EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH THEIR PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF MALAPPURAM DISTRICT OF KERALA

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ABDUL SAMEER PM

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Submitted By

ABDUL SAMEER PM
Assistant Professor
Department of Economics
Government College Malappuram
Kerala-676509
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Declaration

I, ABDUL SAMEER PM, do hereby declare that this written account titled ‘EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH THEIR PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF MALAPPURAM DISTRICT OF KERALA’ is a bonafide record of research done by me under UGC Minor research project as per order 1578-MRP/14-15/KLCA016/UGC-SWRO dated 04/02/2015. I also declare that the thesis has not been submitted by me earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar title.

Malappuram

ABDUL SAMEER PM

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Principal Investigator
INTRODUCTION

India is the second largest populated country in the world where nearly 70\textsuperscript{1} per cent of the population lives in rural areas\textsuperscript{2}. Women constitute an integral part of rural India as 405.83 million or 48.69 per cent of the rural people are women. But in India women have been deprived of various kinds of opportunities and advantages by our traditional society for the past several centuries. The woman was marginalised from the public sphere and most of the decisions are taken by the male dominated power structure in the society. Various initiatives are taken to improve the status of women in independent India. ‘The constitution guarantees socio-economic and political equality and the provision of equal right for availing different opportunities to all social groups of population, especially women’ (Nayana, 2008). The article 14 of the constitution ensures equality before law and article 15 prohibits any discriminatory practices. Article 15(3) empowers states for making special provisions for favor of women and children, Article 16 (1) guarantees equalities in matters relating to employment and appointment to any public office for all the citizens and Article 16(2) forbids discriminatory practices on account of religion, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them in providing employment under any government or public department is concerned. In addition to this, Article 38 directs state to ensure justice, socio economic and political order and to speed up and guarantee the welfare of the people. Similarly Article 39 directly focuses on ensuring equality among men and women in providing opportunities of employment and livelihood, equal pay for similar category of work and protection of every segment of work force. In all, our constitution has provided increasing initiative for minimising the discriminatory practices which were deeply developed before independence against women and other socially disadvantaged communities. Beside these a number of programmes were introduced to reduce poverty and unemployment among the rural women thereby improve the status of women within the family and society.\textsuperscript{3} However little progress could be achieved in ensuring the effective participation and empowerment of women. Mohanty et al (1997) states that in order to make our democracy legitimate, women will have to make their full contribution in the political stream.

\textsuperscript{1} Rural – Urban distribution of population was 68.84\% & 31.16\% respectively as per census,2011
\textsuperscript{2} Census,2011
\textsuperscript{3} Some of the initiatives are; setting up of an exclusive Department of Women and Child Development in 1983; setting up of Women Development Corporations in 1986-87; setting up of National Commission for women in 1990, to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women;
Recognising the unsatisfactory progress, it has increasingly been felt desirable that involving rural women in any political system and ensuring their participation in the activities of political institutions, including in matters related to certain decision making process, would be instrumental in improving the socio-economic status and political empowerment of women. The participation of women in PRIs is considered essential not only for ensuring their political participation in the democratic process but also for realising the developmental goals for women (BiswaJith, 2015). The 73rd constitutional amendment act was a significant step towards opening up the space for women’s political participation and in acknowledging their role in the development of their villages.

EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The term empowerment is a broad concept and it depends on the situations in which it has been used. Empowerment is the ability or capacity attained by a person to determine his destiny. Empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. Empowerment as action refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence, and to recognize and use their resources. In a broader sense, empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. So empowerment has multiple, interrelated and interdependent dimensions such as economic, social, cultural, psychological and political dimensions (Sowdeeswari, 2014).

