

# **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (1951-2016): A CASE STUDY OF 57 NO. RANGIA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY OF ASSAM**

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## **Abstract:**

Participation in politics is one of the most important elements for sustaining of any political system, particularly the democratic political system. Political participation of women of Rangia Legislative Assembly Constituency of Kamrup district, Assam (India) is comparatively analyzed with male participation in this paper since 1951 Legislative Assembly Elections. Today, women participation in politics is very low and inactive in comparison to men's participation. But, people's active and willing participation, whether men or women despite being any gender is very crucial for the fulfillment of the democratic political system. Rangia Legislative Assembly

Constituency bearing no 57 out of 126 Legislative Assembly Constituencies of Assam Legislative Assembly, India is chosen as the study area of this paper. On the basis of secondary data, the study discloses the political status of women of Rangia LAC in terms of voting, standing in an election, receiving MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly from 1<sup>st</sup> Legislative Assembly Election, 1951 to 14<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly Election, 2016. There is a need of increasing political awareness and education to secure equal, active women's political participation so thus all the segments of society can fully be represented in the politics of a state.

**Keyword:** political, participation, women, Rangia, Assam, election, education

## **Introduction:**

Political participation is one of the key driving elements of every political system. No political system; particularly the Democratic Political system can be able to sustain without the involvement of its people in general. The concept of Political Participation refers to the process by which people can willingly participate in the politics of a state. People's active and voluntary participation helps to pave ways for fulfillment of the government of a democratic political system. Therefore, the study of people's participation in all the activities of a political process has been given much more importance in the field of Political Science. From the Greek political thinkers to the Modern political thinkers, all political thinkers and theorists have discussed the concept of political participation in their own way during their ages. The most accepted form of political system throughout the world i.e., Democracy or the democratic pol. system is itself lies on the notion of political participation of people. The democratic political system particularly the liberal one always intends to secure an increasingly active and willing popular participation in the whole process of politics. The level of political participation always reflects the strength and wealth of a democratic political system. A high level of participation of the people in the political process reflects the consent of the people behind the authority and power of powerholders at a particular time. (Ghai, 2016, 222).

India, by being a parliamentary democratic political system always tries to secure an increasing popular participation in its whole political process. The Constitution of India since contains various measures to secure people's political participation without any kind of discrimination. The constitution of India provides equality to all, to both men and women in order to engage all people in the activities of politics through its Part III (Art 12-35) and Art 325-326 of the Constitution so thus people of India can politically aware and participate without any kind of discrimination. It believes on the notion that the successfulness of a democratic political system is guaranteed by the role played by both men and women in the political field. Therefore, India through its the Supreme Law of the land provides equal status to women with men so thus they can share equal importance with men in the decision-making system. The role played by women in politics before independence of the country is also proudful. From early 19<sup>th</sup> century's Reform

Movements to the making phase of Constituent Assembly; from Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai to Sarojini Naidu etc. there were many names who were actively engaged in various activities of India's political struggle for independence. However, despite of all efforts, the political role of Indian women, in contemporary times, is not very satisfactory. A large segment of women population is being deprived of their enjoyment of political rights due to various reasons. The women of Assam are nowhere exception of that. Elections plays a key role in all democracy and it is only through participating in an election, people can bring a fair and equal treatment to them. At this backdrop, this paper tries to examine the political participating behavior of women of 57 no. Rangia Legislative Assembly Constituency in the Assam Legislative Assembly Elections (1951-2016) and make a comparative analysis with men's participation.

