

WOMEN IN LOCAL SELF- GOVERNMENT: A CASE STUDY OF CHAPAR TOWN COMMITTEE (ASSAM)

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ABSTRACT

The Women of India have been exposed to greater insecurity to poverty, illiteracy, Casteism, orthodoxy, unhealthy living conditions, Straditionalism, backwardness, corruption, criminalization and male dominance in most of the fields. They have been affected be lack of opportunities and facilities owing to the innate discrimination prevalent in the society. Women's participation in decision making process is vital for the betterment of their human right conditions. If real democracy ha to be sustained, the women, comprising about half of the world's population have to be incorporated at different levels and different processes of decision-making. It is true that women in top power positions in politics were no indicators regarding the social, economic or political status of the women masses. But they indicated the span of mobility in recruitment process and gender toleration in a political system. Reservation for women in local bodies in Assam has provided ample opportunities for women to enter into politics at local level politics. .Prior to the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution of India, Women had few occasions and opportunities in entering into local bodies because of male dominance. The situation was highly disappointing for women, specially in rural areas. Now due to these constitutional amendments and due to their implementation by the Assam government, women have been able to get power at each of the three levels of of grass root democracy. So the present study has attempted to assess the role of women by taking into account their extent of participation in urban Local self-Government specially in town committee and how far the objectives of the Constitution (74rd Amendment) Act; 1992 has executed in Chapar town committee under Dhubri district of Assam .

Key word: Women, Local self government, Political participation, 74th Amendment Act, Assam

INTRODUCTION

Local self governing institutions exist in every democratic country. They are considered as the grass-roots of democracy. These institutions cater to the local needs. It is not possible for any government to look into the local problems properly. The local institutions are in a position to deal with these problems. Local self governing institutions come into being as per law passed by the legislature. In India local self government of a state subject. Hence it is the state legislature which can create local institutions by laws.¹

G.M. Harris opines, “Local government is a ‘government by local bodies, freely elected while subject to the supremacy of the national government; are endowed in some respect power, discretion and responsibility, which they can exercise without control over their decisions by the higher authority. The extent of power, discretion and responsibility which the local bodies possess is a matter of degree, which varies considerably In the various countries”.²

URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Urban local government mainly operates in towns and cities through Municipal Committees or Councils, Municipal Corporations, Cantonment Boards, Town and Notified Area Committees.

The scope of urban local government extends to the study of the phenomenon of urbanization and its problem, urban planning, structure of urban governments and their classification, municipal legislation, personnel management, financial administration, state local relations, special purpose agencies and attached offices, as also that of the State departments of urban local government.³

WOMEN IN LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT

Gender discrimination has completely been banned by the constitution suggesting that all men and women enjoy equal opportunities for their multi-dimensional growth. Women, nearly half of the human race, are suffering from inequality in every walk of life. They have been considered as second rate citizens in one way or the other. If we analyse the participation of women in the social, political, cultural, economic and religious fields, we find that their participation is not equal to their male counterparts. But modernization has opened the floodgates for women in every area. Democracy and globalization have given them voice and ample space to express their views about the society, polity, culture, economy and religion. Democracy has provided equal opportunity to them to elect the representatives of their choice, who in turn from the government.

¹ Paul.kripesh Chandra, “Political Theory and Indian Constitution” (5th edition), Arun prakshan, Guwahati-2005, p-116

² G.M.Harris, “comparative Local government”, London, 1948,p-1

³Myneni S.R, “Local Self Government”, Law Publishers, Hyderabad, 2016, p-53

But in spite this right to equality given to women civil societies in all countries also present another picture where women are less represented in the decision making process at every level and in every sphere. Thus, the policy of affirmative action in the form of reservation of seats in the legislative bodies, are opted in many countries. In an era a globalization and openness, there is a growing need to associate all sections of society in the processes of nation building and development. This is why in India the Constitution through its 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 weft. 1993 and 74th constitutional amendment act 1992 weft. 1993, makes provisions of 33% for reservation of 1/3rd of the seats for women in Panchayats & Urban Local Administration. About one million women have entered into the local politics in different capacities after the implementation of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992. Among them about 40% of the elected women belong to the marginalised sections of society. However, out of the total women representatives, nearly 70% are illiterate and most of them have no previous political experience; but this very entry of women in local administration has deep impact on gender equality. Initially, there was an apprehension that these women representatives would work like puppets at the hands of the male members of their families, but the experience of their work has disapproved it.

