

Political Awareness Among Elected Members Of Village Panchayath- A Case Study Of Gurupura Village At Dakshina Kannada District

Dr Shakila Hegde

Associate Professor, Department Of Political Science,
St Aloysius (Deemed To Be University), Mangalore, Karnataka

Abstract

In the modern age of development, local government has the greater responsibilities to play. The elected representative are to be the agent of positive change at their level. For this, Elected representatives are to be more sensible towards the socio-economic and other aspects. Although local government in India is subject of the State government, the seventy-third and seventy-fourth amendments to the Constitution of India now make it obligatory for the state government to organise local bodies, to hold regular election to them and to give them appropriate finances. Political awareness means access to political information, political participation, media exposure, interest in politics and education with political information being the best indicator over all. The Political Awareness and Political Participation are the parameters to assess the success of democratic system. There are two forms of political participation such as active and passive. The study of the political awareness and participation among the elected members at the gram panchayat level enabled to derive the efforts done by the external agencies in this regard. The study is restricted to one of the gram panchayat of Gurupur village in Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka.

Keywords: Political Awareness, Panchayat, Participation,

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I. Introduction

Decentralisation is a process of institutionalisation of the Panchayat Raj governance in the country. These institutions were meant to empower the rural poor by making them part of the decision making process. The democratic method is that institutional arrangements for arriving political decisions which realises the common good by making the people itself decides the issues through election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will.

The importance of formation of the local self-government as an instrument for approaching community development and welfare of the people was well realised since British Administration in India during 1842, but the concrete shape in the structure and ideology for the establishment of concerned institutions could not be implemented at policy level. Later Lord Curzon took some initiative for curtailment of powers to local bodies. Thereafter little efforts were undertaken to strengthen local bodies. In 1913 the Indian National Congress urged the Government to pass a resolution to increase the power of the local bodies. After independence, the Panchayat Raj was well included in the Directive Principles of State Policy, stating that states shall take steps to organise Village Panchayats and endow them with such powers as many be necessary to enable them to function as the units of self-government.

Although local government in India is subject of the State government, the seventy-third and seventy-fourth amendments to the Constitution of India now make it obligatory for the state government to organise local bodies, to hold regular election to them and to give them appropriate finances. The urban local bodies are of three grades; municipal corporations for cities with a population of more than 0.3 million, municipal council for town smaller than this population limit and Nagar Panchayats for villages in transition to becoming towns. These bodies are elected on a universal suffrage basis, with all citizens above the age of eighteen years of age having a right to vote. The rural local bodies are organised in three tiers, the village Panchayat at the village level, the block Panchayat Samiti for about 100 villages and District Council for a district comprising about 1000 villages. The rural local bodies do not have many resources of their own. They actually spend the state government funds as implementing agencies.

This paper focuses the study of the political awareness and participation of elected representatives at the panchayat institutions. The elected members of the Gurupura village Panchayat were selected for the study. The study was confined to only the Gurupura village, in Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka.

II. Methodology

Objectives of the study:

- To study about the Political awareness and participation of members of village Panchayat.
- To assess the awareness about Indian constitution among panchayat members
- To explore the extent of interest and their opinion on Political development.
- To analyse the role of the government in training elected members.
- To explore the role of panchayat members in the policy decisions at the panchayat meetings.

Research design:

The study, made is an empirical one and also relied on primary as well as the secondary sources of data collected from the books, journals, newspapers and also the websites published by the government of India. The respondents were interviewed at the village Gurupura in local language known to them Kannada and Tulu. Interviewing a member hardly took some 15 minutes.

Sample:

Majority of the elected gram panchayat members of the village were interviewed. We just selected a few respondents among who were from different age and gender groups. Respondents were from the different sub villages as the elected village panchayat members. This helped us get the personal view of the respondents, and of course this played a prominent role in bringing out our study as a success.

Study Area

The elected members of the Gurupura village Panchayat were selected for the study. The study was confined to only the Gurupura village, in Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka.

The Processing of Data and its Analysis:

The data procured from the field were recorded in the interview schedule. The analysis and the interpretation of the data were done through the use of pie charts and the bar graphs.

