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A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE ROLE OF GRAM PANCHAYATS IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN KARNATAKA STATE

Kavya C. N.¹, Manjunatha S.²

¹Research Scholar, Department of PG Studies in Sociology, Kuvempu University, Shankaraghatta, Shivamoga, Karnataka State; ²# 294, Ganigarapalya, Thalagattapura (p), Kanakapura Main Road, Bangalore – 560062, Karnataka State.

ABSTRACT

Today, in India the problem of rural poverty is increasing very rapidly. There are a very few ways to eradicate rural poverty in India. Through giving economic opportunities for the village people, particularly to the women in rural regions, has been proved very fruitful to reduce the poverty in rural India. Providing economic support and decision making power to women through these Gram Panchayats bring empowerment, further this strengthens the whole society in general. Hence, the present study is placed in this context to examine the role of Gram Panchayats in empowering women in Karnataka state and also to understand the social, educational, economical and political empowerment of women members of Gram Panchayats in Karnataka state. The primary data has been gathered from the method of field survey in the district of Hassan in Karnataka state. In the present study, based on the analysis and discussion on the empowerment of women through panchayat system and rural development in Karnataka state, major findings of this study have been explained in detail.

Key Words: Women eEmpowerment, Gram panchayat, Rural development

INTRODUCTION

In India it is evidently apparent that half of the women population are either working in unorganized sector or non-income sectors. In the 21st century the overall development of Indian society mainly relies on the improvement in status of women. If their situation do not improve then the whole of concept of development is futile. Women empowerment doesn't merely indicate growth in their economic sphere, but also regarding social and political fields. In this direction to achieve complete empowerment of women many attempts have been made by both government and non-governmental organizations. In the process of decentralization of power three tier panchayath system has been implemented in India. At the local level, Gram Panchayths have been found increasingly helpful in bringing women empowerment, particularly in Karnataka state. Hence, this study is placed in this context to examine the role of Gram Panchayats in empowering women in Karnataka state and also to understand the social, educational, economical and political empowerment of women members of Gram Panchayats in Karnataka state.

Background for the Study

The empowerment of women is crucial for the development of rural India. Bringing women into the mainstream of development is a major concern for the government of India. Therefore, the programmes for the poverty alleviation have a women's component to ensure flow of adequate funds to this section. The constitutional 73rd amendment, Act 1992 provides for reservation of selective posts for women. Thus, women members and chairpersons of panchayaths, who are basically new entrants in panchayaths, have to acquire the required skill and be given appropriate orientation to assume their rightful roles as leaders and decision makers. To impart training for elected representatives of panchayath raj institution is primarily the responsibility of the state governments / union territory administrations.

The empowerment of women means for them to have the necessary to undertake a number of tasks either individually or groups, so that they have further access to and control of society resources. Empowerment is recognized as an essential strategy to strengthen the well-being of individuals, families and communities. Empowerment can enable women to

Corresponding Author:

Manjunatha S., # 294, Ganigarapalya, Thalagattapura (p), Kanakapura Main Road, Bangalore – 560062, Karnataka State.
E-mail: manjusoc1@gmail.com

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participate, as equal citizens, in the economic, political and social sustainable development of the rural communities.

Panchayath Raj is an ancient institution as antique as India. In fact, it has been the backbone of Indian villages since the beginning of recorded history. Gandhiji dreamt of every village a republic under the Panchayath raj system of local self-government administered by a council or 'Panchayath' duly elected by the people of the villages in a democratic manner.

The Rural development and Panchayath Raj department is responsible for the implementation of various centrally sponsored and state schemes for poverty alleviation, employment generation, sanitation, capacity building, women's social and economic empowerment apart from provision of basic amenities and services.

The Panchayath Raj system has three – tier structure. i)Zilla Panchayath ii)Taluk Panchayath iii)Gram Panchayath. In 1992, the 73rd amendment to the constitution was enacted and it brought about a number of fundamental changes in the Panchayath Raj system. Gram Panchayath is one of the parts of Panchayath Raj system. It was aimed at the development of a planned village which is taken for counting to play its role at the level of villages these Gram Panchayaths was given prominence to make special works with regards to the development of villages.

As according to the Karnataka panchayath act 1993 district commissioner announced that those villages which consist of 5000 to 7000 of population in a village or a village group is called as Gram Panchayath. In the Gram Panchayath area for every 400 people one elected member with other members were included. Likewise there is a separate reservation in

places for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and backward class and for women.

This study is about Empowerment of Gram Panchayath women members through Panchayath Raj institution. For these we are trying to give findings through the sociological perspective.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims at accomplishing the following objectives:

1. To examine the role of Gram Panchayats in empowering women in Karnataka state.
2. To understand the social, educational, economical and political empowerment of women members of Gram Panchayats in Karnataka state.

