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## LOCAL-SELFGOVERNANCE AND GENDER EQUITY: A STUDY OF SELECTED PANCHAYATS IN UDUPI TALUK, UDUPI DISTRICT, KARNATAKA

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### Abstract:

Women's participation in power and progress of the country is one of the issues debated at various levels ever since the adoption of our constitution. The Union and State Government have taken several measures to bring in women force into the main stream. Karnataka was the first state in the country to implement the Panchayat Raj Act which mandated 25% reservation for women in 1983. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments have provided for 33.33% reservation for women in Local Governments. Now, the Union Government has approved scaling up the reservation for women from 33.33% to 50% in all tiers of Panchayat Raj system. It is hoped that this will empower women. But the question we need to ask is whether it has been able to change gender equations. Gender equity identifies and accepts the equal distribution of liberty, status, dignity, opportunities and authority between men and women in as its prime values. It is not enough if these values are only legally guaranteed and rest only in the law books and constitution, but are never actually practiced.

Women of India today are faced with new situations, trapped by new problems and encountered with many challenges in Panchayat Raj Institutions. Despite governmental concern and official attention to these issues of women and development, a large proportion of women living in the country both, in the rural and urban areas, continue to experience and suffer from acute inequalities, deprivation, exploitation and violence. Official and unofficial data collected and various indicators applied to assess the position of women, reveal that only a small number of women have been benefited from these measures. This paper tries to analyze gender equity in Panchayat Raj institution and the challenges faced by women while participating in good governance.

**Key words:** Gender Equity, government provisions, women in politics, challenges faced by women in politics and suggestions.

**Introduction:** Women constitute half of the population. Issue of political empowerment of women has attracted global attention. The United Nations (UN) adopted Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952. UN has organized four World Conferences on Women. Fourth was held in Beijing in 1995 and it declared that women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. It also affirmed that women should have at least a 30% share of decision making positions.<sup>1</sup> However, participation of women, in general, in politics and public life in India has been abysmally low. There is a huge gap between men and women in political activities beyond voting. Participation of women at the higher level is lower in comparison to and political activities of the country. However, to make use of potential of women and also to empower them, 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act 1992 (73<sup>rd</sup> CAA) for the first time provided one-third reservations for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) and thus ushered a new era of women's participation in the local governance in India. However,

journey of political empowerment of women in Panchayats has evolved gradually. Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report (1959) had suggested only that the 20-member Panchayat Samiti should co-opt or nominate two women interested in work among women and children.

### **Objectives**

1. To understand government's provision to enhance gender equity
2. To evaluate the impact of government's provision in promoting gender equity in politics
3. To analyze women's participation in Panchayat Raj Institution
4. To suggest measures for gender equity in Panchayat Raj institution

### **Methodology:**

This study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through questionnaires and interview of elected representatives of panchayats. Secondary data was collected through books, journals, research articles, Newspapers, documents and websites.

### **Gender Equity:**

Gender as a social category shapes and establishes one's life chances in society and development. The term gender refers to a set of roles, attributes behaviors expected from women and men by their societies. Gender represents the ways in which the socially constructed categories of women and men relate over a wide range of social interactions within family, community as well as in all economic and political relations in a given society. Genders are institutionally constructed. It creates and reproduces systemic differences in the positioning of women and men in the society. Rules, norms and practices of gender have a strong ideological content as it reflects the normative or prescriptive version of female and male roles. Genders are constituted in terms of relations of power and dominance; therefore, the nature of gender is one of opposition and conflict and often takes the form of male dominance and female subordination. Gender is a salient factor in participation and representation in public decision-making. Both women and men need to participate and be active in decision-making and policy formulation. The nation-states, word over, guarantee all its citizens the right to political equality.

Gender Equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. Gender equity in which women have enhanced socio-cultural, economic and political opportunities, enabling them to take crucial decisions which affect them and their families. Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. The criteria of equality between sexes provides women the right to participate and represent in formal political decision-making without any discrimination. But do women really participate equally with men in policy and decision-making bodies? Therefore, Women remain vastly underrepresented in national and local government.

### **Governments provision for Gender Equity:**

Since Independence, Various initiatives have been undertaken for improving the socio-economic conditions and empowering women in India. In this context, the constitution guarantees socio-economic and political equality and the provision of equal rights for availing different opportunities to all social groups of population, especially women. Increasing emphasis has also been placed on initiating variety of development schemes and welfare programmes for maximizing the participation of women in different activities. Various legal reforms and resolutions in the form of social Acts have also been introduced to improve the social status and empowerment of women.

### 1. Constitutional Provisions:

The Indian constitution includes many provisions to protect rights of women. They are the Preamble, the Fundamental Rights, the Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties of women in India

### 2. Legal Provisions:

Parliament and respective state legislatures in India have enacted relevant laws for the promotion of welfare and empowerment of women from time to time. These laws have also tried to remove the obstacles in the path of women's development and progress.

### 3. Special Initiatives for Women:

(i) National Commission for Women:

(ii) Reservation for Women in Local Self -Governance

(iii) The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000)

(iv) National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001:

Thus it is clear that on legal grounds men and women have equality in India. The State in India has enacted laws, made policies from time to time for all round development of women's personality and to provide them equal opportunity, dignity and human rights in social, economic and political spheres.

