Women As Subaltern Group And Their Voices In Political Decision-Making Process In Assam

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Abstract

In a post-structural and post-modern society defining a particular concept is not so easy. Subaltern is one of that term, whose definition and area under subaltern always a matter of debate. Importance of the issue of political decision-making becomes a matter of public concern; but it is important to know after covering around half of the population by women why women are still not getting a satisfactory position of political decision-making. Without a strong voice or not in the position of decision-making process, it is difficult for women to explore themselves in completely. The serious question is that whether women are systematically excluding from the process of decision-making process or women are really not interested to do that. This article is an analysis of various prose and corns of the less participation of women in the political decision-making process.

Keywords: Subaltern, decision-making, women, political participation.

Introduction:

Half of the population belongs to the women but they are always being neglected in every sphere of their life. Before few decades ago even their issues have not been addressed. As after started feminism as a movement the questions of women are being addressed slowly and steadily. But most importantly some major issues still unheard and women movements are miles to go to achieve its goal. Moreover, the negligence of women in decision-making process is not a recent phenomenon but the study of this issues not satisfactory one. Fortunately, people are slowly started talking about these issues which make it into the limelight.

‘Subaltern’ becomes one of the most debated terms that an Italian political thinker Antonio Gramsci used for the first time to refer any group of ‘inferior’ rank based on ethnic, class, gender, or identity extraction. By and large for Antonio Gramsci Subaltern are group that exist within a dominant hegemonic order but there is no place in it, no political space in it, whose views are not taken into account. According to Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak, subaltern studies emphasis on ‘bottom layer’ of the society. In her book named “The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview”, she claimed “Subaltern is
gendered and hence needs to be studies with the help of feminist theory” (page. 344). Who are subaltern? This question has long been debated in subaltern studies because different theories and schools define it in different ways. The Oxford English Dictionary defines subaltern as both a noun and an adjective. As a noun, a subaltern is “a lower rank British Officer” while as an objective subaltern stands for lower rank people in all respects. ‘Can Subaltern Speeks?’ in that easy Spivak define subaltern is someone with a low ranking in a social, political, or other hierarchy. It can also mean someone who has been marginalized or oppressed.

From the above analysis one can place women as a subaltern category because the are the group from the society whose voices are still unheard by the dominant section of the society. Decision-making is one of the key aspects through which one can influence other. In other way it is a way to feel other for one’s existence. But the interesting part is that either as women or as subaltern group women’s voice is always being marginalised by the dominant section of the society. Without a strong voice or not in the position of decision-making process, it is difficult for women to explore themselves in completely. The serious question is that whether women are systematically excluding from the process of decision-making process or women are really not interested to do that.

No doubt economy is a major arena of society for both men and women, but most of the time economically independent women are also used as a tool. In that situation what will be the justifications. The women who have been able to play an important role in the decision-making process what factors led them do so. Whether their leadership quality or any other factors such as political backing from the side of the family, influence and help them to achieve that position. What factors led women to do that? This paper is an attempt to uncover all those things.

Objectives

The paper is based on the following objectives

i. What factors impact women in the decision-making process?
ii. As a subaltern identity whether women get benefited from it or not.
iii. Whether women are always used as bridge to reach the political end by the other half.

Analysis

Assam is a place of tribal people and their economic source for earning is agriculture where role of male and female are almost same. Even in the tribal society women play a dominant role in the market place too. But interestingly, in the political field their role has been limited because they do not think that politics is their field. In the tribal society where women enjoy freedom in almost every field but they do not get the equal status in the political field that with men. In contrary with that the non-tribal society where women are always face lots of hierarchy in every field and restricted their movement in the four walls of their house and in that busy schedule, they have no time to think
about all these issues. During Ahom empire though two or three women got the highest position that the position of ruling the country, but they did not able to enjoy the independent decision-making power. In history there were powerful women like Mula Gabhoru, Romoni Gavoru, Joymoti etc, but they were exception.

