

Study On Women Participation In Panchayati Raj Institution With Special Reference To Karimganj District Of Assam

Running Title: Study On Women Participation

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Abstract:

Panchayati Raj institution as a means to good governance and 73rd constitutional amendment was effected in the hope that it would provide political space to the disadvantages groups of the society like schedule caste, schedule tribes and women in the grassroots level. The present study was effort to know the participation of women in Panchayati Raj institution in term of elected representatives and common people who actively participate in politics and the problems faced by them. Sample consists of five GP which is under Karimganj district. The tools used for information was an interview schedule and other secondary sources. The women who are actively involved in politics or elected representatives are not always treated equally with men. Sometimes their views or suggestions in the decisions making are not considered as important.

Keywords: Women Participation, Panchayati Raj Institution, Governance.

Introduction

Women play an important role in the Panchayati Raj System by becoming members of Panchayats and Chairpersons of the respective Panchayats in their area. Involving women in national administration and development was the primary concern and reason for including women in India's Panchayati Raj System. Women in Panchayati Raj System the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 (or simply the Panchayati Raj Act) introduced the three-tier Panchayati Raj system, which paved the way for women in the system as well. It wished to ensure the participation of women and the public in general in rural reconstruction. The Panchayati Raj Act came into force on April 24, 1993. The Act demands reservation of selected posts for women. While the Panchayati Raj Act requires the reservation of seats for women in a few selected Panchayati Raj posts, it also requires newly joined women candidates in Panchayats to acquire a few skills and training through training institutions with the help of the Ministry of Rural Development, which provides financial assistance for the same. The role of Women in Panchayati Raj Systems such as Taking part in the elections, Participation in major decision making, Aiming for reduced violence toward women, Participating in rural development, Becoming an agent of social revolution, Taking steps toward reducing corruption and violence.

Democratic country like India, having Panchayati Raj Institution is very important in political system. Local people involvement in politics is a must and panchayati raj institution is the only way for local people as well as women to involve actively in politics. Voice of women is also equally important with men, but women involvement in politics is sometimes ignored by male dominated society. Various commission have been setup to improve the structure of panchayati raj institution, committees like Balwantrai Mehta committee (1952), Ashok Mehta committee (1977), GVK Rao committee (1985), Sarkaria commission (1988), 64th Amendment Bill were formed and finally 73rd and 74th amendment was enacted in 1992. The Amendment gives 33 per cent reservation for women at the Panchayat and Municipal level.

Evolution of Panchayati Raj System in Assam

The Rural Panchayat Act was enacted in 1948 which introduced two tiers of Panchayat in Assam- Primary Panchayat at village level and Rural Panchayat at Mouza level. In 1959, Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1959 was passed and three-tier system was introduced. These were Gaon Panchayat, Anchalik Panchayat and Mohokuma Parishad. Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1972 again introduced a two-tier system namely, Gaon Panchayat and Mohokuma Parishad. Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1986 was enacted in 1986 and under this act again a three-tier system was introduced- Gaon panchayat, Anchalik Panchayat & Mohokuma Parishad.

New Panchayati Raj act was passed by the Assam assembly in 1994 following the 73rd constitutional amendment act. But this system generally came into existence in Assam after the completion of the Panchayat election in 2001-2002. This system has established a three tier structures of local-self government- Gaon Panchayat at the village level, Anchalik Panchayat at the block level and the Zilla Parishad at the district level. In addition, there is Gaon Sabha at the grass-root level composed of all the voter citizens of a village within the area of a Gaon Panchayat. This marks an important benchmark in democratic decentralization and empowerment of weaker sections of the society.

Background of the Study:

Karimganj district is in the southern part of assam with an area of 1839 Sq.km. It is situated between longitude 92°15 and 92°35 east and between 24°15 and 24°55 east latitude. Barak Valley mainly consists of three districts Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. Karimganj has an International boundary and with other Northeastern states. International border with Bangladesh in its North West side, Mizoram in the south and Tripura on its southwest. The south and south western parts are covered by dense forests and north and north eastern district are plain.

As per 2011 census, the total population of the district is 1228686. The sex ratio of the district is 961 higher than the state level. The female literacy is 70.11 percent and rural literacy rate of the district is 76.66 percent. Most of the population of Karimganj, i.e., 92.67 percent resides in the rural areas and their occupation is mainly agriculture and allied activities. The district is very weak in terms of economic, political and social infrastructure. In the district, the unemployment problem is very high due to high density of population, lack of economic opportunities and shortage of industries in the region.

