

## Women's Participation in Gram Panchayath – A Study on Kolar District, Karnataka

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### Abstract

Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. Direct political representation of Dalit women in Panchayath Raj is a central human right in itself and enables the realization of a host of other human rights. Political voice and decision-making power concerning basic services, economic development and social justice are critical factors in challenging and transforming structural caste-class-gender discrimination, and enabling Dalit women to realize their fundamental rights. Political representation also demands accountability from state and non-state actors to guarantee and respect these women's equal political voice and development. This requires a transformation of power relationships both within institutions of governance and in the women's social development.

Recent legal and policy reforms in India to ensure the representation of marginalized social groups in decentralized governance, including Dalits and specifically Dalit women, through constitutionally mandated reservations in Panchayati Raj institutions bring these issues to the fore. They demand analysis to determine, that the way Dalit women are enabled to claim their right to political representation in local governance, and the extent to which this participation is an effective tool for empowerment and realization of human rights for excluded social groups.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Justice, Women Empowerment, Panchayat Raj, constitution

### INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. Direct political representation of Dalit women in Panchayath Raj is a central human right in itself and enables the realization of a host of other human rights. Political voice and decision-making power concerning basic services, economic development and social justice are critical factors in challenging and transforming structural caste-class-gender discrimination, and enabling Dalit women to realize their fundamental rights. Political representation also demands accountability from state and non-state actors to guarantee and respect these women's equal political voice and development. This requires a transformation of power relationships both within institutions of governance and in the women's social development.

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### **Focus on Dalit women representation in politics**

The position of women has always been a rather ambivalent one in our culture. A woman is a symbol of sacrifice and blossom of life. She prepares herself for life ahead and lives in a daze with an unexplained smile. One side, she was rise to the status of divinity and on the other side she was exploited in every aspect. There is invisibility and underestimation of women's economic contribution. Though they contribute nearly one third of India's GNP, it is undervalued and invisible. Yet she continues to be in a disadvantaged position. The problems of inequality of status and freedom, sexual harassment, lack of economic independence, lack of health facility, lack of access to credit, training, decision making positions which prevent women to participate in formal and informal social organizations. A number of research findings indicate that women are disadvantaged gender in both rural and urban areas of the country.

Women in many societies are often restricted to the roles inside the house, those of wife and mother. While major changes have occurred in the status of women in some parts of the world in recent decades, norms that restrict women to the home are still powerful in defining the activities that are deemed appropriate for women and they exclude political life which by its very nature takes place in a public forum. Caste has played an instrumental role in raising issues related to the more marginalized among women. In hierarchical society, women belonging to the lower caste have lesser access to public fore, which is compounded by their gender. This exclusion making it difficult for these women to represent and articulate the voices of their constituencies and their demands are often overlooked or subsumed by the dominant sections of the society.

Women's empowerment is one of the objectives of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Panchayath in India. Women in India are awfully underrepresented in political institutions. The political power, access to decision making and authority are the critical prerequisites for women's equality in the process for nation building.

The democratic decentralization programme proposed through the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitution amendment act, provide for reservation of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> elected seats to women is significant step in political history of independent India. It offers at once a challenge and an opportunity for women generally for SC and ST women in particular make an impact and the policy planning and programme administration level in each and every locality of our vast country.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **o Aim of the study**

The present paper aim of the study is the extent of elected Dalit women representative in Grama Panchayath.

○ **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study are to know

- Socio-economic demographic profile of the respondents
  - Political profile of the respondents
  - To analyze the constraints faced by the respondents because of the vulnerability
- **Method of the study**

A descriptive study was conducted among 50 out of 504 (331 Scheduled Caste and 173 Scheduled Tribe) elected Dalith women representatives from kolar district [Total Five Taluks: Bangarpet-(10 respodents), Kolar-(10 respodents), Malur-(10 respodents), Mulabagal-(10 respodents), Srinivaspura-(10 respodents), 10% of the total universe(504) the researcher was adopted Purposive sampling technique, and the study was based on both primary and secondary data. A pre tested semi structured questionnaire was administered and data was analysed by using percentages and proportions. The secondary data was obtained from various published and unpublished records such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and websites etc.,

**MAJOR FINDINGS**

The present study was conducted with the aim of “Elected Dalith Women Representation in Gram Panchayath”. The information was elicited as per the objectives of the study.

