

## **“Political Participation And Awareness Among The Rural Women: A Case Study Of Nagaon District Of Assam**

**Dr. Kunhi Sikha Bhuyan**

*Nagaon, Assam*  
kunhisikha@gmail.com

### ***Abstract***

*The study of the political participation of rural women of Nagaon District has great significance in terms of understanding the socio-economic condition of rural women, the problems which are faced by them and also their consciousness and awareness towards the politics of the state. It's the need of the time to know the problems and to find out the solution, that how we may create a society where women's are equally participating in all aspects. Now a day it is a very big problem in front of the state about inequality in between men and women in the society in terms of social, economic and political. It's a very serious concern that till twentieth first century half of the population which is women is not getting same treatment as like men. There are constitutional safeguards for women but till today the discrimination, deprivation, exploitation is going on against the women and especially against the rural women. . A modest attempt has been made here to throw light on the issues connected with the rural women of Nagaon district for solving the existing problem.*

### **Objectives:**

The following are the specific objectives of the present study:

- (1) To find out women participation in the political process of the grass root level.
- (2) To find out the obstacle in front of the rural women in participating politics.
- (3) To find out the obstacle in front of women to protection her rights and dignity.
- (4) To find out the status of “Women Empowerment”.

### **Hypothesis:**

With a view to examine the above objectives the following hypothesis are tested in the present study.

- (1) Rural women are not aware about politics.
- (2) There are some obstacles in front of the women participation in social and political activities.
- (3) Women are politically not empowered.

### **Methodology:**

The present survey has been confined to rural areas. The research design and methodology devised in this paper is being presented which has been designed keeping in mind the focused objectives and with the aim of acquiring accurate and authentic data. To complete the research both historical and empirical methods have been adopted. All the analysis is done on the basis of primary and secondary data. For collection of data, the main source will be “Field study”. Both forms of data will be tries to be collected i.e., primary as well as secondary.

For the collection of primary data, mainly the techniques of ‘Questionnaire’ will be filled up by me. The main instrument for collection of primary data is the questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed keeping in view the objective of the study.

The selection of respondents was through simple random sampling. All recorded data relevant to the study were collected. The Panchayat office records, the development block records, the Nagaon Zila Parishod records, district administration records, different organization records have supplied information on the socio-political status of rural women of the district are collected in between June to October 2015.

After the data collection work will be completed it will be tabulated and presented in the form of analysis. Cross tabulation technique is also adopted for analysis.

### **Profile of the District:**

Nagaon formerly known as Nowgong is the central district of Assam. Nagaon District comprised the present Nagaon and Morigaon district until 1989, when the Morigaon district was separated as a distinct district, which was a subdivision till then Nagaon District had three subdivisions; Nagaon, Morigaon, Hojai. Later the present Nagaon District was again divided into three subdivisions Nagaon, Kaliabor and Hojai. Nagaon district occupies an area of 3,831 square kilometers (1,479 sq mi). Nagaon extends from 250-45' to 260-45' North Latitude and 920-33'-6" East Longitude. The district is bounded by Sonitpur district and the river Brahmaputra in the north, West Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills in the south and East Karbi Anglong and Golaghat district in the east. The mighty river Brahmaputra flows along the northern periphery of the district. Other major tributaries meandering through the district such as Kolong, Kopili drain into the Brahmaputra.

**Table: 1.1** Demographic characteristics of Nagaon

year	population	Density per sq.k.m	Sex ratio	Literacy rate
1991	1893171	494	929	54.74%
2001	2314629	582	944	61.73%
2011	2823768	711	962	72.37%

Source: census report 2011

Out of total population of the District 86.91%, around 24, 54, 234 people lived in villages among them 12, 03,249 are female. The sex ratio in villages is 962 and the literacy rate among female is quite lower than the urban is only 65.52%.

### **Administrative Division:**

On the administrative front, Nagaon is the District headquarters of Nagaon district and it has 3 civil sub divisions namely Nagaon, Kaliabor, Hojai with 10 revenue circles and 18 development blocks. 7 Towns of the district, Nagaon town tops the list with highest population of 1 26,115. District has 240 gram panchayats, 20 Anchalik panchayat one Zila parishod in 1375 inhabited villages. There are 18 community information centers and number of police station is 21.

