

Gramapanchayati: Women's Representation & Women's Empowerment

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1. INTRODUCTION

India is the biggest Democratic state among the federal states in the world. The decentralization of power is the foundation for the success of Indian democracy. For the successes the democracy India adopted the decentralization and the representative process during post independent period. The basic tenet of the decentralization is to run the administration sharing the powers among Centre, State, Town and Village levels. Indian democracy has become stronger, because of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment which has given the due representation to women. Because of this reason Gramapanchayats is called gross root level democracy.

If women get representation at the Gramapanchayat level which is grass root level they will be able to get representation in social, economic, political, cultural and service sectors. It is believed that, this will bring about a positive change in the rural communities. Mahatma Gandhi's dream of the "Gram Swaraj" was aimed at this purpose. It is notable that, in Fourth Part constitution the provision for establishment Gramapanchayats was made to fulfill his dream. But Gandhi dream has not been realized. Women were not given opportunity in the Gramapanchayats administration due the male domination which for long nurtured by feudalism and orthodoxy. The living conditions of the dalit's, backwards and weaker sections and also of rural women who had been marginalized did not change. They could not get representation at the gross root levels. So it was felt that, for the representation and empowerment of rural women special opportunities and laws were required. Decentralization of the administration and reservation system was brought about with several other actions and laws with for the representation and empowerment of rural women.

Article 40th of the Indian constitution contains description of Panchayat raj institutions. Every village has been given opportunity to establish Gramapanchayat depending upon the population. But the State government is the empowered to decide the formation, duration, powers, representation and reservation of the panachayats. In 1957 "Central Council of Local Government" suggested to 'co-opt' two women has members of Panchayats who are interested in working for women and children. The Balavantha rai Mehatha Committee also recommended the same suggestion. In 1971 "Women Status Study Committee" informed that in Panchayat raj system women have improper representation. Moreover, it recommended that at Grampanchayat levels separate wards for women must be created and there must be women panchayats which have resources and power to utilize it. In 1978 Ashoka Mehatha Committee revised the Panchayat raj system. It recommended that if a woman fails to win in Zilla parishat elections with her own ability two women (among the defeated candidates) who secure highest votes must be co-opted as members of panchayats. In case no woman comes forward to contest (the election) two women shall be co-opted.¹

There was a debate at national level about the representation of women in Panchayat raj system because of the developments at national and the keen interest shown by Rajeeva Gandhi. It was finally concluded that women can participate (in panchayats) only by introducing reservation system. In 1988 "National Women perspective Plan" by recommending 30% reservation for women in membership and executive posts laid a good foundation. Earlier to this in 1983 Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act had given 25% reservation for women in Zilla parishad and Mandala panchayats. But elections were not held regularly and periodically. There was scarcity of financial resources. The representation of Schedule Casts, Schedule Tribes, weaker sections and women did not get proper representation. Because of this reason in 1992 73rd constitutional amendment came into force to give proper representation to women.²

The 73rd Constitutional amendment was brought into force all over India with the intention of removing the strong hold of Feudal lards, Upper class and Bearcats at gross root levels.³ The constitutional amendment was made with the intention of giving power to the people. It made it mandatory to establish elected institutions at Village, Taluk and Zilla levels, once in a every five year to conduct elections, appoints separate election commission, to allocate reservation to Schedule Casts, Schedule Tribes women's on the basis of the population in respective panchayats areas, 33% reservation for women, formation of Grama sabha, Standing committees, collection of resources, to constitute Finance Commission for financial management, Planning Committees in every districts and it was made obligatory to establish Panchayat raj system in accordance with this act in every States.⁴ Probably, this amendment has given scope for positive discrimination of women.⁵ In 1992 the 73rd amendment was made to give due representation and empowerment of women belonging to Schedule Casts, Schedule Tribes, weaker sections in Panchayat raj system. In addition to that, 108th constitutional amendment was made in 2010 to the Article 243(D) of Part IX of Indian Constitution to increase reservation for representation of women from 33% to 50% (The Cabinet has given approval to the proposal to increase the representation of women to 33% in Parliament and State Assemblies)⁶ Because of the 73rd amendment Panchayat raj institutions have gained the constitutional status. Today they have been formed uniformly all over the country. This amendment has given the guarantee of the representation to the rural women.⁷ In accordance with 73rd Amendment in 1993 the Karnataka Panchayat Act