It is evident from the Table No-2 shows that, the majority (78%) of the respondents belonging to the age group varying 31 years to 50 years. It may be stated here that age factor is off course a significant factor. A matured age reflects quite sound and reasonable views in conformity with the needs and necessities warranted by the circumstances. Almost 84 percent are litretes, as it was observed self help group is one of the effective strategy because of which many representatives became literates. The data clearly shows that nearly 62% of respondents were involved in different occupations such as agriculture and coolie. It can be understood since they were felt the need for representation in politics. Majority of 94% respondents were married. More than half (60%) of the respondents were belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC) and rest (40%) were Scheduled Tribes (ST). Income also plays one of the determinants for representation in politics. The respondents in the study were having very low income. It is interesting to know that no woman elected representatives was paid any honorarium for her work. It thereby shows that these respondents were working on self fewer bases for an overall general welfare and development of the people and that of the women interests in particular.

Table No-3 shows that, majority of 78% of the respondents were not aware the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution (Amendment) Act 1992 which provides reservation of one-third seats to women in general and to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in particular. In the study populati8on majority of 84% were elected for first time as Panchayath representatives, so they have yet to gain more political experience. The findings of the study revealed that Self Help Groups are the major inspiration and determinants factor for

the membership in Panchayath raj institutions. It is observed that all the respondents contested elections from reserved seats. Majority (90%) of the respondents were supported by one or the political party. The support from any party however does not always imply that the person is an active member of the party. It has been observed that primary membership and affiliation to political party become more active and articulate. It may be added here that some respondents seek membership of political party after their successful contest in the elections. However, in some cases sometimes the respondents enjoyed backing and support of political party as well. All the respondents had links with one or the other political party as such members were persuaded and astonished by their political mentors who were already in politics. Majority of 32% of respondents mentioned that they had pressure from the family especially from their husbands and father-in-law's. Nearly 24% of respondents wished to help people in the society and to work for the development of concerned village. And same number mentioned political parties pressurized the respondents. 16% of the respondents entered Panchayath to hold power and to prove their identity. Around 4% of the respondents expressed since there was no women member availability they were forced to contest election.

Bringing women into power is not only a matter of equity, of correcting an unjust and unrespective system political restructuring is the key to economic growth with justice. Much has been said about women elected representatives in Panchayath. The Table No-4 shows that, very few (20%) respondents visit Panchayath office daily, because of topographical consideration and domestic constraints. Majority 80% of the respondents reported that they attended the meetings regularly. Around 70% of the respondents viewed that they are active members in the Panchayath. And also more than half (56%) of the respondents had complete on no freedom of expression in the meetings. The rest felt that gender disparity was found to be the major reasons for not entertaining their viewpoints, as male member's view points were preferred in male headed penchant, other reason being that they felt hesitant to present their views in front of male members. The study revealed that around 64 % of the respondents have visited every month their ward area to look into the problems faced by the ward members. It can be understood from the above data that the reservation of women alone will not help them to make decisions unless she becomes assertive.

The Table No-5 depicts the constraints faced by the respondents in discharging their responsibility. Out of fifty respondents majority of them faced constraints from the family and colleagues. Around 36% of the respondents believed that the family had no progressive to a social-economic standing in the community because the family were still taboo ridden and victims of ignorance and guided by old traditions. A majority 94% of the respondents stated that family members do not help them in household chores so household chores act as constraint in their work. Whenever women take up Panchayath works and role seriously, some oversight in family responsibility will only be inevitable simply because they will not be able to devote the same amount of time and energy compared to when they were not Panchayath members. Nearly 32% of the respondents faced constraints like family interference in their work; still another 56% respondent's faced lack of support by family that is family did not support them economically. On the whole it may be concluded that the respondents were between the fire and the frying pan. Neither the government gave them any dole or incentive to inspire their importance and

position in the family, nor was the respondents themselves on their own of any assistance to the family in performance of its daily chores of the life. A majority of the respondents revealed that financial assistance is a necessary ingredient for their self-esteem, their independent functioning and their committed concern and approach to the needs and urges of the people of the area.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

On the basis of the study following suggestions are made:

