

Elected Women's Participation in Social Organisations before Becoming a Grama Panchayat Member

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Abstract: This article reveals about the participation of elected women in social organisations before becoming a Grama Panchayat member and the different types of community based organisations used by women as a basic foundation for their first step.

Keywords: Community Organisaion, Grama Panchayat Membership, Participation, Women.

I. Introduction

Women's participation is crucial in the effective implementation of any development project. Majority of the developmental projects fail due to the lack of women's involvement in its planning and implementation. Women can participate as consultants, decision makers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries. The involvement of all categories of society is essential to achieve sustainable development.

Participation is a process through which stakeholder's influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect the people ([1]World Bank, 1996). Participation is the people's involvement in the decision making process about what is to be done and by whom, their involvement in implementing the programme, sharing benefits and monitoring and evaluating the programme ([2]Cohen and Uphoff, 1977). The core features of participation are - it is a voluntary involvement of the people; the people who participate influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources; it is a process of involvement of people at different stages of the project or programme; and the ultimate aim is to improve the well-being of the people who participate. The people's participation in the development programmes is not an end in itself; it is now considered as a means to get the highest benefit from the public programmes and services ([3] Khwaja, 2004).

The major reasons for emphasising participation are as follows:

- Participation results in better decisions.
- People are more likely to implement the decisions that they personally make rather than the decisions imposed on them by someone else.
- Motivation is frequently enhanced by setting up of goals during the participatory decision making process.
- Participation improves communication and cooperation ([4] Locke, 1968).
- People may learn new skills through participation; leadership potential may be readily identified and developed ([5] Heller et al., 1998).

Participation at the local level of governance refers to the involvement of people of diverse backgrounds, pursuing particular or common objectives. People have, however, different reasons for participating in an activity or event. This means that there are different drives or needs that motivate a person to participate in an activity. For example, why should a woman contest a panchayat election and participate in local governance? Some of the reasons could be the respect, the status and the popularity, the satisfaction or the chance to solve some of the issues affecting them in the village. There can also be expectations of monetary gains, breaking away from traditional roles, or even escape from the rigorous daily chores. These reasons can be categorised into three types, viz., existence, relatedness, and growth, as explained by Alderfer ([6] Quoted by Robbins, 2002). Increasingly, people's participation in local governmental affairs is considered an indivisible part of the meaning of democracy at local levels ([7]Cornwall, 2004a; [8]Lawson & Gleeson, 2005). Pimbert and Wakeford ([9] 2001, 23) argue that it is a very defining characteristic of modern democracy, as they state that "democracy without citizen deliberation and participation is ultimately an empty and meaningless concept".

Importance of the study

Women's participation in political bodies at various levels is the need of the hour. Only when ways and means are evolved to promote women's participation in polity, will women be able to gain equal access to

control over the political process. Research studies on the subject of elected women's role in political bodies must provide an insight into the nature of their participation as well as the obstacles to their effective participation.

II. Methodology

The purpose of the study is to explore the elected women representatives' participation at the grassroots level democracy.

2.1 Objectives

- To find out the profile of elected women representatives in relation to participation of elected women representatives in social activities before becoming a member of the Panchayat.

2.2 Research design

The study is also intended to find the extent of participation by these women in the democratic process and the reasons thereof so as to understand the issues in-depth and arrive at logical conclusions. From this perspective, the **design is descriptive and diagnostic**.

2.3 Sampling

Three elected women representatives were selected (multi-stage stratified random sampling) randomly from each Grama Panchayat, namely those who had put in a minimum four years of service in the Grama Panchayat. The sample size was limited to 288 elected women members (96 Grama Panchayats X 3 Elected Women Members).

III. Results and Discussions

Table one presents data on the age of the respondents belonging to both, Chamarajanagara and Udupi districts. Understanding the respondent's age is crucial to finding out at what age the representation of women is higher and also to find out the mean age representation. In India, you are eligible to vote on completing 18 years of age and the government has put forth various suitable age groups to become members of PRI, MLA, MP, and so on. In this study, age means the elected women's age at the start of their tenure as members in the Panchayats.

