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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STATUS OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF NALGRAM ENCLAVE (CHITMAHAL) AFTER INDO-BANGLADESH LAND BOUNDARY AGREEMENT (2015)

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ABSTRACT

A fruitful environment of democracy always depends on grass root level. Now a day the concept of local democracy also plays a vital role to the success of democracy. In India, the proper functioning of democratic institutions and processes at the local level is a determining and vital factor. Thus, local democracy is understood as a national model of democracy, as citizen participation in governance, as a form of self-organization of citizens, and as a democratic system at the grass root level. The newly included 'enclave' areas are new terrain of experienced. Because of the 111 enclave areas of Bangladesh was deprived from the experience of local democracy and there were no local democratic institutions to enforce the local interest before the 'Indo-Bangladesh land boundary agreement (2015)'. This article would highlight how the people of Nalgram enclave (Chitmahal) area are currently getting local democratic opportunities through Panchayati Raj institutions after Land Boundary Agreement (2015).

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INTRODUCTION

Enclave refers to a territorial portion of a country that is completely surrounded by territory of another country. Currently there are 250 enclaves' areas in the whole World and most of these areas are situated in Western Europe, the fringe of former Soviet Empire and South Asia (Roy and Barman, 2015). In the Indian context these enclave areas mainly came up in academic discourse after independence. There were a total number of 162 territories within India and Bangladesh, which are commonly known as Chitmahal in Bengali (Rahaman, Murshed and Sultana, 2013). Out of this, 51 Chitmahal areas of Bangladesh were located in India and 111 Indian enclave areas were located in Bangladesh. All of the enclaves of Bangladesh were located in Cooch Behar District, West Bengal. Similarly 111 enclaves of India are located in Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Kurigram and Panchagarh district of Bangladesh. In the Mujib-Indira treaty 1974 of boundary identification between Bangladesh and India, it was mentioned that the people of these enclaves and exclaves might live in any of these two countries (Schendel, 2002). Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014 and gave significant push to the enhancement of bilateral relations with Bangladesh. Through the 100th Constitutional Amendment Bill on the Land Boundary Agreement was unanimously passed in India by both houses of Parliament

in June 2015. In the exchange of the instrument of ratification (2015) between India and Bangladesh, both governments agreed that the Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and Bangladeshi enclaves in India would be exchanged pursuant to the 1974 agreement and the 2011 protocol and shall stand transferred to the other with effect from midnight of July 31, 2015 (Bhardwaj, 2015). The Nalgram conclave is the largest enclave of Bangladesh which is located in Cooch Behar district, West Bengal. Before 2015 there was no citizenship, fundamental rights, voting rights, governmental opportunities for its inhabitants. There was no any kind of local administration for implement local democracy and they lived a life like statelessness. After LBA (2015) they got the recognition of Indian citizenship. Later, they exercised their right to vote for the first time through the 2018 West Bengal Panchayat Election. Finally, local self-government was established here through the Panchayati raj institutions. This article shows that how the peoples of this area practice local democratic rights through Panchayati raj institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected from the field survey of these particular area interviews of local people, village panchayat, senior citizens on the basis of random sampling method. Then

secondary data have been collected from journals, newspapers, books and online sources.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study

- To know the actual enclave area of Fragment Nalgram.
- How the general people of this area practice their basic rights?
- To know the status of Panchayati raj institutions.
- To know how PRIs working in this area for local development after LBA (2015)?
- To know the praxis of local democracy of this area?

Study Area: Fragment Nalgram is one of the largest Bangladeshi enclaves which is located in Indian state of West Bengal, Cooch Behar District and the area is located under Sitalkuchi Community Development block. Chhit Nalgram is almost 12 km distant from Mathabhanga subdivision of Cooch Behar District.

The System of Local Democracy in Nalgram: The idea of local democracy is implemented through local autonomous institutions. The local autonomous institutions are of two types in India: Rural local government and urban local government. These local institutions form the core of the democratic government. Rural local government in India is known by the popular name Panchayati Raj. The Panchayati Raj system in India got full vitality through the 73rd amendment Act, 1992 of the constitution. By this Act, democracy is extended to the grass roots level and power is directly vested in the hands of the common people. Due to being a Bangladeshi enclave, before 2015, Fragment Nalgram was an exceptional place in this regard. At that time there was no local self government to implement the idea of local democracy. Finally, after LBA as an enclave area of Bangladesh, fragment Nalgram regarded as a part of Indian Territory. Then they acquired Indian citizenship and the peoples of Nalgram entered the Indian democratic system. Later they started participating in various elections from local to central level.

The Implementation of the Local Democracy in Nalgram: The status of local Panchayati raj institutions in Fragment Nalgram village is on the basis of field survey. For the purpose the following categories of People were interviewed representatives, senior citizens and general people of the area. All the sections of people were very cooperating for providing relevant data on the study. We know that election system is one of the pillars of democracy. After LBA, in 2018 there held first panchayat election, through which the common peoples of fragment Nalgram exercised their first democratic rights. It was the great democratic festival of these villagers after independence. Azizar Mia (common people) says that under the enclave they lived like wild animals. The residents of chitmahal had no identity, fundamental rights. He also said that they were often harassed by the citizens of the Indian Territory adjacent to the chitmahal. There were no educational facilities for the children’s. However, after the Land Boundary agreement (2015), the general peoples of fragment Nalgram gain normal democratic environment. In 2018, the peoples (voters) of Fragment Nalgram exercised their right to vote spontaneously. Trinamool Congress representatives won at all three tiers. Trinamool Congress candidate Pabitra Roy Pramanik won this election as a panchayat member. Now this

village is working under khalishamari gram panchayat, Sitalkuchi panchayat samiti.

