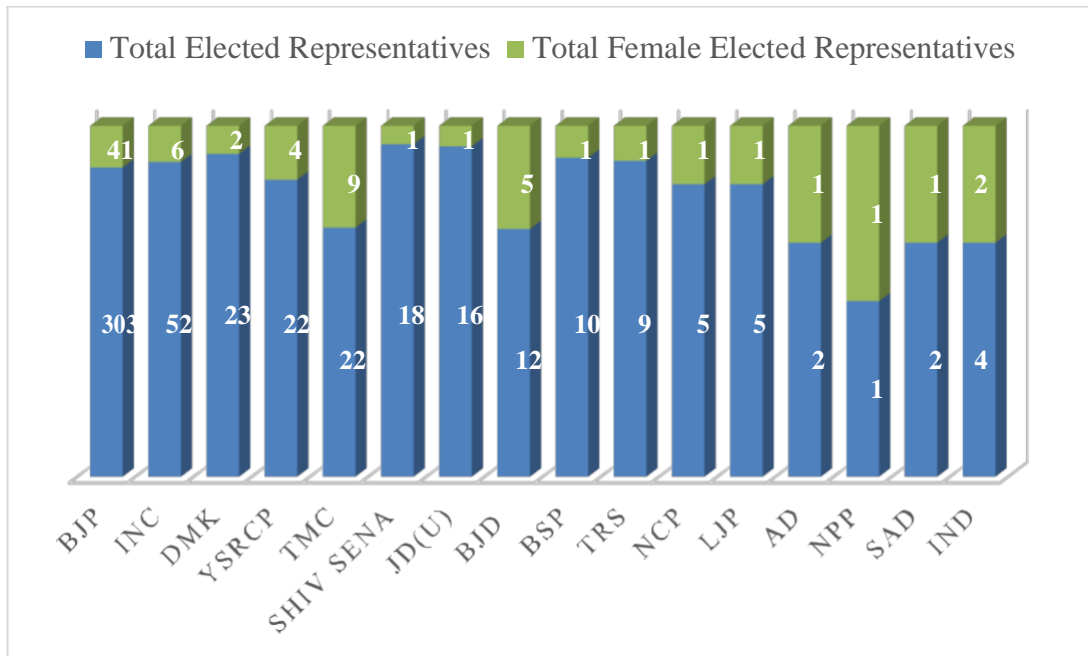
Party Name	Total Numbers of Representatives in Lok Sabha	Total Numbers of Women Representatives In Lok Sabha
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	303	41
All India Trinamool Congress (AITC)	22	9
Indian National Congress (INC)	52	6
Biju Janata Dal (BJD)	12	5
Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSR Congress Party)	22	4
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)	23	2
Independents	4	2
Apna Dal	2	1
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	10	1
Janata Dal (U)	16	1
Lok Jan Shakti Party (LJSP)	5	1
National People’s Party (NPP)	1	1
Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	5	1
Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)	2	1
Shiv Sena (SS)	18	1
Telangana Rashtra Samithi	9	1
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	3	0
Communist Party of India	2	0

AamAadmiParty (AAP)	1	0
Janata Dal (Secular)	1	0

Source: Parliament of India, Seventeenth Lok Sabha (2019)

Table 2.7 shows the number of women representatives from various national and regional political parties. We can see that BJP has the highest number of the women representatives though it's not enough to say as out of 303 representatives only 41 are women representatives. From the data, it is also clear that different parties fielded fewer numbers of women. In Trinamool Congress, only 9 women were elected as representatives in Lok Sabha while many have 1 or 2 only. At the same time, surprisingly national parties like CPI, CPI (M) do not have any women representatives. It reveals that the agenda of all political parties to the improvement of political empowerment is limited in their lectures on meetings and it is far away from the steps towards gender equality. The dreary picture in the sphere of women representation in political parties and representatives' institutions clearly shows the continuation of patriarchal tradition on the name of women empowerment which led to the demand of reservation in both parliament and state assemblies of India.

Figure 2.2: Party Wise Women Representation in 2019



Source: Parliament of India, Seventeenth Lok Sabha (2019)

Debate on Women's Reservation

The women of India have been revealed to greater insecurities, poverty, male dominance, poor living condition. They have been deeply affected by the lack of opportunities in each field. By keeping in mind the Indian government declared 2001 as the year of women empowerment. To amplify the programs of women's development the National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000 AD was adopted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (Sultana, 2015). Along with the other side of development, it recommended the government work efficiently to increase women's participation in national, state and local levels. The question of reservation was also left in this plan. It recommended a 30 percent reservation for women in local and district level (Department of Women and Child Development, 1988).

In the multi-coloured legislative history, several attempts have been made for reservation of women in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly. After the diligent struggle of women's group, the women's reservation bill introduced in the parliament in 1996, 1998 and 1999 (Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 2008). However, the Rajiv Gandhi government took the issue of 33 percent reservation for women in local levels. When the congress government first introduced the 'Seventy-Third Constitution Amendment Bill' in 1991, it became critical issue- some were in favour of reservation by stating that it is a real step to enhance women's representation in politics on the other side some were claimed it as a strategy of congress government for vote bank (Sinha, 2007). However, in December 1992, Lok Sabha passed the seventy-third and seventy-fourth amendments for the reservation of 33 percent in panchayat and urban local bodies (Sinha, 2007). This resulted in a huge number of women entries in the grassroots governance which emerged as 'critical mass'. In 1996, again women reservation bill as 81st Amendment Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by the United Front Government to provide 33 percent reservation to women in state assemblies and parliaments (Sinha, 2007). It was opposed by many parties as there was no quota for other backward castes (OBC). In 1997, again the government failed to introduce in the parliament due to strong objections to the bill. In 1998, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee guaranteed to approve the bill but it impeded in the Lok Sabha with the demand of 15 percent quota for OBC women. Another attempt was made in 1999 but was not successful due to the differences among the political parties. In 2008, the Constitution bill (108th amendment bill) or women's reservation

bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha and proposed for one-third reservation including the reservation for scheduled caste and scheduled tribes in both the Lok Sabha and State Assembly (Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 2008).

National Commission for Women (NCW) has also demanded the reservation of seats for women in both state assemblies and parliaments and made effort to gain public support (National Commission for Women, 2001). Various women's organizations were not behind the reservation issue. It gave a new platform to the voluntary organizations and to those working for human rights for assembling, importuning in favour of women's political reservation. The politician, thinkers and women's organizations all were divided regarding women's reservation bills. There is an on-going debate on women's reservation bill.

Women's reservation bill was debated from many perspectives. The debate on the bill started since the bill was introduced. It has received mixed reactions from the political party, leaders and overall both inside and outside the parliament. From the beginning, the lack of clarity is one of the weaknesses of this bill. Sharad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav had strongly opposed the bill by demanding OBC quota. Madhu Kiswar, the women activist considered the bill as an irresponsible bill. Different solutions have been offered to tackle the issue of this bill. Madhu Kiswar comes up with a suggestion, to provide 50 percent reservation by having double member constituencies. Some suggested that instead of the reservation bill in legislatures and parliament, to make it compulsory for every recognised political party to nominate women candidate in one-third of constituencies. Among the political parties also there are differences with the opinions- some are supporting the bill, some are demanding to make the quota fixed by including the backward section within 33 percent at the same time some are concentrating to protect minorities as well. However, it is also true that the entire issue of women's representatives won't solve out by keeping one-third reservation by the respective parties unless women won't win after the reservation also (Rajan & Retnakumar, 2005). The questions also have arisen that the reservation bill empowers the ordinary women or only elite women will get benefited like other times. Many feminist and women's organizations also come up by opposing the bill as special privileges will consider women as weaker section and also women have rights to represent instead of begging reservation. Uma Bharati also against the bill by stating that "Women should not be given any reservation" (Suchinmayee, 2006). On the other hand, including former union

minister Margaret, many MPs and women organizations are supporting in favour of reservation for women to reduce disparities and increase opportunities and facilities in politics.

Conclusion

The most important debates on political representation focused on women's representation, the principle of equality in the constitution, make changes in the electoral system and approve reservation for women. Representation of women in the political realm is an important instrument of women empowerment. Women's representation in formal politics has been cramped by gender scrutiny. We also cannot deny that India has seen some women politician that made strong impacts on Indian politics like- Indira Gandhi, Prathibha Patil, Mayawati, Jayalalitha, Mamta Banerjee, Sonia Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj and other. It is also be noted that most of the women leaders in India occupied their position either from their royal family's status or hidden hand of a man. Such as- Indira Gandhi trained by Jawaharlal Nehru and also Gandhi family is popularly known in Indian politics, MG Ramachandran did for Jayalalitha, Kanchi Ram was behind the success of Mayawati (Srivastava, 2006). Therefore there is an urgent need to do legislative and constitutional reforms for the government to make fair ingress of women in both legislative and parliament. Drude Dahlerup (1988) has suggested several deeds which could assist to increase political representation of women which included- recruit women by other women politicians, quotas for women, new legislation and new institutions (mobilization of institutional resources). An acute parliamentary discussion is must necessary to deal with confusion and debates with clarity on the reservation bill. The coming years will be testing ground for Indian politics if the women's reservation bill will be approved officially.

Chapter 3

Representation and Gender Equality in Electoral Politics of Assam

Introduction

The public sphere is still been typically dominated by male members throughout the world. As a result, most of the countries failed to give space and representation to women in the political territory (Chhetri, 2014). There is no doubt that opportunities for women have increased in the past years. The women's movement, the expansion of democracy along with other factors has melded to unlock the doors that have been historically closed to women. But the legacy of male domination remains unbroken (Genovese, 2013). Therefore, women are under-represented in political leadership positions (Chhetri, 2014). Even women who belong from those societies who can enjoy freedom in their day to day life also seen undervalued in politics. Passable representation in representative bodies is very important for women's empowerment and to achieve gender equality in the political process.

It is worldwide accepted that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for the development of any society (Gupta & Bhandari, 2010). But women's representation is restricted in most of society. Gender equality may be said to be a social order where all genders are given the same opportunities, the same importance equally. The formal inception of equality is incomplete when it comes to achieving true gender equality- as the picture shows in the political arena by the gap between the men and women representatives. Men and women are equally important in society so both have equal responsibilities. Social modernization could be achieved by enhancing political participation and representation (Gupta & Bhandari, 2010). To achieve gender equality several allegiances have been taken in the international society to intensify women's representation in the political realm including the Constitution of India. In 1971, the Government of India (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare) also appointed a 'Committee on the Status of Women in

India'(CSWI) titled "Towards Equality" (Sultana, 2015). It was requested by the United Nations and submitted to the parliament in 1975. It was an eye-opener for the government as it showed after the independence also in what status women were in. It could say the report showed the failure of Indian government on maintaining gender equality.

Over the past decades, the gender gap has been diminished in various areas-education, health, social areas, politics and so on. However, most of the countries are lag behind in carrying out gender equality in the area of representation of women in the decision-making process (Golder, 2017). Representation would mean that only citizens who are legally authorized should be elected to the parliament and form of government, by reflecting values of equality and equal representation (Bhandari, Balakrishnan & Reddy, 2010). Representation of citizens in the legislature reflects the society as a whole and that is why all groups must be represented equally (Ruiz & Marin, 2008). Certainly, equal representation does not implicit that women should only vote women, or men only to men or both should represent only their interest. Both men or women represent must continue to represent as a whole the population. Gender equality in the political process requires a minimum level of representation proportionately (Ruiz & Marin, 2008). Gender equality cannot be obtained if deep-rooted biasness against women persuade. Real equality is deplored by men for the perception of custom and tradition.

