



Empowering Women Through Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Study of Nedungadu Commune Panchayat, Karaikal

KEYWORDS

Empowerment, Panchayati Raj, Parliament, 73rd Amendment Act

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women is the first and foremost criteria for any society to be claimed as a civilized one. Women constitute almost half of our population which means they deserve to get fifty per cent representation in all walks of life. But the reality is something different. In spite of a series of government sponsored women welfare schemes, they still seem to be a marginalized community. Growth rate of national economy is bound to be hampered if half of our population is debarred from their basic right and as a result they become a burden over society. Findings and suggestions in this article are the outcome of a Master Degree project submitted to our Department. This study is based on the assumption that representation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions is the first step towards their political empowerment and for complete empowerment they must have their proper representation in the Parliament.

INTRODUCTION

Development of any nation is not possible without improving the socio economic condition of its population as a whole. As a fact, we live in a society where we have almost fifty fifty population of both male and female gender. So it is demand of time to look into the issues of gender discrimination. Though women share equal status as men but it is true only for women from urban areas who have better facilities. Here we have to focus on empowering rural women and their development. A special focus should be or empowering girls and women, since it will lead to a change in the society which would be sustainable and will be in effect for ages to come.

Women are equally efficient to their male counterpart. Women are seen very active in all spheres of life and making their mark in various fields with the dedication and hard work shown by them to excel in their area of expertise. Women are not treated as an object or slave, rather they have now become independent of unethical societal norms imposed on them. As a result, companies are hiring women force in more numbers since they have shown excellence in dedication towards their work as well as striking a perfect balance between their social, personal and professional life.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policy. The Constitution not only guarantees equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Several laws have also been adopted to empower women socially, economically, legally and politically. Yet it is very unfortunate that women's rights are universally violated and rarely adhered to. The subject of empowerment of women has become a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. It is held that women now cannot be asked to wait for any more for equality. Inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women have also been age-old issues all over the world. Thus, women's quest for equality with man is a universal phenomenon.

Empowering women is the process of obtaining basic opportunities for marginalized, either directly by them, or through the help of non-marginalized others who share their own access to these opportunities. It also includes actively thwarting attempts to deny those opportunities. Empowerment also includes encouraging, and developing the skills for, self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be completed only when they get proper representation in legislative process.

BRIEF PROFILE OF KARAIKAL

The Union Territory of Pondicherry constituted out of the four erstwhile French establishments of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam. Karaikal region is embedded in the Nagappattinam and Tiruvarur District of Tamil Nadu State.

Latitude : lies between 10° 49' and 11° 01' northern latitude about 150 kms. **Longitude** : lies between 79° 43' and 79°52' eastern longitude about 150 kms. **Area** : 161 sq. km. has a population of 1,70,640 as per the 2001 census.

Karaikal town about 16 km. north of Nagappattinam and 9 km. south of Tarangambadi is the regional headquarters. Karaikal region is made up of the Communes of Karaikal, Kottuchcheri, Nedungadu, Tirunallar, Niravi and Tirumalarajanpattinam.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUB-DIVISION :

Name of Municipalities/ Commune Panchayats	No. of Revenue Villages
Karaikal	9
Kottuchcheri	5
Nedungadu	5
Tirunallar	11
Niravi	3
Tirumalarajanpattinam	5
Total	37

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Objective of study is to assess that how far Panchayati Raj Institution has played the role in empowering women in Nedungadu Commune of Karaikal district. Few more objectives are enumerated below:

- To study about the reservation of women in PRI's
- To study about the women empowerment through participation in PRI'S
- To study about the hindrances for women member in PRI'S
- To study about the freedom to act for women
- To study about the reservation for women is adequate.
- To study about the economic status of SHG members.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has collected the information from the Nedungadu Commune, Karaikal about the total number of SHG's in their area. The study was done on 200 respondents from Nedungadu. Respondents were selected on random basis keeping in mind different criteria like educational qualification of respondents, income group, profession and type of houses

The tool adopted for data collection is Interview Schedule. The reason is most of the respondents are not well versed in their education. Thus, the researcher has undergone data collection through interview method. Most of the respondents were well co-operative and shared their views without any hesitation.

