

Participation of Women in Rural Politics- With Reference to Dalit Community



Rural

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ABSTRACT

Panchayath Raj Institutions (PRIs) have always been considered as a means of good governance and 73rd Constitutional Amendment effected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provided political space to the disadvantaged sections of the society like schedule caste, schedule tribes and women. The present study is an effort to know the extent of participation of Dalit women elected representatives in Panchayath and problems faced by them. Purposive sampling technique was adopted, consisting of 60 respondents from Gokak taluk. The finding of the study revealed that Self Help Groups are major inspiration and determinant factor for the membership in PRIs and financial assistance is a necessary ingredient for their self esteem, their independent functioning, and their committed concern, approach to the needs and urges of the people of the area.

INTRODUCTION

The political participation of Dalit women in local governance is a central human right in itself and enables the realisation of a host of other human rights. Political voice and decision-making power concerning basic services, economic development and social justice are critical factors in challenging and transforming structural caste-class-gender discrimination, and enabling Dalit women to realise their fundamental rights. Political participation also demands accountability from state and non-state actors to guarantee and respect these women's equal political voice and development. This requires a transformation of power relationships both within institutions of governance and in the women's social environment. Reservation to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women was guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. Scheduled Tribes women have been elected at the village, block and district levels, following the landmark 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India, reserving 33 percent of the seats in Panchayath Raj Institutions for women.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ACT, 1993

The 73rd constitution Amendment Act in 1993 provided uniformity to the Panchayath Raj system throughout India and given social justice to Dalit women. Reservation of women in the Ranchayat Raj is to allow the women in rural and tribal areas to develop themselves and contribute to the society. By participating in the rural politics, the women can enhance their ability and confidence to handle the responsibilities.

DALIT WOMEN IN RURAL SELF GOVERNANCE

From past decades it has been experienced that, caste has played an instrumental role in participation of women in rural politics and raising issues related to the more marginalized among women. In a highly hierarchical society, women belonging to the lower castes have lesser access to public fore, which is compounded by their gender. This exclusion makes it difficult for these women to represent and articulate the voices of their constituencies and their demands are often overlooked or subsumed by the dominant sections of the society.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The present paper aims to study the extent of participation of Dalit women elected representatives in Gram Panchayath and in order to reach the aim the following objectives have been laid;

1. To know the Socio- demographic profile of the respondents
2. To understand the political profile of the respondents
3. To analyze the constraints faced by the respondents because of the vulnerability.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive study was conducted among 60 Dalit women elected representatives from Gokak Taluk of Belgaum district in Karnataka. Purposive sampling technique was adopted consisting of 60 respondents from Gokak Taluk. The study was based on both primary and secondary data. A pretested semi struc-

tured questionnaire was administered and data was analysed by using percentages and proportions. The secondary data was obtained from various published and unpublished records such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, reports and web-sites etc.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The present study revealed the following results and findings which are systematically portrayed in quantitative like tables, graphs and pictographs and qualitative forms like analysis and interpretations as follows;

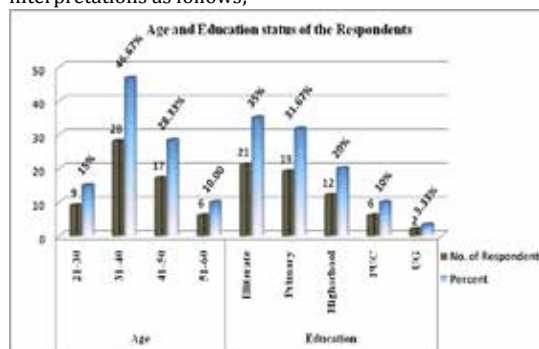


Figure - 1: Age and Education Status of the Respondents

It is evident from the above figure that, the majority i.e., 75 percent of the respondents belong to the age group varying 31 years to 50 years. It may be stated here that age factor is off course a significant factor. A matured age reflects quite sound and reasonable views in conformity with the needs and necessities warranted by the circumstances. Almost 65 percent are literates, as it was observed Self help group is one of the effective strategy because of which many representatives became

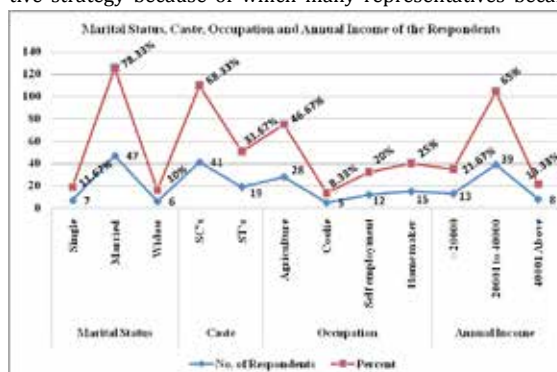


Figure - 2: Marital Status, Caste, Occupation and Annual Income of the Respondents

