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Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj System in Assam

Dr. Anjan Jyoti Borah

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science,

B. P. Chaliha College, Kamrup (Assam, India)

E-mail: anjanbpcc13@gmail.com

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Abstract:

Women constitute half of the human society. A woman plays several roles like mother, wife, sister, and daughter. Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the brutal grips of social, economic, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Since independence, in India various initiatives have been undertaken for bringing improvement to the socio-economic condition and status of women. Panchayati Raj Institutions provide the opportunity to the rural masses to involve themselves at grass-root level to achieve national challenges. The 73rd Constitution amendment act has made an effort to give some special power to women in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse women empowerment through Panchayati Raj system in Assam. Moreover attention has also been given on increasing violence against women in our society. So it becomes necessary to find out the problems of our society regarding women and give valuable suggestions to deal with them. Women are empowered through women emancipation movement, education, communication, media, political parties and general awakening. The Panchayati Raj system of empowerment is one of the most important efforts made for women empowerment. But some factors like illiteracy, ignorance etc. create obstacles in the way towards the empowerment of women.

Keywords: Women, empowerment, Panchayati Raj System,

INTRODUCTION:

Women in India, constitutes almost half of the population. Our society cannot run without women. A woman plays several roles like mother, wife, sister, and daughter but yet women remain to be very neglected and oppressed segment of the society. In Indian society, on one hand women are worshipped as goddesses in the form of Durga, Kali, Saraswati, Laskmi and many others. on the other hand, women are tortured, raped, burnt to death for dowry, sexually abused by their male counterparts. The condition of the Indian women is really very pathetic. Whether they are literates or illiterates, working or non working, urban or rural does not make any difference. Though women today are conscious of their rights, duties and laws, though they are given equal rights with their

male counterparts in almost all spheres of life, yet we find that women still have to fight for justice and there is a great cry for women empowerment all over the world. Since independence, in India various initiatives have been undertaken for bringing improvements to the socio-economic condition and status of women. Panchayati raj institutions provide the opportunity to the rural masses to involve themselves from grass-root level to achieve all the national challenges. The 73rd constitution amendment act has made an effort to give some special power to women in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj. The Panchayati Raj effort of empowerment is one of the most important efforts made in the society.

Objectives:

- To analyse women empowerment through Local self Govt. (Panchayati Raj system) in Assam.
- To find out the problems of our society regarding women and give suggestions to deal with the problem.

Methodology:

The methodology of the paper is descriptive and analysis based on secondary data. The secondary data's are collected from the related books, various websites, contemporary mass-media and articles from internet etc.

Existing Prejudices against Women:

- **Gender based inequality:** In almost all the Indian communities, there is discrimination between girl child and the boy child. In some societies, the birth of a girl is considered to be a curse as a result of which crimes like female foeticide and female infanticide is committed on a large scale. Girls are also not given to eat properly and hence they suffer from malnutrition also.
- **Economic exploitation:** Economically the Indian woman has been exploited since ages. Their work at home and in agricultural fields is not considered to be productive.
- **Early marriage:** In many of the Indian states, still there exists a practice of early marriage of the girls. The parents consider the girls to be a burden and marry them off at a very early age.
- **Social discrimination:** In every society women are considered as inferior. There are also many rules and regulations for the girls.
- **Lack of education:** Most of the Indian women never got the opportunity to attend a school due to social taboos.
- **Violence against women:** Violence against women in different forms still prevails in our society. Women are still raped and trafficked to different part of the world as sex and domestic workers; women are also tortured mentally and physically by their husband. All these violence take place because of the belief that women are inferior to men.

In the north east of India, women enjoy greater mobility and visibility than women of other Communities in the country. But there is high rate of domestic violence in Assam.

Women Empowerment:

Women empowerment has become a global issue in present context. Women empowerment does not mean shouting for rights of women. It means making them able to take the right decision at the right place and at the right time. It also means to develop in them ability to judge what is right and wrong. Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest sons of India, quoted that, 'there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved, it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.' so women empowerment is very necessary. Women empowerment also means emancipation of women from the brutal grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. It also enables women to make the rightful adjustment to the situation. An empowered woman is self confident and recognizes her own potentialities. The concept of empowerment was introduced at the international women's conference at Nairobi in 1985.

