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## Impact of empowerment factors on the participation of women in Gram Panchayats: An empirical evidence from Tamilnadu, India

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### Abstract

The main objective of this paper to find the factors influencing participation of women in Gram Panchayats in Tamilnadu, in the discharge of financial, social, and administrative functions and to formulate an evaluation of the impact that their participation made on local development. The enquiry into the socio-economic background of women members is required to throw some light on the variables that assistance or upset women performance in the Panchayats. For example, support from family, education, and occupational related experience might be factors, which enable women members to obtain political stature in the society. The enquiry into the socio-economic background of women members is expected to throw some light on the factors that help or hinder women's performance in the Panchayat e.g, support from family, education, and occupational practice may be factors, which help women members obtain political importance in society. This study has chosen women representatives in Cuddalore block, totally 160 sample women representatives were selected from 14 village panchayats. For gathering primary data from the field, a structured interview Schedule was developed, which included all aspects necessary to identify empowerment factors influencing participation of women in Tamilnadu, India.

**Keywords:** empowerment, panchayat, rural development, women development, political stature, socio economic status

### 1. Introduction

Women assume a subordinate part in the society in many parts of the world. The issue in women's development is the rectification of the disproportionate power relations amongst men and women in the society [1]. Men dominate both at home and outside home when they work with women; in local bodies in which women have a legitimate status of power, men have a tendency to prohibit them or disregard their perspectives or more awful still, physically ambush them [2]. Women have been strolling on a tightrope since the time they took up leadership positions in local bodies [3]. Women were being pulled in two ways on the one side, by the political party that supported them and on the other side, by the women's organisation, which clamored for justice. The Committee on the status of women in India detailed that no political party had made genuine examination of the ramifications of equality for women and that in each party, aside from social reform agenda on women's education, healthcare and welfare and change of women's position inside the family, they had little idea with as to what genuine political equality for women implied [4]. Their perspective of women was essentially of a crippled group [5]. The enquiry into the socio-economic background of women members is required to throw some light on the variables that assistance or upset women performance in the Panchayats e.g support from family, education, and occupational associated practice may be factors, which make possible women members to get hold of political importance in the society [6]. The enquiry into the socio-economic conditions of women members is predictable to throw some light on the factors that help or hinder women's performance in the *Panchayats e.g*

support from family, education, and occupational practice may be factors, which help women members acquire political importance in society [7].

#### 1.1 Role of Women representatives in gram panchayats

The Panchayats are predictable to take part in a main role in rural development in India, predominantly after independence. The plan documents of both the central and state governments and various committees have emphasized the consequence of these bodies in the polity [8]. The Five-year plans, particularly the second five-year plan, laid special importance on the role of Panchayats in rural developments [9]. The role of Panchayat Raj institutions as instrument of rural rebuilding and development needs no importance. They have been well-run with wider powers and financial resources not purely as institutions of political participation but institutions of social and economic development. However, the Panchayat Raj has come to be connected with two broad images, first, it is a government by itself and second it is an agency of the state government [10]. In the integrated execute of planning for social and economic development and co-ordinate roles, the present set up is a three-tier representative structure of government where the administrators, elected leaders and local population participate in the developmental effort and elected women representatives obtain in the key role in the decision making process, leaders are regard as facilities of the technique of development [11]. Ever since the highlighting of rural development policies is bring about people's participation in the development programmes, it is possible to accomplish this through the leaders. The administrators are acknowledged to

participate with missionary passion in the life and development of the villages and these institutions are to be galvanized to become effectual instruments of social and economic change. The rural development has been especially a government support process rather than the people-led process in India and to formulate and implement rural development programs an suitable institutional structure is necessary. This need was met by the concern of Panchayat Raj Institution in India <sup>[12]</sup>. Further, the Panchayat Raj Institution, being local self-governing bodies ensure, the opportunity for people's participation and participation in the formulation and implementation of rural development programs. Consequently, the Panchayat Raj Institution is entrusted with the task of promote rural development in India <sup>[13]</sup>. Since Independence greater importance has been laid on the social, economic and planning policy of India for create a suitable rural, economic and social infrastructure and promoting overall development <sup>[14]</sup>. The planning policy of India accorded the highest main concern to agriculture and rural development. The primary purpose of rural development is the enhancement of the quality of the rural masses, predominantly the poorer and the weaker sections of the rural society <sup>[15]</sup>. The execution of democratic decentralization in the course of the Panchayat Raj institutions was meant to give an opportunity for local initiative and participation in the developmental actions. Therefore, this study look to accompany objective: to identify the empowerment factors influencing participation of women in gram panchayats of Tamilnadu, India.

