

PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND RURAL WOMEN IN MYSORE DISTRICT, KARNATAKA

ASHOK KUMAR H¹ & H. M. MOHAN KUMARI²

¹Guest Faculty, Institute of Development Studies, University of Mysore, Manasagangothri, Mysore, Karnataka, India

²Independent Researcher, Mysore, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

The paper presents the structure and functions of Panchayati raj Institutions. It also highlights the social composition of elected members and their participation in the decision making process in PRIs. Liberal Democracy is one of the basic features of the Indian Constitution. Mahatma Gandhi advocated Panchayat Raj even before Independence. The further of the Nation felt that as issues at the village levels must be addressed by the people only under self-governance and the State or the Central Governments only facilitate such self-rule through grants and by conferring autonomy on them. Panchayat system had earlier an informal setup to redress the local issues and problems of communities which were mainly social and economic in nature. They were popular institutions at micro levels and the main objective was to keep the local community in harmony and to encourage participation in the process of development.

In our visits to villages for conducting studies on participatory development, we have often come across rural women either indifferent to governmental programmes or plainly stating that the government is not much interest in them and they are being left alone to fend for themselves. Many occasions, the village women have shown lack of interest in discussing their issues with outsiders perceiving this to be not a useful exercise. Sheer neglect of their wretched conditions over long years perhaps explains such attitude. Often their responsibilities in household chores also prevent them from having much spare time and at other times the cultural barrier restricts them from interacting and participating with men folks and the outsiders. In our visits to villages for conducting studies on participatory development, we have often come across rural women either indifferent to governmental programmes or plainly stating that the government is not much interest in them and they are being left alone to fend for themselves.

One major problem in women's participation in panchayats is time. It has been generally observed from field survey that rural women in different and ages have, in general, little time in their daily schedules. Discuss with them their daily schedule of activities and make appropriate arrangements for releasing time for better participation in panchayats for their own decision making. Ask groups of rural women as to how their participation in panchayats can be made more effective, empower the women with different kinds of skill formation for income generation so that they are able to earn from such activities and become financially empowered. The importance of those women actively participates in the PRIs which are at present monopolized by men. This is not only for the sake of the democratic principle but also for their position to benefit from issues which directly affect them and for which there are no appropriate forums to seek redressed. This paper consist the objectives of to examine the relevance and significance of the panchayat Raj Act, to study the effective implementation of the programmes, to study the building up of an appropriate environment for effective implementation of the Act and to study the rural women participation of decision making process in Panchayat Raj Institutions in Mysore District.

KEYWORDS: Panchayat, Participation, Women, Reservation, Decision Making

INTRODUCTION

The paper presents the structure and functions of Panchayati raj Institutions. It also highlights the social composition of elected members and their participation in the decision making process in PRIs.

Liberal Democracy is one of the basic features of the Indian Constitution. Mahatma Gandhi advocated Panchayat Raj even before Independence. The further of the Nation felt that as issues at the village levels must be addressed by the people only under self-governance and the State or the Central Governments only facilitate such self-rule through grants and by conferring autonomy on them. Panchayat system had earlier an informal setup to redress the local issues and problems of communities which were mainly social and economic in nature. They were popular institutions at micro levels and the main objective was to keep the local community in harmony and to encourage participation in the process of development.

The Mysore Government in 1902 passed the Mysore Local Boards Act with a view to revitalizing the rural local Government. In 1918, the Mysore Government enacted the Mysore Local Boards and Village Panchayat Act making provisions for elected representatives at the district and taluk levels. After Independence, District and Taluk Boards were set up by the Mysore Government. The first independent legislation on Panchayat Raj Institutions was enacted by the Ramakrishna Hegde Government in 1983 and was brought into effect from April 1987 with the first elections to these local bodies in rural areas. This was amended during 1993.

The salient features of the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993 are:

- To establish a 3-tier Panchayat Raj System of elected bodies.
- Reservation of seats to SC/ST and 50% seats to women at all levels; reservation of seats to persons belonging to other backward classes.
- Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in favour of SC/ST, women and backward classes.
- Establishing Finance Commission and District Planning Committee.
- Constituting a State Panchayat Council.

The Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 reserved 33 percent seats for women in Panchayats. The Act is indeed a long awaited measure and would have come much earlier in the ladder of time. However, the Act by itself is not enough to work wonders and revolutionize circumstances overnight. The Act is definitely major move towards strengthening the position of rural women and requires many supportive forces like literacy, aspect for women, socio-economic and political milieu in which the Act separates. It needs to be asserted that in the absence of the Act and its supportive forces, considerable damage has been due to the principles of equality and social justice, in general, and to rural women, in particular, who are still earing the brunt of the damage with considerable patience. This is because, in most Panchayats, decision-making has secured, apart from other interest groups, the man folk and of the women. As a consequence, the toil and hardship of rural women continues unabated in harsh surroundings and their workload has increased considerably over the years about much benefit trickling down to them either from the panchayator from the state rural development programmes.

You might be listening to every day news reading newspaper or magazine you would have gone through incidents with women's in India while any other article on women's empowerment in India will take a look at our rich heritage and enlightened societies of the past where women were treated as equals, the concept of India itself evolved quite recently,

relations to the sum of its parts histories, but the truth is that in the modern India the women has always been a second grade citizen, no matter what its esteemed leaders. Women constitute almost 50 per cent of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned. They are not greater as equal to men in all the placed. In the western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender distributes and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as goddess and at other times merely as slave.

OBJECTIVES

- To examine the relevance and significance of the panchayat Raj Act.
- To study the effective implementation of the programmes.
- To study the building up of an appropriate environment for effective implementation of the Act.
- To study the rural women participation of decision making process in Panchayat Raj Institutions in Mysore District.

METHODOLOGY

This paper term of field level experiences collected from rural women representatives through interview schedule. The office of the women members in the villages' panchayats in each taluks is reserved for women candidates. The filed investigation was conducted by administering a detailed questionnaire and through personal interviews. The main tool of data collection was carefully prepared questionnaire for the various categories of sample respondents who included, women panchayat members of the sample villages and Male representatives of the sample villages.

The problem is that no one takes cognizance of women's hardships. It appears as if the village women as groups are taken for granted and not considered important for any local level decision-making. This is the case without any reservation for women in panchayat. The situation, however, need not be in favour of women even when seats are reserved of them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Neglect of Women

In our visits to villages for conducting studies on participatory development, we have often come across rural women either indifferent to governmental programmes or plainly stating that the government is not much interest in them and they are being left alone to fend for themselves. Many occasions, the village women have shown lack of interest in discussing their issues with outsiders perceiving this to be not a useful exercise. Sheer neglect of their wretched conditions over long years perhaps explains such attitude. Often their responsibilities in household chores also prevent them from having much spare time and at other times the cultural barrier restricts them from interacting and participating with men folks and the outsiders.

Problems of Women

It is necessary to appreciate that the problems of women are different from those of men and their perceptions to resolve the problems are also important to understand since they are the best judge of their own problems. If equipped with the decision making capacity through direct participation in panchayats, rural women can help to identify their problems,

priorities, preferences and use their wisdom, knowledge and beliefs and suggest ways and means to resolve them. How the perceptions, priorities and the preferences of rural men and women differ I hereby describe my experience in a tribal village, namely, DoddaHejjuru of Mysore District, where the villagers in groups of men and women made separate maps on the ground to show their village. While men folk drew their village map and laid emphasis on roads and outer connections the village, the map by the women group stressed on different footpaths in the village which they used and which were important for them for collection of water, fuel and fodder.

In the same village, when the two groups were asked to describe their perceptions of well-being, the men group was of the opinion that the ownership of land and employment opportunities were important indicators of the well-being while the women group showed that deprived social status and physical handicaps were more important considerations for well-being. One might argue that the male villagers were more practical than the village women but it is important to appreciate that, in this case, the women group were equally practical and more concerned about social issues which act as major constraints in the livelihood patterns and become a drag in day to day living. This also highlights their first hand experience on relevance of social issues to life which men folk seem to lack.