III. Political Awareness And Participation

The political awareness is a broad term in political science literature. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) define political knowledge as “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory”. According to them, appropriate levels of political knowledge are thought to be important to allowing individuals and groups to effectively participate in politics, represent their own needs before the system, and develop attitudes that are based on more than emotion. Their work marks a watershed when it comes to political awareness and engagement in politics. Robert C. Luskin defined political awareness as a function of three elements:

They are,

- (i) Level of exposure to political information
- (ii) Intellectual ability to retain and organize the encountered information
- (iii) Motivation to obtain and comprehend the political information.

Political awareness means access to political information, political participation, media exposure, interest in politics and education with political information being the best indicator over all.

The importance of political awareness for electoral participation need hardly be overemphasised. Democratic citizens should have a minimum understanding of the political system in which they express preferences and elect representatives. Political awareness has been shown to play a significant role in explaining variation in political participation (Converse 2000). The higher the level of political awareness, the higher would be the level of participation in electoral activities⁴. Certain level of political awareness is indispensable for voters’ activity. They need to keep themselves informed about political issues, functions of political institutions, and more importantly their political rights and their role as political participants. It is necessary to have some awareness not only of the political institutions and the process of politics but also about the issues. Therefore, it stands to reason that people who are unfamiliar with politics and related issues would be less interested to participate. In other words, political awareness is important for making an informed choice. Such a choice may be expressed by the citizens by selecting policies and candidates of their choice.

Citizen's interest in politics is important because it is interest that motivates an individual to follow political events and acquire information. Political interest is also considered to be a consequence, as well as a cause of political activity (Verba et. al 1978). Those who are interested in politics will try to acquire political information that will ultimately lead, in turn, to higher levels of political information. Political awareness of the voters is mostly influenced by the information that they get from different sources. Mass media is one of such source of information on politics. Voters' pattern of media use is likely to increase their level of political awareness (Gerber et al. 2006)

Discussing politics with others is a matter of interest and awareness. Those who engage in political discussions with others usually show an interest in politics and some level of knowledge. The experience of discussing politics with others may also stimulate a sense of political engagement (Gastil and Dillard 1999).

IV. Karnataka Gram Panchayat And Its Functions

The Karnataka pattern of panchayat raj introduced in the state in 1985 when Janata Party under the chief ministership of Ramakrishna Hegde came into power. Karnataka has four-tier system – at the village, mandal (below the taluk), taluk and district levels. The district and the mandal level bodies are directly elected with power to plan and execute development and welfare programmes. It is most significant that all the developmental departments of the state functioning in the district have been brought under the direct and unshared jurisdiction of the elected representatives in the district body. This has been a truly revolutionary move as more than twenty items hitherto remaining with the state government, all relating to development, have been decentralised and thus transferred to the panchayat raj. Programmes have been transferred to the zilla parishad and personnel implementing them stand transferred to the latter. The chief administrative officer of the zilla parishad is designated as its chief secretary. His annual performance is evaluated by the president of the zilla parishad, who is an elective officer.

The Karnataka model of decentralization has brought development administration under the control of the zilla parishad, devolved planning functions and planning funds on the district-level elected body, appointed a statutory finance commission to recommend financial devolution, made gram sabha the pivot of the entire panchayati raj edifice, reserved seats for women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and reduced voting age to eighteen. It is worth remembering that the Karnataka experiment proved to be short lived: the scheme was diluted when Hegde, its architect, quitted.

THE KARNATAKA PANCHAYAT RAJ ACT, 1993, specifies the constitution of Gram Panchayat, functions, duties and powers of Gram panchayat adhyaksha and upadhyaksha. The Act, provides for a 3- tier structure of Panchayats. The Zilla Panchayat forms the apex institution at the district level. Taluk Panchayat, where again the members are directly elected from the people, and which has a similar administrative structure headed by the Executive Officer(EO). At the lowest level there are the Gram Panchayats which are having jurisdiction over a group of villages so notified.

V. Gurupura Village At Dakshina Kannada District (The Study Area)

Dakshina Kannada is a district in the Karnataka State of India. Total area of Dakshina Kannada is 4,861 km including 4,309.74 km rural area and 551.26 km urban area. Dakshina Kannada has a population of 20, 89,649 peoples. There are 4, 39,733 houses in the district.

