



## WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ IN ASSAM: A STUDY ON BOGINADI BLOCK OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT

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### Abstract:

Participation of women in Panchayati Raj System have been widely discussed in recent decades. Participation of a country's citizen in its political activities of a democratic country is regarded a significant phenomenon. As it is said that the development of a country in its all over the sides is primarily depends on its citizen's political participation. It is noted that political participation of the women in any country is very limited and especially in the 3rd world countries. India is not fur from that complicacy. In that circumstances study on participation of Indian women in its Panchayati Raj System is regarded very important. That is why an attempt is made to draw a clear picture on the political participation of Assamese women in Panchayati Raj Institution of Assam. The whole paper is to be prepared by adopting descriptive method of study.

**Keywords:** Democratic, Development, Country, Panchayati Raj System, Participation.

### 1. Introduction:

Women are equal to men in their contribution to society. They are better half of the population. Gender equality is a constituent of development as well as an instrument of development. No country can be developed if half of its population is severely disadvantaged in terms of basic needs of livelihood options, access to knowledge and political voice. The socio-economic development of a country cannot be fully realised so long as its women are confined to subordinate position and their talents remain unexplored.

In the traditional Indian society, women used to pass their lives as the domestic house wives within four walls. A woman plays several roles like mother, wife, sister and daughter. It is not possible for them to participate in the public life or to come out from home and work else. So their status and role were limited.

In this context the Charter of the United Nations enshrined the organisation to "promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion", while the preamble to the chapter spoke of "the equal rights of men and women". Relating to this, in most of the countries of the world various attempts are force to bring a change in the socio-economic and political condition of women. As a result of it women have come up at par with men in different fields of life. Women have been able to prove their existence and identify in the male dominated society. Her partnership in the power structure and decision-making policy can be considered a milestone in her upliftment. It would bring basic differences in the traditional social structure and political field.

In India, women were not provided with the fundamental rights of education, poverty, franchise and other political freedoms till the early part of the British rule in India. After independence the Constitution of India promises equal rights to women. There would not be any discrimination on the basis of sex for political positions. But it is found that the constitutional rights as such have not been availed adequately by Indian women to participate in the political process of the country. Here Panchayats, as people's bodies have been existence since long in the country, but women have not been an integral part of this system except in some states which introduced reservation of seat for women in local self-government bodies. In this respect the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution of India provides a great opportunity for the women for participation in Panchayats at different levels in India. An important feature of these Amendments was the reservation of 33 percent seats for women at all levels of these local bodies. One-third of the chairpersons of Panchayats at all levels are to be women. This reservation of 33% seats for women in the PRIs can be regarded as a bold attempt at social engineering by the government so as to increase women's political participation at the grass root level.

### 2. Objectives of the Study:

The present paper will proceeded basically to find out the result of the following stated objectives.

1. To access the involvement and participation of woman in the Panchayati Raj Institution.
2. To examine the limitations that prevents women participation in the PRIs.

### 3. Methodology:

As per the availability of the relative sources of data that are available in various websites and various studies already done in the field this present study is conducted by adopting the descriptive method. Thus, this study will be prepared by primarily based on secondary data.

So, for secondary data the researcher will depend on published books, several publications of research paper, administrative documents, census data, journals and reports, Web pages and articles etc.

#### 4. Delimitation:

The study area is confined to the state of Assam. Assam is a state of North-East India along with the Brahmaputra and Barak River Valleys. It is located in the north-eastern corner of the state and on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River. The head quarter of the district is North Lakhimpur. The district is bounded on the North by Siang and Arunachal Pradesh, on the East by Dhemaji District and Subansiri River. The River Brahmaputra along with Majuli District stands on the Southern side and Gahpur of Biswanath District on the West.

It has three sub divisions viz Dhakuakhana, North Lakhimpur and Narayanpur-Bihpuria. Lakhimpur district has eight Police station viz. North Lakhimpur, Boginadi, Panigaon, Dhakuakhana, Gilamara, Narayanpur, Laluk and Bhipuria. There are 9 blocks in Lakhimpur District namely Narayanpur, Bihpuria, Nowboicha, Lakhimpur, Telahi, Boginadi, Karunabari, Ghilamara and Dhakuakhana. Out of these blocks, the researcher choose only Boginadi block of Lakhimpur District comprises of 155 villages for this study. This block has two Zila Parishads in this block Boginadi and Kadam. It has 8 Goan Panchayats namely Bhimpara, Boginadi, Chauldhowa, kadam, Na- Kada, Sirajuli, Thowthowniand, Ukhamati.