North East India comprises eight states- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim was added as a member of North Eastern Council in 2002. It is known for its diverse culture, ethnic groups, traditions, languages, and cultures. Geographically the North-Eastern region is almost secluded from the people of the rest of the country. During the British Raj, the North-Eastern states were established. Assam which was together with Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur were separated after independence by the Government of India and formed as separate states (Bhattacharyya, 1995). So basically, the state has experienced many changes including territories and boundaries over the years. Assam is one of the prominent states not only in the North East but also in India. The state is spread over an area of 78,438 km² and known for its attractive beauty and wildlife. The capital of Assam is Dispur. Assam state comprises 27 districts. Table 3.1 shows details about the state of Assam.

Table 3.1: Assam at a Glance

Description	2011
Total Population	31, 205,576
Male Population	15,939,443
Female Population	15,266,133
Decadal Population Growth (2001-2011)	17.07 %
Sex Ratio	958
Density/Km ²	398
Area (Km ²)	78,438
Literacy	72.19 %
Male Literacy	77.85%
Female Literacy	66.27%
Total Literate	19,177,977
Male Literate	10,568,639
Female Literate	8,609,338

Source: Census of India, 2011

Table 3.1 shows that in Assam, almost half of the population are women. The sex ratio of Assam is 958. It means that in every 1000 males there are 958 female members in Assam. The literacy rate in Assam has been seen an upward trend with 72.19 percent as per 2011 population census. Of that male literacy stands at 77.85 percent while female literacy is at 66.27 percent which has been increased impressively in the last few years. In actual numbers, male literates were 10,568,639 and females were 8,609,338. Table 3.1 shows that there is not much difference between males and females in the population, sex ratio, and literacy rate. It considered Assam as one of the better states in the country in terms of sex ratio and literacy rate. However, the development could not be seen in the case of women's representation in the decision-making process though the literacy rate is quite impressive of Assam.

Status of Women before Independence in Assam

Assam was ruled by the kings of different dynasties until the British occupied Assam by the Yandaboo Treaty in 1826 (Bhattacharyya, 1995). Like other parts of India, the social status of women was very high in the ancient time (Barpujari, 1992). Except for a few upper Hindu caste women, Widow remarriage was also common. Women who were from the high class were also educated. There are also some pieces of evidence that Queen used to control some posts in the states. Although there were no recognised basic political rights to the women, women were honoured in society with full dignity. During the medieval period, women of Assam faced uphill and downhill in their status of women. In the early period of the medieval period, women were in the administrative sector. Queen Ambika, Queen Phuleswari, Mulagabharu are some examples of powerful women during the time (Gait, 1905). Later part of the medieval period- Vaishnavism, the new liberal social movements took place, led by Sri Sankardeva were silent about the Role of Women in society. He did not allow women to enter the religious centre (Satra). Women of medieval Assam (later period) remain unengaged in politics. From 1826 Assam was handed over to the Britishers. Later Missionaries also came to Assam to spread Christianity and took initiative to educate women of Assam. In 1840, the first Missionary school for girls was established in Shivasagar (Barpujari, 1992). Within a few years under government initiatives, many girl's schools were established all over in Assam. With these efforts of the government, the new sun arose in the field of formal education of women in Assam. Except for improving women's status in education, the government of India Act of 1935 indulged with the representation of women by reserving one seat in the Assam Legislative Assembly as there were a larger number of women in Shillong compared to other states (Dutta, 2006). The act also permitted women to contest elections in the general election. Though it could not bring more women in politics but they were very active in the different struggle movements of India.

Women of Assam in Freedom Struggle Movement

Assamese women alike other Indian women had played an important role in the struggle movement. The struggle movement brought a maiden opportunity to come out and participate on a larger scale. Along with other Indian women, women of Assam also joined in the salt satyagraha in which mob of women joined in the struggle movement for the first time. During Gandhiji's visit to Assam in 1921, he

made a thriller effect on the women of Assam. His speech and perception to include women in the movement increased the self-confidence of Assamese women.

In the period of struggle movement, Assamese women participated through different associations such as- Assam Student Association (Assam Chatra Sanmilan) and Assam Literacy Association (Assam Sahitya Sabha). Later formally Assam Women Association (Assam Mahila Samiti) was formed in 1926 (Sharma, 1993). Like other parts of India, a large number of women of Assam also joined in the movement by taking part in the protest, meetings, boycotting school, colleges, offices, etc. Some women from urban areas or political backgrounds came forward to bring rural women forwards under the leadership of Tarunram Phukan, Chandra Kumar Agarwalla, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, etc. Some of the women were- Rajbala Das, Nalinibala Devi, Bijuli Phukan, Kiranmayee Agarwalla (Bhuyan, 2000). During the non-cooperation movement, the boycotting of foreign cloths and especially the self-production of khadi was highly successful in Assam. Majority of women in rural Assam are involved in the production of khadi cloths. There are many examples where women of Assam sacrificed many things to work effectively in the movement- Bhanumati Talukdar who left her home to work solely in the struggle movement and received the title of 'Sarojini' from Gandhiji; Chandraprova Saikiani left her job to participate in the movement, many women donated their expensive ornaments (Sharma, 1993). Revolutionary Organization i.e. Mukti Sangha (Freedom Association) was also formed. The members of the Mukti Sangha signed by their blood to fight for the country which was mostly school-going girls. Later Puspallata Das who was active in the association got expelled from the school due to the joining of the Sangha.

In 1940, Assam's wing was opened by realising the increasing women's participation in the movement where Pushpalata Das and Amolprova Das became joint secretaries. It played a key role to give training to women. In 1941, 'All Assam Girls Student conference' or 'Sadou Asom Satri Sanmilon' was organized. In the time of the Quit India movement, many satyagrahi training centres were established for women. Many women also joined in the death force known as 'Mrityo Bahini'. Kanaklata Baruah, Khahuli Devi, and Kamuli Devi lost their lives and many others were injured by the Britishers when they went to hoist the national flag (Barpujari, 1992). Though most of the women followed Gandhiji's non-violent way there were also many women involved in extremist activities. These activities included- setting fire in the

government buildings, carrying secret messages to the long-distance places, provides food and shelter to the underground workers, destruction of government properties, distribute military supplies to different places, etc. Aikan Bhuyan, Sudhalata Dutta, Reboti Lahon, Jaymati Saikia, Gunawati Devi, Rakshada Devi, Ratnabala Phukan, Budheswari Hazarika are some of the examples of women who worked in the extremist groups by putting their lives in danger (Bhuyan, 2000). Women of Assam faced many tortures both mentally and physically by police and military forces but it could not stop them to come out from home for the movement.

Political Status of Women after Independence in Assam

Women of Assam in politics after independence can be discussed in two different broad parts- in the mass movement and the electoral politics. The status of women in Assam is similar like the women in the rest of the country. After being separated into many states after independence, Assam is still the largest state in terms of population and second-largest in the geographical area among the North-Eastern region. But the status of women of the North East region is almost similar to one another as they share many connected cultures, languages, etc. It has been also experienced insurgency and ethnic discord for the last few decades which not only affected the economy but also social instability in the states. The worst victims in all these processes are mostly women. Social evils exist in large scale in other parts of India. But in comparison to other states, the entire region of North East including Assam is mostly free from the social evil practices such as dowry, female feticide, infanticide, homicide, etc due to the tribal and indigenous culture (Nayak & Mahanta, 2015). In this region women are independent and get the right to make their own choices. North Eastern women relatively enjoy more equality and respect compared to other parts of India. However different report reveals that other forms of gender discrimination do exist in the region including Assam. According to Baseline Report, 2018 Sikkim achieved the highest rank of 50 in gender equality among the North-Eastern region where Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh is in 43, 42, 38 and 32 ranks respectively. Assam and Meghalaya ranked 36 while Manipur is in only 25 ranks (NITI Aayog, 2018).

In the different regions, the shape of political behaviour shows different components that influence political participation and representation- these are the social status of women, cultural norms, economic status and also all regional outlook in wider society. Though women of the North East dominate every other profession their direct

participation in the political process is much less in comparison to the other parts of India. By looking at the poor performance in politics or the decision-making process shows that the North East region is still a man's dominated region in politics while few tribes follow a matriarchal social system in the region. Assam is not exceptional to it. In spite of being educated, politically concerns and experience in the social field the women get fewer chances to get involved in the decision-making system. The North-Eastern region which is mostly tribal-based region distinguishes gender roles and gender responsibilities (Vaiphe, 2017). Though women get all facilities, equal education, equal rights but most people believe that women are in charge of domestic issues, such as family and its related issues, while man deals with society, including village administration and councils (Vaiphe, 2017).

In most states of the North East including Assam, women get excluded from the political arena. In maximum times they do not get enough votes to be representatives in the decision-making process. In Assam, there were numbers of dedicated fighters from all of the districts during the independent movement but later they have not been seen in the politics. The election reports show that women members in the Assam Legislative Assembly have been very few. On the other hand, in the mass movements, the role of women can be found the same as a freedom movement. After independence, also different major mass movements took place in the state of Assam including the State Language Movement (1960), Refinery Movement (1967), Assam Movement on the foreigner's issue (1975-1985). Women of Assam freely joined in these movements especially a huge number of women joined in the popular and one of the major movements of Assam known as 'Assam Movement'. Assam also witnessed different community movements at different times for the demands of separate state or autonomy where women have actively participated. Those communities are- Bodo, Karbi, Missing, Rabha, etc. Several women associations also formed of these communities like- Bodo Women Justice Forum, Karbi Progressive Women Association, Missing Women Association and working for rights and security for the women (Baishya, 2016). But the role of women in making the movements successful did not bring any effective results in increasing women's representation in electoral politics. Assam Movement came into an end by signing the Assam Accord in 1985 by the central government and the leaders of the Assam movement. The leaders formed new regional political parties as 'Asom Gana Parishad' and participated in the Assam Legislative Assembly election. Despite millions of girls and women

participated in the movement, only two women got the opportunity for the nomination as a candidate for the election. It shows that though women were considered as indispensable for the success of the mass movement, they kept aside in the electoral politics of Assam. However, the election commission report shows that Assam is in a better position after Sikkim and Meghalaya in women's representation in politics compared to other North-Eastern states of India. Among the North-Eastern region Sikkim stands highest in rank with 9.37 percent in women's representation in assembly whereas Meghalaya (6.66), Assam (6.34 percent), Tripura (5 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (5 percent), Manipur (3.33 percent), Mizoram (0 percent) and Nagaland (0 percent) comes accordingly in list (Election Commission of India, 2019).

Representation of Women of Assam in the Lok Sabha

Women of Assam has shown remarkable progress as a voter but are not able to occupy the position in the decision- making the process. The representation of women in the Lok Sabha has been stagnant and it is not adequate in numbers.

