



The Role Elected Women Representative's Performance with Special Reference to Panchayats in Madurai Districts

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment has become a popular theme among politics, academics, social workers, and policymakers in India. There has been a huge growth of women representatives in Panchayati raj institutions as a result of the allocation of reservations to women in local bodies. Women's empowerment, on the other side, is neither a simple process nor a result of institutional structures for women's representation. It would need a change in attitudes norms, a movement in people's attitude, and a lot more concerted effort on the part of women's groups, NGOs, authorities, and policymakers. Despite the fact that "women from different backgrounds, classes, and communities have implied the role of elected representatives of the people, patriarchal attitudes, a lack of political knowledge and administrative knowledge, and a slew of socio - structural limitations that women face in these institutions have proven to be significant impediments to them carrying out their duties."

The purpose of this article is to investigate the dynamism of the process by which "women's empowerment is realised by legislation or through women's engagement in the Panchayat Raj Institution". The study is based on first time evidence collected from Women Pradhan's in numerous blocks of Madurai districts (as per 2005 elections) and attempts to determine whether increased political participation of women does in fact equate to concrete women empowerment: "a state inside which women are able to carve a niche for themselves in the traditional male bastion and effectively find a forum for effective redress of women's gender-related issues, or whether growing political participation of women (more than 50%, as in Madurai District) is merely an eyewash, a necessary dexterous juggling of numbers with no female empowerment complications". Increased political participation of women in village panchayats (in Madurai District) does not have a significant impact on women's empowerment, as EWVPMs representatives "lack audible forums and fail to seek redress for women's issues, despite the fact that they are primarily (mostly) dummy surrogates subservient to the still vociferously dominant male class."

INTRODUCTION

"Empowerment of women" at the grassroots has been a major issue in India since the implementation of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution, with a variety of interpretations and explanations. "The reservation of third seats for women in all categories and at all levels of grassroot institutions has raised expectations among all sections of the community that this group of women would create a critical mass, leaving an indelible mark on the management of these institutions at the grassroot level."

"Women's empowerment is defined as the process of improving the economic, social, and political position of traditionally underprivileged women in society. It entails the creation of a society in which women can live without fear of oppression, exploitation, suspicion, discrimination, or the general sense of persecution that comes with being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated organisation. Women's empowerment proponents recommend empowering women through laws to ensure their participation in political decision-making".

According to **Deepa Narayan** "Empowerment as the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives". "The Constitutional Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974) observed that the rights guaranteed by the Constitution have contributed to the creation of an illusion of equality and power, which is frequently used as an argument to oppose protective and accelerative measures that would enable women to achieve their just and equal place in society." In "1994, the Indian government, acknowledging the recommendations of the committee on the status of women report (1974), noting the low participation of women in politics, focusing on the effective implementation of developmental and poverty alleviation schemes at the grassroot level, and drawing inspiration from Karnataka's experience (which provided reservation for women in the three tier Panchayat Raj system in 1983), brought the 73rd Constitution into force. With the introduction of a reservation or quota system in Panchayat Raj institutions, a significant step in the direction of legislative empowerment of women has been taken, and it is hoped that this, combined with women's empowerment through collective voicing and participation in the development stream, will go a long way toward achieving true empowerment".

But the crucial question is whether or has been helpful in including "women in decision-making, addressing concerns affecting women's communities, and integrating them into the mainstream of decision-making."

Has it been successful in resolving the fundamental challenges and problems that women face in society?

The current research is mostly focused on examining these difficulties. The research is based on a survey of 10 Areas in Madurai(districts)(Tamil Nadu), which included 80 women Village Pradhan's out of 420 total village panchayat or slightly more than half of the total gramme Pradhan as of the 2005 elections. The primary objectives of the study are:

To determine how successful women's participation has been in incorporating issues affecting the women's community into the mainstream of decision-making.

To identify the causes and factors that hinder women from participating in Panchayat Raj institutions.

To see how far women engagement in the party-political process has helped to alleviate the grave concerns and challenges that women face.

LITERATURE REVIEW

"The British believed that a "Vote of Women" would be premature in Indian society, thus they continued to enforce purdah and restrict women from attending school"(2005, Bhagat) "According to a variety of research findings, women are the most deprived gender in both rural and urban areas of the country" (Agarwal, 1994, 2001).

"Women and minorities in elected office should be included and empowered. The presence of women leaders, according to feminist theorists, promotes the articulation of multiple perspectives on political issues, where elected officials are not only 'standing as' women but also 'acting for' women as a group" (Phillips, 1995, 1998; Mansbridge, 1999). Article 14, which pays special emphasis to women, grants men and women equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic, and social arenas. "The state has the authority under Article 15(3) to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women. However, India was ranked 105 in the Gender Related Development Index (GDI) and 95 in the *Gender Empowerment Measure* in the "Human Development Report" (2001). (GEM)."

