



LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Dr. N. Sukumaran* & Dr. C. Lingaganesan**

* Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Annamalai University,
Annamalai Nagar, Tamilnadu

** Professor and Co-Ordinator, DDE, Sociology Wing, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Tamilnadu

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Introduction:

Gender equality and empowerment of women is recognized globally as a key element to achieve progress in all areas. It is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals to which World leaders agreed at the Millennium summit held in New York 2000. Women have been walking on a tight rope since the time they took up leadership positions in local bodies. A landmark political achievement for women was the constitutional amendment prescribing one-third representation to women in panchayats in the rural areas, and local bodies at all levels not only in relation to seats but also to presidentship. Now the struggle is on for one-third representation in state legislatures and Parliament. The political entry of women as part of the one-third reservation in panchayats has brought about a remarkable change in women themselves, their families, and their immediate community.

Promotion of Women's Participation in Local Government:

The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, 1992 has served as a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in local government. The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 aims at Constitutional guarantees to safeguard the interests of rural local self-government to enable them to function as effective democratic and self governing institutions at the grass root level. This Amendment provides for reservation of 33 1/3 percent of elected seats for women at local government level in urban and rural areas.

These provisions have provided great opportunities and challenges to women in India, particularly in the local government field. This is of great significance, since this grass-root level participation has considerably broadened the base of women's participation in politics at rural level.

Problems of Women's Participation:

Involvement of women in the political arena and in decision-making roles is an important tool for empowerment as well as monitoring standards of political performance at local level. The role of political representatives at local level is demanding and all new 'recruits' need time to gain experience and to understand the rules, regulations and procedures governing the administrative bureaucracy with which they now have to work – often quite closely in the urban service delivery system.

Statement of the Problem:

The study deals with Panchayat Raj Institutions and Women Development with Special Reference to Cuddalore District of Tamil Nadu. The women in Indian society enjoy low socio economic position and they have less empowerment compared to the men. In this situation to what extent the elected village council members make represents their local development issues could be an interesting point of view of investigation.

An analysis of women elected village council members purposes of power utilization in village council meetings relating to development works, promotion of village sanitation and health, social development, fight against social injustice, women development, protection of women rights, supplying basic minimum needs for poor people and economic development of the women could be analyzed from the point of view of the present study.

Further, there is a need to examine the women village council members' ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in village council meetings and representing their problems.

Aim of the Study:

- The study was undertaken;
- ✓ to study the women village council members purposes of power utilization in the village council activities and resolutions,
- ✓ to find out the socio-cultural changes, and changes in the health care behavior on the part of the women village council members consequent upon holding local political power, and
- ✓ to find out the women village council members problems and barriers in their participation in village council meetings and attaining empowerment.

Methodology:

This study attempts to examine the impact of village council membership on women development. This study examines the elected women village council members' role in village council affairs with reference to mode and purposes of power utilization, representation of priority issues in village council meetings.

Selection of Study Region and Sampling:

Out of total districts in Tamilnadu state, the researcher has selected Cuddalore district. This district has a large number of elected women village council members. 300 respondents are chosen as sample. They are working in panchayat wards, panchayat union wards, panchayat president and town panchayat wards. The sampling of the study comes under the snowball sampling methods.

Data Collection:

In order to assess the role of panchayat raj institution in women village council members' development a well-structured interview schedule is prepared. Establishing a good rapport with the respondent carried out the data collection. Besides this, secondary data relating to district profile and other data in Panchayat Raj are collected during field study visits.

