

1. INTRODUCTION:

Democracy in today's world has become like a label that every country tries to aspire for. Democracy requires effective participation of people. Success of Democracy depends on the participation, alertness of people about the existing political/public institutions, proceedings, happenings in the political system. Democracy shrinks in the absence of these elements.

The concept of Democracy has expanded certain terms that have become very common such as election, party, etc. Election appears to be becoming a standard form of Democratic format spread all over the world. Maximum political participation of the people is the key for the success of democracy. One such form of effective participation in the Democracy is the participation in elections. But it has been observed that political participation of people in elections has declined over the years. Women constitute half of the population. Without proper participation of women, democracy cannot succeed. Studies in other places have shown that political participation of Indian women is not up to the expected level.

It has been observed that Indian women are not free to cast their votes in elections according to their own choice; women are still influenced by the decisions of the male members of their family. Sometimes, some of them cannot come to cast their vote due to differences of opinions regarding the choice of candidates with their male counterparts.

Therefore, proper steps have to be taken to increase the rate of political participation of women. They should be made aware of their right to vote and to they should be made to learn about the importance of political participation. The kind of apathy towards the political system that has developed among the people has to be removed.

‘Awareness’ is a process by which people keep themselves informed about economic and social realities in a geographic setting, their political right and duties, function of political institutions and more importantly their role outside the political institution.

The prevailing social structure of India is such wherein women still play a subordinate role in their homes and in the society as well. Women, in general, are not allowed to participate in the decision-making process. Decision of women is not considered important. They are only

passive observers. Society does not consider women competent to take decisions. Woman's involvement in decision-making will take her closer to the objectives like- equality, development & peace. Only then can she bring her situation under control.

1.1 UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY:

Handique Girls' College of Guwahati was chosen as the field of study. It is situated on the south bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra. Handique Girls' College was the first girls' college in the state, established in 1939.

The study tried to assess the level of consciousness among the young women, and their efforts to arouse consciousness among other women. Our study was also endeavored to identify the factors, which help or hamper the process of improving the consciousness level of women. For this purpose, a set of comprehensive 'Questionnaires' was distributed among the students of the college.

1.2 COMPOSITION OF STUDENTS:

Handique Girls College was the first girls' college in the state established in 1939. Girls belonging to different linguistic, ethnic and religious groups and from different parts of the North East region come to receive education in Handique Girls' College.

1.3 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY:

1. Awareness Level of young educated women is high in political area than any other areas.
2. Reducing the voting age limit has helped to increase political awareness.
3. Young educated women show high interest in political issues.

1.4 METHODOLOGY:

This study is primarily based on field survey method. However, Data collection has been done from both secondary and primary sources. Primary data were collected with the help of questionnaire and interview method based on random sampling method. This study was

carried out on this sample. 140 questionnaires were distributed among the TDC second year students i.e. approximately 11% of the total students admitted (901) for the session 2010-2011.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To bring forth a clear picture of the socio-political awareness of women, particularly of the young women,
- 2) To assess the sense of responsibility of the said section of women towards the socio-political and economic development of the society as an educated member of the society,
- 3) To make an assessment of the nature and extent of their contribution towards the political life of the state,
- 4) To secure information about their political participation and non-participation, and
- 5) To investigate into the reasons behind their being or not being conscious of the political development and problems.

2. Analysis of the Problem:

All total 140 questionnaires were distributed among the TDC Second Year students of Handique Girls' College by the TDC second year students of Political Science (Major). The target group was between the age group of 18yrs to 20 yrs, as they have become entitled to exercise their right to vote recently.

Out of 140 questionnaires distributed, we received 113 filled up questionnaires. Out of 113 respondents, 90 respondents were from town or city areas and 23 were from rural areas. (Table: 1)

Table: 1
Age wise Classification of Respondents

Age-Group	Numbers
18	109
19	03
20	01
Total	113

Election appears to be becoming a standard form of Democratic format spread all over the world. But it has been observed that political participation of people in election has declined over the years. Therefore, proper steps should be taken to increase the rate of political participation. People should be made aware of the voting process and they should be educated about the importance of political participation. The intention of the study was to assess the level of awareness of the young voters. So we wanted to get the information about exercising of voting rights by the students.

