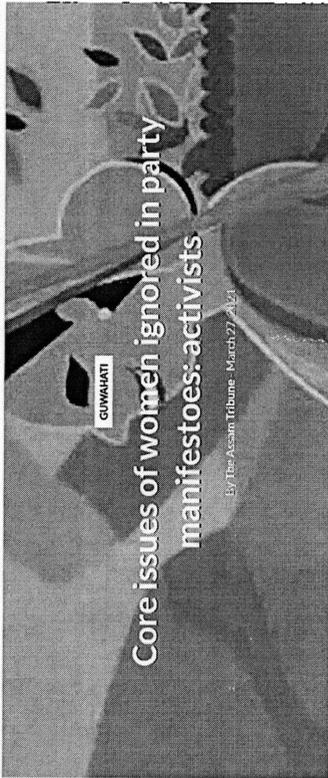


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# The Assam Tribune

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Mamata Mishra

GUWAHATI, March 26: Even as the political parties are pulling out all the stops to woo the voters through their promises and guarantees in order to wrest maximum seats, the core issues concerning half the voters of the State - the women, have largely been ignored in the party manifestoes.

At a time when the safety of women in Assam has raised serious concern with the State topping the chart of crime against women for the third consecutive year in 2020 as per National Crime Records Bureau data, the political parties have totally failed to acknowledge this concern, let alone plan a redressal mechanism, feel women's rights activists.

"Even if all the poll manifestoes include a segment on women empowerment, their planned intervention is limited to making a direct benefit transfer schemes where a few hundred rupees would be given in the bank accounts of women beneficiaries. In the name of safety, making all women police stations at district and sub-division levels has been promised by the two leading parties of the State - BJP and Congress. Going through the poll promises of both the major parties, it can be clearly stated that there is no political will to bring women into the decision-making process or even to create safer spaces for them," said Bondita Acharya of the Women in Governance.

"Even during distribution of party tickets, the women contenders have been totally ignored, which points to the prevailing discrimination against women in politics and also against women in general," she added.

Only 25 women candidates are in the fray in the first phase of the Assembly polls out of a total 264 candidates. The Congress has fielded six women candidates, BJP three and ACP has given ticket to only one woman candidate.

"The regional camp that came into existence through the anti-CAA movement is no different. Despite the fact that women played a key role in the CAA protests across Assam, both the Assam Jatiya Parishad and Rajiv Dal have very few women contestants," Acharya added.

The Asom Mahila Sangha which submits a charter of demands to the State government every year for ensuring safety of women and economic empowerment, too, feels that women's issues are rather included in a clichéd way in the political manifestoes, with real concerns being relegated to the backburner.

"In neighbouring West Bengal, the BJP has announced Mission Atmanirbhar Mahila targeting the women vote bank of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. A huge corpus fund to the tune of Rs 2,000 crore and 33 per cent reservation in government jobs to women have been promised by the saffron party. While in Assam, the BJP government's promises to women include expansion of Oronodal scheme that gives Rs 850 to the women beneficiaries, 24X7 women helpline, micro finance loan waivers, women's hostels, etc. Though there is nothing wrong with these schemes, it is something too little too late for half the population of the State," said Asomi Gogoi, a women's rights activist of the Asom Mahila Sangha.

"The manifestoes of ruling political parties promise special measures for safety and security of women government employees against sexual harassment. As if working women of the private sector, unorganised sector and the homemakers are not the subject and responsibility of the government! We must also understand that women need some long-term sustainable measures for their economic empowerment in addition to schemes like Oronodal," said Anurita P Hazarika of the North East Network (NEN).

"Women are gripped with fear and trauma due to lack of protection and safety in their own homes, workplaces, public transport, streets, markets and other public spaces. These require specific measures," she added.

A number of women's organizations of Assam had prepared a manifesto stressing formulation of a State policy for women's safety and protection with adequate budgetary allocation, establishing women's safety committees at all levels beginning from the panchayat level up to the district and State levels with equal representation of all genders.

With the State recording a number of acid attacks in the last few years, monitoring and regulation of acid sale was also sought. The organisations also stressed appointment of non-political, professional women to head regulatory bodies for effectively addressing women's issues.