



## A STUDY ON THE GRAMA PANCHAYAT WOMEN MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENTAL INITIATIVES: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SHIVAMOGGA DISTRICT

Dr. Chandrashekhar\*

Dr. Ravindranath N. Kadam\*\*

---

**Abstract:** *India is perhaps the first country to recognize this social fact underlined by Lenin on the International Working Women's Day in 1921, and to have taken concrete measures to draw women into leadership positions and thereby into politics by giving them one-third reservation in what may now be called the third tier of governance-the panchayati raj. The Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, Article 243D (3) reads: Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. (Anveshi, Hyderabad, 1993).*

### **METHODOLOGY:**

#### **Need and Importance of the Study**

*Women are expected like their counterparts in developed countries, to play significant role in the development and progress of the national economy. Unfortunately very little attention has been paid on women studies. As a social group the women who are representing in the Panchayat Raj System are needed very good training and kind support from the local bodies Panchayat officials to take developmental initiatives in their constituencies and to perform their role in a good manner.*

#### **Aim of the Study:**

*The study aims at understanding the women representatives' status to discharge their duties and responsibilities in developmental initiatives in Gram Panchayat institutions in Shivamogga district.*

*The paper contains Objectives, Hypotheses, Motivation for the Study, Findings: Sampling, Universe of the Study, etc.*

**Keywords:** *Recognize, leadership, politics, constitution, election, representation.*

---

*\*Associate Professor, Department of P.G. Studies and Research in Sociology, Jnana Sahyadri, Kuvempu University, Shankarghatta-577451, Shimoga, Karnataka, India.*

*\*\*Associate Professor, Dept. of Studies and Research in Economics, Jnana Sahyadri, Kuvempu University, Shankarghatta, Shimoga, Karnataka.*



## **INTRODUCTION:**

India is perhaps the first country to recognize this social fact underlined by Lenin on the International Working Women's Day in 1921, and to have taken concrete measures to draw women into leadership positions and thereby into politics by giving them one-third reservation in what may now be called the third tier of governance-the panchayati raj. The Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, Article 243D (3) reads: Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. (Anveshi, Hyderabad, 1993).

The constitutional amendment providing one-third representation to women in elected bodies as well as reserving one-third of the offices of chairpersons for them will have far-reaching consequences in Indian political and social life. This is indeed a welcome, though delayed, gesture for we cannot make democracy meaningful in a traditional society like ours without the full involvement of women. But a constitutional provision is only a necessary step which should be followed by effective measures for women's uplift in the country. To make women's participation in society and politics a reality, enormities work remains to be done, given their present socio-economic condition. (Ebert, Fredrich, .1993).

As is well known, if we take the age-specific death rate for children between 0 to 4 years, the male infant mortality rate is 33.6 percent, while the female infant mortality rate touches 36.8 percent, as per the 1987 data. The sex ratio (1991) is one of the lowest with 929 females for every one thousand males. The female literacy rate (1991) is only 39.42 percent when compared to 63.86 percent for males. The work-force participation rate (1991) for males is 51.56 percent and for females, less than half, that is, 22.73 percent. Although all the above mentioned indicators bear a certain degree of relationship, two key socio-economic indicators in particular the literacy rate and the work-force participation rate amply testify to the male bias in our society. (Ebert, Fredrich, .1993)

The question to be tackled is: Is the removal of these hurdles a must for women's participation in society and the polity? Or will their participation in societal affairs through the panchayati raj institutions remove those handicaps which exist at present? There is no clear-cut answer except to say that we must begin somewhere. And now the seventy-third



constitutional amendment gives us a wonderful opportunity to make that beginning. They would argue that sooner than later 50 percent of elected positions in the panchayati raj institutions must be reserved for women, for conducting developmental initiatives.

### **THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN IN KARNATAKA**

Before the historic Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act, 1983 (with 25 percent reservation for women) were implemented in 1987, women's entry into panchayats was only possible through the nomination of one or two women to these bodies. For instance, in Maharashtra, out of the 320 women representatives of panchayat samitis and zilla parishads in 1978, 314 were nominated! And Maharashtra is considered one of the few states which has satisfactorily implemented the panchayati raj system in the wake of the Balwantrai Mehta committee report of 1957. (Jain, L. C., 1994).

A study of the women elected representatives to Karnataka panchayati raj institutions between 1987 and 1990, conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences, gives an insight into women's present position in the panchayats as elected members and the possibilities this holds for the future. The study also gives an insight into the nature of their participation, their present sociological and cultural compulsions and their leadership role in society. Since it has an all-India bearing, it is important to go into these findings in some detail. (Jain, L. C., 1994).