Participation of women in politics has also been increasing significantly over the years.¹ Women of India have been participating in politics since 1937, when limited adult franchise was granted to women. The first Lok Sabha (1952-1957) had 4.4 per cent women MP's while in the 13th Lok Sabha (1999-2004), the figure was 9.2 per cent.² As voters (in Lok Sabha election), women's political participation has increased from 63.13% (of total voters) in 1999 to 72.29% in 2004.³

¹ Election Department (Assam);

² BHUSHAN L.1 (CONCERN FOR STATUS AMONG EDUCATED WOMEN, 1993. P.7)

³ www.igovernment.in (blogs.thehindu.com)

More significantly, the 73rd and 74th amendment of the constitution provides for reservation of one-third seats for women in the rural and urban local self-bodies. The participation of women in the political arena has thus assumed much importance.

In Assam, women's political participation as voters (in Lok Sabha election) has been increased significantly.⁴

To assess the level of political participation among the young voters the respondents were asked regarding the exercise of right to vote in the last Assembly election, the responses received from the respondents are as illustrated in the following table (Table: 2).

Table: 2
Exercise of Voting Right in the Last Election

Did you vote in the last election?	No. of Students
YES	82
NO	30
No Response	01
Total	113

The respondents who did not exercise their right revealed the reasons,

- 8 out of them mentioned that they do not have faith in the system of election, and
- 8 respondents mentioned about lack of time to go to vote, and
- 3 respondents had other engagements
- While 14 respondents did not cast their votes because of some other reasons.

⁴ Report of the General Election to the House of People (Election Department, Assam Secretariat, Dispur).

There is a need to assess the quality of government to make Democracy successful. We need to think about the working of democratic government. In the present political conditions, one party ruling the government is of least possibility, which has led to the Coalition Government of the allied parties being formed. Respondents' knowledge regarding the present Government at the Centre is as shown in the Table: 3 below:

Table: 3
Knowledge about the Government at the Centre

NDA	NIL
UPA	25
BJP	01
CONGRESS	86
No Response	01
Total	113

Responding to the question regarding name of the leader of APCC, 64 out of 113 respondents replied correctly.

To have an idea regarding the system of election, government etc. knowledge about the voting, constituencies is considered important. Young generation must equip themselves with such basic knowledge. The reply to the query regarding the number of constituencies in Assam for Assembly elections was as follows:

Table: 4
Number of Constituencies in Assam

Correct Response	48
No Response	42
No idea	23
Total	113

The election process in India revolves around the commonwealth concept of representative democracy, which had been once thought to save the world from monarchy and autocracy. Even though the representative form of democracy has succeeded in driving the nation for the past 65 years, in practice it is yet to be implemented fully. Some of the elected representatives enjoy all their privileges without being accountable for their duties. Their recklessness goes unchecked along with influential peddling, favoritism, and willful negligence. They walk away scot-free, have no fears about wrongdoing and get elected yet again. It felt necessary to enquire about the knowledge of our young citizens regarding the representatives we send to the lower House of the Parliament after every five years. Students were asked about the total number of MP's to the Lok Sabha from Assam, to which the students expressed their view as follows:

Table: 5
Knowledge about the numbers of MP's to Lok Sabha from Assam

No. of Respondents	Answers
16	10
28	12
56	14
03	16
10	Not Responding
Total: 113	

43% of the respondents responded correctly to the question about the sitting MP of Guwahati.

