



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

A Study on “Participation and Seat Reservation of Women in Gaon Panchayats of Barpeta District, Assam”.

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Abstract

Participation and Seat Reservation of Women both are interrelated each other. Without women participation in Indian democracy, the country will have deprived from fifty percent service of citizens. To keeping it mind the government of India has evolved a policy namely ‘Panchayati Raj Institutions’ (PRI) through constitutional amendment Act.1993. Reservation of seats for women is one of the bold steps of the Indian government. Through which the government of India has been trying to increase the participation of women. Several state governments of India have already increased reservation of seats for women up to 50%. To strengthen Indian democracy the maximum participation of people is very vital. Enjoyed the benefit of Seat reservation Women are now feeling proud as a representative of democratic country.

KEY WORD: *Participation, Seat Reservation, Women, Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI), Democracy.*

A society is made up of both male and female. The combination of male and female are the foundation of creation. Both male and female partner’s will have equal in order to maintain continuous creation. But throughout the ages women are neglected stressed. Approximately male and female are equal in number. But female are not equal to male in the social, economical and political field. In India women constitute nearly fifty (50) percent of India's population. According to Census report of India 2011, the rate of male and female population is 51.70 % and 48.30% respectively. In this regard, it is not possible for a country like India to make progress without overall development of women. But yet, in India they have been given worst deal in every sphere of our socio-political process. Women are not only physically and mentally abused, but they are denied equal social status, political role, equal wages and treated as an appendages of men. In fact there seems to be an intensification of torture and harassment against women.

To pay attention these torture and harassment, the union government and state governments of India have evolved a policy namely 'Panchayati Raj Institutions' which can ensure people's participation in Indian democracy. To make Indian democracy strongest, through the system of decentralization by giving more power to the Panchayat, it has offered more amenities to the people for participation in decision-making process. 'Panchayati Raj' the local governance in India is the basic administration element of socio-economic change in Indian rural areas. Socio-economic change is not possible without the ensure of people's participation in local activities.

Objective of the study:- The objective of the study are –

- a) To study the status of women living in the rural area of Barpeta district.
- b) To study the literacy rate of women in this area.
- c) To study the reservation of seats for women in this area.
- d) To find out some significant problems related to the study.
- e) To suggest some remedial measures to eradicate these problems.

Review of related literature:

Verba in his work defines "Participation as an active engagement of citizen with public institutions activity, which falls into three well defined modes voting, election, campaign, contacting or pressure either individually or through group activity, including non-violent protest." According to Pamela Singla "Participation is in interaction among individual to achieve specific goals and outcomes." Sartory considered, participation means self motion. It involves a factor determination of the participants."

Bala Vikasa "Study on Elected Women to Panchayati Raj in Andhra Pradesh" (2009), find out that, elected women members have been reluctant to participate in the meetings due to their lack of communication and public speaking skills. This has been a deterrent in their participation in decision making in the local bodies, despite the provision of reservation. The training programs organized by the government are not adequate to enhance their capacities and innovative skills.

Concept of participation and reservation

It is the term 'participation' means is 'to have a share' or 'to take part' in any activities. Participation in the socio-political sphere stands to have a share in socio-political activities or administrative system decision making process.

Participation of people in the Panchayati Raj Institutions is considered that the involvement of people in decision making process, implementation and evaluation, through which people fulfill their local needs.

It is the democracy ensures free and equal participation for all (male and female). For this purpose a uniform equal franchise i. e. Universal Adult Franchise is granted to the citizens. The value of vote of each individual is equal to the value of vote of everyone else. Anyone can contest in the political struggle (election) and after successfully contesting in elections can hold a public office. While granting the right to franchise, minimum uniform qualifications are prescribed. In a democracy each citizen has a right to share in political power.

At present, (since 1992) women are interested to their own responsibility as a voter. Voting act of citizen is an identity of responsibility and it is good information for democracy. Fruitful democracy depend on public consciousness. Liberty, equality and justice are the basic principles of democracy. Democracy is a system of government where continuous and active involvement of people is necessary in political process. Without popular and effective political participation of the people no democracy can be successful.

Women participation and seat reservation both are really differ from each other. But yet, Indian democracy has introduced reservation system. Because the role of women are not satisfactory in the field of active politics. There is still men's control over women for flow social and social system in decision-making and enforcement of political power. It is clear by observation of previous village panchayats.

Reservation is one of the most important way among the various ways for women participation in administration. The 73rd constitutional amendment Act, 1993 of India is considered as milestone for reservations of seats. Accordingly Assam also introduced the Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 made it compulsory to reserve 33% of seats for women. After that, feeling the necessity of women participation the union cabinet of India has increased the reservation of seats for women up to 50%. With some states of India the Assam state has also increased the same. In the Assam Panchayat election 2012, it was implemented and as well as in the Assam Panchayat election 2018. Women are always regarded as the vulnerable category and therefore their participation in the decision-making process will contribute towards their empowerment.

Reservation is very important for Indian democracy and women's participation, though various complaints are arises about this matter in the time of Seat reservation for women was set up. But at present, situation has changed. Now the women are more conscious, many educated women come forward to serving society by applying the benefits of Seat reservation and they have feeling proud as a representative of democratic country.

An Overview Study of Barpeta District

The district was carved erstwhile Kamrup district of Assam in July 1983. The district derived its name from the head – quarter town of Barpeta created as a Civil – Subdivision in 1841 by the British Administration, Jhon Batlor was the first administrative officer of erstwhile Civil Sub – Division. In present time the district has two Civil Sub – Division, namely – 1) Barpeta and 2) Bajali. This lower Assam Barpeta district is bounded by international border is Bhutan Hills' and Baksa district to the north; Nalbari in the east; Kamrup and Goalpara in the South and Bongaigaon district in the west.

