



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)

A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)

Volume-VII, Issue-II, March 2021, Page No. 86-92

Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: 10.29032/ijhsss.v6.i4.2020.1-8

A Study on Empowerment of Rural Women in Panchayati Raj

Dr. C. Somashekher

Professor of Sociology, Jnanabharathi, Bangalore University, Bangalore, India

Abstract

This paper explores the empowerment of rural women in a backward region. The Panchayat Raj System aims at women empowerment in rural areas by making them more aware of political developments and contributing to the process of rural development. Emphasis on socio-economic attributes and the constraints of rural women with regard to their political participation would enable the policy makers and planners at the government level to restructure the programmes pertaining to rural development in a fruitful manner. The study attempts to measure the level of women participation in local level elections. It is based on 50 elected women representatives in Gram Panchayat Elections of Kalaburagi District. Descriptive method was used for the interpretation of the data. Findings of the study indicate that most of the rural women are illiterate, economically dependent, lacking confidence, unaware of their rights, hesitation in expressing views on feeling inferiority complex. Further majority of the women are facing the problems like male domination, family responsibilities, casteism, sex stereotype role in Gram Panchayat Institutions. Hence training must be provided to the women in these institutions in order to make them more aware of their roles and rights. It is also suggested to enhance their level self-confidence to carry out their administrative roles independently with dignity which requires literacy.

Keywords: empowerment, panchayat raj, political participation, rural development, women.

Introduction: India, like across the globe, is mostly constituted by rural population. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and lack of health and welfare facilities etc. hindered the rural India from centuries. Yet, we find various programmes and schemes for the development of rural communities. The wide gulf between the rural and the urban scenario, encompassing overall development process, projects the existing dichotomy in the distribution of resources on equitable terms.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act, 1993 has enforced the formation of Panchayaths at the village, taluka and district levels. With decentralization playing key role today, this important Act brings closer to Gandhi's dream of every village becoming an independent, self-reliant unit of development. The Panchayati Raj Institution (P R I) has emerged as a solution to the various problems faced by the village communities. It empowers the villages to cater to their priorities and developmental needs. It is an inter-linked, inter-dependent, federal and democratic setup of administrating

rural India. It enables to bridge the gap between the bureaucracy and the common man in the country side. The Panchayati Raj has also been assigned the task of planning and executing the rural development and welfare programmes with people's participation, active co-operation, support and assistance with a view to ameliorate their socio-economic conditions and tone up their cultural lives. It has also been argued that political equality is meaningless in a country, where the mass of population suffers from poverty, continuous threat of starvation, illiteracy, ill-health and inequality of class, status and power. It is more so in the case of women, who suffer from another dimension of inequality namely the weightage of traditional attitudes that regard them as physically, intellectually inferior to them. It could be said that women's traditional status and role has not altered with the same pace as the development process.

The movement of democratic decentralization in the form of rural self-government has far reaching implications for democracy and rural development. The notion of people's participation, development from below, grass root democracy are likely to find expression in the present PRI in Karnataka. The statistics relating to the distribution of PRIs in the state are fairly impressive. Recently concluded 2020 gram panchayat elections reveal that, there are 5,728 Grama Panchayats and as many as 90,729 candidates have been elected. All these gram panchayat units have members directly elected by the people of their respective villages. According to the Constitution of India, the government is not having any provision to nominate any representatives to neither gram panchayat units nor to zilla panchayat and taluk panchayat units. Of the over all 4178 seats in Kalaburagi 388 got elected unopposed and elections were held to elect 3790 candidates for gram panchayats with 10,190 contesting. The turnout for polling in Kalaburagi district was 76.41%. Further, it is heartening to state that more than 50% of the elected representatives in gram panchayats are women. In the sense, women representatives have achieved victory in wards which were not reserved for women.

Thus, reservation of seats to women in the P R I have enabled the women to participate in the administrative aspects of the village. This gave an opportunity to break the shackles of traditional roles of reproduction and home-keeping and provided an opportunity to enter into the political arenas which assures an autonomy in decision making process, which was denied to them over the years. Though women have been playing both productive and reproductive roles, simultaneously, successfully, the norms hailed the latter as the greatest contribution, thus suppressing her potentials in other productive spheres. The various gender specific atrocities which are being perpetrated upon women, such as illiteracy, dowry-related harassment, early marriage, foeticide, infanticide, wife-battering, recurring pregnancies, polygamy, desertion and destitution, which are so very often observed in our rural areas, are the mirror image of the lives of millions of hapless women, who are the victims of patriarchal milieu. Apart from economic hardship, it is the woman who fetch fodder, fuel and water from long distance for the family, yet she lacked the power to decide the village development plan. The Panchayati Raj Institution came as a boon to women which gives an opportunity, a forum, to vent their ideas and to participate actively, on par

with men, in the decision-making process and in the administration of the village. Participation of women in politics varies from region to region. Socio-economic factors like education, income, cultural norms and caste will have their own impact on the opportunity of women in the process of political participation, (Banarjee 2003; Gleason, 2001). In order to increase the number of women involved in politics and government structures, reservations were implemented for women by law (Arora 1999; Kanango 1996). In the wake of women's organizations and movements across India, women's awareness and their participation in the field of politics is increasing along with decision making potentiality in different walks of life (Ahern et.al.2000; Locke 1998, Vyasulu and Vyasulu 1999).