Socio-economic Status of Respondents:

Socio-economic status is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation. Socio-economic status is typically broken into three categories. They are high Socio-economic status, middle Socio-economic status, and low Socio-economic status to describe the three areas a family or an individual may fall into.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variables	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Education		
Primary education	44	14.66
Middle school level	78	26.00
High school level	92	30.67
+2 level	45	15.00
Degree level	41	13.67
Total	300	100.00
Family		
Small	155	51.66
Medium	92	30.67
Large	53	17.67
Total	300	100.00
Age group		
Below 30 years	73	24.33
31-40 years	97	32.33
41-50 years	85	28.34
51 and above	45	15.00
Total	300	100.00
Income group		
Below Rs.10000	81	27.00
Rs.10001-Rs.15000	66	22.00
Rs.15001-Rs.20000	55	18.33
Rs.20001-Rs.25000	50	16.67
Rs.25001 and above	48	16.00
Total	300	100.00

Source computed

The findings of socio-economic status of the respondents revealed the following facts. Out of the total 300 respondents 30.67 percent of them have attained high school level of education. It is noted that 14.66 percent of the respondents are studied upto primary education. It is interesting to note that 51.66 percent of the respondents come under the small family size i.e. below four members. It is observed that out of total 300 respondents majority (32.33%) of them come under age group of 31-40 years and the low income group respondents i.e. below Rs. 10,000 as their monthly income rank the first order in the representation in the study.

Political Power Utilization of Women:

The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of sustainable development in all areas of life. The study explores the elected women respondents' opinion on purpose of power utilization for achieving the gender equality and development.

Table 2: Education Wise Respondents' Purpose of Power Utilization

Education	Development works and promotion of village sanitation and health	Social development and fight against social injustice	Women development and protection women rights	Supplying basic minimum needs for poor people	Economic development of the women	Total

Primary education	8 (18.18)	8 (18.18)	7 (15.92)	16 (36.36)	5 (11.36)	44
Middle school level	36 (46.15)	12 (15.38)	13 (16.68)	6 (7.69)	11 (14.10)	78
High school level	6 (6.52)	25 (27.17)	18 (19.57)	27 (29.35)	16 (17.39)	92
+2 level	6 (13.33)	5 (11.11)	7 (15.56)	21 (46.67)	6 (13.33)	45
Degree level	15 (36.59)	8 (19.51)	7 (17.07)	6 (14.63)	5 (12.20)	41
Total	71 (23.67)	58 (19.33)	52 (17.33)	76 (25.33)	43 (14.33)	300

Chi Square:

Variable	Chi Square Calculated Value	Degrees of Freedom	Chi Square Tabulate Value
Education versus purpose of power utilization	62.40	16	26.3

Table 2 presents data on the education wise women village council members' purpose of power utilization. It could be noted that a more than one third of the degree level educated women village council members (36.59%) and middle school level educated women village council members (46.15%) make use of power towards development works and promotion of village sanitation and health in village council meetings. A considerable number of the higher secondary level educated women village council members (46.67%), high school level educated women village council members (29.35%) and primary school level educated women village council members (36.36%) make use of powers towards supplying basic minimum needs for poor people in their village council meetings.

The computed chi square value 62.40 is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level significance. Hence there is a significant difference between the educational status of the village women council members and their purposes of power utilization in village council. It could be seen clearly from the above discussion that the low level educated women council members mainly use of their powers towards supplying basic minimum needs for poor people in their village council meetings.

Personality Development and Socio-Cultural Changes:

This section deals with women panchayat members witnessed personal lifestyle and socio-cultural changes consequent upon becoming panchayat body members. It can be assessed with the help of 30 factors on a 5 point rating scale. these include increase in access to the immunization, voicing concern about self development, increase in education female children, participation in development programme, increase in decision making related to child centred, local campaigns against domestic violence, increase in access to the sanitation facility, occupational changes, interaction with outsiders, increase in nutritional awareness, increase in girl child development awareness, increase in inter caste dining in festivals and festivities, decline in child birth per household, freedom access to the all parts of the village, decline is joint family system, knowledge about human rights violation, increase in family planning awareness, mobility, receiving equal treatment in local bodies, increase in educational opportunities for household members, decline is female in infanticide, increase in movements of women for education and employment, freedom in spouse selection and marriage timings, increase is access to the health services, increase in health awareness, recognition in community, decline in dowry based exploitation, shift in marriage and kinship system indicating greater value and autonomy, equity in public speech, and decline in the level of untouchability.

