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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE WOMEN LEADERS

The Socio-Economic Background of the Women Leaders

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While studying the socio-economic background of the respondents, age, education, occupation, marital status, and residence before and after marriage are taken as important factors.

AGE:

Age is a very important factor, which has greater influence on affecting political participation. There is a general view that young and middle aged participates actively in institutions. In the opinion of Nie, Verba and Kim, Age has a greater impact on political participation. According to them, participation arises in early year's picks in middle Ages and falls in latter ages. Another author like Narayan Pillai has also the same view, as age is an important factor in participation.

Table-1: Age wise distribution of Respondents

Age group	Number	Percentage
Young Age(21-35)	6	29%
Middle Age(35-50)	15	71%
Aged(50 above)	0	0%
Total	21	100%

So, middle age groups 35-50 years have a greater participation among women in the Panchayat. Women at this stage are free from household responsibilities. Old women (above 50) have a nil representation in my samples. It proves that these aged women have less interest in this activity. Thus more and more young people can be drawn into electoral process and political awareness and aspiration are likely to increase. The presence of young women in considerable number points some indication of social change in rural society. While a few decade earlier younger women were shut out from public exposure, it is now quite possible for them to come to centre-stage of public activities.

EDUCATION:

Higher educational level of citizen is an important prerequisite for greater role in political process¹. Education enables one to act rationally. Some previous study shows that higher education leads to greater commitment. In the opinion of Jorgan, education is not to be regarded as an important factor for political participation. Duverger is convinced that education is the most decisive factor for women's political participation. For the purpose of my study, women leaders in the sample are divided into four categories. Member with elementary (5th class or below), secondary (6th –10th class), intermediate and higher education category and illiterate.

Table-2 : Educational Qualification of the Respondents

Edn Qualification	Number	Percentage
Elementary	3	14%
Secondary	15	72%
Higher	0	0%
Illiterate	3	14%
Total	21	100%

From the above data it is clear that secondary educated background women have a greater representation. So according to this there should have greater role in developmental work. One is elementary education and an illiterate is still having a negative show in the samples as they may be in the trouble while doing their official business.

CASTE:

Caste and politics influence each other. The electoral process, administration and politics are greatly affected by caste. M.N Srinivas introduced the

¹ International Encyclopedia of Social Science.1968.VOL 15,Macmillan(p.250)

concept of dominant caste² to examine the political process in India. Caste has its hold in the Indian politics. According to him, voting preferences are made on caste line.

Table-3: Caste wise Distribution of the Respondent

Caste	Number	Percentage
General Category	12	57%
Reserved Category	9	43%
Total	21	100%

From the above data it is found that women from the reserved category are participating in greater number which may change the equation in Panchayat electoral politics. Reservation of seats and posts for them has been the main reason for the prominence of SCs. But, how many SCs women have been elected from the unreserved seats can only establish the phenomenal presence of reserved women.

OCCUPATION:

Occupation is an important ingredient in moulding participation. In this category, I have two Tables in mind. First for women leaders themselves and other for nearest relatives (what I mean their husband's occupation). When writing on this, Alfred D'Souza's observations need special mention. He observes that in the countries of South Asia rural urban migrations are prominent. Due to marriages or by association women migrate along with their husbands, which affects the occupational pattern of both husband and wives, which have an indirect implication towards political participation in that locality.

Table-4: Occupation Pattern of Women Leader And their Nearest Relatives

Women Leader			Husband		
Occupn.	No.	Percentage	Occupn.	No.	Percentage
House	15	71%	Farming	12	57%
Wives					
Daily	6	29%	Daily	6	29%
Labour			Labour		
Other	0	0%	Other	3	14%
Total	21	100%	Total	21	100%

Above data show that most of the women leaders about 71% of the women are dependant on their

² According to M N Srinivas Dominant caste group has a sizeable amount of arable land locally available, have strength of numbers and occupy a high place in local hierarchy. New factors contributing towards dominant are western education, jobs in administration, and urban sources of income.

husbands and 29% of the women though they are members of Panchayat have to go for daily wages. It states these leaders have to be influenced by their nearest relatives in every aspect. As the right hand side table shows that 57% of their husbands depend upon farming. So it proves that women leaders are from among the farmers and the wage labourer. Here it is difficult to access Desouza's hypothesis because women leaders joined politics after their marriage in the context of my study.

Table-5: House Condition

House Type	Number	Percentage
Thatched	3	14%
Tile/asbestos	12	57%
Pucca	6	29%
Total	21	100%

Another question regarding their house condition which is social indicator are as follow: So, most of the women leaders about 57% live in tile/asbestos house which is a positive sign, two members live in Pucca house. When a some one lives in a good house, it will definitely increase his/her potentialities in their respective fields. It is to be mentioned that some houses of those women leaders are built with Indira Abas Yojana.

So, socio-economic condition of women leaders is a cause and concern as it is linked with the role perception. If they are economically poor, they may not think of about the development of the Panchayat. Our policy makers, who have in mind putting reservation, is that to develop both women and Panchayat through various measures. Mere representation is not a real solution to it, what we found from our previous analysis is that in every aspect socially, economically they are weak.

LAND HOLDING AND INCOME:

The most permanent source of income is land holding. The land holdings and total income of their families are as follows:

Table-6: Land Holding And income (Annual Income)

Land in Acres	Number	Income(Avg)
Land Less	0	00,000
Below One Acre	12	12,000
1.5 -2.0 Acres	6	30,000
2.5-5.0 Acres	3	40,000
Above Five Acres	0	00,000

From the above data, it shows that average of the most of the women leaders' family is very miserable. That is, twelve thousand annually. Therefore, it has a greater impact on the women leaders in engaging in political activity of that Panchayat.