Review of Literature:

Borah (2020) addresses that development impact on women and men are different, and the past few decades of development have been an alarming degree of feminization of poverty. Development in many cases has had negative impacts on a large proportion of women in general and rural women in particular. The study also highlighted that Women in India are victims of a multiple socio-economic and cultural factors. Though women need to be empowered in all the areas, it is essential to make them economically independent. The author also found out that Most of the people in the rural areas are of the opinion that women should be allowed to contest and participate in PRIs more than one third seats if time and situation permits them. However, the family members of the rural women in particular and the society in general have to ensure women equal participation in the decision making process.

Garg, and Sharma (2020) seeks to redress existing gender imbalances in enterprise development through approaches and activities aimed specifically for women. There is a need for change in society in dealing with women. This study also presents efficacious strategies for mobilizing women, building their capacities and ensuring their effective participation in governance structures. However, the study highlighted that lack of interest in its activities and objectives amongst the women. The women were burdened by household responsibilities and social pressures and restrictions added to their inhibitions and reluctance to come out of their homes. The established dominance of their male associates on the PRIs and the opposition of vested interests led to poor participation by EWRs. The idea of women as leaders is not easily acknowledged at the community level or indeed even by government officials.

Nagarajan (2019) the study mainly attempt to make some recommendations to the governments along with the support of political parties, NGO's, Stakeholders, academicians and general public take a necessary action such as conduct free and fair election, create the political awareness among the women particularly in rural areas, special training and refresher courses for women representatives conduct from time-to-time, Make special provisions for the women representatives and give them more powers as compared to male counterparts and educate them about their powers. It helps them to work efficiently and effectively. The paper also highlighted some problems of the women in local level politics. Non-co-operation of male members they are predominantly based on the basis of gender discrimination during the implementation of programmes at panchayat level, Unnecessary political intervention by the male domination from the ruling political parties in the functioning of panchayats. Intervention of male members in the family of women representatives, Husband's interventions of an elected woman in her functioning in her panchayat welfare activities and also mostly actual decisions are being taken by their male partners and his family members. However, women also have some traditional mind set that males are superior to women.

Das S.(2014) revealed that rural women lack in decision making in any aspects whether economic, social, political or family matters and are dictated by their male counterpart. Under such a situation the rural women of Karimganj district of Assam faced problems to actively participate in grass root level democracy. For ensuring active participation in any activity one must have complete knowledge. The study highlighted that in the district the poor level of awareness is due to the existing illiteracy among the rural women, secondly, they are also politically illiterate and thus are not politically conscious; thirdly, they are dependent on their male counterpart and thus, finds no need of gathering knowledge or have no queries too. In such a stand where complete awareness is far behind, to ensure complete involvement from the female participation in panchayats is a far behind dream. However, it is to be noted that in order to bring all the women force in the mainstream of development they should be more conscious of their rights as well the benefits that they can enjoy which are meant for them. They must be more politically conscious to ensure their complete participation in democracy.

Ansari (2014) revealed that the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution particularly in Barak Valley is low and for their activities they are dependent on others. Most of the time, they are not in a position to take a decision on their own and are not able to take positive decision. The study also found out that the progress of women in panchayati raj institution is slow and it will take more time to attain women's goal. Because women are irregular in the Panchayat activities due to worth missing their daily wage and worry about their crying babies and family. So it may be suggested that elected women in each district may develop a network among them and hold meetings and discussions on routine basis about necessary measures to promote their participation and neutralize male domination in local-self bodies.

Parida (2010) observed that there should be increased emphasis on ensuring the participation of women in the meetings of Panchayats at all the levels. This is needed to promote and enhance their leadership qualities and self-confidence. It will help them to perform better in the Panchayats to ensure their participation in the meetings. Attendance of all women must be made compulsory from Gram Panchayat to Zilla Parishad. The author also highlighted that incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision making. It has been noticed that there are very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Panchayat, who have been successfully implementing the developmental scheme and have ensured over all development of their constituencies. Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honoring them in public meetings. It is true that only women can effectively voice their pent up feelings, requirement and perspective in development processes.

Sahni S.(2009) the study revealed that neither the reservation for women or their actual presence in the Panchayat have become any more sensitive to the problems related to the village women. The women who are elected are not always treated with due respect. Many elected women complained that their suggestions were not considered seriously nor were they consulted while decisions were being made. Some felt that their views were ignored only because they are women. At times they were pressurized by their husbands to approve their decisions made by the male dominated Panchayats. However, the women should also be encouraged to organize themselves. The Mahila Mandals in the village can be effectively used as instruments to mobilize them for this purpose. Some successful women's organisations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging the women's participation in social and political activities.

