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TO STUDY THE FUNCTION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the Panchayati Raj System was to formally include rural residents from all demographic groups in local government. The Panchayati Raj's designers intended for women to be involved in their own growth as well as men. Although it is a drawn-out and challenging process, the Panchayats' reservation for women has given them the chance to eliminate the traditional gender, caste, and class roles that women have had to play as well as the hierarchy prejudice that they have encountered. Notwithstanding the obstacles of gender division of labor, low literacy, mobility, seclusion, and a lack of knowledge and training, women must struggle for the right to be more than proxy members. Women's roles at home and in public life, such as as members of the Panchayats, are in conflict because of their poor self-esteem at the home level and their new role in local politics, where they are now expected to act as leaders.

The concept of empowerment supports each person's right to choose their own path in life and future. Human rights are violated when significant segments of society are denied the opportunity to be empowered. Because women face universal obstacles, achieving equality, ending poverty, and creating a better society for everyone depends on their empowerment.

KEYWORDS: Panchayati Raj, training, society, empowerment, obstacles

1. INRODUCTION

In recent years, a number of issues pertaining to women have drawn scholarly attention, giving rise to departments such as Women's Studies and Gender Studies. Equal contributions have been made by men and women to the development of human society. Even yet, women have endured centuries of oppression and exploitation in addition to being denied their proper position in society. In a culture still heavily dominated

by men, their voices have been silenced. If the women's questions are being considered today, it's because they have been fighting for a very long time.

The most significant influence in forming a society has been political power. It goes without saying that women have had to fight hard to obtain political rights. It's fascinating to note that women only gained the most basic of political rights—the ability to vote—in the twentieth century, despite living in many developed, liberal, and progressive western countries. For instance, despite being two of the oldest and most modern democracies, women in the United States and Great Britain were only given the right to vote in 1920 and 1928, respectively. Even certain requirements were added for British women to be eligible to vote. The involvement of women in politics was considerably later. In a way, Indian women were lucky to have been granted the right to vote shortly after the new, independent Indian nation was established on August 15, 1947. India adopted its constitution, which went into force on January 26, 1950, and declared itself to be an independent, sovereign, democratic republic.

The right to equality is one of the essential rights guaranteed by the Indian constitution. Regardless of caste, creed, community, or economic standing, all inhabitants of the nation are entitled to this privilege. However, for a variety of reasons, including widespread illiteracy, a lack of enlightenment that led to a belief in custom and tradition, a cloistered life that kept them limited to household chores, which are another name for drudgery, and the dominance of men in all areas of life, Indian women were unable to exercise this right when it came to political power.

However, as time passed and the global wind of change blew, the voice of Indian women also grew louder and more distinct. In 1992, 42 years after the Indian constitution was ratified, a historic amendment was put forth. The amendment, which went into force in 1993, provided for the reservation of 33% of the seats in Panchayati Raj institutions, for which local elections are held. Indian women were thus given the chance to integrate into the political system at the level of PRIs, which have the authority to create policies for the vast majority of Indian residents who reside in the nation's many villages.

This thesis has attempted to investigate the efficacy of women's involvement in the process of their political empowerment. The involvement of women in Panchayati Raj institutions is a specific focus of the thesis. The Kamrup district of Assam is where the study was carried out.

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2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As its tentacles are dispersed over many societal segments, gender inequities are ubiquitous in multiple tiers of social existence. Women's deprivation occurs all over the world. In addition to being ostracized, women have been subjected to brutal suffering worldwide. Therefore, gender scientists and theorists have given the problem of women's emancipation a lot of attention.

Women worldwide are guaranteed equal citizenship and privileges under the democratic system. However, its political systems and institutions are demonstrating that they are unable to uphold or carry out these guarantees. The dominance of women is greatly influenced by political power. Women's access to the political sphere is restricted. Too frequently, women's opinions are ignored in global decision-making forums. Women's organizations frequently have limited opportunities to impact policy discussions, and they continue to be underrepresented in democratic institutions.. Half of the world's population is female. No nation can afford to overlook the abilities, aptitudes, and life experiences of half of its citizens. Furthermore, organizations that disregard the experiences and viewpoints of women are more likely to make decisions that ignore the realities of women's life. Women's needs are unlikely to be met by policies created in these situations.