One of these is the lack of participation and representation of certain sections of society, especially women. The recent 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution though have been major steps forward in fulfilling this gap. The present study tried to examine the question of political participation women in Local self government specially in Urban area and how far the objectives of the Constitution (74rd Amendment) Act; 1992 has executed in Assam with special reference to Chapar town committee under Bilasipara Sub-division in Dhubri District of Assam.

BACKGROUND OF THE CHAPAR TOWN

Chapar Town situated in Dhubri, district of Assam state. Its geographical coordinates are 26° 16' 0" North, 90° 28' 0" East. According to census 2011 of Assam the Chapar Town has total population of 20320 of which 10,306 are males while 10,014 are females. Population of Children with age of 0-6 is 2568 which is 12.64 % of total population of Chapar (TC). In Chapar Town Committee, Female Sex Ratio is of 972 against state average of 958. Moreover Child Sex Ratio in Chapar is around 919 compared to Assam state average of 962. Literacy rate of Chapar city is 80.30 % higher than state average of 72.19 %. In Chapar, Male literacy is around 85.63 % while female literacy rate is 74.86 %. As per the Census 2011, the literacy rate of Chapar is 80.3%. Thus Chapar has higher literacy rate compared to 58.3% of Dhubri district. The male literacy rate is 74.5% and the female literacy rate is 65.7% in Chapar.⁴

⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/chapar,_dhubri

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of related literature in the area of enquiry is a crucial component of the research process. Numerous studies on political participation of women in local self Government in India have been conducted both by the government as well as by the individual scholars. There is very rich literature on local self Government in India in the forms of books, reports and articles. However, there are quite a few studies dealing with post 74th Amendment particularly regarding women participation in urban local self government.

B.P.Maithai (1997) in his Edited book '**Local self government in North east India ' An appraisal'** compiles the papers contributed by the experts in their fields highlighting the steps taken by the government since 1990 in the direction of creating local self-government in North east India. He points out the steps needed to fully implement the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act. The book also deals with the political issues, allocation of functions and powers, financial resources, role of Local self government in developmental and planning and the steps that could be initiated to avoid pitfalls that blot the pages of the history of democratic decentralization in India.⁵

K. Subha (1994) in his book '**Women in local governance**' focuses on the working of the municipal corporation and evaluate the role of women councilors in policy making, administration and the extent to which it has met with the requirements of women, thereby holding the empowerment of women in proper perspective.⁶

U.B. Singh (2006) in his book '**Empowerment of women in urban administration: Experiences and strategies**' a collection of scholarly papers contributed by academics, administrators and practitioners at national seminar revealed that 74th Constitutional Amendment Act has empowered the women leaders and it had opened a channel for them to occupy a legitimate space in the power structure. But there are obstacles in the process of their empowerment like control of their party men, husband, relatives and responsibilities at home. Some measures are being undertaken by women leaders themselves to overcome the obstacles.⁷

⁵Maithani B.P. "Local Self Government System in North East India An Appraisal", National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, 1997

⁶Subha K, "Women in Local Government" R.B.S.A. Publishing, Jaipur, 1994

⁷Singh U.B, "Empowerment of Women in Urban Administration", Serials Publications, New Delhi, 2006.

