

Challenges of Women Participation in Politics: A Case Study of Karbi Anglong District

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Abstract:

Participation of women in the political landscape plays a crucial role in shaping and promoting society. In order to greater representation and economic development, the Karbi Anglong District was divided into two districts named Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong Districts in 2016 under the authority of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC). In both the districts, the representation of women in political roles remains remarkably scarce. Many barriers contribute to the under-representation of women in politics, such as the stronghold of patriarchal norms, limited access to education and health, gender inequality, isolated location, economic disadvantage, and a lack of political guidance and mentorship. For instance, the gender inequality index of both the districts was 0.14% and 0.20% and the gender gap index obtained for both the districts were 0.70% and 0.74% respectively, as per the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) survey 2025. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) survey 2019-21, the Human Development Index of the Karbi Anglong district is 0.652, ranking 542 in overall districts of India. Moreover, in the NFHS-5 survey 2019-21, the multidimensional poverty index was 16.20% in the district. In order to empower women and promote gender equality, it provides reservation seats for women in the Constitution of India. The key findings of the study show that in the recent KAAC election of 2022, only six women candidates participated out of 154 candidates, accounting for 3.89%, and were able to elect only four seats with 15.38% out of 26 seats. It's also noteworthy that no women candidates have been elected from both the districts in the Legislative Assembly and the Lok Sabha elections yet. Currently, the KAAC government reserved four seats and one nominated seat for women candidates to step forward for women's emancipation in the latest council election. As per the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2019, 33% of seats have been reserved for women under the sixth scheduled Autonomous District Council.

Keywords: Women Participation, Karbi Anglong, Decision Making, Empowerment, Constitutional Amendment, Lok Sabha

Introduction:

Karbi Anglong district is comprises diverse cultures and ethnic groups surrounded by Golaghat and Nagaon district in the North, Dima Hasao and Nagaland in the South, Nagaland and Golaghat district in the East, Hojai and Morigaon district in the West respectively. Political participation is an essential pillar of democratic government. A democratic society is based on equality where there is space for all voices and ultimate powers rest with the people. Participation in the collective affairs of the community was considered important for the rational self-development of the citizens; it was the highest form of good

life that they could hope to achieve, fulfill themselves, and live honourably (Bhargava & Acharya, 2025). According to Mathews and J.W. Prothro defines political participations all behavior through which people directly expresses their political opinions. In a broader sense, political participation refers to activity that is designed to affect governmental decision making and actions (Ashraf & Sharma, 2015). Providing equal opportunities in a decision-making platform promotes socio-economic development as well as solid bonds of nation-building. Therefore, women's representation in political affairs is essential to ameliorate their rights and share thoughts on implementing policies. Women are constantly expressing their leadership influence felt in commerce, management, academia, architecture, healthcare, and other sectors on a local, national, and worldwide scale (Sharma, 2019). Nevertheless, disparities of socio-economic, health, and educational facilities in society promotes to low participation for women in politics. Apparently, the impetus of traditional customary law and caste system are interrupt women as decision-making leaders in diverse processes and resources. These customs of practice triggered gender discrimination in society. In this context, participation of women in political landscape is extremely limited in the Karbi Anglong district. The Karbi Anglong district suffers from a complex web of problems that the present leadership has failed to address due to their detachment from the grassroots people and engagement with their own interests (Mousumi, 2016).

2. Aims and Objectives:

1. The aim of this study is to focus on women's candidates' participation in the KAAC Election.
2. To examine the contributing factors of underrepresentation of women in the political landscape.
3. To focus on resilient measures to empower women's participation in decision-making

3. Research Methodology:

To find out scientific research, this paper adopted the qualitative and descriptive research design. This paper is also collected from secondary sources, including Census of India, Economic Survey, Ministry of Human Resource Development, National Family Health Survey, National Sample Survey, Assam State Election Commission, Assam Human Development Report, Economic Survey of Assam, Assam Sustainable Development Goals Report, Project works of the National Council of Applied Economic Research, Relevant Books, Journals, Peered Reviewed Articles, Newspaper and Web sources.

4. Results and Discussion:

In order to safeguards and promote the Karbi culture, socio-economic and political identity the Constitution of India provides Autonomous District Council to ensure self governance and autonomy under the Sixth Scheduled of Articles 244(A) and 275(1). In terms of political participation, the women of Karbi Anglong are very low. Currently, as per the state election commission of Assam, the total voters of women in the East Karbi Anglong district are 2, 57,827 and 1, 11,927 in the West Karbi Anglong district respectively.

