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SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN UTTAR PRADESH

BHAVANA SINGH
LECTURER
AMITY BUSINESS SCHOOL
AMITY UNIVERSITY
LUCKNOW

ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic and political status of elected representatives, especially women representatives, substantially affects the decentralization process. In India, women constitute nearly half of the population and also contribute substantially in all walks of life. Majority of rural women suffer from social and economic problem, which affect their political empowerment. Several attempts have been made by the government to empower the rural women through various legislations and programs/schemes specifically designed for the women. These efforts have substantially influenced the pace and direction of decentralization and empowerment of rural women. In this regard, implementation of Panchayati Raj Act and reservation seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has helped the women in attaining economic and political empowerment to a large extent. However, the ground realities indicates that still majority of elected women representative are not fully aware about their role and responsibilities and also lack awareness about various rural development programmes. Their active participation in the decision making process and implementation of these rural development programmes is very poor. This calls for increasing awareness among the elected women representatives about their role and responsibilities and functioning of various rural development programmes.

KEYWORDS

women representatives, U.P.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is a political process and can be achieved through democratic decentralization and good governance. Decentralisation is the process of dispersing broad-based participation in local public decision-making. It offers an alternative solution to increase popular participation for promoting more equitable and efficient forms of local management and development (Ribot, 2003). Therefore, with the right opportunities to share knowledge and gain the appropriate powers local communities have a greater chance of success than the State. This leads from the assumption that people are excluded (Ribot, 2007) by the state in decision-making, causing them to appear to not care, when in fact they do but can do little about it. Depending on the type of decentralisation used (Oyono, 2004), in many circumstance local people are represented by others; these could be elected or local authorities chosen by the government. As state releases all control to the lowest possible level (Larson, 2003). However, there are still factors that can limit its success: Political infrastructure, history, territory, culture and society. Decentralisation is more effective in communities where achieving consensus is relatively straightforward. As processes will move smoother with fewer objections. This was put to practice in the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) <http://www.akdn.org/AKF> in the Gujarat province of India (Sccones, I 1944). Shah, 1994 found that non-governmental organisations, within decentralisation acted as a catalyst to aid villagers in a community water management programme which was deemed a success as there was no State involvement. Thus, decentralisation opens up opportunities for local people to make a difference by coming together and giving them the resources to effect the local governments (Larson, 2002).

Decentralization—the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector (Meenakshi Sundaram 1944) is a complex and multifaceted concept. It embraces a variety of concepts. There are various types of decentralisation such as political, administrative, fiscal, and market decentralization (World Bank 2000) and have different characteristics, policy implications, and conditions for success. Administrative decentralization seeks to redistribute authority, responsibility and financial resources for providing public services among different levels of governance. It is the transfer of responsibility for the planning, financing and management of public functions from the central government or regional governments and its agencies to local governments, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, or area-wide, regional or functional authorities while political decentralization aims to give citizens or their elected representatives more power in public decision-making.

It is often associated with pluralistic politics and representative government, but it can also support democratization by giving citizens, or their representatives, more influence in the formulation and implementation of policies. Advocates of political decentralization assume that decisions made with greater participation will be better informed and more relevant to diverse interests in society than those made only by national political authorities. The concept implies that the selection of representatives from local electoral constituency allows citizens to know better their political representatives and allows elected officials to know better the needs and desires of their constituents. Political decentralization often requires constitutional or statutory reforms, creation of local political units, and the encouragement of effective public interest groups.

The issue of 'decentralisation' can be addressed into four different forms of decentralization (Cohen et al. 1981; Rondinelli and Nellis 1986; Rondinelli et al. 1987; Blair 1995, 1998) namely *Deconcentration*, *Devolution*, *Delegation*, and *Privatisation* and *partnerships*. Out of these four forms of decentralisation, deconcentration amounts to the least amount of transfer of power to the local people. This type of administrative organisation can hardly be described as a move towards the development of local governance. Delegation, too, does not by itself transfer power to the local people, although the delegated agencies have scope for involving local people in their decision-making process. The two other forms, devolution and privatisation or partnership, provide the greatest scope for developing genuinely local governance based on popular participation. However, people's participation in the process of governance is an essential precondition for successful decentralisation from the point of view of both efficiency and equity.

