

Empowering of Women in Rural Areas

(A Case Study)

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Abstract: Empowering of women especially in rural area is a burning issue in India, because it is multi-dimensional and takes place in multiple domains of home, community, state and society. The female Headed household is generally living in a close circuit of economic deprivation, illiteracy and lack of exposure in understanding their position in the society. A woman is empowered when she gains productive skill, access to capital and self-confidence. The Government has been protected the right of women in the society giving more power to women through reservation, reducing women atrocities, job reservation etc. Women constitute one half of the population in the society. We cannot afford to keep them out of the mainstream. Population census report 2011 also reveals that women are behind in the mainstream. As per 2011 census, there are 121.06 crore population in India, out of which 58.64 crore is female with the sex ratio of 940 females per 1000 males. 833 million (68.84 percent) live in rural area, and 270 million (21.9percent) people live below the poverty line (UNMDG report) Literacy rate of India is 74.04 percent. The male literacy rate is 82.14 percent where female is 65.46 percent only. Sarva Siksha Abhijan (SSA) is a well planned programme, which benefited illiterate women in rural areas significantly.. The National Commission for women was set up in 1993 has a mandate to safeguard the rights and interest of women. The commission has highest priority to securing speedy justice to women. In 2004-05 Ministry of Women and Child Development launched several initiatives like impact assessment of various schemes, consultations and capacity building, analyzing programmes and strategies etc. If women are empowering economically, politically and socially the desired happiness and development of our society can be brought. Moreover, women have a key role to play in decision making process, besides adequate and effective women participation is essential for implementation of government plan and programmes. So, this paper is a modest attempt to examine the role of Gaon panchayats in empowerment of women in rural area.

Keywords: Below the poverty line, Economically, National Commission, Participation, Programmes, Reservation, Rural area, Women empowerment.

Introduction:

The role of women in the development of family and the society as well is great. They spent much more time with the family. This is because of in our patriarchal society usually men go outside for economic activities and women get engaged with domestic activities. Of course, we have been notice little change in the urban centers since last several years no doubt, but the picture is almost remaining same in rural areas. The daily life of rural women goes through a cycle. In general, the rural women are engaged at home particularly in various domestic and farm activities. Thereby they have made little effort to prevent impoverishment. Of course, the main drawback from their part is that they have united and organized occasionally which is not common and permanent in nature. Therefore, lack of economic strength, lack of social strength, status in the society, peculiar domestic life, illiteracy and ignorance etc. lead the rural women discourage and hence remain inexperienced for which still today, considered them as a weaker section of the society.

In different developing countries like in India rural women are the most disadvantaged section of the society. Thus, the debate on empowerment of women is increasing today having global coverage. The dictionary meaning of empowerment is to make able i.e. enable. In our country about 70 percent population engaged in farm activities and

nearly half of total population are women of which large share belong to rural community. The factors like poverty, insecurity, lack of opportunity, non utilization of potentialities are involved with rural women. However, empowerment is relevant and has special significance for the since it is a long run process political inception is basically required. The government of India has been given greater interest on empowerment of rural women during the plan period and it has conceived and implemented various women empowerment programmes from time to time.

Empowerment of rural women especially in rural area is burning issue in India, because it is multi-dimensional and takes place in multiple domains of home, community, state and society. The female Headed household is generally living in a close circuit of economic deprivation, illiteracy and lack of exposure in understanding their position in the society. A woman is empowered when she gains productive skill, access to capital and self confidence. We should protect the right of women in the society by giving more power to women through reservation; reduce women atrocities and or job reservation etc. Since, women constitute one half of the population in the society they of course need special attention to keep them in the mainstream with principle of equality. As per 2011 census 121.06 crore out of which 62.37 crore are male and 58.64 crore female with the sex ratio of 940 females per 1000 males. Moreover, out of the 833 million (68.840 percent) people living in rural areas 270 million (21.9percent) live below the poverty line (UNMDG report). As 74.04 percent literates in India, male literacy rate is 82.14 percent and female is 65.46 percent only as per 2011 census. However, the present study is considered important as rural women have played the vital role in the development of India.

