



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 8.4
IJAR 2022; 8(12): 199-202
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 01-10-2022
Accepted: 03-11-2022

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Attitude of rural women towards reservation in panchayats

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Abstract

India is a nation of continental size with different culture, social ethos, agro-climatic variations and huge population. Majority of its population resides in far off villages. The present study was carried out on a group of women in village Kagdana district Sirsa. The sample of 200 women was drawn randomly for the purpose of the study the attitude of Rural Women towards Reservation in Panchayats. It was concluded that overall attitude of rural women towards reservation in Panchayat, it is found that (52%) had low level of attitude whereas (25%) and (23%) had high and medium level of attitude. The majority of the rural women faced the personal problems, socio-cultural problem and economic and political problems.

Keywords: Panchayati raj system, women reservation, attitude, problems etc

Introduction

India is a nation of continental size with different culture, social ethos, agro-climatic variations and huge population. Majority of its population resides in far off villages. Due to such socio-cultural, economic and geographical diversities, it is very difficult to govern country like India from top. Moreover, the historical heritage of Indian democratic traditions does not permit, centralisation of power along with the fast changing socioeconomic and techno-scientific situations at requirements. Panchayati Raj bodies have been working as genuine and effective democratic decentralized

It is in this context, the various efforts have been emancipated for empowerment of women by making adequate provision through developmental programmes and Constitutional Amendment Act. Infact, under Indian conditions women have been recognised as integral part of developmental process ideologically, ranging from freedom movement to governance of rule. Identifying a close interaction, women's empowerment and their rile in political decision making has been one of the key consideration for development. Thus, Indian government has made many provisions from time to time.

The Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi who stated "As long as the women of India do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country It would have of no use for the kind of swaraj to which such women have not made their full contribution". It recognized that women can play model roles if tremendous scope is given to them to participate in political decision process. Candhi) while talking on women emphasized, If an ancestral treasure lying buried in a corner of the house unknown to the members of the family were suddenly discovered, what a celebration it would occasion. Similarly, women's marvelous power is lying dormant. If the women of Asia wake up they will dazzle the world". Lenin (1921) emphasized on the "International working women's day" that "You cannot draw men into politics without drawing women into politics". Thus women's participation in decision making at National, State or iocal level has been identified, as a significant indicator for development:] Viewed in this context, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in India is unmistakable a step forward, under which 33 per cent seats have been reserved in Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad for women and also the same percentage of chairpersons of these bodies for women. Similar reservation has been provided for SC and ST ensuring a good representation of women in the three tier of governance.

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Making of such provisions, are not the final solutions to such type of problem. The rights guaranteed by the constitution of India's legislation, policy makers and the actual exercise of the same by various sections and women in particular is the main aspect of actual implementation, These provisions meant to strengthen the hands of women and increase capacity to use power, rights and justice for their own as well as general development. The law of fundamental rights which declares a Indian Sovereign democratic and social republic which grant liberty, equality and justice to all, irrespective of caste, class, creed and sex great need of bolstering. The capacity as well as adoption of needed strategies by women in order to exercise their power more effectively for their own and society development. In making meaningful participation in governmental operation to higher level is likely to give political empowerment to women.

These constitutional provision have come from time to time, thus need to be utilize proficiently by women, to play effective role in local government. Towards such provision non human inputs like education, information, training and improving of attitude of government/public representatives and especially women can serve as important inputs to bring about desirable accomplishments. Therefore, serious attention needs to be paid to strategies, for ensuring effective participation in Panchayati Raj system. In this context, the present study is carried out to assess the attitude and problems of rural women towards Panchayati Raj System with the following specific objectives:

To study socio-economic demographic variable and attitude of Rural Women towards reservation in Panchayats, and problem faced by rural women towards reservation of Panchayati Raj System.

Material and Method

The present study was carried out on a group of women in village Kagdana district Sirsa. The sample of 200 women was drawn randomly for the purpose of the study. The questionnaire comprised of two section. In the first section - To study the profile of Rural Women Respondents. The independent Socio-economic and demographic variables while in the second section attitude is considered as an important component of human behavior. Thus, for the purpose of the study it was conceptualized as rural women's positive or negative feeling in relation to reservation of women in Panchayati Raj System. Initially fifty statements were collected or developed by consulting the relevant literature and available personnel in the subject matter area. Subsequently, the statements collected were scrutinized against the specific criteria suggested by Edwards (1969) [22] and ambiguous and irrelevant statements were deleted. The critical ratio for each of the statement was calculated and the items with 't' value equal to or greater than 1.75 were selected for the final scale. The scale so developed was used to collect data from the respondents. According to weighted cumulative frequency method, the respondents were grouped into low, medium and high attitude categories. The data were collected on the basis of the well structured pre-tested interview schedule. The data were coded, tabulated and analysed by suitable statistical techniques were also used to draw the meaningful inferences.

