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People's Participation in local self-government in Tripura- A Case Study of Chantail Gram Panchayat

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ABSTRACT:

The Tripura Panchayat Act, of 1993 was enacted for strengthening grassroots democracy and rural development in Tripura. However, despite more than three decades of the existence of Panchayati Raj Institutions in this state of Tripura, several study found that grassroots level institutions like Gram Panchayat not yet able to establish itself as a vibrant and responsible people's body. Thus it is very important to understand the causes associated with this problem. Therefore, this present study is an attempt to examine the nature of people's participation in Chantail Gram Panchayat in Tripura, so that some meaningful suggestions come out from the study and it can help in the strengthening of people's participation in Gram Panchayat activities. This study found that in the Chantail Gram Panchayat area there is a lack of awareness and broad-based active people participation in the Gram Sabha as well as in the Gram Panchayat activities. Hence this study also suggests that qualitative improvement in the education, capacity building programs, workshops or regular training for the elected representatives, awareness about the rights of the local people can also help in the improvement of people's participation in the Gram Panchayats.

Keywords: People's Participation, Gram Sabha, Gram Panchayat, Decentralisation.

Introduction:

Participation of the people is critical to the success of local self-government. One of the most essential aspects of good governance is people's engagement in decision-making and execution processes in decentralized governance. Participation can be defined as a mechanism by which residents can have a say in decisions that affect their lives. People's participation at the grassroots level has been seen as the most effective way for the empowerment of local people and rural development. It also helps in improving accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in the local self-government. Through active participation, common people can get the opportunity to involve themselves at the grassroots level governance to identify their own needs and problems, as well as can participate in local level development planning and problem solutions. Therefore, people's

participation is very essential for the effective functioning of the grassroots-level institution. Local self-government, such as Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), can enable citizens to successfully engage in the government's decision-making and execution processes at the grassroots level. However, it has been more than three decades of the existence of the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) in Tripura; still, a good number of people hesitates or are apathetic towards participation in Gram Panchayat activities. Therefore, it is very important to understand various issues associated with this problem.

The objectives of the study:-

- 1) To understand the awareness level among the people about the Gram Panchayat.
- 2) To understand the nature of people's participation in the activities of Gram Panchayat.

Methodology:

The current research is purely descriptive. Data was gathered from both primary and secondary sources for this research. To collect data from primary sources and understand the nature of people's engagement in Gram Sabha/Gram Panchayat activities, an interview schedule was utilized. The purposive sample approach was used to pick a total of 120 respondents. All responders, including men and women, from various political backgrounds, were interviewed. Various socioeconomic criteria were taken into account while selecting respondents and all of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 50. The said interview schedule was administered in the Chantail Gram Panchayat area from, 1st January 2022, to 28th February 2022. Secondary sources data were also employed to understand the existing literatures on this connected topic, including books, research papers, articles, government websites, and other online sources.

Tripura Panchayat Act of 1993:

The Parliament of India constitutionalized the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment A of 1992. It came into force on 24th April 1993. This act provides for the creation of the three-tier system of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Tripura. These three tiers include Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. Following the Parliament act of 1992, the Tripura Legislative Assembly has passed the Tripura Panchayat Act 1993. This Act also adopted a three-tier panchayat raj system with Zila Parishad at the District level, Panchayat Samiti at the Block level, and Gram Panchayat at the Village level.

Duties of Gram Panchayat:-

As per the Tripura Panchayats Act 1993, the duties of Gram Panchayats are divided into three categories: obligatory duties, other duties, and discretionary duties. Some of the duties of the Gram Panchayat in Tripura are-

- 1) Supply of drinking water and the cleaning of public streets and protection thereof.