Table One: Age of respondents

Age of the respondents	Chamarajanagara district	Udupi district
	Number of respondents (%)	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

In the present study, the age of the respondents was classified ranging from 21 years to 65 years with a class interval of five. With regard to Chamarajanagara district, majority (25.9%) of the respondents fell in the age category of 21 to 30 years, whereas, in Udupi district 11.3% of the respondents belonged to the age category of 21 to 30 years. In Chamarajanagara district, it was tilted in favour of the younger age group, whereas in Udupi district majority of the women represented came from the middle age group. The representation of older women was very less. Young unmarried women are usually not encouraged to enter politics due to the irrational fear of not getting a life partner. Snehlata Pandey's ([10] 1987) study revealed that not a single PRI representative was unmarried, and she also mentioned that the entry of married women to PRIs was because - (1) unmarried girls were not allowed by their parents to hold such posts; (2) unmarried girls have no political ambition; (3) village communities have strong reservation against selecting unmarried girls contesting political offices; and (4) girls would stake their marriage if they indulged in public activities before marriage. However, it

is important to mention that there are a good number of women elected from the younger age group, i.e., between 21 to 30 years in the study area. This is in line with the study made by Pamela Singla ([11] 2007) the result of which stated that there are a good number of women elected from the younger age group. On the whole in both the districts, majority of the respondents were in the age group of 21 to 50 years. This observation is reflected in the study conducted by Tremblay and Kumtakar. The study observed that the majority, that is, 81% of the women Panchayati Raj leaders were in the age group of 21 to 50 years.

Prior to the 73rd Amendment, women's participation in PRIs was negligible. Hence this is definitely a significant change from the earlier days, especially in changing the mindset of the families/people. Based on the information given in Table one, it was calculated that the mean age of the Chamarajanagara district respondents was 38.18 and the mean age of Udupi district respondents was 42.25.

Table Two: Membership in community based organisations

Membership	Chamarajanagara district			Udupi district		
	No. of Respondents (%)			No. of Respondents (%)		
	YES	NO	Total	YES	NO	Total
NGO membership	05 (03.4)	142 (36.6)	147 (100)	10 (07.1)	131 (92.9)	141 (100)
SHG 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	5 (3.4)	142 (96.6)	147 (100)	08 (5.7)	133 (94.3)	141 (100)
Milk Dairy membership	00 (0)	147 (100)	147 (100)	06 (04.2)	135 (95.8)	141 (100)

Table two indicates membership in community based organisations prior to Grama Panchayat membership. This helps in understanding the source of 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 in Chamarajanagara district- 68% than in Udupi district- 38.3%. Self Help Groups have become an effective platform in bringing women into the mainstream. Self Help Groups organise various political awareness activities like the importance of voting, Grama Sabha, participation of women in politics, etc. The members of the group motivate the more active members of the group to contest the Grama Panchayat election. Probably due to this encouragement and motivation, a good number of rural women have started entering into local politics.

While co-relating both the districts, i.e., Chamarajanagara and Udupi, the results show that a greater part of the women members of Chamarajanagara district had membership in SHGs as compared to Udupi district. Table two also revealed that in Udupi district all members had membership in one organisation or the other.

In the following section, the Null Hypothesis has been tested by presenting the data in a tabular form using the Chi-square test.

Table Three: Testing of null hypothesis

The independent variable **education** has no association with the dependent variable **participation**, on the elected women representatives of the Grama Panchayats.

Sl. No.	Variable	District	Chi-square value	Degrees of Freedom	Level of Significance	Result	Test of Hypothesis
1	NGO membership	Chamarajanagar	11.563	6	.072	Not significant	Accepted
		Udupi	9.345	6	.155	Not significant	Accepted
2	SHG membership	Chamarajanagar	7.957	6	.241	Not significant	Accepted
		Udupi	11.577	6	.072	Not significant	Accepted
3	Mahila Mandal membership	Chamarajanagar	5.977	6	.426	Not significant	Accepted
		Udupi	11.952	6	.63	Not significant	Accepted
4	Temple/Church Committee membership	Chamarajanagar	--	--	--	--	--
		Udupi	11.866	6	.065	Not significant	Accepted
5	SDMC membership	Chamarajanagar	2.419	6	.877	Not significant	Accepted
		Udupi	8.135	6	.228	Not significant	Accepted
6	Milk Dairy	Chamarajanagar	7.279	6	.296	Not significant	Accepted

	membership	Udupi	--	--	--	--	--
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Significant Level: 0.05

Result: The Null Hypothesis is fully accepted in both the districts

The Chi-square test was applied to find out the association between **education** and the selected variable **participation**, of the elected women representatives of the Grama Panchayats for both the districts, viz., Chamarajanagar (relatively backward) and Udupi (developed).

It is found that the variable **education** has no association with the variable **participation**, viz., NGO, SHG, Mahila Mandal and Temple/Church committee, and Milk Diary membership in both the districts, viz., Chamarajanagar and Udupi (except the Temple/Church committee membership in Chamarajanagar and the Milk Diary membership in Udupi). The result indicates the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

The reason for the non-association of the educational background of the elected women representatives of the Grama Panchayats is that ~~the~~ majority of the women are educated only to the primary level. Very few women representatives have completed their graduation. Hence, their educational background has no relation to their participation in social organisations.

IV. Conclusion

It can be said that participation is very important at the grassroots democracy and education as such has nothing to do with participation in social organisations or the Grama Panchayat. Without it also women have taken an active part in the grassroots democracy.

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