



Uncovering the Major Challenges of Municipal Bodies in Achieving Inclusive Development in Assam with Special Reference to Jorhat Municipality – An Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Municipal bodies in India have its own set of challenges including insufficient funding, limited resources, lack of better coordination with state governments etc. Issues like corruption, inadequate infrastructure, adverse impact of rapid urbanization, inadequate active participation of citizen basically contribute to these difficulties. The issues are including both institutional and non-institutional aspects that hindering the efficient and effective functioning of urban local self- governance in India. The present paper finds and throws light on the challenges which are related to the issues of municipal governance that making the notion of inclusive development, a distant reality for the municipal governance in India. In conclusion, the paper discusses some suggestion through which the current problematic scenario of urban India can be solved with the proper institutional framework and active participation of citizens.

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Introduction:

Local self- governing institutions are considered as the grass-roots of democracy. These institutions cater to the local needs. It is impossible for any government to look into the local problems properly at the ground level. (Paul,2018) The municipalities are in a position to deal with these problems in urban areas. The Municipal governance are the political and public institutions which manage and govern functions and administration in a smaller geographical area as a political unit in a city or town. Municipality as an urban local governance do not possess any power to make laws, but they have the assigned responsibilities to govern and perform several functions at the grassroot level. (Banerjee, 2021). In the contemporary time, there has been a growing need for inclusive development of urban areas of Assam including social, economic, cultural and political development to fulfil and meet current development needs, demands and challenges. It is true that although economic growth is there, but it is not sufficient enough to foster people's welfare and growth through inclusive development. The idea of inclusive development and smart city mission strongly demands and need such a development approach which can ensure the equal and equitable distribution of welfare across all section of society, especially the most disadvantaged sections and provide them with necessary facilities in an equitable manner. (Sodhi and Jha, 2021) Municipalities of Assam are working with several challenges that hinder its efficient service delivery to citizens. One of the primary causes of such issues is inadequate infrastructure which not only affects the quality of public services but also poses significant complication in terms of health and environmental risks to residents. Another major challenge is the limited or lack of financial resources available to municipalities. In fact, many municipalities in Assam rely heavily on financial grants from the state and central government, which are basically insufficient to meet the growing needs and demand for public services. As a result, this financial constraint hampers the development of the town as a whole. (Devi Et al., 2024)

In the path of inclusive development, the role urban local bodies are very crucial and significant; therefore this study tries to finds out the issues that has been carried out by the municipality and its related responsible factors. After uncovering the problems associated with municipal administration, and finding their possible solution, the grassroot democracy administered by the municipality can ensure proper functioning towards inclusive development of the country.

Methodology:

The study took place in Jorhat town of Assam. In Jorhat, under Jorhat municipality there are nineteen wards, out of which seven wards were chosen for the study. The selected wards are – Ward No



:1, Ward No: 19, Ward No: 18, Ward No:10, Ward No: 15, Ward No: 11, Ward No: 6. The study is based on descriptive research design. From the selected wards, 100 respondents were selected and they were employed through the Simple Random Sampling method. The respondents of the current study are of three types, these are – Head of the household that is 70 in numbers, 10 from each ward, Municipal Board officials that is 23 in numbers and 7 Ward Commissioner of the respective wards.

For this study, both primary and secondary data have been collected. The researcher has adopted semi structured interview schedule and observation method for the field survey as tool of data collection. Along with, secondary data has been collected from research articles and websites related to the subject matter of the study.

Objectives:

The objective of this research paper is to understand the issues associated with municipal administration of Jorhat.

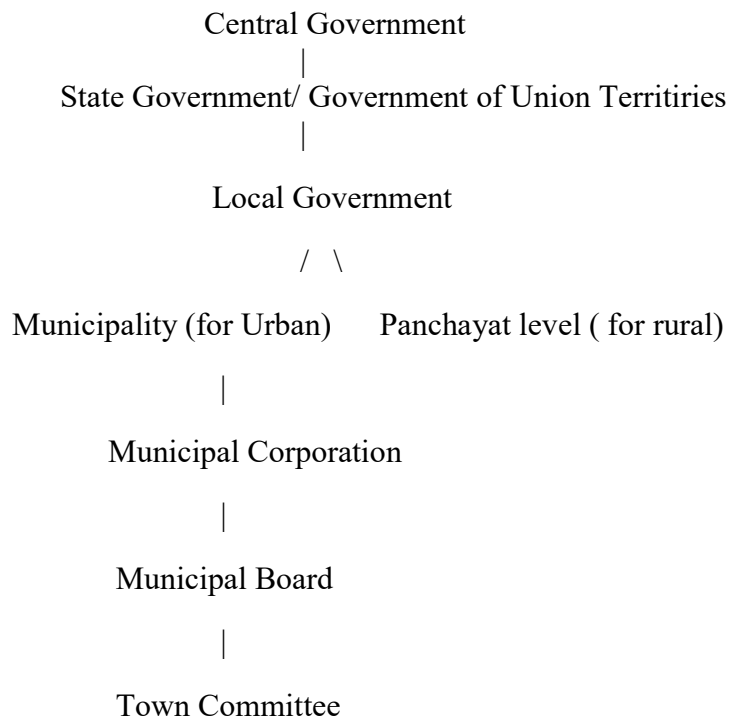
Analysis:

