



POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTION IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH: A CASE STUDY OF PAPUMPARE DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS:

Empowerment, sociological, psychological, economic spheres, patriarchal systems

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives and communities in their society. Empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, economic spheres at various levels. Empowerment of women involves many things- economic opportunity, property rights, political representation, social equality, personal rights and so on. The tribal society in Arunachal Pradesh is patriarchal system in which women's position is much lower in every aspect of life. The term empowerment is defined as "a distribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women". This paper tries to examine the political empowerment of tribal women through PRIs in the state. The study is basically empirical in nature based on primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected from field study of two villages of Papumpare district considering 100 tribal women and 10 elected women Panchayat members through random sampling technique with the help of pre-designed and pre-structured questionnaire. The respondents are from the age group of (20-50) years. The introduction of statutory Panchayat Raj Institution and spread of party politics at the grass root level has given definite impetus to the entry of women in the leadership structure. Most of the women have empowered or gone to be empowered more or less through Panchayat Raj Institution.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment has come to be associated with social justice and equality. This is real barrier for the feminists and women's movement to grab and thrash the government, law makers, and implementers of laws and point out lacunae in social and political structure which are responsible for women being so powerless. The political empowerment can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and in the value given by society to this role of women. The recognition of women's political equality in the Indian constitution was a radical departure, not only from the inherited norms of traditional Indian Society, but also from the political norms of most advanced countries at that time.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), there is tendency to undervalue women's work in rural areas, where they are taken as unpaid family labour, but if it is quantified, the world's Gross National Product (GNP) would increase by 20-30 per cent (ILO, 1981-85). United Nation's Statistics has envisaged that women perform 67 per cent of the world's working hours and earn only 10 per cent of the world's income. They have less than 1 per cent of the world's property. Women as human resource in India constitute about 50 per cent of the population and 77 per

cent of them belong to rural areas. Majority of them comes from small, marginal and landless families. Their main occupation is agriculture and allied activities, involving them either as cultivator or, agricultural labourers. About 60-70 per cent of labour input is provided by women in production, processing and storage of grain.

CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a multidimensional process which enables an individual to realise his/her full identity and power in all spheres of life. The word 'empowerment' means giving power and power means having the capacity to direct one's life towards desired goals. The term "power" is the root in empowerment. It has been one of the most contested concepts in social and political theory. Power can be understood in different ways: power over, power to, power with, power within (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). The concept of empowerment is defined as the process by which he/she takes control and ownership of his/her choice. The core elements of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one's goals and act upon them), awareness of gendered power structures, self-esteem, and self-confidence (Kabeer, 2001). An empowered woman has a positive self-image and takes an active part in taking decision for herself and her family. She is conscious and possesses knowledge how to

stand on her own feet. She helps to empower her children regardless of sex. An empowered woman has a greater access to knowledge and the resources, a greater autonomy in decision-making, a greater ability how to run healthy life, a greater control over circumstances that influence life and the ability to overcome the restrictions and constraints imposed by customs, beliefs and practices. It is a state of mind in which a woman does not consider herself inferior but has the confidence and competence to face problems (Vasanthakumari, 2014). The empowerment of women may be divided into following categories: (i) Economic Empowerment, (ii) Social Empowerment (iii) Political Empowerment (iv) Personal Dimension of Empowerment, (v) Familial Empowerment (vi) Organisational Empowerment and (vii) Political Empowerment.

WOMEN IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Every society accords social status to women members as per its own perspective. The status and role of women in tribal society in Arunachal Pradesh is also governed by their own norms and values. The tribal family is patriarchal. Kinship is recognized on the side of men. The tribal women's status is lower than that of men. She faces many problems in all walks of her life simply because of being a female. In this male dominated society, women are considered inferior to men. They are meant to depend on and under subjugation of men. The family in which she was born as a daughter does not consider her as a permanent abode. She is looked upon as a transient member to be handed over on marriage to her in-law's family. She cannot have a share in the immovable property at all. Decision making and exercise of authority go under power of men. Thus, the tribal women are not recognized by their social system regarding their freedom and rights. The future of children depends, by and large, upon the mother, who generally stays at home and takes care of their children's health and education. This is particularly so in our country where society and life of people are molder by traditional and spiritual foundations. Though women are the key factor in the process of change of development, yet in many times they are underestimated. For example, women in this traditional societies take equal part with men in producing foodstuffs, in addition to endless household works, yet their works are not given due weightage. In rural areas women participate equally or even more with men in various agricultural operations (Mandal, 2010).