Result and Discussion

The study is done on the basis of the socio-economic demographic status and attitude of respondents regarding reservation Panchayati Raj System.

Table 1: Attitude of respondents towards reservation in Panchayats

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage %
Low	104	52
Medium	46	23
High	50	25
Total	200	100

Figures in parentheses are percentages

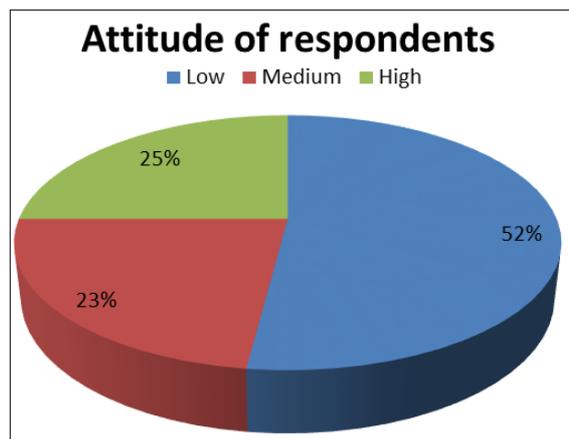


Fig 1: Attitude of respondents towards reservation in Panchayats

The respondents were classified into three categories viz. low, medium and high on the basis of attitude score obtained by using mean (x) and standard deviation formula. The data regarding overall attitude among Rural Women respondents reveals that (52%) had low level of attitude whereas (25%) and (23%) had high and medium level of attitude. These findings indicate that half of the women still had very poor attitude regarding Panchayati Raj System. The reason behind this may be due to lack of education and various social and economic barriers prevailing in the rural society. Therefore, this may be on account of low exposure of Panchayat institutions. Similar observations were made by Gowarlat and Kaushik (1994) [3].

Table 2: Association between demographic variable and attitude of respondents (N=200)

Age	Attitude			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Young	16 (16.10)	38 (40.2)	41 (43.2)	95
Middle	15 (25.4)	9 (15.2)	35 (59.3)	59
Old	10 (21.7)	10 (21.7)	26 (56.6)	46
$\chi^2-13.320^*$				

Figures in parantheses are percentages

The distribution of the respondents according to the level of attitude across the age showed that a sizeable (43.2%) had high attitude followed by medium (40.0%) and low (16.8%) attitude, respectively, by the young age respondents. In the middle age category about one-fourth had low attitude. Only (15.2%) of the respondents in middle age category had medium attitude. Majority of the respondents (59.3%) showed high attitude towards women participation in

Panchayati Raj System under this category. Of those who hailed from old age category like middle age category majority of the respondents (56.6%) showed high attitude followed by (21.7%) who were equally distributed under medium and low categories.

On examination of the data, thus, indicated that in the young age category (83.2%) respondents followed by (78.3%) in the old age category and (74.5%) in the middle age category had medium to high attitude towards women participation in Panchayati Raj System. Krishnaswamy (1993) [11] also suggested there has to be a total change in the attitudes.

Table 3: Association between socio-economic variable and attitude of respondents (N=200).

Caste	Attitude			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Low	17 (21.0)	22 (27.1)	42 (51.9)	81
Medium	11 (25.6)	5 (11.6)	27 (62.8)	43
High	13 (17.1)	30 (39.5)	33 (43.4)	76
$X^2=10.568^{**}$				

Figures in parantheses are percentages.

It was seen that among low caste respondents, a little more than (51.9%) half of the respondents had high attitude followed by medium (27.1%) and low (21.0%) attitude level regarding the participation of women in Panchayati Raj System. In the medium caste respondents (62.8%), (25.6%) and (11.6%) had high, low and medium attitude, respectively. Among the higher caste respondents a sizeable number of the respondents had high (43.4%) followed by medium (39.5%) and low (17.1%) attitude scores, respectively about the participation of women in Panchayati Raj System.

When tested statistically, the value was found to be significance ($X^2 = 10.568^{**}$). It implies that caste has association with the attitude of the respondents.

Table 4: Association between socio-economic variable and attitude of respondents (N=200).

Average Monthly Income	Attitude			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Low	16 (33.3)	9 (18.7)	23 (47.9)	48
Medium	16 (20.5)	19 (24.3)	43 (55.1)	78
High	9 (12.2)	29 (39.2)	36 (48.6)	74
$X^2=11.908^{**}$				

Figures in parantheses are percentages

The respondents with low average monthly income had high (47.9%) followed by low (33.3%) and medium (18.7%) attitude towards the participation of women in Panchayati Raj System. Of those who had medium average monthly income. (55.1%), (24.3%) and (20.5%) showed high, medium and low attitude respectively. The corresponding figures for the respondents belonging to high average monthly income were (48.6%) (39.2%) and (12.2%).