The protection of women's rights requires a participatory democracy. To realize the dreams and ambitions of many women who have a strong belief in women's leadership, both empowered women's participation and the empowerment of many more women are required. This faith in women and trust in their leadership has been repeatedly shown in several studies and activities involving rural and impoverished women. They believe

that women are more likely to care about women's issues, hence they would rather have women lead them than males.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Empowerment, according to Sen and Batliwala (1997), is increased self-assurance and a mental shift that allows one to get over outside obstacles in order to access resources over shifting conventional beliefs (Batliwala, 1995; Malhotra, 2002). According to Chandra (1997), empowerment may be both a process and the outcome of a process. It is exemplified by a transfer of power that subverts patriarchal ideology by gaining control over informational resources. According to Mohanty (1995), "empowering a certain underprivileged segment of society" means giving them authority. They can take part in development as a democratic process when they are empowered. It is a process that frees women from their "unfreedoms" and subjugation and gives them the essential skills for making decisions and taking part in democratic processes. In the context of equality in welfare, access, participation, and control, UNICEF (1993) defined empowerment.

According to the World Summit for Social Development (1995), empowerment necessitates full participation from individuals in the design, implementation, and assessment of decisions that impact our society's well-being and function. In order to apply collective pressure, articulate demands, and effectively participate in the decision-making process, empowerment entails putting them into formal groups and associations, trade unions, cooperatives, etc. with the ultimate goal of laying the groundwork for individual and collective self-reliance. According to Oxaal and Baden (1997), empowerment occurs when individuals actively engage in the decision-making processes that influence their life. He came to the conclusion that women's organizations are crucial to the empowerment of women both individually and collectively, and that empowerment is a useful phrase since it emphasizes the idea of viewing women as active agents rather than passive receivers of development efforts. According to Muraleedharan (2001), women are empowered on an individual basis in the home and community when they are able to make their own decisions, have their own resources and income, play a more significant role in the family and community, participate in decision-making processes, have an impact on important decisions in the family and community, and lead free, peaceful lives. Mehra (1997) provided a definition of empowerment in relation to women's development. Increasing women's options and their capacity to make decisions should be part of empowerment. Women's choice can be amplified by actions that aim to increase their capacity for choice.

4. **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To plot the socio-economic profile of women Panchayati Raj Institutions representatives.
2. To investigate the function of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the political empowerment of women.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The focus of this research is on women's political empowerment via Panchayati Raj institutions. For this work, the case-study approach was adopted as a research strategy. The main sources of primary data collecting have been interview and observation. Secondary data is gathered from various sources such as reports, records, newspapers, journals, and books.

Initially, library research on gender-based discrimination in society was conducted in order to develop a theoretical framework. For the presentation of the notion of women and political empowerment, many published materials on feminism and gender studies were examined. The Feminist Standpoint Theory was chosen as the technique for this study after a thorough examination of feminist theories.

All feminist ideas aim to find a more accurate "stand-point" for understanding the world than prevailing paradigms. Women's experience of marginality, combined with our material activities of reproduction and labour, and our refusal of dualisms such as culture/nature, mind/body, provide us with an understanding of social life that is distinct from, and perhaps superior to, that of men, according to feminist stand-point theorists.

By pointing out that gender, class, and race will always impact each individual's perspective of the world, feminist standpoint theorists reject the concept that there are universal truths or universal answers to social concerns. Stakeholder theory is akin to postmodernism because of its scepticism toward universal assertions.

This research uses feminist viewpoint epistemology as its theoretical foundation. This idea is based on the aforementioned objectives. At the same time, it retains a strong and long-term commitment to achieving those objectives. This idea is a challenge to academics because it forces them to observe and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women. Furthermore, oppressed women's knowledge and perspective are used to promote social activity and change. This theory, it could

be stated, necessitates the integration of theory and practice. It's also known as a philosophy that combines a method of knowledge building with a call to political action.

6. RESULTS AND DATA INTERPRETATION

Organizational Experience and political Support as a Root of WomenEmpowerment

TABLE 6.1

ACTIVE IN GRAMA SABHA

Position	Active		Total
	No	Yes	
President	1 (5.0)	19 (95.0)	20 (100.0)
Vice-President	0 (0.0)	9 (100.0)	9 (100.0)
Member	13 (6.0)	203 (94.0)	216 (100.0)
Standing Committee Chairman	4 (6.9)	51 (93.1)	55 (100.0)
Total	18 (5.9)	282 (94.1)	300 (100.0)

Since Grama Sabha has a social council or forum, people participate collectively and create social capital as a result. This table shows the participation of women in Grama Sabha. They are the convener of the Grama Sabha and oversee or call it in accordance with the rules after being elected as a gramapanchayat member. People from many social categories, religious backgrounds, and political parties are all involved in this communal endeavor. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for women to call Grama Sabha meetings. According

to 94.1% of respondents, they actively participate in Grama Sabha meetings both before and after ward-related activities. Because it's a social platform, it helps children develop a lot of qualities, particularly social ones.