The Dakshina Kannada district is further divided in to Tehsils / Blocks / Community Development Blocks (C.D.Blocks) for administrative purposes. In India, the Block or C.D.Block is often the next level of administrative division after the tehsil. It is important to note that, in some states of India C.D.Blocks are equal to tehsils. The C.D.Block is a rural area earmarked for administration and development in India. The area is administered by a BDO (Block Development Officer). A C.D.Block covers several gram panchayats, local administrative unit at the village level.

Gurupura, is a small town situated on the Phalguni, or Gurupura River. It is located about 345 kilometres (214 miles) west of Bangalore, the state capital, and 13 kilometres (8 miles) east of Mangalore, Karnataka's chief port city. The inhabitants of Gurupura come from various cultural backgrounds, and include Gouda Saraswat Brahmins, Bunts, Billavas, Veerashaivas, Muslims and Christians. Tulu is the primary language for general communication, but Konkani, Beary and Kannada are also spoken.

According to the records of the local temples, the town of Gurupura was once known as Gulipur. Being situated on the banks of the Phalguni River, Gulipur was a commercial town and was connected to other parts of the river. Bandasaale was, and still is, a place on this river where goods are collected from many sources and distributed to other places. The 'Bangla gudde', a dam-like structure built as a drinking water supply, was built in Gurupura by Tipu Sultan.

Gurupura is famous for its religious activities, and the Phalguni River is also named Gurupura, after this town. It also lies close to Vamanjoor and Kalikamba. The village has become a small town with the rapid urbanisation of the Dakshina Kannada district. Temples of the Hindu deities Varadraja Venkatramana and Shri

Satyadevta Dharmadevta are found here. The devasthan of Shri Satyadevta is also well known in and around Gurupura. Festivals take place here through most of the year, but the main festival usually takes place in April or May, in the month of the Indian calendar called "Gurpur Teru", followed by "Ookul", after "Odu Teru". Just across the road from the Sri Satyadevata Dharmadevata Temple is a large mosque.

VI. Panchayat Raj System In India

The constitutional backing has become a hollow device of democratic decentralization. The increased influence of MPs and MLAs over Panchayati Raj Institutions would adversely affect their autonomy, making them vulnerable to the influence of urban cities. Calling for greater people's participation, is needed in strengthening of participative democracy rather than representative democracy. Dr. Amita Singh (1995). The Gram Sabha despite being envisaged as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj system and an effective role player in village development is handicapped due to the lack of closely of its role in village development vis-a-vis the Gram Panchayati. None of the State Panchayati Raj Acts empowers the Gram Sabha to have a control over the Gram Panchayati and to take any final decision in matters of village development its role is only advisory. Katar Singh (1999)

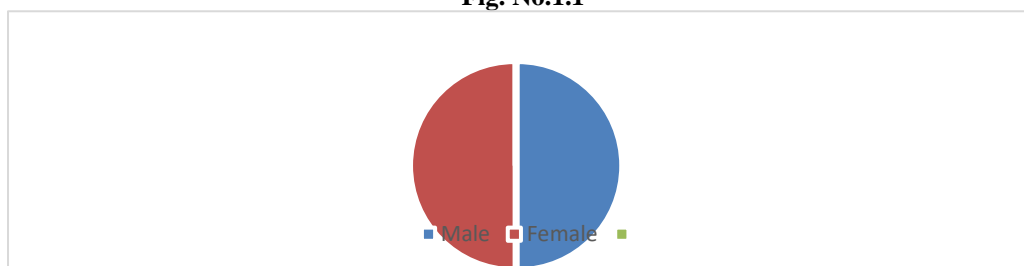
Training for Elected Leaders in Panchayati Raj was attended by illiterates and less educated, politically more experienced participated. There is significance of capacity building among the elected Scheduled Caste leaders, particularly Scheduled Caste women leaders to enhance their participation. R. Venkata Ravi and M. Venkata Ramana (2001). It is well recognized that the success of democratic decentralization depends on adequate power devolution, sufficient financial resource devolution, efficient administrative capacity of the decentralized institutions and effective accountability mechanisms. But a major problem encountered in effecting decentralized governance is the tendency of power holders to not give up power and authority to lower level institutions. The PRIs in Karnataka suffer from certain colonial hangovers. For example the ZPs have been given only administrative roles. The hangover thus continues even today. A strong decentralized authority is needed at district level, in order to strengthen panchayat administration in the state. Karnataka government has undoubtedly taken a number of steps to grant greater responsibilities, powers and financial resources to the PRIs. Despite the Acts of 1983 and 1993, the amendments and government orders passed to curtail the powers of the PRIs Karnataka has moved steadily away from ensuring greater autonomy for PRIs. Kamble Rakesh (2016)

