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CHAPTER - V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Empowering women is becoming an increasingly popular term in human rights and developmental discourse. It is also necessary for socio-economic development of any society. India needs special attention to give top priority for transforming the prevailing social discrimination against women especially Dalit women. In the context of various efforts by government in the form of Acts and programmes, the Government of India introduced 73rd Constituent Amendment Act. It came into effect in April 1993. It has brought about a major reform in local governance in the country. Although the Panchayats have historically been an integral part of rural life in India, this Act combined with some other Acts have institutionalized the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) at the village, block, and district level as the three tier of government. The aim has been to combine social justice with effective local governance, with an emphasis on reservation of seats for the deprived classes of population, including of leadership positions. Participation of women in the Panchayats was also facilitated by this 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 which mandated one-third reservation of seats at all three tiers of Panchayats for women.

Since its inception, Panchayat Raj Institutions in India has seen women go from strength to strength in terms of their political participation. While many faced resistance initially to their presence in offices of responsibility, gradually acceptance of women within the Panchayat Raj framework has been increasing. Empowering Dalit women at the Panchayat level helps to develop leadership, democratization of administration and involvement of women in accelerating economic development. A High Level Committee on Status of Women in India was constituted to study and recommend strategies for speedy socio-economic development of women. The committee recommended setting up of a National Commission on status of women to look into the current status of women and the
outcome of various development programmes relating to women’s empowerment. In this context the present study aimed to assess the role of PRI in empowering Dalit women in Dindigul District of Tamil Nadu.

Objectives

1. To prepare a profile of Dalit women in the study area
2. To describe the activities of Village Panchayat in empowering Dalit women
3. To study the political knowledge of Dalit women
4. To find out factors fostering the socio-economic, political and psychological empowerment of Dalit women in the Village Panchayat
5. To offer suggestions for effective functioning of Village Panchayat in empowering Dalit women.

Operational Definition of the Terms

❖ Panchayat Raj Institutions

Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) is a three-tier system in the state with elected bodies at the Village, Taluk and District levels. The present study has focused only the Village Panchayat which functions at the grassroots level.

❖ Dalit Women

The term ‘Dalit’ means oppressed groups. These Dalit women belonging to Sakkiliyar, Parayar and Pallar are mostly socially suppressed, culturally neglected and economically exploited have been chosen in the age group of 20 to 50 years who were members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) living in rural area.

❖ Empowerment

Empowerment is meant as a process of ‘becoming powerful’ by which individuals, groups and communities are able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their
own goals. The various dimensions of empowerment studied in the present study include socio, economic, political and psychological empowerment.

**Area of the Study**

Dindigul is a corporation city in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It is the administrative headquarters of the Dindigul district. Dindigul is located 420 km (260ml) southwest of the state capital Chennai and 100 km away from Tiruchirapalli. Dindigul has a number of historical monuments, the Rock Fort being the most prominent one. Industries in Dindigul include lock making, leather, tanneries and agricultural trading. It covers an area of 14.01km and had a population of 207,327 in 2011. Dindigul is well connected by road and rail with the rest of Tamilnadu. It is the 11th largest urban agglomeration in the state. It located between the Palani and Sirumalai Hills; it has a reserved forest area of 85 hectares.

**Research Design**

The Descriptive research design has been employed for the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used for the empirical analysis of the role of Panchayat in empowering Dalit women. For the purpose of collecting data on various dimensions of empowerment of rural Dalit women a standardized scale has been constructed and used. As a part of descriptive design, the study probed the factors relating to the dimensions of social, economic, political and psychological empowerment of Dalit women and Panchayat Activities Index of Panchayat Raj Institutions. It also explored the reasons to be focused more in the future for the integral growth and development of rural Dalit women.

**Sampling Technique**

There are 14 blocks in Dindigul District. Among the 14 blocks, three blocks with highest number of Dalits namely Athoor, Dindigul and Rettiyarchatram were chosen for the study. From these three blocks, the blocks which had Dalit women as Panchayat president for two subsequent years were selected. The selected Village Panchayats were namely
Thoppampatti and Pithalaipatti from Athoor block, Dharmathupatti and T.Puthupatti from Rettiyarchatram block and Pallapatti from Dindigul block. From among this Village Panchayat, the researcher selected 172 SHG members from each block by using systematic random sampling technique. The total number of respondents was 516.