In Democracy opposition always plays a very important role. Without effective and vibrant opposition, ruling party is likely to become despotic. Benjamin Disraeli's maxim that "no government can long be secure without a formidable opposition" has been proved true and fully valid for the health and efficiency of a democracy. Wherever a system of parliamentary democracy is established, the importance of a healthy, effective, vigilant and ever alert opposition is recognized as something indispensable. Lord Bryce too was a strong advocate of an opposition. Therefore, opposition's role is as important as the ruling party's in a Democracy. The present unpredicted set-up of Assam Assembly without a strong opposition is a matter of debate. The new generation is expecting to be concerned about such matters. To get the idea about the level of consciousness, we asked them about the present opposition in the Legislative Assembly. The following table illustrates the view of the students:

Table: 6
Knowledge on Opposition Party in Assam

Name of the Opposition Party	Students Response
AGP	38
AUDF	62
BPF	03
CPM	03
No Response	07
Total	113

The above table indicates that about 55% of the respondents have the knowledge about the opposition party in the State legislative Assembly.

To make Politics effective machinery, active participation of young generation is required. It has been observed that non-participation of educated, competent young members of the society has turned politics into a dirty game. Although it seems that students are interested in

political matters, they are not interested to be a part of active politics. Responding to the question whether they are interested to join politics, only 11 out of 113 expressed their keenness to join politics. Nine students did not respond and the remaining did not have interest to join politics for different reasons. Those who did not like to join politics mentioned the reasons as illustrated in the following table:

Table: 7
Reasons for Abstaining from Active Politics

Reasons	No. of Respondents
Corruption in Politics	47
Violence in Politics	05
Women are not treated properly in politics	02
Present political situation.(Not favorable for women)	16
Family responsibility	04
Any other	19
Total	93

Government of India has commented several times that serious attempts have been made to address the rising expectations of people with regard to governance and public services and that it is committed to provide security of education, nutrition and health to every Indian. To understand the expectations of our young generation from the Government, we asked the question about their expectations from the present Government. Students' views are as shown in the following table:

Table: 8
Expectations from the Present Government

Expectations	No. of respondents
Solution of the illegal immigrants problem	08
economic development	18
corruption free state	63
development of the state's infra structure	10
implementation of the Look East policy	01
to have talks with ULFA and other insurgent groups of Assam	09
any other issues to be undertaken.	04
Total	113

3. OBSERVATIONS:

It has been observed from the analysis have done above:

- a) Majority of the respondents are the first time voters.
- b) Total 30 out of 113 did not cast their vote i.e 26.5%. In addition, 8 of them mentioned that they did not vote because of lack of faith in the system, which shows that their level of political awareness is not nil. In fact, they are aware about the functioning (malpractices) of election system.
- c) Respondents are less aware about the concept of 'coalition government' at the centre. Majority of them named Congress as the central government.
- d) The study attempted to get the knowledge about the level of political awareness among the students; therefore, we put the question on the number of constituencies in Assam, to which 42.4% of the respondents replied correctly. This is however, not a satisfying indication.
- e) 49.5% of respondents gave correct response with regard to the number of MP's from Assam.

- f) Democracy can turn into a despotic Government without a vibrant and effective opposition. Almost 55% of respondents responded correctly about the opposition party in Assam.
- g) 41.5% of respondents do not want to join politics because of corruption in politics while 14% of respondents blame the present political situation for non-participation in active politics.
- h) Regarding the expectations from the present government, 56% of the respondents want a corruption free state (Table: 8).

4. Findings and Conclusion:

The aim of the study is to evaluate the level of political awareness among the young generation. The field study was conducted among the students of Handique Girls' College between the age group of 18 to 20.

It was that the level of political awareness among the young generation is not disappointing. As they have time to learn and study the situation of the state so that will definitely increase their level of political awareness. We have observed that, 41.5% of respondents do not want to join active politics because of corruption in politics. Moreover, 56% of the respondents want a corruption free state, which can be considered as a positive sign for our state, society as the young generation is showing concern about the corrupt practices, and we can expect a new society from them, which will be free from all types of malpractices.

Almost 73% of respondents had cast vote in the election, which proves that reducing the voting age limit, has helped to increase political participation.

As suggestion, the study can make an appeal to the young generation to increase the level of political awareness in order to make politics free from all kinds of misconducts and to redesign politics for sincere, honest people. Students can be provided the basic minimum political knowledge such as- requirement to assert the right to vote, name of MLA's, MP's, Opposition party etc. For that, the adults must bear the responsibility of making them good and conscious citizens of the country.