Women play an important role in the rural life and good governance through women's empowerment at the local level is expected to help in socioeconomic transformation of rural areas. But, the traditional Indian mentalities assume that the place of women is mainly concentrated to the household activities like kitchen work and upbringing of the children. They have not been given due status in the society because still the gender-sensitization has not percolated to the grass root level even after more than sixty years of independence. Still women are one of the most powerless and marginalized sections of Indian society. There is too much discrimination against rural women as they do not have secure rights to productive resources, specifically land while most of them are actively engaged in agriculture. But, it has been observed that still there is lack of adequate involvement of people at the grass root level and there is no transparency and leakages of funds provided for development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

In this paper, an attempt has been made to present the socioeconomic status of elected women representatives and the level of awareness about various rural development programmes in Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh.

RESEARCH METHOD

Analysis of data is based on the sample of 100 Gram Pradhans (comprising of 50 men and 50 women Gram Pradhans) out of 318 Gram Pradhans in five selected blocks of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh. Details of selected men and women Gram Pradhans are given in Table 1. It is evident from Table 1 that out of total

318 Gram Pradhans in five Blocks, men Pradhan accounts for about 53 percent while women Gram Pradhan accounts for 47 percent. This shows that women Gram Pradhans are more or the less are equal number. Hence, equal number of Men and Women Gram Pradhans were selected for the study (Table 1).

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS IN SELECTED BLOCKS OF BARABANKI DISTRICT IN U.P.

Particular	Selected blocks					
	Sidhaur	Masuali	Banki	Ramnagar	Haidergarh	Total
Number of Gram Pradhans						
Women	34	25	44	41	24	168
Men	41	23	18	28	40	150
Total	75	48	62	69	64	318
Number of selected Gram Pradhans						
Women	12	7	11	12	8	50
Men	15	7	7	9	12	50
Total	27	14	18	21	20	100

PROFILE OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHAN

While studying the socio-economic background of the selected Gram Pradhans, their age, education, occupation, marital status, land holding size, etc. were considered as important factors that affects their role and effectiveness in Panchayati Raj System. Basic profile of women in selected villages of Barabanki district is given below.

CASTE

In the existing environment caste has become a very sensitive issue but directly and indirectly play a major role in selection of Panchayat representatives and also performance of women in the villages. In fact, caste and politics influence each other and the electoral process, administration and politics are greatly affected by caste. Caste has its hold in the Indian politics and often voting preference is made on caste line. It was found that women from the reserved category were participating in the Panchayati Raj institutions but in a limited way as they have not been fully accepted by the higher caste people, especially in those villages where dominance of higher caste and influential person was prevalent. However, greater number of elected representatives belonging to socially depressed class is likely to change the equation in Panchayat electoral politics. Reservation of seats and posts for them was the main reason for the prominence of SCs. But, election of SCs women from the unreserved seats may establish the phenomenal presence of reserved women. It was found that most (65 to 70%) of the Gram Pradhans in selected blocks of Barabanki district belong to backward caste, followed by scheduled caste (20 to 25%). Gram Pradhans belonging to general caste were only 5 to 10 percent while representation of scheduled tribe was quite low (5% and that too in case of male Gram Pradhans only). Representation of women in total number of Gram Pradhans was relatively higher in case of backward caste and scheduled caste compared to men (Table 2).

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE (%) DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY CASTE (Percentage)

Social Category	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
General	10	5	8
Backward Caste	65	70	67
Scheduled Caste	20	25	22
Scheduled Tribe	5		3
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

RELIGION

Most (80 to 90%) of the Gram Pradhans were Hindu but Muslim were also represented in the Panchayati Raj system. However, their representation was limited to merely 10 to 20 percent. Among selected Gram Pradhans, Muslim Gram Pradhans were 20 percent compared to men (10 % only). In case of Hindu Gram Pradhans, representation of male was slightly higher than women. This is also to be noted that women, especially in Muslim community normally observe Purdah system and they do not participate in such type of social system. However, a few Muslim women belonging to status families having outside exposure do feel active participation in political system (Table 3).