FINDINGS OF STUDY

Findings of the study are summarized below:

- Nearly 32% of the respondents are in the age groups of 31 – 40 years.
- 49% of the respondents are in primary level of education.
- 77% of the respondents are housewife.
- Majority of the respondents are house wife, so they are not earning any income to their family.
- 68% of the respondents are married.
- Majority (56%) of the respondent have 4-6 dependents.
- 39% of the respondents father/husband is employed in cultivation activity.
- 53% of the respondents family income is below rs.6000/-.
- 86% of the respondent are having own house.
- Most of the respondents are residing in concrete house.
- 42% of them expressed that 33% reservation of seats allocated to the women members.
- 50% of them are not to be a member in any political party.
- 78% of PR members are in SHG as the member.
- 74% are not interested to contest election in Panchayat.
- 76% of them responded that they are not contested in the panchayat elections.
- Nearly half of the respondents are opined that SHG is very helpful to contest in panchayat raj.
- 84% of the respondent agrees about SHG may empower the women community.
- 75% of them expressed that reservation is much required to putforth their grievances in the panchayat body.
- Majority of them expressed that the women members are working good in panchayat.
- 65% of the respondents expressed that the women

members are performing well when compare to the male members.

- 29% of the respondents expressed that they are acting independently.
- More than 50% of the respondents opined that they are working at satisfactory level.
- 30% of them expressed that they had provided lighting facilities to their commune.
- Majority of them told that public only initiated to do work for corruption.
- Most of the respondents expressed that they may access the elected representatives at average level.
- 64% of the respondents are expressed that they never implemented their promises.
- 62% of the respondents are expressed that they don't have any idea about the reservation for women is useful or useless.
- Equal percentage of the respondents responded that reservation policy empowered very much and same percentage told that no effect in their empowerment.
- 55% half of the respondents are not aware about any remuneration to be paid to the elected representatives.
- 57% of respondents told that after the panchayat body their locality were improved.
- Nearly 2/3rd of the respondents responded that they want to increase the reservation of women.
- Majority (79%) of them wants to increase 50% of reservation for women.
- Majority (74%) of them opined that there is no need for caste wise reservation among women.
- 83% of them are not aware about the reservations bill is pending in the parliament.
- Most of the respondents are accepted to provide salary for the members, it may avoid corruption.

SUGGESTIONS

Though the Government has taken a number of initiatives for the empowerment of women, few more suggestions are given below:

- First of all we need to bring about an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and rearing children needs to be transformed into a feeling of equal partnership of women and men.
- Studies on women in politics have emphasized that contact with outside world makes women more alert and also active in the political process. There could be two ways of doing it. Firstly, interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected one's should be encouraged. Secondly, these women could be taken out to the urban areas and their interaction with educated urban elected women representatives be arranged.
- The women should also be encouraged to organize themselves. The Self help groups in the village can be effectively used as instruments to mobilize them for this purpose. Some successful women's organisations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging the women's participation in social and political activities.
- Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making. It has been noticed that there are certain very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Panchayats, who have been successfully implementing the developmental schemes and have ensured overall development of their constituencies.

- The media both print as well as electronic can play an important role in creating awareness in the rural society. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.
- The Government of India should take adequate steps to pass the reservation bill for women not only in panchayats but also in Parliament. It really empowers the women to involve in active politics without depending the male community.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the study that Panchayati Raj Institution is a launching pad for women where they are supposed to be well trained to play a positive role in participative democracy. Without any doubt participation of women in local self government has brought a significant change in the functioning of local government. Here fifty percent seat reservation of women in panchayats is really an extraordinary incident in the history of Indian democracy. But it is only beginning, goal of real democracy will be achieved when women will be given proper representation in the top legislative institutions i.e. State Legislative Assemblies and Parliament of India. Hope the long pending Bill of women reservation be passed in the Parliament for strengthening the efforts of women empowerment.

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