Women’s empowerment has become a significant topic of discussion in development economics. The word 'empowerment' has been widely used in relation to women, terms like 'women's welfare', 'upliftment', 'development', 'reservation', etc are proceeded to mean and referred to empowerment. Women’s economic empowerment refers to the ability for women to enjoy their rights to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and wellbeing. In our study empowerment of women will be measured in most of the above said dimensions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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4 A detailed discussion of the concept has given in chapter 2

5 Wikipedia
The Indian constitution guarantees political equality to men and women through adult franchise and equal opportunity in contesting elections and administering various posts. But the equal status could not be visualised through mere declaration in constitution. Political equality cannot be visualized in just casting votes at different level of democracy. If adequate opportunities to take part in the deliberations of the nation are not provided, participation has no meaning (Mastern, 2002). The representation of women in different level of administration seems to be critically low. For instance the proportion of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in the 1993 Lok Sabha was only 35/ 543 members (6.4 per cent) and it was only 66 out of 543 members in 2014, (12.05 per cent) in the present Lok Sabha. The same was in the case of Kerala Legislative Assembly also. It was 8 out of 140 (5.7 per cent) in the last assembly election of 2016. Since participation in casting votes has not been resulted in political representations of women in all level of democracy, various governments were introduced several measure to increase the participation of women in democracy.

Panchayat system or rural local self-government means the ruling of a local area by a body of people of the same locality. The ruling of people in a locality by their own people, preparation and implementation of plans at local level was a long cherished dream based on the Gandhian principle of ‘Grama Swaraj’. Mahathma Gandhi believes that India lives in villages and development of the country will possible only through the development of villages which will reduce the gap between the “haves and have not's”. These Gandhian principles were incorporated in Indian constitution under the part IV Directive Principles of State Policy as Article 40 which states that ‘the state shall take steps to organize Village Panchayats and to endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as the units of self-government’. Since Article 40 comes in Directive Principles of State Policy which are not enforceable by any court, it took long time to fulfill the dream of grass root democracy. It was the 73rd constitutional amendment act of 1992 which paved the way for a constitutionally bind and a uniform democratic decentralization in our country. The 73rd constitutional amendment act of 1992 ensured a three tier panchayat systems across country. It also ensures the representation of women in all local bodies by reserving one third of the seats to women. The introduction of reservation in favors of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions has therefore been an important government intervention for maximising the participation of women in different activities at gram panchayat level and thereby to improve their socio economic status.

A two tier system exist in some states which have been discussed in detail chapter 3
Inline to the constitutional amendment act of 1992 Kerala legislative assembly has also passed the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act in 1994 and one third of the seats are reserved to women. Subsequently various amendments were made on Kerala Panchayti Raj 1994 and in 2009 amendment the number of reserved seats for women has increased to 50 per cent in all positions in all levels of local self governments. The 50 per cent reservation to women made applicable since the local self government election in 2010. In Kerala the panchayati raj system is based on three tier system; Gram panchayat at the bottom, Block panchayat at the middle and District panchayat at the top in a district. This study is focused on the basic tier grama panchayats. Here there is more scope for people’s participation and particularly for women’s representation. In this light the present study is an attempt to examine the empowerment of women through their participation in Panchayati Raj institutions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study and analyse the Panchayati Raj system and participation of women in the wake of seventy third Constitutional Amendment Act
- To understand the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of the elected women representatives in the study area
- To study the involvement of elected women representatives in decision making process
- To examine the role of reservation of seats for women in their empowerment
- To study and assess the level of awareness of the elected women representatives about their roles and responsibilities and awareness of various development programs

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

As the title shows, the present study is an attempt to understand the empowerment of women through their participation in Panchayati Raj institutions in Malappuram district. There are fifteen block panchayats in Malappuram districts, out of which four block panchayats has been selected for our study through simple random sampling method. The selected block panchayats are Malappuram, Mankada, Tirurangadi and Ponnani. There are 21 grama panchayats under these four block panchayats\(^7\). Malappuram block panchayat consists of six grama panchayaths, Mankada block panchayat consists six

\(^7\) Detailed list of block panchayats has been given in Appendix
grama panchayts. Tirurangadi block panchayats consists of 5 grama panchayts, Ponnani block panchayats consists of four grama panchayts. There are 401 wards or constituencies under these 21 grama panchayats, out of which 217 wards are represented by women members. Our study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected from all these 217 elected women representatives by using a questionnaire which has been given in Appendix 1.

The secondary data has been collected from the published and unpublished sources especially from the journals, internet, books, articles and also from the official website of local self department of Kerala government, the website of election commission of Kerala. Secondary data has also been collected from the office of all Block Panchayats. Both primary and secondary data has been used for analysing the empowerment of women through Panchayat Raj Institutions.

PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

Malappuram is a district in northern Kerala with Malapuuram as its administrative headquarters. Malayalam is the principal language of the district. It was formed in the year 1969 by taking some of the regions of erstwhile Palakkad and Kozhikode districts. Ernadu and Tirur Taluks are taken from Kozhikode district, Ponnani and Perinthalmanna Taluks are from Palakkad district. Presently there are 7 Taluks namely Ernad, Tirur, Tirurangadi, Ponnani, Perintalmanna, Nilambur and Kondotty. ‘The term Malappuram means “terraded place atop the hills”, it is mainly because of the geographical features of the district. Earlier the district was known as Eranad, Valluwanad etc. During different periods of time the district was ruled by many different powerful dynasties namely Chera dynasty, Kulasekhara dynasty, Valluwanad dynasty, Vettattunadu (Tanur) dynasty, Parappanad dynasty and Nediyiruppu (the Zamorins) dynasty. During the British rule it was a part of Malabar district of Madras presidency. It was joined to Kerala along with the Travncore and Kochi region to form the state in 1956 (Kerala District Fact Book, 2017).

References

8 Details of wards in each grama panchayat has given in appendix

9 Panchayat wise details of EWRs are given in Appendix

10 Questionnaire has given in Appendix I

11 Kerala District Fact Book, malappuram district, edited by Dr. R.K. Thukral, Data net India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
The geographical area of the district is \(3,550 \text{ km}^2\) and the density of population is 1158 per square kilometer (1,158/km\(^2\)). It is the third largest district in the state. The district is bounded by Wayanad and Kozhikkode districts on the north, Tamil Nadu on the northeast, Palakkad district on the southeast and south, Thrissur district on the southwest, the Arabian Sea on the west and Kozhikode district on the northwest (Kerala District Fact Book, 2017). As per the census 2011 Malappuram is the most populated district in the state with population of 41, 10,956 which accounts 12.31% of the population of Kerala. Out of the total 41, 10,956 people in the district 21, 52,592 are women which are 52.37 percent of total population in the district. Malappuram is a Muslim majority district in the state and the community ratio is; 70.24 per cent are Muslims, 27.06 percent are Hindus and 1.98 percent are Christians. The literacy ratio of the district as per 2011 census is 93.55 and it has the sex ratio of 1096 female for 100 male (1096/1000) which is higher than the state average of 1084/1000 in 2011.

There are 16 Legislative assembly constituencies in the districts; they are Malappuram, Manjeri, Kondotty, Eranad, Mankada, Perinthalmanna, Thirurangadi, Vengara, Vallikkunnu, Tirur, Tanur, Kottakkal, Nilambur, Wandoor, Ponnani and Tavanur. The Indian Parliament constituencies (Lok Sabha) from the district are Malappuram and Ponnani. In Malappuram there is one district Panchayat and 15 Block Panchayats. It has also 94 grama panchayats coming under these 15 block panchayats.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study has its own limitations. Due to paucity of time and financial resources, the study is confined to 4 block panchayts in the district to administer the questionnaire and interview schedule. Another limitation of the study is that due to the time constraints and limited scope of the study it did not take in to account the perceptions of people about the performance of women representative in panchayati raj institutions. We also did face some difficulties while collecting data due to the reluctance of some Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) to disclose things properly.

**FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY**

In the present study we made an attempt to understand the empowerment of women through their participation in panchayati raj institutions. Women empowerment was one of the

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12 A detailed analysis of the LSGIs in Malappuram district has given in chapter3

13 Henceforth we will use EWRs for Elected Women Representatives
important objectives of 73rd constitutional amendment Act of 1992 as it reserved one third of the seats to women in panchayati raj institutions in India. As a follow up to the 73rd constitutional amendment Act, many states has passed their own act and reserved the seats for women. Kerala Panchayati raj act of 1994 was a landmark one in the history of decentralized democracy in the state and empowerment of women. The act has reserved one third of the total seats in all level of panchayati raj institutions to women. In 2009 the Kerala government has increased the reservation of seats for women from the then existing on by third to 50 per cent in all positions and all levels of PRIs. In this context through the present study we tried to understand the impact of this reservation on the empowerment of elected women representatives in PRIs in Kerala. For this purpose we choose Malappuram district as our case.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

- The present study reveals that majority of the current elected women representatives are middle aged group, ie the age group of 41-50. We could also find that more than fifty percent of the present EWRs are entered into politics and democratic process at their younger age, i.e. 31-40 age group. This reveals the fact that the younger generation of women has realised the value of political participation.

