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## **Women Participation in Politics: A case study of Katigorah Assembly Constituency**

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### **Abstract**

*Political participation, a necessary ingredient of every political system, denotes a series of voluntary activities which have a bearing on the political process that involves issue like selection of rulers and the various aspects of the formulation of public policy. These activities include voting, seeking information about policy of political parties and of govt., attending election meetings, contributing money to the party or election fund of its candidates, enrolment in a party, canvassing for a party and holding party offices. (Meclosky, 1968) In other words, political participation can be referred to as a process through which people take part in politics.*

*In every political system, people in authority seem to be quite keen on ensuring some amount of political participation by the people. This is, because by involving many in the matters of the State, political participation fosters stability and order and thereby reinforce the legitimacy of political authority. A society in which a substantial part of the population is denied any participation whatsoever is likely to be highly explosive. That is why even in modern non-democratic political system, the idea of political participation seems to be well nurtured. Participation in politics is, thus, a civic duty, a sign of political health and one of the methods of ensuring that one's interests are not neglected.*

*In view of the importance of political participation in a democratic system, the present study attempts to know, to what extent women belonging to different sections of society take part in political process with reference to the women in Katigorah Assembly Constituency.*

***Key Words: Women, Political participation, apathy, de-jure, citizens.***

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**Introduction:** Political participation is an important area of contemporary research in the general discipline of Political Science in general and comparative politics in particular. From Aristotle to John Dewey, Political Philosophers have extolled popular participation as a source of vitality and creative energy. Earnest Barker, an apostle and champion of liberty believes that the government should be elected on the principle of universal suffrage. Citizens should have the opportunity to participate in government business by means of discussions. To him, the government is not eternal, it springs from people. John Stuart Mill,

another champion of liberty has been a strong emphasiser of citizen's share in political decisions and universal suffrage. Laski argues that political rights could be best enjoyed in a participatory democracy.

Thus, political participation is the right of the citizens through which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled. It is a technique for setting goals, choosing priorities and deciding what resources to commit to goal attainment.

**Political Participation: Meaning:** Political Participation is a broader concept and it expresses itself in various kinds of overt and manifest political activities. It is not only concerned with selection of decision makers but it also affects their political behaviour. Generally speaking, Political Participation is the involvement of individuals and groups in the political process of a political system at different levels. According to Nie and Verbe Political Participation refers to those "legal activities, by private citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and or the action they take". Going one step ahead Milbrath and Goel in their definition of Political Participation include not only the active role that people pursue but also the ceremonial and support activities. According to them, Political Participation may be defined as "those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics".

Political Participation is a complex term, expressing itself in various kinds of overt and manifest political activities. In more clear terms, the concept of Political Participation typically include activities like voting, writing to a member of parliament, going to a government department office to discuss a problem, canvassing support for a political party, attending public meeting to protest about an issue, signing a petition, joining a pressure group, going on a demonstration march etc.

Thus, participation is composed of variety of activities which differ greatly in the time and effort they require, the skill and knowledge needed to perform them and conflict they are likely to engender. At one time, participation was seen as a much more uni-dimensional activity. Lester Millbrath suggested that participants could be categorized into the 'apathetic', the 'spectators' and the 'galiators' who performed a wide range of political actions.

**Review of Related Literature:** Though different studies have been made on women to understand their influence on politics, very scant attention is paid to the socio-economic condition of women and the level of their political awareness and the mode of their political participation. S.J. Havewalla in her work titled 'Status of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran' – argued that in Iran, women enjoyed the right of voting. There is no bar of class, caste or financial position. Women are very enthusiastic about participation in politics. Snehalata Panda in her Article 'External Factors and Empowerment of Women: The case of Orissa' argues that the reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has facilitated the entry of women in remote tribal areas at the grass root level of politics. This is a