Total area of Barpeta district is 2282 sq km(as per census 2011). Where rural area is 2245.62 and urban area is 36.38 sq km and density of the population is 742 of the whole district.

Table: 1 Population structure of the district

Population						
Urban			Rural			Urban & Rural
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
75215	72138	147353	791789	754480	1546269	1693622

Source: Census Report, 2011

As of 2011 India census, Barpeta has a population of 1693622. Male constitute 51.19% and female constitute of 48.81% of the population. Total rural population of the district is 1546269 (table: 3). Male constitute of 51.20% and female constitute of 48.79% of the total rural population.

Table: 2 Literacy rate of the district

Urban Literacy Rate (%)			Rural Literacy Rate (%)			Average
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
90.44	81.94	86.28	67.09	55.56	61.47	63.81

Source: Census Report, 2011

The urban literacy rate of the district is 86.28% which is higher than the whole district average of 63.81% where rural literacy rate is 61.47% . Again rural female literacy rate is 55.56%. Which is very low than urban female literacy rate of 81.94% and also less than the district average of 63.81% (Table: 2)

Methodology:

In social or any other research work, research methods are of utmost importance in research process. They describe the various step of the plan to be adopted in solving a research problem, such as the manner to formulate, identity, select process, the validation of data gathering tools, collection and analysis and interpretation of data about a topic. In this article, the methodology has been presented sample, tool, questionnaire, observation, statistical method, interview etc.

In this work, it is shown that how do the rural women of Barpeta district participate in politics and decision-making process? It is clearly seen that there are 29 Zilla Parishad Member seats in Barpeta Zilla Parishad; among these seats 15 are reserved for women. There are 11 number of Anchalik Panchayat seats where 5 women are Presidents and 5 women, Vice-Presidents seats; there are 129 Anchalik Panchayat Member seats among these 68 seats are reserved for women. Likewise, there are 129 Gaon Panchayats in Barpeta district, out of which 65 women President and 65 women Vice-President seats and there are 1290 Gaon Panchayat Member seats in Barpeta district where 650 is reserved for women (table; 3). Thus 50% women come out to take part in politics. Of course, this number is much more, because each women seat has many competitors.

Problems of women:

This research work is an attempt to observe the result out from the data collected. The investigator select 3 namely a) Bonghugi G.p b) Barbhita G.P and c) Titapani G.P out of 129 Gaon Panchayats under the rural area of Barpeta District through questionnaires in depth study and found the following basic problems -

1. **Lack of Education:** - Education is not up to the expectation in this rural area of Barpeta district. The literacy rate of women of the district is shown 55.56% (rural), where average rural literacy rate is 61.47, which is not satisfactory. Lack of quality education is the big hindrance of development in this area.
2. **Male Domination:** - Male domination over women on every respect of livelihood is high in almost all Gaon Panchayat of the district. Physical torture and mental abuse over women are day to day incident of this area.
3. **Dowry System:** - The dowry system in matrimonial ceremony is very high in this area, Which leads to harassment over women by the husband and his family.

4. **Lack of political consciousness:** - Due to lack of political consciousness, women are still lagging behind in participating in politics. Even most of the elected women representatives do not know what is the 73rd constitutional amendment and what kind of arrangements are there for them.
5. **Sexual harassment at work place:** - Some women are now out of the house and engaged in various government and non-government jobs. However, they are often seen as being sexually harassed such as obscenity, jokes, embarrassing etc. by the head and colleagues of the office at work. They are endured everything for fear of losing their jobs.
6. **Religious superstition:** - Religious superstitions are very high in this area. So, women have to refrain from many social and political activities. Due to this problem, women development is jeopardized.

Here are just only a few of the basic problems mentioned, there are many more such problems that women are far behind than men.

Suggestions and conclusion

The above problems have acquainted us with the problems of women in rural area of Barpeta district. These problems are the great obstacles for all round development of women in this rural area. Hence following measures are suggested for eradication of these problems.

1. **Education:** Education is the epicentre of the development of human mind and thinking. It makes people conscious and logistic. Education, as in the contrast of this area, especially women need this facility in broader sense. Without proper and modern education, the eradication of the problems as discussed above is not possible. Therefore Proper and modern education is eminent for women development.
2. **Increase in political participation:** Political parties have to work for increase of political participation among women. By this process women will be able to take part in the political and policy formation matters in the grassroot level.
3. **Legal procedure:** Strong and active legal procedures is very needed to reducing sexual harassment over women. The government should be taken steps in this matter.
4. **Elimination of prejudice:** Religious superstition is very high in this area. Regarding this matter, the religious scholars should take courageous initiative and they need people to understand that how religious superstitions obstruct in all round developments.
5. **Women's self-confidence:** Women self-confidence is a very necessary tool for developing themselves. So, they have to come forward and take part in social, cultural, economical, political activities. In this context, they need to make it clear to their families that women are human beings and they have the same rights as men, they can do everything as man done. It may be late but they will succeed.

In this way some basic suggestions can be given to solve various problems of women. However, the participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has increased more than before, its reason mainly reservation of seats for women. It is hoped that women will participate in an increasing measure in the coming days in the field of social, cultural, economical political etc. In this way, superstition or prejudice will be removed from the society, women will be educated in quality education through government efforts and thus society will develop with the combination effort of both male and female.

Reservation of seats for women is the milestone step of the government of India as well as Assam through 73rd constitutional amendment regarding Panchayati Raj Institution, which has increased public participation. Taking this opportunity, women are contributing socially, politically, economically etc. If their problems are solved gradually, it is hoped that the overall development of our society will take place. It makes our democracy more meaningful and fruitful.

Reference and Note

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