

## **Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj System- A critical analysis with special reference to North East India .**

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**ABSTRACT:** *After Independence of India Panchayati Raj was first introduced in Assam in 1948 through a legislative Act entitled 'The Assam Rural Panchayati Act 1948'. But until the 73rd amendment to the constitution of India in 1992 Panchayati Raj did not function regularly in Assam and also in the other states of North east India .The 73rd Constitution amendment act has made an effort to give some special power to women in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj .Women are empowered through women emancipation movement ,education ,communication ,media , political parties and general awakening .The Panchayati Raj effort of empowerment is one of the several efforts made simultaneously in the society. But, prevalence of patriarchal value ,illiteracy ,ignorance, non availability of women ,corrupt leadership and bureaucracy ,bias towards elite and middle class are some of the factors that create an obstacle in the way towards the empowerment of women through the Panchayati Raj system. An improvement in the situation can be brought about only by creating a strong public opinion in this regard. Superstition and myth about women must be tested on the touch stone of rational and equal status be accorded to them by the society.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

Women constitute half of the humanity .Besides bearing and rearing of future citizens ,they play significant role in every walk of life. Yet they suffer from the secondary social status and their participation in the development process is marginalized .In India as per 2011 census ,women account for 586 million and represent 48.46% of the total population .In North east also women Represent 48.86% of the total population. Thus without betterment of women's socio economic condition and their effective participation, the development of the country cannot be ensured effectively. The women are both the agent and the target of development process.

### **II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The objective of the present paper is to examine the status of empowerment in the context of Panchayati Raj Institutions especially in the north eastern part of India.

### **III. METHODOLOGY:**

The present paper is based on the secondary data collected from the secondary source i.e. published literature of the subject concern. Moreover classification and tabulation of data have been prepared by applying various mathematical and statistical methods.

### **IV. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS :**

The constitution of India confer on women equal social ,economic and political rights and opportunities along with men as per the provision of Article 14. Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the ground of sex ,caste, religion , race etc. Article 15(3) enables the state to make positive discrimination in favour of women and article 16 provides equal opportunities in the field of government appointments. Article 51(A) makes it a fundamental duty of every citizens to renounce practice derogatory to the dignity of women.

In order to improve the condition of women ,the above constitutional provisions are supplemented by a number of legal provision and acts as such as Child Marriage Restraints Acts (1956), Suppression of Immoral traffic in women and girl acts 1956, Indecent representation of women (Prohibition ) acts ,1986,Commission of Sati Prevention acts 1987, the national commission for women acts 1990,etc have been enacted. The legal right to property bill, protection of women from domestic violence bill, bill for reservation for women in parliament and state legislature are under active consideration .

### **V. SHIFT IN APPROACH**

#### **From welfare to Empowerment -**

Since independence a number of policy and programmes have been launched to ameliorate the condition of Indian women .It should be noted that for longtime the approach has been primarily government

centered with few voluntary initiative .There has been noticeable shift in the government approach from welfareism in 1950s and 1960s and developmentalism in 1970s and 1980s to finally empowerment centered in 1990s.From the first five year plan to fifth plan many programmes were undertaken with a distinct emphasis of welfare of women . There was a visible shift from the 6<sup>th</sup> plan onwards which adopted a multi disciplinary approach with focus on three core areas of development – health ,education and employment .The 7<sup>th</sup> plan continued the development approach with emphasis on raising the economic and social status of women and bringing them into the mainstreaming of national development .The 8<sup>th</sup> plan focus on human development and tried to ensure that women become equal partner in the process of development.

It was the ninth plan approach that clearly focus on the empowerment of women in changed circumstances

This plan laid down on two strategies

- It tries to create an environment in which women could exercise their rights both within and outside home ; and
- It aimed at converging all services in women specific fields.

The 10<sup>th</sup>,11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> plan continue the process of empowerment launched in earlier with definite goals and target with time frame .

## **VI. PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION**

Panchayati Raj is regarded as a real democratic political apparatus which bring the masses into active political participation and also would establish a genuine political control from below, from the vast majority of the weaker ,poor section of rural India. After Independence of India Panchayati Raj was first introduced in Assam in 1948 through a legislative Act entitled ‘The Assam Rural Panchayati Act 1948’. But until the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the constitution of India in 1992 Panchayati Raj did not function regularly in Assam and also in the other states of North east India .The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution amendment act has made an effort to give some special power to women in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj. The empowerment is specially a political process, which require involvement and participation of women in the decision making process in the matter of their vital interest. It is in this background that the establishment of new Panchayati Raj Institution by 73<sup>rd</sup> amendments (1993) assumes significance. The new provision incorporated in Article 243 of the constitution gives binding constitutional recognition to PRI for the first time.