Municipality as an urban local self- governance plays a very significant role in framing the identity and the physical structure of the urban cities through influencing and providing the local services as municipalities are the public political institutions formed to managed urban affairs of urban areas. Urban local governments managed and govern functions in a smaller geographical area of town and city. Moreover, municipalities are the closest public sphere for the people of a town that can have the best access to inquire issues at the grassroot level. Consequently, it opened the ways for better coordination and communication among state government, central government and population from the grassroot level. Alongside, municipal bodies promote the strategy of active participation of residents in a cordial way in different affairs of urban life and as a result, it helps to boost citizens responsibility. It is fact that, active engagement and participation of urban citizens in municipal urban affairs definitely brings urban local self- governance or municipality and government authority closer to the common people. (Banerjee, 2021)

The contemporary form of municipal governance has its origin in the British rule in India, where, for the first time municipal corporation was started in Madras in the year 1688, after that municipal corporations was established in Bombay and Calcutta in 1762. In the year 1882, Lord Ripon released the resolution and advised for the establishment of local urban self-government institutions, where he

adopted election as a means of constituting municipal bodies or urban local bodies. As a consequence, act of the Bombay municipal corporation came into existence that formed the Bombay municipal corporation by elected as well as nominated personnel. After the independence of India in 1947, Indian constitution took urban affair as state matter. That is why, the nature and extent of urban local bodies or municipalities depends on state acts. It is noteworthy to mention that, the 74th constitutional amendment act was the milestone undertaken by the government of India that gave the stabilization in the municipal administration, functions and democratic organizational structure through the constitutional status and provisions to urban local bodies. It is true that, 74th constitutional amendment act gave the required dignity to municipalities with the constitutional status as a remarkable initiation to strengthen the urban governance. (ibid, 2021)

Hierarchy of Government System in India



There are certain specific functions of urban local bodies listed in the 12th schedule of the Indian constitution, these includes – urban planning and town planning, planning for economic and social development, regulation of land use and building construction, construction of roads and bridges, water supply, public health and sanitation, solid waste management, urban forestry and protection and promotion of ecological aspects, slum improvement, safeguarding the interest of disadvantaged sections of the society, urban poverty alleviation, provision of urban recreational facilities, provision of burial



grounds, registration of births and death, public services such as street lighting , parking areas, regulation of slaughter house, and fire services etc. (MHA.gov.in)

Problems:

Rapid growth of urbanization in India poses massive challenges to urban local governance. (Ahluwalia, 2019) Lacking or limited financial autonomy and scanty revenue collection of municipal body is the major serious problem facing the urban local bodies in terms of implementing plan and activities. Therefore, source of income of municipality is very insufficient as compared to their functions. Basically, their primary sources of income are generating from the varied types of taxes within the city or town administered by them. Moreover, most of the income generating taxes is levied by the central and state governments and, the taxes collected by the municipalities are not sufficient to manage and cover up the expenses of the services provided. Although urban bodies can impose certain new taxes to increase revenues, the elected members of the urban local bodies hesitate in doing so as they have fear of displeasing the electorate. (Nanda) Municipal bodies even sometimes find it very difficult to disburse salaries on time to their employees from the own source of revenue collection. As a consequence, it is often seen that employees came on protest or strike over salaries not being paid monthly by the municipality. Apart from this, most of the municipal bodies of India including Jorhat, are not able to extract adequate revenue from different sources (property tax, vehicle tax etc) of revenue collection due to some reasons such as deficiencies in calculating taxes, low efficiency, inadequate and unhealthy attention and solution to citizens grievances etc. Rather, urban local governance are tries to depend on external funds and finance coming from budget of the government and other national and international financial organization like World Bank, International Monetary Fund and so on.