**Tools and Techniques**

The following tools and techniques had used for the purpose of data collection,

**Interview Schedule**

An interview schedule was used to elicit information of Dalit women in the rural area about their background characteristics like age, education, religion, occupation, caste, awareness of Panchayat activities, knowledge on reservation, tenure of Panchayat system, contribution in the Gram Sabha meeting and affiliation to political party.

**Women Empowerment Scale (WES)**

A five point Likert scale was prepared and used to obtain the data on level of empowerment among the women respondents selected for the study. This scale, which was developed by the researcher, consisted of four sub scales such as social, economic, political and psychological empowerment. Each of this sub scale contained 10 items. The items were constructed in such a way that even the least illiterate member could grasp the meaning immediately.

**Case Study**

Case study was conducted among the Dalit Women Panchayat Presidents in the selected three blocks of Dindigul district. The study had collected the in depth information of Panchayat presidents, problems faced during their work, achievement of the Panchayat especially for women in their village and reason for continuously being selected for the second time.
Data Collection

The researcher personally visited the selected villages from the three blocks (Athoor, Dindigul and Rettiyarchatram) and collected the required data. The concerned Village Panchayats was contacted for meeting with Panchayat Presidents. The supporting staff of these Village Panchayats helped and gave assistance to find out the required information from the respondents.

Analysis of Data

Data for the study were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Quantitative analysis of data was done through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for tabulating and analyzing the raw data, frequency tables, cross-tabulations, chi-square analysis, Pearson coefficient correlation and t-test were employed to analyze the data. Thus, the data have been analyzed and interpreted in the subsequent chapters in the thesis keeping in view the research objectives of the study.

Major Findings

Profile of the Respondents

Age is an important factor in understanding the role and status of an individual in the society. The study revealed that 52% of the respondents were in the middle age group i.e. 36-50 years and 48% of the respondents were from youngest age groups, i.e. 20-35 years.

Education is considered as an agent of social change and modernization. It develops the skills, writing and numeracy. It develops the capacity of reasoning, thinking and comprehension. It finds better employment opportunities among women in the rural areas. In the present study, as for their education 46% of the respondents had completed primary education. Only 1% of the respondents had higher education. 29% of them were illiterate. It revealed that the illiteracy existed among Dalit women. It was noticed that 91% of them were belonged to Hindu religion and 9% of respondents belonged to Christianity.
Caste is essentially a peculiar system continue to keep details under the thumb of oppression. Among the respondents 50% of them belonged to Parayar community, 41% of them belonged to Pallar community and 9% were from Sakkiliyar community. Marriage is an important event in the life of an individual. This is more so in the case of women. It redefines one’s role and status in the society. According to this study, 98% of them were married and 2% of them were widows.

Occupation in terms of gainful employment is a crucial factor in deciding one’s position and status in the society. It determines their power position and income. Dalit women were mostly engaged in unorganized sector 88% of them were agriculture coolies, 7% of them were marginal farmers and 5% were engaged in other activities like owning petty shops and flower shops. Few of them were housemaids in families of upper caste communities. Widely Dalit women were not employed in any skilled job sector due to lack of education.

Income is one of the essential factors which influence the economic status of Dalit women. In the present study, 100 days programme of MGNREGS was the main source of income for the respondents. Milch animal was another source of income of the respondents.

The study revealed that 96% had television in their homes; 87% of them had mobile phones; 39% had bicycle and gas stove and 9% had radio in their homes. Since mobile phone is widely used, use of landline phone is very less. Only 2% had land line phones.

**Political Knowledge of Dalit Women**

Political knowledge is essential for Dalit women to participate in the Panchayat Raj Institutions. 71% of the respondents had knowledge on reservation for women in the Panchayat Raj Institutions and almost 95% of the respondents aware about tenure of Village Panchayat; regarding the Gram Sabha meeting 86% of them said that the Gram sabha
meeting was held four times in a year and the remaining of them said that one time, two times and three times in a year.