- The study also find that about two third of the EWRs in the study area are belongs to Muslim community. Traditionally Muslim women were marginalised from the politics and decision making. The reservation of seats to women in PRIs did help to increase the number of Muslim women in power and decision making process. Higher representation of Muslim women in PRIs might be attributed to the Muslim majority characteristics of the district. But it cannot be simply confined to demographic features because even though many committees find that this particular community has been marginalized in many government jobs and the representation of this community in bureaucracy is significantly lower. In this context the higher representation of Muslim women in PRIs in the district is definitely a welcome sign of their improvement.

- It has been observed that the participation of women with secondary education and below is tends to be more in decentralised democracy. The proportion of women

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14 A detailed discussion of the methodology has given in first chapter
having higher education that is degree or more is less in PRIS in the study area. However it should be noted that all the EWRs are literate.

- An analysis of the social background of EWRs reveals that 77 per cent of the respondents belong to other Backward Community (OBC) category. It is also important to note that the proportion of upper caste women is lesser in PRIs in the district as it is only about 12 per cent in the districts. But the most distressing fact is that the representation of Sc and ST women is lesser in PRIs in the study area. This implies that the reservation of seats to women in PRIs is not helped to increase the number of SC/ST women. They have the representation in PRIS in the study area only because of the reservation of seats to disadvantaged or SC/ST seats. This stress the need of increasing the number of reserved seats to SC/ST women.

- We could find that majority of the respondents are married and are able to balance their roles in family life and political life up to some extent.

- It is also find that the nuclear family set up is more prevalent among the EWRs in the study area.

- The study also find that majority of the EWRs were housewives and not engaged in any income earning activities before contesting elections. Some of them were teachers and Asha workers. It has serious concerns that a large portion of women are coming out from home where they were traditionally restricted to domestic work. So proper training and guidance will be needed to perform them more effectively in panchayati raj institutions.

- Most of the EWRs reported that they are spending most of the working hours in a day for the works related to panchayt. That is they are either engaged in their constituency or in panchayat or at home for addressing the things related to their constituency. Many of them are quit their previous job as they says they are not getting enough time to manage all those things.

- 77 per cent of the EWRs reported that none of their family members are elected to PRIs before and only 22 per cent says that their family members were elected before to PRIs. This is against the common perception that the male members are nominating their close relatives either wife or daughter in the constituency they have elected before in order to retain their power and supremacy.

- But when we are asked about the motivational factor for first contesting in elections to the PRIs only few of them states that their self interest and motivation led to their
entry in politics. Majority of them states that their entry in to politics has been influenced either by a political party or by her husband. So the interest of another institution has been dominated over self interest in many cases

- Another interesting finding is that around 81 per cent of the current EWRs are first timers in PRIs. Only few of them are elected twice or thrice in to PRIs. This is a serious concern which is needed to be addressed while forming policies as only very few women is getting acceptance among the society as a political leader there by able to contest twice or thrice in to PRIs

- Another important finding is that 80 percent of the current EWRs are contested in a constituency which is reserved for women and only 20 per cent of them are elected from a general seat

- Two third of the EWRs reported that the voters in their ward meet them first to discuss the matters related to the benefits which they are expected to get from the panchayat and also the other things which are need to be get from the panchayt

- An analysis of the political awareness of EWRs in PRIs reveals that most of them are well aware about the functioning of PRIs. But only very few of them are well aware about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and Kerala Panchayti Raj Act. But all of them are aware about the reservation of seats for women in PRIs

- When we asked about their desire to continue in politics majority reported that they would like to continue in politics. But the serious concern is that 45 per cent of the current EWRs are not interested to contest in the next election or they are not interested to continue in politics. When we asked about the reason for the decision of not continuing in politics many of them reported that they are struggling to maintain balance between work related to panchayat and household work. Most of them also states that the economic benefit is less in performing their duty as a panchayt member and they have to spend more for the work related to panchayt than what they are getting from the panchayat

- Only very few or one fourth of the total EWRs in the study area are handling prestigious positions in panchayts such as President, Vice President or the Chairman of standing committee.

