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Panchayat Raj Institutions as an Instrument for Women Empowerment: A Micro Study

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Panchayat Raj institutions in India are outcome of natural village government. Rural local governments existed during the Indus Valley civilization and there has been no historical continuity of Panchayat Raj in India. The British India was ruled by a centralized system. After independence the constituent Assembly set up two committees, one to draw up the union constitution and the second constituted was Provincial committee. In neither of these committees, any mention was made of Panchayat reflecting Gandhian ideas.

It was largely through the initiative of late K.Sardhanam, who always stood for economic and financial decentralization of powers the resolution on Panchayat Raj was moved in the Constituent Assembly.

December 1, 2010

There was an all-round criticism of over-centralization and denial of village government. It was this village panchayat found its way into Directive Principles of state policy of the constitution. Article 40 of the constitution reads "The State shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable to function as local self government".

The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) and Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) recommended for nominal representation to women in the form of two representatives in each elected body of the PRIs. It was further stated that if no women came forward to become a representative women representation must be ensured by co-opting two women as members for the elected body. The

committee on the National Perspective Plan for women 1988 recommended that 30% seat in local self-government as well as the post of president and vice president of these bodies must be reserved for women. The main objective of introducing Panchayat Raj system is to extend democracy up to grassroots level and ensure involvement of the people in all governmental process and development activities.

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5

Table-1 – Actual Representation vis-à-vis reserved seats for Women in Panchayat Raj institutions in select states of India-2004

State	Reservation for women in local government institutions (%)	Number of women elected	Representation of women (%)
Karnataka	33.3	37676	43.60
Andrapradesh	33.3	74019	33.04
Assam	33.3	8714	50.38
Chhattisgarh	33.3	42914	33.75
Gujarat	33.3	42953	49.30
Kerala	33.3	5535	57.24
Tamilnadu	33.3	28124	36.73
Uttaranchal	33.3	19293	37.85
West Bengal	33.3	20509	35.15

Table-2 – Women representation in Indian Politics

	Total seats	women	% of women
Lok-sabha	543	45	8.03
Rajya-sabha	242	28	11.02
Vidhan-sabha of Karnataka	224	26	8.48
Total number of zilla panchayat members in Karnataka	10056	373	37.11
Total number of Taluka panchayat members in Karnataka	36883	1519	41.24
Total number of Gram panchayat members in Karnataka	88779	38147	42.96

Source-Karnataka Journal of politics

Table-3 – Profile of Haveri district Area wise population

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Taluk	Area (sq Kms)	As per 2001 Population Census		Total
Rural & Urban		Male	Female	
Byadgi	438	65765	62179	127944
Hangal	773	118161	42589	203750
Haveri	799	130230	122117	252347
Hirekerur	808	108829	103629	212458
Ranebennur	907	157019	147971	304990
Savanur	539	74353	69532	143885
Shiggaon	588	86112	80630	166742
Total	4848	740469	698647	1439116

Source: Haveri district statistical Dept-2009-10

Table-4 – Administrative structure and Number of PRIs

Sub-Division	Taluka
Haveri:	Haveri, Byadgi, Hirekerur, Ranebennur
Savanur:	Savanur, Shiggaon, Hangal
Zilla panchayat	Haveri
Number of Taluka panchayats	07
Number of Gram panchayats	208
Source-zilla panchayat, Haveri	

6

December 1, 2010

Table-5 – Awareness of self-employment schemes

Schemes	PRI Members			SHG members			Total		
	No	%	T	No	%	T	No	%	T
SOSY	42	68	62	68	63	108	110	65	170
Indira Awas Yojana	43	69	62	50	46	108	93	55	170
Ambedkar Yojana	40	64	62	60	55	108	100	59	170
Ashraya Yojana	39	63	62	60	55	108	100	59	170
PMRY	42	68	62	30	28	108	72	42	170
Navagam Yojana	62	100	62	108	108	108	100	59	170
Kooligali Kalu	62	100	62	108	108	108	100	59	170
Sree Shakti	60	96	62	100	95	108	160	90	170

Source: Field survey.

they are defeating male members also. They are actively participating in local matters.