- According to UNESCO'S gender empowerment index 'a person becomes empowered when she is able to make decision for herself and for others, socially and politically for the feminist believe that the personal is political'.
- The International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985 defined empowerment as, 'a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women.'

Constitutional Provisions for Empowering Women in India:

The Constitution of India contains various provisions, which provide for equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. The Preamble of Indian constitution contains the goal of equality of status and opportunity to all citizens....

- Equality before law for all persons (Article-14).
- Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(I)).
- However, special provisions may be made by the state in favours of women and children Article 15(3).
- Equality of opportunity for all citizens relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16).
- State policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a);
- Equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d).
- Provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42).

- Promotion of harmony by every citizen of India and renouncement of such practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51A(e)
- Reservation of not less than one-third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies, viz; Panchayats and Municipalities (Articles 343(d) and 343 (T).

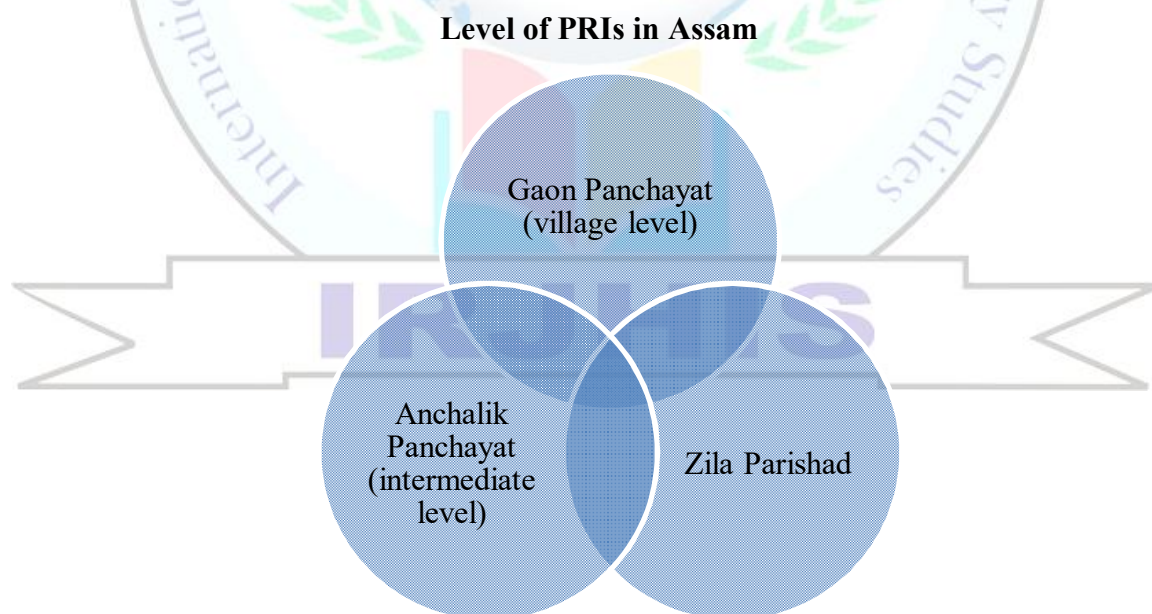
Panchyati Raj system in Assam:

After independence, Assam has seen five Panchayats Acts. These are:

- (1) Assam Rural Panchayat Act, 1948,
- (2) Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1959,
- (3) Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1972,
- (4) Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1986 and finally,
- (5) Assam Panchayat Act, 1994.

Presently, the Panchayat Raj System in Assam is working in accordance with the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994. The Government of India passed the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 to remove the shortcomings of Panchayati Raj system in India. Keeping with the provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act, the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 was enacted and it replaced the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1986. The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 came into force on 5th May, 1994. This Act has retained the three tier system of Panchayati Raj Institutions These institutions are

- Gaon Panchayat at the village level,
- Anchalik Panchayat at the Block level and
- Zilla Parishad at the District level.