Uttam Das (2014) in his unpublished PhD thesis ‘Local Self Government and Women Empowerment: A comparative study of Women’s Participation in Rural and Urban Local Bodies in South Assam’ examines the nature of participation women in Local Self- Government elections. Besides attempt is made to understand the awareness level of women members about the goals, functions, workings, proceeding of meetings and financial matter of local bodies. Attempt is also made to examine the nature of their participation in various aspects such as their contribution to development of their locality. ⁸

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main focus and objectives of proposed study are as follows:

1. To study the socio-economic background on women members of their participation in Local politics.
2. To study the obstacles to political participation of the women in the urban local self government elections.
3. To study the urban government system and participation of women in the wake of 74th amendment act of Indian constitution

HYPOTHESIS

The present study tested the following hypotheses:

1. Participation of women in urban local self government institution is satisfactory
2. Women’s role in family and decision making level is fairly good.
3. There is a no significant relation between level of awareness and the level of political participation.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is confined to women elected representatives at present of Chapar town committee of Bilasipara sub-division of Assam. The study is descriptive, empirical and analytical. The Data was collected for the present study from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data which was the base of our study was collected by interview schedule, through questionnaire . Secondary data was collected from books, journals and such other relevant documents and news papers like Assam tribune, Pratidin etc. Study area is taken only about the political participation of women in urban/ municipal Bodies of Chapar town committee. In order to collecting of primary data field study was conducted in theselected areas of study. At present Chapar town committee there are 08 (Eight) out of which 4 wards are dominated by elected women representatives. All the

⁸Local self government and women empowerment a comparative study of women participation in rural and urban local bodies in South Assam, by *Uttam Das* Ph.D. thesis in the Assam University, 2014

04 members of Town Committees have been selected as study area. Sample was drawn from 100% of the total selected women elected representatives then schedule interview is collected from the women representative of the selected wards.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The area of the study is Chapar town committee. In Chapar town committee there are 08 wards under the Bilasipara sub-division of Assam. It is located 70 KM from District head quarters Dhubri and about 225 km from Dispur Capital of Assam.

Table-1
Classification of Respondents on the basis of Age

| Age Group | Number | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|--------|----------------|
| Young Age (18-30) | 00 | 00 % |
| Middle Age (31-45) | 03 | 75% |
| Aged (Above 50) | 01 | 25% |
| Total | 04 | 100% |

(Sources: primary data from field survey)

The table 1 shows that out of total sample 02 women respondents 75 % belongs to 31 -45 years of age group, 25 percent belongs above the age of 50 and there is no respondent young age. So women of young age group (18-30) not interested to participation in political affairs in urban local bodies.

Table-2
Educational Qualification of the Respondents

| Educational Qualification | Number | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|--------|----------------|
| Illiterate | 00 | 00% |
| Matriculation | 02 | 50% |

| | | |
|------------------|----|------|
| Senior Secondary | 01 | 25% |
| Graduate | 01 | 2.5% |
| Post-Graduate | 00 | 00% |
| Total | 04 | 100% |

(Sources:
data from
survey)

primary
field

The table 2 shows that majority of respondents 50 per cent were *Matriculation* level passed. 25 per cent were studied up to senior secondary level. Followed by Graduate level 25 per cent and 0 per cent respondents were Post-graduate and illiterate respectively. Education level is very low in Higher education of elected women representatives.

Table-3
Respondents category on the basis of their caste

| Caste | Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Upper caste | 02 | 50% |
| Scheduled caste | 01 | 25% |
| Other Backward caste | 01 | 25% |
| Total | 04 | 100% |

(Sources: primary data from field survey)

Table 3, shows that out of the total sample of 04 respondent's majority of women 50 per cent were from upper caste, followed by Scheduled caste 25 per cent and other backward caste 25 per cent. So upper caste system does affect the participation in urban local bodies.

