

MUSLIM WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN GRAMA SABHA: A CASE STUDY OF PONMALA PANCHAYAT IN MALAPPURAM DISTRICT, KERALA

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Abstract: Panchayat Raj bodies have got wide attention in the current academic discussion. Grama Sabha is a main forum which gives equal opportunity to all and it makes a chance to discuss, criticise and approve or reject of any proposal from the concerned body. Kerala is one of the states which strictly follow 50% of women's reservation in local bodies. There are many women representatives in all Kerala local bodies and they are participating in the Grama Sabha meetings. But in the lower strata of the society women's participation in Grama Sabha meetings are comparatively low. Comparing to men, women's participation is high in Ponamala Panchayath, Akkapparamb ward. But it is only lower class women are giving importance to Grama Sabha meetings. The upper class people deliberately ignoring the meetings. This paper analyses the condition of Muslim women's participation in local bodies especially in Gram Sabha meetings.

Key Words: Grama Sabha, Kerala, Malappuram, Ponmala, Akkapparamba

Introduction:

The 73rd constitutional act of Indian constitution passed in 1992 by the Narasimha Rao government came into force on April 24, 1993. It was meant to provide constitutional status to establish democracy at the grass root level as it is the state level or national level. This amendment tries to increase women's participation in local bodies and one third of the seats reserved for women. The amendment opened a new door for women's empowerment at grass root level. In 2009, the cabinet of India approved 50% reservation for women in local bodies. Kerala has announced 50% reservation for women in local bodies. Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have 50% reservation for women. Grama Sabha is a way of deepening democracy and also a democratic forum for rural people in each and every Panchayat. The India government have ordered that there should be Grama Sabha meetings in four times of every year and 10% of the total population from the particular ward, should be present in the meetings. This study seeks to examine the condition of women's participation in Grama Sabha meetings at Ponmala Panchayat 9th ward.

Objective of the Study: The main objective of the study is to find out the status of Muslim women's participation in grass root democracy especially particularly in Grama Sabha and to understand the problems of women which encountered in local bodies. Grama Sabha is a way of deepening democracy and also a democratic forum for rural people in each and every Panchayat.

Study Method: This is a case study about the role of Muslim women in Grama Sabha as participatory democracy. The study is quantitative. Both primary and secondary data are used. The survey research method is used with help of questionnaire. In order to address the question the study has undertaken a field survey and a sample size of 60 had been selected from the voters list in 9th ward of Ponmala Panchayat randomly. This along with government documents of Panchayat report constitutes the primary data.

Study Area: The study is focused on Ponmala Panchayat. Ponmala Panchayat is located in Malappuram district at the state of Kerala, India. It comes under Malappuram district Panchayat. It has situated the east part of the famous town Kottakkal at Malappuram District. The Panchayat is founded in 1963. There is only one village in Ponmala Panchayat which also under Malappuram block. According to the 2011 census, the density of population in Ponmala Panchayat is 1088 and the total literacy rate is 87.40. Comparing to women, men are highly literate people here. Female literacy is 83.82% while male literacy is 90.99% and gender index is 1062 (Ponmala Panchayat: Census data 2011). Following is a map which gives a political and geographic direction to the study area.



Source: <http://lsgkerala.in/ponmalapanchayat/photo-gallery/map/>

These political maps reveal that the north part of the Panchayat is enclosed by Malappuram Municipality and north east is Kodur Panchayat. Looking to east it is sharing border with Kuruva Panchayat and its South is

MarakkaraPanchayat. OthukkungalPanchayat is located it's North West and the famous town Kottakkal is sitting its west. Geographically it has 2165 square km expansion.

In political perspective there are eighteenth ward constituted in the Panchayat and the population was by 2011 census shows 23505 are the total population of the Panchayat. The number by male and female are 11938 and 12107 respectively. The Panchayat includes 10 Lower Primary Schools, 4 Upper Primary Schools and one High School including one vocational and one higher secondary. By the Survey it is revealed that the main occupation and income source of the 9th ward is coolie. But there have foreign workers, government employees, merchants and others. The researcher has conducted a survey in PonmalaPanchayat 9th ward. The 9th ward is Akkapparamba ward which is located in the east of PonmalaPanchayat. A sample size of 60 was selected randomly from the voters list of the Panchayat. The survey was conducted with the help of questionnaire. The following are the main observations drawn out the survey.

