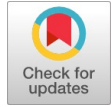


Women Participation in Political Affairs During Covid 19: A Study of North East States of India

Meenu Sharma



Abstract: Women have been suffering a lot during the Covid-19 pandemic. Women have faced psychological, social, economic, and political problems during the time of the pandemic. Traditional norms, the natural environment, the economic condition of women, the social system in society, and the education system for women are some of the factors that have been affecting the political participation of women. In 2021, assembly elections were conducted in Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Pondicherry. The elections in these states have shown that women's participation in political affairs is more important. The women party workers have participated in all types of party-related activities and election-related tasks, like male party workers, but women's participation in political affairs has decreased due to the burden of other households and caring attitudes towards family members during Covid 19 in the northern states of India. The objectives of this paper are, to analyze the status of women's participation in political affairs during Covid-19 in the North East States of India and to find the reasons for the nonparticipation of women in political affairs during Covid-19. Data was collected through a primary tool structured questionnaire from the sample of 124 women through Google form and telephone interviews, from the four states of the Northeast, states Assam (39), Meghalaya (31), Manipur (29), Arunachal Pradesh (25) of India. 96 (77.42%) of the women respondents have been participating in political discussions, rallies, meetings, and campaigns during elections. 88 (70.97%) of the women respondents have been participating in political affairs by casting their votes during elections. None of the women respondents have formed a political party and contested elections in their state. 96 (77.42%) of the women respondents have an interest in political affairs.

Keywords: Covid-19, Psychological, Social, Economic, Natural Environment, Economic Condition

I. INTRODUCTION

Women have been suffering a lot during the Covid-19 pandemic. Women have been facing psychological, social, economic, and political problems during the time of the pandemic. Political activities like elections for state assemblies, panchayats, and municipal bodies have been held in many states as the timely conduction of elections is very important for democracy. The role of women is also equally important in the political affairs of the government. Women play an equal role in policy formulation and policy implementation.

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The number of elected women representatives in the parliament has increased from 5% in the first Loksabha.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature related to research conducted on women's political participation shows that different factors have been influencing the political involvement of women in their countries. (Leite, 2021, [1]) Discussed that political participation by rural Quilombola women is hindered by the lack of transportation, and community demobilization. Social movements, trade unions, resident unions, and religious groups help in increasing the political participation of women. (Heger, 2021, [2]). Feminist paradigms have empowered women for political participation (Wahyuni Iskandar, 2021 [3]). Political reforms have also improved the political involvement of women in Indonesia. They have realized that their vote decides the future of their region. Systematic collaboration of political parties and community organizations is required to increase women's political participation. (Malmberg, 2021, [4]). Women participate actively in elections and cast their votes when they face cases of corruption. According to (Meera, 2021 [5]), for the political development of a nation, women's political and social rights are important. These rights are denied to Afghan women. The natural, cultural, and traditional conditions and norms are rigid. So women are unable to use their political rights. (Indriyani, 2020, [6]). Due to prevalent social, cultural, and religious norms, women have been facing injustice in society, and they are not able to participate in political affairs equally to men. (Mukasheva, 2020, [7]), Women participate in politics in a limited way and a major role is played by men in political activities. Due to traditions and the educational system, women have been playing a secondary role in society. (Wang, 2013 [8]). In the eastern Chinese villages, the political participation of women is low due to a lower level of education, economic dependency, lack of government efforts, and women's organization organizations' efforts. (Saleem, 2020, [9]) During the Mughal period, many women showed their courage in the political field and in administration too. Many Hindu and Sikh women have also played an important role in political politics as well as in the administration of India.

Traditional norms, the natural environment, the economic condition of women, the social system in society, and the education system for women are some of the factors that have been affecting the political participation of women. No literature shows women's participation in political affairs during COVID-19. So the present study is very relevant to the present situation of pandemics worldwide.

A. Women's Political Participation in Assembly Elections During Covid-19

In 2021, assembly elections were conducted in Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Pondicherry. The elections in these states have shown that women's participation in political affairs is more important. The women party workers have participated in all types of party-related activities and election-related tasks, like male party workers. In election-related rallies, campaigning, and meetings and gatherings at different places, women workers were seen equally participating, following the COVID-19 protocol and in some cases not following the COVID-19 protocol.

Most of the political parties have also included welfare schemes for women in the election manifesto to attract women and voters. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women voters equally participated and cast their votes. Now women are more concerned about the party manifestoes and try to analyze the benefits declared by the different political party candidates during the election campaigns. Now women are also casting their votes according to their choices and interests (Mehta, 2021[10]).

In Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh, women voters are over 50% of the electorate. Moreover, the ultimate voter list demonstrated the incorporation of vagrant laborers and a drop in young people enrolling themselves as voters. Election Commission sources pointed out that among states, the participation of women voters is very high in Bengal. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the participation rate of women in the state was as high as 81.7%, which is the best among major states in the country. Among the 7.2 crore voters, the number of men is 3.7 crores, and the number of women is 3.5 crores. The final list shows that there has been an addition of 20.4 lakh voters, which has led to an increase of 2% compared to the draft roll published in November 2020. Sources indicated the fresh inclusion was due to enlisting migrant voters. (Gupta, 2021, [11]).