Table-4**Knowledge of the Respondents regarding 74th amendment act of Indian constitution**

| Knowledge | Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Yes | 00 | 00% |
| No | 04 | 100% |
| Total | 04 | 100% |

(Sources: primary data from field survey)

Table 4 shows that all the respondents have no knowledge and awareness about the provision of 74th amendment act of Indian constitution.

Table-5**Do you think that 'reservation system 'in urban local bodies help in women empowerment?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| (a) Yes | 03 | 75% |
| (b) No | 01 | 25% |
| Total | 04 | 100 |

(Sources: primary data from field survey)

The above table reveals that 75% of respondents agreed that reservation seats for women had enhanced the great steps towards women empowerment in urban local bodies where as one respondent 25% disagree that reservation seats for women has not influenced in empowerment of women.

Table-6**How do you take the decisions in the meetings?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| (a) Consensus | 02 | 50 |
| (b) Majority | 02 | 50 |
| (c) Any other | 00 | 00 |
| Total | 04 | 100 |

(Source- Field survey April, 2017)

The table shows that in half of respondents 50% under study decisions are taken on the basis of majority principle and rest of respondent followed the consensus method.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

1. During the study it was observed that the percentage of elected women leaders is more prominent than the older women leaders. As majority of women members belong to the age group of 31-45 there is no women member belongs to the age group 18-30.

2. Regarding the caste position it was found that majority of women members belongs to upper caste .

3. During the study it was found that majority of women members admitted that reservation of seats for women in urban local bodies is a great step towards women empowerment.

4. With regard to knowledge on 74th amendment act of Indian constitution it is observed that a majority of women do not have any knowledge about 74th amendment act of Indian constitution as well as Assam municipal act 1956, which proved the hypothesis of present study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the present study the result discussion had led to the following recommendations, which are as follows

1. Women in themselves should develop a favorable attitude towards politics. They should spare time and should come out of their homes to take part in political activities. It is also up to women to prepare themselves for participating in all the processes that they have been demanding their representation in. Family members should also co-operate with women by sharing their family responsibilities and encouraging them to take part in political activities. In fact, there is the need for a paradigm shift in the traditional value system.

2. Proper training in political organizations regarding the operational knowledge of political affairs can be organized to attract more women towards politics.

3. The socio-economic characteristics of women have positive correlation with the extent of participation in development activities. This emphasizes the adoption of special efforts to strengthen the socio-economic status of women.

4. All women members of municipal and other executive bodies must be trained and empowered to exercise their authority. Both men and women members must be sensitized to women's issues. A committee should be formed to look into the training needs of women members and to help in designing modules separate allocation may be made for this purpose. Particular attention must be paid to the development of interpersonal communication skills among the trainees and community leaders.

5. Women's participation in decision - making process is vital for the betterment of their human right conditions. If real democracy has to be sustained, the women, comprising about half of the world's population have to be incorporated at different levels and different processes of decision-making.

6. Need for the formulation of one a few models of curriculum development, and of designing a syllabi that would include the different areas in constitutional, political, socioeconomic, social rights and issues, as well as governmental policies, programmes and procedures.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we conclude by saying that though women are socially and politically empowered through local Institutions, they are yet to be empowered economically. Local government institutions are the larger platform of development planning, development dialogue, and development agency of people in grass root level Active participation of women on this platform can bring about desirable change, progress and development. By providing gender friendly environment, optimum use of women resource can be made for the proper functioning of these institutions for delivery of timely and quality of services. This has a bearing on ensuring quality of life of masses. Women's effective participation at the grassroots through the urban local government will not become a reality unless women are made aware of the realities and are properly trained for their new role.

However, the majority of urban women leaders gave priority to local problems in comparison to national problems. The study of the political value orientation and participation of women leaders can be concluded that women leaders of local bodies are highly aware of the political situation that prevails in the country and the state. Their outlook towards the political issues is by and large positive and rational. They showed faith in the democratic institutions and believed in the constitutional methods of change. They are found to be strong in beliefs and clear in vision.

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