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## A STUDY OF SANGAWADE GRAMPANCHAT IN KOLHAPUR DISTRICT (MAHARASHTRA) WITH REFERENCE TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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### INTRODUCTION:

The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the Constitution in 1992 was a major step towards democratic decentralization. It has led to greater participation and empowerment of SC/ST and women in panchayat raj.

After independence, the Bombay Village Panchayats Act 1958 assigned the work of collection of land revenue and maintenance of land records to village panchayats. The State of Maharashtra was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1960. The Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samities Act, 1961 was enacted and Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samities were constituted in May 1962. Maharashtra adopted three tier system of Zilla Parishad, Taluka Panchayat and village level Gram Panchayat. The district was considered as an ideal institution for local development and we find district oriented approach in Maharashtra (Joshi S.D. and Mitragotri N.P, 2000).

Maharashtra amended Village Panchayat and Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samities Act of 1958 and 1961 through Act No. XXI which came into force on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1994 to make them conform to the provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendments. The details regarding elected members in panchayats in Maharashtra in 1997 are presented in the table.

### ELECTED MEMBERS IN PANCHAYATS IN MAHARASHTRA : 2007.

	Nos.	Total Elected Members	SCs	STs	Women
Gram Panchayats	27619	303545	40766 (13.43)	35150 (5.58)	100182 (33.34)
Panchayat Samitis	319	3524	409 (16.61)	453 (12.85)	1174 (33.31)
Zilla Parishad	29	1762	206 (11.69)	232 (13.17)	587 (33.31)

**MAHARASHTRA: SOME STUDIES ON WOMEN MEMBERS IN PANCHAYAT:**

A wise study of woman members in Osmanabad District was carried out and some of the findings are as follows : The women Sarpanches submitted that they were "passive members" rather than active agents of change. Most of them were neither aware of their role, their rights and duties, nor did they know much about the functioning of Panchayats. They were just satisfied with the prestige and other symbol of being a Panch. 16 women members out of 18 did not know how much quorum is required to conduct meeting. Women Sarpanch felt that women members were not keen on attending the meetings of Gram Panchayat. Some women members fell that the presence of women in Panchayats is still ornamental. Most of the male Sarpanches do not consult or inform women members. The papers are sent to their houses for affixing their thumb impressions or signatures.

These leaders who are expected to be agents of social change are themselves so socialized that their attitudes, values, orientation and outlook are not different and they suffer from the same malady. These women sarpanches were not aware of the development programmes of the Government and other agencies for rural areas in general and for women in particular.

**MAHARASHTRA : STUDIES ON ALL WOMEN PANCHAYATS:**

Aalochana, Centre for Documentation Pune carried out study of all women panchayats. Election the villages Salod and Erangaon (Amravati), Vitner and Dudhgaon (Jalgaon), Methikheda (Yavatmal), and Brahmanaghar (Pune) had all women members.

**A. Positive Impact of change :**

Vitner (Jalgaon Dist) - The women had to face opposition from those who held the reigns of power for years. Indirabai Patil became Upsarpanch of Vitner. All men who stood against her lost their deposits. This was the most inspiring example in terms of what has been achieved; Vitner had a population of 2000, most of whom were poor peasants. This is the first village where 127 men have transferred part of their lands to women. The transfer of land was a morale booster and security especially for those women whose husband desert them.

Methikheda (Yevatamal Dist.): The Panchayat installed 90 taps and 24 gohar gas plants in a village consisting of 240 houses. The village donated 4 acres of land to Khadi and Village Industries to attract small industries.

Brahmanghar (Bhor Taluka, Pune Dist.): The attempts were made to start hospital, market place, transportation and school. The members were elected unopposed, so the award of Rs. 10,000/- received which was spent on developmental activities in the village.

Biratagaon (Osmanabad Dist.): The illiterate women handled the affairs of village successfully. They carried out programmes of closing down liquor shops

and gambling activities. There was 100% recovery of Gharapatti. They carried out programme of Kurhadbandi and did tree plantation on 80 hect.

#### **B. Negative Reactions to Changes:**

Ghera Purandar : Smt. Ratnaprabha Sahebrao Chive, Sarpanch of village was assaulted by opposition party because she got elected as an independent candidate from general constituency by defeating a man.