Objectives of the study: The main objective of the study is to investigate the political empowerment of general and elected women through Panchayat Raj Institution.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Study Area: The field study was conducted at two villages: Holongi Nyishi and Holongi Karbi under Balijan Circle of Papumpare district of the state. The survey was conducted during January to February, 2018.

Type of the Study: The study is basically empirical in nature based on primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected from the field study while secondary data are collected from various published sources like books, journal, magazine, reports, and government institutions like Department of Panchayat Raj, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, etc.

Sample Size and Sampling: The survey was conducted among 100 tribal general women and 10 elected Panchayat women members through random sampling technique with the help of pre-designed and pre-structured questionnaire

through direct interaction with the respondents. The respondents were from the age group of (20-50) years. The all respondents were more or less literate consisting of house wife, teacher, shop keeper and other service holders.

Data Analysis: The various collected data are scrutinized, processed, organized and tabulated logically and systematically under appropriate head of rows and columns of statistical tables. Graphical presentation and simple statistical techniques have been used to analyse the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In a world where equality is often misunderstood, misinterpreted and exploited for political gains, it is imperative that "equality" should be redefined. Equality, irrespective of the sex of the individual should promise a life of freedom, choice, opportunity and dignity. The low value for female life is the biggest problem. The desire to have male issues has reduced the chance for girls to be born and thus female infanticide is on the rise. Economic conditions and cultural ethos have forged an invisible combination that threatens even the female embryo. Even if a female child is born against such heavy odds, she is not given a chance to survive. She suffers from malnutrition, early marriage and frequent child births and lacks of medical attention. The crude death rate fostered by abortions and child birth without proper medical care indicate the reduced life span of women. Another major problem is that of illiteracy.

Empowerment in Political Dimension

Rao has pointed out that participation of women in political arena and in the decision-making role is an important tool for empowerment. The extent of this participation is monitoring standard of political performance at all levels. In India, the participation of women in politics has been actually nominal since the days of freedom movement while in many other countries women are moving forward. Although their electoral participation has increased over the years, yet voting is only one aspect of political participation. We find that psychological obstacle, economic hurdles and socio-cultural barriers are restricting women's effective participation.

The basic reason for women's development not picking up as desired has been lack of involvement and participation in decision-making, implementation of their decisions, their monitoring and evaluation (Mahi Pal, 2015). Political Empowerment to women refers giving space to women in larger decision making bodies by accepting them in the leadership position and following her rightful decision for the larger interest of village. Many people argue that participation of women in politics should be encouraged to reduce corruption. The 72nd and 73rd constitutional Amendments on Panchayati Raj and Nagarpalika with 33 percent reservation for women have created political space for women. Nearly seven lakh women occupy position as members and chairpersons of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. Political emancipation will act as the main catalyst in achieving the empowerment of women to a great extent (Rao, 2011).

Secondary Data Based Findings

Women in the state are generally not allowed to participate in the tribal village councils. Thus, the councils are male dominated institutions. Women are generally considered as inferior and weak in decision making. In general, women are expected to be submissive and continue to play the subordinate role in the male dominated tribal patriarchal society. But reservation policy with the principle of gender equality has played a very important role in bringing about a

major socio-political change in this traditional tribal society since 2003. The results of three term elections as per the 73rd Amendment Act are depicted in following Table-1.

