



Performance of Elected Dalit and Non-Dalit Women Representatives in Panchayats with special reference to Kancheepuram district, Tamil Nadu

A. Puvi Lakshmi

Research Fellow at University of Madras, Tiruvallur, Tamil Nadu, India.

E-mail: puvilakshmi@gmail.com

Abstract: The main purpose of the present study is to assess the performance of the elected women representatives who belong to Dalit and non-dalit communities in Rural Local Governance in Kancheepuram District of Tamil Nadu state. The descriptive research design and explorative research design is used. The study was conducted in four blocks of the district and 240 samples are selected purposively. The performances of women representatives in three categories (works related to public welfare, works related to panchayat administration and social service) of panchayats are assessed. The level of performance is measured through three-point scale low, medium and high. The findings of the study show dalit women are performing well in panchayats. It also reveals subjugated and oppressed people once acquired authority, they show abundant interest and keenness to perform well and 73rd amendment provides those opportunities to satisfy their needs and aspirations.

Keywords: Panchayat administration, Oppressed people, Abundant interest

Received : 17 January 2023

Revised : 20 February 2023

Accepted : 26 February 2023

Published : 29 June 2023

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Lakshmi, A.P. (2023). Performance of Elected Dalit and Non-Dalit Women Representatives in Panchayats with special reference to Kancheepuram district, Tamil Nadu, *Society and Culture Development in India*, 3: 1, pp. 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.47509/SCDI.2023.v03i01.01>

Introduction

Family and society are constantly abandoned rural women to participate an active role in the decision-making process at different stages. As per the Global Gender Gap Report 2012, india ranks 105 out of 135 countries in economic participation, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival (Hausmann, *et al.* 2012). Based on such factors many requirements had been made in constitutional alteration and regulation in Panchayati Raj system to support and guarantee the involvement of women in the local governance system. Panchayat act

as the platform for enhancing the participation of women representatives and paves the way for them to reach higher levels of elected or appointed in government. The 73rd and 74th amendment act as a landmark in the Indian history in which grants 33 percent reservation for women at the Panchayat and Municipal level. The central purpose of women's participation in panchayat is to change their socio-economic and administrative status. The women leadership in male-dominated politics is a noteworthy enlargement in post independent India and trashed traditional gender, caste and religious biases in pastoral society. The political reservation for women has changed the face of male-dominated mainstream politics in India (Ghodke, 2011).

Besides, it removed the widespread wrong notion that women are incapable of shouldering political responsibilities and it enabled the milieu in which women achieved not only social status and self-confidence but also effectively tussle against the traditional form of oppression and exploitation (Pillai, 2005). The increased participation of women in political affairs means the winded the role of the women to revolutionize the modalities and outcomes of politics (Jyothi *et.al*, 2012). From the 90's century onwards many women's organization working to improve the political status of women irrespective of national and state political parties influences, these organization continued increasing women's role in political arena. Through constitutional amendments by giving one-third reservation of seats for women in local bodies has released a means that women from different strata of society the occupy a legitimate space and changed the old power structure (Palanithurai, 2001). Deeply entrenched interests are opposing local democracy and women's rights. They are directly and indirectly working to undermine the reservation for women in political institutions. Caste has occupy an influential role in elevate the issues allied to the more marginalization along with women. In a extremely caste hierarchical society, women belong to the lower castes have less significant admittance to the public force which is amalgamate by their gender (Jyothi *et.al*, 2012).

Dalit women political participation in governance is traverse with severe deep entrenched problems that are intertwined in patriarchy and caste (United Nation, 2013). The nature of the crime against Dalit women is always different. A study on the 'Political participation of Dalit Women in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat' conducted by Navsarjan Trust and Evidence - an NGO highlights the occurrence of challenges faced by elected Dalit women representatives. The challenges faced by the elected Dalit women are clear indications of the backlash of violence. Irrespective of the being constitutionally elected, women representative belong to dalit community are abused, threatened and assassinated. Many of the times the predice and aggression against Dalit women representatives in panchayats are all the time associated with

verbal and physical violence and these abuses are covered with caste notion. The problem in Dalit women political participation originate from the a network of allied issues of socio- cultural practices and improper implementation of protective measures. The way out will also arrive from an all inclusive approach with the emphasis on specificities of implementation (Mangubhai & Irudayam, 2008). 73rd and 74th provisions of reservation for women in the local bodies make the way for them as well as for the society to phase out from the customary perception pathway. But in veracity, regardless of a number of weaknesses, the elected women leaders are in a situation to discharge the earmarked tasks with varying degree of achievement. There are some issues in the implementation of the act. The women's participation in panchayats has been observed from multiple perspectives. The leadership of women in the local bodies should have a lucid discernment about the intention of the reservations.