**Statement of the Problem:**

The Research problem formulated for the study is "Political Participation of women in Assam Legislative Assembly elections (1951-2016): A case study of 57 no. Rangia Legislative Assembly Constituency of Assam". The term "Political participation" means the engagement of people in all activities of a political process. It covers all type of political activities; from exercising right to vote, contesting in an election, campaigning for a candidate to attending public meetings, rallies, getting out and encouraging voters to vote, making demands on political system etc. all kinds of activities that put influence on and provide a shape to the decision making, policy formulation, execution etc. process are come under the notion of political participation. In this research paper, the concept of political participation is basically studies in terms of exercising "right to vote" or casting vote, contesting in an election and receiving representation. By being a parliamentary democratic country, the Constitution of India provides various provisions and privileges to obtain active and equal popular participation in the whole process of politics without any kind of discrimination so thus all people irrespective of any gender, religion, colour, race, creed etc. of Indian society can participate equally in politics. But there can always be seen a gender difference between men and women in case of enjoying political rights in India. Women have not been able to equally participate with men in politics. Their participation is very low and disappointing. Not only, in politics "gender" has always been playing a major role in all the spheres of developing Indian society. The status of women political participation in political activities of Assam is also pathetic. Presently, Assam Legislative Assembly has 126 Legislative Assembly Constituency out of which there are only 8 female members in the Legislative Assembly. This paper mainly focuses on the study of the nature of women's political participation of Rangia LAC in the Legislative Assembly elections from gender perspective by comparing with men's participation. Here, the notion political participation is studied in terms of voting, contesting and winning in a Legislative Assembly election from the time span of 1<sup>st</sup> Assam Legislative Assembly election, 1951 to the recent 14th

Assam Legislative Assembly election of 2016.

**Profile of the study area:**

The study area for the research paper is Rangia Legislative Assembly Constituency. Rangia Legislative Assembly constituency, currently bears number 57, is out of 126 Legislative Assembly Constituencies of Assam Legislative Assembly of Assam, India. Earlier, during 1951 and 1957 Legislative Assembly elections this constituency was a reserved constituency for ST category. Now, it is open for all. It comes under the Mangaldoi Parliamentary (Loksabha) constituency. The jurisdiction of the Rangia LAC is in Kamrup (Rural) district of Assam. The district has a total 15,17,542 population as per 2011 census. Rangia LAC has total-number of 84 villages and 2 number of towns. The geographical area covered by the constituency is 4345 square km. The constituency has a total population of 1,55,333 from which males number is 80,630 and 74,703 are females. Total 1,17,523 population are literate among which 64,736 are males and 52,787 are females. Rangia has a sex ratio of 926 females per 1000 males. The major religion of this area is Hindu. Around 63% of people are Hindu, 36% of people are Muslim and 1% of people belong to Christian, Jain, sikh and other reliogion. The constituency is also inhabitant of some minority tribal group like Bodo. The status of women political participation in terms of voting, contesting in an election and receiving representation from Rangia Assembly constituency (57) is the central area of this study.

**Key Objective of the Study:**

The key objectives of this study are as follows-

1. To analyze the political participation of women of Rangia Legislative Assembly Constituency (57) in the elections of Assam Legislative Assembly in compare to male participation.
2. To understand the actual scenario of women political participation of Rangia LAC.

3. To highlight the political status of women of Rangia LAC from 1951 Legislative Assembly election to 2016 election.
4. To bring light on the factors responsible for the differences between men and women participation in politics.
5. To suggest some remedial measures to achieve equal social participation of men and women in political activities.
6. To create awareness about the role of women in politics.

**Methodology:**

The study has been based on historical and descriptive method to understand the actual scenario of popular participation in Legislative Assembly election from a gender perspective. In regards to analyze in comparative manner both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected. All data and information are collected from secondary sources like published research articles, journals, books, newspapers, Election Commissions reports, internet etc. Statistical tool has been used to make the study much more fruitful.

**Results & Discussion:**

Rangia Legislative Assembly Constituency is a renowned constituency of lower Assam. It is located in Kamrup (rural) district of Assam. After independence, from the very first Assam Legislative Assembly Election, 1951 Rangia LAC carries its own significance. From 1951 to 2016 total 14 Legislative Assembly Elections have been held in Assam. Election is always being playing a vital role in politics. People can directly be part of the power struggle by taking part in elections. Thus, total strength of electors, both men and women, have a major role in that case.

Electors refer to those people who are eligible to vote. The electoral size of Rangia LAC is quite satisfactory to hold an election. The following table (Table 1) shows the electoral strength of both male and female from 1951 to 2016 Assam Legislative Assembly elections.

