

# **A STUDY ON RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN SIVAGANGAI DISTRICT - A GENDER ANALYSIS APPROACH**

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## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN WOMEN'S STUDIES**

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## **CHAPTER V**

### **FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Women constitute about half of the world's population. Their contribution in the social and economic sphere is also very significant by virtue of dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. However, their participation in the politics remains unattended which is the most important institution of society that is related to the power and decision-making processes. Women face obstacles in their political participation all over the world. Unless women are involved, in the decision and policy making processes at all levels, changes in socio economic and political life of people will remain marginal. The relation between political participation, gender equality and democratic process is interdependent, since the implementation of each of these concepts depends on the implementation of the others and vice versa. In fact, full equality between men and women in all aspects of life cannot be achieved if equality between men and women is not achieved in the area of governance and political representation. Women's political participation is essential for democratic governance. Women's voices are indispensable for democracy to embrace the plurality of needs and interests of the whole society.

Increase in women's participation have seen in countries that have taken proactive steps in supporting women's political participation, which includes the reforming or amending discriminatory laws, taking concrete action to address gender discrimination and violence against women and addressing gender- specific barriers. However, in many countries they are marginalized and underrepresented in political and electoral processes. This is due to the challenges, faced by the governance in addressing the gender issues which includes: lack of understanding of gender related concepts, limited awareness about gender-related issues and concerns among data producers and users, lack of gender

mainstreaming into statistical processes and programmes, inadequate advocacy in gender-sensitive data, inadequate technical skills, inadequate statistical infrastructure (Sampling frames, classification, definitions and methods)

### **5.1 Socio Economic and Political Profile of the respondents**

- It was found that 46% of women respondents in the sample belonged to the age group 31-40 years. It is evident that changing attitude of the society has helped the women of younger age to come out and take part in village panchayat election. 42 % of the men respondents belonged to the age group 41-50 years. It indicates aged men govern the village administration that in the study area.
- It was found that majority of women (63%) and men (61%) respondents belonged to joint family.
- It was observed that 15% of women respondents were widows and shows that the position of widows in the society has improved and are slowly being accepted in public life.
- It was found that 70% of women and 45% of men respondents were educated up to the higher secondary level. It confines that there are obstacles for women and men to continue their higher education even now.
- It was noted that 46% of women and 41% of men respondents belonged to Backward Community. Among the total number of men respondents 37% and 19% of them belonged to Most Backward and Schedule Caste. For women respondents it was 28% and 22%. It indicates that both women and men from various categories have been able to find new expression as elected representatives in their village in the study.

- It was observed that nearly half of the women and 39% of men respondents were involved in agricultural jobs respectively.
- It was also found that 43% of women respondents had income below Rs. 10,000/- per month, while of 27% men respondents belonged to the income group Rs. 20,001-30,000/- per month. The difference in the monthly income between the gender may be due to the occupational status of the respondents.
- It was observed that 72% and 52% of women and men respondents belonged to families, which are politically active. It indicates that political background is a necessary factor for women, which enhances their participation in rural local governance.
- It was noticed that 41% of women respondents were elected as first time. It reveals the interest of women in politics. Only 6% of women respondents elected more than three times. 46% of men respondents were re-elected as second time. 20% of men respondents re-elected for more than three times. It reveals that village people likely to elect the men respondents who have experience and served as village panchayat leaders.
- It was found that 40% of women respondents had no previous experience in politics. In contrary, it was found that only 8% of men respondents had no prior experience in politics. It is obvious that the political experience of men respondents considered as important criteria in the selection of village panchayat leader. From the facts stated here, it is inferred that though women respondents had no experience, they had been successful in getting representation in rural local governance not only because of the opportunity provide by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment

Act but their capability, interest, support of family members and community for their entry into the political realm.

