ABSTRACT

Background: Women constitute about half (48%) of the total Indian population. In the history of Indian public life, women were not given much opportunity to play any role in governance. There are very few Constitutional provisions made available to improve the quality of life for women. The present study empirically probes on the ‘elected women representatives in Grama Panchayats of Karnataka’ by interviewing elected and serving women representatives, from the 2005 to 2010 term (third batch after the implementation of the 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution of India). The study analyses selected areas of participation, viz., profiles of the elected women, participation in social activities before and after becoming a representative of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, motivational factor to contest the Grama Panchayat election, problems and difficulties experienced, and strategies adopted to solve the problems. The three-tier system of democratic decentralization has given 33% reservation for women to contest in the Grama Panchayat electoral process and participate in the decision making process.

Methods: Systematic methodological procedures are adopted. The methodology includes aim of the study, objectives of the study, hypothesis, research design, place of the study, universe and sample, sources of data, tools and techniques of data collection, development of research tools, pre-testing, main study, data processing, limitations of the study, and chapterwise scheme. Multi-stage random sampling method was adopted to collect the primary data. Of the 266 Grama Panchayats in Udupi and Chamarajanagara districts, 96 Grama Panchayats were selected for the study. In each Grama Panchayat, three members were selected. The total size of the sample is 288. To satisfy the objectives of the study, a descriptive research design was adopted. The study also intends to find out the extent of participation by the elected women representatives in the democratic process. Hence, it is also a diagnostic study.
Results: As per the Human Development Indicator of 2005, in southern Karnataka, Chamarajanagara is a backward district, while Udupi is a relatively developed district. In Udupi district, many developmental programmes were implemented successfully and have proved to be beneficial for the people. The study also supports the indicators of HDR. The elected women representatives in Chamarajanagara also played an important role in political participation. It is noteworthy that a majority of the elected women in the Grama Panchayats are young. Need based developmental programmes were implemented in the community.

Conclusion: Elected women representatives played a major role in the village development process. A good number of developmental programmes are implemented in the village for the benefit of the people. The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution gave women got an opportunity to be involved in the development process by being politically active in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Adequate representation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and their active participation in the overall functioning has a bearing on attaining gender equality, gender justice, and rural development. Social work interventions will certainly enhance the space for women and their ability for dealing with the responsibilities in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Working with Groups, Community and Social Action knowledge base are the methods and tools for attaining the inclusive development of rural India by sharing responsibility with the women.