Table-1: Elected Members of Three Consecutive Panchayat Elections in Arunachal Pradesh

Year of Election	Name of Tier	Total Elected	Number of Male elected	Number of Female elected	Percentage of Elected Women
April, 2003	Gram Panchayat	9046	6485	2561	39
	Anchal Samiti	2216	1639	577	35
	Zilla Parishad	181	136	45	33
May, 2008	Gram Panchayat	7348	4167	3181	43
	Anchal Samiti	1779	1130	649	37
	Zilla Parishad	160	101	59	35
April, 2013	Gram Panchayat	7313	4378	2935	40
	Anchal Samiti	1777	1155	622	35
	Zilla Parishad	177	111	66	37

Source: Data of 2003 and 2008 from State Election Commission and data of 2013 from State Commission of Women, Itanagar. Note: Figures of 2003 do not include the allotted strength of Tirap District, as PR elections were not held in that time.

Table-1 shows that percentage of women leadership in Gram Panchayat level was higher than Anchal and Zilla Parishad level. Arunachal Pradesh has accepted the 73rd Amendment Act gracefully by giving the political leadership space as 33% reserved for women. It was observed in three terms of election results, women occupied more than 33% of seats in all three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. At Gram Panchayat level, 39 per cent of women were elected in first election and it increased to 43 per cent in 2008 and decreased to 40 percent in 2013 election.

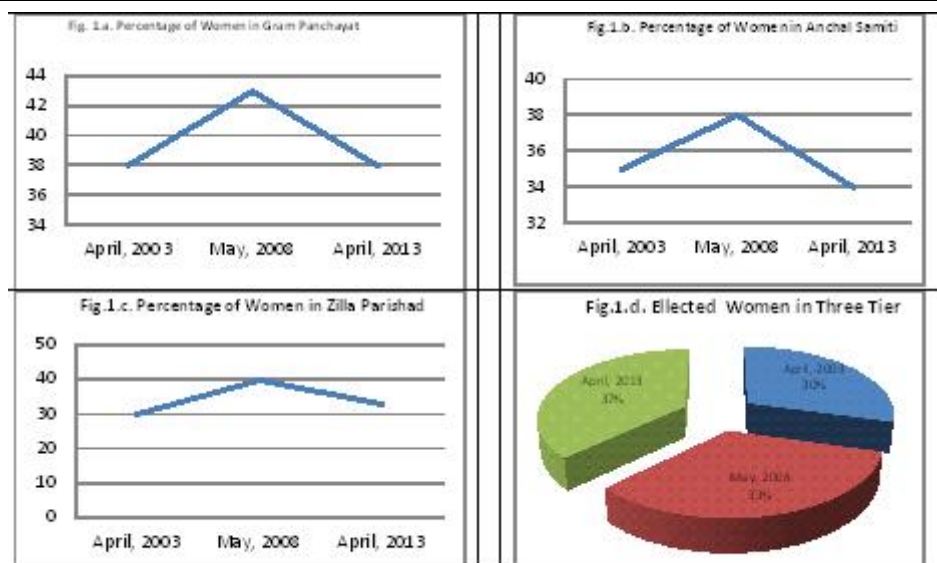
However, these results has revealed that women were not given equal space in higher tier where power to influence decision are more. Zilla Parishad and Anchal Samiti are playing dominant role over Gram Panchayat in decision making process because of Gram Sabha being dormant and inactive due to various administrative and political reasons. It also indicates that women leader at Gram Panchayat was elected or selected just to cover up the seats and to play subordinate role in Anchal and Zilla Parishad.

The percentages of women leaders in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Papumpare district are given below in Table-2.

Table-2: Number of Elected Male and Female in Papumpare District

Name of Tier	Year of Election											
	April, 2003				May, 2008				April, 2013			
	Total	Male	Female	% of Women	Total	Male	Female	% of Women	Total	Male	Female	% of Women
Gram Panchayat	337	208	129	38	338	191	147	43	338	208	130	38
Anchal Samiti	77	50	27	35	76	47	29	38	195	128	67	34
Zilla Parishad	10	7	3	30	10	6	4	40	12	8	4	33
Total for Women			159 (30)				180 (33)				201 (37)	

Source: State Election Commission (2003 & 2008 result) and State Commission for Women (2013 result), Itanagar. Note: Figures of 2003 do not include the allotted strength of Tirap District as PR elections were not held in that time. Figure within parenthesis indicates percentage.



