

Political Participation of Women in Tripura since Independence

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ABSTRACT

The recent participation levels of women in formal politics in India reveal two positives that augur well. First, the upsurge among women voters that started in the 1990s reached the highest female turnout ever, so far, in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Second, women's participation in high-voltage election campaigns during the 2014 general elections also showed a substantial increase. However, the continued under-representation of women in legislative bodies and within the rank and file of political parties offsets the momentous gains made in the people-driven feminisation of electoral politics in India. Within a brief historical context identifying the beginnings of women's electoral participation in India, the article presents a time series analysis of women's voting patterns, showing that there have never been concerted efforts by political parties to mobilise female voters on any issue concerning women in either national or state level elections. Promises by political parties in their manifestos on gender issues remain clichéd and are conveniently forgotten after the hustings. India's failure to pass the Women's Reservation Bill is presented as the most telling testimony about lack of seriousness among political parties in taking better account of women's increasing electoral participation.

Keywords: Women, Political participation, voting rights, equality, patriarchy, Reservation Bill, Institution, Ideology, Gender equality, Political will, Religious belief.

According to Herbert Mc Closky "Political participation refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and, directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy. These activities are: casting vote, seeking information, holding discussions, attending meetings, making financial contributions to political parties, staging strikes and demonstrations, communicating with the legislators and other leading figures and the like. However, the most active forms of political participation are formal enrolment in a party, canvassing and registering votes, speech writing and speech making, working in campaigns and competing for public and party offices."¹

Tripura state is located in the north-east part of India. It is surrounded by Bangladesh on three sides. The Tripuri

dynasty ruled this ancient kingdom for several centuries (642-1949) and at last handed over the administration of the kingdom to the government of India in 1949. Sixty-eight years (1949-2017) have passed since the historic passage from monarchy to democracy in Tripura. In terms of time, the period is significant to examine the degree of political participation of the voters in general and of the women in particular. The future of a democratic nation largely depends on the character of political participation of the voters, both male and female.

Aims and Objectives of the study

The aim of the present study is to investigate into the dearth of law relating to political participation of women in the present scenario and then try to develop

the concept of empowerment of women through the achievement of the following objectives.

1. To briefly recollect the role of women in the development of democracy in Tripura.
2. To outline the trend of political participation of women in Tripura.
3. To assess the political status of women in comparison to man in Tripura.
4. To suggest the recommendations for escalating women political participation in politics.

Literature Review

A review of literature is made on the studies related to women's political participation. The contribution as well as the role of women in the politics as well as the development of a nation is essential. But several socio-economic and political causes impediments to the women's political participation.

Stockemer (2009) argues that the state needs to provide its citizens the political freedom and promote self-development: "Ideally women should have both the right to equal involvement in decision making processes and right to take a stand on issue".

Waylen (1996) claims that the role of women in authoritarian administration is 'traditional and limited' to women. These perceptions discourage women in politics.

Matland (1996) argues that economic advancement is one of the factors which can be enable womens entering into politics. Economic independence empowers women to engage in politics. In this case women are not so good in socio-economic sector as compared to men.

According to Skard (2015), womens participation in politics is strongly and massively influenced by the family members: "When the parents are politically engaged and political issues are often discussed at home". Several instances have worldwide can be mentioned to understand impacts, influences of the political engagement of parents. India's first Prime Minister was Jawaharlal Nehru and his Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister and same stories happened for Sheikh Hasina.

Hunt (2007) suggests that women need to use and pay attention for their advantage, not as a detriment.

Jalanai and Krook (2010) state that leadership styles of female politician affect their political participation. They follow masculine policies instead of women-friendly policies.

Research by Browne and Barret (1991) found a strong association between female education and socio-economic development at both the individual and societal level.

Oduol (2008) found access to education and lack of quality education still remains a barrier for many women. That shows education ill-equips women for leadership.

