



Political Empowerment of Women through Urban Local Government: A Case Study of Tinsukia District, Assam

¹Author Gayatri Medhi Mahanta

ARTICLE INFO

RECEIVED 30 MAY 2023

ACCEPTED 24 SEPTEMBER 2023

PUBLISHED 4 DECEMBER 2023

ABSTRACT

The political empowerment of women is a societal process crucial to development and progress. Without the participation of women in national activities the social, economic or political progress of the country will be stagnated. In spite of constitutional provisions of gender equality, yet only a few women have been able to make a space for themselves in the decision making process in urban politics. The aim of this paper is to present the political empowerment of women in urban politics. Political participation is a major path to women's empowerment and participation in the decision making process.

Keywords:

Political empowerment, development, decision making, political participation.

¹ Corresponding Author : Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Doomdooma College
Email – gayatrimedhimahanta@gmail.com



INTRODUCTION

Political empowerment can be defined as the ability to planning, implementation and influence in decision making process. It includes right to vote, contest in the election, campaigning, party membership and representation in party office at all levels. The concept of empowerment was introduced at the International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985. "Forward Looking Strategies" is a step forward in securing and protecting rights of women. This conference laid emphasis on "equality, development and peace". It suggested that the government and the political parties should encourage women to participate in the election processes so as to become members of elected bodies.

The 108th constitutional amendment bill proposed to 33% reservation of seats for women in Parliament and all State Assemblies. The bill was passed in Rajya Sabha but never voted in Lok Sabha. After the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments to Indian Constitution, one-third of the wards were to be reserved for women candidates and in the recent amendment fifty percent of wards would be reserved for women candidates. Apart from these wards would be reserved for socially backward classes.

Urban local government implies the governance of an urban area by the people through their elected representatives.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Biju M.R. in the book "Women Empowerment" (2006) stresses in Politics of Women reservation in India, women and grass root politics, women in pachayatiraj institutions.

Sumanlata in the book "Towards Empowering Women Views and Reviews" (2010) highlighted some core issues pertaining to empowerment of women.

Kaushal S. in the book "Women, Politics, Participation and Good Governance in the 21st Century" (2011) deals with women's political participation and the issues and trends



affecting women's political participation.

Dutta K.S., Ghosh K.D., in the book "Empowering Rural Women" (2002), examines the complexity of the problem of women.

Malhotra B.K., in the book "Women in Politics, Participation and Governance" (2011) examines the issues relating to equal opportunity granted to women in terms of participation and contests in elections, women's involvement in elected decision making bodies.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) Whether the women participation in urban politics helps them empower socially, politically and economically.
- 2) To examine the rate of women in decision making.
- 3) To examine the kind of impediments faced by the women while taking part in the conduct of the business of the Town committees and Municipal boards.
- 4) To examine the extent of their involvement in conducting affairs of the Town Committees and Municipal board in view of their being housewives.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study provides us a rare opportunity to examine the role of women in Urban government, particularly in the Town committee. Urban governance is an important platform for empowering women politically. The people in general feel that the women lack competence intelligence to take part in administrative or deliberative matters. If it is proved that the women are not lagging behind the man folk even in socio-economic and political fields, it is expected to bring about a sea change in the attitude of men towards the ability of women.

AREA OF THE STUDY

The Study is mainly based on the empowerment of Elected Women Representatives of Municipal board and Town committees of Tinsukia District Assam.

Tinsukia is one of the 32 administrative districts in the State of Assam. Total land area of the district is 3790 sq. km. Tinsukia district consists of one Municipal Board and five Town Committees viz. Tinsukia Municipal Board, Margherita, Digboi, Doomdooma, Makum and Chapakhowa Town Committee.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the study 28 elected women representatives of town committees and municipal board of Tinsukia district were selected. Interview method and questionnaire has been applied to collect the primary data. Secondary data are gathered through literary writings of scholars, journals, official documents of Town Committees and Municipal Board of Tinsukia district.

Table No. 1 Participation level of Women Representatives

Sl. No.	Participation Level	Regularly	Sometimes
1	Do you regularly attend the meetings?	23	5
2	Do you actively participate in deliberations?	18	10
3	Do you raise your voice in the meeting to solve any problem of your ward?	15	13
4	Do the Political parties or family members influence in decision making?	14	14
5	Are you able to solve any problem alone?	8	20

Source: Interview with the respondents

Table 1 pointed out the participation level of elected women representatives of urban governance in Tinsukia district. Majority of the respondents regularly attended and actively participated in the meetings of Town Committees and Municipal Board. Our study reveals that majority of the women representatives raise their voice to solve the problem of their respective wards. The study shows that to some extent the family

members or political parties influence the elected women representatives in the decision making process. Majority of women respondents are not able to solve any problem alone.