While coming to the contribution of Dalit women in the Gram Sabha meeting 76% of respondents perceived that persons from the higher caste (non-Dalits) contributed in the Gram Sabha meeting more. Only 24% perceived that Dalit communities contributed in the Gram Sabha meeting. Feeling of shyness was one of the main reasons for their lower contribution in the meetings.

Regarding the gender issues, 72% of them felt that no gender issues were discussed during the gram sabha meeting. The meeting mainly focused on village development activities like road, water facilities, sanitation, income and expenditure of the Panchayat fund; 87% of the respondents did not have affiliation to any political party, as they did not have interest in joining any political party. However, 13% of the respondent’s belonged different political parties in their villages like ADMK, DMK, DMDK, etc. The highest number belonged to ADMK.

Regarding the poor participation in the Gram Sabha meeting, as per their multiple responses 80.6% of the respondents said that fear of people of dominant caste was one of the major reasons for poor participation in the Gram Sabha meetings followed by 79.8% of the respondents said that lack of awareness, 60% of the respondents said that lack of education, 49.2% of the respondents said that lack of interest and finally 26.7% of the respondents said that being women they were hesitant to participate in any meeting in the village.

**Activities of Village Panchayats in Empowering Dalit women**

The Village Panchayats had done many activities for empowerment of Dalit women in the rural areas. The Panchayats has conducted minimum 10 health awareness programmes related to reproductive and health hygienic for rural female adults. 15 HIV awareness programmes and 22 Eye camps were organized with the help of NGOs.
In political context these Panchayats have organized awareness campaigns about importance of attending Gram Sabha meeting about reservation for women about government welfare schemes available for them like widow pension scheme, old age pension scheme, *Thalikku thangam*, housing scheme, etc.

These Panchayats have conducted gender trainings to the rural women to impart the importance of gender equality in education and decision making. They helped to organize self employment training programmes like pickle making, tailoring and washing soap and powder making in their village.

Apart from this these Panchayats have arranged cultural programmes for giving sanitation awareness to the village people for maintaining hygienic pattern in their life. As Presidents of these villages were women, they voluntarily organized a number of programmes to improve the quality of life of women in the rural area.

**Government Welfare Schemes**

Coming to the welfare schemes of Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), 30% were benefited from Dharmathupatti Village Panchayat in Reddiyarchatram Block. 29% were from Pallapatti Panchayat, 22% of them from Pithalaipatti Panchayat, 17% of them from Thoppampatti Panchayat and 2% of them from T.Puthupatti Panchayat.

In Green House Scheme (GHS), 33% of the respondents were benefited from Rettiyyarchatram block, 28% of them were benefited from Athoor block and 21% of them from Dindigul block.

In National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS), 79% of the respondents got benefited from Dindigul block, 15% of them from Reddiyarchatram block and 16% of them from Athoor block.
Under the individual toilet scheme, 73% of the respondents were benefited from Rettiyarchatram block, 35% of them were from Athoor block and 33% of them from Dindigul block.

All the respondents were the beneficiaries under 100 days employment Programme of MGNREGS. It showed that the programme had been truly serving all eligible villagers in the selected Blocks.

**Empowering Factors**

While analyzing Women Empowerment Scale (WES) it is revealed that, the younger and middle age groups had significantly contributed to the empowerment. This is because of their economic stability, established family situation, familiarity with the social environment and knowledge about local self governance.

Education is one of the important factors for empowerment of women’s in rural areas. The study found that primary and higher education differed positively significant in their empowerment score.

Occupation is another factor which influenced women’s rural life structure and the class status in the society. The study revealed that apart from agriculture, the other activities like like petty shop and flower shop had contributed to the empowerment at a significant at level.

Marital status was another important factor for empowerment of women. Generally, among elected women Panchayat Presidents, unmarried women were less represented in the Gram Panchayat. Married women could get full support from their husbands.

Having awareness about Government Welfare Schemes is one of the factors which help to empower women in the rural area. Attending gender related training programmes conducted by Village Panchayats and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) which contributed to empower women in the decision making level. Participation in the various
protest meetings was found to be one of the factors which helped the women to come out in the society.

Financial independence and having assets in the name of women contributed to empowerment.