Method

According to the nature of the topic, descriptive method is used as suitable research method for this study and data are collected from various secondary sources are mentioned below:

- (i) Census Reports of India
- (ii) Economic Review of Tripura 2013-14, published by Govt. of Tripura
- (iii) Relevant books
- (iv) Reference books
- (v) Website of Election Commission of India
- (vi) Report from the Department of Panchayat, Govt. of Tripura
- (vii) Report from the Department of Rural Development, Govt. of Tripura
- (viii) Website of the Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Tripura
- (ix) Website of the Tripura Legislative Assembly
- (x) National and Local Daily Newspapers

The collected data through survey are supported and supplemented by checking, comparison and verification.

Political Participation of women in Tripura in Pre-independence period

Tripura was a native state ruled by the Tripuri dynasty

for several centuries, before independence of India. The *Maharaja* of Tripura did not allow any political activity in the state. As the people of Tripura state were not directly under the British rule; the anti-British attitude was not so much prevalent among the people of Tripura. So, Political activities among common people of Tripura were almost absent during monarchy.

But, it does not mean that Tripura state was always free from political activities. Some political activities were started in Tripura against the British rule. The Indian National movement which gathered a momentum with the *Swadeshi Movement* in Bengal since 1905 had its influence in distant Tripura too. The people of Tripura reacted to the people's movements in India. The *Swadeshi Movement* in Bengal since 1905 was perhaps the first occasion when Tripura was brought into the arena of people's movements against the British imperialist power. From this time onwards, the people of Tripura despite domestic constraints essayed to play their due role in successive phases of National movement outside their geographical boundary. Along with the rise of freedom fighter Surya Sen (1893-1934), the rejuvenation of the youths found a sudden spurt and spread over an extensive area including Tripura. Some students of Tripura had been residing at Comilla district of Bengal, for higher studies, come into contact with the revolutionaries of Comilla. They were instrumental in channelizing these ideas into Tripura. Under Surya Sen's influence a student organisation, called 'Chatra Sangha' came into existence in Tripura in 1927. It had the real aim of preparing themselves for armed revolution against the authorities. It provided open encouragement to reading books and plays on the theme of Bengal revolutionaries. In 1928, 'Bhratri Sangha' a similar organisation was formed in Tripura, led by Sri Shachindralal Sinha and Sri Pravat Roy.² Following the ideology of Jugantar group in Bengal. Similar organisations were set-up at Brahmanbaria and also at Agartala.

Political participation of Indian women, though in a miniature form, started with the freedom movement. Mahatma Gandhi was mostly instrumental for arousing political consciousness in the poor, illiterate women and making them take part in the freedom movement.

In the galaxy great women freedom fighters of Tripura, the names of three very young women (Santi, Sunity, and Pritilata) stood out prominently for extraordinary bravery. The Chattagong Armoury raid by Surya Sen (1893-1934) on 18.4.1930 was followed by the murder of the Comilla Magistrate C.G.B. Stevens on 14.12.1931 by Santi and Sunity; and Pahartali European Club attack on 23 September 1932 by Pritilata. Next in the order comes the name of Lilabati Nag (=Lila Roy). She confidently opened and managed several schools, girl's boarding houses, temples and associations; she was imprisoned since 1931 to 1938 and 1942 to 1946. Prafullanandini Brahma was jailed in Steven's murder case.³

Political Participation of women in Tripura in Post-independence period

After independence, the Constitution of India guarantees adult franchise and provides the framework for women to participate actively in politics. Article 15 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. It is a pity that women have not substantially availed of the constitutional provisions.

Political participation of women requires that they would be involved in active decision making in political arena. Two important political activities reflect to some extent, the status of women in terms of their political awareness and empowerment: (a) Participation of female voters in the election process; and (b) The number of female contestants and winners in the Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and Panchayat elections.

The successive election statistics shows that the number of women who exercise their franchise has increased from election to election. For the last two decades almost equal numbers of men and women have gone to the polling booths to cast their votes.

