

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: A STUDY OF MADHUKUCHI GAON PANCHAYAT

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation and leadership in political activities plays a pivotal role in the democratic political system of country. In the representation of the country women are still behind. In India the representation of women in political arena is very low and not substantial in leadership. As women comprises half of the population, this section of society requires due attention in the system and due share in the political process. The constitutional 73rd and 74th amendment Act gives the women reservation of 33% in Panchayati raj institution of India and also Assam Panchayat act gives the women reservation in 50% in Panchayat, but the representation is comparatively grow to law and qualities of leadership and decision making is not satisfactory in Panchayat, they could not occupy good position in decision making process and leading role in development program. Also the government of Assam by the Assam Panchayat(amendment)rules,2018, gives importance to the minimum qualifications for candidates which is basically based on education, child policy and the sanitary where is trying to improve the quality of members represent the society. The present paper analyzed the representation and leadership of women in general of Madhukuchi Gaon Panchayat in specifically in the last two Panchayat elections. However, in the electoral politics especially in active politics participation of women is pathetic.

Key word: Women, Gaon Panchayat, Participation, Representation.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy becomes successful only with the political participation of people both men and women. Women's equal participation in political activities plays a major role in the development of the country's political system. Political participations not just casting of vote, it also means some other activities like contesting election, membership of political party and representative bodies, electoral campaigning, attending party meeting, demonstration, communication with leaders, holding party position, participation in decision making and policy making and other related activities. United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has defined participation from a broader perspective that, *"participation is a collective sustained activity for the purpose of achieving some common objectives, especially a more equitable distribution of the benefits of development."* Women who consist of almost half of the population of the country still they remain away from the policy and decision making process of the country. The status of women in terms of political participation is very low in India. The constitution gives equal right of both men and women, but the representation of women in Parliament, State legislature and Local governance is very less. They are marginalized in political participation as well as taking responsibilities as a leader in society. In the north-eastern state of Assam, despite having a glorious history of women, they could not occupy good position in decision making process and leading role in party politics of the state. Their participation in the Loksabha, State Assembly and Panchayat election is not satisfactory in compare to male political participation. The 73rd amendment is one of the landmark to which brought many women into Indian rural governance process. It heralded a new era in decentralized governance process in India by bringing women into position of decision making and power in local grassroots level governance. Through the progressive 73rd constitutional amendment has created a pathway for women to come into the public sphere, if we look at the status of women and their participation in self-governance system, both are still low and sometimes elected women are merely figureheads. Through the amendment aimed at bringing more women into politics, many states have amended State Panchayat Act. They introduced new laws and norms, due to which many deserving candidates from marginalized section have been debarred from participation in grassroots politics thus making the women to be the greatest suffers. On the other hand, many unwilling women are forcefully brought into the political space of grassroots (by their families) due to these norms and criteria.

Location: The study is confined to the geographical area of Madhukuchi Gaon Panchayat under Bihdia-Jajikona Development Block of Rangia sub-division and Kamrup district of Assam. It is one among the 12 Panchayat of Bihdia-Jajikona development block of Kamrup district that the Panchayat has four villages that are Athara, Borlessakona, Madhukuchi and Nagaon (Census of India, 2011).

OBJECTIVE

1. To find out the women's political participation in Madhukuchi Gaon Panchayat.
2. To find out the qualities of women leader of Gaon Panchayat.
3. To investigate the challenges of leadership of women.

METHODOLOGY

Method:

The study is primarily based upon field investigation method. The obtained data are analyzed in application of percentile method.

Data:

Primary data: The primary data is collected from the information obtained through the applying interview method using schedule during the field study. Schedule was prepared in Assamese language.

Secondary data: The secondary data of this paper includes book, magazine, article, local publications, newspaper and journal of national and international repute.

Sample: Total thirty samples are collected from Madhukuchi Gaon Panchayat villages taking ten respondents are the elected members five is present term and another five are previous term of Panchayat and twenty are the non elected or contested women in Panchayat election. Out of ten women one is president.

Procedure: They are informed earlier about the investigation. On the day of interview they are made familiar with the issue. Respondents are given sit in an isolated room and allowed to answer one by one on the questions on test items.

PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS

The present study, Panchayat members were asked to rank the ten indicators of participation based on priority. Explanations of the indicators are below.

Attending Gramsabha

Attending Gramsabha is an important function of the Panchayat members in order to gauge the needs of their constituents.

Attending GP meeting

According to Panchayat raj act, Gram Panchayat should hold at least one Panchayat meeting once in two months.

Consulting constituents

Consulting constituents is one of the functions Panchayat members.

Articulating needs

Representative is required to articulate the needs of the people in the Gramsabha, the Panchayat meetings or any other forum.

Participation in GP and Gramsabha meeting

Panchayat members are supposed to participate in the meetings like the Panchayat and the Gramsabha.

Selection of beneficiaries

The most important responsibility of Panchayat members is to selection of beneficiaries of various development Programmes of the gram Panchayat. These beneficiaries are usually selected in the Gramsabha and their selection is sometimes finalized in the GP meeting. Since these benefits are valued highly in the rural areas, people usually approach Panchayat members

in order to get selected as beneficiaries. Therefore, this activity of Panchayat members assumes enormous significance.

Taking part in identifying the location of the project

Most significant function performed by the Panchayat members is suggesting the location of project in the Gramsabha or sometimes finalizing this location in the GP meeting convened to approve the action plans.

Meeting TP/ZP members and MLA

Meeting taluk Panchayat and zilla Panchayat members and MLAs for redressing their grievances or getting works to their constituency was an informal function engaged in by most of the Panchayat members.