- 2) The maintenance, repair, and construction of public streets and protection thereof.
- 3) The removal of encroachments of public streets or public places.
- 4) Primary, social, technical, adult, or vocational education.
- 5) Rural dispensaries, health centres, and maternity and child welfare centres.
- 6) Management of any public markets which are not declared as regulated markets under any law for the time being in force.
- 7) Irrigation including minor irrigation, water management, and watershed development.
- 8) Rural housing program.
- 9) Family welfare, and women and child development.
- 10) Welfare of the weaker sections and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- 11) Maintenance of community assets.
- 12) Public distribution system.
- 13) Poverty alleviation program.
- 14) The maintenance of lighting of public streets.
- 15) Planting and maintaining trees on the sides of public streets or in other public places vested in it.
- 16) The promotion and encouragement of cottage industries.
- 17) The establishment and running of piggeries, duckeries, and milk centres.
- 18) The construction and maintenance of sarais, dharmasallas, rest houses, cattle sheds, and cart stands.
- 19) The establishment and maintenance of libraries and reading rooms.
- 20) The organization and maintenance of akharas, clubs, and other places for recreation or games and sports.
- 21) Assisting in the prevention of burglary and dacoity.
- 22) Relief against famine or other calamities.

Gram Sabha:

As per the Tripura Panchayat Act 1993, Gram Sabha shall be a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to an area comprised within the area of Gram. It is an institution below the Gram Panchayat, is a new medium through which residents can participate actively and directly in the local decision-making process. The Gram Sabha is also responsible for several obligations connected to the implementation of rural development programs. Despite the state and Central governments providing different facilities, people are less enthusiastic and exhibit negligence in participating in Gram Sabha's meeting. Therefore it is very important to understand this issue more significantly so that some corrective measures can be initiated for improvement of

people's participation in the grassroots level institutions From the above mentioned duties of Gram Panchayts and importance of gram sabha, it is very clear that fruitful execution of these duties would require cooperation and active participation of common people. Unless there is awareness, cooperation and active participation of local citizrens in the activities of the Gram Panchayat, Gram Panchayat would not be able to achieve its institutional objectives and at the same time will not be able to create a significant positive impact in the life of people living in the Gram Panchayat area. Therefore it is very important to understand the nature of people's participation at the Gram Panchayat level.

Chantail Gram Panchayat: A Case Study:

Tripura is divided into eight districts for administrative purposes. According to the 2011 census, Tripura has a population of approximately 36.74 lakhs (3673917). There are 91 villages in Unakoti District, with Gram Panchayats and Village Committees. Chantail Gram Panchayat is one of Unakoti District's most undeveloped villages. Kailashahar, the district headquarters town, is around 4 kilometers away. Chantail Gram Panchayat is currently divided into six wards for administrative purposes. According to government data from 2020-2021, the total population of these 6 wards of this village is 4476.

A field survey was conducted using an interview schedule from March to April 2022 with 20 villagers from a total of 6 wards of Chantail Gram Panchayat to know about awareness among the common people about Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat, and the nature of people's participation in the Gram Panchayat activities.

Table No-1

Do you know/heard about Gram Panchayat?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	120	100
No	00	00
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: Above data indicates that out of a total of 120 respondents, all of them heard about the term Gram Panchayat. Thus it can be said that almost every resident of this village is aware or familiar with the term Gram Panchayat.

Table No-2

Do you cast vote in the Gram Panchayat election?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes, in every election(GP)	97	81
No	3	2.5

Sometimes	15	12.5
Not interested	5	4
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: Above data indicates that out of total 120 respondents, 81 % respondents said that they participate in the Gram Panchayat's election. It also shows that majority of the people are interested to participate in the election process. However, 4% people replied that they are not interested to join in the election of the Panchayat.

Table No-3

Do you think that people's participation is important for the success of Local self-government like gram panchayat?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Important	33	27.5
Not important	69	57.5
Don't know.	18	15
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: From the above data indicates that out of total 120 respondents, majority of the respondents replied that they do not agree that people participation is important for the success of the local self government. Follow up question revealed that they believe that their input is not going to be considered by the local politicians.

Table No-4

Do you get chance to participate in the decision-making process through your feedback /input/ question during the Gram Panchayat meeting/activities?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
a) Yes, regularly	11	9.16
b) Sometimes	39	32.5
c) No	90	75
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: From the above data, indicates that out of total 120 respondents, majority of the respondents (75%) do not get chance to participate in the decision making process. It is one of the most important findings of this study.