Political awareness among the Assamese women became a matter of concern after Mahatma Gandhi’s Assam visit. Though Gandhi met women in the various part of Assam and encouraged them to take part in the political field, but he used the ‘Sita-Sabiti’ model to show the loyalty of women. Following the trend, in the later period Joymoti became the ideal figure to encourage women of Assam and ‘Joymoti Uttshav’ became a tool in this regard. During that time there were some strong who had powerful voice but because of no political baking they did not get the proper chance and place in the politics and in this regard Chandraprabha Saikiani was living example.

In history, the Assamese women had able to enjoy some kind of freeness in the society but in the invasion of the Burmese and influence of Brahminism restricted the movements of women in four walls of the household and the process had been continued till 1921, before Gandhi visited to Assam and arranged meetings with women. Moreover, socio-economic condition of 19th century was also responsible for lower participation of women in decision-making process. Most importantly, the freedom struggle of India made some kind of awareness regarding the political field among the women in India as well as Assam but their political participation was not equal with men. However, before independence women of Assam took a very important part in the political field. During that time, they were inspired by the Gandhian ideology. At that time, they formed Mahila Samities in various parts of Assam; and the first Mahila Samitee was established at Dibrugarh in 1915. Chandraprabha Saikiani, Hemalata Kumari, Devi Bordoloi, Nalinibala Devi, Rajabala Das were some leading women in that field. Along with non-co-operation movement, in Quite India Movement too, the participation of Assamese women was quite noticeable. The participation of women of Assam in Civil Disobedient Movement was so massive that prominent Assamese historian Benudhar Sarma described it as the ‘Women’s Movement’ (page 88). But most interestingly, after getting independence despite having important role of women in freedom struggle, women’s participation in decision-making and policy-making process got side-line and women were confine to the private domain. However, private domain is not free from patriarchy. Moreover, a few continue their position after independence to and became the member of Rajya Shabha as well as Lok Sabha. The process of democratic decentralization which initiate the system of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the village level give a reservation of seats for women enhance the scope for women participation in that process. But lack of education as per with men, domestic responsibilities and work load which plays a significant role in the process of less participation of women in the political as well as decision-making process.

Though institutional mechanism gives equal opportunities to women to participate in the decision-making process, yes it has been considered as the exclusive domain for male. Most importantly, the role of women in mass movements remain precious
forever. For example, mass movements regarding some regional issues such as Language Movement of Assam in 1960, refinery Movement in 1967, Medium Movement of 1972, and long six years Assam Movement for the issue of illegal immigrants. Among all these issues, in long six years Assam Movement the women’s participation was very large. But when the issue of sharing political power comes, women became always in the side-line position. In Assam Movement, where women participated a lot, but most importantly, the movement were also used women as a political tool. In that movement lots of incidents had happened against women, which were undoubtedly tragic and shame on humanity; but ironically, the leaders of the movement did not talk a word strongly against those activities. Infect, they incorporated the issue of nationality with that matter. After the Assam Movement AGP government was formed and among 126 constituencies only two seats were allotted to women. Between two of them one got the seat in the Ministerial level but her respective department was social welfare and policy implementation regarding child. It shows that women are necessary only during the time of movement, not in the time of power distribution. “Still women community is not able to unite themselves and think about their issues. Specially, in the political field they are baby doll of the male community and their movement depends upon on the dictation of the male leaders. Women are always portraying as altruistic for her husband, children, and family and Joymoti should always ideal for them. Most importantly, Assamese women are not free from that mentality till today onwards” (Mahanta, 2002).

Conclusion:

Women are generally termed as ‘half the sky’. But in reality, after covering around half of the population by the women, they are always in the position of negligence. Women are not given proper position in the process of decision-making. Most importantly, women’s identity is always is always being politicised systematically and used them as a tool by the other half. They will be celebrated if they follow the dictation thoroughly assigned to them. But the problem arises if they start questioning in return. After giving all the equal opportunities by the institutional apparatus, that is the Constitution and the legal machinery, but women are still not get the proper position in the decision-making process. Social structure and the political machinery never give equal chances to women to flourish themselves. Because of why women are present themselves as subaltern category and started demanding their identity through decision-making process.

Reference:


