

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN GRAMA PANCHAYATHS: A CASE STUDY FROM KARNATAKA

Dr. Ashok V*

ABSTRACT

Grama Panchayats are most powerful foundation of decentralized government at the village level and constitute the lowest tier of the reformed and re-institutionalized Panchayat Raj System. The important milestones in democratic decentralization process are the 73rd and 74th of the Indian constitution in 1992. As result of the 73rd amendment Panchayat Raj Institutions gained constitutional status and came to be regarded as the three tier of governance consisting of Zilla Panchayats [ZP] at the district level, Taluk Panchayats [TP] at the taluk level, and Gram Panchayats [GP] at village level. The 73rd constitution Amendment Act has made an effort to give some special powers to women in all the three tiers of Panchayat Raj it is argued that [women have acquired some improvement in their social and economic life.] social and economic status of women could improve with political power. The 73rd Amendment aims at provide the reservation of one-third of all seats for women as well as one-third the posts of president and vice president. Provisions were also made for the reservation of seats for women belonging to other disadvantaged sections of the population, such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward castes, is therefore, a bold step towards the empowerment of women. The New Panchayat Raj System is a part of the effort to empower the women at-least in their life.

The present paper considers the electoral process, socio-economic background of the women leaders, their performance and also highlights people's perception towards these women [The Study Conducted]. Based on empirical fieldwork the data is collected in the Grama Panchayats of Hosakote Taluk, Bangalore rural district, Karnataka.

* Assit. Profssor in sociology, S.A.C.College, Kuvempu University, Karnataka.

Introduction:

“My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic independent of its neighbor for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many other in which dependence is a necessity” - Mahathma Gandhi

Panchayath Raj means democratic decentralization. It is characterized as an important landmark in the history of rural administration. Panchayath Raj has led to a greater political articulation of the rural masses and the emergence of a new cadre of women leadership at the grassroots politics. The concept of Panchayati Raj is relatively a new earlier; it was termed as Grama Panchayath and used for rural self-government. Grama Panchayaths means rural administration and particularly administration in the fields of social service and rural reconstruction. The Grama Panchayath is a link between the people and the bureaucracy at the state level.

The Grama Panchayath System is very old in our country. There were village Panchayat is ancient and medieval periods. During the last phase of medieval India the Grama Panchayat became oblivious or ineffective. During the British Raj an effect was made to revive the Panchayati Raj. When popular ministries were formed under the Government India Act-1919, various provinces passed the Village Panchayat Acts in 1919. After independence some states enacted their Gram Panchayat Acts and constituted the Grama Panchayats at the village level. However, a formal three-tier system of Panchayati Raj was introduced in the country in 1959 on the recommendations of Balwanth Rai Mehtha Committee. The state governments were given option to follow the models as per the suitability of their needs and requirements.

Panchayath Raj Institutions in Karnataka:

The process of Panchayati Raj movement began long before in Karnataka. Under princely rule local bodies existed and operated at different levels. During the post independence period, several committees were constituted by the government to revitalize them despite some progressive recommendations by these committees that were far ahead of their times, such as reservation by election for SC's and women – the local boards enquiry committee – 1954. In 1982 the Janata Dal Government was the first to attempt devolution in explicit political terms. A major landmark achievement of this government was legislate the 1983 Karnataka Panchayath

Raj Act. This act provided 25 percent reservation for women in Zilla Parishad [ZP] and Mandal Panchayath [MP] even before this was mandated by the constitution.

This act was substituted by a new legislation in The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act – 1993. This was partly due to the need to accommodate the mandatory provisions brought in by the 73rd amendments Indian constitution. As a result of the 1993 K.P.R. Act provides for the following three-tier structure, Zilla Panchayath at district level, Taluk Panchayath at block level and Grama Panchayath at village level.

In Karnataka at present one-third or 33 percent reservations provided for women, SC's and ST's according to their population. Another one-third of reservation provided for the backward classes under the two categories 'A' and 'B'. A refer to backward communities which accounts for 26.6 percent of the Grama Panchayath seats, comprises 92 communities and includes Muslims, Buddhists and Dalit Christians, B refers other backward communities which accounts for just 6.4 percent of the seats, comprises nine communities and has an income qualification as well. A special reservation provided for the post of president and vice-president of women in all three tiers Panchayath Raj institution.

Grama Panchayaths:

Grama Panchayath is the most important tier of Panchayath Raj institutions. It is [proximity to the rural population] directly involves rural population in local government. Brief sketches of the features of Grama Panchayats in Karnataka are as follows.