The study revealed that women from the dominant castes the Lingayats and Vokkaligas formed 60 percent of the elected women members in the zilla parishads in Karnataka. It may be mentioned here that these two castes constituted 50.61 percent of all the members in the zilla parishads. In Karnataka, women had contested only for the seats reserved for them and not for the general ones. The 1983 act provided for at least one Scheduled Caste woman to be represented in each Zilla Parishad. (Jain, L. C., 1994).

There was a predominance of younger members among the women compared to that among men. More than three-fourths of the women Zilla Parishad members were below forty-five years and more than half the members were in the age group of twenty-five to thirty-five. Incidentally, Karnataka was the first state to lower the voting age to eighteen. It is said that political parties had considerable difficulty in finding women candidates but found it easier to persuade younger women to enter public life than the older generation



because of the latter's conservative and traditional outlook. This also means that the candidates were relatively inexperienced in politics and public life. Almost 80 percent of the women members in the Zilla Parishad had no experience of active politics, except for exercising their franchise in a few elections. The remaining 20 percent had served either in the erstwhile panchayats or in taluk development Boards. And this 20 percent included two former M.L.As also. (Jhamtani, A. 1995).

The women, who contested the 1987 elections, were very often the relatives of political leaders. Usually a male member of the family had been instrumental in persuading' the women to contest. During the election campaign, these women were always projected as someone's wife, mother, sister or widow, as the case may be. They attributed their victory in the elections to the political party or its leader or the status of the male member of the family. None mentioned their own potential or promises. By and large, these women candidates were unknown in their constituencies. The women Zilla Parishad members were not sensitive to party identities and loyalties, unlike their male counterparts. "We are not interested in party politics!" they would insist.

The participation of women in the Zilla Parishad meetings was also an eye-opener. If any woman wished to raise any issue, she chose to speak about it to the adhyaksha or the upadhyaksha, after the meeting when the male members would be leaving the hall. Quite often a male member would also be there to support her. Women members from the southern and coastal districts of Karnataka were more vocal than those from the northern districts because of the farmer's exposure to the urban situation and also due to cultural factors. The social distance in the presence of men, and the relative inexperience and uncertainty as to what they say would be acceptable or not, often came in the way of the women's participation in the meetings. Most women members did not visit the Zilla Parishad offices except when attending meetings. Occasionally the men escorted the women members and also accompanied them to the meeting hall, prompting them to speak. A case, oft cited, is that of the husband of an elected woman wanting to speak on behalf of his wife in the Zilla Parishad meetings.

In education, women elected members lagged behind men. While 20 percent of the men in the zilla parishads had professional and post graduate education, women with comparable qualifications totaled only 5 percent. A majority of women members gave their occupation



as agriculture, housework and social work. Most women preferred to indicate their profession as housewives. With their entry in panchayats, women had acquired the additional responsibility, of public life along with household work. Some women pointed the conflicting roles a strain on their time and resources. This caused a feeling of guilt that they had not been able to fulfill their obligations to their families. In many cases women continued to have all their time for household chores as usual, because the men in their families were involved in discharging the political responsibilities on their behalf. It has been observed that after they get elected, women are no longer considered in terms of caste. The fact that they are women takes precedence over all other aspects of social identity. These findings were based on the field studies done at a time when the zilla parishads had just come into being. (Kanango, Sukla Deb., 1996)

After about two years, when the same zilla parishads were studied, changes were evident. More women were expressing themselves; they had an opinion on various matters that came up for discussion, a qualitatively improved participation in terms of the contents of their comments was also evident. Many women members were taking interest in acquiring a better knowledge of the working of zilla parishads. It was also noticed that the women representatives and office bearers were not corrupt and they had a no-nonsense approach in dealing with education, health, hygiene and such matters which come under the purview of panchayats. (Kanango, Sukla Deb., 1996)

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

There is a plethora of studies on the different aspects of Panchayat Raj institutions, structures and functioning. This chapter reviews the available literature relating to the present study. The main purpose of this chapter is to give a proper orientation and perspective to the present work. The literatures available on the women in rural local self-government taken both from primary as well as secondary sources are reviewed here.

Anne Philip in her work 'The Politics of Presence' (1995) speaks to a large ambition i.e., to make our decision-making assemblies more genuinely deliberative. Representation has to include both accountability and relative autonomy, otherwise we are reduced to mere aggregation of initial preferences and interests. She says that, the argument for a more equitable representation of two sexes and different ethnic groups does move in close parallel with argument for a more participatory democracy.