completely new experience for women handicapped by lack of material resources, even struggling to earn daily food for themselves. Besides the unwillingness of high caste young educated women to participate in the election facilitated by tribal women without political background to enter the Gram Panchayat. Sudha Pai argues that 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act has adopted various measures to increase participation of women in local bodies. But the impact of these measures is different in different states. She has also added that political participation of women is higher in those states where the social status of women has traditionally been better. Whereas, in the states where the position of women has traditionally been low, the provision of reservation failed to bring women in the sphere of politics. P. Manikyamba in her Article 'The Number of Dilemma-Success Stories and Manipulative Mechanisms', argues that though the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act has facilitated the entry of large number of women into local self-government, yet women still have not been able to reach the desired position. Criminalization of politics, violence, sexual harassment, male opposition are regarded as main impediments in the way of active participation of women in politics.

In 'Women's participation in policy and Decision Making Process: Need for a Network' Vibhuti Patel points out that unless and until the socio-economic condition of women is improved their participation in politics will not improve. She argues that economic development has bypassed women. Women are not only bypassed but also has been marginalized in rural, urban and tribal settings. According to Patel, the special provision for women like 33 percent reservations in Panchayat bodies has not properly utilized by political parties. These remain as a popular add to woo women voters at the time of election.

**Data Collection and Methodology:** As there was no sufficient literature on women in Barak Valley, field survey become essential. The field survey was done in Katigorah Constituency by taking a total sample of 120 women. Women belonging to both urban and rural areas are covered.

The data was collected through questionnaire. The interview was conducted usually at home. The data so collected was computerized and analysed.

**Profile of Katigorah Assembly Constituency:** Katigorah is a Tehsil in Cachar district of Assam state, India. In Assam, there are two Valley-Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley. Katigorah Constituency is located in Barak Valley. Katigorah Tehsil Head Quarter is Katigorah town. It is located 26 KM towards west from district head quarter Silchar, 191 KM from state capital Dispur towards north.

Katigorah Tehsil is bounded by Badarpur Tehsil towards south, Kalain Tehsil towards north, Salchapra Tehsil towards east, Tapang Tehsil towards west. Silchar, Hailakandi, Karimganj town are the nearby towns to Katigorah. This place is in the border of Cachar district and Karimganj district. Also it is in the border of other district, Hailakandi. Katigorah Constituency has an international border with Bangladesh.

Bengali is the local language here. Also people speaks Assamese, Bodo, Sylheti and Hindi. The Constituency is strategically located having district connection with four states of North-East, viz. Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur & Tripura.

The number of total voters in Katigorah Assembly Constituency is 136291. On which 72932 are male and 63359 are female voters. In Katiogorah Constituency, there are 2 Blocks and 25 Gaon Panchayats.

**Political Participation of Women:** The concept of political participation of women is broader than one covering women's participation only in the electoral process. It includes gamut of voluntary activities with a bearing on the political process including voting, support of political groups, communication with legislator, dissemination of political views and opinion among the electorate and other related activities.

In the present times the study of women with reference to their participation in politics is gaining attention. The degree of political participation of women varies from country to country and state to state. It has been noted that, the general experience in most countries many women are not come to the forefront and remain largely inactive and indifferent towards politics. Their presence in the legislative and decision-making bodies is scarcely about 10 percent except some Nordic countries.

The situation in India is not different from other parts of the world. Women's participation in the political process in India is impeded by various social, economic, historical, geographical, political and cultural factors, thereby resulting in their minimal participation and even their exclusion. Illiteracy, women's triple burden, patriarchal values, lack of access and control over income and other resources, restrictions to public spaces and insensitive legal system continues to impair their effective political participation. This is compounded by the absence / inadequate availability of infrastructural facilities and support services to facilitate their participation.

The Constitution of India emphasizes the principle of equality and guarantees, equality before law and equal protection of law to all its citizens. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth. Moreover, Article 325 and Article 326 of the Constitution of India guarantees political equality, equal right to participation in the political activities and right to vote respectively. However, these rights have remained de-jure and have not been translated into de-facto rights. This has not only resulted in their presence in meager numbers in the decision making bodies but also in the neglect of their issues and experiences in policy making.