But, the number of women submitting their nomination papers in any election, national or State, is only a fraction of the corresponding number of men. Some withdrawals at the last moment make contesting candidates to become fewer in number. Ultimately the number of women winning elections is so small that their percentage in the legislative body and State Assembly is nominal.

Table 1: Proportional turnout among women compared with men in Elections to the Legislative Assembly in Tripura

Year	Voters			Votes			% of voting		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
1967	NA	NA	666637	NA	NA	432019	NA	NA	71.21
1972	406712	359381	766093	284765	231288	516053	70.02	64.36	67.36
1977	495342	466656	961998	406052	358878	764930	81.97	76.90	79.51
1983	579123	555134	1134257	495281	446504	941785	85.52	80.43	83.03
1988	684596	658470	1343066	590887	560771	1151658	86.31	85.16	85.75
1993	855052	817976	1673028	707725	650519	1358244	82.77	79.53	81.18
1998	893538	833925	1727463	732368	664197	1396565	81.96	79.65	80.84
2003	1000309	931411	1931720	809492	710925	1520417	80.92	76.33	78.71
2008	1038782	999219	2038001	942604	916518	1859122	90.74	91.72	91.22
2013	1201209	1157284	2358493	1089860	1075622	2165482	90.73	92.94	91.82
2018	1311983	1268119	2580113*	1146889	1159086	2305977**	87.42	91.40	89.38***

Source: 1. J. Ganchoodhuri: Political History of Tripura

Election Commission of India report; * = Including 11 voters of third gender; ** = Including 2 votes of third gender; *** = including 18% vote of third gender.

Let us examine these two aspects of political participation of women in Tripura.

It reveals from the table 1 that women’s political participation has been gradually increased in Tripura. From the 2nd Assembly Election of Tripura in 1972 to 5th Assembly election women’s political participation had been increased; but, from 6th to 8th elections women’s voting turnout decreased; again, from 2013 Assembly election voting turnout increased. It is also observed that in last three consecutive Assembly elections of Tripura, women’s voting percentage is higher than men voters. So, it may be assumed that above 91% women in Tripura are conscious about their political rights.

It may be argued that with the increasing literacy rate, the voting percentage of women is also increasing. The literacy rate of Tripura in 2011 was 87.22 percent for the population of age 7 years and above, which was 73.2 percent in 2001 and 60.44 percent in 1991. The corresponding figures in 2011 for males and females were 91.53 percent and 82.73 percent respectively. As per recent study conducted by the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Kolkata, the literacy rate stands at 95.16 percent in 2013. The male literacy rate is 97.93% and female literacy rate is 95.71%. It has shown the highest literacy rate in the country.

High percentage of voting is not only the criteria of political participation. Political participation includes the active involvement and engagement by both women and men with political procedure which affect their lives. The act of active engagements includes voting, standing for office, joining of political party or to take part the political campaigns of the political parties and to exercise influence in the decision making process through dialogue with the representatives they elected or through their capability to organize themselves; or exercise public power by holding public office at different levels - local, regional and national. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality in status of women cannot be achieved.

The table 2 shows the women representation in Tripura Legislative Assembly.

Table 2: Number of Candidates contested and elected in Legislative Assembly by sex in Tripura

Year	Contested		Elected	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1967	86	1	30	—
1972	230	4	60	—

1977	322	6	59	1(17)
1983	195	11	56	4(36)
1988	213	07	58	2(29)
1993	392	15	59	1(7)
1998	249	21	58	2(10)
2003	258	18	59	1(6)
2008	282	31	57	3(10)
2013	234	15	55	5(33)

Source: Election Commission of India Report.

As shown in the above table, the number of women representatives in Tripura Legislative Assembly remained microscopic for the last four decades. The table also shows the percentages of elected representatives out of the contestants were much lower in the case of women. The negligible representation of women in the Legislative Assembly of the state may be either an index of their powerlessness or their subordination to male counterpart.

