



Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

Volume-XIII, Issue-I, October 2024, Page No.105-110

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

Gender Equality In Politics Through Women's Political Participation At The Village Level: A Case Study

Dr. Gitashree Deb

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Jagannath Singh College, Udharbond, Assam, India

Abstract:

Considering their population size, women are underrepresented in political leadership position throughout the world. In June, 2018 women represented only 23.8 percent of all parliament members in the world, rising up from 13.8 percent in 2000. Women are considered to be an integral part of the society as no society would develop without ensuring development of women. In the present day world, democratic form of government is the most popular and acceptable form of government and no democracy would be successful unless there is equality between citizens which comprises both men and women. Recognising this fact, many governments have taken active steps to encourage the participation of women in policy making, especially by establishing the system of reservation for women in parliament or in local governments. In this regard the 73rd amendment to the constitution was a landmark step in India which acknowledged 33 percent reservation of seats for women in the rural local self government or Panchayati Raj Institutions. As Indian women comprises almost 50 percent of total population and more than 70 percent of India's total population reside in rural areas, the introduction of the system of reservation is viewed as a key to increase participation of women in the local decision making process and reduce gender inequalities in traditional rural societies. Therefore it is high time to judge the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions in respect of women's participation in local decision making process. This paper discusses how far reservation for women at Panchayat level politics helping women to participate actively in politics.

Keywords: Democracy, Participation, Equality, Panchayati Raj, Gender.

Introduction: Women have always been an integral part of the society irrespective of its nature and form, but they hardly get what is due to them. For centuries, women who constitute half of the humanity have been suppressed, oppressed and treated as subordinates. However, the position of women had been deteriorated since late Vedic period though a ray of consciousness against the disgraceful condition of the women emerged with advent of renaissance in the nineteenth century India.

The women of the nineteenth century fought against their degraded condition and pursued with all sincerity the object of women emancipation to raise their position in the society. But a few political demonstrations or a few years of organized activity do not bring emancipation rather it needs most importantly a favourable infrastructure, consciousness and desire for equal and free life. In this connection, the founding father of Indian constitution did a magnificent job in ensuring gender justice in supreme law of the country, the Constitution. The Preamble to the Constitution, inter alia, assures justice, social, economic and political, equality of status and opportunity and dignity of individual. The Fundamental Rights guarantee women's equality under law. The Directive Principles of the State Policy provide for affirmative action for securing adequate means of livelihood for men and women, equal pay for equal work, raising level of nutrition, maternity relief and condition of work ensuring decent standards of life and full enjoyment of leisure.

Despite the liberal provisions of the constitution and various laws, serious inequalities remain with regard to women in India. A major factor contributing to these inequalities is the nature of women's identity in the traditional patriarchal society which has been the strongest influence in the development and construction of gender roles in India. The 73rd constitutional amendment Act is a direct attempt to ratify that which calls for a reservation of minimum 1/3rd of seats for women both as members and as Chairperson within all of India's locally elected government bodies commonly referred to as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). More recently in 2009, the Govt. of India approved 50% reservation for women in PRIs and many states including Rajasthan, Odisha and Assam have implemented the same.

Affirmative action to ensure women's political participation is an important step which provides the women with a constitutional platform to stand up to men, to raise their voice on issues concerning women oppression, subjugation and related issues and thus in fact provide them with an identity in an orthodox male dominated socio-political set-up. In short they are provided with a much needed forum to seek redressal of problems directly affecting them and hence got the true essence of empowerment.

Objective Of The Study: The main objective of the study is to enquire into the nature of political participation of women at the level of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the context of policy of reservation for women at various levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The study is based on following objectives

1. To find out the socio-economic background of women political participants in the Panchayati Raj Institutions
2. To know the level of participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
3. To examine the socio-cultural, economic and politico-administrative challenges faced by women political participants in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Methodology: The present study is conducted in Cachar district of Assam. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods was employed for the purpose. The proposed study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected from the field.