Findings: In Table-2, Figures-1.a, 1.b, 1.c. and 1.d, the percentages of women leadership were more at Gram Panchayat level. They were 38 percent in 2003 and 2013 and 43 per cent in 2008 in Papumpare district. In Anchal Samiti, they were 35 percent in 2003, 38 per cent in 2008 and 34 per cent in 2013. In Zilla Parishad level, their percentages were 30 in 2003, 40 in 2008 and 33 in 2013. That is why, all curves rise and again fall. But if we see overall elected women in three tier, their percentages are increasing from 30% in 2003 to 33% in 2008 and to 37% in 2013 shown in Fig. 1.d.

In both of three consecutive elections, the percentages of women for three portfolios increased from 2003 to 2008 but decreased from 2008 to 2013. What do we remark about the political empowerment of women? We can answer that though the election results of 2013 were not in favour of their number but their consciousness might be increased. But overall in three tier, their percentages had increased. Field study can give accurate answer whether their consciousness has decreased or increased.

Many people argue that women leaders are ineffective. They do not participate actively in meeting because of being weak in decision making capabilities, women are not meant for leader, etc., and therefore this 33% of reservations should not be implemented. Efficient women will contest in the general category, thus there is no need of

reservation. Critics, while arguing, fail to realise that inefficient leaders exist among the men folk also. Moreover, it is observed that efficient and able women leader are not given a chance to contest in the election.

Therefore, to increase the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, gender role is required to redefine. Education to women and girl childs (future leader) should have to be re-emphasised, re-enforced and re-designed. To eliminate gender bias in all fields should be redesigned. Educational programmes must be promoted in equal share basis of responsibilities. Reservations in Panchayats and programmes for economic empowerment are not sufficient for women empowerment. In order to empower women, social customary practices and beliefs which are responsible for women's lower status in society and the main hindrances for their progress are need to be redefined.

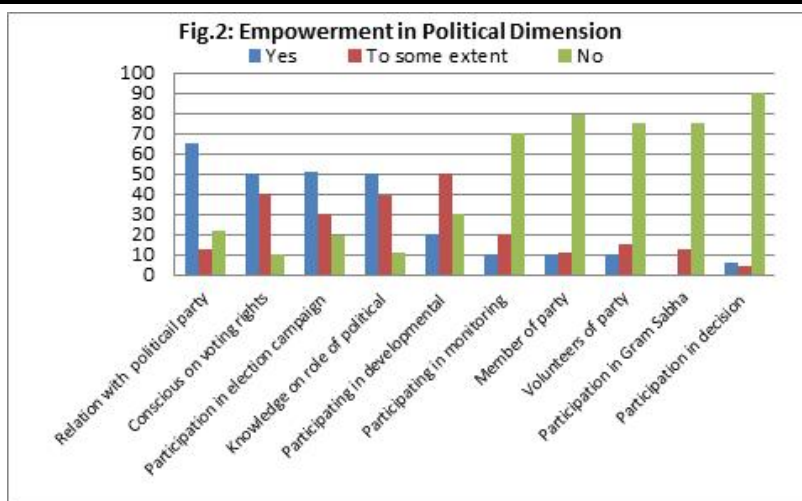
FIELD-BASED FINDINGS

In the following Table-3, some indicators like participation in election process, knowledge on voting rights, participation in political activity, membership in local bodies, participation in Gram Sabha and decision making in development of village, etc., have been asked during field survey over 100 respondents (women) and their responses have been recorded to study the political empowerment in the following 10 indicators. It is shown below in Table-3.