Table 3: Number of Candidates Contested and Elected in the Lok Sabha by Sex in Tripura since 1977

Year	No of Seats	Contested		Elected	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1977	2	8	-	2	-
1980	2	10	1	2	-
1984	2	10	-	2	-
1989	2	12	-	2	-
1991	2	15	2	1	1
1996	2	18	2	2	-
1998	2	10	1	2	-
1999	2	17	-	2	-
2004	2	6	-	2	-
2009	2	8	9	2	-
2014	2	22	3	2	-

Source: 1. Women in India-A statistical Profile, 1997; 2. Daily Desher Katha; 3. Election Commission of India.

The table 3 shows that female participation in Parliament, which is the highest decision making body, has been insignificant in case of Tripura. This dismal scenario of women representation in the Parliament reflects the continuing patriarchal values on the part of the political parties towards the question of political empowerment of women.

Women's political representation in the grass-root political institutions was possible through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment Act (1992), which is the landmark provision of reserving not less than one-third of the total number of seats in the local bodies for women.

The Tripura Legislative Assembly unanimously passed two bills reserving 50 percent seats in civic bodies, including three-tier Panchayats and Municipal bodies, for women in 2010. The Tripura Panchayat (Fifth Amendment Bill), 2010 and The Tripura Municipal Bills (Fourth Amendment Bill) were passed unanimously which were placed in the House for amendments to reserve 50 per cent seats for women in civic bodies. This amendment Act provided the much-needed opportunity for women in Tripura to actively participate in the decision making process of their locality through the political right that was conferred on them.

The table 4 shows, during the period from 1994 to 2004, the percentage of women representatives at Gram Panchayat level have declined for SC and ST women and it has increased for general women. Provision of 33 percent reservation has been fulfilled at this level.

The table 5 shows that at Panchayat Samity level the percentage of women representatives have increased in case of SC and general women but it has declined for ST women. But at present reservation policy for ST candidate is being maintained in case of women reservation in grass-root politics. Overall, 33 percent reservation was maintained for women representatives during 1994 to 2004.

The table 6 shows that in Zila Parishad the representation of women increased for ST and SC women but it has declined for general women between the period 1994 and 2004. Overall, women have been elected in more than 34 percent seats.

The tables 7, 8 & 9 indicate increasing number of women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions. Reservation of seats has been maintained in every occasion.

It is found that women have been playing a meaningful role in running the local self-government in Tripura. It is true, initially women were hesitant to enter this whole

Table 4: Number of Elected Representatives in Gram Panchayat during Panchayat General Elections 1994, 1999 & 2004

Year	No. of Gram Panchayats	No. of elected Representatives											
		Sc			ST			General			Overall		
		Female	Total	Female as % of total	Female	Total	Female as % of total	Female	Total	Female as % of total	Female	Total	Female as % of total
1994	525	519	1237	41.96	289	704	41.05	1001	3486	28.71	1809	5427	33.33
1999	537	614	1490	41.21	129	286	45.10	1152	3909	29.47	1895	5685	33.33
2004	513	547	1408	38.85	113	291	38.83	1125	3553	30.80	1785	5352	33.35

Source: Directorate of Panchayat, Government of Tripura.

Table 5: Number of Elected Representatives in Panchayat Samity during Panchayat General Elections 1994, 1999 & 2004

Year	No. of Panchayat Samity	No. of elected Representatives											
		Sc			ST			General			Overall		
		Female	Total	Female as % of total	Female	Total	Female as % of total	Female	Total	Female as % of total	Female	Total	Female as % of total
1994	16	17	48	35.42	13	26	50.00	37	122	30.33	67	196	34.18
1999	23	27	105	25.71	11	26	42.31	68	168	40.48	106	299	35.45
2004	23	33	78	42.31	05	15	33.33	68	206	33.01	106	299	35.45

Source: Directorate of Panchayat, Government of Tripura.