Table 3.2 Women of Assam in Lok Sabha Elections (1952-2019)

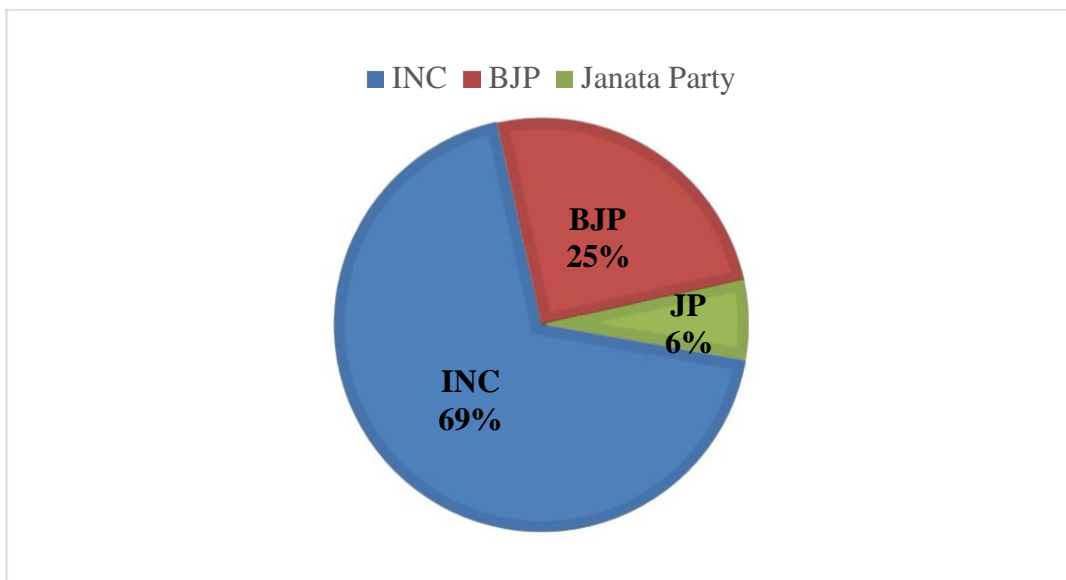
Lok Sabha (Year)	Number of Elected Men	Women Participants	Number of Elected Women	Percentage of Women Representatives
1952-1957	14	2	1	6.67
1957-1962	12	2	1	7.70
1962-1967	10	3	2	16.67
1967-1970	14	2	1	6.67
1971-1977	14	3	1	6.67
1977-1979	12	3	2	14.29
1980-1984	6	2	Nil	Nil
1984-1989	14	Nil	Nil	Nil
1989-1991	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
1991-1996	14	7	Nil	Nil
1996-1997	14	9	Nil	Nil
1998-1999	13	5	1	7.14
1999-2004	13	9	2	13.34
2004-2009	14	4	Nil	Nil
2009-2014	12	11	2	14.28
2014-2019	13	16	2	13.34
2019-2024	13	18	1	7.15

Source: Election Commission of India (2019)

From table 3.2, it shows that from 1952 to 2019, only 16 women representatives elected for Lok Sabha. From 1980 to 1991, there were no women in Lok Sabha from Assam. Mofida Ahmed was the first female Member of Parliament. Bonify Khongmen was the first woman who elected in the Assam Legislative Assembly

(1946-1952) and also later became deputy speaker in the assembly. She became a member of the first Lok Sabha (1952-1957). Rashida Haque Choudhury, Rani Manjula Devi, Jyotsna Chanda are few names of the women who were elected as the representatives of Assam in Lok Sabha. Some successful women elected in the Lok Sabha for several times- such as Smt. Rani Narah (three times), Bijaya Chakroborty (two times), Jyotsna Chanda (Three times), Smt. Renuka Devi Barkataki (two times). However, the number of women from Assam as representatives in Lok Sabha is very low. Though few women elected for many times but most of the cases women files nomination but badly lose in the election against their male opponent candidates. Even in 2019, a total of 18 women contested in the election and seats only one woman, Queen Oja from Bharatiya Janata Party is elected as the Member of Parliament out of total 14 seats in Assam. This shows that women’s representation in the parliament in abysmal. Since 1952 to 2019- total eleven women MP elected from the congress party, four MP from Bharatiya Janata Party and one MP elected from the Janata Party. Indian National Congress has the highest number of women representatives in the Lok Sabha from Assam. The pie chart shows that among the total sixteen women representatives- 69 percent is from Indian National Congress, while 25 percent from Bharatiya Janata Party and 6 percent from Janata Party.

Figure 3.1: Party Wise Women Representatives in Lok Sabha since 1952-2019



Source: Election Commission of India (2019)

Representation of Women of Assam in the Rajya Sabha

From 1952 to till present (2019) nine women are elected as the members of Rajya Sabha different times from Assam and some of them were elected for more than two

times. Pushpalata Das was the first woman from Assam elected to the Rajya Sabha. She became a member of the Rajya Sabha for two terms in- 1952 and 1958. Bedavati Buragohain also served twice in the Rajya Sabha in the year of 1954 and 1960. Usha Barthakur elected in the year of 1966 for one term of office. Bijoya Chakroborty became a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1986. She also became the Union Minister of State for Water Resources in 1999. As a Congress nominee, Basanti Sharma became a member of Rajya Sabha for two times in 1991 and 1996. Dr. Joyshree Goswami Mahanta became a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1999 as the candidate of Assam Gana Parishad. Syeda Anwara Taimur who was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly for four terms (1972, 1978, 1983 and 1991), nominated for the Rajya Sabha in 1988 and elected as the member of the Rajya Sabha in 2004 as Congress candidate. Naznin Faraque- elected in 2010 as a Rajya Sabha member. Smt. Rani Narah who was also the Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) and several times became a member of Rajya Sabha in 2016. Out of 27 total women members, she is the only from Assam who is presently in her office term as a member and will be remain member until 2022. By analysing women's representation in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, it can say that women's representation in national politics is not in majestic condition at all.

Women and State Legislative Assembly Elections of Assam

The ability of women in politics could be seen in all parts of Assam. History bears witness that in the state of Assam, various faces of women have been revealed in politics from time to time since king rule. It is obvious that Assamese women are also facing brunt problems more than men. Women of Assam are more politically dominated and excluded from the opportunities compared to the social, economic and cultural arena. For the process of democratising the state and for the political development, Assamese women entering politics is imperative. The women's representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly presents a dismal picture like in the parliament. From 1952 to 2016 only 88 women were elected in the state assembly of Assam. Table 3.3 shows the poor percentage of women in the assembly.

Table 3.3: Women in Assam State Assembly

Year of Assembly Elections	Number of Seats	Number of women participated in State Assembly	Elected Number of Women	Percentage of Women Representatives
1952	108	-----	1	0.92
1957	94	6	5	5.31
1962	105	4	4	3.80
1967	125	6	5	4
1972	114	12	8	7.01
1978	126	22	1	0.79
1983	109	3	2	1.83
1985	126	29	4	3.17
1991	126	50	5	3.96
1996	122	17	8	6.55
2001	126	55	10	7.93
2006	126	70	13	10.31
2011	126	85	14	11.11
2016	126	91	8	6.34

Source: Election Commission of India

Table 3.3 shows that women representatives in Assam state assembly from 1952-2016 are very less. In the thirteenth assembly election (2011) women have occupied 11.11 percent seats which is the highest number ever in history. The percentage of women representatives never crossed more than 11 percent. In the first assembly election, only one woman was able to occupy the seat. It increased in the second assembly election (1957) up to 5.31 percent. In the third election (1962), the percentage has been decreased again. However, it increased gradually in the fourth (4 percent) and fifth (7.01 percent) elections. It decreased again in the sixth assembly election (0.79 percent). It has increased gradually after that up to 13th elections in 2011 and again in the last election in 2016, the number has been decreased. In 2016, out of 1064 total candidates in 126 constituencies, only 91 women candidates contested in the assembly elections where only eight women were elected as representatives. The grim situation indicates that women's representation in the electoral politics of Assam needs special consideration.

Women as Ministers

Assam has witnessed a very limited number of women as ministers. Till now only a few women became ministers in the State of Assam. Syeda Anwara Taimur became the first woman chief minister of Assam in 1980. Despite being a member of Rajya Sabha and Member of Legislative Assembly, she was the minister for the two times. In 1957, Usha Barthakur was appointed as deputy minister in the health and social

service sector. The portfolios generally assigned to women as ministers that are classified under the soft categories, such as- social welfare, social justice and empowerment, tourism and culture, water resources and human resource development, etc. Assam is not exceptional from it. However, there are also very few women who handled the major departments successfully. In the state of Assam, a very few numbers of women appointed as the cabinet ministers- Syeda Anwara Taimur, Rekha Rani Das Boro, Pranati Phukan, Hemaprava Saikiani, Ajanta Neog have served as the cabinet ministers in the council of the minister in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Presently only one-woman Smt. Pramila Rani Brahma serving as the cabinet minister in the legislative assembly in the Social Welfare, Soil Conservation department (Government of Assam, 2019).

The inadequate numbers of women's representation in the parliament and legislative assembly of Assam have revealed the low visibility of women in politics. The political image of Assam is not exceptional to the other part of Indian society. Even in the Assam legislative assembly except for the elected members, there is the total number of twenty-three committees to handle administrative works. It continued marginalisation of women in these committees also.

Women's Representation of Assam in the Post of Speaker or Deputy Speaker

In the entire political history, Assam has not witnessed women speakers in the State Legislative Assembly since its inception. However, post-independence two women were appointed as deputy speakers of Assam legislative assembly. Bonily Khongmen became the first women deputy speaker in the pre-independent period i.e. 14th March 1946. After her, Renupoma Rajkhowa became the first women deputy speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly in the post-independent era. She was appointed in the year of 1999 and completed her tenure in 2001. After Renupoma Rajkhowa, Pranati Phukan (2006-2011) became the second women deputy speaker of Assam (Assam Legislative Assembly, 2018).

Political Parties and Women in Assam

Ever since the limited franchise was postulated in 1937, women have been participating in the electoral politics both as voters and candidates on a just symbolic basis. The scenario has been quite desolate for women's representation and active participation in political parties as well. The history shows that no serious attempt was made by any political parties to summon women to increase representation in politics. After the execution of the constitution, the number of women representations has not

increased in any noteworthy manner. Political parties seem to be immutably timid in the case of women candidates. The empowerment of women could only be possible if it's granted political rights in real sense along with educational and economic rights. It is a mandatory necessity to impart opportunities to women in the political process at all levels to make empowerment inconsequential reality. The role of the political party in increasing representation of women reflects in the role of the state in particular but society in general (Dutta, 2006).

Struggle attracted women of Assam, but the authority failed to assist their interest and progression due to a lack of definite policy of political parties to fraternize women permanently, as a part of its system. Major political parties of Assam- Congress (I), BJP, AGP, AIUDF never took any worthwhile measure to bring more women into the electoral politics. The oldest political party, congress accepted and declared their goal of complete equality but it is limited in the paper not applied in a programme of action. It also cannot deny that, though it's not a sufficient number but congress party particularly has taken care to give representation to women compared to other political parties. In every election, only a few women get the nomination at the party level to contest an election. Political parties have been interested only in tokenism, thereby they contribute to the low number of participation of women as a contestant. If they nominate also do not make enough plans and programmes to make women win. Not only in the case of Assam but almost in every national, state or regional parties not considered seriously on the recommendation of the report "Towards Equality" which suggested to the political parties to adopt a definite policy regarding the percentage of women candidates to be sponsored for parliament and state assemblies (Sinha, 2006).

Assam movement (1979-1985) brought both men women very closer as it started in such an environment that there was no competition among both men and women for leadership. Women's leadership qualities as audacity were the subject for admiration during the exultant days. When the movements got over, the party elite, as like case other states of male-dominated political parties choose almost to freeze out the leadership qualities of women which once mattered a lot for the war and movements. For almost all the political parties the agenda for women became only for purposes like- mass rallies, protest, campaigning for the party or the male leaders, etc (Dutta, 2006). During the pre-election period, leaders or members of political parties talk about nominating more women candidates but in actual practice, they could never

make it happen by adopting the paper declaration. That is why the result can be seen in every election. In 2016, assembly election totals 1,064 candidates contested for 126 seats from different parties where 90 were women. Among them, only eight women successfully became a member of state assembly which is a very minimal number. Surprisingly many parties including National parties like Communist Party of India (CPI) which is known as progressive and gender-sensitive, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP); State parties (other states) like Janata Dal (United) are some popular parties who did not give any single party tickets to women.

