

Constraints of Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions : A Study in Kamrup District (RURAL) of Assam

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Women constitute more than half of the world population. Their contribution to the social and economic development of the societies is even more than half as compared to that of men due to their dual roles in the productive as well as reproductive spheres. Still their participation in formal politics and the decision-making process regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women remains insignificant. Presently, women's representation in legislatures around the world is fifteen out of hundred. Despite the pronounced commitment of the international community to gender equality and to the bridging of the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, there are only twelve countries where women hold 33 percent or more seats in the parliaments. (UNDP Report). Against this backdrop, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 acknowledged 33 percent reservation of seats for women in the rural local governance body popularly known as the Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. Fifty percent of India's total population is female and 80 percent of them reside in rural areas. Therefore, it has been widely perceived as a crucial step for women empowerment and also raised hope for the increased participation of women in the local decision-making process. Women's enhanced participation in the decision-making process is viewed as the key to reduce gender inequalities in traditional rural societies like ours. Therefore, it has become essential to gauge the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions from the perspective of the women citizens. Questions arise whether these women can overcome the barriers of gender division of labour, low literacy level, lack of information and technology or have the elected women been able to make an impact on the Panchayati Raj Institutions or what obstacles they face in their functioning as elected representatives in grass root level politics etc. In this light, this study makes an attempt to study the political participation of women through the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the various obstacles they face as political leaders and decision-makers at local level.

Objectives of The Study

The main objective of the study is to find out the constraints of women's participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Method of The Study

The field study method was applied for the study.

Location of The Study

The study was conducted in Kamrup district (Rural) of Assam.

Sample

Simple Random sampling technique was adopted in the study. A total of 200 elected women panchayat members were considered as the sample for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data has been collected through structured schedule from the selected respondents.

Secondary data were collected from various reports like Census Report, Election Commission Report etc. and other sources.

Data was put into tabular form with percentage method for scientific analysis for drawing final result.

Findings of The 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 create 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.

The poor socio-economic condition with which women 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 specially of family and society that hinders their participation.

The women members have to shoulder dual responsibility of household works and panchayat activities. Initially they act as homemaker, only after that they come to 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 representatives at panchayats 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 representatives and the panchayat officials need to change their attitude. Acceptance of women as their leader is a issue. The male representatives and the male officials in most of the cases found to be non co-operative towards the women in panchayats.

The relationship between the local bureaucracy and the panchayat representatives also seems to create controversy. Deriving their power from their permanency, long experience, educational qualification, knowledge of rules and regulations, these officials at all levels 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 decentralisation of power through panchayat seems to be a mockery. There is lack of real devolution of administrative power because of which elected representatives 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. The women members are

Conclusion

Our study has found that the women are lagging behind their male counterparts. They are traditionally branded as weaker sex in our society. In a 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 Institutions.

Reference

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