Women and the Role of PRI:

It could be stated that women constitute about half of India's population. They have been an integral part of our social structure, not only due to their reproductive roles, but also by virtue of their significant contribution to socio-economic development. Despite this, they are the victims of discrimination because of the gender-bias in the social outlook and social practices, resulting in the denial of equality of status and opportunities in social, economic and political spheres. This has not only affected society's attitude towards them, but also their own self-image. They have been conditioned into thinking of themselves as inferior, to be tolerated only if they toil, fetch, carry or procreate (Government Report, 1993).

Panchayati Raj Institutions have provided an ample opportunity for the rural women to participate in the political process, "Politically speaking it becomes a process of democratic seed drilling on the Indian soil, making average citizen more conscious of his rights, than before. Administratively speaking, it bridged the gap between the bureaucratic elite and the people. Socio-culturally speaking, it generated a new leadership, which was merely, relatively young in age but also modernistic and pro-social change in outlook. Finally, looked at from the development angle, it helps rural people to cultivate a development psyche", observes Ashok Mehta Committee, with regard to the achievement of the Panchayati Raj (Government Report, 1978). The P R I has paved the way for different sections for the rural population, particularly weaker sections, to take part in the democratic and development process, which used to be dominated in the past, largely by the higher caste and higher economic groups. This is a necessary condition for establishing an egalitarian society. The P R Is have been regarded as Nursery of Democracy, since they provide opportunity for the capable and competent rural people to associate themselves with public affairs. The experience gained in these Institutions helps them to move into the leadership position at the state or the national level.

Thus, it becomes imperative to focus our investigations on the realities prevailing at the P R Is and to ascertain the rate of participation of women members in the administrative setup, in its real sense, and their organizational participation. Several studies have revealed but the women Gram Panchayath members are mere proxies, when it comes to different dimensions of administration.

Significance: The present study is a humble attempt towards ascertaining the degree of empowerment, which the process of democratic decentralization has brought to women in rural areas, through the institution of Gram Panchayat. The political consciousness and active participation in political process could be considered as obvious among the citizens of a democratic nation. It could be a good tool to know that how much women is socially active and concerned about the political setup and change in that area. Active political participation of women in politics includes their contesting of elections at different levels starting with Gram Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat, Zilla Panchayat, State Legislative Assemblies, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. As it is felt that any regional attempt will help in thrashing out the defunct dimensions of women administrators at grass root level, to enable us to chalk out a strategy to revive or orient them to perform their roles in befitting manner. The problem seems to be more pronounced in backward areas. Hence, an attempt is made to study the status of women Gram Panchayath members in this part of Hyderabad-Karnataka, recently renamed as Kalyana Karnataka, backward area. The focus is on many dimensions; starting from their enrolment, canvassing to their new roles and their performance at the different fora. The study is a microcosmic effort to highlight the status of newly elected women Gram Panchayath members and their level of orientation. The study seeks to address itself to the problems faced by these women, in society and at different fora; and their role performance i.e., if they really are delivering the goods, as anticipated.

Objectives:

1. To ascertain the role of rural women in the political field.
2. To examine the extent of participation of women in Indian Politics.
3. To explore the problems faced by women in rural politics.

Research Methodology: The data for this study has been primarily collected from 50 elected Gram Panchayat members located in Kalaburagi district and secondary sources from Books, Journal, Government reports and Internet. Data was collected through personnel interviews, using semi-structural schedules.

Results and Discussion: Majority of the population located in Kalaburagi district depends on agriculture. Generally, dry farming does not yield sufficient economic returns as compared to the irrigated area, which keeps their income within the average of 80-90 thousand per annum. It is observed that the women in majority belong to 25-35 years, which means they are young. They are mostly illiterates (80%) and not able to sign barring a few, who have studied up to matriculation.

As per the reservation envisaged by the amendment, the candidates contested the elections. Women feel elated that their men are happy with the reservation policy and have encouraged them to participate in the mainstream politics. They say, husbands and sons are the main source of inspiration for them to enter into political arena. It is they who instigated them at every step. Without motivation and support from the family, none of the women were ready to contest on their own accord. None of them were politically active in the

past, they all are new contestants. Women who have been active, and have been playing the role of a good Samaritan, had support of the majority. This criterion helped many women get unanimously elected.

This time the elections were not based on party affiliation, yet it is interesting to know that members referred to various party affiliations. They also revealed that various political leaders have extended economic and moral support throughout the election process. They are of the opinion that the elections were party based, pointing towards the fact that the regional parties have influenced the process at this level. Their political agenda consisted of promises, such as house for the poor, electricity, toilets, road, conveyance facility, health centre and provision of income generating activities for the women, in addition to pension for old aged, and self-employment for youth. The common mode of campaigning includes distribution of pamphlets and house to house visits. Addressing the public gathering was not so common. Husbands, sons and friends accompanied them for canvassing.