Table 3 presents data on the income wise respondents' visualized personal life style and socio cultural changes. The highest income group respondents rank the first position in their overall observed personal life style and socio cultural changes after becoming panchayat members and it is evident from their secured mean score of 3.59 on a 5 point rating scale. The respondents in the income group Rs.20001-25000 take the second position in their overall perceived personal life style and socio cultural changes as per their secured mean score of 3.52. The respondents in the income group Rs.15001-20000 occupy the third position in their overall observed personal life style and socio cultural changes as per their secured mean score. The respondents in the income group Rs.10001-15000 stand at the fourth position in their overall witnessed personal life style and socio cultural changes as per their secured mean score of 3.10 on a 5 point rating scale. The lowest income group respondents stand at the last position in their overall witnessed personal life style and socio cultural changes.

Table 3: Monthly Income Wise Respondents' Personal Life Style and Socio-Cultural Changes

Variables	Below Rs.10000	Rs.10001- Rs.15000	Rs.15001- Rs.20000	Rs.20001- Rs.25000	Rs.25001 and above	Mean

Equity in public speech	2.02	2.18	2.29	2.44	2.52	2.14
Decline in child birth per household	2.89	3.44	3.92	3.99	4.07	3.17
Decline in joint family system	2.67	3.27	3.89	3.94	4.00	3.04
Decline in female infanticide	2.46	2.78	3.61	3.66	3.76	2.66
Increase in movements of women for education and employment	2.36	2.60	3.47	3.52	3.58	2.59
Increase in education of female children	3.66	3.79	3.90	3.96	4.03	3.83
Freedom access to the all parts of the village	2.43	3.37	3.69	3.74	3.81	3.11
Decline in the level of untouchability	2.05	2.10	2.15	2.20	2.27	2.08
Increase in intercaste dining in festivals and festivities	2.08	3.43	3.89	3.97	4.03	3.25
Knowledge about human rights violation	2.58	2.94	3.58	3.63	3.69	2.99
Shift in marriage and kinship system indicating greater value and autonomy	2.06	2.13	2.38	2.56	2.66	2.20
Local campaigns against domestic violence	3.49	3.79	3.83	3.93	4.01	3.70
Freedom in spouse selection and marriage timings	2.03	2.43	3.11	3.16	3.23	2.53
Participation in development programme	3.71	3.87	3.92	3.92	3.99	3.79
Increase in decision making related to child centred	3.47	3.71	3.94	3.97	4.05	3.74
Increase in girl child development awareness	3.15	3.28	3.53	3.58	3.67	3.32
Increase in family planning awareness	2.54	2.90	3.58	3.63	3.69	2.94
Decline in dowry based exploitation	2.03	2.25	2.38	2.60	2.67	2.26
Increase in educational opportunities for household members	2.02	2.54	3.71	3.76	3.88	2.72
Recognition in community	2.47	3.61	3.96	3.95	4.01	2.35
Increase in access to the sanitation facility	3.01	3.52	3.95	3.94	4.06	3.64
Increase in access to the immunization	3.71	3.86	3.89	3.95	4.01	3.94
Increase is access to the health services	2.37	2.53	2.66	2.71	2.77	2.48
Voicing concern about self development	3.62	3.87	3.94	3.97	4.01	3.89
Increase in nutritional awareness	2.88	3.81	3.99	3.94	3.98	3.41
Increase in health awareness	2.29	2.32	2.55	2.60	2.68	2.41
Occupational changes	3.39	3.60	3.93	3.98	4.04	3.60
Receiving equal treatment in local bodies	2.52	2.61	3.19	3.24	3.30	2.81
Interaction with outsiders	3.13	3.53	3.92	3.96	4.02	3.55
Mobility	2.69	2.84	3.17	3.22	3.29	2.88
Average	2.73	3.10	3.46	3.52	3.59	3.03

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Fcrit
Rows	43.20228	29	1.489734	28.42162	1.565322
Columns	15.90192	4	3.97548	75.84548	2.44988
Error	6.0802	116	0.052416		
Total	65.1844	149			

The Anova two way model is applied for further discussion. At one point, the computed Anova value 28.42 is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level significance. Hence, the variation among the components of personal life style and socio cultural changes is statistically significant. In another point the computed Anova value 75.84 is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level significance. Hence, the variation among the income groups is statistically significant with respect to respondents rating on personal life style and socio cultural changes after becoming panchayat members.