Erangaon : Anjanbai Torai, Sarpanch reported that the former Sarpanch refused to hand over charge and for four months he used to sit in his chair. He also gave a pot of dung and asked to use it as it was meant for them. The Block Development Officer refused to work with her as she was illiterate.

#### **A Survey of Women in Panchayat Raj in Western Maharashtra:**

The study was conducted by Mr. Vijay Choramare from 'Daily Sakal' in five districts of Pune, Satara, Sangli, Solapur and Kolhapur. He main findings of the study are:

- 1) Even a Her a decade the problems of women have not lessened. They are learning through their experience.
- 2) They are getting respect and invitations for social functions due to their positions in Panchayat system.
- 3) They have gained confidence.
- 4) Even though woman is on the position of authority, the different functions are organised without her consideration. On the one hand, either she is asked to sign after doing all the things or all her work are performed by considering her as weak.
- 5) Her place has been changed. She is sitting in (lie ruling class. If she leads them it is difficult to oppose from the others in the ruling class.
- 6) Due to the political process, elected women's status is transformed from familial women to social person. Her social status and authorities also gets elevated.

#### **KOLHAPUR DISTRICT:**

It is situated in Southern part of Maharashtra. It has eleven talukas. The details regarding grampanchayats in district are as follows (Govt. of Maharashtra).

#### **GRAMPANCHAYAT IN KOLHAPUR DISTRICT:**

Shahuwadi Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats-106, Panhala Panchayat Samiti No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats-111, Hatkanangale Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats- 62, Shirol Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats- 52, Karvir Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats-117, Gaganbawada Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats-29, Radhanagari Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats-101, Kagal Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and

Group Grampanchayats-83, Bhudargad Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats-94, Ajara Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats-74, Gadhinglaj Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats-89, Chandgad Panchayat Samiti, No. of Grampanchayats and Group Grampanchayats-109.

### **SANGAWADE VILLAGE IN KOLHAPUR DISTRICT:**

#### **POPULATION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE:**

Sangawade village is situated 15 kms from Kolhapur on east side. It is 1.5 kms away from Kolhapur-Hupari road. Sangawade is on south and Vasagade is on north side of Kolhapur-Hupari road. Sangawade is famous religious centre of Shri Narsinha temple so it is also called as 'Narasobache Sangawade'. The population of Sangawade in the last three decades was 3518 (1981), 3428 (1991) less due to bifurcation into two villages Sangawade and Sangawadewadi, and 3838 (2001). The village had 2539 voters. The caste distribution of the voters in Sangawade clearly indicates Jains (745 i.e. 29.34) had the highest number of voters, which is followed by Maratha (511 i.e. 20.12) and Mahar (498 i.e. 19.61) voters in more or less similar number. This is followed by Mang (141 i.e. 5.55) and then Kumbhar (119 i.e. 4.68) voters. This village has large number of Gurav (113 i.e. 4.45) voters due to religious centre. The general trend observed in the distribution of households in four wards is the concentration of Jains, Maratha in some wards and concentration of Mahar, Mang, Chambhar, Dhor in other wards of the village.

#### **ECONOMY:**

Sangawade has total area of 581.70 hectares of land. The land under cultivation is 500.03 hectares. Majority of the landholders (423/608) had land upto one hectare only, and it is true for general caste and SC also. At the other extreme of 4 hectares and above no SC landholder was found. If the comparison is made between general caste landholders and SC landholders then the land ownership of general caste landholders had more area of irrigated and unirrigated land. Sugarcane (124/500), groundnut (94/500) and soyabin (160/500) are the main crops in Sangawade. The other crops like paddy and jawar are sown on less area.

