



# Gender Equity and Political Participation: A study of Local Self Government

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## Abstract:

This study is to bring out the achievements and failures of important initiatives in the direction of women empowerment since 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution with reference to Udupi district of Karnataka. Udupi district, among the 30 districts of Karnataka, is considered socio-economically a progressive region in terms of human development indices. When compared to other parts of the country, women from Udupi district have shown active participation in all areas of political, social and economic life. In this context, the present study intends to find out the efficacy of women empowerment measures adopted by the Government and the constraints to effective political participation of women.

**Key words:** Gender equity, political participation, empowerment of women, constraints, findings and suggestions.

## Introduction:

Udupi district has made significant contributions to national development, in its two decades of existence, not much has been done with respect to systematic studies of above mentioned issues. It is imperative to make an in-depth analysis of gender equity, political participation and empowerment of women and the constraints there in. Such an understanding of the vital issues and the consequent recommendations would undoubtedly help to strengthen the Panchayat Raj system and effective implementation of women empowerment programs.

## Objectives of the study:

1. To evaluate the measures implemented by the govt.

2. To analyses the measures adopted by the government and political participation of women.
3. To bring out the socio-economic constraints to effective participation of women in politics.
4. Findings and suggestions

### **Methodology:**

The present study is based on information collected through field work, secondary data and relevant policies of the government. Opinions of scholars have been used to provide an ideological structure to the research work. The primary data is collected through interviews based on questionnaire of elected representatives of Gram Panchayats, Taluk Panchayats and Zilla Panchayat of Udupi district and also through group discussions.

### **Political Participation and Empowerment:**

To understand the socio-economic background of elected women representative's indicators like caste, religion, education, age, family back ground and employment have been used. Indicators like political awareness, interest in political activities, political participation, faith in politics, political contacts, protest against social evils, utilization of schemes and ability to face challenges have been used to understand political participation and empowerment prospects of women representatives.

Majority of the studies in this area reveal that although reservation for women had provided greater opportunities to them in political participation and decision making, yet due to socio-economic constraints, their active participation remained elusive. This is evident from the various indicators of the status of women and gender discrimination like education, distribution of unproductive work of women, women in public domain, decision making, political representation, gender discrimination in development and the like. Since the present study of women participation in politics and gender discrimination is confined only to Udupi district, it is only a study within limited framework and is not comprehensive.

The women representatives are more concerned about expressing their problems and are not willing to point out how political representation facilitated their empowerment. The women representatives did not attend the meetings with investigator although the date and time of meetings had been intimated to them in advance. Very often, the questions had been answered by their husband, in-laws or relatives. They were hesitant to answer questions in the presence of male members of the family.

## **Findings of the study:**

Several measures have been implemented in the country for women empowerment. Apart from gender related constitutional rights and legislative measures. An evaluation of all these Constitutional measures with respect reveals that in Udupi district 90% of women have not effectively made use of their rights and benefitted from the programs in spite of having awareness. Although state legislations resulted in more women getting elected to local bodies, women with higher educational qualifications have not shown much interest in contesting for elections. In spite of all these, reservation based constitutional measures have provided women, opportunities to participate and progress in politics.

The study throws light on the major impediments to the success of women representatives like age old cultural framework, traditional view that women should not visit the wards alone, the behavior of neighbors and family members and the challenges of balancing their family life and political responsibilities. In Panchayat meetings the presentations made by women on important issues are completely neglected and not supported by male members and this has made the future of lady representatives bleak.

An environment should be created with equal opportunities for political participation of women so that they can function without fear. Local bodies should be strengthened to function constructively. Creation of an environment in which women representatives can use their constitutionally granted power without any interference, can strengthen Panchayat Raj System and ensure better participation of women in politics and their empowerment.

## **Conclusion:**

India is a country with democratic representation. 50% of the population is female but their representation in centre and state legislatures is less than 10%. The suspicion that women have lesser winning chance and if elected would in danger the male dominated system had been responsible for this state of affairs. But the political parties did not hesitate to provide 50% reservation for women in local bodies. They knew that reservation for women in weak organization would not come in the way of male dominated system. For effective political participation of women, local bodies should have proper financial administration and administrative and institutional decentralization and these organizations should be ably and effectively structured to function in pro-people manner. The study finds that a quantitative increase in women participation in decision

making leads to qualitative change in their participation and by providing opportunities for this empowerment with possibility of creating a healthy system.

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