As a result to the 73rd Amendment, the Assam Government enacted the Panchayat Act, 1994 which covers almost all the features of the 73rd Amendment. The PR system continues to be the three-tier with a modification i.e. in place of Mahkuma Parishad there shall be Zilla Parishad at the

District level. The reservation for women was increased from 30% (as per the 1986 Act) to 33 percent in the 1994 Act. Reservation for the SCs/STs in non-Autonomous District Council area shall be in proportion to their population. The Act. Provides all the 29 items as per the eleventh schedule to be transferred to PRIs. At the Gaon Panchayat and Anchalik Panchayat levels there were standing committees. The three standing committees at the Gaon Panchayat level shall be – a) Development Committee; b) Social Justice Committee; and c) Social Welfare Committee. At Anchilik Panchayat level, the three committees shall be a) General Standing Committee; b) Finance, Audit and Planning Committee; and c) Social Justice Committee. The Zilla Parishad shall have four Committees a). General Standing Committees; b) Financial and Audit Committee; c) Social Justice Committee; and d) Planning and Development Committee.

The 1994 Act provides for the constitution of District Planning Committee. The Zilla Parishad Chairman shall be the Ex-Officio Chairman and CEO of Zilla Parishad shall be the Ex-Officio Secretary of the DPC. MPs, MLAs, Mayor / Chairman of the Zilla Parishad standing committee shall be the members. The Deputy Commissioner shall be the permanent invitee in the DPC.

In conformity with the 73rd Constitution Amendment, the Act of 1994 has provided for the constitution of a State Finance Commission covering Panchayat institutions and Municipalities. The Finance Commission has been constituted and in it had submitted its report to the state Govt.

The Act extends over the rural areas of Assam, except the autonomous district under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India and area under Autonomous Councils established under amazing some awareness programs in rural areas. For the implementation of several schemes, the govt. Non Governmental organization s and the Self help groups should also work properly. And to reduce violence against women, it is necessary to value education in schools, colleges etc. However, it can be said that the real empowerment is not possible without collective efforts of men and women at State Legislation. It also excluded any area which is included in a Municipality or a Town Committee .The Assam Panchayat Act of 1994 is still in force in Assam.

Women Empowerment through PRI:

Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, and gender based violence and political participation presently, the Panchayat Raj System in Assam is working in accordance with the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994. The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 has made provision for 1/3 reservation of seats for women in the Panchayat bodies and in accordance with this provision 2002 and 2008 Panchayat elections provided 33% reservation of seats to women. On 10th Nov, 2012 the Assam Government has brought some modifications in the reservation policy and announced 50% reservation of seats for women in Panchayat bodies. The Government further stated that the

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women would also enjoy the 50% seat reservation in the Panchayats. Accordingly, in the last Panchayat election there was 50% reservation of seats for women in all Panchayat bodies of Assam. The 33% reservation of seats for women has led a number of women in the decision making positions at the local level. The reservation of 33% seats for women in all tiers of Panchayats on a rotational basis has facilitated representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The Panchayati Raj Institution also plays a central role in the process of enhancing women's participation in public life and helps women to actively involved in the implementation and execution of the National policy for Women at the grass root level. Welfare of women is also a basic function of Gaon Panchayat in Assam. There is also a system of reservation of 1/3 seats for women in Anchalik Panchayat. It also engaged in the implementation of various women welfare schemes. Because of Panchayati Raj Institution, it is possible to increase participation of women in political fields.

Conclusion:

It can be said that for empowerment, women themselves should be very conscious about their rights and liberties. They must challenge and change the ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and stereotypical view of family. The women section must realize their subordinate position and should take some efforts for emancipation. The change of mindset of both very male and female is also very necessary. Awareness amongst the illiterate women is also important and should be developed by or gall levels.

There should be increased emphasis on ensuring the participation of women in the meetings of Panchayats at all the levels. This is needed to promote and enhance their leadership qualities and self-confidence. It will help them to perform better in the Panchayats. To ensure their participation in the meetings, attendance of all women must be made compulsory right from Gram Sabha to Zilla Panchayat. For tackling the problem of the entry of illiterate women into Panchayats, proper identification of village Panchayats and the wards to be reserved for women should be ensured at least for one or two terms. This can help in identifying the educated and enlightened women who could be persuaded to contest elections. It will certainly provide an opportunity to women possessing better educational attainments, leadership qualities and past experiences in carrying out social welfare in their Panchayat as by getting elected to these.

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