

A STUDY ON PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN PANCHAYAT RAJ FUNCTIONING AND ITS CORRELATES IN TAMIL NADU

Dr.S.Gandhimathi

Independent Researcher

Abstract

The important feature of the Indian social system is a commonly held belief that women are inferior to men in all aspects and hence they should be kept in the position of sub-ordination inside and outside the family. Culturally and traditionally, India is the most patriarchal community where the position of women is neglected, and their birth of girl child is regarded as the most misfortune. Overall, it should be admitted mostly that all women in India suffer from patriarchal structures and ideologies. They are the victims of gender discrimination, inequalities, and male domination in all walks of life. They lag behind men in all the indicators of social and economic development. This study intends to analyze the correlates of participation in panchayat raj functioning in Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: Panchayat Raj Institutions, Political Empowerment, Socio-Economic Correlates, Women Empowerment.

Introduction

Women's political engagement has always been regarded as the main indicator of their empowerment. We only have records of a relatively small number of female regents, sovereigns, and active agents in the aristocracy over the course of human history. Liberal leaders like John Stuart Mill had pushed for women's participation in politics. The battle for women's rights in the liberal west serves as an excellent example of how ingrained patriarchal opposition to women's empowerment is. In the last century, Asia had more female heads of state than Europe, and the fight for women's suffrage in India was less physically violent, but this does not mean that women are now more accepted in making decisions in public settings.

India chose a political structure and socioeconomic objective that would allow for participation from all spheres of society not long after gaining independence. Even though it is still in its infancy, women are becoming more aware of their rightful status in society and their true purpose in the country's planned economy. The main ways that women have contributed to the post-independence era are through engagement in politics, education, and the economy.

One may argue that women's roles in Panchayat institutions are disproportionately portrayed as those of the weaker members of society. Involving them in decision-making for Panchayat Raj's efforts at rural development is the purpose of the description. Their engagement is envisioned primarily in relation to the welfare and development of rural women and children. The Indian Constitution guarantees its inhabitants the right to vote, freedom of expression, the right to gather and create organisations, and the establishment of a parliamentary system of government. The Indian Constitution aims to eradicate gender inequality by outlawing sex and class discrimination, outlawing forced labour and human trafficking, and reserving places in elected office for women.

The Indian government gave advice to state and local governments on how to improve equality by class and sex, including equal pay and free legal assistance, accommodative working conditions and maternity relief, the opportunity to work and go to school, and raising standard of living expectations. In the middle of the 20th century, women played a significant role in the Indian Independence Movement and supported independence from Britain. Although equality for sexual orientation was added to the list of recognised rights, women's political involvement has remained muted. India's government is federal in structure but has diminished authority. The electorate votes to choose a National Parliament just as State congregations. In 2012, India had a minimal percentage of 10.9% women elected representatives in the National Parliament, which is relatively higher than Hungary (8.8%) Brazil (9.6%), China (9.1%) and Malaysia (9.8%) (United Nations Development Programme, 2012).

Compared to the Parliament, the Panchayati Raj institutions in India have a far higher representation of women. According to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in 2008, women made up 37.8% of the members of Gram Panchayats, 37% of those in Intermediate Panchayats, and 35.3 % of those in District Panchayats. A total of 36.87 percent of women were represented in all three tiers of the Panchayat. This appears to be a result of Indian Constitutional Article 243D, which requires at least one-third of all Panchayat levels. A further modification to the Article was proposed in 2009, which increased the reservation to 50 percent, but was not adopted (Rathod, 2014).

Despite playing a crucial role in the rise of human civilisation, women's standing is often not equal to that of males. They have less opportunity to gain land, property, credit, education, skills, and well-paying employment, making them less privileged. Women work longer hours than males, yet they make less money because they perform more unpaid work (UN, 2007). Women also experience discrimination in the workplace. Girls drop out of school at a far higher rate than boys do. Women make up two-thirds of all illiterates worldwide (UNESCO, 2006). Women also have greater health issues than males do because they are less educated, earn less, and have less authority to make decisions about their own health. Every year, at least 500,000 women pass away from treatable pregnancy-related illnesses or complications (WHO, 2005). The lack of participation of women in political institutions makes it difficult for them to pass laws that would protect them, improve their socioeconomic standing, and provide them the same rights as males. Less than 10% of parliament members in underdeveloped nations' one-third are female (UN, 2008).