Table 3.4: Party Wise women candidates in the Assam Assembly Election 2016

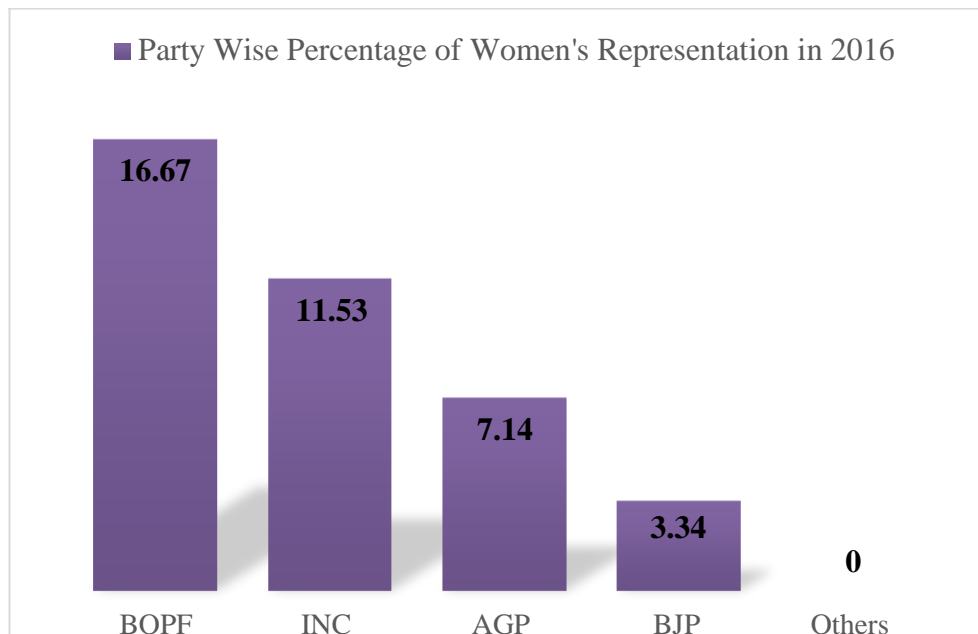
Different Political Parties	Total Number of Candidates	Total Male Candidates	Total Female Candidates	Total Number of Successful Candidates	Total Number of Successful Female Candidates
Indian National Congress (INC)	122	106	16	26	3
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	89	83	6	60	2
Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM	19	18	1	0	0
Asom Gana Parisad (AGP)	30	28	2	14	1
Samajwadi Party	15	14	1	0	0
All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF)	74	69	5	13	0
All India Trinamool Congress (AITC)	13	11	2	0	0
Bodoland Peoples Front (BOPF)	13	11	2	12	2
Jan Congress Party (JNCP)	17	13	4	0	0
Republican Party of India (A) or RPI (A)	17	15	2	0	0
Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)	14	12	2	0	0
Rastriya Pragati Party (RPP)	3	1	2	0	0
Bharatiya Gana Parisad (BGANP)	10	9	1	0	0
Rastriya Jankranti Party (RAJPA)	11	8	3	0	0
Bharatiya Rastrawadi Party (BHARP)	5	4	1	0	0
Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI)	25	22	3	0	0
Jai Maha Bharat Party (JMBP)	6	5	1	0	0
Shivsena (SHS)	3	2	1	0	0
Communist Party of	7	6	1	0	0

India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation)					
Independent	496	462	34	1	0

Source: Election Commission of India (State Election, 2016)

Table 3.4 shows that the less number of women who contested elections from different National, regional or registered parties. Indian National Congress nominated the highest number of women among all parties but only was able to win 3 seats from Boko, Sarupathar and Golaghat constituency. On the other hand, from the Bharatiya Janata Party out of 89 contestants, only 6 were nominated in state election where only two women elected from Hajo and Batadroba constituency. BOPF supported only two women from Bodoland and both won from their respective constituency. Popular state parties like AIUDF selected 5 women to contest the election but no one received enough vote to become representative in the assembly. Similarly, AGP gave two tickets to women where one elected from Tiok. Though women from other parties contested elections from different parties with the maximum number of 4 seats but no one was able to win in the election. Therefore, the performances of other parties were not notable. There was the highest number of independent women contestants in the last assembly election which was total 34. They did not get any party support and not even single women elected for the assembly.

Figure 3.2: Women’s Representation in 2016



Source: Election Commission of India (State Election, 2016)

Figure 3.2 show that women comprise a very nominal percent. Those who belong to the well-known parties always have better chances than others which were visible

even in the last assembly election such as Congress, BJP or state parties like- AGP and BOPF. But it is a fact that in the state women usually contest election belongs from urban middle class or elite background. Women face the greatest obstacle to contest an election because of its expenditure. As women have limited independent resources, it eliminates women's interest in entering into politics. Thus women from a good economic background show interest at the same time political parties do not help any unknown women candidate to contest an election. The study further analyses the political status of women mainly in the two districts of Assam which is Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar district and their representation or status in the state assembly of Assam.

Political Status of Women in Kamrup Metropolitan District

The present Kamrup Metropolitan or Kamrup Metro district is one of the four new districts of Assam created in 2003. Previously it was part of undivided Kamrup but later it created separately in the year 2003. The administrative headquarter of Kamrup metro is in Guwahati. It comprises one sub-division i.e. Guwahati sub-division. It has one constituency for parliament (Guwahati constituency) and 4 constituencies for the state legislative assembly. These are – Jalukbari, Dispur, Guwahati East, and Guwahati West. Guwahati which is the main city of entire North East India belongs to the Kamrup Metro carry itself its sublime history. To understand the limpid picture of Kamrup Metro it has to be traced back with the undivided Kamrup district. It has formed during the kingdom of Kamrupa. It is the oldest district of Assam. Kamrup district previously known as Kamrupa shares the different stories of its formation with the temple of Kamakhya is situated in the Guwahati. It has so many stories believed by the people in the name of goddess Kamakhya. Kalika Tantra and Yogini Tantra two Puranas believed that it was built by Narakasur, the powerful king of Pragjyotishpur (old name of Assam) to impress the goddess Kamakhya to marry her and later the name of the place also changed from Pragjyotishpur to Kamrupa (Presently Kamrup). There is also believed that when Sati (Parvati) died, Lord Shiva carried her body all over the world while one of the important organs of her fall down in the Nilachal hill in Guwahati and from that organ Kamakhya temple was originated. It is also said that Kamdev who was burnt by the fiery glance of Lord Siva, regained his life because of his wife Rati Devi so the place renamed as Kamrupa (Assam Directorate of Census Operations, 2011). The history of Kamrup about its

origin itself says about the power of a woman. However, with the time the status of women also changed.

Despite being covered by the major urban areas, the scenario of the representation of women in politics is not impressive. There are very few numbers of women who have successfully become representatives in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha from Kamrup (M) district that is also altogether with before and after of its formation as a separate district from Kamrup. Since the first general election till now (2019) three women were elected in the Lok Sabha from Gauhati constituency under Kamrup (M) district. Those were- Renuka Devi Barkataki elected in 1977 from Bharatiya Lok Dal, Bijoya Chakravorty elected in 1998, 2009 and 2014 from Bharatiya Janata Party and Queen Oja became a member in 2019 from Bharatiya Janata Party. Only one-woman Bijoya Chokrovorty became a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1986 from Kamrup (M) district (Assam Legislative Assembly, 2018).

Kamrup Metro conducted its first assembly election in 2006 after its separation from the Kamrup district. According to the 2011 census data, the total number of population 12.54 Lakhs, in which females are 606,353 lakhs in Kamrup Metropolitan district. But since its inception to date to now, there are no women representatives from all the four constituencies in all assembly elections held in 2006, 2011 and 2016. In 2016, assembly election, in the four constituencies from Kamrup Metro total of 8 women contested the election. Those were- Makani Barman, Bapi Aich from Jalukbari, Bandana Barman Baruah, Sangita Das and Rijumani Gogoi from Dispur, Bandana Barman Baruah and Babbeeta Sharma from Guwahati East and Dr. Jury Sharma Bordoloi from Guwahati West but no one among them was able to become representatives in the legislative assembly.

Political Status of Women in Kokrajhar District

The present Kokrajhar district was a subdivision of undivided Goalpara till it was formally declared a district on the 1st of July, 1983. Kokrajhar district is also an administrative district of Bodoland Territorial Area of Assam. Kokrajhar city is the headquarter of Kokrajhar district and the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) which was formed on 10th February 2003. Kokrajhar district is comprised of three sub-division- Kokrajhar (HQ), Gosaigaon, Prabhatijhora. It is mostly inhabited by the Bodo tribe. The Bodo are one of the important and major tribe of North East India and particularly in Assam (Government of Assam, 2019). According to the 2011 census data, the total population of Kokrajhar district is 8.87 Lakhs where women are almost

half of its population which is 434,237. The status of women in a society reflects gender equality in that society. It depends on the rights and privileges available for women in that particular society. Income, education, property, their participation in different social activities including the decision-making process are the indicators of the status of women.

Women of Kokrajhar which was before part of the Goalpara district did not come forward for socio-economic and political activities. It was due to their tribal backwardness and illiteracy. They preferred to live their life in a simple way. Not to speak about involvement in the state politics, till the Bodoland movement very few numbers of women came forward to exercise their voting rights. Under the leadership of the All Bodo Student Union, the demand for separate homeland started as a mass movement in 1987. Bodo dominated areas including Kokrajhar became the main centre for their struggle for a separate homeland. Bodoland movement was an awakening alarm for women of Kokrajhar district (including all women from the BTC region) which raised the voting percentage of women in Kokrajhar district.

The formation of 'All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation' (AATWWF), formulated a new platform for all women including tribal-based Kokrajhar district for the involvement of socio-political life. Before the formation of AATWWF, the woman of Kokrajhar alike other Bodo women had to participate under the banner of the Bodo Sahitya Shabha and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU). Pramila Rani Brahma had made a marvellous contribution to the federation from Kokrajhar district. She was the founder president of AATWWF. Except her, Umarani Basumatory, Hira Rani Bramha, Supriya Rani Bramha, Malati Rani Narzary and many other women from Kokrajhar district had actively participated in the first meeting of AATWWF held on 14th July 1986. Also, many women of different age groups participated in the different processions, picketing, blockage of road, as volunteers under the guidance of ABSU (Chaudhuri, 2004).

Upendranath Brahma and Sansuma Khungur Bwismurthiary were among those leaders who felt the importance to bring women in the movement and increase political participation. Brahma who was the main leader of this movement believed that a society cannot progress without the progress of women. The effect of movement, made them realised the importance of political consciousness and political involvement (Choudhuri, 2004).

With the time women of Kokrajhar developed themselves in different areas. However, in spite of being independent of the women in Kokrajhar which are mainly Bodo in different fields, one may ponder to know why there is an insufficient number of women representatives to the Assam legislative assembly. From its formation, only one woman has been elected to the State Assembly of Assam. The elected candidate is Pramila Rani Brahma, present forest minister in the BJP government. She is the only woman from Kokrajhar is in electoral politics. In the 2016 assembly election, social activist Prabha Daimary contested election in Kokrajhar East constituency from the United People's Party which is a local political party but she could not win in the election. Similarly, from Kokrajhar West (ST) four women candidates-Subhadra Narzary, Aruna Brahma, Sujila Basumatary, Nilima Brahma independently came forward to contest in the assembly election of Assam without any party support but no one could win in the election. Instead of four women candidates, from the male candidate from Bodoland Peoples Front Robiram Narzary was able to take the seat from that constituency. Even surprisingly there is no reservation for women in the BTC election. In the past three council election, not even a single woman was elected not only in Kokrajhar district but among all the BTC region (Mochahari, 2017). The political parties also do not show interest in selecting women and give tickets to the women candidates as they do not feel they can win or eligible to enter the political field. Many times, women of Kokrajhar district also do not show interest to participate in the decision-making process and if one or two women come forward also, they do not get enough support from the people (Fernandes & Barbora, 2002).

Conclusion

Women's visibility in active politics has been very poor in both districts of Assam. The nature of their political representation indicates that women of both districts need some more time to employ a strong position in the realm of politics. Like any other part, the social and religious bridge and lack of training and discipline among women have limited their participation and representation in Assam politics. Equal representation will clean the electoral politics and also bring more lucidity in administration system of Assam. It will expand areas of mutual confidence, development, cooperation, solve the women's issue in politics and different debates. However, in spite of their less representation in political field women in both districts can be praised for their active involvement in the social and economic life which is witnessed by their role in women's organisations.

