

Political Participation of Weaker Sections and Role of Panchayat Raj with Special Reference to Tumkur District



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Abstract

Social inequalities existed in the villages and these have continued for centuries. Under these circumstances, soon after Independence the concept of social justice figured in the Indian constitution. Thus the constitution of India made an attempt to provide equal social opportunities for the development of personality of all the people in the society, without any discrimination on the basis of caste, sex or race. Panchayats have been in existence since long in the country. Weaker sections, however, have not been an integral part of this system before 73rd amendment. The Panchayat Raj Act, 1992- popularly known as 73rd amendment- was enacted in the country to revitalize the panchayati raj institutions besides providing reservation to women and SCs/STs. Panchayat raj takes democracy to the grass root level where most of the weaker sections of the community reside. The present paper has examined the participation of weaker sections i.e., women and SCs/STs in panchayat raj institutions of Karnataka. The objective of the paper is to examine "participation" in panchayats by assessing the participation of weaker sections in their functioning and in the village level decision –making process. And To examine the status of weaker sections in village Panchayats of Tumkur District. Finally To examine the awareness of weaker sections representatives towards the working of Panchayat Raj institutions.

Keywords: Weaker Sections, Decentralization, Participation Panchayati Raj and Representation.

Introduction

Social inequalities existed in the villages and these have continued for centuries. Under these circumstances, soon after Independence the concept of social justice figured in the Indian constitution. Thus the constitution of India made an attempt to provide equal social opportunities for the development of personality of all the people in the society, without any discrimination on the basis of caste, sex or race.

However, social inequalities continued for a long time in the Indian society. The reasons may be several. The people from higher social strata had received education, and they controlled and managed land. They took up income - earning activities. On the contrary, the lower strata people were denied education, and they were deprived of their right to manage and control land. Thus they were forced to take up low - income earning activities. Particularly in the villages the lower strata people took up supportive works for the people who had taken up agricultural activities, such as Carpentry, Blacksmithy, Leather work, and labour.

Due to the above- mentioned reasons the marginalized became the weaker sections of the society. Therefore, after Independence, India was one among the countries which went in for social and economic transformation of the rural population. As a preferred condition, rural development became a definite strategy for the improvement of the living conditions of the rural poor. In this direction the Government of India made efforts to solve problems such as poverty, ill health, illiteracy, and backwardness of varied nature prevailing in rural areas, by giving greater attention to the uplift of the rural poor. (Shivanna,1990)

Further, the marginalized sections, i.e., SC, ST, and OBC have become an important component in defining of the development policies because of their socio-economic deprivation in the traditional society like India. The political involvement of the upper castes is still more in institutions like Assembly and Parliament. The reservation of seats was

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15% in State Assemblies and Parliament. On the contrary there was no representation from the larger sections of the marginalized castes i.e., from the backwards. (Singh, S.N 1996) As a result of this, at present, political participation in India is limited to only a few upper castes. As they manage and control the political system, land pattern. The upper caste people did not mind in formulating and execution of welfare and developmental policies intended for the weaker sections. It can be seen in the failure of several programmes. Among these are community Development Programmes (CDP) and National Extension programme (NEP). These programmes were implemented in tune with the upper caste people in the rural areas.

Objectives of The Study

1. To examine the status of weaker sections in village Panchayats of Tumkur District.
2. To examine the awareness of weaker sections representatives towards the working of Panchayat Raj institutions.

Hypothesis

1. The representatives belonging to weaker sections are able to implement welfare policies for the development of SC, ST and OBC in the study area.
2. Due to the illiteracy and ignorance of weaker section's representatives, several welfare policies intended for the welfare of SC, ST's and OBC's are not implementing properly in the institutions of panchayat raj.

Review of Literature

The Institutes of Social Sciences, New Delhi, monitoring the performance of women Panchayat members in Orissa after the recent elections, revealed a mixed picture. While a woman sarpanch from Jagatsinghpur district, who although educated, took time to assert her, while, other woman sarpanch from Rayagada district with no education whatsoever, took up her job confidently from the beginning. At the same time, both these districts had instances of women Panchayat meetings, pointing to the need of proper training of the elected representatives, particularly women (Dr Mathew 1997)

The work of UMA and of Indra Hirway on Gujarat's Panchayati Raj Institutions has repeatedly revealed the enhanced role of women from dominant castes such as the Vokkaligas and Lingayats, while Dalit and tribal participation has been muted. Male relatives usually coach women to speak at meetings, or actually do the necessary paperwork when the women are illiterate (Nair, Janaki 1997)

Decentralisation has assumed a central role in matters of governance in the developing world over the last few years. In their efforts to democratize the governing structure and involve people in the process of governance and decision-making, most of the developing countries around the world are carrying out measures to decentralise governance. Thus, decentralised democratic governance is regarded as 'both a right in itself and a means of ensuring basic human rights observance' (Gloppen et al 2003: 1). The major promise of democratic decentralisation is that it brings popular participation and accountability

to local governance, and therefore, makes local governance more responsive to citizens' desires and more effective in delivering services (Blair, 2000).