came into force in Karnataka. At present the three tiers Panchayat raj system is in force in Karnataka. Since 2010, 50% reservation for membership and executive posts for Schedule Casts, Schedule Tribes, other backward castes and all other groups of women's in accordance with their population. Today thousands of women participate in decision making process in Grama panchayats as representatives of people. Today, women have got the statutory power equal to men in formation and implementation of economic developments policies and social justice. The reservation system seems to have a positive result in empowerment of women. But there is a general opinion that, the reservation system is restricted to their membership only and they are unable to exercise the true power.⁸

It is believed that the women are given due representation at grass root level administration to liberate them from socio, economic and political inequality and exploitation. The gender discrimination, inequality and exploitation can not be removed just by giving more women representation and more participation in Panchayats. In the opinion of experts and study reports there is difference between this two. In this respect we (Government and People) must give more attention to decision making process by women. If there is reciprocal relationship between women's representation and empowerment then there is a relationship between women's empowerment and gender equality. In this respect we should make conscious efforts. The role of panchayats must be decisive in strengthening the power of women in taking decisions independently. Greater participation in decision making process is expected from women in addition to equal representation. Women must not be treated with negligence in participation and decision-making process just because they are women. Totally women must get proper representation. Therefore, we must create an atmosphere in which representation and participation of women is as important as that of men.

Women's empowerment is not limited to their representation in Panchayats. But it decided and depends on their ability to their active participated in decision making. The empowerment of women is depending upon her participation in taking decision on her own and their implementation in her personal life and in important matters related to the community.⁹ One more important aspect of women's empowerment is that, in addition to decision making in social, economic and political matters and also proper utilization of resource they must be able to take decision independently without intervention of men. But the women's representation appears to be nominal in rural background / areas. The male members of the family indirectly exercise women's powers and take decisions on their behalf. Empowerment of women is possible only when they get representation on their own decision or when they get ability to become as a member. But even today rural women are facing many problems related to representation and empowerment. These problems are originating from two sources. One, Social problems likes, gender discrimination or gender intervention, the control of male members of family, authority of feudal lords and upper class, the intervention of caste, religious and political leaders. Secondly, the problems related to representation of women with respective electoral constituency, candidate revolving system of reservation polling system, counting of votes and declaration of results etc. The benefits of 73rd and 108th amendments were limited to only for the representation of women but they could not exercise their power related to their position. Proper solution there is not insight. But Gramapanchayats are sincerely trying to find effective solution to their social, economic and cultural problems. Gramapanchayats are functioning as modern instruments of social change and economic policy reforms. Totally, Gramapanchayats devices for women's Representation and women's Empowerment.

In elections taking place once in every five years to more than ten lakhs women are getting elected. Among them 1/3 of (later 50%) they become Chairman. The women belong to Schedule Casts, Schedule Tribes are getting their shares.¹⁰ Even after a decade women are not getting elected in general constituencies. This is not generally possible in a hierarchical and male dominated society. It is true, that the male members of family control the women it can be reformed. The greater awareness about their functions appears among the women because of changed women's representation and participation in panchayats. The importance of the contribution of women to social, economic and political developments is realized by the society. There is necessity to bring this awareness to women also.¹¹ Women are given due representation in local self-government only then they will realize the importance of their decision and ability. Only by this kind of awareness and consciousness among women we can remove the discrimination by change in the social, economic and political atmosphere.