The foremost striking revelation from the analysis is that the women have not participated on their own accord and the so called 'inspiring' forces continued to inspire them even today. Secondly, they are unaware of the fact the elections were not party based, reflecting upon their ignorance. It does not seem to these men really wanted their women to join the administration of the village and 'rule them'. It is the reservation policy, which forced this male-dominated society to push their women for their selfish and ulterior motive. As is evident, she is the mouthpiece of her husband or son. They remain the 'guiding spirit' to these hapless women unless the government sincerely tries to make them self-reliant in day-to-day affairs.

Majority of these women are illiterate, and economically dependent. A socially and economically disadvantaged woman, when politically empowered, will also have to face problems all around. The situation is compounded by the fact that they are all new entrants, they are amateurs and lack the right confidence to tackle the situation in a staunch patriarchal atmosphere. They have to work and deal with male counterparts, and culturally it is not easily acceptable. Woman has to make decisions in the kind of a context that does not credit her with any kind of intelligence, capacity for thought or individualism, and has to prove her ability to make independent, firm and responsible decisions on behalf of the community. Very few are there, who can spell out the importance of their position and involve themselves in the decision making process, such as the vice presidents of the Gram Panchayaths. The others are just 'Proxies', either to their husbands or to their sons.

For a majority, their illiteracy is a handicap. They feel that they cannot articulate their ideas and express them properly. Firstly, they are unaware of their rights, secondly they do not possess enough courage to express their views, as they feel inferior and 'unintelligent' in front of the male members. They occupy the rear seats in the meeting. They realise that it is the men who brought them to the forefront. As an appendage of men, it is not possible for them to speak strongly about any matter. They say 'we tried to raise some issues, such as insufficient mode of drinking water, road construction, electricity etc. But the men do

not give much importance to 'women's talk', and women feel insufficient to pursue their demands. Regarding attendance in the meetings, their domestic roles take precedence over their administrative ones. They feel they do not get know the agenda or the purpose of meeting as they cannot read the context of the notification.

All the women members have one common aim that is to literate the women folk, so as to liberate them from the shackles of ignorance and men's monopoly. Literacy will help them fight for their cause and fight atrocities. Each one of them have shown great interest in formal education for their daughters. It appears that, given an opportunity and little guidance, these women can do commendable work. Gulbarga District has achieved more than 30 percent women representatives in the Gram Panchayath. What they require is the proper orientation. They should be trained in different aspects of Panchayati Raj and members of Gram Panchayath should be made aware of their roles and rights. A degree of self-confidence should be inculcated to carry out their administrative roles with confidence and dignity, and this requires literacy.

Literature concerning the structure and functions of Panchayati Raj, written in a simple and lucid manner should be made available to the village leaders. Thus, decentralisation of political power could be achieved only if the government sincerely tries to implement its policy of development from grass root level through people's participation. This could be achieved only through the empowerment of women in addition to men, till then the policy of local self-government will remain a pipe dream.

References:

1. Ahern et.al. (2000). *Equity in the Democratic Process: Women's Paths to Political Participation and Decision-making*. Washington, DC.
2. Arora Banarsi. (1999). *Women in Politics: Governance in Patriarchal and Non-Participatory Culture*. *Guru Nanak Journal of Sociology* Vol.20(1-2), pp.111-118
3. Banarjee Sikata. (2003). *Gender and Nationalism: The Masculinization of Hinduism and Female Political Participation in India*. *Women's Studies International Forum*. Vol.26(2). pp.167-179.
4. Borian M.P.(2008). *Empowerment of Rural Women, The Deterrents and Determinants*. Vikas Publishing. New Delhi.
5. Chattopadhyay, Raghendra, Duflo, Esther. (2004). *Impact of Reservation in Panchayati Raj: Evidence from a Nationwide Randomised Experiment*, *Economic and Political Weekly*.
6. Gleason, Suzanne (2001). *Female Political Participation and Health in India*. *Annals, AAPPS*, 573: Pp. 105-126.
7. Kanango, S.D. (1996). *Panchayati Raj and Emerging Women Leadership: An Overview*. *Social Action*. Vol.46(1). pp. 76-91
8. Locke, M. (1998). *Situatin Women in the Politics of Health*, In S.Sherwin (ed), *The Politics of Women's Health: Exploring Agency and Autonomy*. Philadelphia Temple University Press.

9. Report, Government of India 1978.
10. Report, Government of India -1993.
11. Syamala D and G. Lakshmi. (2005). Political Empowerment of Women in Indian Legislature- A study. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*. Vol.66(1), pp.75-92.
12. The Hindu- Women empowerment begins at home (February 12th, 2017).
13. Vyasulu, P and V. Vyasulu. (1999). *Women in Panchayat Raj: Grassroots Democracy in India, experience in Malgudi*. Background paper No,4 New Delhi. United Nations Development Programme.