



Participation of Elected Women in Panchayati Raj System in Bihar

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ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken to know the extent of participation of elected women members in Panchayati Raj institutions. A total of seventy five women representative randomly selected from all the panchayats of Pusa and Kalyanpur block of Samastipur district in Bihar from forty villages selected randomly from two blocks. An interview schedule was used to collect the necessary data. In order to determine the conditions governing the participation of women, the data were subjected to multiple correlation, regression and path analysis. Participation was taken as dependent variable. The findings revealed that maximum 8.0 per cent of these elected women village members “Always” participated in “Construction, repair and maintenance” of public property. More than ninety per cent respondents spoke positively with respect to different life situation as a consequence of their association with Gram Panchayats. The results of correlations and multiple regression analysis between participation and socio-economic and psychological variables of elected village panchayat was positively and significantly correlated with caste ($r = 0.668$) and interaction style ($r = 0.353$) at 1 present level of probability and value of social linkage was negative but significant at 5 present level of probability.

Key Words: Institution, Panchayat, Panchayati Raj, Participation, Village.

INTRODUCTION

Women represent almost half of the human resources of half the potential in all the societies. Women who have been elected to power in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) represent various backgrounds- rich and poor, dominant class and oppressed social class, educated and illiterate (PRIA, 2003). Balwant Rai Mehta study team (1959) and later Ashok Mehta committee (1978) reviewed the *Panchayati Raj* system in the country and stressed the importance of women’s role in decision making in development. In fact for the first time, it was recommended to form committees with representation of the women as members of the Mandal Panchayats, so as to enable the women to make decisions themselves on priorities and choices in welfare and development programmes meant for women and children.

The 73rd constitutional amendment mandated a minimum of one third reservation for women in the membership as well as in the position of chairpersons of Panchayat at all three levels, namely the village, district and intermediate levels. All the states without exception have adopted this reservation policy since then. At the state level the Panchayati Raj Department coordinates the functioning of the PRIs. It is being said that with the advent of women in such a large number in the primary institutions i.e. Gram Panchayats a new phase of the process of empowerment of women has been unveiled. Therefore, it was planned to study the extent of participation of the elected women panchayat members in Bihar’s rural self government, factors which drove them to come out of their homes and make their path through the local politics to reach to the Gram Panchayats as its Mukhia or Sarpanch or

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a ward. The objectives of the present study were to assess the extent of participation of elected women members in Panchayati Raj system and to find out the guiding factors responsible for participation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was undertaken in purposively selected Samastipur district of Bihar state. Out of twenty blocks of Samastipur district only two blocks namely Pusa and Kalyanpur were selected to represent the whole district. Forty villages in the total were drawn randomly from the two selected blocks (20 villages from each block). Seventy five women representatives were randomly selected from all the gram panchayats of these two blocks. A schedule was used to collect the data by personal interview method. In order to determine the conditions governing the participation of women the data were subjected to multiple correlation, regression and path analysis. Participation was taken as dependent variable.

per cent of these elected women village Panchayat members “Always” participated in “construction, repair and maintenance” of public property followed by 6.66 per cent of the respondents in “poverty alleviation, welfare and health” related activities and 5.34 per cent of respondents participated in education. All the respondents never participated in general village work related activities. The “general work” included activities like preparation of annual plans, preparation of annual budgets, removal of encroachments, maintenance of essential statistics in the village etc. in which the women may not be interested assuming that it is a male dominated area of work.

It was quite-discouraging to find that a high percentage of respondents varying from 81.33 percent to 94.66 were found to be never participated in duties and functions i.e. construction, repair and maintenance; Rural housing and Electrification; public distribution, cultural activities and agriculture and allied activities respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data (Table 1) show that maximum 8.0

Table 1. Distribution of elected women village Panchayat members and their extent of participation.