## 1.2 Empirical literature

Keeping this in view the objectives of this investigation, the important literature has been review:

According to Desai and Thakkar <sup>[13]</sup> explain the history of women's major issues and actions since the 19th century. They tried to focus on the complex nature of work contributed by women, their educational status, their contribution in the organized and unorganized sectors, their political participation, and legal status, their position in the family and outside world. Mishra <sup>[14]</sup> argues the husbands and family members influence the women representatives in taking decisions in Orissa, According to Arun <sup>[15]</sup> founds in most cases women representatives are housewives, first time entrants into politics and most of them are illiterate or educated up to primary level and Palanithuri <sup>[16]</sup> reports the women were not reported or invited to the meetings in male headed Gram Panchayat. Husbands of the members used to accompany them (women) when they come to attend the meetings.

Moreover, Pai <sup>[17]</sup> founds the Pradhan in Panchayats were illiterate and only able to affix their signatures on official papers. The women representatives contest for election due to family pressure and also the decision of their community and not because of their own interest. And Spandau <sup>[18]</sup> founds the women entered into politics due to mandatory provision of reservation or due to pressure from their family members or pressure from their village community. Further, Manikyamba <sup>[19]</sup> founds the socio-economic background in general and political background in particular are important determinants of shaping the nature and level of participation of women members in political institutions and her study concludes that

the participation of poor women members is mostly found insignificant. Sing <sup>[20]</sup> presents the findings of an empirical study of the elected women representatives of the PRIs of Haryana for exploring the extent of their empowerment as a result of the implementation of 73rd Amendment Act.

Likewise, Bharti <sup>[21]</sup> explains the before 73rd Amendment came into force, Government of Orissa had adopted some of the important provisions such as reservation of seats for women, SCs, STs in its existing Panchayat Raj Acts and Kaul and Sahni <sup>[22]</sup> explores the extent of political participation of women elected representatives in Panchayats and the problems faced by them in two districts of Jammu and Kathua. Finally, Patnaik <sup>[23]</sup> founds the participation of elected representatives belonging to weaker sections in the functioning of four gram panchayats in Orissa's Dhenkanal district, in order to observe the extent to which numerical representation has been successful in the actual exercise of power by these sections.

## 1.3 Research Methods

The researcher has selected Cuddalore block in Cuddalore district of Tamilnadu, the women representatives are the respondents of the study. A random sampling technique was adopted in villages from sample block. Among the 51 village Panchayats in Cuddalore block, this study was confined to 14 selected village panchayats. The study was conducted by employing an interview schedule. The researcher has chosen women representatives in Cuddalore block, totally 160 sample women representatives were selected from 14 village panchayats. For gathering primary data from the field, a structured interview Schedule was developed, which included all aspects necessary to cover the objectives of the study.

## 1.4 Empowerment factors influencing participation of women

This study concerned the collection of primary data collected from sample women representative through structured surveys. The samples of 160 women representatives from different gram panchayats in Cuddalore district of Tamilnadu were selected with the reason of this study. Thus, the results of the analysis tested by using percentage analysis with the help of primary data collected from primary sources.

Table 1 indicates empowerment factors of women representatives in gram panchayat, the education status of the respondents shows, 38.12 per cent of them are illiterate, 34.38 per cent are up to primary level and 44.50 per cent are up to high school respectively. Now-a-days educated young girls of the village don't want to be the candidate at Gram Panchayats. They give more significance to their own works rather than village-works. While, taking any jobs outside the village is their priority rather than to be the member of village panchayats, initially there was an intention among the educated people to stand in the panchayat election. Now highly educated women carefully avoid the works of Panchayats and even some women do not want to join the village party politics. Similarly, some women of this village are so much educated that they are engaged in teaching or other jobs but they avoid panchayats. Accordingly, education is such a influential parameter, which is necessary for any value judgment, political participation or any decision making. Furthermore, the

traditional society control and access of any decision making lie in the hands of the elder people, it is an accepted fact that