Women are still frequently viewed as being unable to assume leadership roles in fields that are considered as being dominated by males, such as finance, energy, economic development, climatic change, international affairs, defence, commerce, and infrastructure. This is also frequently the case in parliaments, where women are frequently excluded from participation in other committees due to their gender and given "women's only" portfolios or seats (Mohammad Iqbal Ganie and Sona Shukla, 2019). Over the past fifty years, the introduction of a new trend has significantly altered the world of women's politics and relationships. Women are now playing a larger part in mainstream politics, and the effect of global feminist movements has changed how we view women in politics completely. The new strategy began examining a number of fresh concerns related to the place of women in politics. Women's involvement in politics has since been a growing area of interest and study in

a variety of social sciences. The ramifications of male-dominated politics for women are also a key focus of this emerging topic, in addition to women's participation patterns (Mohammad Iqbal Ganie and Sona Shukla, 2019).

Methodology

The study is conducted in Madurai District of Tamil Nadu. To enlist all the elected women representatives of the district and select a sizeable sample randomly would be practical options. Total women representatives are 156, Out of 431 Village Panchayats in thirteen blocks. The size of the population is very low. However, the researcher decided to adopt the census method. All the women representatives were interviewed to gather the information. For collecting the data, the direct interview method was followed. A structured interview schedule has been prepared for that reason. The collected data were checked immediately after data collection for completeness and unambiguity. A codebook was prepared to assign numerical values to the collected data to make them amenable to statistical analysis. Data were entered in the Excel spreadsheet using the codebook and then converted into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Statistical analyses include frequency distribution with percentage, descriptive measures such as minimum, maximum and mean values, ANOVA test for categorical variables, and correlation for quantitative variables.

Result and Discussion

Table 1: Mean Difference Analysis of Participation in the Panchayat Raj and Age

Age	N	Mean	F	Sig.
21-30 years	20	9.7000	1.024	.383
31-40 years	80	10.0000		
41-50 years	30	10.2935		
51-60 years	26	9.9000		
Total	156	10.0822		

There is hardly any considerable difference between any of the groups of respondents based on their age in their level of participation and the panchayat raj. It is evident from the mean scores in the above table. The F value also confirms that there are no significant differences among the different age groups in their level of participation. Participation in the panchayat raj does not vary according to age group.

Table 2: Mean Difference Analysis of Participation in the Panchayat Raj and Religion

Religion	N	Mean	F	Sig.
Hindu	151	10.1565	.953	.387
Christian	3	10.2326		
Muslim	2	9.8361		

Total	156	10.0822		
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The mean scores in the above table show that there are no considerable differences among the different religious groups of respondents in their level of participation in the panchayat raj. The F value is insignificant. Participation in the local body does not vary according to religious groups.

Table 3: Mean Difference Analysis of Participation in the Panchayat Raj Functioning for Community

Community	N	Mean	F	Sig.
Forward Caste	2	10.3103	3.919	.021
Backward Class	43	10.0721		
Most backward Class	78	9.1905		
Scheduled Castes	33	9.000		
Total	156	10.0822		

The mean scores in the above table show that there is no considerable difference between the respondents from Forward Caste and the backward in their level of participation in the panchayat raj functioning. Most Backward Class and Scheduled Castes have relatively low level of participation. This difference is significant as shown by the significant F value in the table.

Table 4: Mean Difference Analysis of Participation in the Panchayat Raj Functioning for Education

Education	N	Mean	F	Sig.
Illiterate	30	9.8381	2.158	.118
Primary/Middle school	74	9.1486		
High School	42	9.4231		
College	10	9.0403		
Total	156	10.0822		

It is noteworthy to find the mean scores in the above table that a meager level increases along with the education. The respondents who have studied up to middle school have meager awareness about panchayat raj functioning than those who have studied up to middle school. Those who have studied up to college level have very meager awareness than all others. The F value in the table shows that such differences in awareness about panchayat

raj functioning based on the educational level of the respondents are significant. The more an elected woman representative is educated, the more she has awareness about panchayat raj functioning.

