

Current Scenario of Women Empowerment: A Brief Study of Ratanpur And Padi Villages In Jonai Circle, Dhemaji, Assam

Bikram Pegu¹, Nazneen Ara Hoque², Saddam Hussain³, Moonmoon Gogoi⁴

¹Research Scholar, Gauhati University, Department of Economics, Assam, India

² Research Scholar, Gauhati University, Department of Economics, Assam, India

³ Research Scholar, Gauhati University, Department of Economics, Assam, India

⁴ Research Scholar, Gauhati University, Department of Economics, Assam

Abstract

Women empowerment has been a burning topic in the present day. But the question arises whether there is impact of women empowerment on the women belonging to the villages of Assam or whether they are aware of their rights and privileges provided by the constitution. Women are regarded as lower in status than man especially in the villages despite the efforts of the rallying cries, Medias, NGO's and Government Policies for empowering women. This paper is a brief attempt to study about the status, privileges and challenges of the women of Ratanpur and Padi villages in Jonai sub-division, Dhemaji, Assam. The status, privileges and challenges of the women of Ratanpur and Padi villages are examined by unstructured interview schedules. The stereotype of women as subordinate to men continues to exist in Assam, particularly in the villages.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Women, Village, Stereotype, Status, Privileges, Challenges

Introduction

In the last five decades, the concept of women empowerment has undergone a sea change from welfare-oriented approach of women empowerment to equity approach. Many researchers have tried to provide a suitable definition of women empowerment. According to Sen and Batliwala (2000) "Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives." One of the most wonderful creations on earth is woman. She is endowed with the greatest gift of being a mother which differentiates her from man. But this boon makes her fragile that emerged as the greatest drawback of her life. Since ages women are considered as subordinate to man because of her vulnerability, which gradually developed into a stereotype. Her role was limited to giving births, kitchens and household activities. The effect of modernization changed their perspective by enabling them to realize the discriminations that is existed in the society. They started claiming their rights to be treated equally as man. They began empowering themselves and other women through various means. Empowerment indicates identification of one's self, increase in self-confidence and emancipation from all kinds of dominance and barriers for the development of the society in every sphere. Women empowerment is spreading all over the world. Today women are aware of their rights, freedom, and self-dependency. Moreover, the status of women of North East is considered higher than that of other states. Still the status of women as equal to men is in question, especially in the villages of Assam. The village women are more backward in comparison to the town/urban women. Although they are aware of the gender issues, the existing socially constructed traditional systems, lack of education, lack of exposure to technologies, communications, general awareness and financial problems causes difficulty in empowering themselves. Moreover, limited knowledge about the government schemes and programmes for empowering women in the villages are hampering in the development process. This

paper is a process to understand the status, privileges, and challenges of women inhabiting in No. 2 Ratanpur and Padi/ No.1 Ratanpur villages of Jonai sub-division, Dhemaji, Assam.

Objectives

The following are the key objective of the study-

- a) To study the status and privileges of the women of Ratanpur and Padi villages.
- b) To study the challenges they are facing in empowering themselves.
- c) To study the causes of backwardness in both the villages.
- d) To study the impact of women empowerment in both the villages.

Area of Study

The area of present study is confined to the small villages No. 2 Ratanpur and Padi/No.1 Ratanpur villages, located in Jonai sub-division of Dhemaji district, Assam. The villages are situated 12 and 10 kms respectively away from the sub-district headquarter of Jonai. Most of the people in both the villages depends their livelihood on agriculture. So, they are financially weak and backward.

Data Sources and Methodology

Data Source

The study is primarily based on the Primary source of data. The primary data are collected from the two villages namely Ratanpur and Padi village under Jonai Subdivision, Dhemaji District, Assam. The secondary data are collected from various sources like Office of the Sub-Divisional Statistical Officer, Jonai, published journals and Census 2011.

Method

Data were collected by a structured interview schedules that was developed by the researchers. The status, privileges and challenges of the women of Ratanpur and Padi villages are examined by focus group method.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The people of both the villages belongs to the Mising community. In Mising community, the position of the women are lower than the men. But it doesn't indicate that the women are completely dominated by the males. Women enjoys many privileges despite its backwardness and existing traditional beliefs. Both male and female are very hard working. But one cannot deny the challenges women have to overcome in empowering themselves.

The women inhabiting in Ratanpur and Padi villages are in a better position than some other villages. They are active in all the household chores, field works and extra activities in spite of their effective participation in Self Help Groups, politics and other development programmes. The male members are supportive to the women in this case. Due to lack of proper education, the women are having problems in utilizing their opportunities. Moreover, maximum people of the villages belong to middle class or below poverty line. So, they are lagging behind in all aspects in comparison to the town women.