**Factors Facilitating for Political Empowerment**

Political empowerment assumes great significance as the major objective of the researcher is to study the role of Panchayat raj in Dalit women’s empowerment. The following variables significantly contributed to the Political empowerment of Dalit women in the rural area. Caste is one of the important factors which significantly contribute to political empowerment. Pallar and Sakkiliyar caste groups showed significant at 0.05 level. Affiliation of political party also encouraged the Dalit women to participate in the election. Knowledge on tenure of Panchayat and awareness of reservation also led to political empowerment of Dalit women.

**Recommendations**

**Education for Development of Women**

Vast majority of Dalit women had attained only primary literacy. Lack of education is one of the main causes for lower level of empowerment of women. Hence, Panchayat should motivate female children in the rural area to get higher education. It can certainly promote development in socio-economic conditions of their life. Towards this awareness and training programmes need to be given. The motivation for higher educational may ensure their participation in all areas of activities including political decision making. In this connection, it is recommended that the Government may take immediate efforts to provide quality education to Dalit women.
Effective Training Programmes

Various capacity building training programmes provided by different institutions of central and state governments and NGOs must reach out to Dalit women. Such effective training programmes especially on self employment need may empower them.

Efforts of Governments and Non-government Organizations

The governments, Non-government organizations and civil societies working for the gender equality must focus on the issues of gender biases embedded in iniquitous and discriminatory practices in local governance. The genuine NGOs must be identified for entrusting them the tasks of training, encouraging, organizing, enabling and guiding Dalit women to participate in the election.

School Curriculum

The curriculum for the students at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels should be so modified as to promote caste and gender equality among the students. There should be chapters on Panchayat Raj and women empowerment in all the classes at the school level. Timely preparation of women is important to voice the needs and ideas of this fraction of society in development.

Campaigns at Large Level

Publishing the reservation of Panchayat seats, nomination and other election related procedures through the mass media is essential to ensure that women, especially Dalit women, are able to access this information. At national and state level campaigns are essential to make Dalit women and men to realize their rights.

Economic Independence of Dalit Women

Economic strength is considered the basis of social, political and psychological power in society. When women gain economic strength, they gain both visibility and a voice in home, workplace and community. Economic independence gives them confidence to manage
their family responsibilities. In this connection, the Panchayat should give entrepreneurship
development programmes for women for self employment and wage employment. It helps to
improve their economic conditions and becoming independent in future without depending
on others.

**Promoting Information and Training to Women on Panchayat**

The Government along with the NGOs should provide information and training to
women about local bodies to increase their knowledge of local government, its
responsibilities and functions. Women should be given opportunities for leadership training
and education in order to encourage them to take up political and leadership position in all
fields. Supportive services should be provided to allow women to participative in local
bodies.

**Providing Congenial Atmosphere**

The women must be provided with congenial atmosphere and environment to voice
their issues that concern the community they represent without hesitation and constitute at the
Gram Panchayat meetings for which a mechanism needs to be evolved.

**Formation of Groups**

The voice of Dalit Women is the voice of the marginalized among the marginal
groups. Hence there is a need of forming groups among marginalized for interactions on
political matters.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The following suggestions are arrived for further research in future,

- The present study has been done only in Dindigul District. More empirical studies on
  Dalit women’s empowerment in Panchayats by State and National level would bring
  better portrayal of their status quo.
A comparative study of empowerment of Dalit and Non-Dalit women by Panchayat Raj Institutions would help in assessing the role of Panchayat in empowering women in general.

Case studies of more Dalit women Panchayat presidents may form a research study by itself which will throw more light on Dalit women empowerment.

Conclusion

On the basis of the study it may be concluded that a large number of Dalit women are coming up in socio – economic and cultural aspects. In the present study, the psychological empowerment of Dalit women was high. This must be having contributed to the higher level of political knowledge and participation in the Panchayat raj institutions. However, they have to go a long way. The process of transition of women from being housewife to become a public person vested with authority has begun leading her to take many more responsibilities outside the home. Empowerment of Dalit woman is on the anvil. The changes in their attitudes, behaviors and outlooks due to their active political participation will go a long way to bring about changes not only in their personality but also in every way in which they relate themselves with family, community and society at large.