PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Panchayats as grassroots political institutions have been in existence in India since time immemorial in one form or the other, from the ancient to the modern period of history. However, women never occupied any important position in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and their participation was almost non-existent up to 73rd Constitution Amendment Act of 1992 due to the predominance of certain social evils like hard patriarchal system, purdah system, illiteracy, superstition and traditional beliefs. Women had an important role in the household work but the economy of the family was mainly in the hands of men. Politics as well as the decision making process has been considered the affairs of men and the participation of women in politics is still microscopic.

The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act which was passed by parliament on December 22, 1992 has been proved as revolutionary step and a landmark in the history of Panchayati Raj in general and political empowerment in particular. All of the three tiers of PRIs have received constitutional recognition and it has added a new direction to the concept of Panchayati Raj by providing enough scope for direct elections. It becomes compulsory for the states to set up PRIs and provides them 29 subjects as provided by the XIth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This Act provided that not less than one-third of seats will be reserved for women including Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and these may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies of PRIs. Not less than the total number of seats for the office of the chairpersons at each level would be reserved for women. This would be rotated among different Panchayats at each level. Thus, the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act marked a watershed in the representation of women in the grassroots politics through the PRIs in the country.

Women empowerment is one of the major objectives of the third generation of Panchayats in India. As such the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act provided reservation of one third of the seats in the PRIs for women. The participation of women in PRIs is considered essential not only for ensuring their active political participation in the democratic process, but also for realizing the development goals of women. Participation of women in PRIs involves women as voters, members of political parties, candidates, elected members of the PRI’s taking part in decision making, planning, implementation and evaluation and as members of Mahila Samity and their association with voluntary organizations. No doubt the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, with a view to involving women in decision making, provided
psychological empowerment and a sense of political efficacy to those who had been left powerless to intense public decisions that affect them. But it also raised some issues which are related to tradition and socio-economic background of the society. In this regard it is important to study whether women have managed to overcome all the age-old traditional obstacles to actively participate in the PRIs and empowered themselves.

The present research is an empirical study based on the data collected mainly from the women representatives of PRIs from Nalbari District of the State of Assam. Research is a corporate affair. This doctoral thesis has been completed under the benevolent guidance and supervision of Dr. Jogendra Kumar Das, Associate Professor, department of Political Science, D.K.College, Mirza, Kamrup, Assam.

The present research work has been devoted to examine the recommendations of different committees, legislations and constitutional amendments since the time of independence with regards to participation of women in PRIs: the role of the Assam State Government; to examine the social background and characteristics of women representatives and to scrutinize whether the socio-economic determinants could bear some impact on the emerging women leadership particularly aftermath the 73rd CA Act; and to examine the role performance and political participation of women in PRIs and nature of leader follower interplay.

The research work is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is the introductory chapter in where we have dealt with the statement of the problem, review of literature, theoretical framework and methodology, conceptual clarification, objectives of the research work and hypothesis and other related matters.

The second chapter is concerned with the profile of the Nalbari district, the study area of the research work along with the participation of women in electoral politics in India and Assam in general and in Nalbari district in particular.

The third chapter is the study on the recommendations of different committees and legislations and constitutional amendments since the time of independence with regards to participation of women in PRIs: the role of the Assam State Government.

The fourth chapter is dealt with the socio-economic and political background of the women representatives of Gaon Panchayat and Anchalik Panchayat. Analysis of different variables related to socio-economic and political background of the women representatives like- age, religion, caste and community, education, occupation, land holding pattern, income, political party affiliation, link with other organizations, previous experience in politics, experience of election campaign and other related variables etc..

The fifth chapter is on the participation and role performance of the women representatives of PRIs and the hurdles and opposition they have faced during the
working in PRIs. The sixth chapter is dealt with the perceptions of male members of PRIs and the members of civil society on the participation of women representatives in the activities of PRIs and the assessment of their performance. The last chapter is summary and conclusion of the research work.

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