Women of these villages are still adhered to the age-old customs, traditions and superstitions. They are unwilling to change their mindset. As a result, they are facing many problems unacknowledged by them. The following are some of instances where women are getting troubles such as-

a) Decision making problems:

Where women are making decisions of their own in the advanced countries, the women particularly in Assam villages are still hesitating in making decisions. They just agree to any decisions taken by the male members as a means of respect and the conception that only male has the capability of making right decisions. Women of Ratanpur and Padi villages are encountering similar problems. During the interview time the author observed more than 80% women opted for their husbands to make any important decisions. This is because of their irrationality or getting married at young age (most of the

girls elopes which is regarded as a custom and not as social dishonour) between 15 to 20 yrs of age. Such problems create problem in empowering women.

b) Domestic violence:

Consumption of home-made alcohol is one the traditions prevailing in Mising community. Excess consumption disturbs the harmony of the family. More often it resulted in loud arguments and disputes. It even goes to the extent of husbands beating their wives. Most of the women bears without complaining anyone as their assumption of it as destiny of being a woman. It hampers in women empowerment. There is absence of other kind of domestic violence in both the villages.

c) Political participation:

The women of both the villages takes active participations in the field of politics. They attend political meetings without any hurdles from the male members. But most of the women fails to understand the meaning, aims and objectives of politics. This is a consequence of lack of knowledge and seriousness about the matter.

d) Education:

Education is the key to women empowerment. Now-a-days all the girl child is admitted to schools. But school drop-out is a common problem that the female sections of both the villages are facing. As most of the families belongs to the poor sections, they can't afford for the expenses even though education is free in government schools. The overburden of works and early marriage are another reason for school drop-out. 90% of the women discontinue their studies after marriage or child birth. The girls face discrimination as most of their parents preferred the boy child to be admitted to English Medium schools and girls to Assamese Medium schools. Discriminations, school drop-outs and early marriage becomes a barrier in empowering women.

e) Self-help groups:

In the present-day Self-Help Groups plays a very significant role in an attempt to alleviate poverty and empower women. SHG is given much attention to equip women with required skills for the socio-economic development of the rural areas. More than 98% of married women of Padi/No. 1 Ratanpur village and No. 2 Ratanpur village are members of various self-help groups. Each group consists of ten to twelve members. Most of them are engaged in animal husbandry and weaving. Their per capita income through SHG is very minimal. The government aids and other bank loans that are provided to the SHGs are proved to be insufficient for the fulfilment of rural development. Although there are many SHGs in both the villages only one group namely, 1 No. Ratanpur Padi Mahila Atmasahai Samiti established in 2003 is in a good position. Major portion of the SHG members could not meet the requirements for developing themselves.

f) Lack of proper information about the working of the system:

The women in both the villages possesses limited knowledge about the current happenings around them. They are unknown to the legal and constitutional privileges. Illiteracy and lack of understanding of the contents of the books of those who are literates constitutes the greatest constraint in women empowerment. Most of them studies only for the degrees. Their mindsets are held captive by the stereotypes. Weakness in English disables them in accessing internet. Moreover, early marriage led to the discontinuation of their studies and they never try to keep in touch with books and the things that are happening around them. They confine themselves to the family and household chores. There is absence of communication and signal problems. Yet they fail to get information about the working of the system.

Conclusion

The findings from the study provides evidences that the women of Padi/No. 1 Ratanpur village and No.2 Ratanpur village are unaware of the idea of women empowerment. They are acquainted to gender inequality but in vain. As they never try to bridge the difference between the male and female generated by the stereotypes. Impact of women empowerment is negligible in both the villages. Greatest part of the women residing in both the villages are of poor sections. Their participation in various activities are not for the benefits of the society or for empowering themselves but to meet their financial needs. The male members support their wives to take part in various social activities for the same reason. Most of the women do not have the right to use their own earnings according to their wish. Besides, lack of proper education, weakness in reading and writing in English contributed to the difficulty in empowerment. It's true that the situation of the women of both the villages are changing to a great

degree with the advent of modernization and government's special attention to empower the women belonging to the rural areas. But they are still dependent of the males in almost every aspect. The reluctance to accept the transition taking place in the present day because of the prevailing traditional practices is causing problem in women empowerment in the villages. The government and NGOs should organize a campaign along with the programmes and schemes for the village women to promote the idea of women empowerment. It is one of the solutions to make the village women know the meaning of women empowerment, which is very necessary for the welfare of the country.

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