#### 5. Review of Literature:

A review of the related literature are to tried to shortly enclose herewith-

**Mishra, S. N., & Kumar, L.** study of New Panchayati Raj in Action revealed that the participation of women in the PRIs has gradually increased. **Dr. Mahipal 2018**, examines in Panchayati Raj in India. The paper attempts to understand the journey of Panchayati Raj in India. **Dr. Udayakumar Rawoorkar (2014)** in his work Women in Panchayat Raj Institution, he analysed the salient features of the Constitution 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act and Provision for Panchayats. **In Panchayati Raj in India, M. Aslam** made a comprehensive study on the local self-government system that has existed in India since long. Such, **S. N Ambedkar and Shilaja Nagendra**, in their book "*Women Empowerment & Panchayati Raj*"(2005), **Napur Tiwari** - "*Panchayati Raj and Women Empowerment*", **Sunkari Satyam**- "*Women in Gram Panchayats- Emerging Leaders in Grassroots politics*" (2017), **Dr. Ramesh H Makwana**- "*Political Participation of Scheduled Caste Women in Panchayat Position, Problems and Prescriptions*", **Kuldeep Mathur**- *Panchayati Raj*, **Afsana Rashid**- "*The Role of Communication in Political Empowerment of Women Panchayat Raj Functionaries: A Field Study of Baramulla District in Kashmir*" (2020), **Pamela Singla**- "*Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Nature and Effectiveness*" (2003), **A M M Zakir, and Nurul**- "*The Assam Panchayat Laws*" (2017), **S. L. Baruah**- (ed.1992) *Status of Women in Assam*, **N. L. Dutta**- '*Political status of women in Assam since independence*', **Sujata D Hazarika**- article "*Political participation of Women and the Dialectics of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment*", **Ranjit Pegu's** book "*Women Empowerment in Rural Local Government*" (2013), they have explained about the participation and empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievements of both transparent and accountable governments and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

#### 6. Analysis:

Women constituted nearly 50 percent of the population of the world, but when it comes to their representation at higher levels of political positions in the government, they account for only less than 10 percent. Poor representation of women is not specific to the political domain alone but is also reflected in the administrative as well as managerial position.

India is a vast country with a large and diverse population. Its political system and methods are democratic in character. In a democratic country, any development activities can't be performed properly without the active participation of the better-half of the society. Women participation in national and local politics is very much essential to make a democracy successful. After the introduction of the New Panchayati Raj System, it is generally felt, success can be achieved through decentralisation of authority with popular participation at the grassroots level. The spaces for political participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been created by the Action of the government. The political participation of women not only empowers them but gives them visibility in key decision-making process that otherwise reflected their exclusion.

In the research area, the socio-economic status of women is not so good. There inhabited various types of community people. A large number of people in the study area i.e. the Boginadi Block is belonged in Scheduled Tribes like Mishing, Bodos, Kachari etc and Scheduled Castes. It is observed that most of the people of this block are belonged to middle class and low income families. Their main occupation is cultivation. The women of these communities are nurtured in traditional values, beliefs and culture that are overruled by male and their society. They are still keeping under the subjugation of men, imposing restrictions by the household and socio-political activities. Some of them even do not come forward to join in local politics because of their hesitation, unawareness and sometimes because of domestic restriction. The women mainly of rural areas do not aware about the provisions and opportunities provided by the Constitution of our country to them. The literacy rate of the women is also not quite satisfactory. Some of them even do not realise what local politics is. Moreover, those who are members in local politics of this area in such a situation, their ability to perform effectively is a matter of serious concern. Keeping in mind that mere physical presence of women members at meetings may not amount to their actual participation. They do not come forward open heart to involve themselves in decision-making process. They are not even interested to cast their vote in elections.

#### 6.1 Involvement and participation of woman in the Panchayati Raj Institution:

After, the passing of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, the Assam Panchayati Raj Act was introduced from May 1994. This act provides for a three tier Panchayat system comprising Gaon Panchayat, Anchalik Parishad, Zila Parishad in accordance with the provision of the Constitutional Amendment. The first Panchayat election as per the Assam Panchayati Act, 1994 was held in December, 2001 and constituent of all the three tiers of Panchayats were completed it June 2002. The participation of rural women in Panchayati raj in Lakhimpur district of Assam is also found similar to that of the status of the women in other parts of the state Assam. In that circumstances the participation of the women citizens of Boginadi Block is also not differ from it. Due to the sake of reservation it was found that the women just go for participation either dictated by their male counterpart who is her husband, brother or father etc. The male counterparts do all the functioning of the gram panchayat in the name of the female elected member. The elected female members of the gaon panchayats seldom goes for gram sabha meeting and if they participate in the meeting they have no say.