There are other ideas on the same issue professed by the public and the functionaries who are operational with the women leaders at the local governance. One could see the absurdity and vagueness in approaching the role properly (Palanithurai, 2003). The present paper attempts to explore the performance of elected women representatives in panchayat activities and it also tries to compare the performance of two caste group dalit and non-dalit elected women in panchayats.

Review of Literature

Phukan (2016) conducted a study on 'Nature and effectiveness of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions: a study in Jorhat district of Assam'. The main objective of the study is to analyze the nature and effectiveness of elected women's participation in terms of their role at the various levels of the Panchayati Raj Structure in the Jorhat district. The study focuses on the participation of women at all three tiers of the PRIs. Through the purposive sampling method, 88 women elected representatives from 12 Zilla Parishad, 22 Anchalik Panchayats, and 54 Gaon Panchayats were selected and interviewed. The study reveals that proxy attendance was not allowed in PRIs meetings. If women were absent from the meetings, their husbands were not permitted to attend the same. It also reveals that women members were not facing gender disparity in PRIs mainly because the numerical strength of the women representatives was equivalent to the male members, most of the women members were belonging to the ruling party and the presidents provided equal opportunity for all the representatives to express their views in the meetings. Most of the women members participated in the implementation of development

programmes including planning, supervising, monitoring, and evaluating the benefits of the programme.

Samria (2015) has made a comparative study on the 'Socio-economic status of Women and Men Participants in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rohtak district, Haryana'. The objective of the study was to evaluate the socio-economic status of women and men participants in the two tiers (Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad) of the PRIs. An interview schedule was framed to collect the data from 107 members of five panchayat Samiti and 14 members of Zila Parishad selected through stratified sampling method. The finding reveals that higher a person's education, occupational status and income levels, the more likely they are involved in political participation. There is no significant difference between women and men members in the age and education. The study also shows that maximum monthly income of the women members were Rs. 2000 only while men earned Rs.4000 and in the case of agricultural land, most of the women members did not own land when compared to men members. The study concluded that socio-economic status of the women was less significant as compared to the men members.

Sahaas (2013) in a study 'women panchayats in Himachal Pradesh' has attempted to explore the problems come across by women pradhans at the same time as delivering their legislative responsibilities. The study was conducted in six districts of Himachal Pradesh with the sample size of 1,380 which included pradhans, up-pradhans and ward members who were selected through stratified random sampling techniques. The structured interview schedule and observations were used to collect data. The findings of the study show that women representatives were actively involved in social works. Most of the women reported that their husbands made the decisions in the panchayat which restricted their autonomy and often their families have to face hostility from other village peoples since women inward bound into the political space. It also shows that political parties supported females joined with their parties at the time of elections but on the other side they were at the midpoint of encouraging gender discrimination when it comes to bestowed with female representatives decision-making power. The study observed that most of the women members who have attended the training programs could not pursue the lectures and there is need to increase the duration of the training that enhanced the sufficient knowledge on the subject. The study also explored political and social barriers that restricted the performance and activities of women representatives.

Manjulamma *et.al*(2013) in their study on 'Awareness of Schedule Caste Women on Panchayat Raj System' have attempted to study annual income, educational status and awareness on the functions of the gram panchayats, Mandal Parishad and Zilla

Parishad of the women representatives. Twenty-five scheduled caste women from four villages totalling 100 Schedule caste women were randomly selected as the sample for the study and data were collected through interviews from various dalit women representatives. The findings of the study show that internal factors such as lack of awareness and exposure, low level of education and external factors such as the influence of family, caste, social outlook, patriarchy were the major obstacles affected women's active role in the execution of Panchayati Raj institutions. The study suggested that awareness programs should be organized to generate awareness among women about panchayat raj system should be motivated to come out of the ban walls of their homes and should be included in all developmental projects.

Sanjeev and Anupama (2005) have assessed 'Participation of Elected Women Representatives in Rural Local Government in India' with the objectives of studying the role of women leaders in Panchayati Raj and their influence on the development in Himachal Pradesh. About 50 percent of the elected women from Rait and Panchrukhi of Kangra districts were selected randomly and interviewed. The result shows that the role of women members was low in social, economic and educational activities. In the fields of public works and civic amenities, the participation of women panchayat members was high and it was low in Trade and Commerce.