Duties and functions		Awareness Always Some times		Extent of Participation		
				Never		
Activities related to		Yes	No	Per cent	Per cen	Per cen
1.	General village work	4	71	-	-	100.00
2.	Agriculture and allied	11	64	-	5.34	94.66
3.	Income generation	12	63	1.33	5.34	93.33
4.	Rural housing and rural electrification	18	57	4.0	4.0	92.00
5.	Education	35	40	5.34	6.66	88.00
6.	Poverty alleviation welfare and health	28	47	6.66	8.0	85.33
7.	Construction, repair and maintenance	25	50	8.0	10.66	81.33
8.	Cultural activities	9	66	2.66	2.66	94.66
9.	Public Distribution	0	65	4.0	4.0	92.00

A= Always S= Sometimes N= Never

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Table 2. Co-efficient of correlation between participation and Socio-economic and Psychological Variables of elected Women Members of Gram Panchayat (n=75).

Sr. No.	Independent Variable	Value of Coefficient of Correlation
1.	Age	-0.174
2.	Caste	0.668**
3.	Development constraints	-0.085 Ns
4.	Family education	0.112 Ns
5.	Family income	-0.075 Ns
6.	Family size	0.094 Ns
7.	Family type	0.253*
8.	House type	-0.111 Ns
9.	Interaction Style	0.353**
10.	Knowledge	0.098 Ns
11.	Marital-status	-0.090 Ns
12.	Material possession	-0.061 Ns
13.	Occupation	0.272*
14.	Personal education	0.184 Ns
15.	Size of land holding	-0.050 Ns
16.	Social linkage	-0.129 Ns

* Significant at 5% level of Probability, ** Significant at 1% level of Probability, Ns - Non significant

The association between participation with family type ($r = 0.253$) and occupation ($r = 0.272$) were also significant at 5 percent level of probability. The variables like personal education ($r = 0.112$), family education ($r = 0.112$) and family size ($r = 0.094$) were also positively correlated with participation of elected women in Panchayat activities but were not significant. The rest of the variables i.e. age, marital status, size of land holding, family income, material possession, house type, social linkage, knowledge and development constraints were in negative association with participation of EWVPMs. This indicates that the participation of elected women is influenced maximum by the caste factor. The highly significant of participation with interaction style revealed that their interaction in development activities in gram Panchayats increased in their engagements in Panchayat Raj System.

Some of coefficients of correlation which were high but minus level of significance are marital

status ($r = 0.090$), family size ($r = -0.094$), land holding ($r = -0.050$), family income ($r = -0.05$), material possession ($r = -0.061$), house type ($r = -0.0111$), social linkage ($r = -0.128$), knowledge ($r = -0.098$), development constraints ($r = -0.085$) and age ($r = -0.174$). This clearly indicated that family status i.e. the members belonging to larger families were more emboldened to participate in the developmental programmes of gram Panchayats. The house type also played negatively towards participation, although in a feeble manner.

The multiple regression analysis to estimate the contribution of independent variables to the participation of elected women members in the gram Panchayat as presented in table 3 indicated that the partial regression co-efficient were significant in case of three variables only. The “t” value of caste ($t = 6.619$) and age ($t = 3.627$) were positive and significant at 1per cent level of probability whereas “t” value of social linkage was negative but significant at 5 percent level of probability ($t = -2.206$).

Table 3. Multiple regressions between Participation and Socio-economic and Psychological variables of elected women members of Gram Panchayat (n=75)

