



**A CASE STUDY ON THE PERFORMANCE AND PROBLEMS
FACED BY WOMEN VILLAGE PANCHAYAT PRESIDENTS IN
VADAMADURAI BLOCK, DINDIGUL DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU**

DR. B. E. GEORGE DIMITROV

Assistant Professor
Department of Humanities,
St. Claret College, Jalahalli
Bangalore-13 (KR) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act guarantees the participation of women and dalit women in local governance. This has made women and dalits to come out of their homes. A new dimension has brought women with new assertions of political identities at grassroots level. On the other hand, the panchayats members nominate their wives, daughter-in-law if they are unable to contest in panchayat elections. Standing in panchayat election is not on their own but by the community or family. Women access to information is limited which are fully controlled by men. Panchayats members are fully male where they have full control over women presidents. They are restricted in denial of their duties in attending meetings, meeting officials. In many situations women presidents are physically, verbally abused and punished for overstepping family boundaries. Reservation for women in panchayats has provided political empowerment to the weaker sections. It gives social justice and promoting equality to various sections of the community.

Keywords: Panchayat, Women, Dalits, Reservation, Local Governance

INTRODUCTION

Participation of women in panchayat raj system for more than many decades women were not allowed to involve in politics. In India social orientation is based on the means of class, caste and gender where women are not considered as a social group at all either men enjoy these powers neglecting women in certain circumstances. Elected women are used as proxies behind their husband or by their men in their family or village. Apart from this rural woman

DR. B. E. GEORGE DIMITROV

1P a g e



are vulnerable group based upon strong traditional values maintained in rural areas, patriarchy, family, lack of power, lack of access to informationⁱ.

Likewise, dalit women are considered to be a proxy-politics where 85% of Dalit elected representatives are pushed into local governance forcefully by the dominant caste as well as by their family members. Reservation alone cannot empower Dalit women when they face power struggle in local level where they have to fight with lot of issues related with dominant caste as well as to stand in election if they win also they had to struggle. Most of the Dalit women presidents are controlled by the Dalit husband where he is controlled by the dominant caste. They are neglected from participation and decision-making where they are used as rubber stamp to sign cheques.ⁱⁱ

In Indian context women are considered to be inferior in our society where constitution speaks about equality of men and women. Women in local governance are realizing the need of women empowerment; many women do not know the activities of panchayats the duties to be carried out in it. Women reservation in local governance has led only in a formal way and not progresses for women empowerment in panchayats, firstly women should get co-operation from the family members to participate in panchayat activities. Many situations they are not encouraged to decide on their own where many are under proxy rule by their husband and dominant caste in the case of Dalit elected representatives. Participating and preparing budgets are not allowed which are wholly controlled by the men; these things are considered to a boundary.ⁱⁱⁱ

Various studies carried on participation of women in panchayats are addressed on three major issues. Firstly, women panchayat presidents are inefficient were they depend upon panchayat officials. Illiteracy and lack of experience makes them difficult to discharge their duties. Secondly, oppression from male dominated society, patriarchal social orders do not allow women panchayat president to carry out panchayat activities. Thirdly, lack of involvement of women in Panchayat raj institutions consider their positions as their family honor and pride as a president. They do not mingle with rural women virtually attend the gram sabha meetings and failed to contribute in governance. Likewise the above mentioned problems also exists in the present study also focuses on various case studies on the performance of women panchayat presidents.

Objective of the study

- To study the socio-economic conditions of women panchayat presidents.
- To examine the level of awareness about panchayat administration among women panchayat presidents.

DR. B. E. GEORGE DIMITROV

2P a g e

- To evaluate the performance and problems faced by women panchayat presidents.

Methodology

This study was undertaken with the primary objective of studying the performance and problems faced by elected women village panchayat presidents in panchayat raj institutions. The study primarily has used quantitative and qualitative method of case study to investigate the research problem. Women village panchayat presidents do not express their opinion freely, most of them are controlled by their family members. They are not permitted to talk with outsiders on their own. Because of these reasons it is found that case study method is more appropriate to collect reliable data from them. The study was conducted in Vadamadurai development block of Dindigul district in Tamil Nadu. Vadamadurai consists of 15 village panchayats in which 5 panchayat are reserved for women were taken for the study.

