

Political representation of women in legislative assembly elections of Assam

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Abstract

The representation of women in legislative assembly elections of Assam have not improved since independence. Although Assam has a dignified history of women but they are not included in decision making and party politics of the state. Assam had witnessed a decline of percentage of women elected members of legislative assembly (MLA). In 2021 lowest number of women MLA's are elected in comparison to other consecutive years. Here in this study, an attempt is made to observe political party-wise change in percentage of elected women MLA's of Assam from 2001 to 2021. Moreover, the study had tried to bring percentage comparison between elected male and female MLA's of Assam. Further, the study had also observed difference between contested and won women candidates in Assam legislative assembly elections. The result of the study shows that there is need of further improvement in representation of women in Assam politics. The study also shows huge difference between male and female elected MLA's in legislative assembly elections of Assam. Regional political parties of Assam should give more candidature to women candidates in legislative elections in comparison to national political parties of the country.

Keywords: Women Politics; Legislative Assembly Elections; Political parties; Indian Politics.

1. Introduction

India is one of the largest democratic countries in the world. The longest handwritten constitution had provides certain fundamental rights to its citizens. Right to cast vote is also one of the rights enshrined in the Indian constitution. There were remarkable changes in the political structure of India before and after independence. The voting right of all adult citizens of India irrespective of race, gender, social status, income etc. was provided through universal adult suffrage. According to census of 1951, the first general election registered 173,212,343 voters across the country. The Indian parliament and state legislative assemblies consist of multi-party elected candidates. The published report of Election Commission of India for 2019 general elections, there are 8 national parties, 52 state parties and 2638 unidentified parties. Politics and administration are areas which traditionally were associated with men [6]. The women contested candidates were lower in comparison to male candidates. Only 6.94% and 4.4% of women candidates had contested first time in the elections of Lok Sabha and Rajyasabha. The percentage of participation of women candidates in the elections has not improved. The high participation of women members in Indian politics would have result in development of economic and social status of women [4]. The role of women in public government is also one of the parameters to measure the impact of women's representation in politics [7]. The government had introduced women's reservation bill in the year 2008 for elimination of gender inequality and political empowerment of women. Statistical data has shown that there is a marginal increase of number of women candidates in the last few decades [3]. The political scenario of state Assam had also gone some changes in the recent past. Assam is also one of the few states which consist of unicameral legislative assembly. Assam had witnessed a decline of percentage of women elected members of

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legislative assembly (MLA) from 2016 to 2021. The proportion of women MLA's in Assam legislative assembly is considerably lower since independence [1]. In 2021 lowest number of women MLA's are elected in comparison to other consecutive years. Although Assam has a dignified history of women but they are not included in decision making and party politics of the state [2]. In this Indian society the status women in Assam is higher in contrast to rest of the country [5]. The present study focuses on the participation of women in Assam politics. Earlier some of the research studies had depicted year wise political participation of women since independence. They haven't considered political party-wise representation of women elected members in the respective studies. This study attempts to observe political party-wise change in percentage of elected women MLA's of Assam from 2001 to 2021. Moreover, the study had tried to bring a percentage comparison between elected male and female MLA's of Assam. Further the study had also observed difference between contested and won women candidates in Assam legislative assembly elections.

Objectives of the study

- To observe political party-wise percentage of elected women MLA's of Assam from 2001 to 2021
- To observe difference between contested and won women MLA candidates of Assam from 2001 to 2021
- To bring a percentage comparison between elected male and female MLA's of Assam from 2001 to 2021.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Data

For the objectives of the study, secondary data has been collected from a useful websites such as [8], [9] and [10]. The results of Assam legislative assembly election from the year 2001 to 2021 have been collected. The data on political parties contested and won in legislative elections of Assam viz. AsomGanaparishad (AGP), AsomGanaParishad (Pragatisheel) AGP(P), All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), Autonomous State Demand Commit (ASDC), BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP), Bodoland People's Front (BPF), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM), Indian National Congress (INC), Independent (IND), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), LokoSanmilon (LKS), Samata Party (SAP), Samajwadi Party (SP), United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) are also collected.

3. Results

From table 1 it can be observed that the percentage of woman elected MLA's in legislative assembly elections of Assam from 2001-2021 is not satisfactory. National Political parties such as Indian National congress (INC) and BharatiyaJanta Party (BJP) women elected MLA's are much higher in contrast to regional political parties of Assam. Further, from the table it is observed that the total seats won by women elected candidates had declined. In 2011, highest number of total seats had won by women candidates in comparison to other respective years. The elected women candidates from independent political parties are few too.