In 'The Concept of Representation' (1967) Hanna Fenichel Pitkin views that, a representative is both an agent of his locality as well as a governor of a nation. She/he must pursue his constituent's interests, in a manner at least potentially responsive to their wishes."

Manin Bernard in her masterpiece, 'The Principles of Representative Government' (1997) argues that, representation is a technique that permitted the establishment of a government emanating from the people in large, diverse nation. She believes that consent constitutes the sole source of legitimate authority and forms the basis of political obligation. 'Representation and Community in Western Democracies' (2000) edited by Nirmala Rao contains several articles on representation and popular participation in democratic institutions. Representation has been seen as a means to a more or less sophisticated translation of the will of the people.

Iris Young in her own exposition of 'Justice and Politics of Difference' has put the issue of group representation more firmly on the political agenda. She argues that guaranteed representation for previously marginalized group is necessary part because it produce a legitimate communicative democratic forum otherwise they might be excluded from the whole process.

In 'When Are Interest Interesting' Virginia Sapiro makes a stimulating and important arguments on the issues like group interest and representation. The author discussed the questions like, a) what is political representation of women? b) To what degree and under what circumstances are political institutions and decision makers responsive to female citizens? Subha K. and B.S. Bhargava in an article entitled 'Feminism and Political Empowerment of Women at the Grass-root: The Karnataka Experience' (2000) widely discussed the aspects like feminism and its three main traditions, recommendations of the committees and commissions constituted to investigate the status of women in India, the need for empowering women in political, economic and social sphere and reservation as a major step and an instrument of political empowerment.

Manu Bhaskar in an article entitled 'Women and Grass-root Politics' (2000) views that gender equality is a prerequisite for effective participation of women. Domesticity of women, masculine nature of political activity, backward consciousness, existing political culture, lack of economic security are the major obstacles and deterrents for women's fuller participation in politics



Vijayalakshmi V. and B.K. Chandrashekar in 'Gender Inequality, Differences and Identities: Women and Local Government in Karnataka' (2000) states that, gender inequality and differences among women are important for our understanding of their participation process in local governance. They argue that the involvement of women in the public and private spheres give them 'dual identity' often giving priority to the latter. Caste and class identity, low education levels was perceived as other two important factors in women representatives' marginal participation or nonparticipation.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

### **Need and Importance of the Study**

Women are expected like their counter parts in developed countries, to play significant role in the development and progress of the national economy. Unfortunately very little attention has been paid on women studies. As a social group the women who are representing in the Panchayat Raj System are needed very good training and kind support from the local bodies Panchayat officials to take developmental initiatives in their constituencies and to perform their role in a good manner.

### **Aim of the Study:**

The study aims at understanding the women representatives' status to discharge their duties and responsibilities in developmental initiatives in Gram Panchayat institutions in Shivamogga district.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To study the socio-economic and political background of Grama Panchayat Women Representatives.
2. To know how for the principles of local self government have been implemented through Grama Panchayat Women Representatives.
3. To explore the extent of participation and empowerment of weaker section and women in Panchayat Raj.
4. To know the pattern of initiation and implementation of development schemes, extent of involvement of family members and general public in program implementations.



5. To understand the participation of women members in the activities and meeting of gram panchayat specially focused to decision making process, for developmental initiatives.
6. To know the perception of women representatives about the changes experienced in their social economic and political status and in receiving respect and honor among different segment of people.
7. To find out the extent of women contribution to better governance.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

In the present research design the following hypotheses were formulated.

1. Women Representatives are represent their constituency, carried out some work without interference of male members.
2. Providing reservation to women in Panchayat Raj Institutions has effectively curbed the tendency of male domination in politics.
3. Grama Sabha is a place where selecting the beneficiaries. Women members are actively participating in selecting beneficiaries.

### **Motivation for the Study**

Representation is indication of the quality of leadership. Through this anyone can get whatever he wants. In the Panchayat Raj System representation is placing a very important role in rural upgradation. Especially women representatives are taking the developmental initiatives in the rural side as a member of local governance. The researcher wanted to know the level of participation of women members, factor contributing their working environment and also know the who is the real worker, whether male or female.