Coming to the question of the participation of women in informal politics, it is worth mentioning that during the struggle for independence many women have been active in the informal political sphere in terms of political mobilization. They participated in large numbers in political demonstrations and mass agitations as well as in the activities of nationalist political bodies and organizations. But once the freedom was won, the women's

wings were more or less marginalized. They ended up playing a secondary role to male leadership in power.

On the other hand, though participation of women in voluntary organizations has increased since independence, they still play the stereotypical and traditional roles of providing food, refreshment, cleaning and maintenance.

The rate of political participation of women in Assam is also not very encouraging like that of the rest of the country. Though women in Assam played an important role during India’s freedom struggle, their involvement in politics has gone down since independence. The number of women members in the Assam Legislative Assembly as well as in the Union Parliament has been very low.

In Assam out of 17443617 voters 8431467 are female voters. But our political parties have not shown any interest to involve them in the active politics. Political parties, which depend on feminine charm to woo voters during elections, have failed miserably in having a proportionate number of women candidates in every elections whether it is for state Assembly or Lok Sabha. It is clear from the fact that in the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha election only 11 female candidates contested against 158 male and only two nomination from the nationalist parties.

**Major Findings:**

Have you ever cast your vote in any elections?

**Table – 1**

Yes / No	Nos. of Respondent	% of Respondent
Yes	67	55.84%
No	53	44%
Total	120	

Table 1 indicates the majority of the respondents (55.84%) have cast their vote in elections where as 44% respondents said that they have not case their votes in any elections.

Is any member family/relations member of any political party?

**Table – 2a**

Yes / No	Nos. of Respondent	% of Respondent
Political	37	30.83%
Non-Political	83	63.16%
Total	120	

The Table 2a shows that 37 respondents i.e. 30.83% having political background and 83 respondents i.e. 63.16% belongs to non-political background.

Political background and voting.

**Table – 2b**

	Yes	No	%	%
Political background	31	6	25.83	5
Non-Political background	35	48	29.17	40

The Table 2b reveals that respondents from political background vote more in elections than the respondents from non-political family background.

Participation in voting on the basis of economic background

**Table – 3**

Family Annual Income	Respondents	Yes	No
50000 – 55000	21	8	13
56000 – 60000	25	11	14
61000 – 65000	32	25	7
66000 – 70000	42	38	4
Total	120		

The Table 3 reveals that family income related positively to voting. Respondents from high family income group take more part as compared to the respondents from the medium and low income group.

Marital Status

**Table – 4a**

Married	68	80.16%
Unmarried	42	50.4%
Widow	10	12%
Total	120	

The above data shows that out of 120 respondents 68 are married women (80.16%), 42 are unmarried (50.4%) and 10 are widows (12%).

Participation of voting on the basis of Marital Status.

**Table – 4b**

	Yes	No	%	%
Married	61	07	50.83	5.83
Unmarried	14	28	11.67	23.33
Widow	03	07	2.5	5.83

The Table 4b indicates that the marital status is strongly related to percentage of voting. Those who are married turn out at the polls in considerably larger numbers than the unmarried and widow. The reason may be the lack of interest in politics among the unmarried girls probably because of their early age at which they are more busy in finding jobs and establishing themselves in the new environment. As far as widows are concerned, they are mentally disturbed, which may be the reason for their lack of interest in politics.

**Conclusion:** With the above in background some suggestions for qualitative and quantitative increase of women's participation could be made. Proper awareness should be created among the women so that they become well aware of their rights particularly political right. An attempt for psychological change is needed.

To improve the situation relating to women's participation in politics, it is necessary to make renovations in the educational, economic and social spheres. Efforts should be made in arousing women's political consciousness and encouraging women to participate in political affairs. In economic terms equal work opportunities and equal pay should be ensured. Political parties should take a lead in fielding more women as candidates. In connection it can be said that there should be the realization of the need for equality and responsibility between women and men in the house and in the world.

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