Secondary data is collected from books, journals, government reports etc. The tools like survey/questionnaire/interview schedule are employed for data collection depending on the nature of respondent and type of data. The universe of the proposed study is composed of 27 nos. Gaon Panchayats of two Community Development Blocks of Cachar district i.e. Udharbond Development Block and Borkhola Development Block. The sample size consists of 100 persons consisting of GP member, GP president, AP member from women and women party worker

Findings:

A. Social Background: It is revealed from the study that average age of the women elected members is 35-40 years and 85% of them are married. It indicates that the women enter in to the local politics after marriage when they have comparatively less responsibility regarding children. From data analysis, it is found that the highest educational qualification of elected women members is senior secondary (6 %). About 10% women passed HSLC and nearly 20% , 42% and 22% read upto High school, Middle school and Primary standard respectively. Though there is no illiterate women member but their educational level is not enough to understand how Panchayat Raj Institutions work and to carry on their official works independently. The study also reflected that the women from different caste categories are able to participate in rural local self government. In the present study almost 60 percent of elected women belong to general category and the representation of other categories like SC, OBC, ST and TGL are 20, 8, 3, 9 percent respectively. As far as religious background of the elected members of PRIs in these two development blocks are concerned, the study revealed that both Hindus and Muslims are represented almost equally with 51.22 percent and 46.34 percent respective. Only 2.44 percent of elected members belong to Christianity and there is no place for other religious group like Buddhist, Sikhs due to low percentage of population and lack of local support or party backing.

B. Awareness About Panchayati Raj Institutions: The active and fruitful participation in any field needs a comprehensive knowledge of that particular area or field. No one is able to avail the benefit of the rights and privileges unless and until he or she is fully aware of the same. Thus, to guarantee active participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and to avail the opportunities of 73rd amendment Act, the women elected members should have complete knowledge of working of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and should be aware of their role and responsibilities. The data represent that only 24% of ward members are aware about their role and responsibilities as public representatives. But in case of GP president and AP member, the figure is as low as 15% as such post are mostly filled up by proxy candidate i.e. as proxy for male members of family as male could not contest due to women reservation. This happens mostly for the posts of GP president and AP member as these posts are regarded as more prestigious and powerful whereas, most of the women candidates for ward members contest and get elected on their own accord. Thus it is unjustified to expect active participation in local democracy from the women representative with such low level of awareness and gendered nature of the society where their male

counterpart is just pushes them into politics only to retain power, if not at their own with the proxy candidate in the of form wife, mother, sister, sister-in-law.

Further, to enquire into the level of participation of women in rural local self government, data is collected which demonstrate that more than 80% of women are active in politics only after being elected as public representative and they contesting election only after the seat is reserved as it is found that there is no elected women against the unreserved seats. It is also found that only 18.3% of rural women are motivated to contest election on their own and that too limited to GP member as other two positions have higher status, power and responsibility than the former which their male counterpart try to hold by whatever way. It is found that 80% of the women PRI members attend the Gram Sabha very frequently but only 27% of them involve themselves in decision making and raising questions relating to women is limited to only 10%. Thus it is clear that the participation of women in all level of PRIs is much below the expectation and it is due to gender biased in the society, lack of education, lack of confidence, lack of political consciousness, ignorance and most importantly the patriarchal nature of the family where women are largely dependent on their male counterpart and dictated too.

C. Challenges to Participation: An attempt is also made to know the challenges faced by the elected members of Panchayat in performing of their duties. In this regard, data reveals that 85% of the elected women members are married and they find it very difficult to maintain a balance between their role as a house wife and public representatives. Nearly 84% of women whose educational qualification is below HSLC admitted that the low level of education is a major constrains to be a successful participant in local democracy. It is also came to the light that though there is a provision for monthly honorarium for elected members that too was increased to considerable amount in 2013 but they have not been paid the same since they hold the office during entire period of the present term except once. As it is found that more that 80% of women have family income below 1 lakh and they find it difficult to attend meetings or training programmes at District or Block level due to scarcity of fund. Thus it is found that reservation policy makes the entrance to grassroot democracy for women much easier than to work there actively and without any bias as they are still less politically educated, excessive family burden, excessive dependence on male member and lack of recognition and reward by the government.