CASE STUDY-1: KOMBERIPATTI

Village Profile

President	Village Panchayat	Hamlets	Wards	Population	Union	District
Chinnamal	Komberipatti	10	9	6389	Vadamadurai	Dindigul

Socio-economic background

Mrs. Chinnammal (36) is the panchayat president of Komberipatti village panchayat. She belongs to the Hindu (MBC) community and an illiterate. She lives in a concrete house, with electricity facility, water tap connection and toilet facility. Her husband is a farmer and has one child. She lives in a joint family and her husband owns 5 acres of agriculture land and a two wheeler. Her husband is very much influenced by AIADMK political party and Chinnamal is also a follower of the same political party till now. She has not held any positions in the political party but just a member and follower of AIADMK.

Recruitment Process

Chinnamal was nominated by her husband because the panchayat president post was reserved for general women. her husband was the vice president for the last tenure when the panchayat was reserved for women he was unable to contest in the election. He had an option of

DR. B. E. GEORGE DIMITROV

3P a g e



selecting Chinnamal to contest in the panchayat election. She had no interest in contesting the panchayat election but her husband forced Chinnamal to contest in the election. She got the support from her family and community members they promised to support Chinnamal in all the panchayat activities, if she wins the panchayat election. She spent Rs.2,00,000 as election expenses and had four competitors in the election. She won by 260 votes and elected as the panchayat president for the first time.

Awareness about Panchayat Administration

Chinnamal was elected as the panchayat president for the first time and did not enjoy any post in the panchayat. She did not have any goals to perform and was not aware about the panchayat activities. She was not educated and faced the difficulty to learn all the panchayat activities. She could not understand the powers and functions of the panchayat. Chinnamal took more than a year to understand all the panchayat activities and learnt everything from the field and had the fear in handling the panchayat administration. She was not allowed to handle all the panchayat activities where her husband occupied the panchayat office. Her husband started to use her ignorance and started to act as the panchayat president where the panchayat officials also supports him.

Performance

Chinnamal being as a panchayat president was fully controlled by her husband and the panchayat officials. She was not allowed to execute her rights as a panchayat president. The role of gender and family are controlling all the activities of the panchayat which makes her position vulnerable. She acts formally and affixes her signature in cheque books without asking any questions. She is not invited to any meetings or function in the village panchayat. All the decisions are taken by her husband with the consent of panchayat officials. She trusts her husband and the panchayat officials that they know what is good or bad for the people. Mostly the panchayat office is locked, and the keys are with the panchayat officials. If there are any issues in the panchayat her husband and the panchayat officials will attend it. She would not address any problems faced by the villagers and ask any questions related to the panchayat administration. They will not discuss any panchayat activities with Chinnamal and take decisions on their own. She is not invited to any meetings and not allowed by the panchayat officials.

CASE STUDY-2:KANAPADI

Village Profile

Socio-economic background

President	Village Panchayat	Hamlets	Wards	Population	Union	District
Andaal Eswari	Kanapadi	8	9	5320	Vadamadurai	Dindigul

Mrs. Andaal Eswari (42) is the panchayat president of Kanapadi village panchayat. She belongs to the Hindu (MBC) community and educated upto 6th standard. She lives in a concrete house, with electricity facility, water tap connection and toilet facility. Her husband is a farmer and has three daughters. She lives in a joint family and her husband owns 4 acres of agriculture land, two wheeler and four wheeler. Her husband is very much influenced by DMK political party and has not held any positions in the political party but holds a member of this party. Andaal also was influenced by her husband to follow the party ideologies of DMK and used to cast her vote to the political party during elections.

Recruitment Process

Andaal was nominated by her community because the panchayat president post was reserved for general women. Her community members convinced Andaal's husband to nominate her in the panchayat election as it would bring pride to their community. Andaal's family was one of the richest families and familiar among the masses made her to use the women reservation. She was not ready to contest in the panchayat election but her husband and community forced to contest in the election. She got the support from her family, community members spent Rs.1,40,000 as election expenses and had six competitors in the election. She won by 460 votes and elected as the panchayat president for the first time.

Awareness about Panchayat Administration

Andaal was new to panchayat and not aware about panchayat administration. She was not interested to carry out the panchayat activities and wished to stay out of it. She was offered trainings to learn all the activities of the panchayat. She was very much ignorant to learn all panchayat activities. She had the difficulty to read the guidelines written in the panchayat books. The trainings which were given by the government officials made her feel she is not suitable to be the panchayat president. Andaal is fully assisted by her husband and family members. She doesn't face any forms of difficulty in running the panchayat administration as her husband and the panchayat officials were looking after the entire panchayat administration.