Chapter 4

Political Representation and Barriers

Introduction

Equal political representations of any group or individual are important for empowerment and eliminate marginalisation and discrimination from society. Political representation plays a crucial role in the promotion of democratic governance and also the advancement of human rights. Enough time has been spent by discussing the issues with the hope that the representation of women through natural changes. Women's role in politics is limited with voting, campaigning for election, rallying, attend political meetings, etc. Women who want to enter into politics and contest an election often meet an unfriendly environment in the political, social, cultural and public arena. Women still face numerous barriers in entering into electoral politics and shaping their own interests. Corruption and power politics create difficulties for a woman to award opportunities to make her realise the true potentiality of women. This is distressing as it reveals the low status of women in general and particularly in the field of politics. The gender bias and the power gap between women and men are difficult to explain. For numerous reasons, women still remain under-represented such as- their family background, economic shortcomings, level of education, cultural-religious background, gender identity, lack of party support, etc. The reasons for under-representation may vary from country to country but some of the major reasons include- lack of party support, religion, economic situation, ethics exists in most of the countries. The very need for an emphasis on a higher political representation of women is so that it may lead to the breakdown of stereotypes about women and emphasis on equality of both genders (Bhandari, Balakrishnan & Reddy, 2010). This will require higher participation of women in the decision making the process from grassroots to national level.

A number of reports, both at the international and national level suggested that proper policy results will improve the participation and representation of women in politics.

Women are usually considered more trustworthy and sincere. India is a society where tradition and modernity both exist side by side. A number of public policies have been implemented for women's empowerment. The status of women in India has been improved remarkably. Women's organisations, NGOs, Women's Commission are working with the government to strengthen their socio-economic conditions. Such initiatives came a long way with improving the status but there still remains a long way to go to achieve in every field including the political field.

In India, election results show women as silent victims because women get fewer chances to be part of the decision-making process. However, it must accept that the numbers of women are increasing in the Lok Sabha but in the state legislation, women are not duly represented in all of the states of India. The reservation bill is pending in the parliament. The elections merely witnessed tokenism by all political parties in fielding women to contest in the election. It is highly noticeable that in India, most of the time the party gives the ticket to those women who have a political background or elite family which suppressed the women of the middle-class family. The presence of powerful women like Sonia Gandhi, Mayawati, Mamata Banerjee may deceptively give a picture of women empowerment in the country but sadly this is not what the reality is. There is a need for a qualitative representation of women in the decision-making process. But to remove gender inequality from society it is very much important to identify and analyse the barriers faced by the women to make an entry into the political field in India. This chapter examines the status of women's legislative representation and identifies the different problems women face in the two districts of Assam by focusing on the opinions and views given by the 17 women politicians through in-depth interviews. As this study was conducted in the two districts of Assam and therefore the brief descriptions about the two districts is important before analysing the data.

Kamrup Metropolitan district is one of the new districts of Assam. The district is spread over an area of 1528 km². Table 4.1 shows details about the Kamrup Metropolitan district.

Table 4.1: Kamrup Metropolitan District at a Glance

Description	2011
Head Quarter	Guwahati
Area/km ²	1528

Total Population	1,253,938
Male Population	6,47,585
Female Population	6,06,353
Sex Ratio	936
Density/km ²	1313 km2
Literacy	88.71%
Male Literacy	92.13%
Female Literacy	85.07%

Source: Census of India, 2011

Kokrajhar district is one of the 33rd districts of the state of Assam. The district is spread over an area of 3,170 km². The head quarter of Kokrajhar district is Kokrajhar city. Table 4.2 shows details about the Kokrajhar district of Assam.

Table 4.2: Kokrajhar District at a Glance

Description	2011
Head Quarter	Kokrajhar
Area/km ²	3,170
Total Population	8,86, 999
Male Population	4,52, 762
Female Population	4,34,237
Sex Ratio	958
Density/km ²	280
Literacy	66.63 %
Male Literacy	73.44 %
Female Literacy	59.54%

Source: Census of India, 2011

Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar districts are important to study about the political status of women. Both districts have a very limited number of women in the decision-making process. Kamrup (Metro) is considered as one of the developed districts of Assam where the major city Guwahati is also situated in this district. The female literacy rate is also quite impressive than other districts of Assam. However, in the Kamrup Metropolitan district, since its formation as a separate district till the last election (2016), not even single women were able to be represented in the state legislative assembly. Kokrajhar district which is tribal majority district, here also

though many Bodo women came forward during the Bodo movement among them, only one woman- Promila Rani Brahma is elected many times in legislative assembly of Assam from Bodoland People's Front. Other than her, few women came forward to contest the election but could not win the position. Parties are also not showing interest to trust women to give tickets. Therefore, these two districts are selected for the study to investigate the reasons for poor representation of women in decision-making bodies and to find out the barriers if any that hinders women's visible presence in politics.

Women and Electoral Politics

Women of Assam have been exercising their votes since the first general elections however their percentage was comparatively lower in comparison to other parts of India. There is no doubt that several women of Assam are holding key positions at various political levels, but given the size of their share in the electoral politics on the basis of women's population is not encouraging. Women's presence is hardly seen while policy decisions are taken for women. In the Assam state assembly of 126 members, the number of women's presence is very less since its inception. To assign the role in elective bodies for women properly are never became a matter of serious concern for any political parties or organisation.

Involvement in the Politics

The marginalisation of women and insincere efforts of mainstreaming them into the political process play a crucial role in their current level of political representation in Assam. Women have risen with socio-cultural traditions, which kept them out of reaching into politics. In most of the developing countries, women are illiterate, underpaid, deprived and disadvantaged (Saksena, 2011). Different religious and social practices have surrounded women with backwardness, illiteracy, ignorance and completely dominated by men. But, in urban areas, by spreading education and increasing the number of working women in different fields, the situation is gradually changing. However, the status of involvement in politics is not improved yet. Urban women though changing their status but their involvement as a working woman are limited until a certain time. The political environment has been changed since the last decades but the gender gap in political involvement is still high. There are many reasons for which women have a gender gap in political aspiration-

- Working women or housewives both have to maintain their household and child-rearing responsibilities. It puts limits on the time they can spend in such processes for involvement in public life.
- Less party supports
- Lower levels of encouragement from family and economic matters
- Perceptions of insecurity in the political environment
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of knowledge about the electoral process

Maximum number of interviewees agreed that most of the women who do not belong to the family with the political background, do not get encouraged to involved in politics. Society has the mindset as ‘politics is a dirty game’ so women’s involvement in politics is not safe at all. They also believe that they grew up in such an environment that joining politics was never considered as an aim. However, there are some exceptional cases as well. All of the interviewees accepted that they had no intention to enter into politics before. In some cases, the interviewee came into politics to take revenge as their husband or family members were killed by the terrorist group of Assam. So, to complete the work left behind by their husbands and relatives they joined into the politics. While few women were involved in politics to represent their community and a few are working in the party but could not be part of the political system. According to Ajanta Neog, present MLA of Golaghat and Former Minister of Assam:

“There are so many scopes in politics to serve the people. But politics became a punching bag and source of all wrongdoings because of that it could not attract the people to join in politics. Not only men or women, young dreams to be civil servants rather than having a dream of becoming a politician. For reaching in this situation, we people are responsible who created this environment in the field of politics. Our environment is developed in such a way that people do not want to say that they want to be a politician. Even our child who supports us to work in the political field or contest election but never come by asking to join in politics whoever it maybe girl or boy. In the case of women of Assam, nowadays they get enough facilities and supports from the family for their studies which were different in earlier times. Even we can see girls are showing more better results than boys. The family also believes in them as sincere and hardworking than their boy's child. In the case of Assam, if we look into the different women representatives the situation or their environment brought them into politics most of them have them joined against their personal wish

due to various underlying issues like the murder of husband or of relatives, in the name of community representation and so on. You will find very few women who joined politics as their ambition was to be the politician. Therefore, it's our responsibility to change the political environment and make politics an interesting field so that like other field women show interest to join in politics. If they will come out in huge numbers and show their capability, they will also represent the politics in a huge number than before”.

Gender in Politics

Women are dominated by the men within the household since ancient time. In modern times, women are showing appreciable performance in every field in all over the world. When a woman gets a decision-making power, they have come up with good governance legislations in matters of domestic violence, dowry, abortion etc. (Kataria, Sharma, & Bhattacharya, 2010). Women's empowerment will be reality only when they will be able to get planned and systematic training and opportunities to play role in the society. Most of the interviewees said that women face multiple hurdles to enter into politics but when they pass all the hurdles and get opportunities, they work better than a male representative. Pramila Rani Brahma, Cabinet Minister of Assam said:

“It is not a question of better, it is a question of equal opportunities. A job that can be done well by a man can also be done equally efficiently by a woman provided the woman gets the same opportunities that a man easily gets. In this world, women are proving themselves that there is nothing that they cannot do like men. Women should not hesitate to do any work. They should not think that as a woman she cannot do this or that. I am a woman but since childhood, I was interested to do everything which male members of our family used to do. I was an expert in cultivation, fishing, went to the market to sell the vegetables, etc, which helped later to work so efficiently when I appointed as minister in the agriculture department. My experiences helped me to make the agriculture department better which was known before as one of the most corrupted departments of Assam. However, it's not only about me but by and large, women are found to be more sincere in their efforts at any given job not only as a politician”.

Plato in his text 'Republic' says that the presence of women makes the potential contribution in a positive light for the betterment of the polis i.e. city-state (Gupta & Sharma, 2010). If get chance, women can play a constructive role in all developmental areas. Anjali Daimari, Social Activist and President of Bodo Women Justice Forum, commented that:

“Women can be better representatives than men as they have the capacity and understand both the inside and outside problems. The public agenda could be seen as different from both male and female representatives. Though people think that a men representative can represent the problems of women but in reality, men concentrate on issues like community-based, infrastructure development or constituency issues and usually neglect the women’s issue. However, most of the times women representatives get engaged with long term benefits and also give importance to resolving the women issues as they suffer the problems and can feel that. So, they able to deal and speak on the behalf of all women.”

Some respondents added that women are more sincere in their work. In a country like India, maximum women hesitate to meet and talk with male representatives and share their problems while women feel free to talk and share their problems with women representatives. Queen Oja, Member of the Parliament, agreed and said:

“If women get opportunities, they can do better than men. But eligibility matters a lot in both cases of men and women. If a candidate is not eligible in the specific field specific field whatsoever may be there gender male or female, they won’t be able to become a better representative”.

Low Representation of Women in Politics

There are a number of factors responsible for the negligible political representation of women.

