

RESEARCH ARTICLE :

Constraints faced by elected women village Panchayat members in role performance

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SUMMARY : Women have been an integral part of social structure not only because their importance in the perpetuation of human race but also by virtue of their significant contribution in socio-economic progress. Despite this, time and again they have been subjected to discrimination due to gender bias and have been denied equality of status and opportunities in social economic and political spheres of life. The present study was an effort to know the profile of elected women village Panchayat members and constraints faced by elected women Panchayat members in role performance. Total seventy five women representatives randomly selected from Pusa and Kalyanpur block of Samastipur district in Bihar. The study reveals that majority of the women members of the Gram Panchayat were within 35 years of age (73.33%), 46.66 per cent of respondents were from forward caste, a large majority (98.66 % and 97.33%) of EWVPMs were married and were housewives only, respectively, personally possessed low (up to 8th standard) level of education (48.0%) and also had high family education (29.33%). They by and large enjoyed a nuclear family (64.00%) but the majority had 3-5 members (42.66%), these respondents owned land up to 2.5 acre (58.66%) and lived with low material possession (84.0%). The family income of more than half of the members (64.0%) of respondents had low income group below 20,000 annually, having as many as (42.66%) of the members had mixed house (76.0%) of respondents had not membership of any social institution. Out of 11 constraints of role performance by EWVPMs, 8 viewed as most serious were lack of resources for development work (90.66%), lack of fund on time for carrying out the work of the projects (88.00%), lack of knowledge to the members (82.66%), non-availability of persons well versed with the rural projects (80.0%), lack of interest in Mukhiya for developmental works (80.0%), carelessness among villagers for development works (74.66%) lack of education among Panchayat members (69.33%) and bribery and misappropriation of funds (54.66%). The maximum number of EWVPMs considered economical constraints to be acting as the greatest hindrance in the way of their role performance (93.33%).

KEY WORDS :

Constraints, Elected women village Panchayat members, Panchayati Raj Institutions

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Women represent almost half of the human resources of half the potential in all

the societies, India being no exception, naturally, therefore, the employment and autonomy of women and improvement of women's social achievement of sustainable

development on all areas of life. Empowerment is a process, not an event, which challenges traditional power equations and relations. Abolition of gender-based discrimination in all institutions and structures of the society and participation of women in policy and decision making process at domestic and public levels are few dimensions of women empowerment.

But contrary to this wisdom, India women continues to languish in our patriarchal society and colossal percentage of them are forced to enjoy low social status the scenario being the worst in Bihar state. The female literacy rate of India stood at 54.16 per cent in 2001. This is 33.5 per cent only in case of Bihar. The work participation rate of women has steadily risen from 14.22 per cent in 1971 to 19.6 per cent in 1981 and was steeper further from 37.81 lakhs in 1991 to only 47.74 lakhs in 1998. Further, only a meagre 14.1 per cent of women are employed in organized sector, but the majority find jobs in the informal unorganized private sector, mainly in the low paid household activities.

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. The present study was undertaken with the following objectives :

- To study the profile of elected women village Panchayat members of Panchayati Raj System.
- To identify the constraints faced by the women village Panchayat members in their role performance.

RESOURCES AND METHODS

The study was undertaken in purposively selected Samastipur district of Bihar state for case in data collection. Out of twenty blocks of Samastipur district 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). For selection of respondent's multistage sampling procedure was used. 75 women representatives were randomly selected from all the Gram Panchayat of these two blocks. The data were collected by personally interviewing the respondents with the help of structured interview schedule. Appropriate statistical tools were used for analysis of data.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The findings of the present study as well as relevant discussion have been presented under following heads.

Socio-economic and psychological profile of elected women village Panchayat members (EWVPMS) (Third-tier of PRI) :

A perusal of Table 1 reveals that the majority of the elected women village Panchayat members were within 35 years of age (73.33%) the majority belonged to forward (46.66%) caste and majority of the elected women village Panchayat members had married (98.66%) followed by only 1.34 per cent had windowed. Majority the women members personally possessed low (up to 8th standard) level of education (48.0%) and also had high family education (29.33%). They by and large enjoyed a nuclear family (64.0%). But the majority had 3-5 members (42.66%). Further most of these respondents enjoyed in household work (97.33%), these respondents owned land up to 2.5 acre (58.66%) and lived with low material possession (84.00%). Maximum 64.00 per cent of respondent had low income group below 20000 annually. The majority of the members were endowed with either mixed (42.66%) or kutch house (37.33%). Majority of respondents had not membership of any social institution.