To empower women educationally, Sarva Siksha Abhijan (SSA) is a well planned programme which benefited illiterate women in rural areas significantly. If women are empowering economically, politically and socially the desired happiness and development of our society can brought (Ali Ahmed kasim) The National Commission for women set up in 1993 has a mandate to safeguard the rights and interest of women. The commission has highest priority to securing speedy justice to women. Empowerment of women refers to the process by which women are acquiring due recognition as men to participate in the development process of the society through the political institution as a partner with human dignity (Ram Ranuka).

Post independence context in India:

Rural poor and particularly poor women require special nurturing in our like country. Looking into this, poverty alleviation was accepted as one of the major objectives of planning since the fifth plan. The six five year plan for the first time give priority on the development of rural women. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and its Sub-schemes Development of Women and Children in Rural Area (DWCRA), Training for Rural Youth Self Employment Programme (TRYSEM) have made provisions for betterment of rural women. The NREP and RLEGP were merged within the single umbrella known as JRY launched in 1989. It also made provision of reservation of 30 percent of the employment generated particularly for women. The IRDP and its allied programmes have been restructuring into a single self-employment programmes called the Swarna Jayanti Gram Swa-Rozgar Yozana (SGSY) in April 1999. The key feature of this programme is to organize the rural poor into group known as Self Help Groups (SHGs) the objective behind this group approach is to utilize the potentiality of these people and to encourage in capacity building of the group.

In 2004-05 Ministry of Women and Child Development had taken several initiatives i.e. Impact assessment of various schemes, consultations and capacity building, analyzing programmes and strategies etc. (Paul Tinku). The Women and Child Development Ministry had prepared the draft national policy for women empowerment on 20 March, 2001 which aimed at to create an enabling environment for women through housing, shelter and infrastructure, drinking water and sanitation, media and culture, sports and social security. However, this policy aimed at empowering women and envisions a society in which women attain their full potential and are able to participate as equal partner in all spheres of life.

Swayamsidha is a nitrated scheme for women empowerment. It is based on the formation of women in to self - help group and aims at the holistic empowerment of women through, mobilization, awareness, generation and convergence of various schemes. The programme covered 650 development blocks throughout the country (Barik B.C.).

The Swa-Shakti project also known as Rural Women development and empowerment project was sanctioned on 16 Oct. 1998 as a central sponsored project to be implemented in seven states over a period of five years. Ujawala scheme was launched in 2007 with the objective of prevention, rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration and repatriation of trafficked victims for commercial sexual exploitation. Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandans Yojana (PMMV) was launched on Oct. 2010, to provide money to help insure the good health and nutrition of the recipients. Women Employment and livelihood programme in Mid Genetic Plain (Priyadarshini) was launched in 2011. The main aim of the programme was holistic empowerment of vulnerable groups of women and adolescent girls in the project area through formation of women self-help groups. Beti Bacho-Beti Padhao was another prominent programme to empower girls and it was launched on 22 June, 2015. The main aim of this programme was eradication of female feticide and raising awareness on welfare services intended for young Indian girls. Mahila E-haat is a direct online marketing platform launched by the MWCD to support women entrepreneurs SHGs and NGOs showcase product made and services rendered by them. The Panchayatiraj institutions (PRIs) have to play active role in true and effective implementation of such programmes. Here, the 73 rd amendment of the constitution is a milestone in the decentralization of village administration. One crucial aspect of this constitutional amendment is reservation of not less than one-third of seats for women in the PRIs. But, on 27 August, 2009 Union Government of India approved 50 percent reservation for women in PRIs. Ultimately the rural women have received great opportunity through participation in village administration and decision making process.

