

CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION

Empowerment of women is one of the main issues towards any socio-economic development programme. A single window clearance approach for addressing the women related grievances and also for attending, evaluating and monitoring the affects of different Government sponsored programmes and project would help in proper understanding of the gender issues. The women Empowerment and Grievance Redressal centres will work on single window clearance Approach and thereby provide timely and adequate services and relief to poor.

Empowerment aims at making women self-confident and self-reliant so that they feel secure and are in a position to take their own decisions. These are idealistic terms while in practical life no individual, man or woman is so independent that he/she can take decisions without consulting others or without caring for others. The basic condition for empowerment is that a woman is to be considered and treated as an individual with intellect, feelings and rights similar to that of a man.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provides psychological empowerment and a sense of political efficacy to those who had been left powerless to influence public decisions that affect them. Democracy will not be meaningful in a traditional society like India without full involvement of women and other weaker segments of society. A constitutional provision is only a necessary and enabling step which should be followed by effective measures for women's uplift in the country.¹

Women's empowerment is one of the major objectives of the panchayati Raj Institutions in India. As such, the 73rd Amendment of the constitution of India provides for reservation of one third of the seats for women in the PRIs. The participation of women in PRIs is considered essential not only for ensuring their political participation in the democratic process but also for realising the developmental goals for women. Participation of women in PRIs involves: (i) women as voters; (ii) women as members of political parties; (iii) women as candidates; (iv) women as elected members of the PRIs taking part in decision-making, planning,

implementation and evaluation; of developmental work and (v) women as members of Mahila Mandals and their association with voluntary organisations.²

The Major findings of the study:

The present study reveals that education, marital status, family structure, political affiliation of family, party affiliation, support of party, economic background of family have played an important role with regard to participation of women members in Nagaon Zila Parishad.

By analyzing the role and level of women's participation, it is found that 72.73% of the women members take their responsibility seriously as they regularly participate in meetings. It has been found that 50% of the women members have gained confidence and experiences in addressing group of people both in formal and informal atmosphere. 27.27% other women members have less experience of addressing group of people. They feel uneasy and diffident particularly at the formal meetings. In presence of highly educated persons, they hesitate to speak in the meetings. It has been observed of is low level of education and lack of public exposures.

Regarding the gains from being elected women member in Panchayati Raj Institution, women have raised confidence level. This is an important gain for 50% of the women members. The first experience of attending meeting was not a comfortable experience for them. With increasing of attendance in meetings, they felt more confident in their presence.

It has been found from the study that, 27.27% of women members in Nagaon Zila Parishad come from Joint family, while 72.73% of women members come from nuclear family. This appears that women members from joint families find it difficult to take part actively in Zila Parishad activities. Responses show that the reason behind this in the joint family they have lots of domestic work, responsibility, family norms. But in nuclear families they have less domestic responsibilities and women can come out easily from traditional role and perform public responsibilities.

The study reveals that, the elected women members regarding their membership as an avenue to be in position and power and enjoy privilege as a

member of Panchayati Raj Institutions. This position was considered as one of the best ways of serving the people because without political power no developmental work could be taken up in the respective areas. As housewife it is not possible to discharge social responsibilities. So, 100% of the women members desire to continue to continue their present position. It is interesting to note that, 12(54.54%) of women members in Zila Parishad level, 9(52.94%) of women members in Anchalik Panchayat level and 61(50.83%) of the women members in Gaon Panchayat level are not only desired to continue their present office but also wants to contest MLAs and MPs position. They want to participate at the higher level of decision making bodies so that people in general and women in particular can lead a better life. This seems that the women members have high political aspiration to be in public life. They also want to gain more knowledge and experience because they feel that by occupying political position they can empower themselves.

So far the nature of participation of women members in implementation and supervision of different developmental work, is concerne that 4(18.18%) of women members have not participated in implementation programme due to their household related activities. While 18(81.82%) of women members regularly participated in stages of implementation of the programmes with supervision, monitoring and examining programme benefits.