• Absence of Party Support

Women are the backbone of the political parties for campaigning, attending meetings. Political parties behave like they do care and concern with the women’s problem but the behaviour pattern of political party’s shows a different reality. The selection process for nomination in contesting elections is also biased against women. Many times, women get a rejection for the small issues which are not even counted for the male candidates. Many times, leader’s wife or women family members come out to promote for the particular political party. There are also so many shreds of evidence that if someone’s wife is popular in the society such as – celebrity, writer, social activist etc. the party uses her to get attention from the public which helps the candidate to win the election. For women candidates, without giving much attention to real representation, parties most of the time prefer to nominate deceased leader’s wife or daughter by taking sympathy factor is into consideration. Looking into the women politician’s history from INC, BJP, AGP or any other party of Assam, most of them came to the politics after their politician husband or father died or killed by the

terrorist group. Though BOPF is exceptional and nominated the two women politicians from BTC since its formation and both were engaged in the grassroots level since the Bodo movement of Assam, but BOPF also in twenty-five years not even single new women introduced in the political ground. These two women are only representing the BTC for many years. Bobbeeta Sharma, General Secretary and Senior Spokesperson of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, experienced it and said:

“The most difficult part is getting a nomination at party level to contest an election as the decision-making process is largely male-dominated. For instance, although everybody was of the opinion that I should have been given nomination in the last 15 years when Congress was in power in the state when we had a good position. I was denied nomination and was given ticket when the INC was in bad shape politically post 2014 general election. However, at the political party getting a nomination is considered a recognition by itself and contesting an election is also experience by itself. Hence we also want that if the party does not want to give nomination in good seats to women at least give those seats to women which we know we are losing, that will also give women the experience of contesting an election and prepare her for electoral politics. That is why it is also important to have a 33 percent reservation for women in Legislative Assemblies and Parliament. While this reservation is prevalent in Panchayats and Municipal Boards and in some states, it is also 50 percent, what is stopping the lawmakers from passing the Women Reservation Bill in Lok Sabha now? It was already passed in the Rajya Sabha when the Congress Party had a majority. Now the BJP has an absolute majority in Lok Sabha but they have still not passed the bill. This speaks volumes about their sincerity in working for women empowerment in politics”.

- **Need for Political Background or Contacts**

Most successful women politicians in India have entered the political field through the help of male politicians. Gandhi family is known for bringing two female politicians- Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi in the political arena. Mayawati, Jayalalitha came with the help of a male politician. Those candidates having contacts or political backgrounds easily get party support and funding for which women face problems in contesting an election. Even in Assam, most of the female politician is wife or daughter of ex-politician leaders who are getting tickets in each election since they entered into the political field. There may not be anything wrong but for a very long time the state has not seen new faces of women especially those belongs to the middle-class family. Because of this, women are started to lose the hope of being

representatives if they do not have any political contacts. A reservation quota might go long way and stop partiality on the part of political parties in giving tickets and bring more common women into electoral politics. Anjali Daimari, Social Activist and President of Bodo Women Justice Forum, said:

“In Assam, whether its national or regional political party, most of women politician came in politics on compensatory ground since independence such as- Dr. Hemo Prova Saikiani (former minister of Assam) only got opportunity when her husband Hiteswar Saikia, the former chief minister of Assam died; when Manabendra Sharma (Congress leader) was killed by ULFA, wife Basanti Sharma was brought into the politics; when PWD & forest minister Nagen Sharma was murdered, wife Aloka Sharma entered into the electoral politics; Sushmita Dev nominated from INC for MP seat after her father MP Santosh Mohan Dev has died etc. These are a few examples of the real scenario of bringing women in Assam politics. Even many of them had no interest in politics and the party nominated them to get a vote on sympathy basis. Which is not we can call real effort to make gender equity in politics”.

- **Socio-Economic problems**

Socio-economic status of women related to the lower representation of women in politics. Women politicians have to face a dual burden in the form of domestic tasks and responsibilities in their professional roles. It becomes hard for a woman politician to balance between home and their job as their work might involve traveling to different places, working late hours, work with male representatives, etc. They are also overworked as they also involve themselves in various committees. Therefore, they need moral support from their families. According to Mitchell (1971), women carry triple burden with their family. They play triple role in the society. These are – reproductive, productive and community management work. She said that women are expected to work within these three roles which decrease their power. Walby (1990) similarly argues that in a patriarchal society it is accepted that, women get busy with the family related work and won't have other alternatives to work on.

Women face problem to contest election for the high cost of running a campaign. Though working women earn themselves and they can spend money but to contest an election they need more money for which they have to depend on the families. It becomes difficult for a middle-class family to bear high election expenses. It affects the representation of women in politics. Sumitra Doley Patir, former MLA of 113 Dhemaji (ST) Constituency, shared her experiences and said:

“When I decided to join the mainstream politics, there was the lacklustre support from the family member, as a result, I had to undergo tremendous hardship even there was death threat and the final consequence of joining politics was that I had my failed marriage experience. Many women compromise every day with their dreams to save their marriage because women always need full support from their families”.

- **Education and Proper Training**

Women were mainly part of the politics as voters except in few cases. These practices are still prevailing in most parts of India including Assam. Low representation of women in legislatures can reflect the reality. There is no doubt that women are holding key positions at various political levels but the percentage of representation is not encouraging. Education and proper training are two key factors responsible for their awareness level. There are several bodies dealing with women’s issues yet they are not always effective. Though Assam has 66.27 percent of women's literacy rate their educational level is low. It remains difficult for any woman coming from an average household and directly engages in the political area and be active in a completely new environment. The lack of knowledge and awareness of elections and electoral process among women especially for rural women is a barrier towards women’s participation and representation in politics. Especially rural women who always engaged themselves in household and cultivation related work prevents them from accessing information about the party, party manifestos or about political filed. They have a lack of knowledge of women’s political roles and responsibilities. Attaining political power may not mean enjoying for the betterment of the society, till they are educated and trained to cross the tumble of Indian politics (Sinha, 2006). Sushmita Dev, former MP and MLA of Silchar constituency, said:

“I personally feel that along with lack of party support, economic, social and religion factor also plays crucial role for lower representation as politics in India depends on many dynamics. The literacy rate of Assam has grown up at an appreciable rate but the literacy rate of women is not appreciable. Education is one of the major instruments for development in any society. Education would make women aware of their political rights, political parties, policies and schemes for them and make them connected with social development. There is a huge difference in the thinking capacity of educated women and uneducated women. Education would broaden their thinking capacity and take the right decision and fight for injustices. At the same time, many women feel scared when they hear the term politics as their upbringing has been such that women themselves feel it is unsafe to enter into fray. It can be

removed by looking into underlying issues where the problem lies and sensitising the women through the training process and telling them about inspiring stories of different powerful women's leader in the world and their pivotal contribution for the welfare of people at large".

- **Lack of Confidence**

Lack of confidence is also another reason for women's low representation in politics. The necessary confidence can help them to achieve a high level of politics. Women of Assam are good in campaigning, organising even active in the movements but many times they do not believe in themselves to contest in the election. Since independence, the status of women in Assam has been increased. Now Assamese women are equally contributing with male members in business, cultivation or in public offices but because of lack of confidence, they hesitate to speak in public meetings, talk openly, argue and make their lives public. Pramila Rani Brahma, Cabinet Minister of Assam and also senior member in the assembly with more than a decade's work of experiences commented that:

"I never thought that I will be part of active politics because of my shy nature and lack of confidence. I was always felt shy to talk in public meetings or in huge gatherings. Though I participated in public meetings from very early I used to seat at last and took part as a listener. I wanted to discuss the Bodo movement but hesitated to go forward. Later when the leader of the Bodo movements convinced and motivated me to join in the movement actively, today I feel it was the biggest challenge for me to overcome from my introvert nature. I think many of women face this problem and even though they are interested they do not participate in politics and as a result it hampers the women representation. Even there are still many women we can see especially in rural areas of Assam who feel hesitant to go in the office and meet officials".

- **Lack of Unity**

Women's organisation and women parliamentarians are fighting for a long time for a 33 percent reservation in the parliament and legislations. But it is quite noticeable that many things have not changed yet in most of the parts of India including Assam. Many times one woman does not support another woman in the election instead of that they vote another male member by following others. Lack of unity among women members of the society can also be considered as another reason for low representation. If the women- half of the society's population become assertive, it is bound to have a decided impact on the political culture of the society (Dutta, 2006).

There is also a problem of cooperation with women's organisation to fight for their justice and rights. Jon Jonali Baruah, former MLA of 80- Morigaon Constituency, said:

“Many times one woman does not support another woman to get elected. Because of lack of proper knowledge and education, they follow up on what their husband or family member says. Even it shows doubt on other women's potentiality. It is not that a woman must have to follow blindly to that woman contestant if she is not deserving also but most of the time deserving women candidates get fewer votes due to lack of women's support. It is not the only case of votes, even sometimes women politicians try their best to pull each other down rather than standing together. Even some women are also present in society because of whom violence takes place against other women because they encourage and support those males to do violence. Therefore, it is high time to wake up and stand with each other not only in politics but against all women's problems in society”.

Gender in Public Space

Men and women are equally important in the society. Both genders have equal responsibilities in the society. Women's empowerment cannot be achieved without the role of both genders. It is responsibility of both genders to create good relations with the citizens who are politically active and give them information to join in the politics; support the female candidates to go forward in the politics; make a friendly environment so that the perception of women would be change about politics. It can increase the women's representation and improve the status of women's empowerment. According to Suman Haripriya, MLA of Hajo Constituency:

“When a woman gets elected as a representative, they have to work more than a man representative to prove themselves capable. Women of the constituency or as a whole keeps more hope with women representatives to look into their needs and demands which they don't expect from a male representative. Therefore, as a woman, they have to work to bring women out and offer them maximum benefits with the empowerment facilities and make them independent with different schemes. Our political environment built in such a way that, we think male representatives can represent and fulfil everyone's need; they will work for both the gender but in reality, a man cannot understand very well to those problems faced by women in day to day life. So it's a duty of women representative to rise her voice on behalf of all women for that they have to work for women's issues along with the common problems in the society. However, the result will be only better if both genders will cooperate with each other and work for women's political empowerment. In our society which have

traditional mentality I think it will take long time when men will equally welcome women especially in politics”.

Women and Barriers

Barriers to equal political participation and representation exist in many contexts in most societies. It may include direct or indirect discrimination on different grounds i.e. race, colour, sex, language, disability, religion, ethnic or social originality, etc. International human rights mechanism has declared that even women that consist half of the world population unable to fully participate in political and public affairs on an equal basis. The existing societal value system, in terms of domain identification of the private-public divide and male dominance in the political institutions, restrict women from exercising their electoral rights and fair representation in the decision-making process (Rai, 2011). Limited access to economic resources is also one of the barriers women face to contest an election. In the words of Nilima Brahma, who unsuccessfully contested election twice in 2011 and 2016 respectively:

“Women face a major barrier to contest the election if she is economically dependent on family. In the election, who can spend more money only have a chance to win. My source of income is only from my husband. Therefore, with our limited resource without any party support, independently I couldn't spend more money, which I consider one of the reasons for failure”.

In every state of India, the political environment is built in such a way that without money power no one can come forward to contest an election and when a candidate does not get any party support, they have to bear all expenses alone to contest an election. The family responsibilities and traditions also create barriers to women and basically when they do not get mental support from their respective families. The burden of playing multiple roles which women are doing since ancient times restrict them to exercise their rights and represent in the electoral politics. Respondents are accepted that there are barriers which women face in getting into the decision-making process. But they gave a different opinion about the barrier's women face. Few respondents said by giving an example of their own life that the time has been changed and it is not the same environment which was twenty years before. With the advent of new millennium there has been active support from the family members unlike previous century. But the main barrier they face to get a party ticket. Bobbeeta Sharma, General Secretary and Senior Spokesperson of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee shared her opinion on women's barrier in politics:

“Nowadays we do see young women entering politics so I do not think there is any hindrances for women in entering politics. The only problem is not getting the opportunities to contest at the right time and a lot of time is wasted waiting for the right opportunities at the party level. Hence it is very important to have the Women Reservation Bill passed. This will open the doors for more women”.

Many times men representatives also create a barrier by not supporting a women candidate to give a party ticket. Inadequate organisational support directly affects the political participation of women. Women face a major barrier to get support from a party. Bismita Gogoi, the former MLA of Khumtai Constituency, added:

“Women have to cross so many steps before becoming a politician. The mindset of the society has not changed yet so the family does not want to allow unmarried young women to contest the election. Because still, society judge a young woman who comes late to the home and work with male till late night which even effects on their marriage. So before going to the party itself, they have to fight or convince their own families. But the cases of married women differ as most of the cases they get full support from their parents and husband after marriage to contest the election and sometimes in some cases their husband’s family also does not support her. If a woman somehow convinced the whole family then they have to struggle to get a ticket from political parties and all women cannot contest election independently due to the economic condition. They hesitate to come alone without having any party support. However if we talk about voters, now-a-days people are becoming more aware than before and give votes to women if that particular women worked in grassroots level before without contesting election but illiterate people who have traditional mindset gives vote to a male candidate opposite to women though the male candidate is less deserving in comparison to female candidate. Therefore, it is a long process of barriers which women have to pass to finally reach in the goal and become a representative”.

