Research Paper Sociology

Awareness of Women Panchayat Members on Panchayat Administration: A Sample Survey in Gulbarga District

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ABSTRACT

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has given reservation to women to participate in administration of Panchayats at different levels. But, it is essential to know whether the women are aware about the aims, objectives, powers, functioning, administration, etc of Panchayat Raj Institutions. Hence, the present study was made surveying 300 women panchayat members in Gulbarga district. The study was concluded that it is essential to assign more powers to Panchayat Raj Institutions to generate revenue and its management for the rural development locally.

KEYWORDS

Introduction:

With independence, the whole social, economic and political scenario of India underwent a significant change. India accepted a modern Constitution based on principles of democracy, equality and freedom. The Constitution mainly focused on the welfare and empowerment of weaker sections and women. For it enables the people to participate in decision-making process as effective and responsible citizens. "Decentralization through Panchayat Raj Institutions is the way to combine popular responsibility with dispersal of decision making powers" (Krishnan, 1992).

It has been argued that the democratic decentralization has widened the base of democracy in India by involving the marginalized and the women in the process of governance. It is also observed that the values of caste loyalty, patriarchy and gerontocracy have given way to the egalitarian principles of social justice, equality and development in the rural politics. 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, 2006). Thus in some of the states the number of women Panchayat members exceeds the proportion that is provided in the law.

However, there are concerns about the functioning and performance of women Panchayat members. This has gained a wider academic attention in the country. The studies carried on participation of women in Panchayats so far have addressed broadly three issues. Firstly, the inability of women Panchayat members, presidents and vice-presidents in carrying out their functions in the Panchayats. Under this kind of studies it is reported that because of illiteracy and lack of experience women Panchayat leaders are unable to discharge their duties and exercise their power in an efficient manner. Thus they become easy preys in the hands of the men folk (husbands, fathers, father-in-law etc,) who pretend that they themselves are the rightful occupiers of these offices and many of them carry visiting cards calling themselves "sarpanchapati" (Tandon, 2004). Secondly the oppositions and problems posed by the male dominated society to the women Panchayat members have been addressed. It has been reported by several studies that the patriarchic social order comes in the way of women's' effective working as Panchayat leaders. When some women leaders become more assertive, the men folk abuses by calling them as brazen and shameless (Jain, 1996). Thirdly the lack of involvement of women in Panchayat Raj institutions has become another issue of the focus. It is observed that women Panchayat leaders consider their positions in Panchayats as ornamental in nature and they feel that maintaining family pride and culture is of paramount importance to them. Such women Panchayat leaders do not mingle with rural women folk and try to address their problems. They ritually attend the Panchayat meetings and fail to contribute to the process of governance (Banerjee, 1998). Hence, to analyze the extent of participation of women in panchayat administration, the present study was made in Gulbarga district.

Gulbarga district is located in North Karnataka and it is backward region consisting of total seven talukas. In Gulbarga district, of the total 3864 Gram Panchayat Members, 1671 are women, then of the total 155 Taluka Panchayat members, 87 are women and of the total 43 Zilla Panchayat Members, 23 are women as on 2010-11.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study is made:

- To look into the age and educational aspects of the women panchayat members;
- To find out the knowledge of women panchayat members in Panchayat administration; and
- To examine whether women have adequate awareness about the social welfare schemes on rural development and women empowerment.

Scope and Methodology:

The present study is based on survey of women members of Panchayats in Gulbarga district of Karnataka. Total 15 women Members of Zilla Panchayat, 26 Women Members of Taluka Panchayats and 259 women members of Gram Panchayats were surveyed to collect the primary data. Interview schedule was used to collect the primary data. The collected primary data is analyzed and discussed as under.

Analysis and Discussion:
The collected primary data is analyzed and discussed as under.

