



# A STUDY OF ELECTED WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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## ABASTACT

The article is the result of empirical study made on to explore the role of Community Based Organisations in promoting elected women's participation in the Grama Panchayats. The study compares the participation of women representatives between Bijapur and Bagalakot district with a sample of 248. It reveals that CBOs play a vital role in the life of one's public life. It has provided a platform for the women to explore her strengths and convert her weaknesses into strengths. The CBOs can mould the women members and encourage them to participate in public life.

**KEY WORDS:** Grama Panchayat, Politics, Women, Participation, Representation.

## INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in the nation's politics in general, and the Panchayati Raj in particular, was very low until the enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act. The Act is a landmark in the history of Panchayati Raj and is a boon for women. After the enactment of the Act, a number of rural women, willingly or unwillingly, entered local politics mainly due to the reservation of seats for women. In the initial years, women's active participation was very minimal, due to the limitations of being a woman in a patriarchal society. The women who did not have the freedom to raise their voice in the family and community could not very well have the courage to speak in front of their male colleagues. Surat Singh (2004), in a study observed that the involvement of elected women leaders in the decision making process is insignificant, both in the Panchayats and in the households. It is mentioned that women have little say in even the household activities and have a negligible involvement in the decision-making process in the Panchayats on account of their low socio-economic status. Ours is the largest democracy in the world where women constitute almost half of the population.

Though our Constitution guarantees her equality with men, only a few women are able to participate in politics. Especially in local bodies, their participation is very low (Sushma and Pranavi, 2009). A few women in rural areas have contested for the Grama Panchayat election due to their enrolment in CBOs like Self Help Groups, Mahila Mandals, School Development and Management Committee (SDMC), and Temple/Church committees. These CBOs provided a platform for the women and foster them in many ways.

## **WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICS**

a critical analysis Local bodies are a level of government where women can enter the political life with relative ease as the cost of election campaigns are relatively low and issues at the local level tend to motivate women to enter politics. Moreover, local governments are good training grounds for women politicians who want to attain the higher levels of office in the government (Sushma and Pranavi, 2009). Though the Constitution of India guarantees the right of equality to Indian women, there still exists a hiatus between the constitutional guarantees and the realities of the women's lives. Reservation for women at local government level is supported on the grounds that it will provide an opportunity for the women's political participation.

However, it is found that various factors such as lack of political party nomination, lack of family support, and other limitations act as deterrents to their participation in the political processes. In spite of these hindrances, it has been observed that the overall performance of the elected women representatives at the local government level is better than their male counterparts (PRIA. 2002).

Most of the women face tremendous opposition from their family, community, and male political leaders if they decide to enter electoral politics or public life. The present political leadership, in spite of its populist rhetoric, wants to keep women out of the political arena. The Indian women's low educational level, inferior social status, and lack of autonomy are reflected in their low participation in politics. Increasing criminalization, corruption, and compromises required to sustain one's political career also deter women from entering mainstream politics (Usha Takkar and Rohini Gawankar, 2004).

In many instances women are the proverbial rubber stamp because they do not know what to do. George Mathew (2003:159) rightly observed that a new class of "sarpanch patis" emerged where the husbands of the women sarpanchs managed the affairs of the Panchayat, while the woman acted as only rubber stamps.

In spite of all these lacunae, a number of women started entering local politics and slowly became aware of their rights and duties due to various motivating factors like regular training, membership of SHGs, and support of family members and community. Training is one of the most effective tools in transforming the women representatives to become assertive.

## COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

Community organization method is one of the primary methods of social work that extends service to the community. Community organization method had got recognition after the publication of the Lance Committee report in 1969. Social work practitioners recognized the magnitude of this method for the integrated development of the society. Forming community based organizations or people's organizations like Self Help Groups, youth groups, village forest committees, etc., are some of the major activities that come under the purview of this method. Organizing people into groups has wide-ranging advantages to the community in specific, and the society in general. Once the people are organized, they can be made actively aware as regard to their rights, contributions, responsibilities, and so on. It provides a platform to act upon and gives strength to fight against exploitation and injustice.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) like Self Help Groups and village forest committees are mostly managed by NGOs or government bodies, but the membership is purely voluntary. The formation and promotion of CBOs provided a platform for the marginalized sections of the society like women, SCs, and STs. There are many cases of the emergence of women leadership, due to their participation either in SHG, Mahila Mandal or membership in the School Development and Management Committees.

CBOs are instruments in promoting rural development in general, and women empowerment in particular. Women's participation in SHGs gave them an impetus, especially the rural women, to think beyond household activities and to take part in public affairs like the Grama Panchayat. According to Minogue (2001), these organizations are playing a dominant role in policy formulation and implementation as against the power of states and bureaucracy which is shrinking and declining due to the globalisation process.