The government on their part has made comprehensive effort to empower the rural women and the panchayats are definitely an integral part of the whole process. Women's involvement in the planning and management of any programme became indispensable, and at the same time they have to be involved with the community organisation. Moreover, women have a key role to play in decision making process, besides adequate and effective women participation is essential for implementation of government plan and programmes. However, this paper is a modest attempt to examine the issue of women empowerment in the rural areas.

Objectives of the study:

The objectives of this paper are --

1. To analyze socio-economic profiles of the selected Panchayats
2. To examine participation of women in different developmental activities
3. To investigate the constraints of empowering women in rural area

Scope of the Study:

The present study is a case study to examine the empowerment of rural women in Tinsukia District of Assam. It is one of the 33 districts of Assam. The District is covered by Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh on the East, The Brahmaputra, the Dibang and Dhemaji district on the West, the slops of hilly tracts of Arunachal Pradesh on the North and Dibrugarh district of Assam as well as Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh on the South. The District covers a total area of 3790.00 Sq kms. It comprises of 3 Sub-division viz, Tinsukia, Margherita and Sadiya. There are 7 Development Blocks, 88 Gaon Panchayats and 1138 inhabited villages in the district (Distract at a glance).

The total population of the district is 13,16,948 out of which 6,75,986 (51.32 percent) are male and 6,40,962 (48.67 percent) female as per 2011 census. Thus, out of the total population of the district 10,53956 (80.03percent) live in rural area of which 543210(51.54 percent) are male and 515746 (48.46 percent) female while the population density was 347 persons per sq km. The Sex ratio of the district is 948 females per 1000 males. The literacy rate in the district is 933979 (70.92 percent). The district population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 14.5 percent. Under 7 Development

Blocks in the district, there are 1162 Villages, 88 Gaon panchayats and 3 Anchalik Pranchayats. The major town of the district are Digboi, Margherita, Doomdooma, Makum, Chapakhowa and Tinsukia. The major rivers in the district are the Brahmaputra, Lohit, Buri-Dehing, Dibru, Kundil, Na-Dehing, Dibang, Doom-Dooma etc.(Field study)

To conduct the field study one Development Block has been selected viz, Kakopather Development Block which is under the Tinsukia Sub-division. The Block is located in the Eastern part of Assam surround by the Arunachal Pradesh. There is Saikhowa and Na-Dihing River on the North, Margherita development block on the South, Arunachal Pradesh on the East and Hapjan Development Block on the West. The Panchayat is selected on the basis of location, population, level of development etc

It is one of the old Block in Tinsukia district; it was established in 1962 and covered a total area of 48,676 Sq.kms. The block is located 37 k.ms away from the headquarter of Tinsukia district. Presently there are 1 Anchalik Panchayat, 18 Gaon Panchayats and 268 villages. 4 Rivers i.e. Maithong, Dangori, Dirak and Na-Dihing are flowing across the block. In the rainy season some area of the village terribly affected. It caused large-scale damages to the life and properties of the people. It is situated at a distance of about 37 K.ms. from the headquarter of Tinsukia district. The Block is dominated by the OBC population. Ignorance, hesitation, low rate of literacy, inadequate infrastructure, and traditional outlook of the people towards development is remaining obstacles in the area. To conduct the study smoothly Mankhowa Gaon Panchayat has been selected.

Methodology:

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data have been collected from selected beneficiaries who are engaged in rural development program. The data also have been collected through the questionnaire, observation and informal discussion with the official, non-official and knowledgeable persons, besides, general information was collected with the help of social census.

Moreover, the secondary data have collected from relevant literature, published as well as unpublished books, journals, official records and documents. The author also collected through participant observation. The collected data are tabulated for analysis by statistical method. Besides this historical, analytical and behavioral methods have also been followed to a certain extent.