**Table 1: Strength of Male and Female Electors of Rangia LAC in the Assam Legislative Assembly Election (1951-2016)**

Sl No	Year	Male	Female	Total	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
1	1951	Data not found	Data not found	71775	-----	-----
2	1957	84043	0	84043	100	0
3	1962	47448	0	47448	100	0
4	1967	44107	0	44107	100	0
5	1972	29486	23440	52926	55.71	44.29
6	1978	33826	27710	61536	54.97	45.03
7	1983	35798	33897	69695	51.36	48.64
8	1985	43936	34758	78694	55.83	44.17
9	1991	53887	49907	103794	51.92	48.08
10	1996	56152	53818	109970	51.06	48.94
11	2001	66195	59213	125408	52.78	47.22
12	2006	78015	72256	150271	51.92	48.08
13	2011	80918	75352	156270	51.78	48.22
14	2016	88876	80790	169666	52.39	47.61

(Source: eci.gov.in)

The above stated Table 1 clearly shows that every time women elector size is less than men, but it is not negligible. In 1951 election, the total elector strength of Rangia LAC is 71,775. But the data by sex is not found. From 1957 election to 1967 Legislative Assembly Election women elector size is 0% which is highly miserable and disappointing. However, from 1972 assembly election, there can be seen a drastic change. From 1972 election and onwards the female percentage of electors seem to be improved. Since 1991 Legislative Assembly election women electoral size constitute almost half of the total electoral size. In 1991 Assembly election female electoral strength is 48.08% whereas male's percentage is 51.92. In the last 2016 election female electoral size is 47.61% and men's electoral strength is 52.39%. As electors people have the right to vote in an election. Data relating to voting are assembled in the following table i.e. Table 2. Casting of vote in an election is the another most important determining aspect of political

participation. A person can participate in the decision-making process of a state by rightfully exercising his/her 'right to vote'.

**Table2: An Overview of Turn Out Male and Female Voters of Rangia LAC in the Assam Legislative Assembly Election (1951-2016)**

Sl. No.	Year	Total Voters	Male	Female	Female Percentage
1	1951	59761	Data found not	Data found not	-----
2	1957	64456	64456	0	0
3	1962	19352	19352	0	0
4	1967	22583	22583	0	0
5	1972	33767	20765	13002	38.51
6	1978	42504	25522	16982	39.95
7	1983	9137	5412	3725	40.77
8	1985	67616	35435	32181	47.59
9	1991	79379	42729	36650	46.17
10	1996	85959	43437	42522	49.47
11	2001	96463	52233	44230	45.85
12	2006	114455	59734	54721	47.81
13	2011	118317	62769	55548	46.95
14	2016	143175	74780	68395	47.77

(Source: eci.gov.in)

Table 2 again refers to the inferior status of female voters in compare to male voters of Rangia LAC. In each election, from 1957 to 2016, female, that turned out, voters are lower than the men. During 1957,1962, 1967 election female percentage of voter is 0% which indicate a miserable condition of democratic character of Assam's political system. However, in 1972 Legislative Assembly Election, a dramatic shift had taken place by increaseing of female voters from 0(zero) to 38.51%. Since 1972 election onwards, the situation has been improved but it has never crossed the margin of male voters. In the last 2016 Legislative Assembly election the percentage of women voters of Rangia LAC is quite satisfactory in compare to male turned out voters. In the patriarchal structure of Assamese society, casting of vote is not the problem but the problem lies getting a woman in the forefront to lead or represent a constituency when the whole structure of party politics is dominated and run by male authority. The following tables i.e., Table 3 and Table 4 reveals the pathetic political condition of women of Rangia LAC in terms of contesting in a Legislative Assembly election and receiving representation. By contesting or getting elected in an election a person can directly be part of the decision making and executing system of a state.

**Table 3: An Overview of Contesting Women Candidate in the Assam Legislative Assembly Election (1951-2016) from Rangia LAC**

Sl. No.	Year	Total	Number of Male Candidate	Number of Female Candidate
1	1951	Data not found	Data not found	----
2	1957	---	---	---
3	1962	----	----	---
4	1967	----	----	----
5	1972	6	6	0
6	1978	8	8	0
7	1983	----	---	---
8	1985	----	----	----
9	1991	17	17	0
10	1996	12	12	0
11	2001	6	6	0
12	2006	6	6	0
13	2011	10	10	0
14	2016	11	11	0

(Source: eci.gov.in)