There were 2 development co-operatives, 2 milk cooperatives, 2 credit cooperatives and 1 water supply cooperative operating in Sangawade, The development cooperatives have been established before independence. The other cooperatives came after 1970s. The board of directors was consisting of persons from General, SCs, OBCs and women. In one credit cooperative all members and board of directors were from SCs. The chairpersons and Vice-chairpersons of other cooperatives belonged mainly to dominant castes like Jains and Marathas, The directors were also from the same castes except quota directors. The number of members of these societies had range from 92 to 1012. The number of women was less in every cooperative. The members were from general castes, SCs and

OBCs. The members from SCs and OBCs were less compared to general caste members. All the cooperatives were in profit and the main purpose of all these cooperatives was to provide credit facility and services in the field of agriculture. The Directors of these Co-operatives do play active role in Grampanchayat elections.

#### **POLITICAL SYSTEM:**

The grampanchayat in Sangawade was established in 1927. In the earlier phases the Sarpanches were appointed by the government. The details regarding name of Sarpanch, their caste background and tenure are presented in the table

**TABLE GRAMPANCHAYAT SANGAWADE: SARPANCHES**

1	Vhanagonda Patil	(Jain)	12	Mahadeo Chougule	(OBC)
2	Dattatraya Joshi	(Brahmin)	13	Devu Mane	(SC)
3	Bhujagonda Patil	(Jain)	14	Parisa Marle	(Jain)
4	Vhanagonda Patil	(Jain)	15	Atmaram Yadav	(SC)
5	Ganapati Gujar	(OBC)	16	Parisa Marle	(Jain)
6	Dhulgonda Patil	(Jain)	17	Dudhappa Jadhav	(SC)
7	Anna Kusanale	(Jain)	18	Vijay Patil	(Jain)
8	Bala Mulani	(Muslim)	19	Pravin Mane	(SC)
9	Devagonda Patil	(Jain)	20	Sanjay Biraje	(SC)
10	Dada Sawant	(Maratha)	21	Vandana Koli	(OBC)
11	Pandit Kulkarni	(Brahmin)			

The table clearly indicates that Jain, Brahmin, Muslim, OBC, SC have acted as Sarpanch. Two Sarpanchs have got the post twice. Since 1929, for the first time at present the woman has become Sarpanch. She is OBC. The tenure of the Sarpanch have varied and now it is for five years. The researcher had an opportunity to meet Mahadeo Gopal Chougule who acted as Sarpanch for two terms from 1967 to 1972 and 1972 to 1976. In this period the elected representatives were from different caste background like Maratha, Lingayat, Jain, Mahar, Dhor and Koli. The cluster of houses of different caste groups leads to the fact that the representative of that particular caste group gets elected from their ward. There used to be three representatives from backward castes.

**GRAMPANCHAYAT BODY :****SANGAWADE: GRAMPANCHAYAT BODY**

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Reservation category</b>	<b>Edu.</b>	<b>Occu.</b>
1	Mrs. Vandana Koli	Sarpanch	OBC	Std. III	Housewife
2	Mr. Ashok Tirpankar	Dy. Sarpanch	General	B.Com.	Cultivator
3	Mr. Dadaso Ghatage	Member	General	Std. X	Farm Labourer
4	Mr. Vinayak Shirke	Member	SC	B.A.	Cultivator
5	Mr. Baburao Shinde	Member	SC	Std. IV	Cultivator
6	Mr. Sukumar Jaganade	Member	OBC	Std.X	Grossary Shop Owner
7	Mr. Bhujagonda Patil	Member	General	Std.XI	Cultivator
8	Mr. Vishnupant Chougule	Member	OBC	Std.XII	Cloth Shop Owner
9	Mrs. Parvatibai Yadav	Member	SC	Std.X	Housewife
10	Mrs. Akkatai Patil	Member	General	Illiterate	Housewife
11	Mrs. Laxmibai Kurhade	Member	General	Std.IV	Housewife

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF PANCHAYAT MEMBERS:**

The majority of members of Grampanchayat were below 40 years of age. Out of (his age group, majority belonged lo SC and OBC which indicates that younger persons from this group arc entering into grampanchayat. The women members were having-primary level of education whereas men were having high school and college education. All the women members were housewives. In the case of agricultural occupation, one was labourer whereas four were cultivators. In the case of cultivators the land was unirrigated and irrigated which ranged from half acre to live acres. There were two persons having their grocery and cloth shops. The trend which emerges from the data is that women from SC/OBC were having less acres of land compared to higher castes. Six members were having annual income upto Rs.20,000/- and live members wore having annual income above that due to sugarcane cultivation. There were four persons without any loan and two of them from SC were having annual income upto Rs.25,000/-

and two higher caste members were having more than that. On the other extreme four persons (one open caste and three SC/OBC) were having loan of Rs.25,000 + above. The members have borrowed loan for agricultural work, cloth shop, grocery shop and house construction.