From the analysis of two elections in Nagaon Zila Parishad it has been found that, election held in 2013, out of total 41 nos. Zila Parishad seats women members secured 22(53.65%) (Table 3.23%) of seats from different political parties, but it was 17(41.46%) (Table -3.13) in 2007 Zila Parishad election from different political parties. Which reflect that the number of participation of women members in Nagaon Zila Parishad has increased from 17(41.46%) to 22(53.65%) from 2007 election to 2013 election .

It has been found from the election analysis that, Panchayat election held in 2013, out of total 31 sample Anchalik Panchayat seats women members secured 17(54.83%) (Table 3.23), it was 11(35.48%) (Table 3.17) of seats in 2007 election. So the participation of women members in political process has increased.

It has been also found from the election analysis that, in the election held in 2013 out of total 237 sample Gaon Panchayat seats, women members secured

120(50.63%) (Table 3.25) of seats it was 100(42.19%) (Table 3.20) in 2007 election. This prove that the participation of women members has increased from 100(42.19%) in 2007 to 120 (50.63%) in 2013 election. The increasing representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions and increasing participation in decision making and implementation of the decisions of Panchayati Raj Institutions prove the empowerment of women in reality.

On analyzing the perception of male members on the nature and role performed by the women members, it is found that 89.47% of the male members of Zila Parishad, Anchalik Pachayat and Gaon Panchayat of all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Nagaon distict have positive view towards role and participation of women member's. Only 10.53% of male members have expressed their dissatisfaction regarding women's participation In Panchayati Raj Institutions. Bureaucracy has positive view about the role of women members in panchayat. According to the chief Executive officer (CEO), women members are very active and they participate equally with their male counterpart in various stages of zila parishad activities. The CEO opined that the women Members maintain punctuality in meetings and they strictly follow rules and regulations.

Apart from observations of male Members and chief executive officer of Nagaon Zila Parishad, the study reveals that women Members do not invest enough time for village affairs, because the 45% of women have not been relieved from their household duties. From the study it has also been found that, 55% of the women Members were found investing only one hour to two hours per day in panchayat work

The study also reveals that the issues related to welfare of women do not receive enough attention at the meetings. Discussions are rarely held on women's issues (Table 4.11). Women's interests are not adequately represented because women members themselves are failing to take initiatives. This can be seen as a failure on the part of women members, though they do not see it as a failure. 22.72% of the women members feel that there is no need in discussing women's issue as a separate subject because it is included in the discussion on all round development programmes.

Regarding decision making, it has been observed that decisions are made in the four committees of Nagaon Zila Parishad. Every committee has ten members and in each committee there are only two women members. So in four committees there

are only eight elected women members who participate in decision making process of Nagaon Zila Parishad. This implies that women's involvement in decision making is low as compared to male members.

On the question of keeping contacts with the voters, it has been found that 54.54% of the women members don't frequently visit the villages and meet the people, because of unavailability of transport facilities and burden of domestic responsibilities. It is a fact that male members of families encourage women members of the family to contest election and participate in Zila Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat and Gaon Panchayat activities but do not share domestic burden to help them to manage and time fulfill public responsibilities.

It has also been found that the burden of domestic work is one of the major causes for women's absence in the official meetings of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The primary role of women is still considered as wives, mothers, child bearers whatever may be their level of education and professional career and political involvement.

From the above analysis it can not be said that there is participation of women members in Nagaon Zila Parishad for their empowerment. The study has brought out that there are 90.91% women who are active articulate at the Zila Parishad while there are 9.09% others who are passive. The analysis reveals that their participation as elected members is itself a new experience and they are not exposed to the formal official procedures. They depend a quite often on the male members of Panchayati Raj Institutions and officials of PRIs for advice and for clarifications.