Table 2. Awareness of Women Representatives regarding Urban Local Government

Sl. No.	Awareness	Respondents view (Yes/No)	Percentage
1	Are you aware about the powers and functions of TC/MB?	16/12	57%
2	Are you aware about the problems of Urban areas?	25/3	89%
3	Are you aware about the welfare schemes undertaken by MB/TC?	16/12	57%
4	Do you know how does MB/TC prepare the beneficiary list?	19/9	68%
5	Do you know your role after being elected as a representative?	14/14	50%

Source: Interview with the respondents

Table 2 points out that 57% of the respondents are aware of about powers and functions of town committee and Municipal board. 89% of respondents are aware about the problems of urban areas. Our study shows that 57% of women representatives are aware about the welfare/developmental schemes. 68% of respondents know the procedure to prepare the beneficiary list. Almost half of the women representatives of urban government of selected area know about their role as an elected representative.

Table 3. Constraints of Women Representatives

Sl. No.	Constraints	No. of Respondent	Percentage
1	Family Responsibilities and Burden	5	18%
2	Lack of proper cooperation	6	21%
3	Lack of support from male colleagues	8	29%

4	Lack of experiences	6	21%
5	Lack of orientation programmes	14	50%

Source: Interview with the respondents

Table 3 shows that majority of women respondents received cooperation from the male colleagues, family members extended their support. It has been found that the women representatives did not find many obstacles in the functioning of the governance.

Table 4. Political Participation of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Political Participation	Respondent	Percentage
1	Did you contest election as independent?	3	11%
2	Did you contest election in support of Political Party?	25	89%
3	Do you involved with party activities?	25	89%
4	Do you organize any party meeting?	16	57%
5	Do you contest in the election on the basis of Reservation policy?	28	100%

Source: Interview with the respondents

Out of 28 women respondents of the Town Committees and Municipal board, according to table 4, 11% of respondents contested in the election as Independent candidate, 89% of respondents contest in the election with party affiliation , 89% of elected women representatives are involved with party activities, 57% of respondents involved themselves in organizing party meetings and all the respondents are contesting election on the basis of Reservation policy.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- a) Majority of women representatives regularly attended the meetings and participates in the deliberations and also raised their voice for developmental activities for their areas. The women representatives are not able to solve any problem independently. They were dependent on their husband or party

workers to solve any issue.

- b) The elected women representatives were aware about the powers and functions of town committees and municipal board. The women respondents were less aware about the welfare schemes under taken by urban government. Almost 50% of total respondents were did not know about their role as a representative of urban governance.
- c) Majority of women respondents perform their duties and responsibilities with the support of family members and from their male counterpart. But 50% of women members feel the necessity of orientation programme which may help them in performing their responsibilities more qualitative.
- d) Almost 89% of women members are actively associated with party politics and party activities. Majority of respondents entered into the fray with party affiliation. All the respondents contest in the election on the basis of reservation policy.

SUGGESTIONS

- a) There is a need for Orientation / Training programme to empower the women members and to function effectively as public representatives, policy makers and decision makers.
- b) Various Non-governmental Organizations and women organizations should come forward to encourage the women representatives to take effective part in socio- economic activities of the urban areas.
- c) Political parties as wel as educated section of the society should organize seminars, workshops and awareness programmes on issues like women empowerment, domestic violence, 74th amendment of Indian constitution, Reservation provisions etc.
- d) Political parties must ensure larger proportion of seats to women. Women issues should be included in party manifestos.



CONCLUSION

It is commonly believed that women are unable to make meaningful contribution on municipal matters either due to illiteracy or lack of awareness. But our studies show that women are capable of sharing responsibilities equally well like men in the local self-government administration in spite of having certain limitations. As house wives, they have no doubt some duties and obligations forwards their families, but if they are willing, with the family support, they can prove their worth in administrative field which has been so long male dominated.

It is hoped that in course of time, the urban local bodies would act as training grounds of democracy and leadership, particularly for women who experience gained over time, can climb the ladder and occupy positions of power even at the state and national level.

REFERENCES

1. Biju, M.R. (2006). Women's Empowerment. A Mittal Publication.
2. Chandra, P. (2005). Political Dynamics of Women. Akansha Publishing House.
3. Kaushal, S. (2011). Women Politics Participation and Good Governance in the 21st Century. DPS Publishing House.
4. Malhotra, B.K. (2011). Women in Politics, Participation and Governance. DPS Publishing House.
5. Sumanlata (2010). Towards Empowering Women, Views and Reviews. Akansha Publishing House.