Sr. No.	Character	Standard regression	Standard error	T-Value	SDR regression Co-efficient
1.	Age	-0.434	0.244	3.627**	-0.156
2.	Caste	10.992	1.661	6.619**	0.617
3.	Development constraints	-3.002	0.053	-0.558	-0.051
4.	Family education	0.861	1.247	0.691	0.064
5.	Family income	-2.015	1.523	-1.723	-0.127
6.	Family size	-0.924	1.581	-0.585	-0.055
7.	Family type	2.629	2.956	0.889	0.082
8.	House type	-1.149	1.588	-0.723	-0.066
9.	Interaction style	2.155	1.470	1.466	-0.138
10.	Knowledge	-1.502	0.052	0.287	-0.026
11.	Marital-status	-14.681	9.954	-1.475	-0.132
12.	Material possession	-1.115	1.683	-0.663	-0.060
13.	Occupation	0.798	0.824	0.968	0.093
14.	Personal education	1.427	1.741	0.820	0.071
15.	Size of land holding	0.901	1.817	-0.496	-0.044
16.	Social linkage	-5.673	2.572	-2.206*	-0.189

$R^2 = 0.615$, $F = 5.795$ * Significant at 5% level of Probability ** Significant at 1% level of Probability

The results (Table 3) revealed that participation by elected women was positively and significantly correlated with caste ($r = 0.668$) and interaction style ($r = 0.353$). In terms of standardized regression coefficients caste, social linkage and age occupied the first three ranks respectively. The corresponding partial regression coefficients obtained from these three variables indicated that in case of caste, social linkage and age, a unit gain is capable of effecting a change in participation to the tune of (10.992), (-5.673) and (-0.434) units, respectively provided other variables were kept constant.

The coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.615$ indicated that upto 61.50 percent variation in participation was explained by all the sixteen independent variables taken together (Table 4).

It was revealed (Table 4) that the direct effect of social linkage (-0.5329), age (-0.3446), Interaction style (-0.3423), Personal education (0.3241), Family type (0.3111), Caste (0.3091), Family Size

(0.2528), Occupation (0.2489), Family education (0.2132) and Material possession (-0.2126) over extent of participation of the elected women members in gram Panahayat were substantial.

The house type had only a modest direct effect (0.1132) but interestingly had maximum indirect effect (0.8321). substantial indirect effect (0.8321). substantial indirect effects were extended on participation also by caste (0.3020), interaction style (-0.2531), family type (0.2437) occupation (0.2432) and family size (0.2113). Interaction style, caste, social linkage and age were the variables through which the majority of the independent ones extended their effect though over the participation in Gram Panchayats by the elected women members.

CONCLUSION

In Indian constitution, there are provisions for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social and economic status. The above finding concluded

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Table 4. Direct–Indirect effect of independent variable with participation of elected women members of gram Panchayats (n=75)

SL. No.	Character	Direct effect	Total indirect effect	Maximum indirect effect	Through
1.	Age	-0.3446	-0.1304	0.1389	Caste
2.	Caste	0.3091	0.3020	-0.1301	Age
3.	Development constraints	-0.0168	-0.0321	0.5483	Interaction style
4.	Family education	0.2132	0.1356	0.3221	Caste
5.	Family income	-0.1724	0.1389	-0.1202	Age
6.	Family Size	0.2528	0.2113	0.1246	Caste
7.	Family type	0.3111	0.2437	0.2451	Caste
8.	House type	0.1132	0.8321	0.1798	Caste
9.	Interaction Style	-0.3423	-0.2531	0.0821	Famiy type
10.	Knowledge	-0.1321	-0.0031	-0.0542	F.E.S
11.	Marital-status	0.0115	-0.701	-0.2011	Age
12.	Material possession	-0.2126	0.2218	0.1636	Caste
13.	Occupation	0.2489	0.2432	0.2341	Interaction style
14.	Personal education	0.3241	0.1021	-0.2152	Social linkage
15.	Size of land holding	0.0721	0.0007	0.2669	Caste
16.	Social linkage	-0.5329	0.1211	0.1028	Interaction Style

that maximum 8.0 percent of these elected women village Panchayat members “Always” participated in “construction, repair and maintenance” of public property and overall positive impact of increased participation of elected women members in gram panchayats as the representations of the society. Thus women’s reservation in the Panchayati raj Institution has not made a mark in terms of improving the grim scenario faced by women in general and poor low caste women in particular would be in exercise in fallacy.

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