It is also found in the present study that 53.15% of the women Members of Nagaon Zila Parishad economically depend on their husbands or other male members of their family. Further it has been noticed that economic dependence of the women Members leads to the curtailing of their position in both family and political office.

Further, we see that 77.27% of the women members of Nagaon Zila Parishad contested election not on their own will but under the pressure from family. Very few members i.e., 22.73% of the women members have their own decision to contest in the election (NZP). Influence of family members thus assumes more importance in fieding women candidate in election. In Nagaon Zila Parishad it has been found that majority of the women members are promoted by their husbands to contest in

election. So, the study reinforces the “Proxy” theory of women empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

18.18% of the women members of Nagaon Zila Parishad have been facing problems due to departmental rigidity of different government offices. It has been revealed by the women members that attitude of government officials towards them is not very cordial. Official staff of various departments do not provide proper and timely information to the members regarding various development programmes. Besides, women members are found facing problems in getting allotment of schemes and later in the release of funds in favour of allotted schemes. Women members also face problems in identification of beneficiaries to be proposed for covering under various development programmes and selection of sites and location. Interference of state government and top party leaders is also another problem for the women members of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Nagaon district.

Support of political party is also another feature of PR election, which affects women's participation in Nagaon Zila Parishad. Since all the women members of Nagaon Zila Parishad contested the ZP, A.P., and G.P. election on the basis of support by political party, the study reveals that party support acts as a catalyst in getting the women representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions of Nagaon district. Many women members of Nagaon Zila Parishad in 2007 election did not get party support to contest for the second time in 2013 elections. Many new aspirants, who wanted to contest, did not find it easy to contest election because of lack of party support. It also happens that a seat which is reserved for a women candidate becomes unreserved in the next election. So there is no certainty that the members will get re-elected. Here the party plays an important role. It is unfortunate that political parties always do not want to field women candidates for unreserved seats. Adding to this problem is that women do not want to contest as independent candidate, for fear of losing in the election. This clearly indicates that political parties who are supposed to play a very important role in fulfilling the goal of 73rd Amendment Act, have accepted 33% reservation for women with a grain of salt as a compulsion not voluntary as an avenue for social change.

The legislative arrangements of reservation of one third seats for women in all Panchayat bodies and reservation of one third of the total number of offices of

chairpersons in the Panchayats for all women including women belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have created at least a political space for rural women to participate in politics and in local level decision makings. From study 86.36% of the women members in Nagaon Zila Parishad are aware of their rights and the problems.

It has been observed from the study in Nagaon district, that a great deal of resistance to this change in rural administration come from the rural bureaucracy itself, who saw elected women members a threat to their own power, privilege and authority. They ignore the women members on the ground that they are not highly educated. The study found that such attitudinal resistance have taken a back seat.

Age is an important variable in determining the character of emerging leadership. The data on the age group profile of zila parishad, panchayat samiti and Gaon Panchayat members of the district indicate the emerging trend of middle age leadership of Panchayati Raj structure in Assam. Data analysis indicates that nearly 72.72% of women representatives of Nagaon Zila Parishad belong to the middle age group of (36-45). Absence of old women members is a sign of change from the traditional attitude which tended to provide leadership only to those women who belong to older age group.

Another important finding of the present study is that religion and caste do not have any role in determining the women leadership in Panchayat bodies of Nagaon district. By and large women are elected to three tiers from the thirty three percent reserved quota including women belonging to schedule caste and scheduled tribe categories. In some Zila Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat and Gaon Panchayat the women were elected from unreserved constituency, that is why percentage of women in the panchayat leadership in this district is higher than the 33% or 50% of reservation of seats. This suggests that, women have made a significant dent in the village level power structure cutting across caste and religion and have their presence felt in the decision making process.