Table 6: Number of Elected Representatives in Zila Parishad during Panchayat General Elections

Year	No. of Zila Parishad	No. of elected Representatives											
		Sc			ST			General			Overall		
		Female	Total	Female as % of total	Female	Total	Female as % of total	Female	Total	Female as % of total	Female	Total	Female as % of total
1994	3	4	15	26.67	4	7	57.14	16	48	33.33	24	70	34.29
1999	4	7	29	24.14	2	6	33.33	19	47	40.43	28	82	34.15
2004	4	8	23	34.78	3	4	75.00	17	55	30.91	28	82	34.15

Source: Directorate of Panchayat, Government of Tripura.

new political arena. But over the last three decades women have enriched themselves through their active participation in the developmental activities, in the local bodies. It has been proved that women in Tripura are not passive or disinterested in political institutions, also they are not proxy members. The State government and other organisations are recognizing outstanding women leaders in the Panchayats. Although representation of women is higher in the Panchayat Raj Institutions in Tripura, the scenario of women’s representation in Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly reflects the continuing patriarchal values on the part of the political parties towards the question of political participation of women.

Reason behind women’s less representation in higher decision-making bodies

While the Constitution of India provided universal franchise with equal rights to both men and women, existing societal values, the private–public spheres but masculinity create barricades for women for exercising electoral rights and equal participation in elections. The lack of critical and quality representation of women in key decision-making positions results in women’s agenda not getting reflected and addressed in public policies and programmes. The public agenda of Indian men and women elected as people’s representatives

Table 7: Elected Pradhans in Gram Panchayat in Tripura, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 & 2014

Year	No. of Gram Panchayat	No. of elected Representatives							
		SC		ST		General		Overall	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1994	525	53	34	111	55	177	95	341	184
1999	537	54	31	41	31	253	127	348	189
2004	513	97	46	13	13	226	118	336	177
2009	511	143	56	26	7	342	115	333	178
2014	591	94	79	15	16	197	190	306	285

Source: Directorate of Panchayat, Government of Tripura.

Table 8: Elected Chairpersons in Panchayat Samity in Tripura, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 & 2014

Year	No. of Panchayat Samity	No. of elected Representatives							
		SC		ST		General		Overall	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1994	16	03	00	02	03	05	03	10	06
1999	23	02	02	03	02	10	04	15	08
2004	23	04	03	01	00	10	05	15	08
2009	23	6	1	1	1	16	6	15	8
2014	35	5	5	1	1	12	11	18	17

Source: Directorate of Panchayat, Government of Tripura.

Table 9: Elected Sabhadhipaties (Chairpersons) in Zila Parishad in Tripura, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 & 2014

Year	No. of Zila Parishad	No. of elected Representatives							
		SC		ST		General		Overall	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1994	03	01	00	00	01	01	00	02	01
1999	04	01	00	00	01	01	01	02	02
2004	04	00	01	00	00	02	01	02	02
2009	04	01	01	0	0	03	01	02	02
2014	08	01	01	0	0	03	03	04	04

Source: Directorate of Panchayat, Government of Tripura.

is quite different and their priority of public works undertaken is also dissimilar.

Political factor

Political will is the big factor to get clearances in Indian politics. Especially, in case of women's issue like reservation policy, the country witnessed the political poverty and reluctances of political parties for supporting the reservation bill. Although, one third

seat reservation has been passed in delay. But women had great roles and fought for independent India. The political parties are dominated and controlled by male. As result, nomination and selection process of women in political parties are biased against women. So, it is very difficult to enter in political arena for women.

Ideological factor

Ideological factor is another important impediment for

women political participation. The glass ceiling concept is existing in political system of India which is barrier for women advancement. Gender ideology and cultural perceptions as well as predetermined the social roles as assigned to women and men. Sexually segregated the role of women and men in the patriarchal society. Women are housewives and they have certain roles to take care of the family and its members as well.