Table 1: Total Voters of Karbi Anglong District

District	Name of the Contituency	Male	Female	Third Gender	Total
Karbi Anglong	108. Bokajan (ST)	75168	75032	0	150200
	109. Howraghat (ST)	91393	93449	6	184848

	110. Diphu (ST)	87918	89346	12	177276
	District total	254479	257827	18	512324

Source: State election commission of Assam, 2024

Table 2: Total Voters of West Karbi Anglong District

District	Name of the Contituency	Male	Female	Third Gender	Total
West Karbi Anglong	111. Rongkhang (ST)	64863	63800	1	128664
	112. Amri (ST)	48415	48127	0	96542
	District total	113278	111927	1	225206

Source: State election commission of Assam, 2024

Women candidates’ participation of Karbi Anglong District in Politics:

The first general election of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council was held in 1952. There were no women participating as candidates in the first election. The stronghold of a male-dominated society, extreme rate of illiteracy, lack of financial assistance and lagging behind in infrastructural development in the district lead to the underrepresentation of women in politics. As a result, no female candidates appeared in the KAAC elections from 1952, 1957, 1962, 1971, and 1978. It is mentionable that the women candidates participated for the first time in the KAAC election in 1989 with only one member out of 148 candidates, secured with 0.67%, 3.22% in 1996, and 3.40% in 2001. Although the number of elected female candidates in the KAAC election gradually improved since 2007, they secured one number of seats with 3.84% out of 26 constituencies in the district. Likewise, 2 women were elected, with 7.69% in 2012, 1 female candidate was elected with 3.84% in 2017, and 4 women candidates were elected, with 15.38% in the last KAAC election, 2022. Participation of female candidates is very limited in the legislative and the Lok Sabha elections from the district. In the legislative assembly elections of 1985 to 2021, only one participated as a candidate and elected members of female could not be occupied yet. Not more than one member of female candidates participated in the Lok Sabha election. In 1991, contesting women's candidates were nil, one in 1996, 1999, 2009, and 2014. Moreover, there were no women candidates who participated in the last Lok Sabha election of 2024.

Table 3: Women participation in the KAAC Election from 1952 to 2022

Years	Total candidates	Total women contestant	In %	Elected	Elected in % out of 26 seats
1952	12	Nil	0.0	Nil	0.0
1957	22	Nil	0.0	Nil	0.0
1962	32	Nil	0.0	Nil	0.0
1971	66	Nil	0.0	Nil	0.0
1978	134	Nil	0.0	Nil	0.0
1989	148	1	0.67	Nil	0.0
1996	62	2	3.22	Nil	0.0
2001	147	5	3.40	Nil	0.0
2007	168	7	4.17	1	3.84

2012	128	6	4.6	2	7.69
2017	168	9	5.35	1	3.84
2022	154	6	3.89	4	15.38

Source: (Political history of Karbi Anglong by Borsing Rongphar)

Performance of women’s candidate from the above table no 3 in Chart

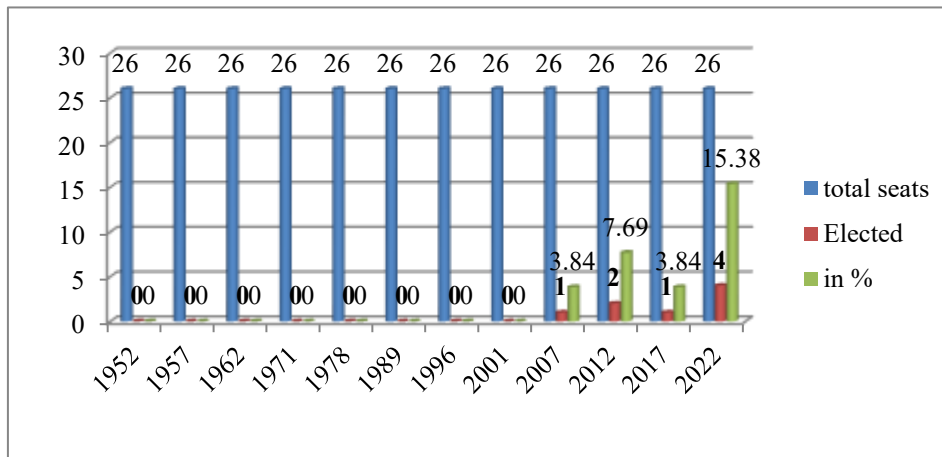


Table 4: Women participation in the Vidhan Sabha Election from Karbi Anglong District