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE (%) DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY RELIGION (Percentage)

Religion	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Hindu	90	80	85
Muslim	10	20	15
Christian	-	-	-
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

AGE

Age is an important determinant for the performance of role played by the elected women Gram Pradhans and women panchayat members. Table 4 shows that nearly half of the Gram Pradhans were in the age group of 36 to 45 years. The proportion of male Gram Pradhan in this age group was relatively less (40%) compared to women Gram Pradhan (60%). About one-fourth women Gram Pradhan were young in the age group of 26 to 35 years while proportion of men Gram Pradhan in this age group was only 10 percent. Large proportion (40%) of men Gram Pradhans were in the age group of 46 to 55 years. None of the women Gram Pradhan were in the age group of more than 55 years while 10 percent of the men Gram Pradhan were more than 55 years of age. However, none of the men or women Gram Pradhan was too young in the age group of less than 25 years (Table 4).

TABLE 4: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY AGE (Percentage)

Age group (Years)	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Less than 25	-	-	
26-35 yrs	10	25	17
36-45 yrs	40	60	50
46-55 yrs	40	15	28
55 and above	10	-	5
Total	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

Women Gram Pradhans and elected members in the middle age groups of 35-45 years had greater participation in the Panchayat. This was mainly because women at this age are relatively free from household responsibilities while older women of more than 55 years were very less and also played lesser active role. It shows that old-aged women had less interest in this activity. Thus, more and more young people can be drawn into electoral process and political awareness as well as aspirations is likely to increase. The presence of larger number of young women in Panchayati Raj system indicates some indication of social change in

the 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. Those Gram Pradhans who started their career at the early age could easily understand the dynamics of Panchayati Raj institutions and started performing their role more effectively. However, there was sharp difference in the age of men and women Gram Pradhans in the selected Blocks of Barabanki district (Table 4).

MARITAL STATUS

Among the selected Gram Pradhans, 75 to 85 percent were married while only 15 to 25 percent of the Gram Pradhans were widow/widower. Divorce as well as separated/deserted husbands was a rare phenomenon in the villages. Among the selected Gram Pradhans, none of them belonged to such category (Table 5).

TABLE 5: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS ACCORDING TO MARITAL STATUS (Percentage)

Marital Status	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Married	85	75	80
Divorced	-	-	-
Separated/deserted	-	-	-
Widow/widower	15	25	20
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

EDUCATION

Higher educational level is an important prerequisite for greater role in political process as it enables one to act rationally. This was true in case of women representatives. However, it was important in case of men also but compared to illiterate women active participation was greater by elected men representatives.

TABLE 6: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION (Percentage)

Level of Education	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Illiterate	-	-	-
Literate but without formal schooling	5	25	15
Less than primary	-	5	3
Primary school (up to 5 th)	40	15	27
Middle school (up to 8 th)	10	30	20
High school (up to 10 th)	25	15	20
Intermediate (up to 12 th)	10	-	5
Technical Education/ Diploma	-	-	-
Graduate	10	5	7
Professional Degree	-	5	3
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

It is clear from Table 6 shows that none of the Gram Pradhans were illiterate or had higher education of more than graduate degree or had any technical education/diploma degree. In general, men Gram Pradhans had higher education than women Gram Pradhans. However, even 5 percent of women Gram Pradhans had graduate degree and even about 5 percent had some professional course. About 40 percent of men Gram Pradhans had education up to primary level against 15 percent women Gram Pradhans. In contrast, more than 30 percent of women Gram Pradhans had education up to middle level (8th standard) than men Gram Pradhans (10% only). About 25 percent men Gram Pradhans had education up to high school (10th standard) compared to 15 percent women Gram Pradhans. It was observed that women with at least secondary level education had greater participation in Panchayati Raj system. They also monitored various rural development programmes more effectively and were more efficient in their office work. Most of the illiterate women representatives or with less formal education were often dependant on the village secretary or family members, especially husbands for various official work for various official work (Table 6).

OCCUPATION

Occupation, which is often associated with caste, is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of role performed by women. For example, women from Yadav families or farming caste, especially from Koiri or Kurmi (mainly vegetable growers) find less time for such work as most of them remain busy with their household and farming activities. Most of the women leaders were dependent on their husbands while others had to go for daily wages or own farming activity. These leaders were also influenced by their nearest relatives in every aspect (Table 7).

