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POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN RAICHUR DISTRICT: A SAMPLE SURVEY

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ABSTRACT:

Women empowerment is emphasized so as to achieve gender equality in family and society. As such, political empowerment of women is emphasized through their active participation in Panchayat Raj Institutions and Indian Constitutional Amendments were recommended for 33% reservations to women in Panchayats. Women were backward in terms of education and knowledge since medieval age and it is essential to know whether presently, they are managing Panchayats efficiently and effectively. The present study is made to explore the knowledge of women panchayat members on the objectives, functions and administration in Panchayats in Raichur district. Further, knowledge women panchayat members is also analyzed on the different Government Schemes for the women empowerment and rural development.

KEYWORDS : Women empowerment , Political Empowerment , family and society.

INTRODUCTION

Political participation of women is broader than their participation in the electoral and administrative process. It includes the whole gamut of voluntary activities with a bearing on the political process including support of political groups, dissemination of political views, involving in any form of organized activities that effect or seeks to effect power relationships. It refers to activities not only formally empowered to make decisions, but also intends to influence the attitudes and behavior or those who have powers for decision-making (Nagaraja and Kusugal, 2014).

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts passed in 1992 provide for an opportunity for women's entry into political spheres. These Amendment Acts provide for a 33 percent reservation of seats for women in the governance of local bodies both rural and urban with target of good governance and fair representation in the development process at grassroots level.

Since the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) have potential to start the process of women empowerment from the village level, it can change the social scenario of the village. The PRIs provide village women, the opportunities for leadership and to take part directly in the decision making in the process of development. It will also help in managing the violence against women. So the following factors had attracted to take the problem of women empowerment through PRIs for this work. These are: i. To create a healthy environment to exercise women's rights equal with men in rural areas. ii. For equal participation of women in decision making bodies for their development and welfare. iii. To prepare women for political participation in Parliament and Assemblies also with 33 per cent reservation. iv. To adopt an integrated approach for empowering women through effective convergence of the services, resources, structures and man power in related sectors. v. To organise women into groups as self help groups for economic empowerment of rural areas. vi. To generate political awareness and political participation in village politics by women through PRIs (Nandal, 2013).

Of course, the Constitutional Amendments

enabled the gender equality and women's political empowerment, but it is essential to know how the women panchayat members are performing and executing their duties as decision makers at the local government. To perform effectively, women must aware about the objectives, functions and administration of panchayats and welfare schemes of the Government. In this respect, the present study is made in Raichur district to assess the political empowerment of women achieved.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present study is made:

1. To look into the age and educational aspects of the women panchayat members;
2. To study the social background of the women panchayat members; and
3. To examine whether women have gained benefits from their participation in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY:

The present study is based on survey of women members of Panchayats in Raichur district of Karnataka. Total 10 women Members of Zilla Panchayat, 26 Women Members of Taluka Panchayats and 164 women members of Gram Panchayats were surveyed to collect the primary data. Hence, the present study is limited to the total 200 women panchayat members at villages and talukas of Raichur district. Interview schedule was used to collect the primary data. The collected primary data is analyzed, interpreted and discussed as under.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

The collected primary data is analyzed and discussed as under.

1. Age-wise Distribution of Respondents:

Age of the respondents helps to explore their knowledge and awareness on the socio-economic and political aspects of different people living in rural areas. Further, it also throws light on the level of administrative experiences of panchayat members. It is noted that minimum age for voting is fixed at 18 years and to contest in elections, the minimum age is fixed as 21 years. Hence, the information was collected from the respondents on their age and presented in the following table.

Table No. 1. Age of the Respondents

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
18-25	22	11.0
26-40	47	23.5
41-50	96	48.0
51 & Above	35	17.5
Total	200	100

Among all the respondents covered under the study, 96 (48.0%) are in the age group of 41 to 50 years followed by, 47 (23.5%) are in the age group of 26 to 40 years, 35 (17.5%) are of more than 50 years and the remaining 22 (11.0%) are between 18 to 25 years respectively. It is summarized from the age factor of the respondents that more youth is participating in panchayat related administrative activities rather than elders.

2. Education:

Education determines the level of knowledge of human being in different aspects. Hence, information was collected on the education of the respondents and tabulated as under.

Table No. 2. Education of the Respondents

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Illiterate	19	9.5
Lower/ Higher Primary	36	18.0
Intermediate/ SSC/ SSLC/ Secondary	120	60.0
Under-Graduate	11	5.5
Graduate/ PG	14	7.0
Total	200	100

The educational level of the panchayat members revealed that, 19 (9.5%) are illiterates, 36 (18.0%) of the respondents have completed lower or higher primary education, majority that is, 120 (60.0%) of the respondents have completed intermediate, or SSC or SSLC or secondary education, 11 (5.5%) have completed under-graduation and the remaining only 14 (7.0%) of the respondents have completed graduation or post-graduation. The collected primary data revealed that a great majority of the respondents are educated and even more than half of the respondents have completed at least 10 years of education. It shows that the participation of more educated people is prevailed in panchayat system.