Performance

Andaal would feel when her tenure is over as a panchayat president. She doesn't know anything about the panchayat administration and all the activities are controlled by her husband and family members. As a panchayat president there are no changes within her and feels depressed. Before being as the panchayat president Andaal was respected within her community members. The panchayat clerk and vice president carries out the entire panchayat administration. They look after all the accounts and collection of taxes which are not discussed with her. She will not ask any questions related with the panchayat activities. Andaal is afraid to tackle all the issues of the panchayat. She would say the independent participation of women presidents are limited in the decision making process. In her case she is being limited to participate in the panchayat activities and controlled by the means of gender and family. She is asked to come to the office to affix her signature in the ledger books and in records. Even in cheques she is forced to affix her signature and doesn't know how much amount is quoted. While selecting the beneficiaries her husband, ward members and the vice president decide whom to allocate the scheme. They collect money to select the beneficiaries in various schemes. She get Rs.1000/- as honorarium to handle all the panchayat activity. She cannot travel alone in the bus and needs the help of family members.

CASE STUDY-3:SUKKAMPATTI

Village Profile

President	Village Panchayat	Hamlets	Wards	Population	Union	District
M.Saraswathi	Sukkampatti	13	13	8253	Vadamadurai	Dindigul

Socio-economic background

Mrs.Saraswathi (40) is the panchayat president of Sukkampatti village panchayat. She belongs to the Hindu (MBC) community and educated upto 3th standard .She lives in a concrete house ,with electricity facility, water tap connection and toilet facility. Her husband is a farmer and has two sons. She lives in a nuclear family and her husband owns 5 acres of land, two wheeler and four wheeler. She is influenced by AIADMK political party though her husband was a party member of DMK.

Recruitment Process

Saraswathi was nominated by her family because the panchayat president post was reserved for general women. She had no interest in contesting the panchayat election but her family members compelled Saraswathi to contest in the election. She got the support from her community and family members. The community members promised her that they would support Saraswathi in all the panchayat activities if she wins the panchayat election. She spent Rs.100000 as election expenses and had three competitors in the election. she won by 450 votes and elected as the panchayat president for the first time.

Awareness about Panchayat Administration

Saraswathi being elected as the panchayat president for the first time gave happiness but she had the fear in handling the panchayat administration. She was not aware about the panchayat administration and sought help from panchayat officials. She is not aware about the powers and functions as panchayat president. Her husband helps Saraswathi in all the panchayat activities and finally her husband started to use her ignorance and started to act as the panchayat president. Apart from it she goes to panchayat office and to wards but always assisted by her husband.

Performance

Saraswathi as the panchayat president is under the control of her husband and acts according to his directions in the panchayat activities. Though she visits the panchayat office all the panchayat decisions are taken by her husband and panchayat officials. She is not allowed to speak in the panchayat meetings and in gram sabhas. She visits the panchayat office and sits in her allotted chair but all the functions are carried out by her husband. Her husband would organize meetings and gram sabha where she would keep herself idle and watch all the panchayat proceedings. All the people in the panchayat believe her husband is the panchayat president. She is not aware about the panchayat activities and seeks answers from her husband. Apart from it her panchayat has achieved some functions and performance of panchayat president. She has provided road facility, streetlight facility, drinking water facility and drainage facility.

CASE STUDY-4:CHINGARAKOTTAI

Village Profile

President	Village Panchayat	Hamlets	Wards	Population	Union	District
Suppamal	Chingarakottai	9	8	5589	Vadamadurai	Dindigul

Socio-economic background

Mrs. Suppammal Perumal (49) is the panchayat president of Chingarakottai village panchayat. She belongs to the Hindu (BC) community and has educated upto 7th standard. She lives in a concrete house, with electricity facility, water tap connection and toilet facility. Her husband is a farmer and has two daughters who are already married. She lives in a joint family and her husband owns 20 acres of agriculture land and a two wheeler. Her husband is very much influenced by Congress political party and Suppammal doesn't like political party and hates politics. She avoids speaking about politics with her family members and neighbours.