B. Women Population in North-Eastern States

According to the 2011 census, the total population in Assam is 31,205,576, which includes a women's population of 15,266,133, and the total population of Manipur is 2,855,794. The women include 1,417,208 the total population of Meghalaya is 2,966,889 which includes a women population of 1,475,017, and the total population of Arunachal Pradesh is 1,383,727 which includes a women population of 669,815. The number of women in these states is almost equal to the male population.

The difference in the male and female populations is not so significant. The Northeast part of India is full of natural biodiversity, hills, and natural and mineral resources. This region is mainly popular for handicrafts, coal mines, tea, and petroleum. The economic activities and business activities are not as developed as in India's western and northern parts. There is a need to develop proper transport facilities, infrastructure, and economic organization in this region. This region is more important for international trade and is a gateway for South Asian countries.

C. How Can Women Participate in Political Affairs?

Women can participate in political affairs, by expressing their opinions on political issues, participating in political

discussions, rallies, meetings, and campaigns during an election, forming a political party, contesting the election, and casting their votes during the election.

D. Statement of Research Problem

Women's participation in political affairs has decreased due to the burden of other households and caring attitudes towards family members during Covid 19 in the northern states of India.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the status of women's participation in political affairs during Covid-19 in the North East States of India

2. To find the reasons for the nonparticipation of women in political affairs during Covid-19.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data was collected through a primary tool structured questionnaire from the sample of 124 women through Google form and telephone interviews, from the four states of the Northeast, states Assam (39), Meghalaya (31), Manipur (29), Arunachal Pradesh (25) of India.

A. Findings of the Study

According to the study, women have participated in political affairs during Covid 19: Data from the 124 women was collected from the three states of the northeast state of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh of India, which include 65 (52.42%) of the women respondents from rural areas and 59 (47.58%) of the women respondents from urban areas, all the women respondents were literate, 86 (69.35%) of the women respondents were working and 38 (30.65%) of the women respondents were not working anywhere. 29 (23.39%) of the women respondents were in the age group 18 to 25, 33 (26.61%) of the women respondents were of the age group 25 to 35, 23(18.55%) of the women respondents were in the age group 35 to 55, and 39(31.45%) of the women respondents were above the age of 55 years. The study shows that 113 (91.12%) of the women respondents have been expressing their opinion on political issues in a homely environment and discussions in their neighborhood only.

96 (77.42%) of the women respondents have been participating in political discussions, rallies, meetings, and campaigns during elections. 88 (70.97%) of the women respondents have been participating in political affairs by casting their votes during elections. None of the women respondents have formed a political party and contested elections in their state. 96 (77.42%) of the women respondents have an interest in political affairs.

Most of the women respondents have not been able to participate in political affairs due to social norms of society, their economic dependence on the male members of the family, and lack of political education. Poverty and unemployment are also reasons behind the nonparticipation of women in the political affairs of the state [17].

Women political leaders have been able to influence the political participation of women voters more than the male political candidates. The door-to-door campaigning by the women's candidates was also the main factor candidates in women's participation in political affairs during the Covid-19 (Barthwal, 2021, [12])

During the pandemic situation, mass gatherings were not allowed and in some regions, there was a total lockdown. Women were not allowed to move out of their houses to discuss political issues, and they were more concerned about the health issues of their family members [13]. Work-from-home and lockdown situations have not given enough time to women to think more about political issues, unlike the male members of the family [14]. In some families [15], the sorrow and pain of lost family members affected the female members more than male members [16].

B. Reasons for Nonparticipation of Women in Political Affairs During the Covid-19

- I. They have to be involved in many tasks at home, from domestic kitchen work to care for children and elderly people at home.
- II. They devote more time to taking care of family members.
- III. They are conservative in their thinking; and think more about the health and well-being of their family members.
- IV. Some women have to do household work and office work at home, taking online classes, so they feel overburdened with work.
- V. Expectations of family members have increased for women during the age of 19th. Family members expect that they should perform all the duties there.

V. CONCLUSION

There is a need to promote women's participation in political affairs for gender equality and the stability of democracy in our country. Women can play a very decisive role in political policy formulation and implementation. There is a need to recognize their role and input into political affairs.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The adequate resources of this article are publicly accessible.
- **Authors Contributions:** The authorship of this article is contributed solely.

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Dr. Meenu Sharma is currently working as an Associate Professor in the Department of Public Administration at the Assam Royal Global University, Guwahati, Assam. She has 19 years of teaching experience. She has supervised the research work of 10 doctoral scholars and 16 M.Phil Scholars. She has presented 60 research papers at international and national conferences/seminars in India. She has attended and completed 20 faculty development programs/refresher programs/orientation programs/workshops. Her 46 research papers have been published in national and international journals.



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