TABLE 7: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY OCCUPATION (Percentage)

Main Occupation	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Farming	55	35	45
Animal Husbandry/Fisherman/ herder	-	25	12
Agricultural wage labour	10	10	10
Skilled work in government	5	-	3
Rural artisan	-	5	2
Home based workers	-	20	10
Self employed professional	15	-	7
Self employed worker	5	-	3
Trader/retail business	10	-	5
Other	-	5	3
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

Selected Gram Pradhans had more than one occupation but main occupation which provides major source of income was considered while reporting their occupation. Diversification of occupation was necessary for the elected representatives to earn income from various sources to meet their requirement of food and other expenses. However, main occupation of majority of the Gram Pradhans was farming and animal husbandry. The proportion of Gram Pradhans having trade as occupation and skilled job in the government was very low. Most of the women Gram Pradhans were busy with household activities, as agricultural labours and rural artisans. While about 25 percent of men Gram Pradhans were self employed workers or self employed professionals (Table 7).

HOUSING

Housing condition of selected Gram Pradhans indicates that less than 10 percent of the Pradhans had Kucha house while about 45 percent had semi-kucha and remaining about 45 percent had pucca house. However, there was no such difference in the type of houses of men and women Gram Pradhans. In fact, due

to increase in the income level in rural areas people whether elected representative or common people, all prefer to have pucca house. The construction of pucca house has become a common thing in the villages (Table 8).

TABLE 8: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY TYPE OF HOUSE (Percentage)

Type of house	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Kuccha	10	10	10
Semi pucca	40	50	45
Pucca	50	40	45
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

INCOME STATUS

On average, per household annual income of Gram Pradhans was Rs 52,000, slightly higher in case of male Pradhans than women Pradhans. However, income per household was highly unequally distributed and a few of the Pradhans belonging to higher caste had substantially higher income than rest of the Pradhans. A few of Gram Pradhans having business or were involved in trade, etc. also had higher income (Table 9).

TABLE 9: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY INCOME STATUS (Percentage)

Change in income	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Income per annum (Rs)	54,000	48,000	52,000
Change in income during last 10 years	94	90	92
Increased	72	72	72
Decreased	22	18	20
Remained same	6	10	8
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

The Gram Pradhans who were solely dependent on farming or animal husbandry had limited income. The answer to the question that whether they experienced any change in their income, 92 percent of them indicated that their income did change during last 10 years. However, about 6 to 8 percent of the Pradhans indicated that their income remained almost the same. It was interesting to note that they expressed that their real income has in fact declined. In nominal term, income of 72 percent of the Gram Pradhans increased while 20 percent expressed that their income declined (Table 9).

ECONOMIC STATUS

The economic status of selected Gram Pradhans indicate that as per village record more than 70 percent of them were below poverty line (BPL) while 25 percent were above poverty line (APL). About 5 percent Gram Pradhans were not aware about their status. However, as per ration card the economic status of selected Gram Pradhans was quite different. About 74 to 78 percent Gram Pradhans had ration card as BPL while only 12 to 16 percent had ration card as APL. About 10 percent of the elected Gram Pradhans had no ration card (Table 10).

TABLE 10: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY ECONOMIC STATUS (Percentage)

Economic Status	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
As per Village record			
Above Poverty Level (APL)	32	24	28
Below Poverty Level (BPL)	68	70	69
Not Aware	-	6	3
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)
As per ration card			
Above Poverty Level (APL)	16	12	14
Below Poverty Level (BPL)	74	78	76
Do not own ration card	10	10	10
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

LAND OWNERSHIP

Distribution of land holdings of selected Gram Pradhans does not indicate the actual pattern of land distribution in the selected blocks. Since many of the seats of Gram Pradhans were reserved for women and backward/scheduled caste the pattern of land distribution is quite different than actual record for the block as a whole. However, nearly half of the Gram Pradhans were marginal farmers (having less than 1 ha of land) while about 18 percent were small farmers having 1 to 2 ha of land. These Pradhans were mainly those who belonged to backward/scheduled caste. The proportion of men as well as women Gram Pradhans was about 13 to 15 percent and they mainly belonged to higher caste. It is to be noted that in Barabanki district backward caste (Kurmi) also have more land. Hence, the Pradhans of this caste had larger holdings (Table 11).