The salient features of new PRIs are time bound election by an independents state election commission ,devolution of financial power and resources on the recommendation of states finance commission and bestowing power to prepare and execute plan for socio economic development. However the most significant features of new PRIs is the provision contained in article 243D of the constitution which reads ,not less than one third( including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to schedule caste and schedule tribe) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in Panchayats. In brief the 1/3 of total member and chairperson of Panchayats at each level shall be women. Besides women may contest election from unreserved seats.

With the enhancement of constitutional power and authority of Panchayats, the provision for 1/3<sup>rd</sup> reservation of women is a revolutionary steps in Indian context.

This step elevates women from merely beneficiaries of development to the decision makers in the development process. The new provision addresses to the four core element of empowerment : a) access to education ,B) Inclusion and participation in decision making process with respect to development. C) sense of accountability in respect to their duties and roles, D) Generation of local organized capacity to seek their own betterment.

The provision of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> reservation for women in PRIs has enable women to participate in local government decision making process. It has enabled then to gain administrative and political training at local level. It has made them aware ,conscious and confident. They have gained the opportunity to address their problem through their own efforts. The women related issues are bound to gain centre stages in the deliberation of Panchayats . the growing number of women in Panchayats indicates the emergence of new social groups at local level which is more conscious and articulate. Taking into account the figure at national level ,out of 475 Zila Panchayats ,158 are headed by women .Out of total 51000 members of Panchayats Samities at block level 17000 are women members . The information received from the data provided to the 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha for Committee of Empowerment of women ,reveals that their actual number has exceeded the mandatory provision of 33% seats .For example, in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh ,Manipur ,Sikkim and Tripura the total women members were 38.9%,38.5%,36.5%,38.2%, and 34.6 % respectively. The work participation rate has increased from 22.3 % in 1991 to 25.7 % in 2001 at all India level.

## **VII. CRITICISMS AGAINST WOMEN PANCHAYAT MEMBERS**

The enthusiasm and active participation of women is likely to increase in near future ,though there is a criticism against women Panchayat members that-

1. They are controlled by their husband and other family members .
2. It is also alleged that their level of awareness about issues and processes is low

3. Proxy participation of male members related to Elected Women Representatives(EWR) in Panchayat meetings- It is a cause of concern that relatives of elected women representatives interfere in the official activities of women EWRs. Though in some cases the relatives of newly elected representatives play a role in nurturing, encouraging and lending support to women elected representatives, in many cases male relatives even participate in official proceedings on behalf of women, a practice that can never be approved.
4. Patriarchal system, inexperience, responsibilities at home, etc. keep women away from the Panchayat meetings. This makes their representation ineffective as many of the decisions are taken in their absence.
5. Illiteracy is the most pertinent hurdle that prevents the entry of rural women into mainstream politics. The AC Nielsen ORG- MARGA study commissioned by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj among elected representatives of PRIs showed that about one fifth of them were illiterates.
6. The social background of the EWRs survey indicates that the majority of them are from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) or Other Backward Classes (OBCs) groupings showing thereby that political representation of women in Panchayats is not confined to the elite.

### **VIII. REMEDIAL MEASURES**

The following are the some of the remedial measures that may be taken to overcome the problems-

- 01) Enhancement of training facilities and capacity building programmes of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs)-  
The Elected Representatives of the people, especially women, need training to enable them to discharge their duties because of their lower literacy levels and limited exposure to public affairs. Though the Ministry of Panchayat Raj has some training modules under schemes like Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan (PMEYSA) and Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojana, there is no separate scheme exclusively for the capacity building of women.
- 02) Steps must be taken to ward off proxy participation of male members related to Elected women representatives in Panchayat meetings.
- 03) Special quorum of women in Panchayat meetings- Reservation of seats alone cannot ensure the active participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Therefore certain provisions should be made which mandates a minimum quorum of women in every Gram Sabha meetings.
- 04) The provision should be made for rotation cycle of reserved seats for women to two terms.
- 05) Involvement of NGOs in strengthening PRIs - NGOs should be involved in the Training and the Capacity Building of elected representatives. They should be engaged by the States in carrying out need assessment and preparing participatory plans at the Panchayat level.
- 06) The media both print as well as electronic can also play an important role in creating awareness among the elected women representatives. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.