The object of this study is to give a brief introduction to the 73rd amendment which was brought into force for democratic decentralization system in which the representation for women and empowerment of women and the challenges faced by women at various states in Gram panchayats.

2. PROBLEMATISATION OF THE STUDY

1. Women are given representation at the expected level in Gramapanchayats. But the benefits of representation have not resulted in the empowerment of women, why?
2. Women in panchayats appear to be instruments rather than the leaders of the people, why?
3. Is the political power which is gained through social and economic background affecting the empowerment of women?
4. At the grass root level politics women have got sufficient representation. But their empowerment is not taking at the expected speed is it because of the gender intervention?
5. The labour of women is not taken into consideration and their share in land and wealth has been denied. Therefore, is their role in representation and decision-making process neglected?
6. Are the age, caste, education and income of the rural women a hurdle to their independent decisions?
7. Rural women participate nominally in panchayats and community development activities. Are the family prestige and vested interest of male members of the family reason for this?
8. If the women's representation is aimed at the empowerment of women, why are its benefits not reaching the women?

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The Gramapanchayats which are established in accordance with 73rd amendment have to two important goals. One, giving due representation to Schedule castes, Schedule tribes, other backward castes and women. Secondly, the empowerment of these targeted groups. There is impression that if the first goal is fulfilled the second also will be fulfilled. Today rural women have not due representation. But there is a deficiency in independent decision and self-dependence. It is believed that, women gain self-dependence and power to take independent decision it will be helpful for their empowerment. In agreement with the above mentioned beliefs Gramapanchayats have fulfilled their basic responsibility of allocating the representation properly. The main object of this study is to analyse the proposition of the independent decision making in exercising the responsibility as members of panchayats. The representation and empowerment of rural women depend upon the proposition of their participation in community development activities. The women's empowerment is analysed by comparing the independent decisions taken by men and women. The objects of this study are presented as follows in the background of above said ideas.

1. It is examined whether the women cast their votes independently in general election.
2. To describe whether the women candidates have taken decision to contest in Gramapanchayats election.
3. To observe the competitive spirit of women and analyse the secured votes by them.
4. To know the knowledge of women representative about their development activities, participation and independent decision taking in panchayats external activities by the locals.
5. To discuss the relationship between women's representation and women's empowerment and suggest necessary steps for improvements.

4. METHODOLOGY

The proposed study is an experimental one. In order to examine the objectives primary and secondary statistical data are essential. For one, the matters relating to representation like formation of wards, reservation, candidature, voting etc, come within the legal purview. The laws of panchayat election are clear in this regard. Secondly, the responsibility also lies in the self decisions of the candidates, participating in administration. Thirdly, information regarding the social, economic and political environment of women members of panchayat and also the opinions of villagers regarding the participation of women in development related meetings, activities, their awareness and decision must be procured. Information in this connection is gathered from the following two sources.

One, primary sources like, records of Zillapanchayat and Gramapanchayat. One, the information regarding membership, tax collection annual budget, formation of general body meeting, gramasabha and standing committee, numbers of meeting, decision etc have been sourced from the departments concerned. Two, census and government records. Details of population, literacy and women workers have been taken from these records. Data regarding the required basic facilities and the actual facilities available are procured from various departments. There, the other sources are research articles, from which information about women's social, economic and political life has been taken. Various books have provided information about panchayat work and women empowerment in other parts of the country.

Two, secondary sources. Necessary information has been collected through elected representatives and selected villagers in the form of questionnaires. This information is collected as per the guidelines and filled in the questionnaire in front of the villagers. The focus of the questionnaire is on basic facilities, gramasabha, panchayat planning, annual budget and also awareness of elected representatives, villagers and their participation.

5. THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is a comparative study. It is limited to two gramapanchayats of the Hospet Taluk, namely Hosure and Nagenahalli and two of Siddapur Taluk, namely Bedkani and Kolasirsi. Having been irrigated and Hospet taluk is most progressive in the district of Bellary, the most fertile ones are Hosure and Nagenahalli. They are in touch with city life, modern health care, transportation etc. Hosur panchayat comprises four villages with ten elected members. People of Scheduled Tribe (Nayaka) are the majority here. Nagenahalli with six villages has fifteen elected members. The population here has almost equal representation. The Siddapur taluk is in the rainy malnad region. It is the most backward district of Uttara Kannada district. Agriculture in Bedkani and Kolasirsi is monsoon dependent. Both these panchayats have come into contact with modern life, education, health, transportation etc. Bedkani gramapanchayat comprises four villages with eleven elected members. Kolasirsi with nine villages has thirteen representatives. These two are dominated by Namadharis (II A category). All these four panchayats differ from each other in many ways. In this backdrop it becomes a fair and comparative study of women empowerment. All the elected members of two tenures have been interviewed. Among the villagers interviewed 50% are women and 50% men. In this their social, economic and political environments as well as caste factors have been taken into consideration. Ninety five elected members and one hundred villagers were quizzed.

The gathered data has been considered analytically. Women empowerment has been measured on the basis of participation of villagers in election and community activities voluntarily. Women empowerment is decided on their own decision as well education, caste, age and income. It is assumed on the basis of two factors. One basis is their voluntary participation in community development activities and panchayat meeting; votes secured and competition in candidature also play a role. The second basis is the rule regarding their representation, reservation, rotation policy, formation of wards etc, these two factors have been compared to find out the co-relation. In the absence of any link between the two it is studied whether there is too much of male dominance or intermediation.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There is a limited frame work for this study. The span of study is from the year Panchayat Raj Act promulgation in 1993 to the present day. The study has given importance empirical and scientific methods. The results will be arrived at through collection of information and statistical data. Only women representation and their empowerment have been relied upon. It is possible that there may be insufficient data in such a context. The information available in the panchayat shall be used. Since it is an in-depth micro study it is confined to only two grampanchayats of two taluks each. The result shall not be universalized as they are limited to villages. The scope of the study itself is its own limitation.

7. IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY

It is an experimental study. It is possible to improve women representation and empowerment though the results. The study includes the finding by the elected representation and the selected villagers at the gramapanchayat level regarding the percentage of women taking self-decisions about their participation in voting, candidature, management of collective resources, distribution and responsibilities of essential need. Social, economic and political hurdles to their voluntary participation will be identified. So this study makes it possible to find a solution to the problems in their own context, locally.

8. CHAPTERISATION

This thesis consists of six chapters. They are as follows introduction the problems, objectives, method, scope, limitation, importance, chapterisation and bibliography.

Chapter One: This chapter explains briefly the evolution of Gramapanchayats at National and Karnataka levels, women representation of women in Gramapanchayats and empowerment of women through them proper representation in Gramapanchayats.

Chapter Two: This chapter contains the demography of study. Introduction to the area of selected Districts, Taluks and Gramapanchayats study and information regarding the historical, geographical, social, economic and political factors and statistical analysis.

Chapter Three: This chapter explains the self-decision of women in participating and casting their votes during general elections. On this basis their empowerment has been recognized. The indicators used to measure the women representation and women empowerment are gender-based discrimination and age, caste, education and income.

Chapter Four: This chapter explain the background of women representation and women empowerment on the basis of the formation of election constituencies/wards, allocation of reservation, rotation of reservation, female candidature, voting method, designs of ballot papers and percentage of votes secured by women candidates in gramapanchayats.

Chapter Five: This chapter contains the self-decision and knowledge of women in the participation of general meeting, gramsabha, standing committees, selection of beneficiaries, developmental works and women representation in public programmes and functions.

Chapter Six: The concluding chapter deals with the summary and the results of the study. It also provides some suggestion on the women representation and women empowerment at the Gramapanchayat level.

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