- It is evident that men's attitude towards women's entry into politics has begun to change from that of total rejection to limited encouragement and in some cases even to active encouragement. This trend needs to be strengthened through orientation courses and training programmes for official and elected representatives, both men and women.
- Besides there is a need to train the women leaders at regular intervals to enable them to manage the responsibilities assigned to them in the Panchayath at all the levels. Since the hard of the women members found it difficult to forego their wages for attending training programmes, these must be organized at their doorstep and some of the articulate Panchayath leaders should be involved as the trainers.
- Another important effort required for real empowerment of Dalit women is to bring about an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and rearing children needs to be transformed into a feeling of equal partnership of women and men. To inculcate this they should be imparted education for bringing about social economical and political awareness among both.
- It is not enough that women are motivated, bit the whole household and the community, especially men need to be made aware and be convinced and hence they too support the women in their effort for an integral development.
- Studies on women in political have emphasized that outside world makes women more alert and also active in the political process. There could be two ways of doing it. Firstly. Interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected one's should be encouraged. Secondly, these women should be taken out to the urban areas and their interaction with educate urban elected women representatives be arranged.
- The women should also be encouraged to organize themselves. The Mahila Mandals in the village can be effectively used as instruments to mobilize them for this purpose. Some successful women's organizations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging the women's participation in social and political activities. The government should provide finances and infrastructure to some of the deserving and successful women organization to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives.
- Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making. It has been noticed that there are certain very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Panchayaths who have been

successfully implementing the developmental schemes and have ensured over all development of their constituencies.

- Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honoring them in public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives and their success stories and good practices will gate replicated.
- The media both print as well as electronic can play an important role in creating awareness in the rural society. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.
- All the members may not have the same caliber and expertise, the group developers should identify the inefficient members of the group and impart proper training to them in order to make them competent.
- The training of Dalit women Panchayath members should be based on their won local experiences and elicits their involvement in preparing a framework that will enable them to analyze and understand their roles and responsibility in accordance with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment.

## CONCLUSION

Panchayath Raj is not a new phenomenon in the country. Its illustration in history goes back to more than thousand years. Panchayath Raj Institution have always been considered as a means to good governance and 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment was effected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantaged section of the society like Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and women. Dalith women face discrimination, exclusion and violence as a result of both their caste and gender. Dalit women’s participation in the Grama Panchyat is nessesary so that they can think about Dalit women’s issues. In as much as Dalit women’s participation is required, they also need to be given support and guidance. Then only can they become capable representatives. The government, NGOs and donor community need to understand and address this situation right from the start. Crucial aspects to the development of Dalith women’s potential is training and other empowerment activities that lead to Dalit women can gather, the more they will be empowered to engage with political process and be involved in collective action.

**Table 1: Total Statistics of Kolar District Grama Panchayat Elected Members**

Sl. No	Taluks	Grama Panchayat														
		Total			Elected Members											
					Scheduled Caste			Scheduled Tribe			Backward Class			General		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
1	Bangarpet	348	271	619	115	82	197	5	35	40	126	82	208	102	72	174
2	Kolar	327	259	586	99	80	179	29	52	91	39	20	59	60	107	267

3	<b>Malur</b>	265	193	458	68	53	121	31	29	60	93	57	150	76	51	127
4	<b>Mulbagal</b>	273	207	480	92	64	156	7	29	369	171	112	283	3	2	5
5	<b>Srinivasapura</b>	236	166	402	64	52	116	23	28	51	64	47	111	85	39	124
<b>District Total</b>		<b>1449</b>	<b>1096</b>	<b>2545</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>697</b>

Source: Kolar District at A Glance 2011-12 ([www.kolar.nic.in](http://www.kolar.nic.in)). PP-187

**Table 2: Socio- Economic Demographic Status of the Respondents**

Socio-Economic Status	Responses	Respondents (N=50)	Percentage
<b>Age</b>	21-30	10	20%
	31-40	26	52%
	41-50	13	26%
	51-60	01	02%
<b>Education</b>	Illiterate	08	16%
	Primary (1-4 <sup>th</sup> )	15	30%
	Higher Primary	14	28%
	High School	07	14%
	PUC	06	12%
<b>Occupation</b>	Agriculture	20	40%
	Coolie	11	22%
	Home Maker	19	38%
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	47	94%
	Widow	03	06%
<b>Caste</b>	Scheduled Caste	30	60%
	Scheduled Tribe	20	40%
<b>Annual Income</b>	< 10,000.Rs	38	76%
	10,001-20,000 Rs	08	16%
	Above 20,001 Rs	04	08%