### **IX. CONCLUSION**

In Indian Constitution, there are provisions for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social, economic and gender status. However such provisions exist only in pen and paper for millions of economically and socially disadvantage people especially in case of Women. There fore the role of PRIs is significant in the empowerment of women in the following ways 1) by creating a positive environment for women development in social and economic sphere and enabling them to realize the full potential 2) by providing access and opportunities to women for equal participation in decision making with respect to planning and implementation of socio-economic development program at local level.3) by gradually changing social attitude toward women through new practice and behavior .By strengthening collaboration with civil society and Panchayats in women related activities .Since access to political opportunities and participation in political decision making process are important components of capability and autonomy in exploration of women's talent and efficiency which are necessary for all around development of the country. Therefore, to achieve the women empowerment, advancement can be facilitated with the co-ordination of different sections of the society such as male gentry, religious heads, political leaders who should come forward and shun their interpersonal interest even ego to understand and appreciate that the women are equally as important segments of society as men.

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ANNEXURE – I

**Table 01 No. of Panchayats and elected representatives in the three tiers of Panchayats in states/uts as on 01-12-2006 Panchayats at all levels.**

Sl	States	No of Panchayat	Total for panchayats at all levels : Number of elected representatives							
			General	SC		ST		Total	Women	
				No	%	No	%		No	%
01	<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	1789	0	0	0.0	8260	100.0	8260	3183	38.5
02	<b>Assam</b>	2431	23206	1344	5.3	886	3.5	25436	9903	38.9
03.	<b>Manipur</b>	169	1684	43	2.4	41	2.3	1768	646	36.5
04	<b>Sikkim</b>	170	639	57	5.7	309	30.7	1005	384	38.2
05	<b>Tripura</b>	540	3914	1509	26.3	310	5.4	5733	1986	34.6

Source : Published in the State of Panchayat, A Mid-Term Review and Appraisal dated 22.11.2006, p-26  
Data provided to the 14th Lok Sabha for Committee of Empowerment of Women.

**Table 2 Women population of India and North East, 2011.**

States/Country	Total population	Female population	% of total
North East	45587982	22278817	48.86
India	1210193422	586469174	48.46

Source : Census of India 2011.

**Table 3 GDI and male female literacy gap in NE States**

States	GDI 1996	GDI 2006	LG 2001	LG 2011
AP	.544	.642	20.33	14.12
Assam	.523	.585	8.64	11.54
Manipur	.600	.699	18.17	13.32
Megha	.592	.642	5.37	3.39
Nagaland	.626	.679	9.19	6.60
Mizo	.612	.687	4.56	4.32
Tripura	.546	.626	16.10	9.03
Sikkim	.566	.659	15.60	10.86
All India	.514	.590	21.60	16.68

Source : statistical table p-132-133.

**Table 4 Sex ratio in North eastern states.**

States	Sex Ratio		
	2001	2011	% increase
A P	893	919	2.91
Assam	935	953	1.92
Manipur	978	987	0.92
Mizoram	938	975	3.94
Nagaland	909	931	2.42
Tripura	948	961	1.37
Sikkim	948	961	1.37
India	933	940	0.75

Source: Economic Survey 2010-11 Census of India 2011

**Table 5 Work participation rates In NE states**

States	Urban			Rural		
	M	F	GAP	M	F	GAP
AP	46.1	14.8	31.3	50.0	41.0	9.0
Assam	55.1	10.9	44.2	55.9	20.9	34.2
Mnipur	45.6	55.1	-9.5	52.4	35.1	17.3
Megha	45.4	30.3	15.1	57.2	47.8	9.4
Mizo	48.4	28.1	20.3	59.4	44.1	15.3
Nagaland	45.7	25.7	20.0	54.9	50.4	4.5
Tripura	50.4	10.0	40.4	54.9	8.5	46.4
Sikkim	54.6	16.8	37.8	55.5	31.9	23.6
India	54.6	16.6	38.8	54.6	32.7	21.9

Source : Economic Survey 2006-07.