TABLE 11: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY FARM SIZE CLASS

Farm size class	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Marginal (less than 1 ha)	42	54	48
Small (1-2 ha)	24	12	18
Sub-Medium (2-4 ha)	7	5	6
Medium (4-10 ha)	14	4	7
Large (more than 10 ha)	13	15	14
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

FOOD SECURITY

Food security of elected Gram Pradhan indicates that about 36 to 40 percent of men and women Gram Pradhans expressed that they had inadequate food for the whole year while 24 and 12 percent men and women Gram Pradhans respectively indicated that they had in fact surplus food throughout the year. But, about 4 to 8 percent men and women Gram Pradhans expressed that they did not have adequate food for the whole year while 8 and 16 percent men and women Gram Pradhans indicated that they did not have adequate food for some months of the year. As against this, 28 and 24 percent men and women Gram Pradhans respectively expressed that they had neither deficit nor surplus food. This variation in availability was mainly because of income status and caste of men and women Gram Pradhans. This shows that food security in the selected villages was good (Table 12).

TABLE 12: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS BY ADEQUACY OF FOOD (Percentage)

Adequacy of food	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Adequate food throughout the year	36	40	38
Inadequate food throughout the year	4	8	6
Inadequate food for some months of year	8	16	12
Neither deficit nor any surplus	28	24	26
Surplus food throughout the year	24	12	18
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

EFFECTIVENESS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The Constitution of India and the Ministry of Rural Development have made several provisions for devolution of functional and financial powers to the Panchayati Raj Institutions as an ongoing process. But, devolution of financial powers to the Panchayati Raj institutions at the village level is not encouraging. Women play a major role in Panchayati Raj institutions but they lack political as well economic empowerment. Recognizing the importance of women empowerment, the Ministry of Rural Development has special components for Women in its various programmes like Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY), the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), the Restructured Centrally Rural Sanitation Programme (RCRSP), the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) and funds are earmarked as "Women's Component" to ensure flow of adequate resources for the same. But, it was found that majority of women were not aware about these programmes and the chairpersons or Block officials have not adequately spread the message among the women in general and especially among the elected representatives.

The study shows that many of the elected representatives, especially women and members of Panchayats at the village level were not aware about many of the rural development programmes initiated by the central government. It was also surprising that even a few of the Block Development Officers, who were expected to implement various rural development programmes were not fully familiar with the complete procedures of the implementation of the programmes. Circulars or revised guidelines for various programmes were not very clear to them and the interpretation of these revised guidelines was quite different by various grass root officials.

The awareness about various important rural development programmes indicates that less than 85 percent representatives had no knowledge about Total Sanitation Campaign, while about 80 percent were not aware about Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. Similarly, more than three-fourth representatives were not aware about National Old Age Pension. In contrast, 60 to 65 percent elected representatives were not aware about National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) and Indira Awas Yojana (Table 13). It was also surprising to note that still people and even elected representatives talk about Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP), Development of Women and Child and Rural Artisans (DWACRA), and Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY) while these programmes have been revised or changed to new programmes.

TABLE 13: AWARENESS AMONG ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES ABOUT RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES (Percentage)

Sl. No.	Programme	Answer	
		Yes	No
1	Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)	70	30
2	Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)	35	65
3	Pradhan Mantri Gram Sakshari Yojana (PMGSY)	20	80
4	Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC)	15	85
5	National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS)	25	75
6	National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP)	60	40
7	Indira Awas Yojana	65	35

This shows that awareness about various rural development programmes among elected representatives was in general quite low. There was also lack of proper training to elected representatives and inadequate protection as well as recognition on part of the government. However, it is too early to have more expectation from the elected representatives without creating a proper institutional framework. One need to be satisfied for some time till these institutions becomes more mature.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the forgoing analysis that the decentralization process through Panchayati Raj Act has been quite helpful in empowering the women but still the elected women representatives are not fully familiar about their roles and responsibilities in the decision making process. Most of them are working as a proxy to the office bearers and main decisions are taken by their counterparts or dominated/dictated by the influencing higher caste people in the village. Majority of elected women representative still lack awareness about various rural development programmes and their active participation in the decision making process and implementation of these programmes are very poor. In fact, awareness about components, implementation process, and benefits of various rural development programmes, either by state or central government is very poor among the rural people as well as elected representatives.

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