Women's Participation

The inhibiting factors for effective women participation in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) are many and diverse. Such factors will help us to suggest practical ways to overcome some of the limitations in evoking women's participation. It is not only important to pass laws and Acts of political issues; it is also equally important to find out in which such laws and Acts can be effectively implemented.

One major problem in women's participation in panchayats is time. It has been generally observed from field survey that rural women in different ages have, in general, little time in their daily schedules. Right from early morning to late night, the care of their children, sweep and clean their homes, long distances to fetch water, fodder and fuel wood, children to school, take care of livestock, gather and do all miscellaneous things which are important to keep all holding going. One needs to look for different options consulting women as to how best to match panchayats with some spare time of women.

Women may not be properly motivated and / or not able to undertake additional work to panchayat given their workload. Their workload may be such that can hardly find time to do justice to panchayat work. Training for motivating rural women can bring favourable results.

Majority of the rural women are illiterate which is a major constraint in their official operations in panchayats especially for technical matters and other matters like reading and writing and written endorsement and there are they trained for such activity which they are always considered the prerogative of men. It is not unnatural to elect problematic situations and even a certain sense of inferior complex existing among such women which can pose to their participation in panchayat activities amongst well experienced and veteran male colleagues in panchayats. It is not difficult to solve these problems through training programmes, training camps and study visits of the women belonging to different groups. It is important to equip them. All such programmes would better run in prior consultation with rural women seeking their inner involvement.

The cultural inhibitions accompanying women's participation often pose a major problem of men and women held in villages. It can constrain the women from expressing their frank opinion on any matters. For example, in many villages, different groups of women have privately expressed their difficulties placed in the evening due to their menfolk's drinking habits and making their life difficult under the influence of alcohol. Many women are under constant threat from increased

alcoholism of their men and do not want to discuss such matters openly due to many reasons, such and other matters are always remain hidden due to lack of courage of women of cultural inhibitions. Some time support from outside development agencies to protect with sensitive issues.

Male resistance is not possible to expect encouraging response from menfolk concerning women's rights and privileges especially in a male dominated society. The men are used to seeing and interacting with men in Panchayats and with new women members, the men have to accept them mentally and from the habit of interacting with them. The men should be able to appreciate that the women are able to understand village issues and are capable to doing much more in the socio-political life of villages, if properly motivated.

Caste is an important factor in socio-political intervention and more so for women. Women of lower castes may be and it extremely difficult to make the panchayat of mixed castes hears them and gives them their respect and importance as members of panchayats. Such women may lack confidence to express their opinions and many occasions they may be reluctant to attend meetings and not finding them useful. In all such cases better training of the panchayat members is necessary.

SUGGESTIONS

Discuss with them their daily schedule of activities and make appropriate arrangements for releasing time for better participation in panchayats for their own decision making. Ask groups of rural women as to how their participation in panchayats can be made more effective, empower the women with different kinds of skill formation for income generation so that they are able to earn from such activities and become financially empowered:

- Make arrangements for professional training of rural women so that they are able to handle their new role in panchayats.
- Arrange for study visits of rural women to different areas to perceive for themselves how other women have been empowered.
- Make arrangements for crèche and babysitting during the time of panchayats meetings and activities so that mothers of small children are able to participate.
- Motivate the men through NGO's and other agencies to accept the new role of women.
- To arrange the special training camps or workshop for panchayat members effective participate in decision making in panchayat.

CONCLUSIONS

At present, the women are not adequately empowered to play an effective role because of social, economic and political factors. However, it is possible to turn the tide in favour of the effective women participation in panchayats.

The development organizations is to motivate them apart from the facilities to be provided to them as suggested above. If so, this can be motivating force in itself. If they can see some benefits directly emerging from their participation, whether short or long run, then they may be more inclined and illustrate to them as to what they can actually gain from the constitutional empowerments. The importance of those women actively participates in the PRIs which are at present monopolized by men. This is not only for the sake of the democratic principle but also for their position to benefit from issues which directly affect them and for which there are no appropriate forums to seek redressed.

Their participation would also help in bettering the conditions of women and improving their status in society and hence add directly to the well being of households in particular.

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