the overall educational status of female is quite low in all the gram panchayat

**Table 1:** Empowerment factors of women representatives in gram Panchayat

Empowerment factors	Number of respondents	Percentage
Education wise		
illiterates	61	38.12
Up to primary	55	34.38
Up to high school	44	27.50
Total	160	100
Caste		
General class	55	34.38
Backward class	60	37.50
Scheduled caste	45	28.13
Total	160	100
Representation		
representing their gram panchayat for the first time	89	55.62
representing their gram panchayat for the second time	27	16.88
representing their ward for the third time	44	27.50
Total	160	100
Awareness		
aware of the 73rd constitutional amendment	15	9.38
role in identification of the problem of the gram panchayats	31	19.38
raised problem in the meeting and the problem have been solved	62	38.75
Role in link people to Government Projects and schemes	33	20.62
role is to take initiation to complete the incomplete project	19	11.87
Total	160	100
Active participation		
didn't have any sort of participation	5	28.13
participate regularly and are active	28	17.50
poor participation of the respondents includes male dominance	35	21.87
lack of political experience	33	20.63
gender discrimination	19	11.87
Total	160	100
Source of inspiration		
husband encouragement	69	43.13
husband and family members	55	34.37
village leader	36	22.50
Total	160	100
Decision making		
active involvement in decision making	124	77.50
Not involvement in decision making	36	22.50
Total	160	100
Male dominance		
Husbands	36	22.50
gender discrimination	19	11.88
handling issues independently	58	36.25
don't have the capacity to handle issues independently	47	29.37
Total	160	100
Socio-cultural and educational activities		
economically well-off families	82	51.25
other backward castes and poor women	78	48.75
Total	160	100

Source: Computed

The caste reveals the majority of backward class (i.e 37.50%) participates in gram panchayat, while, in general class the level of participation is 34.38 per cent and schedule caste is less participation in gram panchayat (i.e 28.13%). As a result that it clears that the backward class is more participate in gram panchayat as compare to other. As a consequence, caste is

another main parameter to guess the type of leadership according to social stratification, it denote the members' placement, access and control in gram panchayat. The representation of women in gram panchayat examine 89 (i.e 55.62%) of the respondents are representing their gram panchayat for the first time, only 16.88 per cent are

representing their gram panchayat for the second time and rest 44 (i.e 27.50%) are representing their ward for the third time. As a result, the majority of the members is first entrant to gram panchayat and for this reason is less experienced.

The awareness of the respondents in gram panchayat activities reveal 9.38 per cent were aware of the 73rd constitutional amendment. The awareness about discharging the responsibilities was also very much varied as only 19.38 per cent shared their role in identification of the problem of the gram panchayat, though 38.75 per cent women representatives said that they raised problem in the meeting and the problem have been solved. Approximately, 33 (i.e 20.62%) opined that their role is to link people to Government Projects and schemes, where 11.87 per cent women representatives thought that their role is to take initiation to complete the incomplete project. The participation of the women was record in terms of members of SHG, members in the committees of gram panchayat and attendance at the meetings of gram panchayat or member of any other local organisation. Conversely, active Members of the respondents in gram panchayat activities depict, 28.13 per cent of the respondents didn't have any sort of participation and out of those who have any participation only 17.50 per cent participate regularly and are active. The key in causes mentioned for poor participation of the respondents include male dominance (i.e 21.87%), lack of political experience (i.e 20.63%) and gender discrimination (i.e 11.87%).

The sources of inspiration of respondents into the public life due to the influence of varied factors, such as self-interest, compulsion of family members and others. The Source of inspiration of respondents in gram panchayat depict the husband encouragement (i.e 43.13%) was the foremost factor responsible for large-scale induction of women into Panchayats. It is clear that, husband and family members (i.e 34.37%) and village leader (i.e 22.50%) play a significant role in motivating women to enter in panchayat politics.

The ability to think and take independent decisions is an important dimension in the empowerment process; it also depends to a large extent on the social and cultural background of the individual as well as the values of the society. Therefore, better level of awareness and providing opportunities for participation in public sphere collective with an enable environment could lead to effectual decision making among women. The decision making of the respondents in gram panchayat show that the barriers in women participation are also hindering them in decision making due to which only 124 (i.e 77.50%) women representatives respond about their active involvement in decision making rest of them are not involvement of decision making. Selected the male members (husband of elected women representatives) take advantage by keep them out of main meetings and attending the meetings in place of women representatives and execute their decisions. While, some respondents also felt that their views are ignored only because they are women.