Voluntary contribution

One of the merits of decentralized planning is its ability to mobilize voluntary contribution from the people. Panchayat members could motivate people to contribute either through money or voluntary effort.

Meeting officials

Meeting officials was a routine activity engaged in by most of the members. Officials refer to the Taluk Panchayat Executive Officer (EO), the Panchayat Extension officer (PEO), the Junior Engineer (JE), ZP Deputy Secretary and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

FINDINGS OF STUDY

Due to rotational system, women can scarcely continue their relationship with politics. Very small percent of women members get elected for the second or third time which creates a short-term gain mindset among the women, leading to a lack of accountability. The process also entails a huge wastage of resources on the part of the state government as with every election, they have to train the newly elected members.

Poor socio-economic condition with women have come have come into the grass-root politics is itself a constraint on the way of their effective participation. Economically poor members are more concerned about their daily earnings than Panchayat matters. It is evident that lack of

proper education also restrains women's participation to a great extent. Our social norms and culture also puts limitations on women's mobility as well as acts as an impediment in their effective participation. Women are often run into barriers especially of family and society that hinders their participation.

The women members have to shoulder dual responsibility of household and Panchayat activities. Initially they act as homemaker, only after that they come their responsibility as people's representatives.

The women members find it very difficult to interact with the government officials due to lack of proper communication skill. The male representative at Panchayat or other male family members talk with the officials on behalf of them. Although there is no obvious discrimination against women in Panchayat office, the male representative and the Panchayat officials need to change their attitude. Acceptance of women as their leader is an issue. The male representatives and the male officials in most of the cases found to be non co-operative towards the women in Panchayat. The relationship between the local bureaucracy and Panchayat representative also seems to create controversy. Deriving their power from their permanency, long experience, educational qualification, knowledge of rules and regulations, these officials at all have sought to dominate the elected representatives. Particularly when the representatives are rural women and that too, less educated and inexperienced, the bureaucrats literally look down upon them.

The experiences of the women members in handling finance make them quite dependent on Panchayat secretaries in financial matters. Their ignorance makes them easy target of the corrupted male representatives and block officials.

Although majority of the women members contested Panchayat election on party line, undue interference of the top party leaders in Panchayat matters renders them helpless. Another problem is "Proxy representation" where the husbands or other male family members of the elected women manage the affairs related to Panchayats. Government order on decentralization of power through Panchayat seems to be a mockery. There is lack of real devolution of administrative power because of which elected representative find it difficult to act independently. Most of the women members felt that they were not able to satisfy the needs and expectations of the people due to lack of funds or delay in releasing funds.

CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATION

It has been observed that the quality of performance of the elected women representatives is largely dependent upon social factors like literacy, education and the tradition of social reform movements in that region.

- Feudal and patriarchal values are serious hurdles in the path of progress in the rural areas. These restrain the political participation of women.
- Communal feelings, cast clashes and election related violence have negative impact on the political participation of women.
- The entry of women in the political process was essentially the fallout or statutory reservations.
- Overburden with family responsibilities
- Introversion due to lack of communication skills.
- Poor socio-economic background with which the women have come into the system and poor capacity building.

Although there were instances where such reservation has failed to break the dominance of men over women, there is no denial of the fact that the arrangement has helped in introducing a radical change in perceptions and if the change is not distorted, the seventy-third amendment could lead to far reaching changes in the social power structure.

SUGGESTION

There is need to empower rural women to enhance their quality of participation. The awakening of women in India towards a society where justice and brotherhood prevail can best be achieved by women- to – women contact. The cultural patterns of Indian society are such that social progress among women can be promoted effectively though the medium of personal relationship among them. It is women who can inspire confidence and offer stimulus for social change especially among their sisters in the rural areas. Hence, effective leadership among women must come from the ranks of women themselves. Their qualitative participation can be achieved through training besides of course the literacy educational programmes. Links has to be strengthened between the village and bureaucracy at the lower level. Special programme on the role of women in Panchayats, on right of women and procedures should be prepared and highlight through the mass media so as to make women aware and improve the quality of their

participation in the socio-political system. The commitment to political empowerment must be supplemented by a new conceptualization of women's role in the economy of India. The government should take the responsibility to make the rural women aware about their rights and responsibilities.

Need of up-gradation- most of the women in rural areas feel inferior to male members of family/Panchayat. This attitude needs to change to make women as part and parcel of the family as well as representatives. Women hailing from SC and ST categories may find it difficult to mix with representatives of general categories. To cope with this problem, it is necessary to inculcate confidence among them and to bring attitudinal changes through training in the psyche of the upper classes. Stern action should be taken against such persons who foment communal feelings.

Need to take independent decision- women representatives in Panchayat must be trained in the art and science of decision-making so that they are not influenced by extraneous factors. They must develop leadership qualities. They should discuss among other women and take their opinion. All women members of Panchayats and other executive bodies must be trained and empowered to exercise their authority. Particular attention must be paid to the development of inter-personal communication skills among the community leaders.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion it is funded out that the women are lagging behind their male counterparts. They are traditionally branded as weaker in our society. The constitutional reservation of seats in local bodies by 73rd and 74th amendment has provided ample opportunity to women participate in active local politics equal with men. But women are participated only the reserved post of members and president not in unreserved post of Panchayat election. They are always feels that they are not able to represent the society to some extent. In developing country like India, this gender disparity stands as a great stumbling block to women emancipation. Thus the attitude of our society has adversely affected the process of women empowerment through Panchayati raj institution.

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