Objectives

- To study the Performance of the elected dalit and non-dalit women representatives in panchayats
- To analyze the relationship among caste of the elected dalit and non-dalit women representatives and their performance in panchayats

Methods and Materials

The study adopted descriptive and explorative research design. The performance of the women representatives is analyzed in three categories as public works, administrative works, and social works. The sample size of 240 respondents which include 120 dalit women and 120 non-dalit women representatives in various panchayats are purposively selected and interviewed from four blocks (Acharapakkam, Maduranthagam, Thirukalukundram, and Uthiramerur) of Kancheepuram district. The blocks which are having the highest number of women representatives are selected for the study and three-point scale (low, medium &

high) are used to measure the performance level of women representatives in panchayat works.

Data Analysis

Public Works

The public works mainly deals with the infrastructure and basic facilities of the village. It shows both dalit and non-dalit women are performing highly (74.7%) in obtaining drinking water for their village and low level (41.1%) of performance is observed in construction and maintenance of public toilets in their village.

Table 1: Performance of Elected Women Representatives in Public Works

<i>Public Works</i>	<i>Level of Performance</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Dalit</i>	<i>Non-Dalit</i>
Construction of roads and drainages	High	50.5	27.6	22.9
Obtaining drinking water	High	74.7	37.6	37.1
Implementation of MGNREGA	High	60.4	33.3	27.1
Quality of service	Medium	44.1	20.8	23.3
Construction of public marriage	Low	43.1	19.2	24.2
Construction and maintenance of public toilets	Low	41.1	17.9	23.4
Providing sanitation in public places	Low	54.6	22.5	32.1
Organizing co-operative markets	Low	66.3	30.8	35.5
Providing irrigation facilities	Low	41.3	20	21.3
Implementation of insurance schemes	Low	80	36.6	43.4

It reveals problem of drinking water is a most important issue pertaining to women; so they are giving a crucial role to solve it and representatives are not aware of the significance of using toilets, sanitation, and personal hygiene.

Administrative Works

These works are pertaining to panchayat administration. Each representative of the panchayat is expected to perform their duties effectively as per the Panchayat raj act. It is observed very high (50.4%) performance is seen in monitoring the implementation of programmes in their village and very low (43.7%) performance is seen in sustaining accountability of panchayats. It is observed women founds it is

easy to observe the implementation of government programmes and women needs training in the aspects of sustaining accountability of panchayats. It is observed very high (50.4%) performance is seen in monitoring the implementation of programmes in their village and very low (43.7%) performance is seen in sustaining accountability of panchayats. It is observed women finds it is easy to observe the implementation of government programmes and women needs training in the aspects of sustaining accountability of panchayats.

Table 2 Performances of Elected Women Representatives in Administrative Works

<i>Administrative Works</i>	<i>Level of Performance</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Dalit</i>	<i>Non-Dalit</i>
Role in monitoring the implementation of programmes	High	50.4	29.2	21.2
Fulfilment of the election promises to electorates	High	41.7	18.4	23.3
Role in identifying beneficiaries of development schemes	Medium	47.5	22.5	25
Involvement in Decision making of panchayats	Medium	52.9	27.5	25.4
Supervision of the expenditure for development programmes	Medium	43.7	20.8	22.9
Role in negotiating for their constituency	Medium	56.6	20.8	27.1
Chances of winning again	Medium	48.7	25.8	30.8
Exercising the rights as elected representative	Medium	40.4	25.8	22.9
Involvement in implementation of government programmes	Low	55.8	15.8	24.6
Participating in preparing village development plans development plans	Low	47.1	24.2	31.6
Involvement in preparing the budget	Low	65.3	17.5	29.6
Participation in mobilizing resources	Low	53.2	26.6	38.7
Seeking co-operation from the people in development works	Low	76.1	22.5	31.6
Role in maintaining the records of the meetings	Low	69.2	32.7	43.4
Checking misappropriation in panchayat budget	Low	68.7	28.4	40.8
Role in maintaining transparency in the constituency	Low	69.2	30	38.7
Role in sustaining accountability	Low	43.7	30	39.1
Involvement in implementation of government schemes particularly for dalit people	High	50.4	20.8	22.9

Social Works

The works that object to the social development and maintenance of the social norms are referred to social works. It reveals women representatives are performing

at medium (43.7%) level in maintaining the relationship between different caste and they are involved at low (25.8%) level in eradicating the child labour. It is observed women are maintain an egalitarian relationship with all caste in their village apart they discourage caste conflicts in their locality. Child labour is not persistent in the study area.