Male dominance of the respondents in gram panchayat depict that husbands (i.e 22.50%) handle their work and hassled them to approve their decisions, while, 11.88 per cent says that gender discrimination exist in panchayat. The male dominance is prove by the fact that only 36.25 per cent women representatives told that they are handling issues independently in wards and panchayats, while 29.37 per cent respondents was in the view that they don't have the capacity to handle issues independently in their constituencies. Though, the women representatives are getting limited opportunities and freedom to participate in socio-cultural and educational activities. The women among upper castes and those belong to economically well-off families have more participation in the panchayat activities as compare to other backward castes and poor women. The socio-cultural and educational activities of the respondents in gram panchayat shows on the issue of women empowerment the voice was strong as 51.25 per cent has favored it and also, 48.75 per cent told that they are handling issues separately.

### 1.5 Empowerment factors influencing participation of women

This section inspect the empowerment factors influencing participation of women representatives in the study area, the results of the analysis tested by using Correlation and multiple linear Regression technique. Furthermore, this study has taken women participation viz., caste and education as dependent factors and empowerment factors viz., awareness, and sources of inspiration, participation, male dominance, decision making and women empowerment as independent factors. This study analyzes relationship between empowerment factors and participation of women (education and caste) in gram panchayat in the study area. The results are analyzed using correlation techniques. The Correlation Co efficient formula is;

$$R = \frac{\sum dx dy}{n \sqrt{(X^2 - A1)(Y^2 - A2)}} / \sqrt{nx}$$

Where,

X = mean of x series, Y = mean of y series

A1 = Assumed Mean Value of X series

A2 = Assumed mean value of Y series

S<sub>dx</sub>d<sub>y</sub> = product of deviations from assumed averages

X = standard deviation of X series

Y = Standard deviation of Y series

N = Total number of pairs

The zero order correlation coefficient of independent variables viz representation, awareness, active members, source of inspiration, decision making, male dominance and socio cultural activities taken up for the study towards dependent variable viz., caste and education. Table 2 depict out of seven independent variables taken up for the study, five variables viz., awareness, source of inspiration, decision making, male dominance and socio cultural activities were found to be having a positive and significant association at one per cent level of probability.

**Table 2:** relationships between empowerment factors and participation of women in gram Panchayat

Variable(s)	Correlation co efficient value (r )	
	Caste	Education
awareness	0.6475*	0.5675*
source of inspiration	0.7156*	0.6245*
decision making	0.6942*	0.6012*
male dominance	0.7925 *	0.6547 *
socio cultural activities	0.6668*	0.5978*

Source: primary data

Note: \*Significant at 1 per cent, NS: Not Significant

Moreover, empowerment factors namely, awareness, source of inspiration, decision making, male dominance and socio cultural activities are most important variable, which influence caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayats as revealed in correlation coefficient values. It reveal that all the above mentioned most important empowerment factors are positively significant with caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayat in Cuddalore District of Tamilnadu. Further, this study analyze impact of empowerment factors on caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayat in the study area. The results are analyzed using multiple log linear regression equation; it is given in the form of

$$\text{LogY} = a + \text{logbx}_1 + \text{logbx}_2 + \dots + \text{logbx}_n + u$$

Where,

Y = Dependent Variable

X1...Xn = Independent Variables

U = Random Disturbance

Table 3 indicates the empowerment factors viz., awareness, and source of inspiration, decision making, and male dominance and socio cultural activities influencing participation of women in gram panchayats. The ‘t’ values are the result of a test of the significance of relationship. The value of elasticity indicates that the degree of relationship between the dependent and the explanatory variables. Among five explanatory variables, that influence the differences in caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayat in the study area, it is evident that the calculated value of ‘t’ is greater than the tabulated value of ‘t’ at 1 per cent level of significance. The five variables have positively influencing the caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayat.

**Table 3:** empowerment Factors influencing caste and education wise participation of women in gram Panchayat

Variable(s)	Regression co efficient value (b )	Regression co efficient value (b )
Constant (a)	1.3201** (2.18)	1.72349* (4.10)
awareness	1.6541* (3.382)	1.1245* (3.124)*
source of inspiration	1.0656* (3.123)	1.0042* (3.011)
decision making	1.9900* (2.272)	1.3451* (2.114)
male dominance	1.0690* (2.208)	1.0111* (2.107)
socio cultural activities	1.0432* (3.487)	1.0012* (2.987)
R2 Value	0.66.75	0.6054

Source: primary data, Note: \*Significant at 1 per cent, NS: Not Significant

The sign of elasticity co efficient of these variables (i.e awareness 1.6541 and 1.1245, source of inspiration 1.0656 and 1.0042, decision making 1.9900 and 1.3451, male dominance 1.06903 and 1.0111, socio cultural activities 1.04325 and 1.0012) are positive and more than one, it means that, if all the five significant variables’ influence increases, the caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayat also increases. In other words, the rate of increase in the caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayat is more than the rate of increase in the variables viz., awareness, and source of inspiration, decision making, male dominance and socio cultural activities. The value of co efficient of determination R2 indicates that the all variables bring about differences in the caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayat by 0.6875 and 0.6054 (i.e 66.75% and 60.54%) in the study area.