Discussion:

Total population of Kakopather Development Block is 2,14,707 out of which 1,09,036(50.78%) are male and 1,05,671(49.22%) femal (As per 2011 Census). Different caste and creed inhabited in the block. As such, The Schedule caste population is 2,613(1.22%) schedule tribes is 21,972(10.23%) and the rest of 1,90,122(88.55%) belong to others category. Density of population in the block is 226 per sq.kms. The literacy rate of the block is not satisfactory, there are only 1,23,005(57.29%) are literate, out of which 70,469(57.29%) are male and 52,536(42.71%) female. Kakopather block is located in rural area. Therefore, 82 percent of people engaged in agricultural and allied activities. Significantly there is no big public and private sector industry in the block to lessen the rate of unemployment. But the Block is partly dominated by the tea estates. Medical facility is vital which influence the human development in a locality. But, this is not sufficient in Kakopather Block. The people of the block used to bring their serious patients to Tinsukia Civil Hospital or Assam Medical College for better treatment. There are one Public Health Centre and two Dispensaries, 45 Family Welfare Sub-centres, 45 community Health centers in the block.

Mankhowa Gaon Panchayat is under Kakopather development block in Tisukia district. It is situated at a distance of about 12 K.ms. from the office of the Kakopather development Block. Its situated in a semi-urban area. Total land area is 10 Sq.kms. and total population has about 14887, out of which 7972 (53.5 percent) are male and 6915(46.5 percent) female. Schedule Caste population is 323 (2.2 percent) and schedule Tribes 482 (3.23). The source of livelihood of 72 percent inhabitants is nonfarm activities. The size of cultivable land is negligible.

The panchayat has covered tea-dominant area and two tea estates viz. Beesakopie and Phatikjan. There are also two private tea factories. The panchayat has mix population of different castes, religion and languages. The panchayat is headed by women and 50 percent are women among which is belong to tea tribes. The average educational qualification of women is under matriculate. The panchayat is rich in having educational institutions from primary to college level.

The panchayat officials inform that women response towards different development programmes is satisfactory. The presence of women is appreciable in Gram Sabha. Total 87 nos. of houses were sanctioned under the PMAY scheme out of which 55 nos. for women till 2019. Estimate Cost of per house is Rs. 1.30 lakh.

In the present study, the researcher has investigated level of awareness on MGNREGA. This study reveals that 38 percent of respondents were aware about the MGNREGA. As per MGNREGA guideline, at least 100 days work during the year will be provided to the beneficiaries, but the field study shows that no single beneficiary has avail 100 days employment in a year. No unemployment allowance was provided to them even though they were aware about number of days allotted for a beneficiary for one household, day limitation to get the employment, women quota, in registration for employment, unemployment allowance, minimum wages etc.

From the field study it has been found that 73 percent of respondents were women, they were actively participated in MGNREGA programmes. It was also found in field study that the panchayat undertaken road construction, land development and water canals schemes only. Moreover, the beneficiaries reported delay in issue of job card to them and even wages to the labourer were not released according the Act.

Further, the Self Help Groups play significant role in empowering rural women. As per information received from the panchayat office total number of SHGs in the panchayat is 86 and these are led by women. It had been revealed that SHGs are engaged in money lending as well as poultry farming, weaving, piggery and goat-farming. Being member of the SHGs women earn income and profit. The income of the SHGs includes interest, self - deposits and subsidy from bank etc. The rate of interest in internal lending of a SHG varies from 8 to 10 percent. Even though the performances of SHGs are not note-worthy.

In 2018, there were 92 SHGs in the panchayat but 6 SHGs disappeared due to unavoidable reasons. These include non –satisfactory progress of SHGs might be lack of co-operation, lack of mutual- understanding among members, absence of managerial and organizational skill, household problem, lack of encouragement from the family members etc. Thus, economic empowerment of BPL women in this Gaon Panchayat is still a big question mark.

It also revealed that women become independent in taking decision on selection and grant of loans, fixation of interest rate and selection of activities that they planned to do.

There are 219 nos. of women workers engaged in the two tea private tea factories i.e. Beesakoie and Phatikjan located under the Gaon Panchayat. Women laborer has high demand in the tea gardens might be because they work for 8 hours at a lower wage-rate than the male laborer. They are un-organized too. 32 percent of such women are illiterate and basically they came out of house in search of job with the objective of contributing a little to family's income.