CBOs are an important platform for women empowerment, if formed and monitored in the right manner. People, through these organizations, can change policies and effect planning for the empowerment of the oppressed sections of society. This particular study focuses to examine the efforts of the CBOs in facilitating women participation in Panchayats.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study on the role of CBOs in promoting women's participation in Grama Panchayats in the selected districts of Karnataka is distinctive in nature. It will bring out an in-depth understanding on the role of CBOs in women's political empowerment in Karnataka. This will help the policy makers, planners, social workers, and development organizations working on the Panchayat Raj Institutions and rural development, to assess the effectiveness of the CBOs in the integrated development.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the profile of the respondents.
- To assess the CBO's motivation towards encouraging the women to participate in local politics.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The study is an attempt to explore the Role of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in Promoting Elected Women's Participation in the Grama Panchayat with reference to selected districts of Karnataka with holistic perspectives.

To satisfy the objectives of the study, a descriptive research design was adopted.

## UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY

The universe of the study consisted of 141 elected women members of selected Grama Panchayats of two taluks of Bagalako district and 147 elected women member of selected Grama Panchayats of two taluks of Bijapur district.

## SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The researcher adopted a multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure by selecting 46 Grama Panchayats of two taluks of Bagalkot district and 50 Grama Panchayats of two taluks of Bijapur district for the study. In each Panchayat, three members were selected and the total sample collected in Bagalakot district is 141 and Bijapur district is 147.

## Data analysis and interpretation

**Table No. 1: Age of the respondents**

Age of the respondents	Bijapur district Number of respondents (%)	Bagalkot district Number of respondents (%)
21-25	07(04.8)	03 (02.1)
26-30	31(21.1)	13 (09.2)
31-35	37(25.2)	19 (13.5)
36-40	22(15.0)	28 (19.9)
41-45	11(07.5)	28 (19.9)
46-50	17(11.6)	20 (14.2)
51-55	12(08.2)	15 (10.6)
56-60	04(02.7)	14 (09.9)
61 -65	06(04.1)	01 (00.7)
Total	147(100)	141 (100)
Mean age	38.23	42.18
SD	10.31	18.79

The table explores the data on the age of the respondents belonging to Bijapur and Bagalkot districts. The age of the respondents was classified as ranging from 21 years to 65 years with a class interval of five. With regard to Bijapur district, majority 1/4 of the respondents fell in the age category of 21 to 30 years, whereas, in Bagalkot district 11.3% of the respondents belonged to the age category of 21 to 30 years. In Bijapur district, it was tilted in favour of the younger age group, whereas in Bagalkot district more number of women was represented from the middle age group. Based on the information given in the table, it was calculated that the mean age of the Bijapur district respondents is 38.23 (SD 10.31) and the mean age of the Bagalkot district respondents is 42.18 (SD 18.79).

**Table No. 2(A): Level of education cross tabulated with caste category of the respondents in Bijapur district**

Education of the respondents	Caste of the respondents								Total
	SC	ST	Cat.1	Cat.2A	Cat.2B	Cat.-3A	Cat.-3B	General	
Illiterate	15 (10.2)	13 (8.8)	12 (8.1)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	02 (1.4)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	44 (29.9)
Neo-literate	07 (4.8)	02 (1.4)	03 (2.0)	02 (1.4)	00 (0)	00 (0)	00	02 (1.4)	16 (11.0)
Pre-primary	06 (4.0)	04 (2.7)	04 (2.7)	02 (1.4)	04 (2.7)	02 (1.4)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	23 (15.6)
Primary	08 (5.5)	03 (2.0)	04 (2.7)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	00 (0)	04 (2.7)	03 (2.0)	04 (2.7)
High School	15 (10.2)	13 (8.8)	12 (8.1)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	02 (1.4)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	44 (29.9)
PUC	07 (4.8)	02 (1.4)	03 (2.0)	02 (1.4)	00 (0)	00 (0)	00	02 (1.4)	16 (11.0)
Degree	04 (2.7)	02 (1.4)	00 (0)	00 (0)	00 (0)	00 (0)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	07 (4.8)
Total	56 (38.1)	28 (19.0)	25 (16.9)	11 (7.6)	04 (2.7)	04 (2.8)	08 (5.4)	11 (7.5)	147 (100)