Table 1. West Bengal Panchayat Election, 2018

Name of People’s representative	Tiers of Panchayat	Winning Party
Pobitra Roy Pramanik	Gram Panchayat	AITC
Dipubikash Barman	Panchayat Samiti	AITC
Lipika Roy	Zilla Parishad	AITC

Source: Field Survey, 2023



Photo by Researcher

Figure 1. Use of Solar in Agriculture after LBA-2015

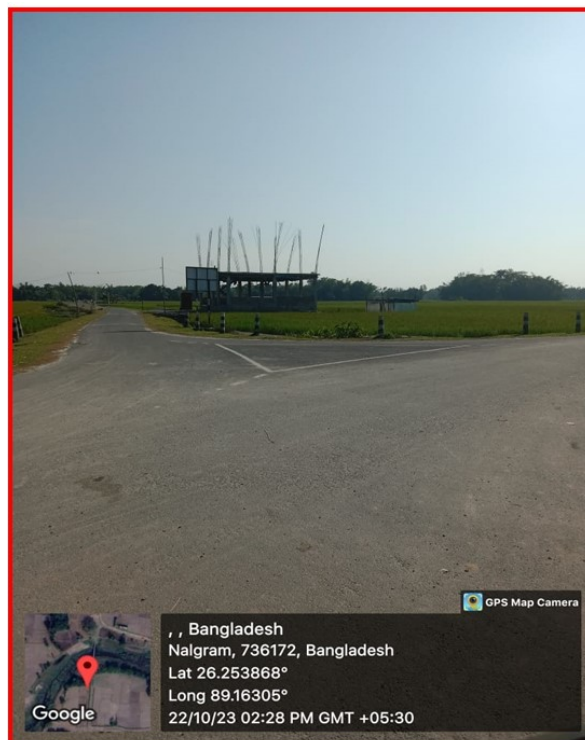


Photo by Researcher

Figure-2. Development of rural road system

After this election (2018), local self government was established in Fragment Nalgram and the Panchayatiraj

institutions were functions for the local development of this area. Various central and state government schemes were implemented through Panchayati raj institutions. Common people started talking their local problems to higher authority through panchayats. Along with the people’s representatives, Block Development Officer also tried to solve various local problems of this village. In this way common problems of this village have been solved through Panchayati raj institutions. Gradually, the village started coming back to the mainstream of Panchayati raj system of West Bengal. Besides the 2018 West Bengal panchayat elections, they faced another Panchayat election in 2023.

Table-2. West Bengal Panchayat Election, 2023

Name of People’s representative	Tiers of Panchayat	Winning Party
Kanika Barman	Gram Panchayat	AITC
Abu Bakkar Siddik Miah	Panchayat Samiti	AITC
Jayanta kr. Barman	Zilla Parishad	AITC

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The total number of voters in this election were 1064 and 750 voters gave their opinion to the election. Like 2018, Trinamool Congress candidates won in 2023 panchayat elections as well in all three tiers. In this election, Mrs. Kalpana Barman is elected as the gram panchayat Pradhan from khalishamari G.P. An interview was conducted with respected Pradhan for collecting some information for the development plan of fragment Nalgram. She said that currently special emphasis is being given to Fragment Nalgram in implementation of various developmental projects of khalishamari G.P.

Apart from this; various funds are being allocated to this village from the panchayat samiti and zila parishad. In the mean time the peoples of Fragment Nalgram also participated in an Assembly election in 2021 and a Parliamentary election in 2019. According to Gajendranath Barman, one of the members of the enclave protection committee (Suraksha Committee), since 2018 they have been getting various projects of the state and central government through the panchayat. All the facilities or schemes they get under both governments (state and central) are given bellow:

Table 3. Schemes of State & Central Government

Sl. No	State Government Schemes	Sl. No	Central Government Schemes
1	Kanyashree	1	PM Kishan
2	Rupashree	2	100 days Work
3	Laxmir Bhandar	3	Mission COVID Suraksha
4	Sikshashree	4	Solar Charkha Mission
5	SabujSathi	5	Ujala Yojana
6	Jay Bangla	6	Digital India Mission
7	Swasthya Sathi	7	Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)
8	Gatidhara		
9	Khadya Sathi		
10	Sufal Bangla		
11	Krishok Bandhu		
12	Karma Sathi		
13	Banglar Gram Sadak Yojana (BGSY)		
14	Mission Nirmal Bangla		
15	Duare Sarkar		
16	Hasir Alo		
17	Duare Ration Prakalpa		

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Apart from the above schemes after the exchange of enclave’s central government sanctioned 1005.99 Crore INR for the development of the enclaves and the adjacent areas of the Cooch Behar District. These packages are for the physical development of the enclaves and benefits for the adjacent people (Chakraborty & Hossain, 2018).

CONCLUSION

For democracy to be universally effective it must extend to the local level. In India three-tier Panchayati raj system regarded as local-self government. Local-Self government is a medium to activate the idea of local democracy for the interest of local people. But for a long time there was no mechanism to solve the local problems of the enclave areas like Fragment Nalgram. This article summarizes that how to Panchayati raj institutions are working in this area for local development after LBA (2015). It is clear that without local democracy and local panchayat the peoples of Fragment Nalgram ‘lived a life with hazards’. But now the institutions of local-self government are the main part of their way of life. The inclusion of Fragment Nalgram village in the map of India in 21st century and their local governments by panchayat has made their way of life a democracy. After long deprivation, the inclusion of Chhit Nalgram village in Indian territory and the establishment of Panchayati raj system ushered in a new era. This has democratized their standard of living under the Panchayati raj system.

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