The money power of male members or opponents creates a barrier to women as they try to influence the voters by giving money illegally or by threatening opponents. It became a common scenario in the elections of every state of India. Except for elite women, most women depend on the husband’s money or have limited fund therefore, cannot spend money like a male opponent which create an obstacle to winning in the election. Ajanta Neog, Present MLA of Golaghat, Former Minister and also one of the senior politicians of Assam, said:

“The most difficult problem for women to contest election in India including Assam is that unmarried women do not get enough time to engage in the election as a family

arranged marriage in a specific time. But while women get to marry the problem is that most of the time, they have to leave her birthplace and move to her new home or new place i.e. husband's home where they have no base or so many contacts to get full support from her husband's place. In addition, they do not have more money to contest an election so if the family does not encourage her or shows interest to spend money, they have to leave their interest to join in politics. Corruption and Criminalisation which became now the identity of the politics also hinder them from entering mainstream politics”.

Women in Public Offices

Women perform as like men or sometimes more than a male representative in the public office. Women spend more time and effort for their constituencies. Yet they remain under-represented in electoral politics. After facing many difficulties in getting into politics, women do not assign roles in which they have the interest to work in. They are often assigned in those areas which are related to the domestic sectors. This is only because of their lack of faith in women to handle challenging positions of power. Many women due to lack of decision-making power, fail to act as active political actors who might bring a huge change in government policy.

Women face problem to play the role properly as representatives if her party use her as ‘proxy representative’. There is also evidences that party supports few women to contest election just for namesake with the condition that the woman legislator will run as ‘fronts’ for other male interest of that party. It creates an obstacle to a female to work with her ideas and she could not able to work without the opinion and permission of the male members of the party. The dominating attitude of the male representatives or officials also creates a barrier for the smooth functioning of women officials. They are also forced to maintain silence with the help of the male majority in the legislation. Many times, women's advice and proposal were rejected and ignored by party leaders. This kind of environment creates a great impact on women's minds. Elected women's representatives who are relatively new in the political field, the lack of knowledge of the roles and responsibilities associated with political institutions create a barrier in their effective participation in taking major steps in decision-making processes and formulate new policies and schemes for that training is necessary for women. Maximum number of the interviewees agreed with that women's struggle continues after getting elected into the decision-making process.

The situations and experiences vary from women to women representatives. Anoorlata Deka, one of the female MLA from Batodroba constituency, said:

“In panchayats we see that there are many women work on her husband’s or family direction. She does not get the freedom to work according to her wish. Most of the time women intent to join politics attributed to reservation system or family pressure. But we cannot say that this kind of situation is not present in national or state-level politics. Even many women who come from a political background but do not have knowledge about politics or newly entered into the politics, party make them work with the direction of the party. She cannot do what she wants if her decisions are not accepted by the male members of the party. This is not what we call representation in true sense”.

Women politician also hampered by the working conditions and organisational culture which is not adapted to women’s circumstances (Sinha, 2006). Many women due to lack decision making power, fail to act as active political actors who might bring a huge change in government policy. Sumitra Doley Patir, former MLA of 113 Dhemaji (ST) Constituency, experienced it and said:

“Women are showing the potentiality in each of the field in which they are getting chances. But there are many fields where women face so many obstacles to run public or private offices. I was in such circumstances where I was asked to get the position of minister by compromising with a male representative. When I rejected it, I lost the position which I was supposed to get...”.

Political Party and Women

The women marginalisation from electoral participation and representation are mainly because of political party competition. The national political parties and regional parties in the states discriminate against women, not only in terms of seat allotments in electoral politics but also in the party rank. It is accepted that the role of political parties is not enough for the increasing of both participation and reservation in electoral politics all over India including Assam. In this section, the study tried to find out whether their parties have adopted any special measures to bring women in the decision-making process. All interviewees accepted that both national and regional parties are not taking any initiatives for involving more women into politics. Parties use women for campaigning and want to make them participate in the election meetings on large scale but while it comes to give tickets to women, party workers mostly do not support them even though those women working for the party for the long term. Kamali Basumatary, present MLA of Paneri constituency, Former General

Secretary of All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation, Assam from her experiences in political field, said:

“Political parties intentionally do not give tickets to women in those constituencies where women would have a chance to win that is why whatever parties give the smaller number of tickets also to women, women do not get enough votes to become representatives. They want to keep important or can say major constituency as male-dominated but not by women. They always keep in mind that they will give tickets to women but in such a way that the political arena will be under male's control”.

Political parties do not place women in leadership positions, and therefore women's access to decision-making bodies remains inadequate in numbers. Aruna Brahma, who unsuccessfully contested election as an independent candidate from Kokrajhar (East) constituency said:

“I decided to take part as one of the independent candidates because my manifestos did not match with the political parties. Political parties do not give much interest on women's empowerment in real sense. That is why I had plans to work independently by giving much focus on the issues face by the women in the constituency, which could not be fulfilled”.

The candidates fielded by the political parties are mostly male candidates. Basically, any party play limited role in increasing women's representation. Nandita Das, present MLA of Boko Constituency, also said:

“Getting tickets from parties is one of the most difficult tasks especially if women contestants do not have any political background. Political parties look at the main criteria in the selection of women is how much possibility is there to win the seats. Women have to face more tough competition than any male members to contest in the election. To compete equally and to get noticed in the party women should get involved in the party works from earlier and at the same time they must have to be a familiar face in the society. It will be only possible if a woman works both for the party and active in the different activities of the society. Because though it's male or female, voters elect those candidates who are popular and seen as actively engaged in various activities”.

The poor representation of women in political parties does not give them the strength to negotiate gender issues and concerns that need to form a part of the party agenda (Prakash, 2010). Not having a political background is one of the first hurdle women faces from the political parties. Sumitra Doley Patir, former MLA of 113 Dhemaji (ST) Constituency said:

“If a woman doesn’t come from family which has political background, it becomes very difficult to get the party ticket on own, for that to happen you need to toil hard. Even in my case, though I worked as General Secretary at the party level for a longer period. I waited 15 years to get party ticket that also when the party was losing that constituency continuously and at last party had no other option left rather than giving me ticket as I was known in that place for my engagement in social activities”.

Some of interviewees also pointed out the party those have a majority but still, they are not trying to pass the long-debated reservation bill in the parliament because in true sense parties do not want more women to get involved in the decision-making process especially in parliament and state assemblies.

Reservation as Measures for Gender Parity

The issue of women’s reservations during the last two decades more or less has been a bone of contention amongst various political parties (Singh, 2010). There is a scarcity of proper plans and action to increase the representation of women in politics. But at the same time, the question always raised that whether there is a need for such action to increase the status of women in the country even in the 21st century. Reservation or quota system is one of the acceptable mechanisms worldwide to increase the representation and participation of women in the political arena. It is a method where a certain percentage of seats in the parliament or legislatures are reserved for a particular or deprived section of the society for the betterment of their status (R. & Garg, 2010). This mechanism is implemented by providing reservations within the registered political parties to field the required percentage or fixed number of candidates to contest the election. So that they do not face any injustices in getting tickets to enter into politics.

Reservation in Indian politics has been a much-debated issue on which no action has been taken so far. The concept of representation was initially rejected by the constituent assembly as the women representatives were given the opinion that in a democratic country, there would be an adequate representation of all sections of the society (R. & Garg, 2010). But when reality continued to under-represent women in politics and their needs were very rarely started to take into consideration, women started to demand reservation. However, there is one section of people who till now don’t support reservation bill in both parliament or legislatures as they think that women are capable to get into politics and reservation will proof women are in deprived section in true sense. In India, the scenario of women’s representation in the

parliament and state legislatures reveals the stark reality that even after seventy-two years of independence. Women still find themselves unable to compete with men in electoral politics. According to Subhadra Narzary, social activist from Kokrajhar district, said:

“Women like us, who do not have a link with political parties would not be able to contest an election from major parties of Assam if we will not get a reservation. I contested election twice but could not win against the male candidate who were contested from the major party of Bodoland. It is also hard to get a party ticket so I think reservation only can give us an opportunity those who want to join in politics but do not have any political link”.

Most of the respondents do not support the reservation just because it categorised women as a weaker section but they also accepted that without reservation, women will take much more time to get an equal or nearly equal position in the politics so a reservation is the only mechanism to increase women’s participation into the political arena. Once women started to get enough seats to contest election it will automatically increase the representation in both parliament and state assemblies. Pranati Phukan, former MLA, Cabinet Minister, State of Minister and also Deputy Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly, added:

“Women deserve to be get into politics without any reservation as they are not less capable than any male members but main problem is to get party tickets so reservation is the only way to bring more women in the politics. Because of the reservation will be in state assemblies or parliament, the party won’t have any option without giving the tickets to women. But reservation should only on the basis of gender by excluding caste. It is because sometimes even in the panchayat level though many women are not deserving just for the sake of caste reservation, they get chances to contest in an election which deprives the other deserving women candidates and it is also harmful to the society. It is easy to become a politician but not a good leader. That is why increasing women representatives is important for gender equality but we should not forget that deserving women should get chances to be eligible for the betterment of society. A good representative always does justice to society”.

Providing reservation will help women to stand on their own feet. Approval of the reservation bill would provide a solution to the issue of women’s presence in politics in legislative bodies and parliament by providing greater representation to women without facing any party politics. The absence of affirmative action for 33 percent

reservation of seats for Indian women at the state legislature and Parliament is having a negative impact on women's share in the institutions of representations (Rai, 2011).

Conclusion

The exclusion of women from policy formulation and decision making relegates them to peripheral, supportive activities (Saxena, 2011). Women are better represented in many fields in both of the districts including Assam. But they are always restricted to get entry into the politics equal to men. The gender discrimination in politics has been practiced for centuries that they cannot stand unless strong steps or decisions provided to them. Women have to bring forward in each field including politics as they have been left behind of men. All were of the opinion that reservation of women's seat in legislations or parliament is the first step to increasing women's participation and representation. Nandita Das, MLA of Boko Constituency, said:

“Reservation is first step to increase the participation and representation of women in politics. It is already proved that without reservation women won't come into the legislation in huge number as party support will be continued to be limited. Except reservation also there are few steps should be taken to improve the status of women in politics such as- education, training and most importantly family support. If we get reservation also if women will remain uneducated, they won't be able to understand their role and responsibilities. Women also need to get trained to become more aware on women's role in the decision-making process. Women are usually emotional. They need full moral support from their families as their families are everything for them. So families also should leave traditional mentality and encourage their daughters, wife or daughter in laws to join into the politics with full trust and freedom. Women also have to be united to challenge other male representatives. They can do anything if they become united. It is easier to achieve any goal if women will support each other as they have equal population with men.”

Women's equal representation in politics would be a major step towards equality in both of the districts. It will allow them practically exercise and enjoy their voting rights granted in the Constitution. It is necessary to go beyond the barriers and cooperate both the government and civil society together to make the women's equal presence in politics in reality.