Like other economic variables, average monthly income too showed the increase in percentage of respondents under high to medium attitude categories as there was increase in average monthly income.

Statistically, significant association was established ($X^2 = 11.908^{**}$) between average monthly income and attitude.

Table 5: Major Problems

Attributes		Total Number
1.	Personal Problems	4
a.	Education/Illiteracy/less education	4
2.	Socio-Cultural Problems	4
a.	Caste	4
b.	Patriarchal System of family structure	4
c.	Male dominance/Gender bias attitude	4
3.	Economic Problems	4
a.	Economic independence	4
4.	Political Problem	4
a.	Lack of self-confidence and previous experience in public life.	4

Legend: Strongly agree- 5, Moderately Agree-4, Agree- 3, Disagree-2, Strongly Disagree-1

Based on the data it reveals that majority of the women respondents asserted that due to the involvement with a modal rating 4 interpreted as moderately agree Personal Problems

Education /Illiteracy/less Education: Education is one of the important variable which determine the status of women. It is strongly related to political participation and empowerment as it helps to develop a sense of civic duty, political competence, interest and responsibility as well as personality development. Out of the total respondents interviewed, majority of them stated that illiteracy or less education is a major barrier mainly responsible for low participation of women in the functioning of Panchayats. Rest of the respondents did not respond to this statement. The percentages show that factor of illiteracy was a major problems faced by respondents.

Lack of education thus remains a problem even after 55 years, of India getting independence. It is a problem which poses a major bottleneck in participation of women panches/sarpanches in the functioning of Panchayats especially for technical matters and other matters like reading and writing and written endorsement. Besides, their outside awareness/knowledge is also limited on account of low mobility, which is mostly restricted to areas in and around the village. Similar findings were reported by Mukherjee *et al.* (1994) [12], Devi (1995) [13], Goel (1997) [14], Singh and Malik (1998) [15] and Thakur (2000) [16].

Socio-cultural problems

Caste: Caste as a major problem was emphasised by many of the respondents. This indicates thereby that caste bias greatly hinders political participation especially of the tower caste women in the society.

The respondents emphasised that women of lower castes find it extremely difficult to make their presence felt when it comes to expressing their views in Panchayats of mix castes. Usually members of higher castes do not give them due respect and importance as members of Panchayats.

Patriarchal Values: Gram Panchayats are based on democratic values and equality. Factors such as caste and class in conjunction with patriarchal Values tend to create a hierarchical pattern. Similar observations were made by Rajalaxmi (1985) [17] Rajput (1993) [18] Kaur (1994) [19] and Subha (1994) [20].

Gender issues / Attitude / Male dominance: Out of the total majority of the respondents interviewed emphasised that they were dominated by their male family members especially husbands. The attitude of male dominance retard's women involvement increasingly. Their personality is controlled, regulated and maintained by male members of the society. Women are kept out of all kinds of major decision making process and are thus not given any chance to empower themselves. Similar results were (Srivastawa and Singh (1998) ^[15] Rathee (2002) ^[21] found. The situation has only slowly moved from one of total rejection to limited objection, as women's entry into Gram Panchayats is gradually being accepted by men

Economic problems

Economic independence: Not being economically independent was another major problem faced by women respondents. Almost all the respondents in these states who responded to this statement were of the view that economic dependence was a major obstacle in their proper functioning in the Gram Panchayats.

The Indian political culture is primarily associated with money, muscle and men. This culture has its impact on rural politics as well. And that is the reason women find themselves handicapped when they have to face men, muscle and money power in election or even day to day working as a panch or sarpanch. Economic independence of women would go a long way in making them bold enough to face the challenges of public life and in effectively performing their duties. Public life even at the village level is not possible without reasonable flow of money at ones command. And if a women has to depend upon family male members to get money even for minor day to day needs, how can such a women perform public duties and fight election without being solely dependent on males in the family, Singh (1998) ^[15]. A study of Chowdhari and Kumtakar in Madhya Pradesh same results were revealed (1999).

Political problems

Lack of self confidence and previous experience in public life Lack of self confidence and previous experience in public life had also hindered women respondents in the participation of Panchayats. Point out this factor being responsible for their inability to perform properly. Infact lack of public life experience leads to lack of public life experience leads to lack of confidence among women panches to perform Panchayat duties. Report by Women Studies Research Centre (1999) of Haryana revealed the same.

Conclusion

The result of the above study shows that overall attitude of rural women towards reservation in Panchayat, it is found that (52%) had low level of attitude whereas (25%) and (23%) had high and medium level of attitude. The majority of the rural women faced the personal problems, socio-cultural problem and economic and political problems. On the basis of the present study rural women to some extent have gained a direct outcome of women reservation in Panchayati Raj System.

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