### **Participation in the political Affairs:**

People's participation in the socio-political affairs is a major factor determining the level of awareness and participation. Democratic decentralization of political power in the form of local governance has

been one of the significant post-independence political developments of India. The essence of such decentralization process essentially needs active public participation with clarity of political ideology. For successful democratic decentralization in the country, peoples' participation is must at the grass root levels. The survey shows that the level of participation is quite high among the sample households at all levels. The 2014 Parliamentary election under Nagaon Parliamentary Constituency 80.74% of female it means that 589454 female voter cast their voting rights. More than 97% of the total households reported to cast their votes in the Panchayat, Assembly and Parliamentary elections. Religion wise distribution indicates that Muslim is more active in casting their votes as compared to the other religions.

**Table: 1.2** Age-wise Distributions of the Respondents:

Age Group	Number	Percentage
<25	85	26.57%
26-35	90	28.12%
36-45	75	23.43%
46-55	45	14.06%
56>	25	07.82%
Total	320	100%

An analysis of the present age of sample women as presented in table 1.2 reveals that 26.57 per cent women are under 25 age group, 28.12 per cent women are come in between 26 to 35 ages. 23.43 per cent respondents are in between 36 to 45 ages. 14.06 per cent women are in between 46 to 55 ages and remaining 7.82 per cent respondents are above 56 years of ages.

**Table 1.3** type of the family of the respondents

Types of family	Number	Percentage
Nuclear	185	34.26%
Joint	355	65.74%
Total	540	100%

Classification of respondents according to the type of family has been shown in Table No. 1.3. It is observed that 65.74 per cent of families were joint families, while remaining 34.26 per cent were nuclear families. It was seen that the percentage of the nuclear family is increasing day by day but an overwhelming majority of the respondents is from Joint family system. Therefore it can be concluded that respondents have other members in the family to look after the members in the family and other affairs of the family such as education, welfare of children etc.

**Table 1.4** the nature of involvement in the process of the decision making by the respondents

Involvement in decision making	Number	Percentage
Actively involvement	107	19.81%
Moderately	97	17.97%
Less involvement	187	34.62%

No involvement	149	27.60%
Total	540	100%

Table 1.4 shows that how the rural women participated in the decision making process. Decision making process includes decision taken in the grass root level and in panchayats. Almost 19.81 per cent rural women of the district actively participated in the decision making process including political decision i.e. whom she cast vote etc. not only in the home but also in the meetings of the panchayats they actively participated and forwarded their view points. 17.97 per cent rural women of the district moderately participated in the decision making process, they are interested but due to some factor like pressure of domestic works, children's responsibility etc. they cannot openly participated. 34.62 per cent women does not actively nor moderately participated their involvement is less in the decision making process. The main reason behind that less involvement is family and social binding. 27.60 per cent women of the rural area of the District has no involvement in the decision making process. Due to lack of proper knowledge and traditional outlook thinking they are totally not involved in the decision making process whether it was at home or outside.

**Table 1.5** interest of the respondents in politics

Opinion	Number	Percentage
Yes	390	72.22%
No	150	27.78%
Total	540	100%

Table 1.5 proves that the rural women of the district have interest in politics. Around 72.22 per cent women say that they have interest in politics and they want to participate in the different aspect of the politics of the district if they get opportunity to do that. In the last parliamentary election 2014 more than 75 percent women casting their votes with almost equal with men. Around 27.78 per cent women say that they are not interested in politics. Most of them dislike politics because they are dissatisfied with the system and their representatives as well as some say are that they dislike because of the criminalization of politics and corruption.

**Table 1.6** Do you want to participate in politics

Views	Number	Percentage
Yes	250	46.29%
No	85	15.74%
Cannot say	205	37.97%
Total	540	100%

Above table shows a very interesting figure that 46.29 per cent respondents are wants to participate in politics. It means that they are interested in politics and if they get chance they can prove themselves. Only 15.74 per cent women are not like to involve in politics. They are not interested because they thought that this may hamper their family life. 37.97 per cent women cannot say anything about participation in politics. In concluding we can say that a majority of women are interested in politics which is good for the state and also for women.