Table 1 Political Party-wise percentage of elected women MLA's of Assam from 2001-2021

Year	Political Party	Total number of seats won	Number of seats won by women candidate	Percentage of elected women MLA's
2001	INC	71	6	8.4
	AGP	20	0	0.00
	IND	19	2	10.53
	BJP	8	1	12.5
	NCP	3	1	33.33
	ASDC(U))	2	0	0.00
	AITC	1	0	0.00
	SAP	1	0	0.00
	SP	1	0	0.00
2006	INC	53	8	15.09

	AGP	24	2	8.33
	IND	22	2	9.09
	BJP	10	1	10.00
	AIUDF	10	0	0.00
	CPM	2	0	0.00
	AGP (P)	1	0	0.00
	ASDC	1	0	0.00
	CPI	1	0	0.00
	LKS	1	0	0.00
	NCP	1	0	0.00
2011	INC	77	11	14.29
	AIUDF	18	1	5.56
	BPF	12	2	16.67
	AGP	11	0	0.00
	BJP	5	0	0.00
	IND	2	0	0.00
	AITC	1	0	0.00
2016	BJP	60	2	3.33
	INC	26	3	11.54
	AIUDF	13	0	0.00
	AGP	14	1	7.14
	BPF	12	2	16.67
	IND	1	0	0.00
2021	BJP	60	3	5.00
	INC	29	2	6.90
	AIUDF	16	0	0.00
	AGP	9	1	11.11
	IND	6	0	0.00
	BPF	4	0	0.00
	CPI(M)	1	0	0.00
	UPPL	1	0	0.00

Table 2 Contested and won women MLA candidates of Assam from 2001-2021

Year	Women contested	Women wins	Women winning percentage
2001	55	10	18.18
2006	70	13	18.57
2011	85	14	16.47
2016	91	8	8.79
2021	76	6	13.53

From table 2 it can be observed that the number of contested women MLA's in legislative assembly elections of Assam had increased from 2001-2016. There is a decline of contested as well as won women MLA candidates for the year 2021. Further from the table, the winning percentage of women candidates had decreased from 2001-2021 assembly elections of Assam.

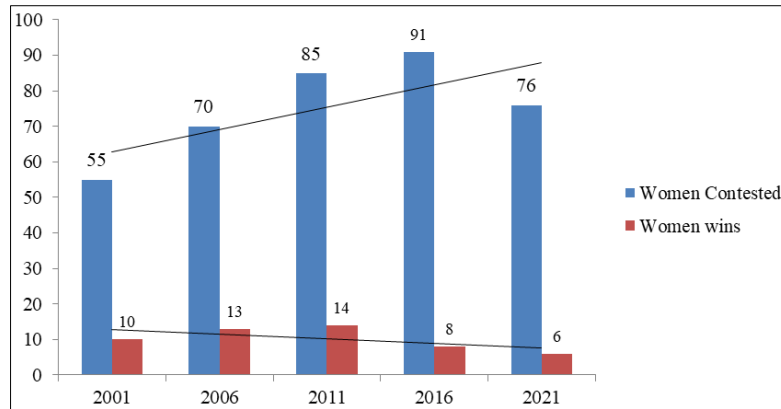


Figure 1 Number of Women contested and won data from 2001-2021

Table 4 Percentage of Male and Female elected MLA's of Assam legislative assembly from 2001-2021

Year	Percentage of elected Male MLA's	Percentage of elected Female MLA's
2001	92	8
2005	89.68	10.32
2011	88.89	11.12
2016	93.65	6.35
2021	95.23	4.76

The table 4 shows the percentage of elected male and female candidates in Assam legislative assembly elections held from 2001-2021. It can be observed that the percentage of women elected candidates has declined from 2001 to present legislative election in comparison to male elected candidates. However, it was increased from 2001 to 2011 and there was sharp decline for the next consecutive years of elections respectively.

4. Discussion

In this paper we have observed that contribution of women in Assam politics is much lower than male counterparts as only 77 women had been elected to Assam Legislative Assembly since 1951. In our study only 8.09% women (51 out of 630 MLAs) won in last 20 years (i.e. 2001-21). On the other hand, percentage of women of Assam in national politics is very low as compared to other parts of India. There are many reasons for such low representation of women from Assam in politics and decision making bodies. Some of such reasons are ---

- Women in North Eastern India has low rate of illiteracy (except Mizoram) for which they have been lagging behind till now-a-days. They have rather involved in household affairs.
- Majority of women does not prefer politics that of male counterparts as a result males always get priority in political system.
- There are less than 40% workforce participation rate of women in Assam as well as North East Region which is a matter of concern.
- Domestic violence and crimes against women create negative motivation towards society which prevents them to go beyond their locality.

For preventing such behaviors from our society we have to provide independency and freedom to our women so that they can involve in democracy towards decision making. In such circumstances, policies of our government, public bodies and other private organizations like NGOs, charity trust etc. should focused towards gender equality and unbiased in our society. The role of women in decision making is inevitable ---- starting from our home to all the sectors of our society. More participation of women only can improve dignity and status of women of our state and the whole of India.

5. Conclusion

The paper depicted a clear picture of women in Assam political system as compared to male Legislative Assembly members. Only two national parties had given candidature to women in Assam that of other political parties. The elected women MLA's of Assam Legislative Assembly in 2011 marks history as 14 women have been elected in that year. Though there was record number of women (i.e. 91 nos.) contested in 2016; only 8 of them marked footprint in Assam Legislative assembly. Similarly, in recently held Assam Legislative election of 2021, only 6 women have been elected out of 76 in poll fray. The male dominated political system of India has been giving low priority towards females and it should be corrected in our country. Women MLA's also should take necessary steps for wellbeing of poor women of our rural areas so that they have proper accessibility of modern education system and get represented in rural decision making bodies.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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