### **Universe of the Study**

In order to make an assessment of women empowerment through their representation in Grama panchayat. Shivamogga district, one among the 27 districts of Karnataka state, has been selected for research purpose. The researcher has selected four i.e., bhadravathi, sagar, Shikaripura, and Shivamogga taluks for field survey. Since the study is a comprehensive one, the researcher has considered different variables before making selection of seven taluks and Eight Grama Panchayat from each taluk according to the number of Grama Panchayats. The primary indicators considered while selecting seven taluks are population, agriculture and industrial output, irrigation, transport and





communication, financial infrastructure, medical and health facilities, literacy percentage, power supply, SC and ST population to name a very few. While selecting the Grama Panchayats, the lot method was employed to overcome the difficulties.

**Sampling:**

The researcher has selected Four taluks in the district namely; Bhadravathi, Sagar, Shikaripura, Shimoga. The researcher intends to analyse the nature of functioning of Panchayat Raj institutions and women participation in developmental initiatives in the district.

**Sampling:**

For the purpose of drawing sample the researcher choose simple random sampling technique. Out of 260 Grama Panchayats the researcher has selected 25 Grama Panchayats and 84 women, 97 men, 25 panchayat official and 97 local people respondents from different sectors.

**Findings:**

Women suffered as much, in fact more by virtue of their belonging to the community. It is therefore, now a time to involve women equally in the process of development and governance in the Scheduled Areas where Constitutional powers have been given to the s for self-governance. The following points emerged from the above analysis:

The study reveals that panchayat raj institutions in areas of Shivamogga comprised of young and educated women, as against the prevalent view. 51.18 percent of them are 31 to 40 years of age and 66.66 percent are educated Agriculture is the main occupation of the people and though some of them are from economically influential families, a large number are from middle and lower class households.

Women are dependent to a large extent on the support of their husbands and other family members. They mainly took the decision to contest, campaign and other decisions. Of those who said they said about 59.52% of the women members are discussing with family members while attending meeting, about 53.57% of the women members are opined that their husbands always attending any meeting as representatives, about 44.04% of the women members are opined that they are discussing meeting activities and other issues with their husbands/ in-laws and other family members sometimes,.



Reservation of seats for women in panchayats or even in other political bodies is the most viable and appropriate method in the given circumstances, to ensure women's representation. Not only women's entry into panchayats could have been made possible without reservation, nor could it be sustained without it, at least for the time being. Many people proposed reservation initially on different grounds like it will help the family life, Nearly 86 percent stated they would never come to occupy positions in panchayats, if there was no reservation of seats for women. Though majority of them (60.71percent) were willing to contest again, a large number (86 percent) said they would do so only if the seat is reserved for them. Even then, most of them had some idea as to why seats are reserved for women, and were also aware of the provision of the Constitutional 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, especially that of reservation for women..

It is not surprising that though most of the women respondent want to stand again for elections, majority of them (60.71percent) said they would do so only if the seat is reserved for them. In a few cases, some respondents said that they would re- contest only if their political party wants them to do so. Thus, there are many factors which influence women's choice to re-contest which range from general, like party's decision to the personal ones, like if the seat is unreserved.

### **WOMEN MEMBER PARTICIPATATION IN DEVELOPMENTAL INITIATIVES**

The meaning of the representation is involved in the ability of communication through this the members get leadership qualities and convey their aspirations and their constituency's problems there is a need to involve effectively to implement any programmes. Women members were asked about their awareness regarding standing committees and how effectively they participate in the meetings of these committees. It is essential to know that there are 5 standing committees in Zilla Panchayat and 3 each in Taluk Panchayats and Gram Panchayats.

It gives a clear impression about performance level of women presidents and vice presidents. The majority of male members strongly gave their view that men do better than women as heads of PRIs. About 90.47% of male members affirm that men alone are efficient as presidents and vice presidents. This view gains strength as 82.47% of local people and 72% of officials endorse the views expressed by male members.

The researchers with a view to finding out of women members participate in the meetings



of Grama Sabhas. 89.28 % of the women members, 92.78% male members, 92% of the officials and 84.53% of the local people have opined that women members are attending the meetings regularly. It shows that women members are very interested in taking decisions and initiating developmental activities through attending the Grama Sabhas.

The developmental initiatives indicate the programmes of rural development technique used to implement this programme with qualitative manner. To know the active participation in developmental initiatives of the women member the researcher interviewed the respondents according 86.90% of the women respondents have opined that women members are participating in the deliberation of development programme meetings, whereas 74.22% of men members, 84% of the Panchayat officials and 61.85% of the local people have also opined positively about women members' participation in the deliberation of developmental programme meetings.

The researcher wanted to know the quality of women members' participation in Panchayat activities. In the light of this desires, the researcher found 71.42% of the women respondents have opined that they have support from other members at the time of meeting. 67.85% of the women members opined that they have organized the people in general and women in particular of your constituency to solve their basic problems.