1. Age:
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	46	15.3
26-40	97	32.3
41-50	111	37.0
51 & Above	46	15.3
Total	300	100

Among all the respondents covered under the study, 111 (37.0%) are in the age group of 41 to 50 years followed by, 97 (32.3%) are in the age group of 26 to 40 years, 46 (15.3%) are in the age group of 18 to 25 years and the remaining 46 (15.3%) are of above 50 years of age 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	32	10.6
Lower/ Higher Primary	113	37.7
Intermediate	97	32.3
Any Other	58	19.3
Total	300	100

Among the total respondents covered under the study, 113 (37.7%) have completed lower or higher primary education followed by, 97 (32.3%) have completed intermediate education, 58 (19.3%) have completed other education and the remaining only 32 (10.6%) are illiterates. It is highlighted that the other education here refers to education higher than intermediate education including pre-university, under graduation, graduation and 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. Extent of Awareness on 73rd Constitutional Amendment on Panchayat Raj:
As discussed earlier, 73rd Constitutional Amendment facilitated equal participation of all the castes, genders and communities in the panchayat raj institutions. Consequently, now due to such reservation women are actively participating in the administration of villages through panchayats. To analyze the awareness of the respondents on the extent of awareness on 73rd Constitutional Amendment on Panchayat Raj, information was collected from the respondents and presented in the following table.

Table No. 3. Extent of Awareness on 73rd Constitutional Amendment on Panchayat Raj

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Fully Aware	59	19.6
Aware to a Moderate extent	120	40.0
Not Aware	59	19.6
Can't Say	62	20.6
Total	300	100

Among the total respondents, 120 (40.0%) of all the respondents are aware on the 73rd Constitutional Amendment to a moderate extent followed by, 62 (62.0%) have not expressed their opinions, 59 (19.6%) are fully aware about the constitutional amendment and the remaining 59 (19.6%) are not aware about the same respectively.

4. Extent of Awareness on Objectives of Panchayats:
Panchayats are newly introduced in 1993 and there are also many new entrants to panchayat politics. Hence, it is essential that these new leaders should aware about the objectives of panchayats. As such information on the extent of awareness on objectives of panchayats was collected and tabulated as under.

Table No. 4. Extent of Awareness on Objectives of Panchayats

Particulars	Total	
	Numb er of Respondents	%
Fully Aware	128	42.6
Aware to Mediate extent	113	37.6
Not Aware	35	11.7
Can't Say	24	8.0
Total	300	100

Of all the respondents covered under the study, 128 (42.6%) are fully aware on the objectives of panchayats, 113 (37.6%) are aware on the panchayat objectives to mediate extent, 35 (11.7%) are not aware about the objectives of panchayats and the remaining 24 (8.0%) are not expressed their opinions on the same. Surprisingly, a considerable number of respondents are not aware or even not expressed that they are aware about the objectives of panchayats.

5. Awareness on Functioning and Administration of Panchayats:
Like the awareness on the objectives of panchayats, there is also essential to know about the functioning and administration of panchayats at different levels. Hence, information was collected from the respondents on their awareness on functioning and administration of panchayats and presented in the following table.

Table No. 5. Awareness on Functioning and Administration of Panchayats

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Fully Aware	169	56.3
Aware to a Greater extent	93	31.0
Not Aware	17	5.6
Can't Say	21	7.0
Total	300	100

As stated by all the respondents covered under the study, 169 (56.3%) are fully aware on the functioning and administration of panchayats followed by, 93 (31.0%) are aware to a greater extent on the same, 17 (5.6%) are not aware on the same and the remaining 21 (7.0%) have not expressed their opinions on the same.

6. Need for Development in Villages:
Of course, majority of the respondents are satisfied in many of the aspects of development due to the introduction of panchayats. But, still there are few aspects, which need to be developed in their villages and information was collected from the respondents on such needs for development in their villages and tabulated as under.

Table No. 6. Need for Development in Villages

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Drinking Water	96	32.0
Road Facilities	54	18.0
Transportation	52	17.3
Education	83	27.6
Employment Generation	54	18.0
Women Empowerment	57	19.0
Self-employment	54	18.0
Empowerment of Weaker Sections	142	47.3
Electricity	36	12.0
Irrigation	70	23.3
Health	162	54.0
Rural Development	29	9.6
Any Other	08	2.6
None	23	7.6
Total	300	100