As is evident from the data, the representatives appeared to possess certain characteristics which were comparatively less expressed in the beneficiaries (rural women). The EWVPMs were relatively younger in age, possessed at least some education, the family members of many of them being highly educated, had several sources of earning and so were well to do and naturally therefore, several of them had got constructed mixed houses with wealth comes the contact and so was the case with many respondents who were found to be having active linkage with certain socio-political organizations. Sarkar and Adhikary (1998) also reported that most of the Panchayat women belonged to low socio-economic groups.

Such being the socio-economic and psychological background of the elected women members, what degree of preparedness did these representative have to turn this basic institution in to a key player in accelerating the socio-economic development in the country side while there may be numerous indicators to this effect, a knowledge of the sources of motivation for the women

Table 1 : Socio-economic and psychological profile of elected women village Panchayat members				(n= 75)	
Sr. No.	Variables	Categories	F	%	
1.	Age	Young (up to 35 years)	55	73.33	
		Middle (35 – 50 years)	20	26.66	
		Old (> 50 years)	-	-	
2.	Caste	Forward	35	46.66	
		Back ward	18	24.00	
		SC	22	29.33	
3.	Marital status	Unmarried	-	-	
		Married	74	98.66	
		Widowed	1	1.34	
		Divorces	-	-	
4.	Personal education	Illiterate (No formal Education)	14	18.66	
		Low (up to 8 th Standard)	36	48.00	
		Medium (Matric and intermediate)	22	29.33	
		High (Graduate and above)	3	4.00	
5.	Family education index	Illiterate (No formal Education)	10	13.33	
		Low (up to 8 th Standard)	25	33.33	
		Medium (Matric and intermediate)	18	24.00	
		High (Graduate and above)	22	29.33	
6.	a) Family type	Nuclear	48	64.00	
		Joint	27	36.00	
6.	b) Family size	Up to 3 members	15	20.00	
		3 – 5 members	32	42.66	
		> 5 members	28	37.33	
7.	Occupation	Household work	73	97.33	
		Caste occupation	-	-	
		Small scale industries	-	-	
		Independent profession	-	-	
		Construction work	-	-	
		Business	-	-	
		Farming	2	2.66	
8.	Land holding	Landlers (No. Land)	4	5.33	
		Marginal (up to 2.5 acre)	44	58.66	
		Small (2.5 to 5 acre)	25	33.33	
		Medium (5.1 to 10 acre)	2	2.66	
9.	Family income	LIG (up to Rs. 20,000)	48	64.00	
		MIG (Rs. 20000 – Rs. 35000)	12	16.00	
		HIG (> Rs. 35000)	15	20.00	
10.	Material Possession	Low (up to MPS)	63	84.00	
		Medium (MPS 4-6)	2	2.66	
		High (MPS > 6)	10	13.33	
11.	Type of house	Kutcha	28	37.33	
		Mixed	32	42.66	
		Pucca	15	20.00	
12.	Social linkage	No. Membership	57	76.00	
		Membership of one organization	18	24.00	
		Membership of more than one organization	-	-	

L.I.G. = Low Income Group

H.I.G. = High income Group

M.I.G. = Medium Income Group

M.P.S. = Material Possession Score

Note - Figures in Parentheses indicate Percentages

N = Elected women village Panchayat members.

to fight a for the rules and regulations of Gram Panchayat and awareness to the developmental programmes under the Panchayati Raj was considered important towards effective role playing by the elected women members.

Constraints faced by elected women village Panchayat members in role performance:

An investigation into the possible impediments become inevitable against the backdrop of low level of performance by the elected members in respect of various designated roles of Gram Panchayat, an investigation into the possible impediments becomes inevitable with this point in view the elected women members of the Gram Panchayat under study were interviewed to reveal various constraints in their role performance. An effort was also made to delineate the degree of the problem that these constraints posed to defeat the purpose of wisdom behind the constitution of the Panchayati Raj System. The observations recorded in the course of inquiry into these aspects are posted in Table 2.