Moreover, unplanned urbanization also hampers its functions. Services of urban local bodies have facing difficulty to cope with the increasing demands, needs and issues of the urban dwellers, both qualitatively and quantitatively due to rapid growth of population and lack of resources as equal to numbers of population. The situation is worsening day by day due to rapid migration of people in search of employment and better opportunities from rural to urban areas as well. Alongside, the growth of slums is also increased in the town which is increased into seven in numbers and traffic congestion is rampant in the town. Due to lack of available finances, the municipality have not been able to performed and fulfilled their obligatory functions according to the needs of the citizen. Consequently, they suffer a constant outcry from the public. Among all the public services, water is not supplied properly and



quality is not so good to use as drinking water, drainage facilities do not cover the entire city, and sometimes drains are found blocked by plastic waste due to irregular street and drainage cleaning. In short, lack of proper sanitation and poor hygiene is there that make the town unsafe. It is very significant to find that, despite a relatively higher level of literacy, having awareness and education, town dwellers do not take adequate interest and manage time to take a significant part in the functioning of the municipal bodies. As we know, the town dwellers of the cities consist of heterogeneous groups in nature and they are not much interested about others. Generally, citizens of urban areas were look at the city merely as a place to earn money, enjoy their livelihood with different opportunities, and has least interest as well as attachment with it. Although the 74th constitutional amendment act gave constitutional status to municipality to bring the local voices to the local governance, the reality reflects that the urban citizens are rarely involved and aware about the functions and decision-making process. (Vaishampayan Et al., 2020) In this context, the marginalised and vulnerable section of the society need more participation in every urban affair as they are mostly affected by the adverse impact of rapid urbanization. In our country, people are suffering and experience a lot of disappointment and inconvenience in terms of obtaining the basic amenities or public services. Moreover, most of them are used to facing water, drainage, waste management, traffic congestion and sanitation problems, and they feel that it is worthless to look up to the municipal bodies for any solution in this regard. Inefficient or poor service delivery in cities is a result of administrative and governance challenges at the municipal level, that creates outdated administrative practices and lack of modern technology. Elections of urban local bodies have been delayed in several states due to multiple issues cited by the government, and affecting the democratic functioning of the bodies.

Apart from these, there are several significant challenges often face by Jorhat municipality including financial constraints, urban population and growth pressure, inefficiencies of government etc. These problems are basically associated with limited revenue generation, more reliance on government grants, rapid urbanization and its impact on urban infrastructure and service demands, shortage of skilled manpower and technological resources. It is found from the study that, municipality is often struggle to generate sufficient revenue from various sources and generally through local taxes, as a result, financial crisis making them heavily depends on government funds. In this regard, loopholes associated with property tax assessment, tax collection method etc makes it more difficult. As it is obvious that, due to rapid urbanization process, there is a growing need for better water supply, roads and drainage system, public health and sanitation facilities, waste management services and so on, which creates and increases

immense pressure upon municipal bodies. It is also found that, municipality have been facing the issue of lack of proper coordination and cooperation between different department as well as with citizens, which results in delays in decision making regarding different activities of its administration. Municipal body is badly suffering from serious lack of required skills of municipal employees. Although the aspects of responsibilities of urban local bodies have increased over time, human resources and capacity building effort of employees at different levels and aspects do not increase equally. It is found in the study that departments among municipal administration are lacking the staff strength, where board employed staffs without having requisite skills. As a result, citizens argues that they are facing serious issues in terms of public services. It is noteworthy to mention that, in recent times, the problem of unskilled or semiskilled manpower in municipal bodies has emerged as a great concern as the rapid population explosion or urban population density has been increased massively. So, lack of requisite skills in terms of profession of municipal employees are reflected their poor management and functioning.

Failure to conduct municipal election on a regular basis and timely in most of the Indian states is also an important cause associated with the problems of municipal governance across the country that harming the notion of democratic local bodies.

Conclusion:

The 74th Amendments of the Constitution of India in 1992 marked a significant step in strengthening democratic decentralization by establishing local self-governments for urban areas. This implicitly laid the foundation of three tier federal structure in India. A strong institutional framework is indeed very important for the urban governance where the chairperson and executive head should have requisite autonomy and power to make decisions for better governance system at grassroot level of the nation. Moreover, active and high participation of the urban citizen should be encouraged by any means, basically among the disadvantaged group and vulnerable section of the society. Otherwise, the concept of participatory local governance of municipality will remain a distant reality. Besides, to improve the urban governance system, administration and management mechanism should be active and strong enough, which is possible only through the skilled manpower. To make this possible, the capacity building programme and appointment of skilled personnel is need to carried out for better performance of the municipality and improving the managerial system of the board, so that employees can work with more efficiency. Capacity building programmes should be long term with strong planning and



programmes. Alongside, in most of the cities of our country, revenues are collected by municipal bodies from the property taxes basically, and from various parks and public places also. In Jorhat also, if the municipal bodies focus on the beautification of the city with proper public facilities of recreation and parks are constructed beautifully and scientifically with proper management for public, both for adults and children will definitely help to earn revenue in a desired way for the upliftment of the city.

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