GEM assesses women's and men's relative power over economic resources in political and economic spheres of activity, based on "earned income, professional, technical, administrative, and managerial positions held, as well as access to political opportunities and participation in political decision-making." "Most parliaments around the world fail to reflect the proportion of women in the electorate based on these criteria. Despite changes in the home, family, school, and workplace reshaping women and men's lives over the post-war era, as well as the rise of more diversified countries, this tendency endures, even in established democracies" (Inglehart and Norris, 2003).

"Women's employment rates have consistently increased from 14.22 percent in 1971 to 19.6 percent now. While only 14.1% of women work in the organised sector, the majority find work in the informal, unorganised private sector, primarily in low-paying home tasks" (Thakur, 2010). With the enactment of "the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, India has reached a critical juncture in the assessment of the Panchayati Raj institution, which is India's version of rural local self-government. People's participation in the planning, decision-making, execution, and delivery system is envisioned".

The stark differences in the position of women in elected office are highlighted by regional variations. Women legislators fare best in the Nordic countries, where they account for 40% of lower house members. Women now make up half of all Cabinet Ministers in Sweden, and there are 149 female members of the Riksdag (43 percent), up from 10% in 1950. In the other Nordic countries, women have also made strides in politics (Bergqvist et al., 1999).

Gram Panchayats have well-defined roles. By adding the eleventh schedule to the constitution, "the 73rd Amendment Act of 1993 gave the Panchayati Raj Institution a responsibility list with 29 developmental issues. However, they were bifurcated for the aim of generating role singularity." As a result, there were 33 role elements in the final list. These items were used to evaluate the role performance of women Panchayat representatives.

METHODOLOGY

The study was undertaken in purposively selected Madurai district of state for case in data were collected. Out of 13 areas of Madurai district two blocks namely Thirumangalam and Melur were selected to represent the whole district. Ten villages were selected as randomly. A simple random sampling process was employed to choose respondents. From all of the gramme panchayats in these two blocks, 500 members were chosen at random. The information was gathered by conducting personal interviews with the respondents using a standardised interview schedule. The data was analysed using appropriate statistical tools.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Demographic profile of EWVPMs village Panchayat members:

The majority of EWVPMs village "Panchayat members" were under the age of 35 (72%), that the majority belonged to the "forward caste" (46 %), and that the majority of EWVPMs village Panchayat members had married (97%), with only 4% having windowed. The majority of the women members had a low level of education (up to 8th grade) and a high degree of family education (48%) (28%) representatively. They were primarily a nuclear family (64%). The majority, however, had 4 to 6 members (42%). Furthermore, the majority of these respondents worked in the home (88 %), owned less than 2.5 acres (60 percent). A total of 64% of respondents had an annual income of less than Rs.200000.

The majority of respondents (84%) did not belong to any social organisation. As evidenced by the statistics, the representatives appeared to have specific characteristics that were represented in the recipients to a lesser extent. The EWVPMs were younger in age, had at least some education, and many of their family members were well educated. They also had multiple sources of income and were thus well-off, and as a result, several of them

had gotten constructed. “Many respondents who were found to have active links with certain socio-political groups lived in mixed houses with affluence, as did many respondents who were found to have active links with certain socio-political organisations.”

Table 1
Demographic profile of EWVPMs village Panchayat members:

S. No	Variables	Particulars	F	P
1	Age	Below 35	360	72%
		35 - 50	140	28%
		Above 50	-	
2	Caste	SC	70	14%
		Backward	200	40%
		Forward	230	46%
3	Marital status	Married	480	96%
		Unmarried	0	-
		Widows	20	4%
		Divorcers	0	-
4	Personal Education Level	Illiterate	50	10%
		Up to 8 th standard	240	48%
		SSLC to HSS	70	14%
		Graduate	140	28%
5	Family type	Joint family	180	36%
		Nuclear family	320	64%
6	Family size	1 – 3 members	190	38%
		4-6 members	210	42%
		7-9 members	100	20%
7	Occupation	Coolie	20	4%
		House work	440	88%
		Farmers	40	8%
		Others	00	-
8	Annual income	Below 200000	320	64%
		300000- 400000	120	24%
		Morethan 500000	80	16%
9	Land Holding	Less than 2.5 acre	300	60%
		More than 2.5 acre	200	40%
10	Social memberships	No membership	420	84%
		Membership with one organization	80	16%
		Membership with more than one organization	00	-

The majority of Panchayat women, according to **Sarkar and Adhikari (1998)**, were from low socioeconomic classes. Given “the socio-economic and psychological backgrounds of the EWVPMs members, what level of preparedness did these representatives have to transform this basic institution into a key player in accelerating socio-economic development in the rural areas. While there may be numerous indicators to this effect, a knowledge of the sources of motivation for women to fight for Gram Panchayat rules and regulations, as well as awareness of developmental programmes, are two of the most important.”