Methodology

In the present study fifty women members of Gram Panchayats were selected with the use of simple random sampling method in Hassan taluk of Karnataka state. Through the direct interviews I have collected primary data from the pre-selected sample. The following table provides information on the overall profile of panchayath system in Hassan taluk.

Statistics of Panchayaths in Hassan taluk

Panchayaths in Hassan taluk					
Gram pan- chayaths	40	Taluk pan- chayaths	25	Zilla pan- chayaths	7
Members		Members		Members	
Male	360	Male	11	Male	4
Female	270	Female	14	Female	3
Total	630	Total	25	Total	7

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Profile of the respondents

Sl.no	Personal profile of the respondents					
1.	Age	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Above 60
		5	-	35	10	-
2.	Religion	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Buddhist	Others
		45	05	-	-	-
3.	Caste	Vokkaliga	Lingaitha	SC's	ST's	Others
		30	-	10	5	5
4.	Educational Qualification	Illiteracy	Primary	Middle	High school	PUC
		20	20	-	5	5
5.	Marital status	Married		Unmarried		Widows
		45		-		5
6.	Family structure	Joint family			Nuclear family	
		5			45	
7.	Position in Gram pan- chayath	President		Vice President		Members
		5		5		40

1. **Age classification:** The above data show that 10% of respondents are in the age group of 21-30. In that maximum number that is 70% of respondents are in the age group of 41-50. Only 20% of respondents are in the age group of 51-60.
2. **Religion classification:** From the above table we can notice about 90% of respondents are belongs to Hindu religion and 10% of respondents are belongs to Muslim religion.
3. **Caste classification:** In the Hindu religion 60% of them are vokkaliga, 20% of scheduled castes, 10% of scheduled tribes and remaining 10% of respondents belongs to other castes, who are elected as members, president, and vice-president through reservation.
4. **Educational Qualification:** If educational qualification is considered 40% of illiterates are there because of their poor economic condition through they are not get education. 40% of respondents had primary education and they were not get education more that because of their non interest and due to lack of co-operation by their family. 10% of respondents got high school education and the remaining 10% of them educated up to PUC level.
5. **Marital status:** 90% of respondent were married, and only 10% of respondents were widows.
6. **Family structure:** There is a decrease in the numbers of joint family we find 10% of respondents live in joint family and 90% of respondents are having nuclear families.
7. **Position in Gram panchayath:** 80% of respondents were elected as members in Gram panchayat. 10% of them were vice president and others 10% of them were president.

07.	Awareness about importance of the education.	50	00	100	00	100
08.	General awareness of education.	41	09	88	12	100
09.	Ability to grasping knowledge about society.	35	15	70	30	100
10.	Increasing ability of motivate to others.	32	18	64	36	100
11.	Encourage to women education.	50	00	100	00	100
12.	Freedom to expenses earning money for own use.	34	16	68	32	100
13.	Freedom of opinion to buying and selling of family property or things.	24	26	48	52	100
14.	Changes in the life style through the economic opportunities.	33	17	66	34	100
15.	Involvement in public organization.	50	00	100	00	100
16.	Full opportunity to utilize the power.	30	20	60	40	100
17.	Interference of male in using the power.	20	30	40	60	100
18.	Compete in elections with own interest.	30	20	60	40	100
19.	Confidence to participate in further elections.	38	12	76	24	100
20.	Involvement in solving problem of public.	40	10	80	20	100
21.	Interest in giving prominence to women organization.	50	00	100	00	100
22.	Happy with membership in Gram panchayath.	36	14	72	28	100
23.	Decrease in the feeling of inferiority complex as women.	43	07	86	14	100
24.	Involvement in rural development	50	00	100	00	100

Table 2: Empowerment Aspects of women members of Gram panchayath

Sl. No	Empowerment Aspects	Frequency		Percentage (%)		Total (%)
		Yes	No	Yes	No	
01.	Increasing self confidence.	42	08	84	16	100
02.	Good respect from the family and society.	40	10	80	20	100
03.	Changes in living condition.	35	15	70	30	100
04.	Increasing self decision making.	38	12	76	24	100
05.	Increasing of ability to solve problems.	36	14	72	28	100
06.	Family co-operation.	44	06	88	12	100

The above table deals with the opinion of women members of Gram panchayath about empowerment aspects.