2.1. POLITICAL EXPERIENCE:

The pre-existing political experience of women has a greater relevance with the role as representative in political institution. It provides a picture about women leaders of the Panchayat.

Table-6: Political Experience of the Women Respondents

Political Experience	Number	Percentage
Exists	3	14%
Not Exists	18	86%
Total	21	100%

It is found from the above data that more than 86% of the women members had no pre-existing political experience before entering into the Panchayat office. Out of twenty-one, only three members had a previous political experience before becoming a member to Panchayat Samiti.

2.2. THE ELECTORAL PROCESS:

Out of twenty-one elected women leaders, seven contested election with ruling party support and won by a comfortable margin defeating their nearest rival from opposition camp. The average expenditure for election per candidate was Rs15, 000. According to three elected leaders, they won election as they were aquatinted to that panchayat since birth itself. One interesting finding came as a defeated Sarapanch candidate contested election after getting assurance from the congress party that she will be paid daily wages from starting of electoral process to the end. She also spent approximately Rs 15,000 in election campaign all from party sources. What we found that approximate expenditure for each ward member is rupees two thousand only. The most of the ward members were elected unopposed (twelve out of sixteen) and all posts were reserved for them only.

There is difficult to access the political affiliation of these un-contested ward members. These un-opposed ward members had a praise to BJD Chief Mr. Naveen Patanik. It certainly proves that they have some affiliation towards BJD. Another interesting finding came out asking them 'Whether they have attended the meeting in which their candidature was finalized for election?' the answer was simply pessimistic. They told that 'How come we will talk/stand before our

brother in laws (elders to their husband) in a public place?' The village meetings of male members finalized their candidature. It is very strange, as the one who is contesting the election did not attend the meeting where their candidatures were finalized.

The principle of inducting a large number of women through affirmative action in rural local bodies raises two basic questions. The first is the question of their capacity to effectively represent general interest of the community and second more specifically, their capacity to conceptualize and effectively represent the interest of the women in community. In interviews, the most basic problem with political efficacy appear to be handicaps which are typical in low income, rural settings but which are compounded in the case of women. These handicaps typically have to do with the lack of education, articulation and self-confidence. In large number of cases even when the women interviewed, it was their first exposure to a political role. Out of twenty-one women leaders interviewed, we found only three women who had some kind of previous political experience otherwise all others were new entrants in fact. Out of three one woman leader addressed a political rally in the district head quarter and other two were member of some women organization in their areas.

The question posed to many of the women 'What made you seek election' has different interpretation in their response. Most of the answers concentrate on the role of husband, women quota and villagers. Most of the elected members clarified that their husbands persuaded them to contest election and villagers backed it latter on. But two interesting matters need to be mentioned. First, the defeated Sarapanch candidate contested election after getting assurance from the congress party that; she with her husband will be paid daily wages, the day they will spend in the electoral activity. One woman Sarapanch of the Panchayat has a different answer. She told 'Educated women should not sit idle at home'; by this logic she contested election. For some, party has also some kind of influence behind their entry in to politics.

Another couples of questions were asked to them to test their dependence on their husband. In the case of all women members, the respective husbands had to be brought in even when there was a need for a member to sign papers. Questions like 'whom do you give credit to win this election? From which sources you are being informed about political events? And another response about their visit to capital city?' Most of them have a single answer that is ' through husband. When I asked women elected leaders that 'What had been the major projects in the Panchayat after her election? They were even unable to give the information. Theses disabilities were compounded by the fact that many of these women owed their elected position to their husband or influential politician or person. Given the low profile of the women in

Panchayat matters, it was relatively easy for these persons to dominate the Panchayat from behind the scene. In this context, I had a question to all the elected members in the Panchayat 'After entering Panchayat office, have you ever faced a situation in which your husband forced you to sign or implement certain Panchayat matters in his wish?' With this, out of twenty-one responses, fifteen answers have no exception rather tallying 'yes' with husbands 'yes'. But six members have a negative response, which has a positive significance. These six members told that they generally take decisions what they feel good.

So out of twenty-one elected women leaders, eighteen Women State that they contested election due to pressure from husband. But three member say that they come to the fray on their own and claims that they even can contest election even if there will be no quota system. Secondly, the villagers in the presence of their respective husbands finalized fifteen candidatures and these were without their wives presence. The congress party finalized candidate of the defeated member for the post of the Sarapanch after assuring her that she would be compensated with daily wages during the campaign period. The remaining six were present at the meeting called by the political party they were affiliated.

Thirdly Out of twenty-one elected women leaders, the six strategic posts like that of Sarapanch and the nominee were in contest. Out of fifteen ward members three seats were in contest and all others elected unopposed. It became clear that women enters politics due to the compulsory policy of reservation,. Before the implementation 73 rd constitutional amendments, there were five women members in these three Panchayats. Now it is twenty-one.

Then it is found that most of the women respondents are from the schedule caste and other backward caste. Women are from middle age group. Majorities (70%) of the sample are between (35-50 years). A majority of them are with primary education. They are all married women. As to the social background women respondent's family, some sorts of educational attainment was not seen. From occupational standpoint, 57% of the sample depends upon agriculture followed by daily laborers of 29%. Then, regarding their landholding, out of twenty one samples, twelve respondents have a land of below one acre that is miserable and average annual income from the land is R12000/ from two crops. As to the previous political experience, 86% has no previous political experience and 14% of the sample has certain political experience like one nominee addressed a political rally at district head quarter and two have some kind of organizational linkages.

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