#### **WOMEN AND RESERVED CATEGORY MEMBERS:**

The seven members who got elected under reservation were asked different questions regarding grampanchayat elections. The suggestion for election was mainly made by friends, family members, neighbours and in few cases it was self decision. The final decision was mainly taken by the members themselves. The assistance at the time of election was provided mainly by the voters and friends, Mahila Mandal, political activists. The reactions from their own caste and other castes after their victory in the election were good. Five out of seven members have desire for contesting next election under reservation. One of the members aged 65 comments that 'nobody says no to you when you are contesting in democracy. I will contest until I am alive. Two members wanted to recontest for works in the village and desire for public work. One member from a joint family has less responsibility in family and so he wanted to devote time for village work. Two members were not interested in contesting election as they wanted to give this opportunity to others. The members feel that their contesting elections has not encouraged others in their caste. In the case of women members also it has not encouraged other women to contest election.

#### **PARTICIPATION IN MONTHLY MEETINGS:**

The members were asked whether they attend all the meetings. Nine members responded positively and two women members reported that they were unable to attend some meetings due to household work. One woman reported that some of the meetings are attended by her son. There were no difficulties on the part of members to take part in the discussion of panchayat meetings and they were expressing their opinions. Before the meetings, few members were having discussions with ward members, husband and senior leaders in the party. Two members reported that even though Sarpanch is a woman, the administration is looked after by her husband and other leaders. There is no abusing to prevent views of SC/OBC/Women members in the monthly meetings. One male member reported that even though we ask them to speak, female members don't speak in the meetings.

#### **GRAMSABHA:**

Except one woman member, others reported that they do attend all Gramsabhas, The woman who suffers from blood pressure does not attend the Gramsabhas. The members have cooperative attitude at the time of Gramsabhas. This scheme is viewed beneficial as the people in the village know

many things, the task of panchayat members is made easier, the people can put resolutions. The Gramsabhas are declared in advance by pasting notice and making public announcement as per the rules. But the people in the village do not take it seriously, they do not attend the meetings due to their agricultural work and they have not understood the importance of Gramsabha. There is very poor response to Gramsabha. The people do not turn up for the meetings. The meetings are postponed. The attendance for the meeting is recorded with the signatures of those who come for their office work in grampanchayat, Talathi's office and post office as all these are located in one building. The office records are maintained but the gramsabhas in their true sense of the term are not held. The only grain sabha was actually held on 15th Aug. 2002 in which woman sarpanch did not utter a single word.

#### **VIEWS OF MEMBERS ON RESERVATION:**

The question was asked about the opinion of the members regarding reservation of seats in Grampanchayat. Ten members favoured it. The reasons they put forth were scope for common men and leadership, power to powerless, power from one class to another class, SCs and OBCs we feeling, prestige to the downtrodden class, social welfare, difficulties of women and SC/OHC solved etc. One member expressed that it is alright reservation for membership but it should not be for the post of Sarpanch. The candidates from reserved category have their own limitations; they have no financial strength to work effectively so the highest post of Sarpanch should not be reserved. The members expressed that there is need of training for the members who have got elected on the reserved posts as most of them have no experience of the administration of panchayat system. The members of Sangawade Grampanchayat have participated in the Training Camp conducted at Uchagaon for three days. The members feel that the benefits of reservation have not been restricted to the individual family but these have reached to women class and SC/OHCs class.

The present body of Grampanchayat has carried out the activities of drinking water supply. Village-well, Tar-road construction, bridge on stream, shed for funeral, toilet blocks, pre-primary classes, gutters, bore for drinking water, health clubs, rooms for primary school, community hall for scheduled castes, school compound etc. What type of change has occurred in caste relations due to reservation of seats in Grampanchayat?' The members responded as good changes and there is peaceful co-existence of different castes and no tensions. The members reported that with the introduction of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the constitution, there has been changes in the functioning of Grampanchayats. There is scope for development. The facility of gramsabha gives the people an opportunity to talk.

