POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH DAIRY COOPERATIVES IN RAJASTHAN

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is necessary for accelerating the pace of the development of a nation and reducing poverty. The present study was carried out on 120 randomly selected Women Dairy Cooperative Society (WDCS) members in Jaipur district of Rajasthan to assess their political empowerment through dairy cooperatives. The data were collected through structured interview schedule. The ex-post facto research design was used for the study. The findings of the study revealed that there was significant (P<0.05) change in awareness about political institutions and participation in electoral process but non-significant change in contesting election of gram panchayat/other local bodies, solving women problem through political means, access and freedom of participation in political activities of the members after WDCS membership.

***Key words*:** Political empowerment, electoral process, women dairy cooperative society

Introduction

Women play crucial and significant role in livestock rearing, but their contribution in livestock rearing has not been given the due place they deserve. They always remain invisible workers (Chayal *et al.*, 2009). Most of the activities of dairy farm were carried out by women so they spent more time compared to men in dairy farming (John and Thirunavukkarasu, 2002). Despite their dominance of the labour force, women in India still face extreme disadvantage as to pay, land rights, control over income and representation in politics (Ahluwalia, 1990). The condition of women in Rajasthan is not different from this. The total literacy rate of Rajasthan is 66.11% in which male hold the upper hand with 79.19% literacy and female around 52.12%. Rajasthan is among the states having worst sex ratio (928/ 1000 male) in the country (Anonymous, 2011). High rate of child marriages and female foeticide, lower wages, malnutrition, low level of skills and greater expose to the domestic violence and vulnerability to sexual crimes are some of the other dimensions of women's low status in the state.

The cooperatives have addressed the issues related to the poverty, vulnerability and the social exclusion which the women face reflecting on their physical mobility, political participation and gender equality (Jabvala, 2013). They can contribute to the achievement of the millennium development goals of promoting gender equality and empowering women. Dairying is an occupation that supports the livelihood of women, especially the rural poor women in India. Political mobilization ofwomen in the cooperatives and participation of poor and women at all levels of decision making in the democratic institutions run by them is vital for poverty reduction leading to the transformative empowerment of women (Corner, 1997; Jabvala, 1994; Manchanda, 1998; Panda, 2008; Sen, 1997 and Sudha, 2015). Gender integration in leadership positions fosters functional performance, good internal control, cooperative governance and ensures better responsiveness to the specific needs and priorities of the members (FAO, 2012; Itkonen,1996; Lyon and Humbert, 2012 and Teasdale *et al.*, 2011). Greater participation of women in both social and political life is significant in their integration in the growth process and helps in initiating a positive policy of promotion (Dandekar,1982 and ILO, 2012). The voting right not only creates a new awakening among women but also makes them understand that they could offer their opinion in matters concerning the society. In dairy cooperative society, each person is equal to the other in voting power, regardless of the value of shares held by them. The experience of the members in managing the affairs of the cooperative society would enable them to learn the art of administering any political institutions. Therefore cooperative societies are serving as a seed bed of political democracy. Keeping these facts in view, the present study was undertaken with the objective to assess the contribution of dairy cooperatives in the political empowerment of women.

Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted in purposively selected Jaipur district of Rajasthan owing to prospective rate of dairying, good cooperative network, livestock wealth status and large numbers of dairy cooperatives. Four tehsils *viz*. Amber, Chaksu, Chomu and Phagi were selected randomly from Jaipur district and two villages were selected randomly from each tehsils. From each village, 15 women who were active members of WDCS for at least three years were selected randomly. Thus, total 120 respondents were selected for the study. The data were collected by personal interview techniques through structured interview schedule. The ex-post facto research design was used for the present investigation. The change in the political empowerment status of the respondents was assessed by studying the

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variables such as awareness about political institutions, participation in electoral process, contested in election of gram panchayat/other local bodies, solving women problem through political means, access and freedom of participation in political activities of the members before and after WDCS membership. Statistical tools like frequency, percentage and paired t-test (Snedecor and Cochran, 1994) were used to draw the inferences. The data were entered in the computer using the software SPSS and processed.

Results and Discussion

Change in political empowerment status of WDCS members

Table 1 depicts the changes that occurred in political empowerment status of the members during before and after WDCS membership. Before joining WDCS 63.33% women had no awareness about political institutions whereas after joining WDCS 34.17% and 5.83% women were partial and full awareness category. Significant (P<0.05) change was observed from about 1.41 (Before WDCS) to 1.46 mean score (After WDCS) on the aspects of awareness about political institutions. About 25.00 per cent members had not participated in electoral process earlier moved to partial 70.83% and full 5.83% participation category after WDCs membership. The mean score of respondents changed from 1.66 to 1.70 with significant (P<0.05) change in participation level of respondents. Before WDCS membership about 86.67% of the respondents had not contested in election of gram Panchayat/other local bodies. However, after WDCS membership, non-significant changed into contesting in election of gram panchayat/other local bodies. Before joining WDCS 70.83% women had not solved women problem through political means whereas after joining WDCS 29.17% and 3.33% women were partial and full solving category. About 76.67 per cent members had not access and freedom of participation in political activities earlier moved to partial (25.00%) and full (4.17%) access category after WDCS membership. Overall, there was non-significant change in access and freedom of participation in political activities.

The results of the present study indicated that significant (P<0.05) change inawareness about political institutions and participation in electoral process but non-significant change in contesting election of gram panchayat/other local bodies, solving women problem through political means, access and freedom of participation in political activities of the members after WDCS membership.Therefore, Government should enhance awareness, provide opportunity to participation and mobility into political institutions,effectively addressed and managed challenges of women posed by society and organized special programmes for women's to solve their problems through political activities.

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Conflict of interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Table1: Change in political empowerment status of WDCS members

Variables	Before WDCS membership			After WDCS membership			Difference of mean score
	F	%	Mean Score	*f*	%	Mean Score	
Awareness about political institutions			1.41			1.46	0.05*
No	76	63.33		72	60.00		
Partial	39	32.50		41	34.17		
Full	5	4.17		7	5.83		
Participation in electoral process			1.66			1.70	0.03*
No	30	25.00		28	23.33		
Partial	90	75.00		85	70.83		
Full	0	0.00		7	5.83		
Contested in election of gram panchayat/other local bodies			1.17		1.21		0.04^{NS}
No	104	86.67		100	83.33		
Partial	13	10.83		14	11.67		
Full	3	2.50		6	5.00		
Solving women problem through political means			1.31			1.36	0.05^{NS}
No	85	70.83			81	67.50	
Partial	33	27.50			35	29.17	
Full	2	1.67			4	3.33	
Access and freedom of participation in political activities			1.31			1.33	0.02^{NS}
No	86	76.67			85	70.83	
Partial	31	25.83			30	25.00	
Full	3	2.50			5	4.17	

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