The observations in Table 2 revealed as many as 11 important constraints which affected the role performance by elected women members in Gram Panchayat adversely. Some of these constraints were judged highly problematic by some members while others related different constraints to be moderately problematic

or little problematic. The constrains which were considered highly problematic by more than 50.0 per cent of the EWVPMs interviewed were lack of resources for development works (90.66%), lack of fund on time for carrying out the work of the programme/projects (88.0%), lack of knowledge of the members about the developmental projects(82.66%), non-availability of persons well versed with the rural projects (80.0%), lack of interest in Mukhiya for development works (74.66%), lack of education among elected Panchayat members (69.33%) and bribery and misappropriation of fund (54.66%).

Thus, out of a total of 11 serious constraints of role performance by women members in Gram Panchayat, these 8 were felt to be highly problematic. The lack of unity among the villagers was considered highly problematic (46.66%) and moderately problematic (40.0%). Incidentally, caste based cooperation and conflicts in the villages were considered moderately problematic by the large number of women. The conflict in the villages, however, was considered to be the factor to be highly problematic (33.33%) and moderately problematic (50.66%). As against (18.66%) EWVPMs indicated that caste cooperation in the villages was highly problematic, other 53.33 per cent believed it to be moderately problematic and the rest of 21.33 per cent

Table 2 : Degree of constraints as perceived elected women village Panchayat members in role performance

Sr. No.	Statements	Highly problematic		Moderately problematic		Little problematic	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Lack of unity among the villagers	35	46.66	30	40.00	10	13.33
2.	Caste based co-operation in the village	14	18.66	40	53.33	16	21.33
3.	Conflicts in the village	25	33.33	38	50.66	12	16.00
4.	Lack of education among Panchayat members	52	69.33	16	21.33	7	9.33
5.	Lack of resources for development works	68	90.66	4	5.33	3	4.00
6.	Lack of knowledge of the members about the development project	62	82.66	8	10.66	5	6.66
7.	Lack of interest in Mukhiya for development works	60	80.0	5	6.66	10	13.33
8.	Carelessness among villagers for development works	56	74.66	15	20.00	4	5.33
9.	Lack of fund in time	66	88.00	5	6.66	4	5.33
10.	Bribery and misappropriation of fund	41	54.66	27	36.0	7	9.33
11.	Non-availability of persons well versed with the rural projects	60	80.00	7	9.33	8	10.66

Note: F= Frequency, Figures in Parentheses indicate Percentage

Table 3 : Socio-economic and Psychological constraints of role performance by the elected women village Panchayat members

Sr. No.	Nature of constraints	Highly problematic		Moderately problematic		Little problematic	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Social constraints	34	45.33	26	34.06	15	20.0
2.	Economical constraints	70	93.33	2	2.66	3	4.0
3.	Psychological constraints	62	82.66	4	5.33	9	12.0

considered it of a little problem only.

The caste based cooperation and conflicts in the villages were considered little problematic by the large number of women (21.33 %) and (16.0%), respectively. This indicated that the democracy at grass root level is matured enough and people could put aside their personal problems in matters of development works launched by the Gram Panchayat for up-liftment and betterment of the villagers.

The 11 constraints were further classified into three categories viz., social constraints, economic constraints and psychological constraints. The data in terms of number of elected women village Panchayat members and their percentage are summarized in Table 3.

It can be observed in Table 3 that the maximum number of EWVPMs considered economical constraints to be acting as the greatest hindrance in the way of their role performance (93.33%). In comparison 82.66 per cent respondents considered the psychological constraints to be highly problematic by (45.33%) of the EWVPMs. However, more number of respondents (34.66%) commented that the social constraints were moderately problematic number of such members who considered these three types of constraints to be of little problem in their role performance in Gram Panchayats were small. However, among the socio-economic and psychological constraints the social constraints were considered less problematic by 20.0% per cent members followed by psychological (12.0%) and economical constraints (4.0%). Jayalakshmi (1997) also reported that women members were facing some practical problems in managing the affairs of Panchayat.

Conclusion :

In Indian constitution, there are provisions for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social and economic status. It was only role performance by the elected women members that was not directly influenced substantially by caste or personal education or family size or family type or house type or even empowerment. The EWVPMs were younger in age, possessed at least some education, the family members of many of them being highly educated had several sources of earning

and so were well to do and naturally, therefore, several of them had got constructed mixed house with wealth comes the contact and so was the case with many respondents who were found to be having active linkage with certain socio-political organizations. Elected women possessed better knowledge about Panchayati Raj System. In fact it was the degree of participation which acted as deciding factor in performance by the elected women members in Gram Panchayat.

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