- Democratically elected bodies
- Constitutional status through the 73rd amendment to the constitution.
- 33 percent seats reserved for women
- Reservation of seats for SC's and ST's in proportion to their population
- 33 percent seats reserved for other backward classes
- Reservation for the post of president and vice-president.

These provisions have changed the composition of local governments by explicitly including in them previously marginalized groups.

Methodology:

The major concern of the paper is to explore the nature of women's entry into rural politics, their political participation and empowerment in Grama Panchayat in Karnataka. Four Grama Panchayats are purposefully selected for the study. The selected Grama Panchayats are namely Kumbalahalli, Nandagudi, Sulibele and Ettasandra. Out of 26 Grama Panchayats only four Grama Panchayats were selected of Hoskote Taluk. 26 elected women representatives are my sample. Interview scheduled as structured and administered to the respondents.

Table-1: Grama Panchayats and Women elected members.

Name of the Grama Panchayats	Samples size	Total members
Kumbalahalli	06	20
Nandagudi	07	21
Sulibele	07	22
Ettasandra	05	19
Total	25	82

Socio –Economic Background of the Women Leaders.

While studying the Socio – Economic background of the respondents' age, education, occupation, marital status and residence before and after marriage are taken an important factor.

Age:

Age is a very important factor, which has greater influence on affecting political participation. There is a general view that young and middle aged participates actively in Grama Panchayaths. Young people are relatively dynamic, dashing and likely to respond to situations which confront them quick if not always quite responsibly.

Table-2: Age wise distribution of respondents

Age group	Number	Percentage
Young Age (21-35)	07	28%
Middle Age (35-50)	16	64%
Aged (50 above)	02	08%
Total	25	100%

It can be seen from above the table that middle age groups 35-50 years have years have a greater participation among women's in the Grama Panchayats. Women at this stage are free from household responsibilities. Old women (above 50) have very less representation in my samples. It proves that these aged women have less interest in this activity. Young age people can be drawn into electoral process and political awareness and aspiration are likely to increase. The presence of young women in considerable member points some indication of social change in rural society.

Education:

Education enables one to act rationally. Some previous study shows that higher education leads to greater commitment. In the opinion of Jorgen, education is not to be regarded as an important factor for political participation. For the purpose of my study, women leaders in the sample are divided into four categories, such as elementary, secondary, intermediate and higher education category and illiterate.

Table-3: Educational qualification of the respondents

Educational Qualification	Number	Percentage
Elementary (5 th class/below)	06	24%
Secondary	14	56%
Higher	00	00%
Illiterate	05	20%
Total	25	100%

From the above data it is clear that secondary educated background women have a greater representation. So according to this there should have greater role in developmental work. One in elementary education and an illiterate is still having a negative show in the samples as they may be in the trouble while doing their official business.

House condition:

Another question regarding their house condition which is social indicator is as follow: so most of the women leaders about 56 percentages live in tile/asbestos house which is a positive sign, five members live in pucca house. When a someone lives in a good house, it will definitely increase his/her potentiates in their respective fields. It is to be mentioned that some house of those women leaders are built with Indira Avas Yojana.

Table-4: House condition of respondents

House type	Number	Percentage
Thatched	04	24%
Tile/asbestos	14	56%
Pucca	05	20%
Total	25	100%

Occupation:

Occupation is an important ingredient in molding participation. I have been mentioned two things in the above table first for women leaders themselves occupation and other for their husband's occupation.

Table-5: Occupation pattern of women leader and their husband's

Women leader			Husband		
Occupation	No.	%	Occupation	No.	%
House wives	18	72%	Farming	16	64%
Daily labour	07	28%	Daily Labour	07	28%
Other	00	00%	Other	02	08%
Total	25	100%	Total	25	100%

Above the data show that most of the women leaders about 72 percentage of women are dependent on their husbands and 28 percentage of the women though they are member of Grama Panchayath have to go for daily wages. It states these leaders have to be influenced by their husband in every aspect. As the right hand side table shows that 64 percentage of their husbands depend upon farming. So it proves that women leaders are from among the farmers and the wage labourer.

Elected women political participation in Grama Panchayats

“Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affects their lives. Peoples may, in some case, have complete and direct control over these processes – in after cases the control may be partial or indirect. The important

thing is that people have constant access to division – making and power participation in this sense is an essential element of human development. According to Human development report.

Women’s political participation play a significant role in survival of an ongoing process to democratic decentralization. After 73rd constitutional Amendment of the Panchayat Raj institution has been provided to women have participation opportunities is dived politics. The political participate, participation and political empowerment of women in Grama Panchayat is crucial for the development and creative potation of women.

Concept of participate management has been immensely popular since the days of max and got extended to other spheres of life. This is surprised to usher in ‘Grama Swaraj’ the dream of Gandhiji, particular.