**Table 3: Socio- political profile of the Respondents**

Aspects	Responses	Respondents (N=50)	Percentage
<b>Aware of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment before election</b>	Yes	11	22%
	No	39	78%
<b>Term</b>	First Time	40	80%
	Second Time	08	16%
	Third Time	02	04%
<b>Support from Political Party</b>	Yes	45	90%
	No	05	10%
<b>Member of the Political Party Before the Contest</b>	Yes	10	20%
	No	40	80%

<b>Reason for Contest</b>	Hold power	08	16%
	Help people in society	12	24%
	Pressure from family members	16	32%
	Pressure from party leaders	12	24%
	Non-availability of candidate	02	04%

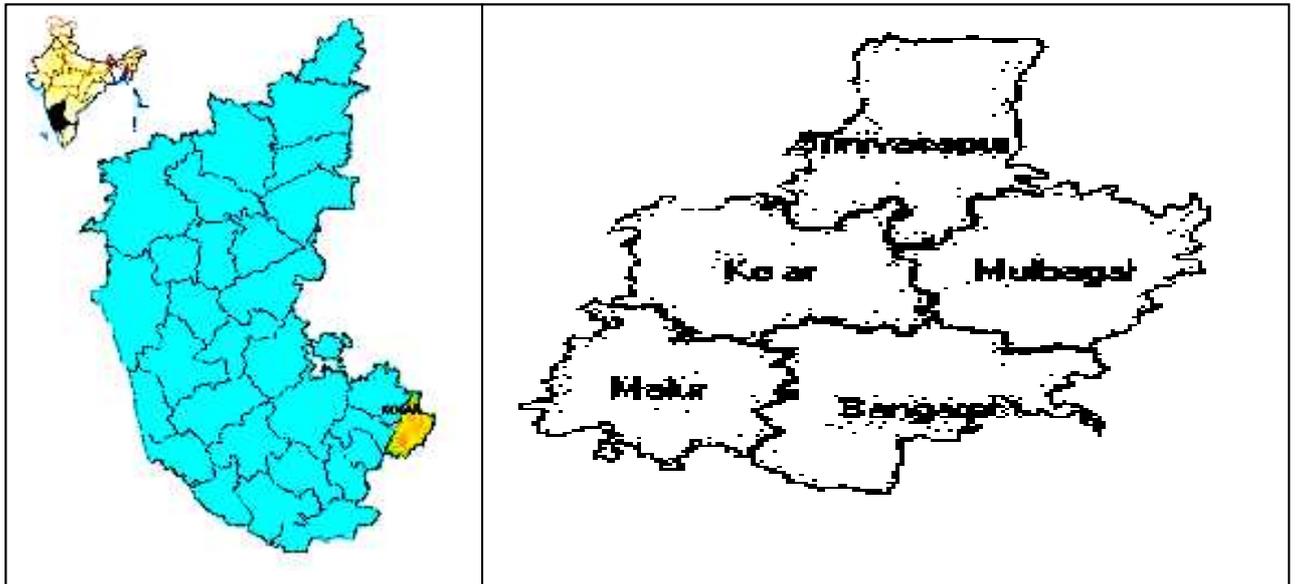
**Table 4: Participation in Panchayath Activities of the Respondents**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Respondents (N=50)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Visit to panchayath office</b>	Daily	11	22%
	Once in a Week	15	30%
	Once in a Month	24	48%
<b>Attendance at Meetings</b>	Regularly	40	80%
	Some times	10	20%
<b>Type of participation in meetings</b>	Active	35	70%
	Passive	15	30%
<b>Freedom to express views</b>	Yes	09	18%
	No	28	56%
	To some extent	13	26%
<b>Frequency of visit to the Area/Field</b>	Daily	06	12%
	Once in a Week	08	16%
	Once in a Month	32	64%
	Not at all	04	08%

**Table 5: Family Constraints Faced by the Respondents**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Respondents (N=50)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Lack of support</b>	28	56%
<b>Household chores</b>	47	94%
<b>Economic constraints</b>	34	68%
<b>No social standing</b>	18	36%
<b>Interference</b>	16	32%

**Figure 1: Choice of the Study Area in Kolar District-Karnataka**



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