It is also highlighted from the above table that still the villages have to be developed in many aspects, as expressed by few of the respondents covered under the study. As stated by the respondents, on the developmental needs in their villages, 96 (32.0%) have stated that there is need for drinking water facilities, 54 (18.0%) have expressed that there is need for development of road facilities, 52 (17.3%) have stated that there is need for transportation facilities, 83 (27.6%) have responded that there is need for development in education, 54 (18.0%) have expressed that there is need for employment generation, 57 (19.0%) have expressed that there is need for women empowerment, 54 (18.0%) have expressed that there is need for self-employment, 142 (47.3%) have stated that there is need for empowerment of weaker sections, only 36 (12.0%) have stated that there is need for electricity facilities, 162 (54.0%) have stated that there is need for health facilities, 29 (9.6%) have responded that there is need for rural development, 08 (2.6%) have stated need for other facilities and only 23 (7.6%) of the respondents have stated that there are no needs for development of their villages.

7. Measures to Increase Income of Panchayats:
To make the developmental expenses, there is need for the panchayats to increase revenue on their own in the villages. Hence, it was asked to the respondents, to suggest the measures to increase income of panchayats and the collected information is tabulated as under.

Table No. 7. Measures to Increase Income of Panchayats

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Increase in Tax Revenues	41	13.6
Need for More Plans from Govt	158	52.6
Levying of New Taxes	71	23.7
Any Other	30	10.0
Total	300	100

Of the total respondents covered under the study, 158 (52.6%) have stated that there is need for more schemes and plans from the government followed by, 71 (23.7%) have expressed that there is need to levy new taxes, 41 (13.6%) have expressed that there is need to increase tax revenues and the remaining 30 (10.0%) have stated that there are other means to increase revenue of panchayats respectively.

8. Panchayats Bring Overall Social Development:
It was asked to the respondents that whether the panchayats at all the three levels that is, Zilla Panchayats, Taluka Panchayats and Gram Panchayats will bring overall social development and the collected information is tabulated as under.

Table No. 8. Panchayats Bring Overall Social Development

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Yes	173	57.6
No	92	30.6
Not Sure	35	11.6
Total	300	100

Among all the respondents covered under the study, 173 (57.6%) have agreed that the panchayats will bring overall social development, 92 (30.6%) have not agreed to the same and the remaining 35 (11.6%) are not sure about the same.

9. Implementation of Rural Development and Employment Programmes by Panchayats:
The information was collected from the respondents on whether the rural development programmes and employment schemes are successfully implemented by the panchayats and tabulated as under.

Table No. 9. Implementation of Rural Development and Employment Programmes by Panchayats

Particulars	Scheduled Caste		Scheduled Tribe		Other Backward Caste		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Very Much	32	32.0	41	41.0	29	29.0	102	34.0
To a Moderate extent	43	43.0	35	35.0	45	45.0	123	41.0
Not at All	18	18.0	18	18.0	23	23.0	59	19.6
Don't Know/ Can't Say	07	7.0	06	6.0	03	3.0	16	5.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	300	100

Of all the respondents covered under the study, 102 (34.0%) have stated that the rural development and employment programmes are implemented very much, 123 (41.0%) have expressed that these programmes are implemented to a moderate extent, 59 (19.6%) have stated that these programmes are not implemented and 16 (5.3%) have not expressed their views on the same.

10. Performance of Panchayats:
It was asked to the respondents to rate the performance of panchayats at different levels, such as Zilla Panchayats, Taluka Panchayats and Gram Panchayats. The collected information is presented in the following table.

Table No. 10. Performance of Panchayats

Particulars	Total	
	Number of Respondents	%
Good	47	15.6
Satisfactory	96	32.0
Not Satisfactory	33	11.0
Can't Say	124	41.3
Total	300	100

Of all the respondents covered under the study, 47 (15.6%) have rated the performance of panchayats as good, 96 (32.0%) have rated the performance of panchayats as satisfactory, 33 (11.0%) have rated the performance of panchayats as not satisfactory and 124 (41.3%) have not expressed their views on the same.

Concluding Remarks:

It is observed from the above discussions that, majority of the respondents are well versed with the aims and objectives of Panchayats. But it is highlighted that still the women panchayat members must get awareness on the different social welfare schemes of the Government pertaining to women empowerment, rural development and employment guarantee schemes. Further, it is suggested to the Government to decentralize the administration and more power should be given to panchayats with reference to revenue generation and spending local financial resources for the local development.

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