Change in Health Care Behaviours:

This section deals with women panchayat members observed changes in their health care behaviours consequent upon membership in panchayat bodies. It can be assessed with the help of 15 factors on a 5 point rating scale. These include proper protection of food from flies and insects, proper washing and protection of utensils, hand washing after defecation, increase in family planning awareness, endorsing household members to follow healthy practices, taking preventive health care practices, cleaning latrines and using sanitary latrines, proper washing of rooms and home environment, taking preventive health care practices, taking preventive proper health care use, boiling water before drinking, proper protection of rooms and home environment, safe disposal of infant excretion, taking modern medicine and drugs, and proper vaccination of children.

Table 4: Age Wise Respondents' Change in Health Care Behaviours

Variables	Below 30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51 and above	Mean
Taking modern medicine and drugs	2.27	2.20	2.18	2.15	2.27
Taking preventive proper health care use	3.46	2.62	2.27	2.21	2.67
Taking preventive health care practices	3.74	3.65	2.40	2.34	3.24
Increase in family planning awareness	3.69	3.33	3.21	3.15	3.40
Taking preventive health care practices	3.65	3.22	2.35	2.29	2.73
Proper vaccination of children	2.55	2.44	2.28	2.22	2.21
Endorsing household members to follow healthy practices	3.71	3.68	2.44	2.38	3.33
Boiling water before drinking	2.85	2.55	2.38	2.32	2.55
Proper protection of food from flies and insects	3.64	3.78	3.73	3.67	3.72
Proper protection of rooms and home environment	2.6	2.45	2.25	2.19	2.48
Hand washing after defecation	3.77	3.66	2.80	2.74	3.53
Proper washing of rooms and home environment	3.26	3.01	2.45	2.39	2.84
Proper washing and protection of utensils	3.75	3.72	3.67	3.61	3.65
Safe disposal of infant excretion	2.39	2.32	2.30	2.26	2.36
Cleaning latrines and using sanitary latrines	3.69	3.51	2.46	2.45	3.13
Average	3.27	3.08	2.61	2.56	2.94

Anova:

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Fcrit
Rows	12.97238	14	0.926599	10.79344	1.935009
Columns	5.47222	3	1.824073	21.24763	2.827049
Error	3.60563	42	0.085848		
Total	22.05023	59			

The respondents in the age group 31-40 years take the second position in overall observed changes in their health care behaviour as per their secured mean score of 3.08 on a 5 point rating scale. The respondents in the age group 41-50 years occupy the third position in overall observed changes in their health care behaviour as per their secured mean score of 2.61 on a 5 point rating scale. The respondents in the age group 51 and above stand at the last position in overall observed changes in their health care behaviour as per their secured mean score of 2.56 on a 5 point rating scale.

The Anova two way model is applied for further discussion. At one point, the computed Anova value 10.79 is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level significance. Hence, the variation among the components of health care behaviour is statistically significant. In another point the computed Anova value 21.24 is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level significance. Hence, the variation among the age groups is statistically significant with respect to respondents rating on health care behaviour after becoming panchayat members.

It could be seen clearly from the above discussion that the respondents in the age group below 30 years rank the first position in overall observed changes in their health care behaviour after becoming panchayat members, in the age group 31-40 years respondents the second, in the age group 41-50 years respondents the third, and in the age group 51 and above respondents the last.

Problems and barriers in Participation of Panchayat Activities:

This section deals with women panchayat members' problem in participation in panchayat activities. It can be assessed with the help of 16 factors on a 5 point rating scale. These include difficult to express some social issues, lack of support from the male member, domination of husband role, lack of support from the family member, self motivate of panchayat members, household chores, low attention towards voicing concern on women issues, inadequate attention to the representation made by women member, lack of support from the female member, relative interference, Family interference, domination of state ruling party member domination, Partiality in allocation of works, economic constraints, abusive language and Inhabitations in speaking in front of elders.