- It was observed that the motivating factor for women and men respondents to contest in panchayat election was to serve the people in their village panchayat. It depicts that local panchayat elections gave an opportunity for the respondents to come forward and participate in the democratic process and to be an agent of change in the community.
- It was noted that 28% and 22% of women respondents attributed that their family and community support was the major reason to win the election. It reveals that family and community exercise a strong influence in inculcating political ambitions of women in rural area. 22% and 19% of men respondents attributed that their previous experience and assistance from political party were the major reasons to succeed in the election. It clearly depicts that the men respondents' previous experience and support of political party was very important for them to win the election.
- It was found that 26% of women and 52% of men respondents expressed that they wanted to develop the infrastructure facilities of their community. 23% of women respondents expressed that they wanted to contest in election to solve gender issues such as prevention of violence against women and children, promoting girl child education, prevention of girl child marriage etc.
- It was found that 18% of women respondents reported that gender stereotypes faced by them during their tenure demotivated them to contest again in panchayat election, none of the men respondents reported the same. 24% of men respondents

reported that lack of financial resources that they have faced discouraged them to contest again in the election.

## **5.2 Gender roles and responsibilities of the respondents**

- From gender analysis of a typical twenty-four hours workload of women and men respondents, it was found that in the study area that there exist gender differences in carrying out the household activities due to socio-cultural norms. It depicts that more gender sensitization programme should be conducted at periodical interval for men respondents and for the spouse of women respondents in order to promote gender equality at home in turn the society.
- While analyzing on gender wise 40% of women respondents revealed that both husband and wife involved in decision making for the welfare of their family. In contrast, more than half of the men respondents reported that they were sole the person in taking the decision for the welfare of their family. It reveals that traditional mindset still exists among the men respondents, which inhibit them to consider their spouse as an equal partner in taking decision for the welfare of their family.
- It was found that traditional attitudes on gender roles in doing household activities still exists in study area and women are more vulnerable in spending more time on house hold activities.
- It was noted that women and men reported very distinct reasons for their imbalance of their personal and public life. 29% of women respondents revealed that commitment in doing the household chores were the main reasons for their work life imbalance. 32% of men respondents reported that lack of time was the main causes for their work life imbalance. It is evidenced that entrenched gender

roles against women through the persistence of harmful norms, practices and traditional patriarchal attitudes hinder progress of women's participation in rural local governance.

- It was observed that only minimum gender differences existed among the women and men respondents in carrying out the social and economic developmental activities, but it has to be noted that as compared to men respondents political development activities carried out by women respondents were more in the study area. Thus, it can be said in a democratic society, participation of women in rural local governance has a great significance to preserve political values.
- It was found that women category accessed to women respondents and men category accessed to men respondents in order to solve their problems. It reveals that women's participation in rural local governance is essential to solve various gender problems related to women. Hence, it is noted that the people access to their respective gender to solve their problems in the study area.
- Though the frequency of meetings attended by women was high, when compared to men, the level of participation of women in rural local body meeting was low. Thus, the substantial presentation of women respondents were low in rural local body meeting in the study.
- For women respondents (20%), their first priority was the development of health and sanitation facilities, but for men respondents (30%) their first priority was development of infrastructure facilities such as road, drainage facilities, street light, construction of bridge and culvert etc., For both women and men respondents their second and third priorities were providing the safe drinking water and improving the educational status of their villages respectively. 14% of

women respondents revealed that their fifth priority was on the infrastructure development of their village, but it was on development of women and children for 13% men respondents. Thus, it was noted that gender differences in prioritizing the activities related to the development of the village was seen in health and sanitation, infrastructure development and development of women and children.

- It was found that in protection of women and children against violence, prohibition of alcoholism and in the eradication of corruption participation of women was high. The participation of men in those three sectors mentioned was low. It reveals that gender difference exists in solving the issues of their village people in the study area.
- Though the position held by women respondents in various organization, association, groups etc., the percentage of women was low when compared to men respondents in the study area.
- Both women and men respondents have attended training on the rules and regulations of village panchayat, roles and responsibilities of panchayat leaders and panchayat members, preparation of village action plan, budgeting, monitoring of rural development programs and training related to government schemes and policies. But, none of them have undergone awareness programme on gender sensitization. Hence, it is necessary to include awareness programme on gender sensitization for both women and men together that enable to create conducive working environment among them to promote gender mainstreaming.
- It is interesting to note that when compare to men respondents (12%), women respondents (17%) were in higher percentage in accessing and controlling the

Total Sanitation Campaign programme. When compared to men respondents, women respondents were more concerned about the health and sanitation of their village in the study area.

- From the gender-segregated data on access to information, it is noted, that when compared to men, women respondents were deprived in accessing the information related to the administration of their village in the study area.

