

# Representation of Women in The Panchayati Raj Institutions With Reference to Assam

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**Abstract:** Participation of women in politics is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and strengthening democracy. A democratic country will success, if it provide equal status to all citizens irrespective of caste, class, religion, sex etc. India is a democratic country, The constitution of India has ensured greater participation of people in socio-economic and political spheres by incorporating fundamental rights to all citizens of India. Apart from this, Article 325 and 326 of Indian constitution ensure equal right to participation in political activities. There is no legal barrier for women to take active part in politics. Majority of women of India lives in rural areas. Therefore, their participation in the grass-roots level political institutions is indispensable for their empowerment and gender equality. But it has been found that representation of women in the panchayati raj institutions remained unsatisfactory. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution creates a remarkable step towards women representation in the panchayati raj institutions by reserving 33% seats for them in the panchayati raj institutions. In the context of Assam, woen participation in the panchayati raj institutions as an elected representative is became high as a result of the reservation introduced for women in the panchayati raj institutions as per the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act of the Indian constitution. But their representation is not qualitative. The present study will make an attempt to analyse the level of representation of women in the panchayati raj institutions in the context of Assam.

**Key Words:** Representation, Reservation, Women, Politics etc.

## Introduction:

India is a democratic country. Decentralization of power is one of the most important characteristics of a democratic country. The primary aim of decentralization of power is to give the people the right to take active part in decision making process at the grass-roots level democratic institutions. Women constitute half of the population in any society. The development of the society depends upon the development of the whole society. In order to protect and promote the inherent interest of women they must take active part in all spheres of life. The constitution of India has incorporated some provisions for socio-economic upliftment of women and to uphold the political rights of women along with their participation in decision making process. But it has been found that participation of women in the decision making process in the panchayati raj institutions remained unsatisfactory. No doubt women participation is steadily increasing after the enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, but their participation in the grass-roots level democratic institutions is to maintain just formalities. In order to bring all women force in the mainstream of development they should be more conscious of their rights. They must be more politically conscious to ensure their active participation in democracy .When the rural women will be able to understand their need in participation in democracy and confidence enough to take their own decision hope reservation may not be required to bring the women to the field of politics.

## Review of Literature:

A number of studies have already been undertaken on women participation in grass-root politics. Books have also been published on women's political participation. The study of different scholars regarding participation of women in grass-root politics in different parts of the country find out some factors responsible for ineffective participation of women particularly the rural women in grass-root politics, However, place to place or region to region these factors are different though there are some common factors also. V. Rajalaxmi (1985), in her book on Political Behaviour of Women in Tamilnadu, revealed that decline of political morale, women's disinterest in publicity, high expenditure in election and unprincipled defection from parent parties are some reasons which make women disinterest in politics . The author also find out some causes which are responsible for low level participation of women in politics and these are conflicts between public and private life, changing norms and values in politics, identification of role for women as housewives and mothers, cultural constraints, difficult entry into male dominated arena of politics etc. Sweta Mishra (1997), in her study on "Women and 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act" tries to find out the role of women in Panchayat in the context of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act of the Indian constitution .The author has observed that the reservation of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institution will provide them an opportunity to ventilate their grievances and to take active part in politics .The author has concluded that the election of the Panchayati Raj Institutions has bought rural women to the forefront. They Sinha,Niroj (2000) in his book "Women in Indian Politics:Empowerment of Women Through Political Participation"tries to analyse the problems faced by women in political participation in Indian context. He reflects that because of patriarchal nature of Indian societywomen were unable to play active role in politics.

S. Nagendra Ambedkar and Shilaja Nagendra (2006) in their book "Role of Women in Panchayati Raj", revealed that although women make up at least half of the electorate in almost all the countries and have attained the right to vote and hold office in almost all states, women continue to be seriously under represented as candidate for public office . The traditional working

patterns of many political parties and government structures continue to be barriers to women's participation in public life. Tiwari, Nupur (2008), in his study on "Women in Panchayati Raj" explained that the traditional institutions of local governance have not given space for women. There are many factors like class, caste and religious factors hindered women to actively participate in local governance.