Caste & politics:

Caste & politics influence each other the electoral process. Administration and politics are greatly affected by caste. M.N.Srinivas introduced the concept of dominant caste to examine the political process. According to him, voting preference is made on caste live.

Table-6: Caste & politics caste wise distribution of the respondent.

Caste	Number	Percentage
General Categories	14	56%
Reservation Categories	11	44%
Total	25	100%

From the above data it is found that women form the reserved categories are participating in greater number which may change the equation in Panchayat electoral politics. Reservation of seats and parts for them has been the main reason for the prominence of SCs and STs, but how many of them have been elected from the unreserved seats can only establish the phenomenal presence of reserved women.

Political Experience:

The pre-existing political experience of women has a greater relevance with the role as representative in political institution. It provides a picture about women leaders of the Panchayat.

Table-7: political experience of the women respondents

Political Experience	Number	Percentage
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Exist	04	16%
Not Exist	21	84%
Total	25	100%

It is found from the above data that move the 84% of the women members had no pre-existing political experience before entering into the Panchayat office. Out of twenty five only four members had a previous political experience before becoming a member to Grama Panchayat.

Table –8: Attending meetings of Respondents

Attending meetings	Number	Percentage
Regular	10	40%
Irregular	07	28%
Not attend at all	02	08%
Whenever convenient	06	04%
Total	25	100%

It is found from the above table that the responses have been classified in to ‘regular’, ‘irregular’, ‘not attended at all’ and ‘whenever convenient’. It can be seen from the table that 40 percent of the women respondent of the sample reported to be ‘regularly’ attendant the Grama Panchayat meetings. Two percentages of women members not attended at all the in meetings. It is being a very negligible in women members. Seven and six present of women members are irregular and whenever convenient they may be attending the Grama Panchayat meeting. The analysis of the responses, though only in terms of frequently only seem to suggest many implications.

Table–9: Reasons for not being able to participation in meeting of respondents.

Reasons	Number	Percentage
Lack of knowledge	10	40%
Caste discrimination	11	44%
Not holding key position	04	16%

Total	25	100%
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Most of the members being elected for the first time encounter a number of difficulties in participation effectively an attempt is made to see how exactly the elected members perceive themselves vis-à-vis participation in the process. It is found from the above table that self – assessment of their participation is another thing that the present study seeks to highlight. Lack of knowledge of the rules and underlying procedure was mentioned 40 percent of the sample. Caste discrimination was mentioned most all reserved elected member in the sample. Not holding key position was mentioned only 16 percent of elected members of the sample.

What is needed is awareness of the local context and thus the informal power structures preventing people from active participation. There is still a wide gap between the democratic rhetoric of the policies and practice. As has been illustrated it is not sufficient to invoke formal positive discriminatory steps such as reservation, when the elected are not otherwise empowered to participate in their own self-governance. If genuine participation for all is truly the objective of the decentralization process, then the local context must be addressed first.

The new status supposedly afforded participants of the decentralization process, as a new face of development, is not supported by this research in Karnataka. The potential has been noted, but a neglect of context has left the weak without genuine influence. Developing country governments and development practitioners have to move beyond the generalized delegation schemes which originate from political slogans of democracy. Women will have to play a more proactive role, through increased awareness of the social context. There is an unstable balance between empowerment and disempowerment of the women of society. That balance could tip towards disempowerment if context is not incorporated more into the arrangements devised for decentralization, which must promote participation by all society's actors if the weak are not to be excluded from development.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it can be stated that the quota for women is indeed an important impetus to women's empowerment in rural India. On the other hand it became obvious that the process will take a long time and that the goal of women's empowerment will not be secured by the quota

alone. In order to support and accelerate the process one has to employ additional strategies which promote the self-reliance of women economically as well as socially, build women's capacities, and remove structural obstacles. Furthermore, it seems not very realistic to expect that women will necessarily represent women's interests. That holds especially if there are no strong women's movements that could pressurise the representatives as well as support them in their undertakings.

I referred to the fact that so far the decision-making on who gets elected is mainly taken by the male elite. Only when women will become independent voters or manage to pressurise the male elite can we hope for enhanced women-friendly politics at a larger scale. Furthermore, female representatives also need the support of men, especially at the initial stages of their political careers. As we have seen, social practices still prevent most rural women to take over responsibilities outside the confines of the panchayat offices. Thus, men need to be co-opted for the cause of women's empowerment as well. In cases where the support by men is not sheer dominance one should rather see this as positive than as negative. Above all, considering the fact that change has been taking place already in a very short time span one can propose that these trends will lead to greater transformations in the long run.

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