TABLE 6.2

RATE OF PEOPLE PARTICIPATION IN GRAMA SABHA

Rate	District			Total
	WAYANAD	MALAPPURAM	PALAKKAD	
No Response	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (2.5)	3 (1.0)
Less than 50Per cent	16 (45.9)	61 (41.8)	40 (33.6)	117 (39.0)
50 per cent	6 (18.9)	24 (16.4)	28 (23.0)	58 (19.3)
More than 50 Per cent	13 (35.1)	60 (41.8)	49 (41.0)	122 (40.7)
Total	35 (100.0)	145 (100.0)	120 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

The Grama Sabha attendance rate is examined in this table. It refers to people's involvement in the Grama Sabha. Of the total, 41% said that "more than 50%" of people attend Grama Sabha sessions, while 39% said that "less than 50%" do. They give a variety of explanations for why fewer individuals are attending Grama Sabha. The sample districts yield some intriguing findings. In Wayanad, 46% of elected women stated that there is a lower level of Grama Sabha engagement, while 41% of elected members in Palakkad responded that there is a higher level of Grama Sabha participation. However, elected women's responses in Malappuram are tied, with 42% of them believing that both the Grama Sabha and the people's representation are less than 50%.

TABLE 6.3

REASONS FOR LESS PARTICIPATION IN GRAMA SABHA

Reasons	Position				Total
	President	Vice-President	Member	Standing Committee Chairman	
No Response	6 (40.0)	4 (40.0)	85 (39.2)	22 (37.9)	117 (39.0)
Grama Sabhais seen as a forum of beneficiary selection	0 (0.0)	0 0.0	4 (1.8)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.3)
Most Participating GS Expecting benefits	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.8)	1 (1.7)	5 (1.6)
Once a benefit is got, less likely to get the next	2 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.0)
Benefits are limited to the particular section only	1 (1.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.3)
Political bias in decision making	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.7)	1 (0.3)
All of the above	0 (0.0)	2 (20.0)	4 (1.8)	1 (1.7)	7 (2.3)
Multiple Response	9 (55.0)	4 (40.0)	118 (54.4)	31 (55.2)	162 (54.1)
Total	18 (100.0)	10 (100.0)	216 (100.0)	56 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

There was a slight variation between those who participated in Grama Sabha at less than and more than 50%, as seen in table 4.2. As a result, this table looks at the causes of lower Grama Sabha participation. The majority

(54.1%) say that a variety of factors contribute to people's lower Grama Sabha involvement. The bulk of individuals often attend Grama Sabha in order to receive benefits. People therefore believed that there was very little chance of them doing it again after they had benefited. This is the primary cause of lower participation rates, because people believe that benefits are only available to specific groups, such as BPL families, SCs, and STs. These findings demonstrate that the public did not comprehend the significance of the Grama Sabha or their role in forming societal planning. One of the survey's intriguing findings is that people's involvement in the Grama Sabha is influenced by geographic disparities. Because they believe that people are not interested in participating in Grama Sabha when the ward is close to the town. Thus, the active functioning of Grama Sabha in our sample districts has been adversely affected by metropolitan cultures.

7. CONCLUSION

In his timeless words, Abraham Lincoln described democracy as a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." There may be no better way to describe democracy's participatory nature. However, because women were completely excluded for a long time in all democracies, the history of contemporary democracy does not provide any proof of widespread participation. However, as time went on, women's voices became louder and more powerful, and more democratic nations began to take action to grant women their proper position in the political system. Up until a few decades ago, women in all contemporary democracies lacked the fundamental right to vote. Women now have this fundamental right in practically all democracies, which has increased their opportunities to actively engage in the political process of the nation in question. It has been a long road from voting rights to being elected as a female representative of the people. Hundreds of women members of legislative bodies and numerous strong and remarkable female leaders of state today have been instrumental in determining the political future of their nations.

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