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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATS: A SAMPLE SURVEY

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ABSTRACT:

Karnataka state has adopted three tier panchayat systems at the early 1993s and Panchayat Act has enabled reservation to women in panchayats so as to bring gender equality in family and society. As such, to look into the gender equality, socio-economic equality and political equality, a sample survey of total 120 women panchayat members was made in Kalaburagi district. It is revealed that due to impact of reservation in pachayats, to a greater extent, women have gained socio-economic, political and gender equality in their families and society. Still it is suggested to increase awareness of women in villages through education.

INTRODUCTION:

In 1956, the Karnataka State came into being. In 1959, the Karnataka Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act were passed. The Act, though it gave a certain degree of uniformity to Panchayat Raj Institutions in the State, it failed to secure any amount of democratic decentralization, as the Act did not confer real powers and resources to the Panchayat Raj Institutions. The Karnataka Government accepted and implemented the Panchayat Raj system in 1985 based on the model proposed by the Ashok Mehta Committee viz., two-tier system (Bhargava, 1979).

One of the distinct changes that have come out as a result of democratic decentralization is the emergence of women leadership in the Panchayats. The patriarchic society in India had confined women for a long time only to the household chores and denied them participation in public activities. The traditional caste Panchayats which were decision-making bodies of the villages denied access to women as they did in case of Dalits. The rural socio-political life was upper caste male dominated and women were mere voiceless spectators. However, the democratic decentralization has brought revolutionary changes in the rights of women at the grass root level governance. The constitutional mandate making one-third of the seats in the Panchayat reserved for women has brought drastic changes in the male dominated decision making traditional bodies. The rise of women leadership

in male dominated politics at the grass root level is a significant development in post independent India. It is noteworthy that there are more than 1 million elected women Panchayat members in the country which is 42 per cent of the total elected Panchayat members (Parsa, V.2006).

The Panchayati Raj has provided a common forum for social, economic, political and legal advancement of rural women. Now women are more than nominal in the political bodies and this is an epoch-making step in the women's empowerment and political participation. Women are now involved in the local political process and are confronted with complex situations while carrying out their tasks as local leaders. The new Panchayat system has played relatively positive role in providing infrastructure, employment opportunities and economic empowerment of women. Consequently, there is a change in the attitudes of rural women who are becoming conscious of education, employment, etc.

On the other hand, Banerjee (1998) observes that women from the lower socio-economic order have been emerging as effective leaders of Panchayats. In fact, her study shows that women from the well off sections of the society lacks initiative and are dummy representatives who are controlled by their family members. Hence, it is essential to know whether the prime aim of decentralization and women's active participation has become successful. For this purpose, the present study is made in Kalaburagi district.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present study is made:

1. To study the social background of the women panchayat members; and
2. To look into the impact of political participation on status of women panchayat members in family and society.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS:

The present study was began with literature search. The author collected secondary literature on political participation of women, 73rd constitutional amendment, etc. Based on the same, theoretical background was derived. Further, totally 120 women panchayat members were surveyed through interviews and the collected primary data through interviews is shown as under.

ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY DATA:

1. Age-wise distribution of Respondents:

As discussed already, about 120 women panchayat members are selected to conduct the present study, the age of the respondents plays an important role in knowing their aims and aspirations towards betterment of their areas. It is generalized that the younger members can concentrate on the modern facilities such as road, telecommunication, conveyance, women's education and employment and such other facilities, but the older people may concentrate on the other aspects such as drinking water, sanitation etc. The age-wise distribution of the respondents covered under the study is shown as under.

Table No. 1. Age-wise distribution of Respondents

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Below 25 Years	--	--
26 to 35 Years	07	5.83
36 to 45 Years	38	31.67
46 to 55 Years	40	33.33
Above 55 Years	35	29.16
Total	120	100

Of the total 120 (100%) respondents, 40 (33.33%) are between the age group of 46 to 55 years followed by, 38 (31.67%) are from 26 to 35 years, about 35 (29.16%) are of above 55 years of age and the remaining 07 (5.83%) are of between 26 to 35 years. The age of the respondents shows that majority of the respondents are of above 45 years and it proves that the experience shows major role in the management of panchayats.

2. Education:

The educational qualifications have great impact on the level of understanding and knowledge of the respondents. As such education plays an important role in deciding the aims and aspirations of the panchayat members in development of rural areas. The collected data on the education of the respondents is shown in the following table.

Table No. 2. Education

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	30	25.00
Primary/ Secondary	35	29.16
Under-Graduate	41	34.16
Graduate	14	11.67
PG/ Research	--	--
Total	120	100

Education of the women panchayat members revealed that, 41 (34.16%) have completed their under-graduation followed by, 35 (29.16%) have completed primary or secondary education, about 30 (25.00%) are illiterates and the remaining 14 (11.67%) have completed their graduation. It was generalized that majority of the women panchayat members have completed under-graduation or completed only primary or secondary education.