In the above arranged Table 3 data related to contesting female candidate and male candidate from Rangia LAC in Assam Legislative Assembly election (1951-2016) are arranged. Table 3 indicates how women have always been treated as weak and inferior at being able to social participation in a patriarchal structure of Assamese society. The data related to contesting or standing in an election from 1951 to 1967 elections are not found. In 1972 election, total number of 6 candidates stood in the election and they all are male by sex. In 1991 election total number of 17 candidates contested but among them female number of candidates is 0(zero). From the above table it is clear that from 1972 to 2016 Assam Legislative Assembly election, no female candidate stands in any Legislative Assembly election from Rangia LAC and that is highly questionable. A constituency like Rangia LAC where women electoral strength constitutes almost half of the total electoral strength, where female literacy rate is 70.66 % as per 2011 census that is also higher than many other parts Assam; 0(zero) number of woman contest in Assam Legislative Assembly election from 1<sup>st</sup> Legislative Assembly election, 1951 to 14<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly election, 2016. during 60 years of independence 0% of female contesting candidate again put question on the patriarchal character of political system of Assam.

**Table 4: Name of the Winning candidates from Rangia LAC to the Legislative Assembly of Assam (1951-2016)**

SL No.	Assembly Election (year)	Name of the Winning Candidate	Sex
1	1952	Siddhinath Sarma (winner1) Dharanidhar Basumatary (winner2)	Male Male
2	1957	Baikunth Nath Das(winner1) Siddhinath Sarma(winner2)	Male Male
3	1962	Siddhinath Sarma	Male
4	1967	Kamini Mohan Sarmah	Male
5	1972	Manabendra Nath Sarma	Male
6	1978	Purna Boro	Male
7	1983	Purna Boro	Male
8	1985	Thaneswar Boro	Male
9	1991	Thaneswar Boro	Male
10	1996	Thaneswar Boro	Male
11	2001	Bhubaneswar Kalita	Male
12	2006	Ananta Deka	Male
13	2011	Ghanashyam Kalita	Male
14	2016	Bhabesh Kalita	Male

(Source: eci.gov.in)

The above prepared Table 4 discloses the name of all elected representatives to the Assam Legislative Assembly from Rangia LAC in a chronological order from 1951 to 2016 with their biological identity. During 1951 and 1957 Legislative Assembly Election, Rangia LAC was a reserved (ST) constituency, therefore, two members were sent to the Assembly house. However, till now, all the elected representatives (MLAs) from Rangia LAC are male which is quite obvious with reference to Table 3. Presently, Mr. Bhabesh Kalita is the elected representative (MLA) from Rangia LAC to the Legislative Assembly of Assam.

Gender based discrimination is quite often in political field throughout the world. Women are always being kept out from the political realm. They are being treated as incapable, weak and inferior to men. The data of all the above stated tables clearly prove the existing gender-based discrimination in political sphere of Rangia LAC. As a result of expansion of modern education, women are allowed or encouraged to vote but not in a representative manner. They are treated as weak to be able to socially participate. But only casting of votes is not all about political participation; along with it, equal opportunity for political representation of both men and women is also required for the all-round development of a society. Lack of political education is one of main reasons of this unequal power-relationship existing in political structure. Table 1 and

Table 2 while showing good percentage of women voters in contemporary times, Table 3 and Table 4, on the other hand, unveils the miserable conditions of women political representation of Rangia Legislative Assembly Constituency. In order to secure women political participation in true manner of terms political education should be inculcated in society so that all men and women of a society can be politically aware and involved. The Government of Assam and Government of India should also take proper measures to increase women political participation in equal manner with male participation. Only by participating in the decision-making system of a state women can bring fair and equal treatment to them.

#### **Conclusion:**

Women political participation is the pivotal concept for the successfulness of a democracy. When men and women are equally be able to exercise their political right at all levels, then only a society can truly be represented in the representative house of that particular state. Is it also important for achieving gender

equality and development of a society? The male dominated authority must be encouraged women to come forward and participate in politics by casting vote, standing in an election and receiving representation. They should be allowed of social participation by coming out of their private life sphere. Along with society, the government has to play a major role in this regard. The government must take effective initiatives to provide education in society so thus all the people of society can be politically aware and educated to help in the smooth functioning of the state. The government can also resolute some reservation policy to increase women active political participation and representation in the representative house. It is the duty of all of us to attain and provide positive and equal value to all the sections of society.

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