**WOMAN SARPANCH:**

Mrs. Vandana Sonappa Koli is the Sarpanch at Sangawade. She has studied up to 3<sup>rd</sup> std. in Kannada. So she cannot read and write in Marathi. She only signs in Marathi. She is a housewife. Her husband used to work in agricultural field as labourer. The family is poor. She attends the meeting. But the main work is being carried out by her husband and the leaders in her party. The role which is expected from the Sarpanch is not being performed as she lacks educational qualification, sound financial position and experience in public life. Here 'Sarpanchpati having primary level of education acts like a Sarpanch in the office. The administration of the village is carried out by other influential members. The researcher attended gramsabha on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 2010. It was historic as for earlier gramsabha only paper-work was done. The corruption charges were alleged on gramsevak who was absent for the gramsabha. The meeting was held in the presence of acting gramsevak. The villagers gave their written complaints and suggestions regarding tax rebate to Amit Spinning Mill. The tax levied was in lakhs. It was alleged that gramsevak and some panchayat members gave tax rebate in return of cash payment and it was loss to grampanchayat. The other issues raised were pollution of drinking water, road-widening, village cleanliness campaign, permission for construction of Maruti temple, grant to BC to be used for them only. The question was raised 'who is the Sarpanch and how many members are there in grampanchayat?' Sarpanchpati stood to answer which was strongly objected. The villagers made Sarpanchpati to sit down. The gramsevak reported that Vandana Koli is the Sarpanch. She stood up, folded her hands and sat down. She did not utter a single word in the meeting of two hours. The no-confidence motion was passed against the sarpanch by 9 vs 0 votes in a special meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2010. The sarpanch and one more lady were absent and the meeting was held under the chairmanship of Mr. Sanjay Patil, Tahasildar Karveer taluka. The no-confidence motion was for the factors like Sarpanch and her husband carry administration according to their whims and fancies, obstacles in developmental work, humiliating treatment to grampanchayat members etc. There were charges of changing the resolution by pasting paper on the proceedings of the monthly meeting and corruption against Sarpanch and village development officer with reference to preparation of bond papers regarding school building and tax charged on Amit Spinning Mill. The no-confidence motion was passed and the charge was given to deputy Sarpanch. the notice of monthly meeting used to be given late to the Sarpanch. The deputy Sarpanch acted for six months. The post of Sarpanch is reserved for women OBC. As the present woman is the only OBC woman, no other women can contest for the post of Sarpanch. So the same woman now has taken over the post of Sarpanch.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

1. The women engaged us housewives under the present study have entered in politics due to reservation but their rote has remained nominal. This is due to their less education and experience in panchayat administration. In most of the cases, they were dependent on their husband for grampanchayat activities.
2. The woman Sarpanch at Sangawade play official role in Panchayats. She got status in the village, but she is unable to take decisions by herself. At Sangawade the dominant caste men control grampanchayat. The Sarpanch is less educated, less experienced in Panchayat administration and economically weak which leads to control from outside. She has not become empowered In true sense of term as the real power remained with the dominant caste. The Sarpanch is economically dependent on dominant caste for agricultural work. The reservation to the post of Sarpanch is declared at the time of election. If it is reserved, the dominant caste gives candidature to financial weak and amenable person with less political skill. These persons are then not able to challenge the dominant caste leadership.
3. The only actual gramsabha held in Sangawade where women Sarpanch could not prove her role effectively. The only meeting at Sangawade was mobilised by ex-sarpanch and the members of grampanchayat who were against the interference of Sarpanchpati in administration.
4. The women have been empowered under 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment. In Maharashtra we find mixed picture of success and failure. In some places women could perform their role adequately while in some other places they could not do so. The women Sarpanch in Sangawade having education upto 3<sup>rd</sup> standard in Kannad could not read Marathi and could not perform her role upto the extent expected. She has been alleged for corruption alongwith gram sevak. What happens now onwards is an issue of further investigation for the researchers.

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