### Women in Local Governance:

This study relates to Panchayat Raj Institutions with particular reference to the 'Gender equity in Gram Panchayats' in rural local self-government. Though in Karnataka the Panchayat Raj System is based on three tier system, this study is focused on the basic tier i.e., Gram Panchayat. This is done with a view to explain the basic units of Local Government in Karnataka. Here there is scope for people's participation and particularly for women's representation. It is very difficult to study in detail the whole system of Panchayat Raj, as the subject covers vast area. In this study an attempt is made to analyse the empowerment of women representatives in Gram Panchayat – A case study of thirty-two Gram Panchayats in Udupi district. The selection of respondents was through random sampling.

In this light, the present study has attempted to examine various issues related to the implementation pattern of reservation policy and its awareness among women, the nature of participation of women members in different meetings, activities and various development programmes of Gram Panchayats, social reform and welfare activities.

### Socio-Economic Background of Women Members:

While studying the socio-economic background of the respondents age, education, caste, occupation etc. are considered as the important factors. 78 percent of the women contesting for Panchayat election belong to middle class. 20 percent of them are from poor and labour class, they contest for elections only for reservations and they are compelled by their menfolk for political participation. Only two percent of them belong to upper class. They contest by virtue of their contact and political power.

### Political Profile of Respondents:

Political Participation plays a significant role in survival of an ongoing process to democratic decentralization. It is crucial for the development of women. Political profile Respondents are:

**Table 1: Awareness of women on 73rd Amendment Act**

Awareness of 73rd amendment	number	Percentage
Very well aware	69	27.1
Just aware	144	56.5
Ignorant of it	42	16.4
Total	255	100

In this table, it is concluded that most of the respondents knew that reservation of seats has been made for women as per the Amendment Act. As per data 27.1 percent of the respondents are very well aware of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment Act of Indian constitution. 56.5 percent of them are just aware of the amendment. Remaining 16.4 percent are ignorant of the constitutional amendment.

**Table 2: Participation of women in politics**

Nature of Participation	Number	Percentage
Always	36	14.1
Very often	93	36.5
Often	69	27.1
Less Often	39	15.3
Not at all	18	7
Total	255	100

This table shows that 14.1 percent of the respondents said that they are active in politics, 36.5 of the respondents very often participate in Panchayat elections. 27.1 percent of the women are often participating in politics, 15.3 percent of the respondents participate less often in politics, whereas seven percent of them do not participate in politics at all. It shows that majority of the women participate very often, and it is because of the awareness of panchayats and because of the menfolk.

**Table 3: Frequency of women Visiting the Panchayats**

Visit the ward	Number	Percent
Always	78	30.6
Very frequently	90	35.3
Frequently	54	21.3
Less frequently	27	10.6
Never	06	2.2
Total	255	100

This table can be concluded that majority of the respondents have the awareness of their roles and responsibilities in panchayats. As per data 30.6 percent of the women visit panchayats regularly, 35.3 percent of them visit very frequently, meanwhile 21.3 percent of them visit frequently, 10.6 percent of the women visit Panchayats visit less frequently whereas 2.2 percent of them never visit panchayats for lack of awareness.

#### **Problems and Challenges:**

Problems and Challenges faced by women in politics in India, particularly at the local levels are manifold. Specific Problems of women are:

**Table 4: Problems Faced by Elected Women Representatives.**

Specific Problem	Number	Percentage
Gender discrimination	66	25.9
Family-life and Work-life balancing	138	54.1
Male members dominant attitude	48	18.8
Lack of previous political experience	93	36.5
Lack of knowledge of the Panchayat act and other Govt. circulars sent from time to time.	180	70.6
Male dominated society	78	30.6
Lack of awareness, inferiority complex and selfconfidence	51	20

Note: Percentage is not equal to 100 due to multiple choices

This table No. 4 shows that over whelming majority of the respondents argued that they face various problems in politics. Most of the women are involved in politics out of the compulsion from political parties and family members. They have not entered into politics out of personal traits. Reservation policy for women has set a positive trend. Therefore, reservation for women and reservation on the basis of caste should be continued. In most of the case maintaining a balance between their family life and political life is very challenging.

In fact, effectiveness of Women's political presence and participation depends not solely on their competence, capability and merit, but also on the local configuration of power and problems like poverty, illiteracy, health, lack of economic resources, negative social and legal environments, family and household pressures and varies across class, caste and region in India. The cumulative effect of all these has been that women still tend to lack the required opportunities, skills and self-confidence needed to function effectively in the public sphere.

Thus participation in the public domain through reservation, it is hoped, will empower women. But the question we need to ask is whether reservation for women in a system of party policies has empowered women and whether it has been able to change gender equations.

### **Findings and Suggestions and Conclusion:**

Fundamentally India is a male dominant society where all privileges were male oriented. Women were denied basic rights and discrimination is obvious in every walk of life. Indian women, by and large, educationally backward, socially and economically dependent, she was assured, the unique pride of the mother hood of man, and unparalleled influence in the shaping of the society, has had lived through suppression, exploration and ill treatment at the hands of man.

The presence of women in local governance has increased substantially after the 73rd and 74th amendment. But more increase in numbers is not reflective of women's needs receiving adequate attention in local governance. Thus participation in the public domain through reservation, it is hoped, will empower women. But the question we need to ask is whether reservation for women in a system of party policies has empowered women and whether it has been able to change gender equations. Therefore, it is the moral obligation of all including the Media, Educational Institutions, NGO, Governmental Machineries, Feminists, Political and Socio - Religious leaders to fight injustice and uphold Gender equity.

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**Tables**

1. Table 1: Awareness of 73rd amendmentAct
2. Table 2: Participation in politics
3. Table 3 : Visit the Panchayat
4. Table 4: problems faced by women elected representatives