Sharma (1998) revealed that strong women candidates are discouraged by men in order to retain hold over core public space which they do not want violated. The study also highlighted that women's representation as being largely proxy in nature also undermines the possibilities that reservation offers. It is also found that the lives of women representatives are controlled by their husbands, in-laws and political parties. The husband of the panch or the sarpanch, (panch-pati, sarpanch-pati) is often seen as the real wielder of power. Men alternately see women as a threat to their authority, or as a source of status enhancement. Lack of information and knowledge also poses a serious problem to women representatives.

Research Questions

1. What are the roles played by women in Panchayati Raj institutions?
2. What are the problems faced by women for actively participating in panchayati raj institutions?
3. What are the provisions made by government of India for women participations in politics?
4. How many women are aware of their political rights and why some educated women ignored to participate in politics?

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

- (i) To find out whether the constitutional amendments really contribute to women's empowerment or patriarchal practices still continue to dominate in the society.
- (ii) To understand the participations of women and their role in Panchayati Raj and how far the involvement and representation helps for women's empowerment.
- (iii) To know the socio-economic conditions of the women participation in the Panchayati Raj institution with special reference to Karimganj district of Assam.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. To collect the primary data regarding involvement of rural women in panchayat interview schedule is conducted and a standard questionnaire is used. Secondary data are collected through Books, newspapers, articles and other online sources.

Panchayati Raj and women in Karimganj

Karimganj consists of five Assembly Constituencies namely Ratabari, Patharkandi, Karimganj North, Karimganj South and Badarpur. In Karimganj district the three tier system of gram panchayats we have in total 960 ward members, 96 Gaon Panchayat President (GP). 7 members of anchalik panchayat president (AP) and 20 members of zilla parishad (ZPC) members. That is in total we have 1083 representatives in the three tier system of panchayati raj institution.

Many elected representatives of women in GP level, ward level, and block level in Karimganj district have been conducted interview directly to them. The elected members of female in Gaon Panchayat and women who actively

involved in politics can be considered the awareness score and involvement scores of female elected members and other women in various activities under 3 tier system of Panchayati Raj institution. In any actively, one should have complete knowledge for ensuring active participation particularly in Panchayati Raj institution. If one is not aware of his/her own rights they cannot claim or practice the same. To actively participate in panchayat, first of all women must aware of her own rights and their role in the panchayat. In spite of their rights and empowerment, it is found both the women who are the general rural women and who are elected as panchayat members keeps rare information regarding the structure and functioning of Panchayati Raj institution. It is found that the elected members of ZPC is more aware as compared to the ward members and GP president or AP member. It is found that in the rural area particularly women, there is lack of awareness about their own rights, politically illiterate and they are less conscious in politics because of illiteracy among the rural women. Sometimes the rural women particularly in the region also believe on patriarchy though the Constitution gives them rights and freedom but still they don't want to come out from the male decision or dominated areas, in such a situation where complete awareness is far behind, we can also see less involvement of women in Panchayati Raj institution, we can also not expect more involvement among the rural women unless society gives priority to women education.

It has been found in the district that the rural women who are active participation in the Panchayati Raj institution seat is reserved for women. During interview with the elected members it has been found that before in these seats were their relatives male either uncle, father, brother or husband was elected and because of seats reservation for women, they participate in politics or PRIs. Because of seats reservation for women, they can actively participate in Panchayati Raj institution and it is also a way for women empowerment. Hence without the seat is being reserved for women, active participation in Panchayati Raj is still challengable for women. The elected women enjoy equal treatment with men in participating PRIs. Some of the elected women who actively participate in Panchayati Raj are influence by their male counterparts in the region.

It is also found that some elected women members speak very less in meetings and decisions makings. It is because of their confidence level is low and some women still have their traditional mindset that men are superior than women despite the Constitution of India gives equal status with men. In the district, the GP members and ZP members are more active in the meeting and taking decisions compared to others members. It is also found that the members of women in ZP levels are more educated as compared to GP president or ward members. However, though the elected women are influence by their male counterpart, it is also found that some of the women after elected they can speak very well and make a decision in the meeting. The higher educational level among the women the higher outcomes rate of women participation in Panchayati Raj Institution in the region.

Conclusion

The Constitution of India provide some provisions for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social, sex and economic status. In India women are more worst position as compared to men. Giving more opportunity to women is a must in the state like India. As we have seen that because of 33% reservation seats process in the panchayati raj institution, women are more participate in politics. It is also important to know that more women have to involve in decision making process in order to fulfill their demands in the national agenda. In the district, the elected women from ward members to ZP level, only few members are educated and many are not much educated especially in ward members and GP president. Women should be more educated and it is also found that some of the rural women who are highly educated but not involved in politics, so it is suggested that to improve women empowerment, the educated women should not ignore politics instead they should involved in the decision making process then only some changes will be seen in the society. The active participation of women in the Panchayati Raj will bring national development building. Women's participation in the grassroots level will bring huge changes in the nation.

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