Table-3: Percentage of General Respondents in the Empowerment of Political Dimension

Sl.No.	Indicator	Yes	To some extent	No
1	Relation with political party	65	13	22
2	Conscious on voting rights	50	40	10
3	Participation in election campaign	51	30	19
4	Knowledge on role of political leaders	50	39	11
5	Participating in developmental activities of village	20	50	30
6	Participating in monitoring (social audit) of development schemes	10	20	70
7	Member of party	10	11	79
8	Volunteers of party	10	15	75
9	Participation in Gram Sabha	12	13	75
10	Participation in decision making process	6	4	90

Source: Field Study, January- February, 2018



Findings: In Table-3 and Figure-2, most of the members have increased their relation with political party. 65% of the members responded that their relation have increased highly with political institutions or party while 13% and 22% of the members responded in favour of 'To some extent' and 'No' respectively.

In question of conscious on voting rights, 50% of the members have responded positively, 40% in 'To some extent' and 10% answered negatively.

Participation in election campaign during election period is also very high among the members. Members responded in this indicator is 51% in 'Yes', 30% in 'To some extent', and 10% in 'No'.

Most of them are very actively participating in the election campaign, though they are not having any relation with the party. It is generally observed that voters including women are highly active during election period because of money involvement during the election time. It is high time for them to earn easy money in maximum possible way from the contested candidate. Though not all, maximum voters in the village have bargained their voting right with the contested candidate at this time.

Most of the members has responded that their awareness on the role of political leaders have increased, which have encouraged the members to participate in the voting process in the election. 50% of the members have responded in 'Yes', 39% in 'To some extent' and 11% in 'No'. However, it is observed, members are looking for the direct benefit or help from the leader like, government job, contact business, government supply, cash money, etc. Indirect benefit like common infrastructure and other facilities of social amenities are looked upon very little by the voters from the leaders.

In question of participating in developmental activities of village, the study reveals that majority of the respondents are not participating in developmental activities of village. Only 20% in favour of 'Yes' and 50% in 'To some extent' and 30% in 'No'.

Members' responses on 'participating in monitoring (social audit) of development schemes' are 10% in 'Yes', 20% in 'To some extent' and 70% in 'No'. This indicates that maximum members are not involved in any development activities in the village.

It is revealed that even though members are highly connected with the political party, they are not full time members and volunteers of any party. As high as 10% of the

members responded in 'Yes' while only marginal percentages like 11% in 'To some extent', and 79% in 'No'.

Similarly in question of 'Participation of Gram Sabha' and 'Decision making process', members are not active, as 75% are responded in 'No'. Only nominal percentages of members i.e., 12% have responded in 'Yes', and 13% in 'To some extent' respectively.

It is revealed that only 6% of respondents have participated in decision making process while only 4% have participated to some extent but 90% have not participated at all in decision making process of Gram Panchayat. That is, 90% are not connected with PRIs activities except during election time where they have to take decision to support a candidate.

Unlike other state, in Arunachal Pradesh, Standing Committee for development, education, gender, health, water and sanitation are not formed. However, the State has initiated the process to take decisions for the formation of these committees in respective three tier of the Panchayat Raj Institution.

Therefore, the study has revealed that majority of respondents are not aware of government programmes and policies. They do not participate in the activities of gram sabha and political decision making process. However, they are very optimistic in engaging in the PRI activities as they are kept lagging behind by the male counterpart.

In the focused group discussion as well as in interview schedule, it is found that very few women have reported to have helping hands of their husbands in fulfilling the domestic chores. The burden of triple roles of women restricts their exercise and enjoyment of their right in various stages of political processes.

