



Women Representatives and Political Empowerment: Study of women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions

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Abstract

Women constituting around a half of population in a country like India. Development of any country is not possible without contribution of whole population. In India still half of our population is engaged in household activities. For overall growth of the nation it is expected that women should contribute in social, economic, cultural and political wings. To improve their political participation 73rd amendment in constitution has given reservation of one third of total seats in local self-governance. Now day's women are having a 50% reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (Local Self Governance). The reason behind giving this constitutional right to women is to increase their political participation in local government especially in decision making. Though constitution provided the rights to them rights are seen on paper only. It is again the question that is they enjoying these constitutional rights or somebody else using the same rights. So the present study has made to know the influence of relatives in political career of women representatives and to assess the performance of women representatives in Panchayat Raj System. Present study has conducted in Palus Taluka of Sangli district in Maharashtra. Primary data which was the base of study which has been collected by using interview schedule as a tool for data collection. Present study conducted on 30 samples from three tiers of Panchayati Raj i.e. Grampanchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad. Stratified sampling technique was adopted to select samples from all the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj. Present paper argues that still the women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions are influenced by the family member. The political decisions have been taken by the other family members. It is important to know the problem regarding to their performance then only we can find the remedy for the same.

Keywords: Women representatives, Panchayati Raj, Decentralization of Power..

Introduction

Women constitute around half of the population of any country. However their involvement in politics is insignificant compared to men. A democratic country like India cannot progress if half of population is engaged in kitchen only. The concept of empowerment of women is of recent origin. The word "empowerment" has been given currency by UN agencies during recent years. Empowerment is a imparting the power to powerless part of the society. Women contribute half of the population of the nation. As half of population is away from the main stream of the development. We kept women limited to the house and children that resulted into half of our population not contributing in nation building. Political status of women indicates amount of freedom and equality adored by women in sharing power in politics. It also indicates the importance given by the society to the role of women in political system¹.

Active political participation and equality cannot be separated. Active political participation is necessary for the advancement of the women. Their Political participation does not only means to right to vote but also participation in decision making, sharing power, and participation at policy making

level. Women's equal status in every sphere is inextricably linked to country's progress and development.²

Constitutional Privileges: The constitution of India not only offers equality to women but also direct the state to take the measures of positive discrimination in favour of women to minimize the socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. i. Equality before law for women (Article 14)³, ii. There should not be the discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i))³, iii. One third of the total numbers of seats are reserved for women out of total number of seats to be filled by direct election in three tiers of Panchayati Raj system.(Article 243 D(3))³, iv. One third of the total numbers of offices of Chairperson are reserved for women at each level of Panchayat. (Article 243 D (4))³.

Review of Literature: Singh (2004) found that in Haryana relatively younger women are replacing older women. Formal empowerment and women leadership in Panchayati raj is a result of reservation of women in local self-government. These women now enable to participate and decide in day by day's activities⁴.

Sharma (2000) also observed in Himachal Pradesh, that participation of women in Panchayat election has been increased in grass roots governance after the year 2000. The state government is also committed towards promoting leadership of women to share the power what they deserve and exercise authority in the decision making process⁵.

Mandal (2003) Assesses Social and Political Background of Women Members in One District of West Bangal, evaluates various facets of their participation and role performance in PRIs, ascertains the nature, their social acceptability and informs both the positive and negative aspects of reservation policy for women. The study brought forth few exclusive and absorbing features: women members are not dummy or docile; their participation both at formal Panchayat process and informal levels is no less exalting⁶.

Anupama Singh (2008), in a study conducted on *Rural Women in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh*, reveals that full development may not be achieved unless women and the resources they represent are fully integrated into the development and women empowerment as a tool to sustain the development as an ongoing process. Dr. Singh also highlights the problems of the concept of *PatiPanchayats* or proxy rules by husbands⁷.

Objectives: Present paper aims to study following aspects of SHG: i. To study general background of women representative in Panchayati Raj. ii. To know the influence of relatives in political career of women representatives. iii. To assess the performance of women representatives in Panchayat Raj System

Methodology

Present paper is based on the empirical data. The data has been collected from the Palustaluka of the Sangli district, Maharashtra, India. Present study has been conducted by using the primary and secondary source of data. Primary data is a base of this study and has been collected by using the interview schedule. Present study conducted on 30 samples from three tiers of Panchayati Raj i.e. Grampanchayat, Panchayat Samiti and ZillaParishad. Stratified sampling technique was adopted to select samples from all the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj.

Sample Size: The Researcher has selected 30 Respondents as a sample size. 02 Zilla Parishad Members, 02 Panchayat Samiti Members, 26 Grampanchayat Members.

Table-1
General Background of Women Representative in Panchayati Raj

Variable	Major Findings
Age	40% Women representatives from age group of 40-50 years.
Education	46.7% Women representatives completed their secondary education.
Caste	56.6% Women representatives are from the general category.
Occupation	86.9% Women representatives engaged in agriculture along with housework.
No. of Family Members	46.7% Respondents are having 6-9 members in family.
Annual Family income	Majority of the respondent i.e. 43.3% having more than two lac annual incomes.