### **5.3 Gender influence in leadership role of the respondents**

- It was found that women and men respondents have a similar perception on the qualities of a good leader. They revealed the three most important qualities for a leader. They are problem solving and decision-making, fair and just, co-operation and good public relation.
- Though women and men have a similar perception of a successful leader, they display differences in their leadership characteristics. Women respondents revealed four important leadership qualities such as fair and just, good character and attitude, commitment and hard work and problem solving and decision-making were their existing leadership qualities. However, men respondents pointed out that fair and just, communication skills, problem solving and decision-making were their existing leadership qualities.
- It was noted that only few respondents had pointed out that both women and men were better decision maker for their community and for their family as well. It is evidenced that gender stereotypes prevents women to utilize their full potential for making better decisions for the welfare of family and community.
- It was found that women respondents felt that the lack of confidence, fear and insecurity hinder the political participation of women where as men respondents

rely on socio cultural norms and community attitudes in the study. Hence, it is opined that the attitude of men towards women have not changed though numerous laws and bills which were enacted to enhance the political participation of women.

- 19% of women and 20% of men respondents pointed out that it is necessary for women to participate in rural local governance to promote gender equality. Both women and men respondents believed that women themselves could best understand and address social problems that women and children face. In addition, the respondents pointed out that woman should participate in rural local governance owing to other significant reasons such as, role model, solving gender issues, promoting clean and healthy environment in the study area.

#### **5.4 Gender challenges faced by the respondents**

- It was found that the campaign strategies adopted by the respondents may be varied, but group campaign has been considered as significant strategy by the respondents to win the election.
- Logistic difficulties, wrong propaganda by opponent party, household responsibilities, election expenditure and gender disparity in media campaign were reported as the main challenges faced by women respondents during the electoral process. Wrong propaganda by opponent party and election expenditure were reported as the main challenges faced by men respondents during the electoral process.
- To overcome the challenges faced during the electoral process, 43% of men and 23% of women respondents received support from the political party. It is interesting to note that inspite of several problems they faced, only 8% of men

respondents avoided the situation where as 21% of women respondents expressed that they have avoided the situation as the complaint made by them would spoil their image.

- 28% of women and 26% of men respondents cited the interference of opposite party was as a major challenge faced by them while providing decision for the welfare of their village people and village. Both women and men faced challenges during their decision making process irrespective of gender in the study area. It is to be noted that women respondents faced more socio cultural challenges and interference of political party when compared to men respondents in the study area.
- It was noted that commitment in doing household chores and managing the time were the main challenges faced by the women respondents. For men respondents age factor and health issues were the main challenges that they have faced during the training programme.

### **5.5 Gender Based Political Violence faced by the respondents**

- It was found that though women and men respondents faced various form of political violence, women respondents are vulnerable to psychological violence in the study area.
- The most perpetrators of political violence for women respondents were the opposite party and vice-president of their village panchayat. As for as men respondents concerned, the opposite party and members within the party are the perpetrators of political violence in the study.
- It was noticed that majority of women (73%) and men (63%) respondents have faced political violence at public places.

- It was observed that gender discrimination was a prime cause for political violence on women respondents which acts as a barrier for their effective participation. For men respondent the prime reason for political violence was caste, which acts as barrier for their effective participation.
- Though there is a raising consciousness on making legal complaint to the police station; women are still hesitating to make complaint on violence faced by them.
- 47% of the respondents reported that women are more vulnerable to political violence. By conducting Gender-sensitive anti-violence training for men, women, local government officials, election officials, law enforcement and electoral stakeholders, Political Violence Against Women can be prevented to large extent in the society.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

Reservation of seats alone cannot ensure the effective participation of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions and their empowerment. To help them overcome the socio-cultural barriers including illiteracy, inexperience, lack of access and control over income and other resources, restrictions to public spaces etc., and carry the concept of empowerment forward, the government needs to make necessary amendments in the law. Since Panchayat is a state subject, appropriate policy measures should be taken by the state governments to take forward the agenda of empowerment of women through PRIs. Panchayat itself has to take proactive role in adopting multi-pronged strategies in bringing about quantitative as well as qualitative changes in the level of participation of women leading towards their empowerment. Some suggestive actions are indicated below to enhance the scope of improvement.