Recruitment Process

Suppamal was nominated by her community members as the panchayat president post was reserved for general women. She was not ready to contest in the panchayat election but her community members convinced her to contest in the panchayat election. Suppammal family was not highly influenced by any political party which made her to contest in the election as an independent candidate. She got the support from her family and community members they promised to support Chinnamal in all the panchayat activities, if she wins the panchayat election. She spent Rs.1,00,000 as election expenses and had five competitors in the election. She won by 560 votes and elected as the panchayat president for the first time.

Awareness about Panchayat Administration

Suppamal is not aware of panchayats and was not exposed to panchayat activities. She is just a nominal president and was not aware of her powers. Her husband Perumal controlled all the panchayat activities and he did not allow her to act independently. She was given exposure to various training programmes which were held at the district collectorate. She felt shy to learn all the panchayat activities and had the fear to learn them. She thought it is better her husband can carry out all the panchayat activities. She did not like her position and wished to stay back at home. She has completed 4 years as the panchayat president but doesn't know about the panchayat activities. She always had the fear to speak with others and always be silent. If someone raises any questions about the panchayat she would ask her husband or the panchayat officials. She is not allowed to carry out her works independently.

Performance

Suppammal is not aware of panchayat and not exposed to any panchayat activities. She has completed 4 years as the panchayat president but doesn't know about the panchayat activities. She always has the fear to speak with others and always be silent. Her husband assists Suppamal and he carries out all the panchayat activities. She is not allowed to carry out the panchayat works independently. She feels that her ignorance has made her not to perform the duties as a panchayat president. She is not allowed to go for meetings which are held at Block office and in the collectorate office. She is asked to sign in empty cheques and in other documents. Her presidential chair is occupied by her husband. She would be allowed to sit on her chair when the government officials visit the panchayat. The panchayat officials and her husband dominate her in all the panchayat activities. They do not allow her to take decisions on her own.

CASE STUDY-5: PILATHU

Village Profile

President	Village Panchayat	Hamlets	Wards	Population	Union	District
Murugai	Pilathu	6	6	5689	Vadamadurai	Dindigul

Socio-economic background

Mrs. Murugai Murugesan (44) is the panchayat president of Pilathu village panchayat. She belongs to the Hindu (SC) community and has completed 10th standard. She lives in a colony house outside the outskirts of the village panchayat. She has a house tap connection, toilet facility and electricity connection. Apart from this her family owns two wheelers and other basic facilities. She doesn't have any assets or land, but her husband holds 5 cents of land registered in his name. She has two sons who are not highly educated and working as daily labourers. Murugai has constructed a house for her sons and lives separately with her husband. With the minimum income from her sons she is able to run her daily bread. Her husband being a politician influenced her to be the panchayat president for two consecutive times.

Recruitment Process

Murugai was not interested in politics or did not hold any position in the panchayat office. She always wanted to stay back at home and look after the family affairs. When the panchayat election was reserved for SC women there was a talk to nominate her in the panchayat election. Her husband was behind this and wished Murugai to be nominated in the panchayat election. Her husband who was working as a rationshop employee had healthy relationship with the people. The goodwill of his relationship with other community members made them accept Murugais candidature in the panchayat election. Her community members and her sons convinced her to contest in the panchayat election. Murugai did not like to contest in the panchayat election, her husband gave assurance to help her if she won the panchayat election. These words made her encouraging and contested in the panchayat election. She had 3 competitors from the same community who spent more amounts to win the election. Murugai spent around 1 lakh as election expenses during the first election and won with 780 votes. During the second tenure she was once again forced to compete in the



panchayat election by her husband. She had 2 competitors and didn't spend much money in the second election as her husband's political influence made her to re-elect as the president.

Awareness about Panchayat Administration

Murugai was new to panchayat administration when she was elected as the panchayat president for the first time. She was feared to handle the panchayat administration and she was the first women to hold the position as the panchayat president. She was given exposure to various training programme to improve her leadership quality. This made her aware about the various powers and functions of the panchayat president. These training programmes were organised by the government officials which made her aware about the entire panchayat administration. The government officials made all the SC women presidents to know their rights and duties. They briefed if their rights are violated they can get guidance to the government officials. This made her encouraging as well as gained the confidence. When she applied these functions in the field her husband used to control her in all the panchayat activities.