Table 5: Age Wise Respondents' Problem in Participation in Panchayat Activities

Variables	Below 30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51 and above	Mean
Abusive language	2.25	2.28	2.42	2.63	2.34
Self motivate of panchayat members	3.22	3.37	3.61	3.66	3.36

Relative interference	2.31	2.54	3.58	4.02	2.72
Lack of support from the male member	3.59	3.83	3.92	4.03	3.72
Lack of support from the female member	2.39	2.89	3.10	3.81	2.96
Inhabitations in speaking in front of elders	2.23	2.25	2.29	2.38	2.25
Family interference	2.32	2.38	2.91	3.14	2.60
Lack of support from the family member	3.14	3.35	3.38	3.98	3.47
Household chores	2.18	3.16	3.59	3.92	3.22
Economic constraints	2.21	2.42	2.63	2.73	2.39
Domination of husband role	3.02	3.53	3.82	3.99	3.60
Difficult to express some social issues	3.86	3.92	4.00	4.04	3.93
Partiality in allocation of works	2.20	2.47	2.62	2.85	2.46
Inadequate attention to the representation made by women member	2.23	2.75	3.35	4.02	3.08
Domination of state ruling party member domination	2.22	2.49	2.64	2.87	2.48
Low attention towards voicing concern on women issues	2.79	3.14	3.59	3.92	3.16
Average	2.64	2.92	3.22	3.50	2.98

Anova:

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	F crit
Rows	16.64354	15	1.109569	16.58001	1.894875
Columns	6.66168	3	2.22056	33.18126	2.811544
Error	3.011495	45	0.066922		
Total	26.31671	63			

Table 5 presents data on the age wise respondents' problems in participation in panchayat activities. The respondents in the age group 51 and above rank the first position in their overall observed problems in participation in panchayat activities after becoming panchayat members and it is evident from their secured mean score of 3.50 on a 5 point rating scale. The respondents in the age group 41-50 years take the second position in their overall perceived problems in participation in panchayat activities as per their secured mean score of 3.22 on a 5 point rating scale. The respondents in the age group 31-40 years occupy the third position in their overall observed problems in participation in panchayat activities as per their secured mean score of 2.92 on a 5 point rating scale. The respondents in the age group below 30 years stand at the last position in their overall witnessed problems in participation in panchayat activities as per their secured mean score of 2.64 on a 5 point rating scale.

The ANOVA two way model is applied for further discussion. At one point, the computed ANOVA value 16.58 is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level significance. Hence, the variation among the components of problems in participation in panchayat activities is statistically significant. In another point the computed ANOVA value 33.18 is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level significance. Hence, the variation among the age groups is statistically significant with respect to respondents rating on problems in participation in panchayat activities after becoming panchayat members.

It could be seen clearly from the above discussion that the respondents in the age group 51 and above rank the first position in their overall observed problems in participation in panchayat activities after becoming panchayat members, in the age group 41-50 years respondents the second, in the age group 31-40 years respondents the third, and in the age group below 30 years respondents the last.

Ways and Means of Overcoming Barriers:

It can be assessed with the help of 15 factors on a 5 point rating scale. These include self initiative development, help in household chores by family members, self decision making power, economic independence, liberal outlook, self confidence development, freedom from restriction by community, transparency in subject discussion, free and frank decision making, economic support from government, free from male domination, need of capacity development trainings, freedom from restriction by family member, week of effective leadership training and ability to speak in public.

Table 6 presents data on the education wise respondents' views on ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in panchayat affairs. The degree level educated respondents rank the first position in their overall observed ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in panchayat affairs after becoming panchayat members and it is evident from their secured mean score of 3.55 on a 5 point rating scale. The higher secondary level educated respondents take the second position in their overall perceived ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in panchayat affairs as per their secured mean score of 3.47 on a 5 point rating scale.