Role performance constraints experienced by EWVPMs Village Panchayat members:

An investigation into the possible impediments became necessary in light of the elected members' poor performance in various designated roles of gramme Panchayats. With this in mind, “EWVPMs members of the gram Panchayats under study were interviewed to reveal various constraints in their role performance.” An attempt was also made to define the magnitude of the challenge that these limits posed in defeating the rationale underlying the Panchayati Raj System's creation. Table 2 lists the observations made throughout the investigation of these issues.

Table 2

Elected women village Panchayat members in role performance – With constraints

Statement	Highly Difficult		Moderate difficult		Low difficult	
	F	P	F	P	F	P
Lack of unity amongst the village people	43	86%	5	10%	2	4%
Lack of resource for development	45	90%	3	6%	2	4%
Lack of availability of persons	40	80%	7	14%	3	6%
Lack of fund	44	88%	3	6%	3	6%
Lack of knowledge	41	82%	6	12%	2	4%
Lack of Rural projects	25	50%	10	20%	15	30%
Conflict in the village	17	34%	25	50%	13	26%
Lack of Mukhiya development work	27	54%	15	30%	8	16%
Lack of cohesiveness	23	46%	18%	36%	9	18%
Caste Based collaboration	12	24%	27	54%	11	22%

Table 2 reveals a total of 10 significant restrictions that negatively impacted the role performance of EWVPMs members in gram Panchayat. Some members considered some of these limits to be extremely severe, while others considered them to be somewhat problematic or minor. “Lack of resources for development works (90%), lack of funds on time for carrying out the work of the programme/projects (88%), lack of knowledge of the members about developmental projects (82%), lack of availability of persons well versed in rural projects (80%), and lack of interest in Mukhiya for development works were among the constraints identified by more than 50.0 percent of the EWVPMs interviewed (54%).”

Thus, out of a total of 11 major impediments on women's role performance in Gram Panchayats, these eight were deemed particularly troublesome. The villagers' lack of cohesiveness was rated as extremely problematic (46%) and moderately problematic (36%). “In addition, a high number of women found caste-based cooperation and conflicts in the villages to be moderately problematic. The dispute in the villages, on the other hand, was rated as highly problematic (34%) and somewhat problematic (50%).” In contrast, 18 percent of EWVPMs panchayat members said caste collaboration in villages was extremely difficult, while 53 percent thought it was moderately problematic, and the remaining 21 percent thought it was merely a little issue. A considerable percentage of women and men in the villages deemed caste-based cooperation and conflicts to be minor issues.

This suggested that democracy at the grass-roots level has grown to the point where people are willing to set aside personal issues in the name of development projects initiated by the gramme Panchayat for the upliftment and benefit of the villagers. “The 10 restrictions were divided into three groups: social constraints, economic constraints, and psychological constraints. Table 3 summarises the data in terms of the number of EWVPMs village Panchayat members and their percentage.”

Table 3

Socio-economic and Psychological constraints of role performance

Constraints Nature	Highly Difficult		Moderate difficult		Low difficult	
	F	P	F	P	F	P
Social	23	46%	17	34%	10	20%
Economical	47	94%	1	2%	2	4%
Psychological	41	82%	3	6%	6	12%

Table 3 shows that the majority of EWVPMs view economic restrictions to be the most significant impediment to their duty performance (94%). Psychological restrictions, on the other hand, were deemed severely difficult by (46%) of the EWVPMs by 82 percent of respondents. However, a larger percentage of respondents (34%) stated that social constraints were moderately problematic in their role performance in gramme Panchayats. “The number of members who stated that these three types of constraints were of little concern in their role performance in gramme Panchayats was small. However, among the socio-economic and psychological restraints, members regarded social constraints to be less significant (20%), followed by psychological (12%) and economic constraints (4%). Women members of Panchayats, according to Jayalakshmi (1997), face several practical difficulties in administering their affairs.”

CONCLUSION

The Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens, regardless of their social or economic standing. "It was only the EWVPMs members' role performance that was not significantly influenced by caste, personal education, family size, family type, dwelling type, or even empowerment. The EWVPMs were younger in age, had at least some education, and many of their family members were highly educated and had multiple sources of income. As a result, several of them had built mixed houses." "Socio-economic and psychological restraints on EWVPMs village Panchayat members' role performance Constraints' nature Extremely troublesome Moderately troublesome A little Constraints of society Economic restrictions, Psychological restraints, factor in performance by EWVPMs members in gram Panchayat."

The degree of participation played as a deciding factor in the performance of EWVPMs members in gram Panchayats during the fast. The most important factor in the role performance of EWVPMs members of Gram Panchayats was participation. "Interaction Style, Participation, Empowerment, Family Education, and Family Income were all positive and highly significant in relation to role performance". Other independent factors, such as Caste and "Personal Education, were also positive and significant at the 5% level of probability". "In the case of interaction style and personal education, partial regression coefficients are highly significant. Participation, Family Education, Family Income, House Type, Social Linkage, Marital Status, Family Type, and Age all had a significant direct effect. Empowerment, amount of land holding, caste, personal education, interaction style, material ownership, and development restrictions were the variables with the lowest direct effect."

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