Table-2 shows women are highly underrepresented in national politics. The success for women in Panchayat Raj institutions due to reservation for women.

Objectives

1. To examine the measures undertaken by PRIs to improve the basic infrastructure viz. public health, anganwadies, education, water and sanitation.
2. To study whether the PRIs have implemented any employment schemes for the empowerment of women.
3. To know whether the PRIs have played any role in promoting SHGs, and
4. To study the attitudes of PRI members towards women's empowerment.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Haveri district of Karnataka. Gram

Panchayat, Taluka Panchayat, Zilla Panchayat members, secretaries, account writers and SHG members constituted the sample unit. An interview schedule was prepared and administered to respondents. Respondents were contacted at their residence, office, and meetings.

The present Haveri district came into existence on 24-8-1997 upon the bifurcation of the District of Dharwad. The District has a historical significance and finds references in the ancient Epic Mahabharat. Through the origin of the name is not known with certainty, some local historians opine that in the olden days the place used to be haunted by a lot of snakes (Havu in kannada the local language). Hence it came to be addressed as Havru (snake). En (came from). In the past, Haveri was ruled by a number of illustrious rulers of Karnataka. The district has a number of historical sites & religious shrines. Culturally, Haveri is well known for folklores, drama, fairs & festivals. The district has rich cultural history. It is also well known for

religious movements spread through the Bhakti cult. The cult was propagated by the Dasas like Kanakadasa, Sharfatab were born here. The temple in Haveri district is generally pleasant and healthy. The district is backward in its socio-economic composition of population.

Haveri has 7 taluks and an area of 4568 sq kms & constitutes 2.53 percent of the state's total geographical area. Decentralization of administration has led to the division of the district into 2 revenue sub-divisions, Haveri & Savanur.

According to the 2001 census, there were 698 villages & 7 unincorporated ones in the district. Decentralization has been successfully implemented in the district where the gram, taluk & district level bodies have been working towards the goal of development with people's participation. PRIs help the women to improve their political empowerment level. In the survey 70% of the

7

December 1, 2010

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women members of GPs and TPs said that to achieve equality in politics, women should make an entry into politics and the problems of women can best be solved only by women. Men cannot understand the women's problems.

PRIs Activities about women empowerment: Empowerment in general and self-employment in particular is closely connected with women's empowerment. An attempt has been made to know what measures the PRIs had taken to implement employment schemes, especially **swarnajyanti gram awarezger yojana**. It played a positive role in organizing SHGs by calling meetings, helped in opening account in a bank, providing seed money and establishing bank linkages etc. Many vocational training has been taken place to improve the conditions of the women.

Training in skills like free computer education, tailoring garments, knitting, bakery sweets, food for anganwadies, health care, agriculture training, preparation of earth worm compost (Erehu manure) small scale industrial training etc. Awareness camp for

rural women has been taken place to improve the conditions of the women as well as the youths.

Data presented in Table-5 shows that an overwhelming majority of both PRI members and SHG members were aware of schemes meant for women and empowerment. It could be clearly stated that a majority of the rural women, under the investigation, had some idea of schemes meant for their upliftment.

One of the basic responsibilities of panchayats is to promote Self-Help Groups, which have come to stay in rural areas as the main women's organizations for empowerment.

It should be noted that women's empowerment depends upon the extent to which basic infrastructure such as schools, public health, anganwadies and water and sanitation are provided to rural women. In the survey it has come to know that all are functioning well as per people, expectations. PRI's office bearers supervise and check duties, attendance of school teachers public health and anganwadi staff. There were over head tanks and water

stands, but water is not regularly stored due to leak shedding.

Conclusion

Majority of the members reported that there has been improvement in the panchayat administration due to 73rd amendment. They also feel that it has improved the status of women.

The women members also stated that there were no difficulties due to male dominated society. The situation is changing very fast. Some of the women chairmen have done commendable job. They are marching on the challenging road towards empowerment.

It could be concluded that the new PRIs has played relatively positive role in providing infrastructure, employment opportunities and promoting SHGs. Consequently, there is a change in the attitudes of rural women who are becoming conscious of education, employment etc. But income generating schemes have not been implemented to the satisfaction of the beneficiaries. □

December 1, 2010