## **Capacity Building Training Programme**

Panchayat can design, develop and implement capacity building and training (CB&T) exclusive for the Elected Women Representatives (EWRs). Separate training modules for them keeping in mind their educational level and cultural barriers may be designed making the content more simplified, more pictorial and interactive using case studies and short videos. Separate training programme for EWRs are expected to create an enabling environment for open discussion and sharing. Adequate attention should also be given on comfortable and modest accommodation for them in case of residential training along with facilities for taking care of their children.

## **Sensitization of Government Officials**

All officials concerned with Panchayat Raj Institutions, including election officers, rural extension officers and particularly Panchayat functionaries (Executive Assistants, Panchayat Secretary, etc.) should also be sensitized on gender based political violence faced by both women and men representatives . By creating awareness on gender based political violence, it can be prevented to some extent and creates a conducive environment for both women and men elected representatives.

## **Change in attitudes**

The power of the patriarchal culture and its endless ramifications in all aspects of life were seen as one of the main barriers to women's access to politics. They come from a sequence of representations, roles, prejudices and responsibilities that are seen as appropriate for women and men. They are part of the culture and they have a wide and deep social base. They are well rooted in social practices by roles considered "natural" for women and men. Moreover, they frequently go beyond the boundaries of social practices to settle themselves in the laws that regulate people's lives. The changes in attitude

require extensive awareness programmes within a strategy of fighting against discrimination in the area of political participation and representation, designed for different levels and areas such as media, political parties, trade unions, public agents, schools, rural areas, etc. Hence, awareness programmes should be given to all stakeholders which, focus on promoting a democratic culture among women, by explaining the electoral processes, the voting systems, the political parties, etc. The “Change in attitudes” suggested for this area require the involvement of all agents of change in order to reach wide social and political spheres with very long term actions.

### **Involvement of Women’s Organization**

Some successful women’s organizations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging women’s participation in social and political activities. The government should provide finance and infrastructure to some of the successful women organizations to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives.

### **Honouring of enlightened women leaders**

It has been noticed that there are certain very active and enlightened women leaders in village Panchayats, who have been successfully implementing the developmental schemes and have ensured overall development of their constituencies. Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honouring them in public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives and their good practices will get replicated.

## **Role of media**

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 quality and gender justice.

## **Passing the Law against the Harassment and Political Violence Against Women**

Violence Against Women in Politics is a serious issue that affects the development of strong, inclusive and democratic societies, and global progress toward gender equality. The 2015 Sustainable Development Goals make clear that in achieving these outcomes it is fundamentally requires to ensure the action that women and girls have claim full, equal opportunities, and rights— including their right to participate meaningfully in all aspects of political life free from the threat of violence.

In some countries, grassroots activists, legislators and media watchers have begun to develop strategies to address and prevent violence against women in politics. There are also emerging initiatives from a growing number of international organizations—including International IDEA, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Liberal International, the Organization of American States and the United Nations— focused on addressing the issue on a global scale.

Although female politicians around the world have long faced problems of aggression, coercion, and intimidation, the term ‘violence against women in politics’ has surfaced in only the last ten to fifteen years in various contexts around the globe. In Latin America, ‘political violence and harassment against women’ appeared for the first time in 2000, when local councilwomen convened a seminar on the topic at the Chamber of Deputies in Bolivia to discuss reports regarding acts directed at female candidates and elected officials in rural municipalities. Over the following twelve years, the Association

of Local Councilwomen of Bolivia (ACOBOL), along with other female politicians and activists, worked together in an inductive manner to name this phenomenon and identify its various manifestations. These efforts culminated in 2012 in the passage of Law 243 against Political Harassment and Violence against Women, protecting female candidates, elected officials, appointees, and those exercising political functions who confront attempts by others to prevent their presence in decision-making positions for reasons of gender.

The findings of the research study suggests that in India there is a need to raise awareness about political harassment and violence, create new norms and standards against this violence, construct processes to register and respond to complaints, provide services for women who are victims and punish the perpetrators of violence. To do so, all relevant stakeholders must act together to confront Violence Against Women in Politics, which will contribute in strengthening democratic culture and practice, and achieving prosperous and resilient societies. In India, it is mandatory to have an act on Prevention of Political Violence and Political Harassment in order to make women and men benefit equally and so women can achieve the political equity and equality, which is necessary to create strong and sustainable democracies.