Shymala (2001) conducted study on 594 Zilla Panchayat Members in Karnataka, of which 232 were females and 362 Males. Specific purpose of the study was to know (a) socio-economic, political and cultural background of the members, and (b) their perceptions and aspirations about the working of Panchayats in relation to the expectations of the people and the villagers in general. These are the specific findings:

In other study Aziz (1994) found more or less the same phenomena. While dealing with the Relationship Between local level Traditional Power Structure, Panchayati Raj and the Dalits he said, "Attempt made to access power to weaker sections by reserving seats and executive positions have altered hitherto dominant caste centred rural power structure. It should now go to the credit of the makers of law to have given seats and executive positions to the extent of 18 per cent to SC and ST candidates and 33.3 per cent each to backward communities and women, However, since most of the elected representatives are first generation politicians there is a need for providing training to them." (pp. 132-47)

Sudha Pai cautioned, after brief study of three villages from Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh, that female literacy, independent voting rights and change in the status in the family and society are required for women to play active role in the village politics. The Pradhanis played an almost insignificant role in the functioning of the gram and block Panchayat level bodies. They have never attended any meeting or made any decision about allocation of funds to individuals or schemes. (Bhaskar, Manu)

It is widely believed that the analysis of age, education, Caste, family structure, occupation, income, land holding, party affiliation, etc., are important in determining the nature of leadership. The data relating to socioeconomic background of elected respondents of Panchayati Raj institutions were collected in the % study to get an insight into the emerging pattern of rural leadership the Tumkur District.

Table No.1
Distribution of Respondents By Sex

Sl. No	Sex	Frequency	%
1	Male	49	65.33
2	Female	26	34.67
3	Total	75	100.00

Source: Compiled from the Data Collected from Field Work.

Table no. 1 discusses the sex wise distribution of respondents in the study area. It is evident from the table that out of the total 75 respondents, the highest number 49 constituting 65.33 % are male and 10 respondents constituting 13.33 % are female.

Table No. 2
Caste-Wise Distribution of Respondents

SLNo	Caste	Frequency	%
1	SC	25	33.33
2	ST	10	13.33
3	OBC	40	53.33
4	Total	75	100.00

Source: Compiled from the Data Collected from Field Work.

Table number 2. Is intended to discuss the caste wise distribution of the respondents in the study area. The table shows that out of the total sample 75, respondents belonging to SC are 25 constituting 33.33 %, STs are 10 constituting 13.33 % and OBCs are 40 constituting 53.33 %

Table No. 3
Distribution of Respondents By Age

S.No	Age	Frequency	%
1	18-25	22	29.33
2	26-35	34	45.33
3	36-45	8	10.67
4	46 & Above	11	14.67
5	Total	75	100

Source: Compiled from the Data Collected from Field Work.

Table number 3 is intended to analyses the distribution of respondents By age. It is observed from the table that the age group of the respondents has been grouped into 4 categories. Among these the highest number of respondents 34 constituting 45.33 % are from the age group of 26 - 35, followed by 22 respondents constituting 29.33 % belonging to the age group of 18 - 25. Further the table shows that the lowest number 8 respondents constituting 10.67 % are from the age group of 36 – 45.

Table No. 4
Distribution of Opinion by Caste about the Objectives of Panchayat Raj Institutions

S.No.	Opinion	SC	%	ST	%	OBC	%	Total	%
1	Yes	19	76	5	38.46	10	27.03	34	45.33
2	No	6	24	8	61.54	27	72.97	41	54.67
3	Total	25	100	13	100.00	37	100.00	75	100.00

Source: Compiled from the data collected from the field data.

Power structure and activity in rural India were closely associated with caste. The relationships between the high castes and the low caste were virtually that of the master. In this connection Nadel opines. "The lower caste is not only deprived but unhappily under-privileged. They have a stigma apart from living unfortunately. Conversely, the higher castes are not merely entitled to the possession of correlated privileges, but also in some way exalted and endowed with a higher dignity (Nadel, 1954: 16).

Ideally, the higher caste % was paternalistic and authoritarian, which the low caste % responded with deferential submissive and subservient behavior (Berreman, 1979 : 5) The deference by the high castes was demanded, not merely independently given to them (Dollard, 1957 : 135). The lower castes did not have any meaningful access to elite or political culture, and if at all, it was limited to caste Panchayats.

Table No.5
Distribution of Opinion Towards By Caste Towards the Accuracy of the Existing Reservation Provisions in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

S.No	Opinion	SC	%	ST	%	OBC	%	Total	%
1	Yes	18	72	7	70	34	85	55	73.33
2	No	7	28	3	30	6	15	20	26.67
3	Total	25	100	10	100	40	100	75	100.00

Source: Compiled from the data collected from the field data.

Table No.5. Discusses the caste wise distribution of respondent's opinion towards the accuracy of the existing reservation provisions in Panchayat Raj Institutions. It is evident from the table that the majority 72% of respondents belonging to SC are opined that the existing reservation provisions in Panchayat Raj Institutions is sufficient, and 28% of respondents opined that the reservation is be increased. The opinion of respondents belonging to ST's is on par with the opinion of Sc respondents. The highest number 70 representatives have satisfied with existing reservation provisions and the lowest number 30% of respondents opined that the existing reservation provisions in Panchayat Raj Institutions for STs are not accurate. . The highest number 85%

of respondents belonging to OBC's are opined that the existing reservation provisions are adequate. The findings of the table are that the majority of respondents from SC,ST and OBC's have satisfied with existing reservation provisions.

Conclusion

Panchayati Raj is not a new concept to India. Panchayats have been a part of rural cultural heritage of India. From time immemorial, panchayats have enjoyed the confidence of the people. The system has survived in spite of turmoils and changes, because the village folk were fully confident of their own capabilities of sound thinking and right approach to their problems.

In the study area though there is the representation of weaker sections. i.e. SC,ST and OBC. There exists less representation of STs. There is sufficient representation of and OBCs. The majority of SC representatives are having awareness of the objectives of Panchayat Raj Institutions and the major observation and suggestion is The Government has to make provisions for the involvement of people with higher education in the Institutions of Panchayt Raj and the members at all the Institutions of Panchayt raj will be given orientation to understand the objectives and provisions of various Panchayt Raj Acts. Representatives belonging to STs and OBCs is to understand the concept of Social Justice.

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