Performance

Murugais performance as the panchayat president was not satisfactory. She was not aware about the powers and functions of a panchayat president. When she went to the panchayat office for the first time it gave happiness. She had the fear to enter the panchayat office which is very nearer to her residence. The vice president and the panchayat clerk were from the dominant caste. This made her very much embarrassed to enter into the panchayat office. The vice president and the panchayat clerk who had healthy relationship with her husband made them to treat her respectfully. She was allowed to chair the panchayat office without any forms of restrictions. She felt shy to sit in the presidential chair, her husband and the panchayat officials made her to sit in the presidential chair. She was very much comfortable after holding the panchayat office. She has a nominal role by going to the panchayat office to affix signature in the panchayat records and cheques. She is not allowed to take decisions and always intervened by her husband in major decisions. She made her husband to attend the government meetings and other activities in the panchayat. For the last 9 years she doesn't know anything about panchayat and goes compromisingly with her husband to carry out the panchayat administration. From various odds she is aware about panchayat activities and its function. She knows that various welfare and development activities can be carried out through panchayat. She has felt that if she is educated well it would be more comfortable to handle all the panchayat activities. Till now she doesn't know to handle all the panchayat activities and no one is ready to teach her. She attended all the panchayat meetings which are held at the block office. She felt shy to speak to with the government officials regarding the

village panchayat. She has attended various training programmes conducted by NGOs and voluntary organizations. Presently she knows the importance about the panchayat administration and does all the formal works in the panchayat.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The study has found that most of the women panchayat presidents were forced to contest in the panchayat election by their family members.
2. The village community preferred to elect Dalit women with lesser capability as the village panchayat president.
3. Majority of Dalit women village Panchayat presidents are used as proxies by the dominant community.
4. The participation of women in panchayat raj institutions are determined by non party institutions.
5. Majority of women panchayats presidents gets their legal authority through proxy representation by their husband and relatives.
6. The independent representation of women presidents in decision making is being limited by gender and family.
7. Dalit women village Panchayat presidents supported by the political organizations, activist groups and nongovernmental organizations are more empowered than others.
8. The socio economic conditions of women influence the emergence as village panchayat presidents.
9. Majority of Dalit women panchayat presidents do not have political knowledge.
10. The study found that increasing the capability of women village Panchayat presidents is a prerequisite for their empowerment.
11. The intervention of political organizations, activist groups can play a major role in the empowerment of women village Panchayat presidents.
12. Majority of the women panchayat presidents have been elected for the first time as panchayat president.
13. Majority of the women presidents have reported family members do not support them in panchayat activities, instead they control them.
14. Most of the women president's duties are fully exercised by family members and husband.

CONCLUSION

The study mainly focuses on the performance of women panchayat presidents and their problems faced by them while exercising their powers and functions. In many situations women panchayat presidents are being nominated by their male counterparts of the family



when the panchayat is reserved for women. women panchayat presidents after winning the election they are not allowed to carry out their duties in the panchayats. Mostly the panchayat is under the control of the panchayat officials and by their husband. though they have attended various training given by the state government it doesn't make them empowered were they lack out from education. Women panchayat presidents posts are being occupied by the male counterparts were they take total control over the panchayat. Whenever government officials visits the panchayats they allow women presidents to occupy their seats. After they go away once again women panchayat presidents are sent back home and their husband looks after the panchayat. Their performance is also very much questioned as they do not go to the panchayat office, avoid meetings, gramsabha, and always assisted by her husband, panchayat officials. Finally the study comes to an conclusion the women panchayat presidents need proper training, affiliation with political parties and organizations can make them empowered in performing well in panchayat activities. Likewise women reserved panchayats should also reserve the post of vice president and panchayat clerk to women which could make them perform well in panchayat activities.

REFERENCES

-
- ⁱ.Anuradha Roy (2012), Participation of Women in Panchayat Raj System, June 2012.
http://www.devalt.org/newsletter/mar11/of_3.html.
- ⁱⁱ.Amy Mookerji (2011), Panchayat Raj With Special Reference Of Dalit Women Sarpanches, Merinews.
- ⁱⁱⁱ.Dayanidhi Pardia(2010), Women and Panchayati Raj- A study, Orissa Review.pp22-23
<http://odisha.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/2010/Feb-Mar/engpdf/22-23.pdf>.