### **Formulation of National Gender Commission**

In societies where convention is deeply rooted and various practices, beliefs and circumstances are not in favour of women, it is not enough to have laws that seek to upgrade the status of women. There is often need for a national machinery to oversee the transition from gender inequality to gender equality and to ensure that the trend is not reversed. In South Africa, parliament passed a legislation to create a National Commission on Gender Equality, which commenced its work in 1997. The task of the

commission is to promote gender equality in society and to ensure that government and other statutory bodies implement their commitment to gender equality. Therefore, the formulation of National Gender Commission in India is necessary to promote gender equality in all aspects.

### **Initiation of Separate Administrative Unit for Rural Local Governance**

The Ministry of Local Self Government has established the Kerala Institute of Local Administration in 1990, which engages in different capacity building activities of the local bodies, both in rural and urban. They act as an advisory agency to the State Government in the area of Panchayati Raj and local administration. It addresses the gender inequalities in local governance and promotes gender responsive governance by providing training for elected panchayat leaders and concerned officials who involve in the development activities of the village panchayat. Thus for effective participation of elected women leaders in local governance and to promote gender responsive local governance in Tamil Nadu, it is necessary to establish a separate administrative unit for the rural local governance.

### **Eliminating biases in school/college educational system**

Despite governments focus on the importance of gender equality in textbooks, women and men are still portrayed in a stereotypical manner. To promote gender fair society it is necessary to periodically review and revise curricula, textbooks, programmes and teaching methods to ensure that they do not perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes.

## **CONCLUSION**

Though the 73rd Constitutional Amendment set a milestone in the history of India in making provision for participation of women in local level government it has not yield satisfactory results in their participation as well as empowerment. Two and half decades after the amendment, it is now proved that reservation alone cannot ensure the effective participation of women in PRIs and their empowerment. Panchayat itself has to take lead role in promoting the agenda of empowerment of women by making concrete actions. At the same time, government and non-government stakeholders including Community Based Organizations and media have to join hand to take forward the agenda of women's empowerment. Elected women in panchayats will not only perform their role like other elected representatives but will also make significant contribution to models of gendered governance with equity, social justice and efficient delivery of public goods and services in future.

Decentralization increases participation of citizens in governance at the grass root levels. In many countries, decentralization has resulted in government's affirmative actions, which ensures the inclusion of women in the political sphere. There is no doubt that the provision of reserved seats for women in rural local bodies helped in recognizing the voice and role of women in local governance, but also shows at the same time that reservations do not lead to effective participation for women in rural local governance. While there is an increased participation in grass root political movements, it is not getting translated into a growing share of women in the formal political structure of the country. For effective participation of women in rural local governance, they need training on their roles and responsibilities, awareness on laws that favor their development and importantly the attitude change of society that supports and enhance women's political participation and their contributions for the welfare of the society.

From the findings of the research study, it is concluded that local governance has not provided adequate opportunity for women's participation. The cultural beliefs and practices that prescribe the public domain for men and domestic for women are the main factors inhibits women's political representation and also influences the other factors like women's low level of education, low access to resources, and lack of gender-sensitive decentralisation practices.

Gender equality is a goal which cannot be achieved only by higher representation of women in the legislatures and other public bodies. It has to be stressed by other supportive measures like restructuring the gender relations both within the family and in the society is an important step not only towards promoting freedom, equality and justice in favour of women but also for ensuring their participation in the development process.

From the study, it is noted that it is now a felt need to build the capacities of the PRIs to be an effective mechanism for gender responsive governance by incorporating some changes. First, the gender advisor/gender specialist should be appointed in local governance to conduct a systematic gender analysis, gender budgeting of the local governance bodies and mechanisms for social justice within the local governance framework. This will pave the way for incorporating changes needed to transform the local governance structures for addressing gender and social inequalities. Secondly, the capacity building initiatives for the elected PRI representatives and concerned department officials need to be focus on the concepts of gender equity, social justice and equitable development as well as leadership and decision making for effective panchayat functioning. This will promote the adoption of gender just attitudes among all the elected PRI representatives and department officials that promotes gender fair society, which helps to attain a sustainable development in rural local governance. Hence, it is concluded by initiating the gender responsive local governance, it addresses existing gender

inequalities, ensures that local governance processes, procedures and systems are developed and implemented in ways that address the different needs of women and men and promotes the equal participation of elected women and men panchayat leaders in local governance.