EMPOWERMENT OF ELECTED WOMEN MEMBERS IN ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND FAMILIAL DIMENSIONS

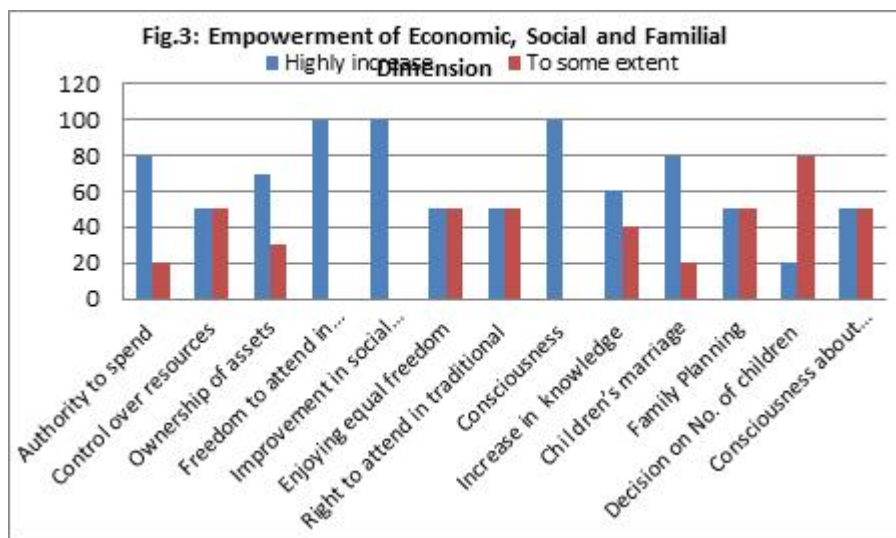
The empowerment of elected women members in Economic, Social and Familial Dimensions indicates their economic activity such as resources for investment, responsibility for household subsistence expenditure, etc. In Social Dimension it indicates their freedom to attend social function, mobility, understanding of the existing pattern of society, improvement in social status, enjoying equal freedom and rights, to attend in traditional decision making institutions, etc. Their empowerment in Familial Dimension means their position improved inside and outside of their own family.

Survey has been conducted in the study area among 10 elected Gram Panchayat women. The outcome is shown in Table-4 below.

Table-4: Members in the Empowerment of Economic, Social and Familial Dimension

S.N	Dimension	Indicator	Highly increase	To some extent
1	Economic Dimension	Authority to spend money for house	8 (80)	2 (20)
2		Control over resources/ household assets	5 (50)	5 (50)
3		Ownership of productive and consumer assets	7 (70)	3 (30)
4	Social Dimension	Freedom to attend in social function	10 (100)	0
5		Improvement in social status	10 (100)	0
6		Enjoying equal freedom	5 (50)	5 (50)
7		Right to attend in traditional decision making institutions	5 (50)	5 (50)
8	Familial Dimension	Consciousness about importance of children's education	10 (100)	0
9		Increase in knowledge about health and hygiene	6 (60)	4 (40)
10		Children's marriage	8 (80)	2 (20)
11		Family Planning	5 (50)	5 (50)
12		Decision on No. of children birth	2 (20)	8 (80)
13		Consciousness about better life	5 (50)	5 (50)

Source: Field Study, January-February, 2018. N.B.: Figures within parenthesis indicate percentage



Findings from Table-4 and Fig.3: on the basis of the indicators, the empowerment of elected members has increased after being elected member. There is no negative answer. In some indicators there is 100 per cent highly increased while in some indicators there is at least 50 per cent increased in 'To some extent'. Therefore, in Economic, Social and Familial Dimensions, the empowerment of elected women members has enhanced satisfactorily after being elected in PRIs. So we can see it is positive signal towards the empowerment of women through PRIs.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of statutory Panchayat and spread of party politics at the grass root level has given definite impetus to the entry of women in the leadership structure. They have achieved empowerment in Economic Dimension, Social Dimension, Political Dimension, Personal Dimension, Familial Dimension and Institutional and Organisational Dimension respectively. Indeed, family is a joint venture of women and men. So, women and men should equally be empowered in running a family. But, in Tribal Society, women's backward position in all spheres of life is socially structured and

culturally conditioned. It is very difficult to break the circle to bring the changes regarding women empowerment. However, Central and State Governments have taken some initiatives in regard of empowering women through various programmes. Strategically different programmes can actively promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Moreover, the empowerment of women enhances their interactions among themselves and their participation in different developmental activities. As women are empowered with information resources, it enables them to initiate social action against alcoholism, illiteracy and other social evil issues. In particular, empowerment of women will undoubtedly have long-term socio-economic benefits in the society.

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