3. Caste:

In order to promote the social justice and gender justice, now state and central governments have already passed several legislations to provide caste and gender representation in the local bodies such as Municipalities or panchayats. As such to know about the caste-wise representation the information was collected from the respondents and presented in the following table.

Table No. 3. Caste

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Scheduled Caste	41	34.17
Scheduled Tribe	13	10.83
Other Backward Classes	34	28.33
Others/ General	32	26.66
Total	120	100

The caste-wise distribution of the respondents shows that, 41 (34.17%) are from Scheduled Caste, followed by, 34 (28.33%) are from Other Backward Classes, about 32 (26.66%) are from Others or General classes and the

remaining 13 (10.83%) are from Scheduled Tribe. It is observed that compared to other classes, the representation of the scheduled tribe is less in women panchayat members.

4. Average Monthly Income:

Income determines the economic power of any family. It also considered as standard of living factor of a family. As such the information on the average monthly income of the respondents was collected and presented in the following table.

Table No. 4. Average Monthly Income

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Below Rs. 2000	04	3.33
Rs. 2001 to Rs. 3500	11	9.17
Rs. 3501 to Rs. 5000	33	27.50
Rs. 5001 to Rs. 7500	56	46.67
Rs. 7501 to Rs. 10000	09	7.50
Above Rs. 10000	07	5.83
Total	120	100

The income of the respondents shows that a major portion that is 56 (46.67%) are between monthly income of Rs. 5001 to Rs. 7500 followed by, 33 (27.50%) are between income level of Rs. 3501 to Rs. 5000, about 11 (9.17%) are between the income group of Rs. 2001 to Rs. 3500, about 07 (5.83%) have monthly income above Rs. 10000 and the remaining only 04 (3.33%) have income below Rs. 2000. It was observed that majority of the respondents are from economically middle class families.

5. Occupation:

Occupation like income plays an important role in the economic status of the respondents. The occupations of rural people mainly includes the own agriculture, agricultural labour, industrial labour, business, self-employment, informal sector employment, etc. The collected information on the occupation of the respondents is presented in the following table.

Table No. 5. Occupation

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture (Own)	46	38.33
Agricultural Labour	19	15.83
Industrial Labour	24	20.00
Business/ Self-employment	18	15.00
Informal Sector	13	10.83
Others	--	--
Total	120	100

It is observed from the above table that majority that is 46 (38.33%) are engaged in their own agriculture, followed by 24 (20.00%) are industrial labourers, about 19 (15.83%) are agricultural labourers, about 18 (15.00%) are engaged in business or self-employment and the remaining 13 (10.83%) are working in informal sector. The rural areas are predominantly covered by farmers or agricultural community and as such there are many women managing panchayats from agricultural families.

6. Marital Status:

Marital status is most important as the women in the society has to play dual role that is to look after her family as well as their occupation and if they have entered politics, then that also become additional responsibility to them. As such the information on the marital status of the respondents is collected and presented in the following table.

Table No. 6. Marital Status

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Unmarried/ Single	--	--
Married/ Living with Husband	106	88.33
Widows	12	10.00
Divorcee/ Separated	02	1.67
Total	120	100

Majority of the respondents that is, 106 (88.33%) are married and living with their husbands followed by 12 (10.00%) are widows and the remaining only 02 (1.67%) are divorcees or separated women. Among the women

panchayat members, the women who are married and living with their husbands are getting major portion in the gram panchayats compared to the single women.

7. Satisfaction in Social Life:

Overall satisfaction in life is essential for every human being. As such the information on the satisfaction in social life of the women panchayat members covered under the study was collected and presented in the following table.

Table No. 7. Satisfaction in Social Life

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Fully Satisfied	67	55.83
Satisfied to Greater extent	53	44.16
Not Satisfied	--	--
Total	120	100

It is disclosed from the above table that 67 (55.83%) are fully satisfied, whereas the remaining 53 (44.16%) are satisfied to a greater extent in their social life.

8. Husband respect Equally in Family:

As discussed already, even though educated, employed or hold good position like panchayat member, the women have lower or secondary status in their families. As such it was asked to the respondents that whether they are getting equal respect from their husbands and the collected responses are shown as under.

Table No. 8. Husband respect Equally in Family

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	69	57.50
No	51	42.50
Total	120	100

It was observed from the above table that majority that is 69 (57.50%) of the respondents have expressed that their husbands are giving the respect to them equally, whereas the remaining 51 (42.50%) have not agreed to the same.

CONCLUSION:

It is noted from the above discussion that, the prime aim of political participation of women is to bring gender equality in family and society. It shows that, it is achieved to a greater extent. It is observed that the panchayat system has encouraged political participation of all castes and women of all economic classes and it is greater development to bring socio-economic and political equality in society. Still, it is suggested to increase education among rural women, so that they can gain more awareness on political participation and panchayats at different levels.

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