It is interesting to note that the mother themselves do not have any interest in giving free school education particularly to their daughters. Right to education is the fundamental right and there is the provision of free education up to 14 yrs. even that we have seen a dismal picture. It is found that the panchayat's locality highlights various socio-economic diseases, which are chronic by nature, among the rural poor.

Illiteracy and poverty is chronic among them, hence, ignorance and vulnerability exists. Even they do not take advantage of free schooling up to 16 years.

Constrains in the way of empowerment of rural women:

The various Constrains have been associated with the process of empowerment of women as stated below ---

1. Illiteracy and hence ignorance are a major hurdle in this process. For this, they lose trust on capabilities of themselves and never come forward to join in Socio-economic activities.
2. Nonetheless poverty is a curse, the rural poor remain stoic. Thus, it transforms from one generation to the other.
3. The pattern of domestic life and customs and tradition are also striking factor for which the rural poor women fail to find out enough time for group activities. Most of the SHGs member commented that the member do not encourage them in participating SHGs activities.
4. Many beneficiaries particularly women are not aware about the procedures. Thus, they themselves keep away from official procedure.
5. Communication distance with block office, bank also a problem on the part of the beneficiaries. They hardly managed the transport expenditure.
6. Political biasing sometime create problem in case of selection of beneficiaries.
7. For better of poor women in the panchayat, there is lack of activeness and special attention from the part of women ward members
8. In case of wage-rate, the women workers deprived of getting remuneration equal to same level of work of their counterpart.
9. Co-ordination between the block and panchayats officials, Gram Sathi, village level workers and respondents are very essential for proper implementation of rural development plan and programmes. But it has been reveals that Gram Sabha is not much active and aware about the rural development programmes. The concerned Gram Sabha often does not report the panchayat about the progress of the programmes.

Suggestions:

1. To smoothening the process of empowerment of rural women it is the responsibility of the Gaon Panchayat necessary to make the rural women aware about the benefits of different development programmes.
2. Their economic, social, political and legal empowerment may not come into front without evoking self-consciousness. The panchayat through their ward members may take initiative in ensuring empowerment of these people.
3. The SHGs like this Gaon Panchayat may involve themselves in the supply of mid-day meal to surrounding office, institution and to start a crèche centre etc.
4. The Government, PRIs, Voluntary organization etc. never along be successful in upliftment of rural women until the sun of empowerment of women does not rise in every family. However, the other member of the family should encourage the women in this field for the better development of the family. Thus, change of attitude is necessary.
5. Spread of education among women and participation of women in various job opportunity and social activities can raise their social status which can indirectly help in bringing socio-economic betterment for this; the discrimination in wage-rate should be removed.
6. Discrimination in case of children should be abolished. It is not a forceful act, but requires change of attitude. A girl is like a fruit giving tree- which meant that she is to be considered as wealth of the family. This kind of campaign more particularly increase of attitude is necessary to grow. In addition it is also necessary to learn them to have a dream in life.
7. The District authorities should take necessary steps to arrange regular exhibition every year at each and every district of the state to promote the finished products made by the SHGs. The SHGs and their members may the demand of the SHGs product too.

8. The promoting agency like DRDA must monitor of regular interval the overall functioning of the SHGs and attitudes of the member pertaining to their respective SHGs.
9. There is a need for regular monitoring of SHGs by the development agencies like DRDA for better functioning of the SHGs working in a rural base region.

Conclusion:

The Government has prepared a lot of development programmes for the rural poor and particularly for rural women. There are different government, departments and PRIs involved in implementation these programmes. Now, the ball is in the court of so called **target- group** to show the power of how to accumulate the fruits. Thus, self-consciousness among them is the secret of success and it can stimulate the country in achieving better tomorrow.

Acknowledgement:

1. Selected Block Statistical officer.
2. President and Secretary Selected Panchayat.
3. Village Headmen of the selected Villages.
4. Selected Respondents.

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