Table No-5

Are you aware that there is a reservation of seats for the elected representatives in the Panchayat?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
a) I Know	23	19.16
b) Don't know	69	57.5
c) Not Sure	28	23.33
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: Above data indicates that out of a total of 120 respondents, the majority of them are not aware of the reservation of seats in the Gram Panchayat. It also revealed that there is a lack of awareness among the people about the rules and different processes of the Panchayat and its election.

Table No-6

Do you participate in the implementation of rural development programs (through encouraging others/cooperating with elected representatives) in your Gram Panchayat area?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes, regularly	40	33.33
Sometimes	22	18.33
No	27	22.5
Not interested	31	25.83
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: From the above data it is clear that out of a total of 120 respondents, 33.33% of people participate in the implementation of rural development schemes and programs through a different medium. However, 25.83% of people replied that they are not interested to participate in the implementation of rural development programs. Thus it also indicates that good numbers of people are apathetic towards participation.

Table No-7

8) Are you aware of the purpose/function of the Gram Sabha?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
a) Yes, I Know	39	32.5
b) Don't know	57	47.5
c) Not sure	24	20
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: From the above table of data it indicates that out of a total of 120 respondents, only 32.5% of people are aware of the purpose/functions of Gram Sabha and 47.5% people are not aware of it and 20% people are not sure. It again reveals that there is an urgent need for awareness generation among the people about the purpose and functions of gram Sabha.

Table No-8

Do you participate in the meeting of Gram Sabha?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Regularly	49	40.83
Sometimes	21	17.5
Not interested	50	41.66
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: From the above data it indicates that, out of a total of 120 respondents, only 40.83% of people participate in the meeting of Gram Sabha, and 41.66% people do not participate in the gram sabha's meeting. It again reveals that there is a lack of interest and enthusiasm among the people towards the participation in Gram Sabha's meeting.

Table No-9

Do you receive information about Gram Sabha meetings on time?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes, in advance.	47	39.16
On the day of meeting	16	13.33
Sometimes receives on time, sometimes not.	07	5.83
No, we do not get information	50	41.66
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: Above data indicates that out of a total of 120 respondents, only 39.16% of respondents receive information on time about the Gram Sabha's meeting and 41.66% people do not get information, and 13.33% people get information about the meeting on the day of the meeting. It also indicates that there lack of communication between the Elected Representatives and common people.

Table No-10

If you participate in the Gram Sabha meeting, then are you aware of the process/method of selection of beneficiaries?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes.	33	27.5
No	56	46.66
Not Sure	31	25.83
Total	120	100%

Source: Field survey conducted by authors.

Analysis: From the above table it indicates that out of a total of 120 respondents, only 27.5% of people are aware of the method of selection of beneficiaries related to various schemes, and 46.66% people are not aware of it. It was also found in the study that instead of objectively selecting the beneficiaries elected representatives use their own discretion in the selection of beneficiaries. Not only that while selecting beneficiaries they give preference to those people who belong to the ruling party even if they are not truly deserving candidate for getting benefits of government schemes and benefits.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This present study's findings gives an indication about the areas of concern which affecting negatively the prime objective of the institution of Gram Panchayat. The most important findings, as well as the area of concern, is that this study revealed that although the majority of the people of this village participate in the election of Gram Panchayat but in general there is a lack of awareness among the people about the Gram Panchayat and importance of people participation in Gram Panchayat activities. Another important finding is that there is lack of enthusiasm among the people towards the participation in Gram Sabha's meeting. This study also highlighted that out of total 120 respondents, majority of the respondents do not get chance to participate in the decision making process at the Gram Panchayat level.

This study only reflects the nature of people's participation in the Chantail Gram Panchayat. Thus further, more comprehensive research work needs to be conducted in the various Gram Panchayats of Tripura so that a total picture about the nature of people participation can be revealed and all the stakeholders can take corrective measures for improving people participation. Government can also collaborate with the different non-governmental organizations or clubs for awareness generation about the importance of people's participation for the success of local governance. Improvement in the access of quality education, regular capacity development programs, regular training/ workshops for the elected representatives, awareness about the rights of the common people can also help in the improvement of people's participation in the Gram Panchayats.

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