From the present study it has been found that, 86.36% of women members are aware of the subjects related to Panchayat Raj Institutions and that these are listed in 11th schedule of Indian constitution which concern rural development. Even they are aware about the implementation of those Acts. 13.64% of women members are not

aware about those Acts. They only know about the New Panchayati Raj Act. 1994. All (100%) the women members have the political experience about Nagaon zila parishad. Most of the women members are aware about the 33% of reservation for women in panchayati Raj Institutions. The respondents of zila parishad panchayat samities and Gaon Panchayat level of the district held that they were aware of their duties. They held that their main duty was to help the village panchayat for construction and maintenance of village streets, drainage system and development schemes of their respective constituencies. The other duties, of which they were aware, include looking after the education of the villagers, improvement of public health and family welfare, women and child development, settlement of disputes etc.

An interesting findings of the study is that, 91.16% of the women members of the three tier panchayat structures of the Nagaon district are married, only 8.84% of women members are belong to the category of unmarried or single widow. Comparatively married women panchayat members get larger scope in the development activities and they show greater interest too such activities. It has been observed that unmarried women face restriction from the family to participate in political affairs, because unmarried women are very young and usually families do not like them to expose to public life. We may conclude that the young and unmarried women are not encouraged to enter in politics. Majority of the married women panchayat members have much more clearer ideas of village development as they are close to grass-roots realities of literacy, legal rights, health, wage equality.

From the present study it has been found that, the 73rd Amendment Act and corresponding amended legislations of the state of Assam, have been a gold beginning in the right direction for

rural women and to make them equal partner in local politics with their male counterparts. The respondents affirmed positively is to make the women aware by imparting to them training about local governance and the environment in which they are living.

Another important identification from the women respondents is that attitude of men or perception of male members towards women's participation is one of the most important factors in the empowerment process of women. The strategy has to be aiming at eliminating the effect of factors which are external to the women (i.e. those

which are in the social environment) and secondly, at developing rural women by way of enhancing their psychological orientation towards themselves as well as towards development work so that they become assertive and take on their new role effectively.

This research work is concerned with the political participation of women members of Panchayati Raj Institutions of Nagaon district located in the central part of Assam. It has explored the impact of socio-economic variables on electoral participation, the impact of socio-economic variables on attitudinal variables on political participation. The study is based on the data collected from the field. In addition, official data and secondary sources have been used for an overall appraisal.

The hypotheses have been formulated at the initial stage of the study are as follows:

1. The Provisions of the 73rd amendment regarding the 33% reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions of the Nagaon district have facilitated the process of Women Empowerment.
2. Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has made the Panchayati Raj Institutions less corrupt and more transparent, accountable and responsive to the public.
3. Reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has enabled women population to participate actively in rural development and self-help groups.

Hypotheses have been formulated for the study that have been tested with the following findings:

Hypothesis No-1: The first hypothesis proved and verified by the study is that, election held in 2013, out of total 41 no Zila Parishad seats, women members secured 21(51.22%) (Table- 5.9) seats from reserved quota and 1(2.44%) of women member was elected from unreserved seats. So, majority of the women 21(51.22%) has been elected from reserved seats, it was 15(36.59%) (Table- 5.3) in 2007 election as per Assam Panchayat 33% reservation. In 2013 Panchayat election Assam State Election Commission introduced 50% reservation for women. This confirms the hypothesis that the the Provisions of the 73rd amendment regarding the 33% and subsequently

50% reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions of the Nagaon district have positively facilitated the process of women empowerment.