Table-2
Influence of Relatives in Political Career of Women Representatives

Variable	Major Findings
Decision of contest Election	Majority of respondent (50%) reported that decision of contesting decision was taken by relatives, after that 33.3% reported that decision has been taken by their husbands.
Interference of Family Member in their work	53.3% Women representatives told that there is interference of family member in their work
Help of Family Member	96.7 % Respondents said that they get the help from the family member in their work.
Feeling of political Pressure	83.3% Women representatives reported that they never felt political pressure while working.
Co-operation from oppositions	Majority (70%) of the respondents reported that they get the co-operation from the opposite political party.

Results and Discussion

Table-1 speaks about general background of women representative in Panchayati Raj. Majority of the women representatives are belongs to the age group of 40-50 year. It clears that woman representatives in Panchayati Raj are at mature level of the age. When we see the education of them, around half of them are completed their secondary education. It shows that Education level is very low in this area. Education is essential to bring awareness in among respondents in context to PRI's. It also becomes a need for better performance as a member of Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad.

Most of the women representatives are from the general category and remaining from the reserved category. Most of the women from general category are from the Maratha caste which is dominant caste in this area. Majority of the women representatives are engaged in the agriculture work along with house work. It simply means that they are not full time engaged politics though they are representing rural community in the Panchayati Raj. Majority of the respondent's annual income is above two lac. It seems that economic condition of them is good enough. It also clears that majority of the political parties having one of the criteria of good economic condition while giving tickets for the election.

Table-2 depicts about the influence of relatives in political career of women representatives. It also talks about the political empowerment of the women representatives from the rural area. Decision of contesting election of Panchayati Raj has not been taken by the women representatives. The decision has been taken by their relatives and their husband. It seems that though we have 50% reservation for the women in the local self-government, decision of contesting election has taken by the relatives and in some cases by the husbands of women representatives. More than half of the women representatives reported that there is an interference of family member in their work. It seems that women don't have freedom to work in Panchayati Raj. Almost all the women representatives reported that other family members helping them in their work. It is confusing that, is that help of the family member or the interference of the family member in their work? It simply seems that there is absence of freedom in taking decisions and overall working of women representatives. When we asked women about the political pressure majority of them told that they never feel political pressure while working in Panchayati Raj. It is also interesting to know that majority i.e. 70% representatives told that they are getting the co-operation from the opposition political party.

It is clear from above analysis that it is very impatient to say that women are politically empowered by using the tool of representativeness in Panchayati raj. Though we have constitutional provisions for political empowerment of the

women, still we have the situation that women are influenced by the other family member.

Table-3
Performance of Women Representatives

Variable	Major Findings
Awareness about The 73 rd Amendment Act	80% of the women representatives reported that they are not aware about The 73 rd Amendment Act.
Attendance of regular Meetings	86.7% respondent attended meeting regularly.
Need of Training to improve the performance	86.7% women representatives felt that there should be special trainings to improve their performance.
Willingness to contest next election	66.7% respondents are willing to contest next election.

Table-3 describes performance of women representatives in Panchayati raj. 80% of the women representatives reported that they are not aware about The 73rd Amendment Act. It is very essential that all the representatives of local self-government should aware about the 73rd amendment for their better performance in three tiers of Panchayati raj. Majority of the respondents attending regular meetings held in respective tier of panchayati raj. Majority of the women representatives reported that there is a need of special training for newly elected women representatives to improve the level of performance in panchayati raj. It will help them to know the powers and function of the representatives in the local self-government. Training to the representatives help them to improve their performance. When we tried to check the willingness of the women representatives to contest the next election of panchayati raj, majority of the respondents shown their willingness to contest the election and continue in the Panchayati Raj.

Suggestions: Providing constitutional rights is not enough for the political empowerment of the women in rural self-governance. Along with the reservation, it's a duty of government and society to create such environment where women can enjoy their political rights and participate in the decision making without pressure and hesitation. i. Organizational induction to newly elected women representatives to understand the Panchayati Raj Institutions. ii. Role induction to women representatives to prepare them to understand their role and play their role in three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. iii. As said earlier, providing reservation is not everything for the political empowerment of women we need to work with men to keep them away from the interference. iv. Government should take the help of NGOs and Trained Social worker to strengthen women representatives.

Conclusion

Women are contributing half of population of country and though we have given 50 per cent reservation in Panchayati Raj

Institution to them for their political empowerment. It seems like that political empowerment is on paper. Still they are unable to enjoy their rights because of certain reasons. Duty of the government and society is not over at providing reservation to them but also to ensure their participation in every decision in local self-government. We cannot blame to women that they are not playing their role. Even we can't say that they are unable to play their role effectively so men's are interfering to their work. Providing above suggested training to them and creating favourable environment to participate will definitely improve their performance as well. It will empower them politically as well as our half of population will start to contribute in nation building.

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