Though complete participation without the seat is reserved is still to be achieved. The women now who has been elected can enjoy the joy of treating equality in respect of participating in PRIs and thus participating in grass root level democracy as well find her status. As we

know ZPC lies at the top of the three tier system of PRIs, and at that top level the female elected members are dictated by the male counterpart. After being elected these female members though participate in the gram sabha meetings but seldom speak in the meeting and take decisions. Lack of confidence level may restrict them to raise their voice in meeting. It can be seen from the studies that a huge portion of women participate in the gram sabha meeting but only a few of them speak and take decisions. It is also found that the percentage of speaking in the meeting and taking decisions is highest among the GP member and ZP member.

It is also found that due to sake of 33 percent reservation we are having to see the rural women mostly participating in the panchayats or in the grass root level democracy. It is no doubt a good sign at least on the one hand that they are getting an equal treatment in respect of filling nomination for the seats in grass root level democracy. On the other hand this participation is ensuring women empowerment, as we have found that a good number of women are self-motivated to participate in the panchayat elections, and a good number of them use to speak and take decisions in the meeting of gram sabha. Though it is also found that this participation are coming from the top tier of the PRIs. It is also found that those female members who are elected as ZP member are more educated than that of the GP president or ward member. Higher is the educational level higher comes the participation rate. Again another thing to be mentioned here that the ZP member who are motivated to participate by their male counterpart, once being elected are efficiently manages their duties as they are participating in the meeting as well also taking decisions. This is no doubt a positive sign of women empowerment and active participation of women in grass root level democracy.

As the PRIs have been formed with the intension of ensure the development of rural India, in that context the 11 schedule of Indian Constitution plays a significant role in the parts of funds, functions and functionaries of PRIs and which are directly related with powers, authority, and responsibilities of Panchayats. It was the output of 73rd Amendment Act of Indian Constitution in 1992. It has 29 subjects such as Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Fishery, etc. Under the eleventh schedule, local institutions have been assigned major responsibilities. These in fact could determine the future course of the country adopts and the development stance it takes, mostly in matters pertaining to sustainable development, education, and welfare of the weaker sections, etc.

## 6.2 Limitations that Prevents Women Participation

Women want to work for the society, express and raise their points and views in the panchayat meetings. But very often they fail to do so. As found by Kaul and Sahni (2009), sometime some factors like their inability in motivating their colleagues, frustration of not being heard may discourage their participation. They also sometime unable to take decision in the meeting because of shyness, unaware about the agenda and the belief of only male can take right decision

Factors like sexual division of labour, exclusion of women from certain positions and level of power, poor representation in decision making etc., keep away women participation in politics. Some other causes for low participation includes poor educational level, less support from guardian, shyness, family and society.

## 7. Suggestion:

For ensuring active participation in any activity one must have education and complete knowledge. Unless and until one is aware of his/ her rights they cannot practice the same. Thus, for ensuring participation of women in the grass root level democracy of course requires first of all the awareness of the women regarding their role in the panchayats.

## 8. Conclusion:

Thus, as per our study it is resolved that the proper functioning of a democratic country there need to participate almost all of its citizen. In that circumstances the participation of women could not be ignored. The women must discover their capacity, strength, responsibilities by participating in political arena as well as decision-making processes. Without the development of the rural women, it is not possible to make socio-political progress in any area. Thus it is an urgent need to participating the women in the each and every political processes of the research area for the all-round advancement of the society and also the women themselves.

Thus the existence of PRIs and its role in the sphere of rural India is very significant. Through which, we can expect the development rural India and at the same time the participation of rural women in the political process and as well as their self-development. For instance, the saying of the father of the nation is noted very important- "the real development of India could able to be found if we develop the villages of Indian nation". Following his great idea the all-round development of whole rural India has been dedicated to the PRIs. So, there is an ample scope to do a crucial investigation on the subject whether these PRIs could able to perform their role according to the aspiration and if so, in what extent?

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