VII. Analysis And Interpretation

Personal Data

Gender Distribution of the Respondents:

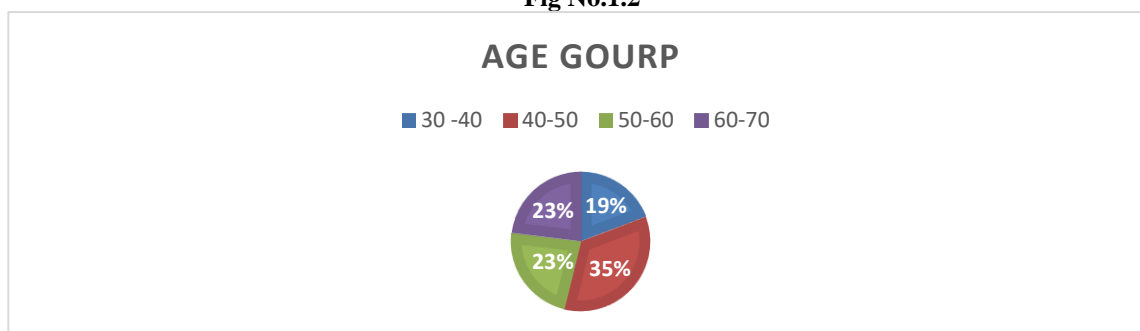
Fig. No.1.1



Out of 26 respondents 13 were men and 13 were women.

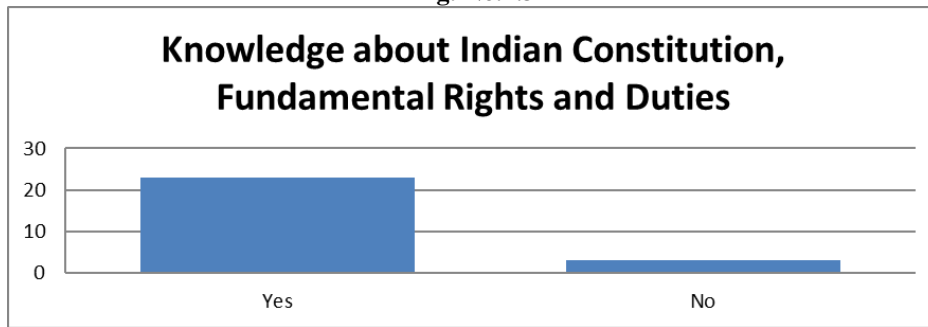
Age distribution of the Respondents:

Fig No.1.2



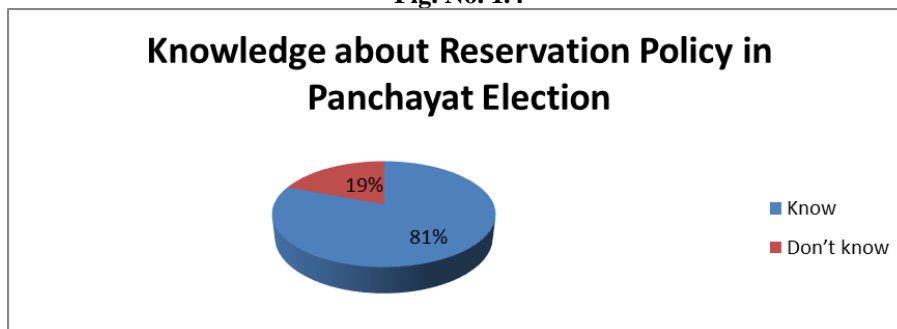
Out of 26 respondents 5 belong to the age group of 30-40, 9 respondents belong to the age group 40-50, 6 respondents belong to the age group of 50-60 and 6 respondents belong to the age group of 60-70.