- A majority of the respondents belonged to APL category, only 35 per cent of them are belongs to BPL category. It means that majority of EWRs in the study area are from financially sound families
Majority of the respondents reported that the economic decisions within the family and the decisions related to the education of their children have been taken by the husband and wife jointly. That means they also have their voice in the most important decisions within the family.

99 per cent of the EWs are regular attendees of panchayt board meetings and majority of them say that they are actively participating in the board meetings and are able to speak freely the matters related to the panchayts and their constituency.

Almost all of them are convened at least 4 or more grama sabha meetings in the last year.

Women are the major attendees of grama sabha meetings in the study area. 85 per cent of the respondents says that the participation of women in grama sabha meetings are more than 50 per cent.

Only very few of them are organised protests or submitted memorandum related to the common issues of their constituency. Most of them say that they have not experienced such issue in their constituency so far. Most of them are organised health related campaigns in their constituency.

All of them say that their interaction with the public has been increased after being elected as a member. Most of them also reported that their interaction with other institutions such as; Interaction with bureaucrats, Interaction with police are also increased after getting elected. 91 per cent of them also reported that their concerned political parties or political front are now inviting them to participate in general election campaigns or party meetings.

Association of EWRs with Community Based Organisations such as Kudumbashree, youth clubs etc are less in the study area. Only 41 per cent of the EWRs are members of Kudumbashree units.

Most of the EWRs have the opinion that their status in the society has been improved after becoming a member in grama panchayt.

In our study we could find that Elected Representatives function within a supportive environment. They are getting support from their family members in house hold work getting more support from their partners and only few of them are the opinion that the support from the family or husband has decreased or remained the same after becoming a member.
Most of them have attended more than two training programmes in the current term and they have the view that the training which they are received so far were excellent.

EWRs have emphasised that the reservation of seats to women in PRIs will helps to improve the status of women in the society. They also now feel that they are more role to work for women in the society and they are also wish to do so.

**IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

- The reservation of seats to women in PRIs did help to increase the number of Women especially Muslim women in power and decision making process. So the reservation policy should be continued.
- The same seat or constituency should be reserved for women for more than one term so that the woman could able to establish a rapport and acceptance among the people in the society. The existing rotation system will not help to improve the conditions of women as only very of the members are getting chance to contest in the same constituency due to this rotation system.
- The representation of SC/ ST women in grama panchayat in the study area is critically low. So the number of reserved seats to SC/ ST women should be increased and reservation on the basis of caste should be continued.
- Most of the women members are motivated to enter politics either by political parties or by any family members. They have not entered into politics out of personal traits. So the government should take necessary steps to attract more talented women in to democratic process.
- The proportion of highly educated and qualified women in garama panchayts is relatively smaller compared to lower level of education. So the government should take necessary steps to attract more educated women in to democratic process and politics.
- Since all of them are not satisfied with the current honorarium which they are receiving, the government should increase the honorarium to the elected members in PRIs. It will attract more highly educated and talented women in to politics and decentralized democracy. It will also help to reduce corruption in local self governments.
Most of the EWRs are struggling to maintain a balance between their family life and political life. This appears to be the major impediment for women in not making much headway in politics.

Since most of them are not well aware about the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act and Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, more classes and trainings should be given on these acts.

Since empowerment is a multidimensional process, concerted efforts and holistic intervention of all is necessary to achieve the goal.

The government should take the initiatives to improve the access of women to community based organisations and may also try to form women youth clubs, vayana shalas, and other youth forums.

More support from officials and the public should be given to EWRs to perform their functions effetely.

CONCLUSION

It is quite evident from the study that, participation of women in grama panchayats helped to improve the status of women in the society. The 73rd constitutional amendment act and the reservation of sets to women in PRIs helped to bring out more women from their home to the political sphere. It did help to improve their autonomy, self esteem and also helped to improve their status in the society. Their voices are now heard not only in panchayat board meetings but also in the society that they live and their opinions are now considered while taking major decisions within the family. They are now able to interact with other institutions in the society such as police, bureaucrats etc without any fear. Political parties are now seeking the involvement of these women in their election campaigns and also participating them in their party meetings. Now the male dominant society have realised that participation and representation of women is an unavoidable factor at least in the context of elections to the local self government institutions. We do agree that there are miles to go before we sleep to get the women empowered in all aspects. To conclude we can say that despite all the short comings and challenges woman are now become an integral part of our grass root democracy.