Leadership qualities making to everyone lead their life without any problems. In view of the above knowledge, the researcher wants to know the voice of women representatives during the time of proposing the names of beneficiaries in the Grama Sabha. 80.95% women respondents, 71.13% male respondents, 76% Panchayat official respondents and 58.76% local people respondents have opined that women are taking the initiatives at Grama Sabha for proposing the beneficiaries name without any interference of others.

### **WOMEN MEMBER EMPOWERMENT IN DEVELOPMENTAL INITIATIVES**

Through the effective participation in Panchayat activities, the women representatives have the potentiality in challenging the members politically that indicates their empowerment. Majority i.e-70.23% women respondents, and 59.79% men respondents, whereas, 64% Panchayat officials have opined that the status of women members is going towards the empowerment and their responses to ability in challenging the members politically.

Women members also have a good experience in understanding local problems. While taking the decision about the upliftment of people, it is necessary to consider Women



members opinion. In the light of the above knowledge the researcher interviewed 84 Women members as respondents, Women members have been taken developmental initiatives in their constituency. This supervising includes good communication with subordinate as well as beneficiaries. It indicates their empowerment.

According to the 91.66% women respondents, 63.91% men respondents, whereas, 60% Panchayat officials, 59.79% local people have opined that the women members are as capable as men members an function independently without interference by men. Majority i.e., 83.33% women respondents, 64.94% men respondents, whereas, 68% Panchayat officials, 67.01% local people have opined that women are performed better than men members. It indicates that women have also the capacity of doing public service in equal to men members.

The researcher wants to know the ability of women representatives in discharging their duties and responsibilities towards empowerment of women. According to 88.09% women respondents, 70.10% men respondents, 64% Panchayat officials and 81.44% of local people have opined that women members have improving in their social and family status. And also it shows that majority i.e., 83.33% women respondents, 69.07% men respondents, 64% Panchayat officials and 84.53% of local people have opined that women members are need to have more education and training. According to 90.47% women respondents, 93.81% men respondents, 68% Panchayat officials and 83.50% of local people have positively opined that there is a need for reservation to help members to develop leadership quality.

## **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion it may be remarked that women must get greater social and political exposure so that they can be dynamic in active politics. If they take active participation they can contribute a lot to the all-round development of their regions. They must be provided with better education facilities and offered necessary training at all levels. Efforts must be made to bring about a thorough transformation in their attitude and mindset. Only then the process of women empowerment through political representation becomes meaningful and realistic. This is not impossible but requires committed and dedicated efforts. All these observations should not lead us to a negative conclusion about the very policy of reservation to women. It has opened many opportunities to them in terms of participation



and to fight against negative impact of patriarchy. The article has shown that the process needs to be carried forward and not halted.

## REFERENCES:

1. Anne Phillip (1995). *The Politics of Presence*, London, Oxford University Press, p. 164,168.
2. Anveshi, Hyderabad, (1993) *Reworking Gender relations, redefining Politics, Nalore village women against arrack*, Economic and Political Weekly, Jan., pp.16-23.
3. Athreya, V.B& Bhargava, B .S. & Bhaskar, Manu, (1992). *Women in Grassroots Democracy-A study of Kerala*, New Delhi. University of Kerala/ ICSSR,
4. Chandrashekar, B.K., (1984). '*Panchayat raj law in Karnataka: Janata initiative in decentralisation*', Economic and Political Weekly, XIX (16): 683-92.
5. Ebert, Fredrich.(1993) *Shifting Women in Politics: Forms & Process*; New Delhi, Har Ananda Publication.
6. Hanna Fenichel Pitkm (1967). *The Concept of Representation*, Berkely, University of California, p. 44.
7. Jain , L. C. (1994). *Panchayat: Women will win*, Kurukshetra, June,
8. Jhamtani, A. (1995), *Rural women: Powerless partner in development* Kurukshetra, Aug., p.63.
9. Kanango, Sukla Deb. (1996), *Panchayati Raj and Emerging Women Leadership: An overview*, Social Action Vol-46.
10. Manin Bernard. (1997). *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge.
11. Cambridge University Press.
12. Rao, Nirmala (2000). *The Changing Context of Representation, Representation and Community in Western Democracies*, London, Macmillan Press Ltd.
13. Subha, K. and Bhargava, B.S. (2002). *Feminism and Political Empowerment of Women at the Grass-roots. The Karnataka Experience*, South Asian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 2, 72-86.