Participation of Women

In Kerala, after 73rd and 74 amendments there was jump in the representation of women in rural and urban areas. But comparing to male it is very less participation of Muslim women in the 9th ward of PonmalaPanchayat. At the same time comparing to Muslim women it is very high participation of SC women in GramaSabha meetings in the in the Akkapparamba ward.

Table.1 Level of Class Background

Percentage of Population	Upper class	Lower class
Percentage of Population	33 %	67%

The study is only focused on Muslim women. 67 % of the respondents are from lower class family while 33 % respondents from upper class. It means that the study area is dominated by lower class people and only lower class people are giving importance to the participation of GramaSabha as forum for direct democracy. Upper class women are deliberately avoiding the GramaSabha because they do not want economic helps from the body. Lower class women have been participating in the GramaSabha meetings to achieve economic help from the body.

Table.2 Awareness about GramaSabha

Awareness about GramaSabha	T Those who are aware	Not aware
Percentage of population	97.5 %	2.5%

In the 60 random samples, around 97.5 % of Muslim women are aware about GramaSabha. Even 2.5 % of them are not aware about GramaSabha.

Table.3 Level of Participation

Percentage of population	Participation	Non participate
Percentage of population	60 %	40 %

40 % of Muslim women they were not participated in GramaSabha. They are from upper class family and they utterly ignored GramaSabha meetings.

Table.4 Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries	Benefited	Non benefited
Percentage of population	20%	80%

80% the participants not benefitted by the policy making. But 20 % of them have benefitted as economic aid especially for the house construction.

Analysis

97.5 % of the population are aware of about GramaSabha (Table.2). 60 % had participated in GramaSabha meetings. Only 1 % agreed that they have participated in all three GramaSabha in a year while 40% population had not participated. At the same time they were aware about GramaSabha (Table.2). 32.5 % of the population considered GramaSabha as an efficient mechanism of deepening democracy. But the majority keep themselves aloof from GramaSabha out of the sample only 20% agreed that they are benefitted out of participation in GramaSabha meetings (Table.4). Another important observation is that the participants in GramaSabha are mostly from the lower strata of society. 67% of the participants belong to lower classes (Table.1). Generally in 9th ward the majority of the participants are non-Muslim women from SC category. Because men they were busy with job and few of men coming to GramaSabha for giving to support to conduct the GramaSabha as per Panchayat rule. The official people are facing problem to mobilise people for participating GramaSabha. But in lower strata of society women have many economic issues in their day to day life. 90% of the population identified the lack of proper communication is a defect while conducting GramaSabha. All those who participated had agreed that the GramaSabha meetings have discussed many developmental aspects of the Panchayat including construction of roads, houses, toilets, dispensaries etc.

Among the women a majority said that they do not participate in GramaSabha. It is the Muslim women who constituted the majority. The upper class women generally ignore the GramaSabha meetings. The study had revealed that majority people participate in GramaSabha activities are political activists too. So they consider GramaSabha as a means of the political parties for capturing more votes.

Conclusion: The debates on GramaSabha as an instrument for deepening democracy had dominated in the academic circle for a long period. GramaSabha has potential to practice grass root democracy. But the experiences show that there are many drawbacks in its functions. The reasons are many, but mainly it is because lack of political culture and mobilisation of people. The case study helped to identify the peculiarities of functioning of GramaSabha in Kerala.

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Questionnaire

1. Do you know what GramaSabha is?
2. Did you participate in Gramasabha?
3. If Yes, How many times in a year?
4. If no, what are the reasons?
5. In your opinion what are the defects of GramaSabha?
6. Did you participated in the discussion in the GramaSabha
7. What is your opinion about GramaSabha as a means for deepening democracy?
8. Are you aware about the way in which the GramaSabha has used the funds allotted it?
9. You benefitted out of in the participating in the GramaSabha?

Other Information Sources

- a. Name
- b. Gender
- c. Religion/Cast
- d. Income
- e. Educational qualification.

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