Years	Total candidates	Total women candidate	Elected	Elected in %
1985	19	1	Nil	0.0
1991	21	1	Nil	0.0
1996	18	1	Nil	0.0
2001	23	0	Nil	0.0
2006	30	1	Nil	0.0
2011	15	1	Nil	0.0
2016	21	1	Nil	0.0
2021	29	1	Nil	0.0

Source: (Political history of Karbi Anglong by Borsing Rongphar)

Table 5: Women participation in the Lok Sabha Election from Karbi Anglong District

Years	Total candidates	Total women contestant	In %	Elected	Elected in %
1991	5	0	0.0	Nil	0.0
1996	6	1	16.66	Nil	0.0
1999	4	1	25	Nil	0.0
2004	6	0	0.0	Nil	0.0
2009	6	1	16.66	Nil	0.0
2014	5	1	20	Nil	0.0
2024	5	0	0.0	Nil	0.0

Source: (Political history of Karbi Anglong by Borsing Rongphar)

Challenges faced by women in Political landscape in Karbi Anglong District:**Socio-cultural Barriers:**

1. Patriarchal Dominance : Basically, the gender discrimination issue has no impact on tribal society. Although women are not rendered to equity facilities in terms of inheritance property rights and practice of socio-religious perspectives. Noteworthy, the persistence of traditional customary law and priority for son preference reflects the diminishing of women's participation in the decision-making platform of the Karbi Anglong district.
2. Illiteracy factors: This incessant issue promotes scarce position for recognition of women's leadership. Pragmatically, extreme poverty, poor transportation connectivity, isolated location, lack of modern infrastructural educational institutions, and superstitions stirring on women's capacity building. It can also be considered that the political voice of women is marginalised. As a result, the female literacy rate of Karbi Anglong district is 61.81% compared to 76.14% of males as per the 2011 census.
3. Lack of family support/community support: Regarding household work, the family members are supported by women's engagement in cooking, child-rearing, and management of other domestic burden. Substantial avoidance of family support directly abrogated recognition of women's leadership in decision-making pathways. Consequently, the Gender Inequality Index of both the East and West Karbi Anglong districts is 0.14% and 0.20% respectively.
4. Violence and Harassment: Targeting sexual harassment and intimidation against women marking its gender discrimination and legally unfair in society. Therefore, women are physically and mentally at high risk of political campaigning. According to the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) survey 2023-24, the sexual and physical violence rate in both the districts was 17.23% and 22.50%.
5. Early Marriage: Lack of a well-planned family policy, illiteracy and the prevailing of the traditional customs system are the contributing factors of early marriage in the district. It has promoted issues of poverty, growing population, robust loss of per capita income, and health issues. For instance, as per the survey of NCAER 2023-24, the pregnancy rate of a girl child aged below 18 is 0.39%. Moreover, in 2024, there were a total of 126 cases were registered and 56 arrested against child marriage under the POCSO Act in Karbi Anglong district.
6. Health issues: Lack of good quality productivity in terms of medicinal facilities for women fostering maternal mortality rate. According to the National Family Health Survey 2019-2021 report, the maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births) in the Karbi Anglong district was 200 and the adolescent birth rate (births are 1,000 women ages 15–19) 56 and in the West Karbi Anglong District was stand 200 and 21 respectively.

Economic Barriers:

1. Lack of financial support: Generally, the possession of inheritance property rights has been entrusted to the male side of the family members compared to girls' children of Indian society. Unwilling to financial assistance it may acknowledge to detrimental to women's empowerment as well as political participation. As per the NCAER's survey 2023-24, the Women Capacity Index (WCI) was 0.10% and 0.16% in both of the districts. Furthermore, the percentage of deprived women was 25.83% and 38.59% in both of the districts.

2. Income disparity: Women are primarily engaged in household work. In order to promote and safeguard the livelihood of women, it has deprived them of equal workforce participation for earning of income. Serving family members is the sole mindset of the parents that paved inadequate status of women's representation in politics.
3. Lack of economic freedom was the persistent challenge of women's rule in the political platform. As per the surveys of PLFS 2012-22, the labour force participation of women was 9.52% compared to 97.07% of males in the Karbi Anglong district and 23.74% against 78.09% of males in the West Karbi Anglong district respectively.
4. Unequal domestic and unpaid care work disparity against women promotes inequality in politics. The gender-based difference between the daily wages paid for men is Rs.350–Rs.500, and females are Rs.250-Rs.350 per day.
5. Limited access to economic assets and credit include loans, credits, and subsidies facilities from the banking institutions leads to declining possess of women in democratic ways of political participation.