Datta, Deba Kumar (2015), in his study on "Factors Responsible for Low Level Participation of Rural Women in Grass-root Politics", discussed about some factors responsible for low level participation of women in grass-root politics. The author has also discussed about some measures to improve the level of participation of rural women in grass-root politics.

Shivani Phukon (2016), in a study on "Nature and Effectiveness of Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Study in Jorhat District Of Assam" tries to explain that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act gave the rural women an opportunity to take active part in grass-root politics. Women representatives do not invest enough time for public affairs. Though the numerical strength of women representatives have increased they have not been able to affect decision making substantially. Women's role in public domain did not lead to lessening and sharing of domestic burden.

Bora, Mahan & Rabha, Hemanta (2020) in their study "Women's Participation in The Village Level Politics of Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) of Assam" clearly revealed the status of women in politics at village level institutions such as Village Council Development Council (VCDC) and Territorial Council Level Co-ordination Committee (TCLCC). The rural women in BTAD are considered as the second citizen and their political aspirations are suppressed by the male dominated society.

### Scope and Limitations of the Study:

The present study will focus on the representation of women in the panchayati raj institutions in Assam. The study will analyze different levels of representation of women in the study area. At the same time the present study will address the problems and challenges faced by the women as an elected representative. The present study is limited to study the representation of women in the panchayati raj institutions of Assam only.

### Profile of the Study Area:

Assam is the gateway of the North East India. It is the largest state of North East India. Assam is bordering 7 states namely Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura and West Bengal. Assam also shares its border with two countries viz. Bhutan and Bangladesh. The total geographical area of Assam is 78,438 sq K.M. Assam is administratively divided into 33 districts with 80 Sub Divisions, 219 Development Blocks and 2202 Gaon Panchayats out of which 3 districts with 4 sub divisions and 16 Development Blocks are under three hill districts namely Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong and East Karbi Anglong. Four districts with 8 sub divisions are under BTC area i.e. Chirang, Kokrajhar, Baksa and Udalguri. According to the Census 2011, the total population of Assam is 31,20,556, out of which Male population is 15,93,943 and the female population is 15,26,613. The total literacy rate of Assam is 72.19% out of which male literacy rate is 77.85% and female literacy rate is 66.27%. There are 36,262 primary schools, 5,732 upper primary schools, 5,142 High and Higher Secondary schools, 301 Colleges in Assam.

### Objectives:

The following objectives have been set for the present study:

1. To understand the representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions of Assam.
2. To assess the representation of women at Panchayati Raj Institutions in the study area.
3. To study the problems and challenges faced by elected women representative of the Panchayati Raj Institutions of Assam.

### Research Methodology:

Relevant data and information for the present study have been collected from secondary sources. Data have been collected from books, journals, magazines, State Statistical Handbook and through digital sources.

### Representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Assam:

Panchayati raj Institutions are grass-roots level governing institutions. The representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions are elected by the people through direct franchise. Assam is one of the pioneer states of India to enact Panchayat Act and established the panchayat raj when the Assam Rural Panchayat Act, 1948 was passed. This act was amended and replaced by the Assam Panchayat Act 1959, the Assam Panchayat Act, 1972, the Assam Panchayat Act 1986 and finally the Assam Panchayat Act 1994 which incorporated the provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 of the Indian constitution. The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 established three tier Panchayati Raj System- Gaon Panchayat at the village level, Anchalik Panchayat at the intermediate level and Zila Parishad at the district level. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act of the Indian constitution reserved 33% seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Accordingly this provision has been incorporated under Assam Panchayat Act, 1994. As per the information available with the Ministry of Panchayat half of the states of India ensured 50% reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, even in some cases more than 50% seats are reserved for women. Assam is also included in the list of states

**Table: 1.0**  
**States/Union Territories wise Percentage of Elected Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions:**