- Self confidence is one of the basic requirements of women members of Gram panchayath. In that 84% of respondents are opined that their self confidence is increasing after the membership of Gram panchayath. But 16% of respondents are facing lack of self confidence due to the cause of social attitude towards women members.
- Every person should have good respect from the family and society. In that our 80% of respondents are opined that they are getting good respect from the family and society as members of Gram panchayath. Before the members of Gram panchayath they were facing lack of respect from family and society. But now they are getting good respect from family and society. 20% of respondents are opined that though they are members of Gram panchayath they can't get respect from family and society because of male dominancy.
- Power and opportunities can change our living conditions like food, shelter, life style, etc. likewise women members of Gram panchayath are also not exceptional from this. 70% of respondents are opined that their living conditions are changing through membership of Gram panchayath. But 30% of respondents though they are members of Gram panchayath their living conditions are not changing because of more poverty.
- Decision making is not an easy task it is full of risk, if a person took wrong decision it may affects their whole life. So while taking decisions they must be careful. So as per concerned to this our 76% of respondents are opined that their self decision making is increasing through the membership of Gram panchayath. But 24% of respondents are opined that they are facing lack of self decision making due to the reason of dependency on their family and husband.
- Every human being should have ability to solve their problems. 72% of respondents are opined that after the membership of Gram panchayath their ability increasing to solving and actively facing any problems. But 28% of respondents are opined that they are facing lack of ability to solving their problems due to the reason of lacking of self confidence and they are depended on their family.
- Family is one of the important units of the society. Family co-operation is essential criteria to achieve anything. In that 88% of respondents are opined that they had good family co-operation to actively participate in Gram panchayath and they fully supportive to them. But 12% of respondents are opined that their family members do not co-operative to them. Because they involved in their own work, due to this reason their family members do not fully supportive to them.
- Education is one of the basic activities of people in all human societies. Education creates an opportunity for each and every person to enlighten themselves by acquiring knowledge. Likewise women members of gram panchayaths are also not exceptional from this. Day by day education is gaining more and more importance. So in that our 100% of respondents are opined that as members of Gram panchayath they had awareness about importance of the education.
- Education means not only formal education, informal education is also can give more knowledge to us. 82% of respondents are opined that general awareness of education is increasing through membership of Gram panchayath. But 18% of respondents are opined that they are facing lack of general awareness of education due to the reason of illiteracy.
- 70% of respondents are opined that after the membership of Gram panchayath their ability is increasing to grasping knowledge about society like crimes, women harassment, awareness of politics, leadership qualities, corruption, etc. but 30% of respondents are facing lack of ability to grasping knowledge about society. Due to the reason of lacking of awareness and low level of participation in society.
- As for as utilization of power is concerned 40% of respondents are not having full freedom to used their power. They have to take permission by their husband or son even though there is a lacking in support of the officers and president. 60% of respondents are opined that they well know about using power and they having opportunity to utilize the power.
- 80% of respondents are opined that as members of Gram panchayath they are involve in solving problem of public, like women harassment, dowry problems, eradication of poverty, against alcoholism, etc. but 20% of respondents are not able to solving problem of public, because of their hesitation and lack of knowledge to solving problems of public.
- 100% of respondents are opined that as members of Gram panchayath they gave prominence to Women organizations like sthri shakthi sangha, self-help groups, etc. Women organization can improve the status of women.
- 72% of respondents are happy and satisfied with their membership of gram panchayath. But 28% of respondents are not satisfied with their membership in Grampanchayath.
- 86% of them opined that they can achieve anything without any inferiority complex as women who are required for society and country. 14% of them due to the lacking of education they are still under the family control made them to have feeling of inferiority complex.
- 100% of respondents are opined that as members of Gram panchayath they involving and actively participating in rural development process.

Major Findings of the Study

The major findings are as follows.

- Women self confidence is increasing through membership of Gram panchayath.
- After the membership of Gram panchayath they getting good respect from family and society.
- Women had awareness about importance of the education. And also they are all encouraging to women education.
- They are all involving in public organizations and they giving prominence to women organizations.
- They are all involving in rural development process.
- After the membership of Gram panchayath also women are facing some problems with respect to their living condition, economic condition, utilization of power etc.
- Even though elected by election full power was not given to them.

Major Suggestions

- The basic approach should be to inculcate the confidence among women and bring about an awareness of their own potential for development.
- Family support should be need for women members of Gram panchayath.
- For better performances of women participation three factors are required.
 - They should be need of equality
 - They should be need of efficiency
 - They should be need of empowerment
- Opportunity should be given to them of utilize their power in Gram panchayaths.
- Interference of husband or son should be avoided in misusing the power of women.
- Higher officers should be give power support them.
- Training facilities should be given to them by government.
- Media support is essential for women members of Gram panchayath.

CONCLUSION

Our present study which is focused on empowerment of Gram panchayath women members through Panchayath Raj institution which deals with the social, Educational, economical, political empowerment of women members. Through this study we can find maximum women are empowered

through Panchayath Raj institution. But some women are not more empowered in this way it is because of their lack of education, non co-operation by their family members and even non co-operation by their higher officers. They should be change their notion about women and give more importance to women empowerment. If women are empowered then the rural society is also become developed society.

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