Chapter 5

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

Women's right to vote and stand in the elections has been legal rights for about 100 years globally. Almost all of the countries in the world have enacted laws against women's discrimination in a different field. Still, women are marginalised in many fields including electoral politics. Women representation in political processes provides an opportunity to reflect the aims and it is a hallmark of a democratic country for gender parity. Before women were not aware of their rights but once women became socially and politically aware due to the spread of education and modernisation, they started to demand their political rights. As a result, many feminist organisations were emerged to raise voice for women. The government of different countries also realised that women who are having half the population need equal rights along with men to enjoy equality. But after having official rights, freedom the situation is different in reality. There are many obstacles women face to include in the decision-making process. The debate and discussions are going on for a very long time to solve the issues, but very few countries became successful to bring women equally in the parliament or legislatures. In many countries of the world, women are representing just as a symbol. The representation of women in political life should not be only symbolic but real.

This study was carried out to understand the current situation of gender parity in electoral politics in the two districts of Assam. The situation in these two districts is central component of this study. This study has tried to answer three research questions, viz. - 1) How do politicians perceive gender representation in politics in Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar districts of Assam? 2) Are the women sufficient by numbers to influence policy and decision- making? And 3) What are the barriers if any that affect the performance of women in politics? These questions are discussed

and listed along with women's status since pre-independence to present times both in India and Assam in the previous chapters. Therefore, this final chapter of the study provide a conclusion for the study whereby the pertinent findings are summarised, challenges and barriers relating to women's representation and participation are highlighted, and recommendations measures to address these challenges/barriers are indicated.

The second chapter of this research has shown that in most countries' women access to the parliament and legislatures is strongly limited. It has examined the percentage of women's representation in politics in different countries, different international initiatives on women's political representation. It further examined the situation of India from the pre-independence period to the post-independence period. It also described the role of political parties in women's representation in India and the reservation debate of women. It has found that for quantity representation of women in parliament and state assemblies, the reservation will be an immediate solution for India. Because of reservation in local bodies, India is getting the fruitful result in which women can obtain critical mass.

In the third chapter of this study has discussed the political representation and gender equality in electoral politics of Assam with special focus on Kamrup (M) and Kokrajhar district. By presenting the second research question, it has found that women of Assam including both districts are not in enough numbers in the decision-making process. Women's representation is only 6.34 percent in the last election (2016) of the Assam state assembly. Since its independence, a very less number of women became representatives in both parliament and state assembly. For a very long time, only a few numbers of new women are elected and got an opportunity to join in the decision-making process. Like other parts of India, Assamese women too played an active role in the freedom struggle movement but they did not get an opportunity which they deserved. By looking into the grim situation of women's representation in politics this chapter has found that special consideration is needed by the different actors to improve the status of politics.

The fourth chapter of this study has answered the first and third research questions and the answers are based on field survey/primary sources. According to the interviewees socio-economic and political barriers remains salient factors that hinder women's presence in the legislative assembly of Assam. In the case of Assam, descriptive representation is more relevant than substantive representation, however

both these types do not form a special place. Lack of party support as a key barrier women face is mentioned in the interviews. In the interviews, all respondents accepted that they were not brought in politics based on their capability. While some were supported by parties for certain situations, some were only got tickets when the party position was not in a good position. They have been proved as better representatives compared to many male representatives. But true efforts have not put by the political parties to bring more capable of women in electoral politics.

Many interviewees also pointed out that economically dependent, not having a political background, lack of encouragement from families, lack of knowledge about political systems, the role of women as wife, mother or in-laws hinders them to join in the politics and these are the reasons for low representation of women in Assam. There is a very a smaller number of women in both parliament and legislations. Women get less opportunity to get experience of political life. Interviewees also pointed out that most male politician do not bother about the situation of gender representation. Even many times they show less trust to give an important department to female colleagues.

Key Major Findings

These findings are highlighted certain major aspects of the study. The findings support some but not all of the work of India's and western case studies. However, it is important to understand that the experience of women's representation is universal. In key findings highlight the following:

Firstly, patriarchal traditional dominance is still existing in the area of politics, in both of the districts of Assam because of which women face difficulties to successfully contest against a male counterpart. Although progress has been made since independence, there are still many gaps to make the adequate numbers of women representatives in the legislative assembly. In both the districts, if we look into hierarchy of the political parties, one can easily find masculine dominance in key post which eventually impacts the process of ticket distribution.

Secondly, women face dual burden with their personal and professional roles. As many times it becomes hard to manage both sides, it effects on the representation in politics.

Thirdly, in the area of research conducted, women are equally contributing with male members in business, public offices but because of lack of confidence they still hesitate to speak in public meetings and talk openly. Shevedova (2005) also finds that

as a whole women face, lack of confidence to participate in politics. Dutta (2006) in her research indicates that women usually combine themselves with the homemaking process and their participation in politics limited with the voting in the elections. Lack of political awareness and knowledge about the political environment make them hesitate to come forward and contest the election.

Fourthly, in both Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar districts, women representatives are well educated in comparison to male representatives but still, most of the time they are dominated in the working places as well, wherein most countries or states women's illiteracy or education up to lower level considered as one of the major barriers women face in the political field. It has been believed that education is the solution to all problems. But the scenario is different in both of the districts. While this situation is also could be seen in the other districts of Assam.

Fifthly, the contribution of educated women politician in both districts are satisfactory as they are well known for their roles and duties. In the both districts, educated women are representing and they are working in their constituencies in a progressive way.

Sixthly, women face many barriers to enter into active politics in both the districts, where the scenario is different for women who have political backgrounds, as they easily get support from the political parties. Most of the women are having a political background in the Kamrup (Metro) and Kokrajhar districts including the other districts of Assam and political background is from their in-law's side. It has been found that unmarried women are less represented and also do not shows much interest to contest in the state assembly. Though women are most qualified to be in politics they were only included on a compensation basis when their husband or family members died or killed. But it is also noticed that women are considered as better representatives in the state of Assam. Similarly, Dutta (2006) said that from the last many elections, political parties are nominating mostly winnable candidates and they are mostly wife of political leaders. However, it is also revealed in the study that though most of the women came in the favour of political parties and received sympathy from their constituency but working far better than many male representatives because of which they are winning again and again.

Seventhly, political parties play a major role in the democratic process of a country. The contribution of the parties can be measured through the numbers of women they give nomination during the elections. Political parties of Assam are not showing so

much interest to bring young women into politics in the both districts. In each election parties are giving most of the tickets only to those women who are already in politics for a very long time. Women who do not have political background have to wait for a longer period to get a ticket from the political parties and sometimes they do not get also. Bhandari, Balakrishnan & Reddy (2010) also said that either woman needs contacts or political background to get party support easily. But it is clear from the study that women who have political backgrounds do not see any barrier to getting access to politics.

Eighthly, the political representation of women is essential to ensure that women's issues and problems are integrated with the decision-making process. Most of women representatives from both of the districts, did not join in the active politics as per their own will or they had any interest in politics but they joined due to the circumstances that necessitated their participation in active politics.

Lastly, gender quota or women's representation is a way that may bring about the swift quantitative jump in legislatures. Absence of affirmative action is one of the major reason of women's insufficient numbers of representation in the districts. Reservation is the only way to increase the women's representation in the both districts of Assam and bring capable women into the electoral politics. However, there are differences on the opinion of the reservation in politics. It also raises the question of the real meaning of democracy. However, though reservation will be one of the important immediate affirmative action can be taken by the government but caste-based reservation won't do justice with the capable women as a whole in the both districts. In the opinion of the respondents, in the panchayats, qualified and capable women deprived of politics due to quota within women.

Conclusion

Feminist theory focusing on the politics of presence has constituted the theoretical framework of this study. Politics of presence is an approach that raises the central questions of how the problem of women's under-representation. The politics of presence is limited to the formal institutions, while in the case of both districts of Assam goes beyond the formal institutions as there are other factors and areas of inequality which creating barrier of women's representation in the politics. The challenges facing by the women of both districts of Assam due to the patriarchal traditional mentality still exist in the area of politics. It has been found that the presence of women in the legislative assembly is a very limited from both of the

districts. More women are needed in the both districts to represent women's issues and problems.

The summarisation of the key findings gives an idea that the elected women representatives of the legislative assembly including other districts have been performing well in their respective constituencies and moving ahead with a positive attitude. However, ordinary women who came into politics crossed many barriers and sacrificed many things.

When comparing the main results of this study with previous research it can be concluded that there are similar conditions and barriers of women in many aspects. When looking at more general studies about the political representation of women in India, there are some factors and the situation which is different in the case of both districts of Assam. The study has examined women's political representation on the state assembly in Assam and it makes difficult to come to general conclusions. However, the study pointed to the problems of female under-representation in the case of Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar districts of Assam in which women representatives from other districts also shared their experiences on women's barriers and issues, party's role to bring women in the Assam legislative assembly etc.

Recommendations

Reservation is a very important mechanism to bring more women into politics but there are many more areas that needed to be concentrate to improve the quality to represent truly in the decision-making process. Because increasing the number of women in the state assembly is one thing and make them represent in true sense with all freedom is another thing. The question is also raised that though reservation system will bring only elite women into politics.

After discussion on findings of women's representation in the electoral politics of Assam, the following points should be given special attention:

- To create awareness by providing gender training and making them understand the administrative procedure, their rights, and different gender issues.
- Women need to be educated up to a certain level so that they can make their own decisions. There are many cases in local levels where the husband directs the wife to take the decisions, so women must have to be independent and capable enough to take the decisions instead of depending others all the time.

That is why they should be interested to establish their identity rather than engaging themselves only in household activities.

- The key barrier women face is from political parties to be in the decision-making process. Very few women get supported by the political parties. Many of them have a political background or they are brought on a compensation basis. Because of which young and capable women are being marginalised in politics. Therefore, political parties should also give attention to give chances to the young generation as well.
- Women should become forward by themselves by showing interest to join in politics. For that, there is a need to be promoted and encouraged by both the government and family.
- Women politicians are still hampered by the working conditions. Because of which they do not feel to influence other women from her family to join the politics. Therefore, it is highly needed to improve the working environment to make them feel comfortable in the political arena.
- Increasing the numbers of criminals, corrupted people, rapist already polluted the environment of the political arena and it also deters women from entering mainstream politics. Therefore, it is a voter's responsibility to vote by knowing their background.
- Qualified women also get excluded due to their lack of financial resources. Women who do not get support from political parties also can contest independently but insufficient funds stop them to enjoy their political rights. Therefore, economic independence will encourage them to join in politics.
- Women also have to develop the confidence to come forward. Though mostly women face the problem to get party attention as not having a political background, should engage themselves in both social and party level activities to get attention by both voters and political party.
- Rather than depending on political parties, women leaders should come forward to bring and support other women in politics.

Limitations and Future Research

There are few limitations of the study. Firstly, this study is limited only with the two districts of Assam viz- Kamrup Metropolitan and Kokrajhar districts. Secondly, this study has not answered the local level of politics and the parliament, it only dealt with

state legislative assembly of Assam. It would be useful to look in to the women's representation in politics after the reservation and how they are making their representation useful by their contribution. Thirdly, as this study only limited with the two districts, therefore it cannot be generalising whole state of Assam.

This study also faces some difficulty in the time of field study as most of women politician who have political background do not see the problems of getting into the politics which are common for ordinary women. They had discussed mostly in general level. At the same the sample size also decreased due to different reasons such as death, out of the station, time unavailability to give interviews and also among few representatives, most of women are re-elected for many times.

The study also raises many areas where future analysis is needed. The further analysis which has not covered in this research such as - women's contribution into the politics of Assam as women are in positions of member of parliament, important ministerial positions member of legislative assemblies, party secretary and so on; women's role in the political process beyond the formal representation in electoral politics; A study on the limited role of political parties of Assam to bring the youth in the decision-making process are some area of further investigation. Unlike the other state of India, the state of Assam is also using reservation at the local levels (panchayats) which drew important lessons. Therefore, it would be useful to look into the impact of the reservation system for women at the grassroots level of Assam and exploring barriers women face to run panchayats in comparison to those found on the national and state-level politics.

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