**Table No. 2 (B): Level of education cross tabulated with caste category of the Respondents in Bagalkot District**

Education of the respondents	Caste of the respondents								Total
	SC	ST	Cat.1	Cat.2A	Cat.2B	Cat.-3A	Cat.-3B	General	
Illiterate	15 (10.2)	13 (8.8)	12 (8.1)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	02 (1.4)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	44 (29.9)
Neo-literate	07 (4.8)	02 (1.4)	03 (2.0)	02 (1.4)	00 (0)	00 (0)	00	02 (1.4)	16 (11.0)
Pre-primary	04 (2.7)	02 (1.4)	00 (0)	00 (0)	00 (0)	00 (0)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	07 (4.8)
Primary	15 (10.2)	13 (8.8)	12 (8.1)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	02 (1.4)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	44 (29.9)
High School	07 (4.8)	02 (1.4)	03 (2.0)	02 (1.4)	00 (0)	00 (0)	00	02 (1.4)	16 (11.0)
PUC	06 (4.0)	04 (2.7)	04 (2.7)	02 (1.4)	04 (2.7)	02 (1.4)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	23 (15.6)
Degree	06 (4.0)	04 (2.7)	04 (2.7)	02 (1.4)	04 (2.7)	02 (1.4)	01 (0.7)	00 (0)	23 (15.6)
Total	56 (38.1)	28 (19.0)	25 (16.9)	11 (7.6)	04 (2.7)	04 (2.8)	08 (5.4)	11 (7.5)	145 (100)

Table 2(A) and Table 2 (B) cross tabulate the education and caste category of the respondents of Bijapur and Bagalkot districts. It is clear from Table 2(A) that majority of the women members in Bijapur district represented the Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribe (57.1%) and Category-I (16.9 %). In the three categories, 27.1% are Illiterates. The general category representation was not much when compared to the SC, ST, and Category-I. There are 9.3% respondents under the general category, who are educated.

With regard to Bagalkot district, Table 2(B) reveals that majority (37.5%) of the women members represent Cat.-2A. There appears to be an equal distribution of the number of elected women members around various caste categories, except Category2B and Category-3B as shown in Table 2(B). Under Cat.-2A, only



two women members are Illiterate, while the majority had primary and high school education. Under the general category, none of the woman members are Illiterate.

When the education and caste category of both the districts is compared, it is found that SC, ST, and Cat.-I representation is higher in Bijapur district. The percentage of Illiterate SC, ST, and Cat.-I is 27.1% in Bijapur district and 17.0% in Bagalkot district. It was noted that Illiterate women members were more in Bijapur as compared to Bagalkot district. It is important to mention that none of the SC, ST, and Cat.-I women members had reached graduation level in Bagalkot district.

CBO's motivation in encouraging the women to participate in local politics

**Table No. 3: CBOs membership before becoming Grama Panchyat members**

Membership	Bijapur district No. of Respondents (%)			Bagalkot district No. of Respondents (%)		
	YES	NO	Total	YES	NO	Total
Membership	100 (68.0)	47 (32.0)	147 (100)	54 (38.3)	87 (61.7)	141 (100)
Mahila Mandal membership	04 (02.7)	143 (97.3)	147 (100)	23 (16.3)	118 (83.7)	141 (100)
Temple/Church Committee membership	00 (0)	147 (100)	147 (100)	10 (07.1)	131 (92.9)	141 (100)
SDMC membership	05 (3.4)	142 (96.6)	147 (100)	08 (5.7)	133 (94.3)	141 (100)

Table 3 indicates membership in other organizations prior to the Grama Panchayat membership. This helps in understanding the source of community based organisations (CBO) motivation to become a Panchayat member. It is clear from the field data that majority of the women members' had membership in Self Help Groups before becoming a member of the Panchayat.

The percentage was high (68%) in Bijapur district than in Bagalkot district (38.3%). Self Help Groups had become an effective platform for bringing the women into the main stream. While correlating both the districts, i.e., Bijapur and Bagalkot, the results show that a majority of the women members of Bijapur district had membership in SHGs as compared to Bagalkot district.

It is found that in Bagalkot district all the members had membership in one or the other organizations as specified in Table 3.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the 73rd Panchayati Raj Act, 1993 has given a lot of provision to women to participate in the local self government, including caste based reservation. But this is just a start to enter into politics. Without knowledge of societal activities, women cannot participate in public life. CBOs play a vital role in the life of one's public life. It has provided a platform for the women to explore her strengths and convert her weaknesses into strengths. The CBOs can mould the women members and encourage them to participate in public life. In Bagalkot district, all members are identified through CBOs. They were members of one or the other CBOs, before becoming a member of the Grama Panchayat. CBOs are working to change the mindset of the people, besides encouraging them to take up major responsibilities.

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