**Table 1.7** who inspired you to enter in politics

Inspiration	Number	Percentage
Family members	89	16.48%
Husband	43	07.96%
Political party	67	12.41%
Friends'	98	18.15%
Self	71	13.14%
No one	172	31.86%
Total	540	100%

Table 1.7 shows about who inspired women to enter in politics. From the table 16.48 per cent women say's that there family members inspired them to involve in the politics. 7.96 per cent rural women say's that there husband inspired them to enter in politics. Interestingly it's the lowest percentage of all. Its shows that only a minimum number of husband ready to accept that her life partner can participate in the decision making process of the state. The political party whether National or Regional only 12.41 per cent women say's that they are inspired by them. It shows that all the political parties are yet not motivated them well to participate in politics. Political party must try to encourage rural women to actively participate in politics. Due to reservation of seats in panchayats now the parties are encouraging women to contest in the election from their side. 18.15 per cent rural women say's that they are encouraged by their friends. 13.14 per cent women say's that they themselves try to enter politics. These women love to participate in politics without inspiration from others. 31.86 per cent rural women say's that no one inspired them to participate in politics and interestingly it's the highest percentage. Till the society and also women thought that they are not made for participate in politics. We need to change that attitude.

**Table 1.8** do you attend any political meeting

Opinion	Number	Percentage
Yes	376	69.63%
No	164	30.37%
Total	540	100%

Table 1.8 proves that the respondents are politically aware and they are interested to attend in different political meeting organized by different political party. Majority of the respondents told that they usually attended political meeting held in their locality. 69.63 per cent respondents attended political meeting in their life. 30.37 per cent does not attend any political meeting organized by any political party. They told that they does not believe the words of the leaders so, they are not interested to listen their lecture.

**Table 1.9** do you ever exercise your franchise

Opinion	Number	Percentage
Yes	456	84.44%
No	84	15.56%
Total	540	100%

Table 1.9 shows that rural women are aware about her political rights. Majority of women exercise her voting rights in General, Assembly or in Panchyats election. 84.44 per cent women say's that they

always cast her votes in election. Only 15.56 per cent yet not exercise their voting rights. Some of them told that due to not include their names in voter list they could not exercise their franchise. In conclusion, it was proved that the rural women are aware about her voting rights. So, in the last general election women voting percentage in rural area of the district is almost same with the men voters.

**Table 2.1** do you think as a women you faced problems in politics, if you join

Views	Number	Percentage
Yes	172	31.85%
No	231	42.78%
Cannot say	137	25.37%
total	540	100%

The above table explains about women thinking about politics after joining. It was asked that according to you, do you think that if you join politics then whether you faced problems or not. 42.78 per cent respondents say's that no, if they join politics they think that they can overtake all such types of problems which are creating problems in front of them. 31.85 per cent women say's that yes, they think that if they join politics they faced problems. They think that, joining politics may hamper her family and children's responsibility and some of them told that their male partner also do not like it. 25.37 per cent respondents are confused, they cannot say anything whether it was creating problems or not. In concluding we can say that most of them think that it does not create any problem to them when they join politics and most of them say yes they are happy to join politics, if they get chance to participate politics actively.

**Table 2.2** Do your male member creating problems you to participate in Politics

Creating problems	Number	Percentage
Greater extent	91	16.86%
Moderate	147	27.22%
Minimum	140	25.92%
No	162	30%
total	540	100%

Table 2.2 indicates that maximum rural women say's that their male member does not create any problem to them in participating political activities. 30 per cent women are happy that their male member does not interfere them in political decision like in the time of casting vote, joining political party, going to attending any political meeting etc. 25.92 per cent rural women say's that at minimum level their male member interfere them in their political decision making like dictating them not to attend political meeting, at the time of casting vote etc. Further they told that it's not forcefully but they politely told them that do not go or do not cast vote to that candidates. 27.22 per cent women told that their male member moderately interfere them in their political decision making. Interestingly only 16.86 per cent women say's that their male member interfere them in greater extent in the political decision making time like at the time of casting vote, attending in political meeting or joining in a political party etc. the male member forcefully tried to establish their dominance over them and most of them are accept the decision of their male member without voicing against them. The main reason behind this was fear and traditional outlook towards male partner. But concluding it's great to see that

most of the rural women of the district are freely taken their political decision which is great for a democratic country like India.