Political Barriers:

1. Male-dominated party structures will promote to discourage of women's leadership. As per the estimation of the NCAER Gender Gap Index on political empowerment, both the districts account for 0.722% and 0.717%.
2. Lack of political support from the family members. As per the NCAER estimation, the gender gap index of both the districts obtained 0.70% and 0.75%.
3. Lack of confidence and linguistics barrier acknowledge the scarce performance of women's candidates in the district.
4. Lack of leadership training and mentorship guides such as seminars, public city, drama, mock-drill, poster campaigning, etc.

Findings of the study:

1. Expansion of Digital Media, development of higher educational institutions including Assam University Diphu Campus, Diphu Medical College and Hospital, Model College, and other infrastructural development have gradually improved the representation of women candidates in political participation in the Karbi Anglong district. As a result, the women candidates occupy 3.74% in 2007, 7.69% in 2012, 3.74% in 2017, and 15.38% in the last KAAC election, 2022.
2. Lack of self-employability and skills training: Pragmatically, the women of Karbi Anglong District keep away from the knowledge of vocational, digital, and financial literacy like trading, tailoring, handloom, nursery and micro-entrepreneurship that leads to poverty. As per the NFHS-5 (2019-2021) report, the poverty ratio was 16.20% with intensity 42.5% and the multidimensional poverty index was 0.0068 in the district.
3. Illiteracy issue: Apparently, isolated location, lack of transportation connectivity, extreme poverty of parents and the prevalence of traditional practice and norms delineates to low participation of women in politics.
4. Early marriage issues have depleted the shaping and growing bonds of women in society. Rationally, the prevalence of superstitions, illiteracy, and poverty are contributing factors to women's low

participation in politics. According to NFHS -4 surveys 2015-16, women's pregnancy rate is 7.6 under 15–19 years of age in the district.

5. Kinship politics are also prominent, promoting factors that lead to women's underrepresentation in politics in the district. Practically, in the present political scenario of the district, it can be observed that the candidate selection process favors those who are the family members of the executive members of KAAC, the minister or MLA, or the members of Parliament.
6. Linguistic barrier was the pivotal challenging factors for women specially the tribal women which contribute to low rate of performance in the different elections. For example, speaking skill in public city, lack of confidence in social media like debating, talk show, news channel, and anchoring leadership in front of reporter.
7. Shyness of contact with the wider community especially the tribal women facing the reverse status of women in leadership making.
8. Lack of capacity building and good mentorship guide in terms of awareness programmes on women's empowerment.

Concluding observation and Recommendations:

The inherent persistence of social barriers promotes gender inequality and discrimination in society. As a result, poverty, early marriage, and mental health disorders affect women in society. To uphold peace, discipline, unity, and integrity, society needs to provide equal positions for both males and females. In modern society, the democratic form of government has been adopted, and it ensures equality of rights, justice, freedom, and liberty for all. In this context, political participation is a pivotal pillar of democratic nations. Furthermore, it has promoted sharing of equal expressions, speech, ideas, and thoughts. Therefore, providing equal participation for females in decision-making promotes healthy democracy. It also shapes and reaffirms the development of national income, human resource, accountability, transparency, and effectiveness to promote strengthening nation-building. However, the persistence of traditional customs, lack of financial aid, and a high rate of illiteracy affect women's scarce possession of decision-making in the Karbi Anglong district. There are some suggestions has given below, [a] Binding legal quotas for women's reservations to boost decision-making in political affairs, [b] Encouraging political parties is mandatory for women candidates to uphold equal status, [c] Encourage women's education and literacy awareness programmes, [d] Promoting capacity building and training on different platforms through seminars, talk shows, drama, publicity, leadership skills, etc, [e] Promoting financial support and economic freedom for women to exercise their rights and sharing thoughts in the political landscape, [f] Addressing social barriers faced by women should be explored in terms of rape, intimidation, sexual harassment, suicide, kidnapping, mental disorders, etc, [g] The role of mass media is also a crucial factor that explore the rights of women on the global platform through digital media like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, podcasts, television, and other modern technologies of communication.

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