3. Marital Status:

Information on the marital status of the respondents is collected and presented in the following table.

Table No. 3. Marital Status

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Unmarried	--	--
Married	172	86.0
Widow	28	14.0
Divorcee/ Separated	--	--
Total	200	100

The marital status of the respondents disclosed that, 171 (86.0%) are married and living with their husbands and 28 (14.0%) are widows. It is noted that an overwhelming majority of the respondents are married and living with their husbands.

4. Occupation of the Respondents:

Occupation of the respondents helps to reveal their economic status and standard of living in the society. Hence information collected on the occupation of the respondents is tabulated as under.

Table No. 4. Occupation of the Respondents

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Agriculture	44	22.0
Small Business/ Industry	23	11.5
Unorganized Work	30	15.0
Housework/ Housewife	68	34.0
Caste Based Occupation	12	6.0
Official/ Student	--	--
Social Worker	23	11.5
Any Other	--	--
Total	200	100

The occupations of the respondents shows that, 44 (22.0%) are engaged in agriculture, 23 (11.5%) are working in small business or industries, 30 (15.0%) are engaged in unorganized sector work, 68 (34.0%) are housewives, 12 (6.0%) are engaged in caste based occupations and 23 (11.5%) are social workers. It is observed that due to the increase in education and awareness in the society and also due to the welfare schemes of the government for the poor, many of the rural women are engaged in different types of employment.

5. Annual Income:

Annual income of the respondents and family determines the economic power of the respondents. Hence, information on the annual income of the respondents is collected and tabulated as under.

Table No. 5. Annual Income

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Less than Rs. 25000	31	15.5
Rs. 25001 to Rs. 60000	65	32.5
Rs. 60001 to Rs. 120000	29	14.5
More than Rs. 120000	07	3.5
Nil	68	34.0
Total	200	100

Annual income of all the respondents shows that, 31 (15.5%) have annual income of less than Rs. 25000, 65 (32.5%) of the respondents have annual income between Rs. 25001 to Rs. 60000, 29 (14.5%) of the women panchayat members have annual income between Rs. 60001 to Rs. 120000 and 68 (34.0%) have no any income as they are housewives.

6. Status of Women in Panchayats:

Reservations are given to the women so as to achieve gender equality and participation of women in democracy. Hence, to know whether the status of women is changed and improved due to participation in panchayat administration, a question was asked and the collected responses on the status of women in panchayats are tabulated as under.

Table No. 6. Status of Women in Panchayats

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Honourable	73	36.5
Moderate Status	51	25.5
No Change in Status	44	22.0
Lower Status	32	16.0
Total	200	100

Of all the respondents surveyed, after their participation in panchayats, 73 (36.5%) have mentioned that their status has become honourable, 51 (25.5%) have stated that they have got moderate status, 44 (22.0%) of the respondents have no change in their status and 32 (16.0%) have remarked that they have not gained any status, but got lower status.

7. Benefits Gained from Panchayats:

Many of the respondents are also functioning as President, Vice President and Secretary in Panchayats. Due to reservations, the women have got power and hence, it was asked to them regarding the benefits gained from participation in administration of panchayats and the collected information is presented in the following table.

Table No. 7. Benefits Gained from Panchayats

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Social Equality & Status	61	30.5
Popularity & Prestige	73	36.5
Economic Wealth & Power	32	16.0
Any Other	18	9.0
None	25	12.5
Total	200	100

It is observed from the above table that, a few of the women panchayat members have gained more than one benefit from their participation in their panchayats and a few have not gained any benefits. Particularly, of all the women panchayat members, 61 (30.5%) have gained social equality and status, 73 (36.5%) have gained popularity and prestige, 32 (16.0%) have gained economic wealth and power, 18 (9.0%) have gained in other ways and 25 (12.5%) of the women panchayat members have not gained anything from their political participation in panchayats.

CONCLUSION:

It is concluded that, women have gained many benefits from their participation in panchayats. It is emphasized that gradually the women are getting gender equality and gained knowledge on education and also participating in economic activities by starting self-employment. Further, panchayats have enabled learning of women members and women panchayat members are encouraging education and literacy in villages. Through their awareness on the self-employment programmes, women empowerment programmes and rural development schemes, women panchayat members have gained and working for the overall development of rural areas.

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