Fig. No.1.3



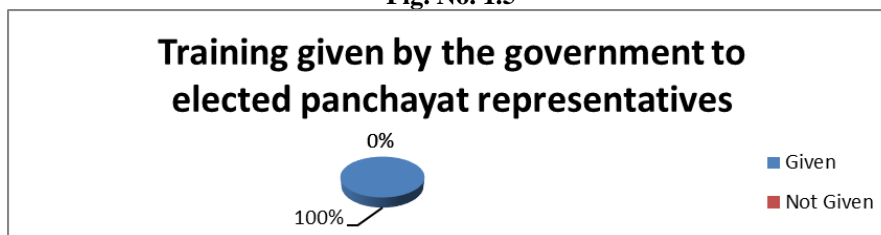
Out of 26 respondents 16 have got the knowledge about the Indian constitution, Fundamental Rights and Duties. While 10 respondents said they don't have the knowledge of the same.

Fig. No. 1.4



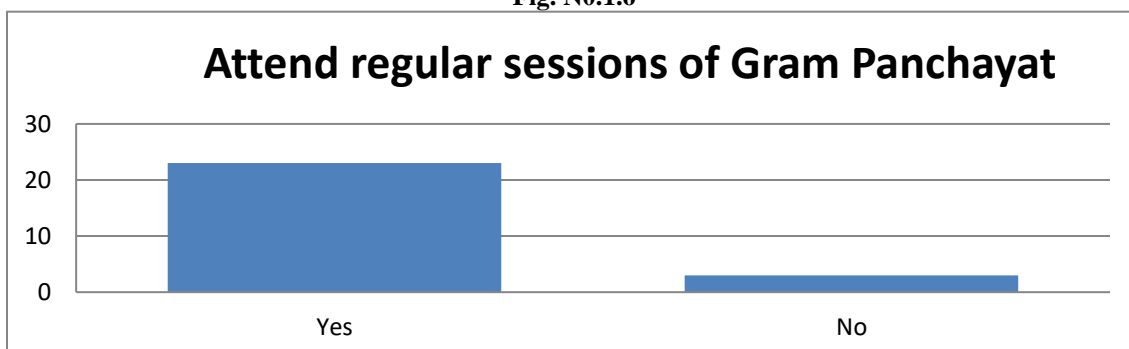
Out of 26 respondents 21 knew about the reservation policy in applied in the panchayath elections, while 5 respondents are not aware of such policy.

Fig. No. 1.5



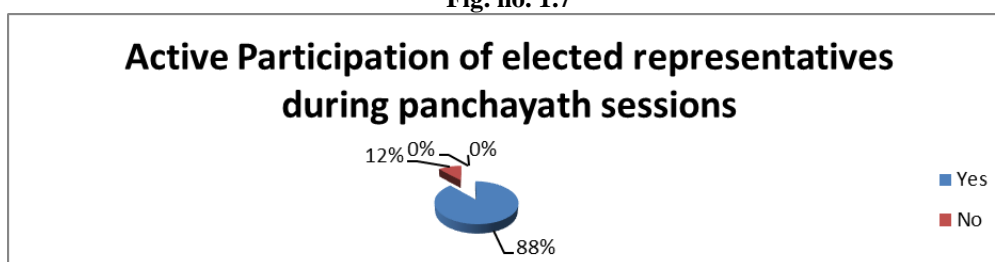
All the respondents have said they have been given with the training by the government after getting elected to impart their role at gram panchayat level.