Table 6: Education Wise Respondents' Ways and Means of Overcoming Barriers

Variables	Illiterate	Middle school level	High school level	Higher secondary level	College level	Mean
Freedom from restriction by family member	2.15	2.36	2.56	2.67	2.76	2.40
Freedom from restriction by community	2.16	2.68	3.29	3.98	4.03	3.09
Economic support from government	2.18	2.44	3.48	3.98	4.03	2.74
Help in household chores by family members	3.44	3.71	3.80	3.97	4.04	3.76
Liberal out look	3.14	3.26	3.31	3.56	3.65	3.34
Self decision making power	2.98	3.49	3.78	3.95	4.01	3.64
Ability to speak in public	2.17	2.14	2.18	2.27	2.36	2.22
Self confidence development	2.16	3.13	3.55	3.88	3.97	3.26
Self initiative development	3.68	3.83	3.91	4.06	4.02	3.92
Free from male domination	2.22	2.28	2.81	3.04	3.13	2.62
Week of effective leadership training	2.17	2.17	2.31	2.52	2.61	2.31
Transparency in subject discussion	2.69	3.04	3.49	3.82	3.91	3.18
Economic independence	3.08	3.29	3.32	3.92	4.01	3.49
Need of capacity development trainings	2.16	2.39	2.54	2.77	2.86	2.46
Free and frank decision making	2.29	2.79	3.00	3.71	3.80	2.98
Average	2.58	2.87	3.16	3.47	3.55	2.54

Anova:

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	F crit
Rows	19.95058	14	1.425041	20.41888	1.872588
Columns	9.981539	4	2.495385	35.75542	2.536579
Error	3.908261	56	0.06979		
Total	33.84038	74			

The high school level educated respondents occupy the third position in their overall observed ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in panchayat affairs as per their secured mean score of 3.16 on a 5 point rating scale. The middle school level educated respondents stand at the fourth position in their overall witnessed ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in panchayat affairs as per their secured mean score of 2.87 on a 5 point rating scale. The illiterate respondents stand at the last position in their overall witnessed ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in panchayat affairs as per their secured mean score of 2.58 on a 5 point rating scale.

The ANOVA two way model is applied for further discussion. At one point, the computed ANOVA value 20.41 is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level significance. Hence, the variation among the components of ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in panchayat affairs is statistically significant. In another point the computed ANOVA value 35.75 is greater than its tabulated value at 5 per cent level significance. Hence, the variation among the educational groups is statistically significant with respect to respondents rating on ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in panchayat affairs after becoming panchayat members.

It could be seen clearly from the above discussion that the degree level educated respondents, rank the first position in their overall observed ways and means of overcoming barriers in participation in panchayat affairs after becoming panchayat members, higher secondary level educated respondents the second, high school level educated respondents the third, middle school level educated respondents the third and illiterate respondents the last.

Conclusion:

Gender inequality poses a significant development challenges in India. The global gender gap India 2014 ranked India at 114 out of 142 countries. The ranking is based on a country's ability to reduce gender

disparities in four areas: economic participation and opportunity, education, political empowerment and health and survival. From the results of the study it is concluded the women village council members have ascended in attaining the fruits of development towards gender equality, dignity, enlargement of choice, political freedom, assurance of human rights, and empowerment. It is also evident from study that socio-cultural progress, legal and political empowerment and modifications in their health care activities could be seen in the village consequent upon holding political power and involving public life. It is interesting to note from the results of the study that political power considerably empower the rural women (eg. Elected rural women representatives). The knowledge of political system and local self governing system enable the village council members to eliminate the social injustice and discriminations in terms of gender. It is evident from the study that good number of elected women representatives has undertaken many community development work such as infrastructural facilities, source of livelihood in addition to their routine village council activities. The women village council members boldly represent their socio-economic and political issues in their village council meetings, a mark of political empowerment. Such empowerment enhances the management capacity of women in villages and enables them to have sustainable development. However, the elected women village council members face some constraints while executing their duties.

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