Sl No	States/Union Territories	Total PRI Representatives	Total Elected Women Representatives	Percentage of Elected Women Representatives
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	858	306	35.66
2	Andhra Pradesh	156050	78025	50
3	Arunachal Pradesh	9383	3658	38.98
4	Assam	26754	14609	54.60
5	Bihar	136573	71046	52.02
6	Chhattisgarh	170465	93392	54.78
7	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	147	47	31.97
8	Daman & Diu	192	92	47.91
9	Goa	1555	571	36.72
10	Gujarat	144080	71988	49.96
11	Haryana	70035	29499	42.12
12	Himachal Pradesh	28723	14398	50.12
13	Jammu & Kashmir	39850	13224	33.18
14	Jharkhand	59638	30757	51.57
15	Karnataka	101954	51030	50.05
16	Kerala	18372	9630	52.41
17	Ladakh	NA	NA	NA
18	Lakshdweep	110	41	NA
19	Madhya Pradesh	392981	196490	49.99
20	Maharashtra	240635	128677	53.47
21	Manipur	1736	880	50.69
22	Odisha	107487	56627	52.68
23	Puducherry	NA	NA	NA
24	Punjab	100312	41922	41.79
25	Rajasthan	126271	64802	51.31
26	Sikkim	1153	580	50.30
27	Tamil Nadu	106450	56407	52.98
28	Telangana	103468	52096	50.34
29	Tripura	6646	3006	45.23
30	Uttar Pradesh	913417	304538	33.34
31	Uttrakhand	62796	35177	56.01
32	West Bengal	59229	30458	51.42

Source: Press Information Bureau, Govt. of India, [www.pib.gov.in](http://www.pib.gov.in) as on September, 2020.

Women participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as an elected representative became high in most of the states of India. In Assam there are 14609 female representatives comprising 54.60% of total representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions as shown in the Table 1.0. This is indeed a big achievement for the women in Assam. They have been provided enormous scopes and opportunities to uplift their political status. In Assam a significant numbers of women came forward to extending their candidature and got elected. That is going expected to revitalize the local self government and electoral politics of Assam. With

regard to the representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Assam it has been observed that the representation of women has increased after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act. There is no denying the fact that it is due to the reservation policy the percentage of women representatives increased in the local level than the national and state level elections of Assam. Problems of Women Representation in The Panchayati Raj Institutions in Assam: Though it has been noticed that the representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Assam has gradually increased, several factors constraints women's effective representation. Women representatives in the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been facing some problems. Some such problems are-

- Lack of Knowledge: The women have to shoulder dual responsibilities. They are traditionally engaged in Household activities. Their knowledge about outside activities are less than the male people. Lack of adequate knowledge about outside activities creates constraints on effective functioning of the women representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Assam,
- Lack of Political Consciousness: Generally women are less conscious about political affairs. Most of the women are not aware about government programs and official works. The women representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions like to remain as audience rather than leaders.
- Patriarchy: Assamese society is patriarchal in nature. In a patriarchal society women are dominated by men. Women are discouraged from seeking political office by discriminatory attitude and practices. Though women representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions increased, in reality it can be said that this is only because of the reservation of 33% seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as per the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act. Women representatives in the Panchayati Raj Institutions are proxy representatives. Patriarchal system indirectly directs the representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Most of the female representatives take decision regarding their official work as per the directions of their male counterpart.
- Lack of Proper Communication Skill: The women representatives face difficulties to interact with the government officials because of lack of proper communication skill. The male representative communicates with the officials on behalf of the female representatives.
- Problem in Adjustment: The women representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions face the problem of adjustment with male representatives. They face difficulties in asserting themselves.
- Lack of Proper Training: The newly elected women representatives of the Panchayati Raj institutions do not know about their powers and functions to exercise properly. Most of them were not aware about their department or about the work handed over to them. In Assam it has been found that due to lack of proper training the women representatives were not able to perform their role effectively.

#### **Suggestions and Conclusion:**

From the above discussion, it has been found that the Assam Government has enacted some laws to increase the level of representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as per the Government of India. But it has been noticed that the laws have not achieved expected result. Concerns have been raised over the genuine participation of women as an elected representatives in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. For qualitative representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions women should have proper education, political consciousness, develop their communication skill and give proper training. Special training programmes should be conducted from time to time. It will give them confidence and creates political awareness among them. Government should make special provisions for women representatives and give them more power and educate them about their powers. It will help them to perform their role efficiently and effectively.

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