**Table 2.3** Opinion Expressed by the Respondents on the women’s Political Reservation Bill.

Opinion on Women’s political Reservation Bill	Number	Percentage
Absolutely essential	121	22.40%
Essential	286	52.97%
Not essential	82	15.18%
Not at all essential	51	09.45%
Total	540	100%

Table 2.4 explains about the awareness of respondents on the women’s political Reservation Bill. Among them 52.97 per cent of respondents say that it is essential, 22.40 per cent of respondents are of the opinion that it is absolutely essential, 15.18 percent of women expressed the opinion that it is not essential and a meager proportion of 9.45 percent argued that it is not at all essential. It can be concluded that an overwhelming majority of the respondents are in favour of the bill, because, this has enabled a large number of women to enter into politics.

**Table 2.5** Do you aware about 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendments act.

Views	Number	Percentage
Yes	177	32.78%
No	363	67.22%
Total	540	100%

The 73rd constitutional amendment has created a space for women in political participation and decision-making at the grass-root level. By providing Reservation seats reserving for women in the political institutions will, provide them an opportunity to raise their grievances and other related social and economic problem in a formal forum, a political process necessary to ensure the improvement for all women in all sphere of life. The above table shows that only 32.78 per cent rural women of the district hard about the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment. 67.22 per cent till not hard about 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment and the provision which are related with the amendment. Most of them do not know all but somehow they knew that reservation of seats has been made for women as per the Amendment Act. So, it’s very essential to create awareness among the rural women of the district about the provision which are provided by 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment and how much it was important for them.

### Suggestions

In the light of the above study following specific suggestions can be made for the empowerment and awareness of women through their effective participation in political affairs.

1. Education is the key to all success. Illiteracy is the main obstacles in front of the women empowerment. To make rural women politically aware and conscious we need to expand educational facilities as well as developed girl’s education.
2. Men’s hostility, indifferent attitude and domestic responsibilities are the major constraints in empowerment of women. Therefore, political awareness programmes should make women

understand their constitutional rights and the benefits provided by our constitution to them. Organized timely orientation and motivational programme in the grass root level is beneficiaries to rural women.

3. A long-term solution to women's participation in political activities rests in greater awareness about their role, responsibilities and entitlements.
4. Participatory approaches need to be adopted by the women and we also provide them the space.
5. There is the need for regular orientation and training programmes that will help to increase the political and management skills of women. Being politically skillful, they will be able to understand and assimilate diverse political opinion, participate intelligently in political debates and analyse issues to make useful decisions.
6. Political empowerment of women need more support from officials, public and most importantly her male partner.
7. Minimizes corruption in panchayats level.
8. Gender discrimination should be minimized or avoided. Traditional outlook of the society and family towards female should be changed.
9. Reservation for women should be continued to ensure their empowerment through greater participation in political administration and decision making. More reservation for women in Panchayats and in other local body is suggested for the empowerment of women. It's good if parliament of India passes Women Reservation Bill which provides 33 per cent reservation of seats in Parliament and Assembly, may open the door for more women in direct participation of politics.
10. Organized more political awareness programme, seminar and workshop for women.

In the light of the objective set for the study following conclusion can be drawn on the basis of empirical analysis.

- Most of the respondents at least knew that reservation of seats had been made for women from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and they were in favour of the Bill. This shows that the awareness level of women in rural area is quite high.
- Most of the respondents are comparatively young age group.
- A over whelming majority of the respondents franchise their voting rights.
- Most of the women are from non-political background and entered politics due to the pressure of political parties, husband and family members.
- Social status of the family tends to bear a strong influence in determining women empowerment in politics than the economic status of the family.
- The nature of participation by the respondents in Panchayat proceedings and the village level meetings are quite encouraging.
- Involvement of women in the public activity is important for empowerment of women.
- Majority of the respondents have strong consciousness of their role in Panchayats and grass root level politics and they are capable of handling Issues independently. They can proves that they are capable to take right Decision independently.
- Dominance by male members still exists in the grass root level. The respondents think that only illiterate and ignorant are dominated by male.
- A majority of respondents have shown interest in continuation in politics.
- Majority respondents have interest in politics. Most of them attend different political meeting.
- Most of the women confidence that when they enter politics they can sort out all difficulties.
- A majority respondents told that they are not encourage by anyone to participate in politics.



- The problems faced by majority of the women in politics are balancing, Family life and professional career, lack of previous political experience, Lack of knowledge of the Panchayat Act, lack of awareness, inferiority Complex and lack of self-confidence.