Family is the main institution of patriarchy, which explains in greater extent gender inequality. In many societies' women are portrayed as weak and incapable of making firm decisions. They have been depicted across generations to be only capable of insignificant matters, constantly engaged in gossip and rumour, utterly incompetent and less intelligent. This belief was projected and reinforced through the years through male-dominated institutions and patriarchal societies. With the constant reinforcement of the notion that women are inferior in every aspect, it became hard for women to pursue their political rights as an active participant. The truth is that such attitudes are not a thing of the past. Such attitudes towards women still exist in societies all over the world – in both developed and developing countries.

Socio-economic factor

In Tripura, like in many parts of India, traditions continue to put emphasis on women's primary roles as mothers and homemakers and to restrict them to those roles. A traditional strong, patriarchal value system favours sexually segregated roles, and 'traditional cultural values' challenge against the advancement, progress and participation of women in any political process. There is division of works between men and women, which means home activities are belongs to women and outside home activities are belongs to men. Women are overburdened with different household activities like cooking, take caring kids, washing and so on. These all activities make women busy in the household and hinder their involvement in the politics of the country. In some cases men even tell women how to vote, whom to vote. So, these traditional ideas about women affect women's levels of representation throughout the political process, from an individual woman's decision to enter politics, to

party selection of candidates, to the decisions made by voters on Election Day. Women face discrimination as leaders because people tend to assume that leadership is a masculine trait.

Religious reason

Keeping out of women from religious institutions and religious leadership may have a negative impact on limiting their opportunities in politics and public life. Hence, religion is one of the outdated cultural beliefs in many communities in the country that excludes women from political leadership. In most religions, power and authority is belonging to men, hence, subjugating women. Thus, women are encouraged to play subsidiary roles since their place is in the kitchen and men are the decision makers. Arguments about women's inferiority to men are present across all dominant religions, and traditionally religion has long been used to exclude women from social, political, or religious life around the world.

Economic reason

Economic status of women to a greater extent plays a significant role in enhancing their participation and representation in political decision-making bodies. Lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles that prevent women from participating in politics in greater numbers. Most of the woman has no money of their own to meet rising cost of running an effective campaign; this create another hurdle for women in the developing world. In fact, women's participation in politics depends largely on their access to employment which gives them not only material independence, but also certain professional skills and grater self-confidence.

Recommendations

Some recommendations are given for effective women's political participation in India, (1) To enforce stringent measures to stop corruption, criminalization and communalization of politics. (2) To ensure that women are taken seriously in their elected post by allotting important portfolios and limiting their functions to social welfare and women and child development.

(3) To enforce stringent ceiling of funding expenses incurred for election campaigns. (4) Legal system aiming at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women should be strengthened. In addition to that, awareness level about laws should also be raised among women. (5) Women should be provided leadership and communication training. (6) The Representation of People Act, 1951 should be amended to compel political parties to provide for mandatory nomination of the women candidates for at least one-third of the seats to avoid de-recognition as a national party. (7) All the women organizations should come on a common platform with single target of pressing the political parties to either support the passing of Reservation Bill or face the anger of women voters in the next general elections because a critical mass of women is a pre-requisite for the effective political participation of women.

CONCLUSION

It is observed that 33 percent reservation of seats in Three-tier Panchayat institutions has made Indian women active participants in political arena. So, certain measures for effective participation of women in the arena of state and national level politics may be suggested in this connection: At least one-third of the Tripura Legislative Assembly seats may be reserved for women; among two Lok Sabha seats in Tripura, one seat may be reserved for women; Periodical training for newly elected women representatives may be conducted; training-cum awareness building programmes may be initiated for greater impact on male mentality towards their counterparts, so that women are given enough space to exercise their role in political institutions; economic independence is a pre-condition for political empowerment of women. Elected women representatives have to depend on their husbands or other male members of the family for their living. In such a situation it is difficult for women, mostly coming from the marginalized sections of the society, to perform their responsibilities effectively. Hence, means of livelihood should be ensured for them. Honorarium and sitting allowance of elective representatives in grass-root level may be increased.

END NOTES

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