## 2. Conclusion

It could be observed from the above discussion that the majority of women (i.e 44.50%) are up to high school. Now-a-days educated young girls of the village don’t want to be the candidate at Gram Panchayats. The caste wise participation of the respondents in gram panchayat reveals the majority of backward class (i.e 37.50%) participates in gram panchayat. Thus, caste is another important parameter to guess the type of leadership according to social stratification. It denotes the members’ placement, access and control in panchayats. The representation of women in gram panchayat examines nearly 89 (i.e 55.62%) of the respondents are representing their gram panchayat for the first time. Thus majority of the members are first entrants to gram panchayat and hence are less experienced. The awareness of the respondents in gram panchayat activities reveals 38.75 per cent of them are said that they raised problem in the meeting and the problem have been solved. Likewise, active Members of the respondents in gram panchayat activities depict, 28.13 per cent of the respondents didn’t have any sort of participation.

However, in the factor like active Members in Gram panchayat reveals 28.13 per cent of the respondents didn’t have any sort of participation and out of those who have any participation. The sources of inspiration of respondents into the public life due to the influence of varied factors, such as self-interest, compulsion of family members and others. The Source of inspiration of respondents in gram panchayat depicts the husband encouragement (i.e 43.13%) was the principal factor responsible for large-scale induction of women into Panchayats. The sources of inspiration of respondents in gram panchayats observed that the husband encouragement

(i.e.43.13%) was the principal factor responsible for large-scale induction of women into Panchayats played an important role in motivating women to enter in panchayat politics.

The ability to think and take independent decisions is an important dimension in the empowerment process. It also depends to a large extent on the social and cultural background of the individual as well as the values of the society. Better level of awareness and providing opportunities for participation in public sphere combined with an enabling environment could lead to effective decision making among women. As far as decision making, it was observed that the barriers in women participation are also hindering them in decision making due to which only 124 (i.e. 77.50%) women representatives responded about their active involvement in decision making rest of them are not involvement of decision making. As far as decision making, it was observed that the barriers in women participation are also hindering them in decision making due to which only 124 (i.e. 77.50%) women representatives responded about their active involvement in decision making rest of them are not involvement of decision making.

The male dominance is proved by the fact that 36.25 per cent women representatives told that they are handling issues independently in wards and panchayats. As far as the factor of Socio-cultural and educational activities indicates the women representatives are getting limited opportunities and freedom to participate in socio-cultural and educational activities. The issue of women empowerment the voice was strong as 51.25 per cent has favoured it and 48.75 per cent told that they are handling issues independently. The nature of relationship between caste and education caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayats, correlation results indicates the nature of relationship between caste and education caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayats are positively and significantly influenced by awareness, and source of inspiration, decision making, male dominance and socio cultural activities in the study area as shown in correlation coefficient values.

Moreover, the regression results reveals the impact of empowerment factors viz., awareness, and source of inspiration, decision making, and male dominance and socio cultural activities on caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayats positively and significantly in the study area. The sign of elasticity co efficient of these variables are positive and more than one, it means that, if all the five significant variables' influence increases, the caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayat also increases. The value of co efficient of determination  $R^2$  indicates that the all variables bring about differences in the caste and education wise participation of women in gram panchayat by 0.6875 and 0.6054 (i.e 66.75% and 60.54%) in the study area as shown in regression results. It could be observed from above findings the reservation for women can be an important impetus to women's empowerment in India in village level but it is not a guarantee for participation of the elected women. The goal of women's empowerment cannot be accomplished only by giving reservation, the other social and demographic factors also influencing the empowerment of women representatives to participate and work actively in local

self-governance.

On the way to accelerate and speed up this process it is necessary to implement some supplementary policies which encourage the self-confidence of women, build their negotiation skills and remove operational obstacles in their participation and decision making. On the basis of the present study it cannot be stated that women are categorically empowered but also it cannot be denied that they have gained a certain extent of authority and confidence as a direct outcome of the women reservation in Gram panchayat.

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