



## **PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ASSAM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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### **Abstract:**

The present study conducts a critical analysis of the current situation of women's political engagement in Assam, India, emphasizing the necessity of feminist growth in the area. The paper emphasizes the obstacles women experience in gaining access to political power and the socio-cultural norms that prevent them from actively participating in decision-making processes through an analysis of literary works, statistical data, and historical viewpoints. The experiences of women in post-Assam Movement politics are examined through the lens of Rita Chowdhury's book "*Ei Samay Sei Samay*." In addition, the study explores legislative attempts like the Women's Reservation Bill of 2010, comparing the intended legislative outcome with the sharp reality of women's representation in Assamese politics. The study also looks at how gendered cognitive patterns are viewed by society and how it affects how capable women are seen to be in governance. Utilizing census data and election reports, the study illuminates the differences in education and work that women encounter, ultimately promoting women's empowerment through increased political engagement.

**Keywords:** *Women's Political Participation, Feminism, Women's Reservation Bill, Gendered Cognitive Styles, Empowerment.*

### **1. Introduction:**

Women's political participation in Assam has long been a topic of concern, with various socio-cultural factors contributing to their limited representation in governance. This research paper

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aims to analyze the status of women in Assamese politics, drawing insights from literature, historical records, legislative initiatives, and statistical data. The experiences of women, as depicted by prominent writer Rita Chowdhury in her work "*Ei Samay Sei Samay*," will serve as a narrative backdrop to understand the challenges and aspirations of women post-Assam Movement.

## **2. Literature Review:**

Rita Chowdhury's novel "*Ei Samay Sei Samay*" (2007) provides a poignant portrayal of a woman's journey from being an active leader in the Assam Movement to navigating the complexities of married life with a revolutionary turned Minister. The struggles of the protagonist in Rita Chowdhury's novel can be analyzed through the lens of feminist philosophy, which examines the intersection of personal autonomy and socio-political structures. Through her writing, Chowdhury highlights the loss of freedom and agency experienced by many women who find themselves in similar situations.

## **3. Legislative Initiatives and Reality:**

The Women's Reservation Bill of 2010 aimed to reserve 33% of legislative seats for women, intending to enhance their participation in decision-making processes. However, as noted by Devi (2013), the implementation of this bill has been lacking, with no woman elected as a Member of Parliament from Assam by 2013. This clear inequality between legislative intent and on-ground reality underlines the uphill battle for women seeking political representation in the region.

## **4. Gendered Cognitive Styles and Perceptions:**

Societal constructs often state gendered cognitive styles, categorizing deductive, quantitative, and analytic thinking as male traits while associating empathic, intuitive, and qualitative thinking with females. This bias not only influences perceptions of women's decision-making abilities but also hampers their opportunities for political engagement. Dighe (2016) argues that true empowerment lies in women's capacity to participate in community and national activities, a sentiment reflected by the need for increased political representation. These societal constructs are deeply rooted in philosophical debates about gender essentialism and the social construction of gender roles, as discussed in feminist theory.

## **5. Educational and Employment Disparities:**

The 2011 census reveals a literacy rate of 67.27% for females in Assam, indicating progress yet highlighting persistent gaps. Enrollment of women in higher education remains low, leading to limited opportunities for employment in the public sector. This disparity in education and employment directly impacts women's ability to engage meaningfully in political spheres, as evidenced by the low participation rates mentioned by the Election Commission of India in 2016 (Bordoloi, 2017).

## **6. Historical Perspectives:**

Pre-independence, women's involvement in politics was minimal, largely due to societal norms referring them to the household domain. The Election Commission of India's reports from 1951 to 2011 reflect the historical trend of low women representation in Assam's legislative bodies.

Despite reserved seats, women struggled to fill these positions, indicating deep-rooted challenges in their path to political empowerment.

## **7. Current Scenario:**

The Assam election of 2021 saw 74 women candidates (7.8%) contesting for Assembly seats, yet only six succeeded in securing positions. This statistic represents the persistent barriers faced by women in Assam's political landscape, emphasizing the urgent need for concerted efforts towards gender equality and feminist development (Badwe, 2021).

## **8. Conclusion:**

Women in Assam face many challenges in politics due to societal, educational, and legislative barriers. Despite efforts like the Women's Reservation Bill, women's political representation remains low, as seen in the 2021 Assam Assembly elections. Issues like low literacy rates and employment opportunities further limit women's participation.

To change this, we need to improve education for women, challenge gender biases, and fully implement laws like the Women's Reservation Bill. Empowering women and removing these barriers is crucial for creating a more inclusive and fair political system in Assam. Only then can women truly contribute to shaping the state's future.

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