Table 3: Performances of Elected Women Representatives in Social Works

<i>Social Works</i>	<i>Level of Performance</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Dalit</i>	<i>Non-Dalit</i>
Involvement in resolving caste disputes	Medium	25.8	5.8	20
Role in maintaining relationship between different caste	Medium	43.7	25	18.7
Encouraging inter-caste and inter-religious marriages	Medium	42.1	25.8	16.3
Role in resolving disputes regarding sharing of resources	Medium	42.1	25	17.1
Discouraging caste discrimination	Medium	26.2	20	6.2
Role in helping dalits for obtaining ration cards and bank loans	Medium	42.1	20.8	21.3
Involvement in eradicating dowry	Low	50	19.2	30.8
Involvement in eradicating child marriage	Low	69.2	30.8	38.4
Involvement in eradicating child labour	Low	88.4	42.6	45.8
Involvement in eradicating female infanticide	Low	25.8	30	37.9

Kruskal - Wallis Test

It was applied to test the relationship between caste and performance of the elected women representatives. The test result is shown in below table. The below table illustrates the overall performance of the elected women representatives in panchayats. From the computation, it is clear that the dalit women have a higher mean score as compared with non-dalit women in all performance indicators. The chi-square test value on P value (0.000) also favours the rejection of the null hypothesis. Therefore, the researcher concludes that there is a significant difference in the mean score of performance indicators. Dalit women expressed that women's reservation gives them an opportunity to empower them, they can implement programmes effectively for people without any discrimination which is not possible in the previous decree of panchayats and village people are encouraging and supporting them.

Table 4: Kruskal - Wallis Test for Overall Performance in Panchayats

<i>Performance Indicators</i>	<i>Grouping Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>	<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>P value</i>
Public Works	Dalit	120	134.84	14.11	0.000**
	Non-Dalit	120	106.16		
Administrative Works	Dalit	120	139.55	26.17	0.000**
	Non-Dalit	120	101.45		
Social Works	Dalit	120	142.58	31.82	0.000**
	Non-Dalit	120	98.43		

**0.01 significance Level

Other reasons such as eagerness and enthusiasm to participate in panchayats are seen among dalit women members than the non-dalits. Among non-dalit women, the system of patriarchy, lack of awareness and interest are reasons for their low performance in panchayats.

Conclusion

The women reservation in local bodies paved a way to move out from traditional society to modern. Even though server weakness in such constitutional provision women representatives are in status to discharge the allocate responsibilities with changing degree of accomplishment. There are some issues in the implementation of the act. Many approaches are observed to understand the women's role and participation in local governance. The most important rationale of the current study is to assess the performance of the elected women representatives in Rural Local Governance in Kancheepuram District of Tamil Nadu state. The descriptive research design and explorative research design is used. The study was conducted in four blocks of the district and 240 samples are selected purposively. The conclusion of the study shows women are performing well in local panchayats. It also reveals subjugated and oppressed people once acquired authority, they show abundant interest and keenness to perform well and 73rd amendment provides those opportunities to satisfy their needs and aspirations. It is important to formulate an enabling milieu in order to achieve successful results and need-based approach

should be implemented in each village. The civil society and government must work together to develop the system and strategies for the effective performance of the women in democratic governance at their local level.

References

- Hausmann R, Tyson L.D., and Zahidi S. (2012). “The Global Gender Gap Index 2012”, World Economic Forum, Switzerland.
- Ghodke, S. (2011). Women’s reservations are not sufficient for responsible democracy. *Indian Streams Research Journal*, 1(4), doi : 10.9780/22307850
- Pillai Sudha. (2005). *Panchayati Raj Dwara Adhikar Sampannata in: Verma, S.B. et al. (eds) Mahila Jagriti Aur Sashktikaran*. Jaipur:Avishkar Publishers.
- Phukon, Shivani. (2016). Nature and Effectiveness of Women’s Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions : A Study in Jorhat District of Assam. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*. Vol. II, Issue IV.
- Jyothi P.S, Singhe, M.S and Marpady, P. (2012). Dalit women participation as representatives in rural local self governance – an empirical study. *Elixir International Journal*, 50, 10334-10337.
- Palanithurai, G. (2001). The genre of women leaders in local bodies: experience from Tamil Nadu. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 47(1), 39-50.
- Mangubhai, J., Irudayam, A. and Sydenham, E. (2009). Dalit women’s rights to political participation in rural panchayati raj: a study of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, justitia et Pax: The Netherlands retrieved from http://idsn.org/.../Dalit_Women/India_Dalitwomen_PolParticipation_RuralPanc.
- Sahaas. (2013). Study on present status of women panchayats in Himachal Pradesh: exploring the problems encountered by women pradhans while delivering their statutory responsibilities retrieved from <http://icds-wcd.nic.in/research/StudyReport-SAHAAS.pdf>
- Manjulamma, K. Sudharani, K. and Samraj, O. (2013). Awareness of S.C. women on panchayat raj system. *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, 3 (11), 465-467, retrieved from <http://worldwidejournals.com/ijar/file>.