Conclusion: The above discussion reveals that the reservation of seats at the Panchayat level definitely increased the level of women's participation quantitatively in grassroot democracy and provides them the opportunity to come out of their traditional role as a house wife. Moreover, it is no doubt a good sign that women find easy access to local democracy due to reservation policy and also a good numbers of women are participating actively and thereby got the opportunity to be empowered. But this is only one side of the coin as women work in local democracy under extreme challenges due to patriarchal nature of the society, excessive dependence on family members, non-cooperative behaviour of their colleagues and their role as proxy member which results in ignorance regarding working of PRIs. The result of the study is not much encouraging as gendered nature of the

society still plays a very important role to make the women inactive in local democracy and thereby the goal of active participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions is still a dream.

In conclusion, it can be said that though the gender equality in politics is still a dream even after the implementation of 50% reservation of seats for women in local democracy for many reasons, the role of such huge human forces cannot be underestimated in a democratic form of government as no democracy would be successful unless there is equality between citizens which comprises both men and women. Thus it may be considered that to achieve the objectives set for minimising inequality and gender discrimination in politics, progress can be made through the co-ordination of different sections of the society such as family members, religious heads, political leaders, government officials, NGO's and they should come forward ignoring their personal differences to recognise and appreciate the work of the women. Besides, the duty of the government and society is not over by providing reservation but it is their duty to achieve the goal of reservation through active participation of women in decision making process in local self government. So, every segment of the society, government organisation including NGO's should develop positive attitude and join hands to make the rural women aware about their role and framework of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Then only the realisation of real objectives of reservation at grassroot level may be realised. At last, the road to achieve the goal of reservation through minimising gender discrimination would be more challenging unless the patriarchal structure and gendered nature of society is transformed and replaced by an egalitarian/ gender sensitive society where men and women are co-workers and enjoy equality of status and opportunity not only in paper but also in practice.

Reference

- 1) Thapar Romilla (2001), *India: Another Millennium*. Penguin Books, New Delhi.
- 2) Bandyopadhyay. D. (2000), "Gender and Governance in India in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXXV, No.31.
- 3) Kapur, Promilla(ed.) , (2001), *Empowering the Indian Women*, Publication Division, Govt. of India.
- 4) Choudhury, Rita (2010), "Women, Politics and Empowerment", in *Concerns and Voices*, Cotton College Women's Forum, Guwahati.
- 5) Jharta, Bhawana, 1998, *Women and Politics in India*, Deep & Deep Publication, New Delhi-110027
- 6) Kamble, Nitin, (2009) "Governance, Development and Panchayat Raj, Some Theoretical Implications, Journal of people's studies , Voi. I, Issue. I

- 7) Buch, Nirmala, (2009), "Reservation for Women in Panchayats, A Stop in Disguise" in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XLIV No. 40
- 8) Ansari, Imam Uddin, (2014): "Women Participation in Panchyati Raj Institutions: A Case Study of Barak Valley" International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Vol III, Issue.II, ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) cited on [http:// www.theecho.in](http://www.theecho.in) in October, 2014.
- 9) Das Suchitra, (2014): "Women Participation in Panchyati Raj: A Case Study of Karimganj District of Assam", International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Vol. 1, Issue.1, ISSN : 2349-6959 (online) cited on [http:// www.ijhsss.com](http://www.ijhsss.com) in July, 2014.
- 10) International centre for Research on Women and UN Women joint publication, (2012): "Opportunities and Challenges of Women's Political Participation in India: A Synthesis of Research Findings from Select Districts in India" cited on <https://www.icrw.org>.