In 2013 election out of total 31 nos. sample Anchalik Panchayats elected members, 16(51.61) (Table 5.11) of women members has been elected from reserved seats, and only 1(3.22%) of women members was elected from unreserved seat. Even in 2007 election 11(35.48%) (Table 5.5) of the women members has been elected from reserved seats. So, it confirms this hypothesis that the the Provisions of the 73rd amendment regarding the 33% reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions have facilitated the process of women empowerment. In 2013 Panchayat election, out of total 237 Gaon Panchayats elected members 119 (50.21%) (Table 5.14) of the women members has been elected from reserved seats and only 1(0.42%) of women member won the election from unreserved seat. While in 2007, 85 (35.86%) of women members has been elected from reserved seats and 15 (6.33%) was elected from unreserved seat, this hypothesis proved and verified by the study is that the idea of the 73rd amendment Act and other legal and administrative arrangements have ensured the increase of women to the leadership and decision making process (Table-4.19) that, (81.82%) are regularly taking part in implementing programme and 18.18% are rarely taking part in implementing programme. It has been also proved that said Act and corresponding legislations and other measures have created a definite space for women's participation in politics and in the process of women empowerment. So, this hypothesis is partially valid. So far Gaon Panchayat level is concerned because 18.18% do not take part in implementing programme of panchayat. Hypothesis No-1: is entirely valid so far Zila Parishad and Anchalik Panchayat level are concerned and partially valid so far as Gaon Panchayat level is concerned.

Hypothesis No-2: From the perception of male respondent on women's participation in Nagaon Zila Parishad it has been found that, 89.47% (Table-4.26) of the male respondent have positive attitude towards participation of women members in Nagaon Zila Parishad. According to these male respondents women members are participating actively in Zila Parishad activities. On the otherhand (10.53%) of respondents have expressed their discontent regarding women's participation in Nagaon Zila Parishad. So, this hypothesis is partially valid.

It is evident from the respondent of Anchalik Panchayat level that, (92.86%)(Table-4.27)of the respondent viewed that women members are taking part actively in various block level activities. According to them women members are less corrupt, more accountable and responsive to the public.It has been found from the conversation with the Block Development officer (B.D.O) that women members participate equally with their male counterpart in various stages of block activities.While (7.14%) of the respondents keeps neutral about-the role and performance of women members in Nagaon Zila Parishad.

It has been found from the respondent in Gaon Panchayat level that, (97.44%) (Table-4.28) of the respondent have the positive attitude towards the participation of women members in Gaon Panchayat level. According to them women members are attending meetings regularly.They maintain punctuality in meetings and they follow the rules and regulation strictly. On the otherhand (2.56%) of respondents keeps neutral towards the participation of women members in Nagaon Zila Parishad.

So this hypothesis, the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has made the Panchayati Raj Institutions less corrupt and more transparent, accountable and responsive to the public, is not totally valid but partially valid.

Hypothesis No-3: The study reveled that, reservation of seats for women in Panchayats have created a space for women for active participation. For active participation it is evident from the study that (72.73%) (Table 4.1) of the women member have ever missed the meeting in Zila Parishad level. The members response were that attending the meetings of Zila Parishad is essential as they get the necessary information about many issues. They also prefer to attend meetings as the meetings help them to keep in touch with the development in Nagaon Zila Parishad. It has been observed that (27.27%) of women members are not regular in attending meetings due to illness and domestic work. In Anchalik Panchayat level it has been found that (70.59%) (Table 4.3) of the women members have been regularly present in the meeting. On the other hand (29.41%) of women members are not regular in attending meetings. In Gaon Panchayat level it has been found that, (87.5%) (Table 4.5) of the women members have never absent in the Gaon Panchayat meeting and Gaon Sabha. On the other hand (12.5%) of women members are not regular in attending meetings.

So in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions of Nagaon district majority of the women members are taking part actively and few members are not regular in attending the official meetings. It is proved that this hypothesis is not fully valied but partially valid.

Without reservation women could get the opportunity of becoming the member of Zila Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat and Gaon Panchayat. The number of women from unreserved seat is very few. It also proved that political parties give nomination to women candidates to Panchayati Raj Institutions under the compulsion of law of Reservation of seats for women. The facts substantiat fully the hypothesis that the Reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has enabled women population to participate actively.

With references to the main findings of the study and from survey data and official records, it has been found that due to reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions women political mobilization is increasing but their participation in politics is still lower in comparision to their male counterpart.

Reference:

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