The data clearly shows that nearly 75 percent of respondents were involved in different occupations such as agriculture, coolie and self employment like tailoring, dairy, poultry and bangle shop. It can be understood since they were felt the need for participation they started to take representation in politics. Majority of 78.33 percent respondents were married. More than half (68.33 percent) of the respondents were belonging to Scheduled Caste and rest (31.67 percent) were Scheduled Tribes. Income also plays one of the determinants for representation in politics. The respondents in the study were having very low income. It is interesting to know that no women elected representative was paid any honorarium for her work. It thereby shows that these respondents were working on self fewer bases for an overall general welfare and development of the people and that of the women interests in particular.

The study reveals that majority i.e., 53.33% of the respondents are opined positively in contesting the next elections while 46.67% of the respondents are opined negatively for their coming elections. This is because they have no interest in contesting in the next elections. The majority of the respondents i.e., 85% of the respondents are attended the training programmes which is given by Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj at their constituencies (Block headquarter, district headquarter). And rest of the 15% of respondent have not attended any training programme because they are not interested to obtain training facilities. And Majority (81.67 percent) of the respondents were not aware before the election about the seventy-Third Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1992 which provides reservation of one-third seats to women in general and to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe in particular.

To elicit information for this purpose the researcher interviewed 60 dalit elected women members. It can be inferred that a dominant force or factor that has brought majority of women to the fold of PRIs is the force or motivation created by family, relatives and friends. 45% of respondents have participated in the political activities due to the influence of their Family members. According to 23.33% of the respondents they have involved in political activities with the influence of friends and relatives. According to 13.33% of the respondents they have involved in political activities with the influence their education. 11.61% of the respondents they have involved in political activities with the influence of their own decision. It shows that the family support, friends circle, relatives and the education these are highly influenced factors for the dalit women to encourage their participation and represent in a huge number at local governance.

All the respondents had links with one or the other political party as such members were persuaded and astonished by their political mentors who were already in politics. Majority (53.33percent) of the respondents wished to help people in the society and to work for the development of the concerned village. Nearly 11.67 percent respondents mentioned that they had pressure from the family especially from their husbands and father-in-law's, whereas 13.33 percent of the respondents entered Panchayath to hold power and to prove their identity, and the same number mentioned political parties pressurized the respondents. Around 8 percent respondents expressed since there was no other women member available they were forced to contest elections.

RECOMMENDATION

On the basis of study, the following suggestions are to be made:

- The rural women require support and encouragement by

the family members in the form of appreciation of their official work, their decisions and ensuring their presence in the meetings and that would help to encourage active participation in decision making and to contribute essential factors that leads the community development.

- The women representative in general and dalit women in specific in rural areas needs to have training on administration, powers and functions of the local bodies.
- The trend of men attitude towards women has been changing and this trend needs to be strengthened through orientation courses and training programmes for officials and elected representatives, both men and women.
- In order to make women aware about their political responsibilities they should be imparted education for bringing about social and political changes.
- It is not enough that women are motivated, but the whole household and the community, especially men need to be made aware and be convinced and hence they too support the women in their effort for an integral development.
- 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 Self Help Groups and Mahila Mandals in the village can be effectively used to make the women politically sound. Some successful women's organizations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging the women's participation in social and political activities. The Government should provide finances and infrastructure to some of the deserving and successful women organizations to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives.
- Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making. The successful women political leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honoring them in public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives and their success stories and good practices will get replicated.
- 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 training of Dalit women Panchayath members should be based on their own local experiences and elicit their involvement in preparing a framework that will enable them to analyse and understand their roles and responsibilities in accordance with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.
- Wherever the committee or commission is set up by government for any purpose 33 percent of representatives must be of women.
- All government and non-governmental delegations from bottom to top meetings must be include population based dalit women representatives.

CONCLUSION

The implications of present study will immensely helpful in government and non government sectors at the policy making level. Further, this study concludes that reservation policy provided social justice to disadvantaged groups and marginalized groups particularly in the context of Dalit including Dalit Women. This clearly shows that the emerging Dalit Women leadership in local governance. This process gave birth to the development and nation building process.

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