Fig. N0.1.6



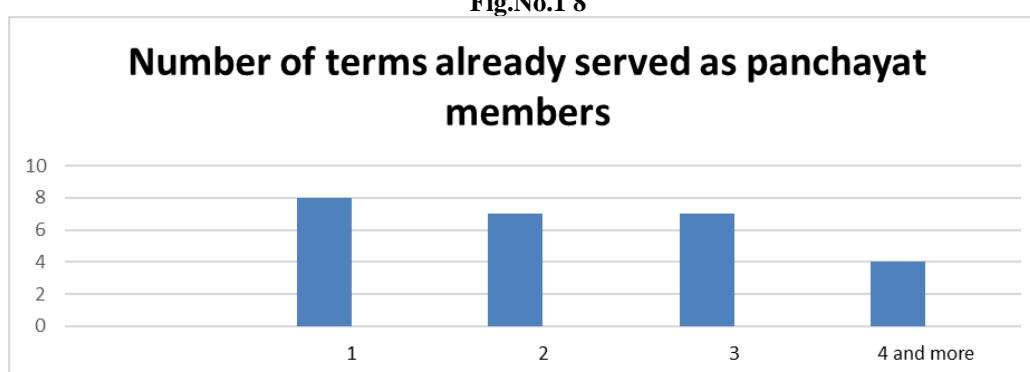
The above graph shows that 23 respondents regularly attended the gram panchayat sessions, while 3 of them said they did not attend the sessions regularly.

Fig. no. 1.7



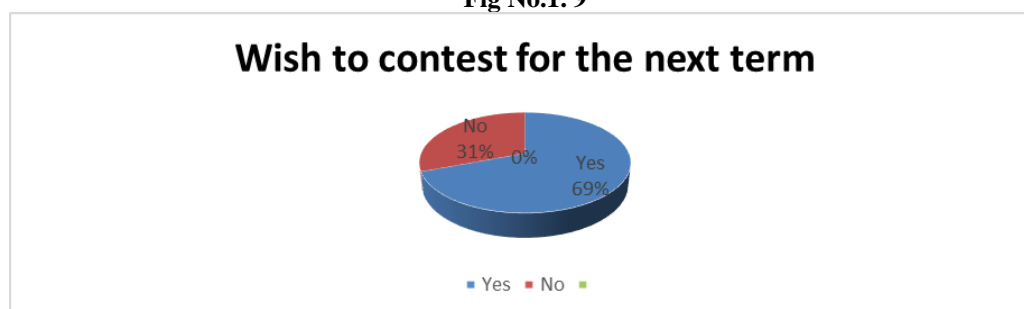
Out of 26 respondents 19 of them actively participate in the gram panchayath sessions while 7 did not take active participation.

Fig.No.1 8



Out of 26 respondents 8 are in their first term, 7 have already finished two terms, 7 have finished 3 terms and 4 have already served for more than 4 terms as elected gram panchayath members.

Fig No.1. 9



The above chart shows that out of 26 respondent 18 have expressed their willingness to contest for the next term and 08 did not wish to contest for the next term.

When respondents were asked to share any other information they would like to share, few shared their views, as they were happy to be the part of Panchayat and serve in their capacity towards the empowerment of the residents of the village and development of the village. One of the respondent said that Gurupur Gram panchayat has got its own library where good quality books are available for elders and students to gain knowledge on various fields. Keeping in mind the needs of poor students, various competitive exam books are kept in the library for their convenience.

VIII. Findings And Conclusion

The Political Awareness and Political Participation are the parameters to assess the success of democratic system. There are two forms of political participation such as active and passive. Here is an effort to make a study of the political awareness and participation among the elected members at the gram panchayat

level. The study is restricted to one of the gram panchayat of Gurupur village in Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka.

In the selected area of study all the elected representatives have expressed their interest in political matters and developments and majority of them gain knowledge through media and discussion. One more notable information derived through this study is government organises various programmes from time to time to keep informed about the new developments taking place around, thereby to prepare these elected representatives to discharge their role in an effective manner.

This study enable to understand that, not many young people choose to serve as an elected representative. Hence as a suggestion for the effective functioning of local self government, more number of youth to participate at this level and contribute for the development of the village, as today's youth are more resourceful and skillful.

Panchayat Raj is a system and process of good governance. Democracy depends upon the equality of all human beings, their right to participate in social and political transformation and the right to development, to live in dignity. Villages have always been a basic units of administration in India since ancient times. Gram Sabha can become the cornerstone of the whole Panchayat Raj institutional set-up, thereby the Indian democratic system.

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