Table 5: Mean Difference Analysis of Participation in the Panchayat Raj Functioning for Occupation

Occupation	N	Mean	F	Sig.
Employee	30	10.0244	3.063	.082
Housewife cum representatives	126	10.1546		
Total	156	10.0822		

The mean scores in the above table show that those respondents who are housewives cum representatives have greater awareness about panchayat raj functioning than those who are employed. However, the F value is not large enough to assert that this difference is significant.

Table 6: Mean Difference Analysis of Participation in the Panchayat Raj Functioning for Number of Times Elected

Number of Times Elected	N	Mean	F	Sig.
One	132	10.0495	.414	.521
Two	16	10.2432		
More than two	8	10.2432		
Total	156	10.0822		

Participation in the panchayat raj by the respondents does not vary for those who have been elected once and for those who have elected more than two times in the panchayat. It is evident from the mean scores and the F value in the above table that there is no association between the number of times elected and participation in panchayat raj.

Table 7: Correlation of Participation in the Panchayat Raj Functioning with Select Variables

Variables	Awareness about panchayat Raj Functioning	
		Corr.
Age		-.004
	Sig.	.957
Education	Corr.	.140
	Sig.	.039
Personal Income	Corr.	.221
	Sig.	.001
Family Income	Corr.	.110
	Sig.	.106
Highest Education in the Family	Corr.	.074
	Sig.	.275
Years of Living in the Present Place	Corr.	-.077
	Sig.	.258
Number of Times Elected	Corr.	.032
	Sig.	.640

In the above table, the results of correlation analysis of participation in the panchayat raj in relation to the quantitative background variables are presented. They show that the variables namely age, family income, highest education in the family, years of living in the present place and number of times elected, do not have a significant correlation with participation in the panchayat raj. We have already observed in the categorical analysis of participation in the panchayat raj based on educational groups that participation increases as educational level increases, but that such categorical differences are not significant. However, in the correlation analysis here it is found that education has a significant positive correlation with participation in the panchayat raj. Those who have more education have more participation. Personal income of the respondents also has a significant positive relationship with participation in the panchayat raj; those who have more personal income have more participation. Family size has a significant negative relationship with participation in the panchayat raj; those who have small families have more participation and those who have large families have less participation.

Table 8: Regression of Participation in the Panchayat Raj Functioning on the correlated Variables

Predictors	Beta	t	Sig.
Education	.077	1.136	.257
Personal Income	.197	2.896	.004
R²	.08		
F	6.758		
Sig.	.000		

It is observed from the above table that of the eight quantitative background variables, two have significant correlations with participation in the panchayat raj. They are education and personal income. Here those two variables are further analyzed for their independent and combined effects on participation. The R² value in the table shows that the two variables together explain 8.6 percent of the variation in participation. Education does not have an independent effect on participation in the panchayat raj, as evident by the corresponding t value in the above table; that is, when another variable is held constant, education alone does not have significant influence on participation. Personal income has a significant independent effect, as evident from the t values in the above table, as shown by the significant t values. The beta value for personal income shows that one standard unit increase in personal income leads to 0.20 standard unit increase in participation. The significant F value shows that this regression model involving the three independent variables is valid.

Conclusion

Age, highest education in the family and years of living in the present place do not have significant correlations with awareness about panchayat raj functioning. Education has a significant positive correlation with awareness about panchayat raj functioning. Those who are more educated have more awareness. Personal income and family income have significant positive relationship with awareness about panchayat raj functioning; those who have more personal and family income have more awareness about panchayat raj functioning. Those who have been elected to the panchayat raj for more times have greater awareness about panchayat raj functioning.

The increasing involvement of women in the mainstream politics and the impact of feminist movements all over the world led to an entirely different approach towards the role of women in politics. The Governments have taken several legal and administrative measures to provide more educational and job opportunities for women. The policy makers and planners are increasingly becoming gender sensitive. In India, Government implemented various reforms and policies to promote equality. It is widely believed that the traditional social system

prevailing in the country is responsible for the suppression of women in several ways.

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