

Gram Panchayat Elections in Andhra Pradesh State, 2021--An Over View

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ABSTRACT

“Local self-governments must be the basis of any true system of democracy. We have got rather into the habit of thinking of democracy at the top and not so much below. Democracy at the top will not be a success unless it is built on the foundations from below”.---- Jawaharlal Nehru.

The success of a democratic system largely depends upon the existence and efficient operation of a system of Local Self-Governments at the grassroot levels. The democratic and ideals of Decentralisation, development and increased continuous and active popular participation of in the process of nation building can be possible only through the organisation and efficient working system of local government. In fact, each part of India whether Rural or Urban is being locally administered for the satisfaction of local needs by a local government.

The makers our constitution were fully aware of the imperative necessity of organising a system of local self-government at the grassroot level and using it as a solid foundation for ensuring the stability, strength and health of the Indian liberal democratic political system. The 4th ordinary elections to Gram Panchayats were held in July 2013.

In this connection I would like to present the Fifth Gram Panchayat Elections results, percentage of polling, mandate of the voters of elections conducted in Andhra Pradesh State in the month of February, 2021 for the satisfaction of local needs by a local self-governments in spite of many disputes levelled between State Election Commission and State Government to conduct these elections.

Key Words-Decentralisation, Popular participation, Local needs, voters mandate

INTRODUCTION

Without a well organised system of local government, no democratic political system can be expected to become stable and real development in the state. Local governments provide benefits for the people living in various corners of the state. Rural Local Governments originated and developed in India after independence on the basis of the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta committee.

According to 73rd Amendment Act of Indian Constitution, Strengthening of Gram Sabha as the foundation level institution of Panchayati Raj and Panchayats were given ore functions, additional finances and definite sources of revenue are the some of the salient features of the said amendment. Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution was added and it enumerated 29 subjects which were to be with in the jurisdiction of the Panchayats.

The elections are being held using ballot paper and without any political party symbols. Though these Panchayat elections were conducted based on irrespective of political parties, in a significant development, the supporters of YSRC Party wins in Panchayats strengthen capitals stance. Part secures 85% seats in Krishna and Guntur districts despite Telugu Desam Party (TDP) making a strong pitch about the relocation of the capital city from Amaravati. With elections in the core capital city area in Tulluru postponed due to court cases, Yuvajan Sramika Rytu Congress Party (YSRCP) and TDP approaches the elections in the neighbouring areas a prestige issue.

So, Local Governments are considered as the grass roots of representative democracy. They promote political conscious among the people of different localities in every state. They yield several benefits to the common man.

The studies of several notable scholars on the working of the Panchayat Raj in different States and the Status Report of the Ministry of Panchayat Raj (1996) lead us to the implication that the Gandhian ideal of Gram Swaraj remains an partial agenda even after seven decades of the implementation of the Panchayat Raj on the recommendation of the Balwant Rai Mehta Study Team on October 2, 1959.

The State Election Commission announced schedule on 08.01.2021 for conduct of ordinary elections to Gram Panchayats in the State. Commencement of Nominations from January, 29. Elections had been conducted in four phases Phase- 1 Polling February, 9, Phase-2 Polling on February, 13, Phase 3 Polling on February, 17, Phase 4 Polling on February, 21 and polling timings extended from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm. Earlier it was from 7am to 1 pm. Direct election was conducted for Panchayat Sarpanch and indirect election for Vice-Sarpanch from elected ward members.

Need for Study

The opposition parties alleged the rule of the Yuvajan Sramika Rytu Congress Party (YSRCP) at the rate of their one and half tenure. Telugu Desam Party (TDP) made a fervent appeal to voters that victory in gram panchayat elections would at least work as an eyeopener to the government in the region. Both ruling party(YSRCP) and opposition parties (TDP) Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and Janasena Party, approaches the elections in the neighbouring areas a prestige issue. In this connection it has become an inevitable to conduct a study on Gram Panchayat elections to assess the civic opinion about the policies and programmes are being executed by the ruling party. Charging that the development in both Krishna and Guntur districts was stalled by the YSRCP government. TDP launched an aggressive campaign in the panchayat elections.

Objectives

1. To decide the public opinion regarding the programmes implemented by the ruling party
2. To evaluate the impact of manifesto in the form of ‘Navaratnalu’
3. To understand the opinion of the voters regarding the three capitals i.e., Amaravati, Visakhapatnam and Kurnool, which was a burning issue of today.
4. To witness the pulse of the voters against statements made by the opposition parties in the state in favour of Single capital i.e., Amaravati only.
5. To realize the voting behaviour

Methodology-The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources, books, magazines and daily newspapers. The researcher interacted with a few voters in Krishna district and Guntur district.

In the **first phase** election the State Election Commission has released notification for 3,249 villages in 12 out of 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh state to conduct Gram Panchayat elections. In the first phase the supporters of ruling party won 2,640 seats, about 81.25% and TDP won 510 seats, about 15.69%, Others won 96 about 2.9%, and in 3 villages polling was not conducted. In this phase the Sarpanches of 525 villages have been elected unanimously. It is interesting to know that among them 90% of the Sarpanches were the supporters of YSRCP. After considering the unanimous seats elections were conducted for 2,721 village panchayats. In 3 gram panchayats elections were not held due to various reasons.

Second Phase Election-

In the second phase elections were conducted for 3328 panchayats in all the 13 districts in Andhra Pradesh. In the second phase the supporters of ruling party won 2,649 seats, TDP supporters won 538 and 40 seats won by Bhartiya Janata Party(BJP) and Janasena Party (JSP). Others won 98 seats. Elections were not conducted for 3 seats in this phase also.

Polling percentage recorded in all four phases of elections in A.P

Table-1

S.No	Name of the District	Poling%
1	Srikakulam	83.59
2	Vijayanagaram	87.09
3	Visakhapatnam	86.94
4	East Godavari	90.30
5	West Godavari	83.76
6	Krishna	85.64
7	Guntur	84.92
8	Prakasam	82.04
9	Nellore	76.00
10	Chittoor	78.77
11	YSR Kadapa	85.13
12	Kurnool	78.41
13	Anantapur am	84.49
Total		82.85

Source-SEC

The above table shows, in all four phases of elections 82.85 percentage was recorded. East Godavari district occupied first place by achieving highest poll percentage at 90.30 % followed by Vijayanagaram and Visakhapatnam districts @ 87.09% and 86.94% respectively. Nellore district recorded 76 percent.

Over view of Gram Panchayat Elections in Andhra Pradesh

Table-2

S.No	Name of the District	Phase-Wise elections conducted panchayats				Total Villages
		Phase-I	Phase-II	Phase-III	Phase IV	
1	Srikakulam	321	278	293	274	1,166
2	Vijayanagaram	-	415	244	296	955
3	Visakhapatnam	340	261	244	117	962
4	East Godavari	366	247	186	273	1,072
5	West Godavari	239	210	178	266	893
6	Krishna	234	211	225	288	958
7	Guntur	337	236	134	266	973
8	Prakasam	227	277	299	208	1,011
9	Nellore	163	194	342	236	935
10	Chittoor	454	276	264	375	1,369
11	YSR Kadapa	206	175	188	224	793
12	Kurnool	193	240	245	292	970
13	Anantapur am	169	308	379	184	1,040
Total						13,097

Source-SEC

In all four phases, elections have not been conducted in 14 villages due to various reasons. Elections were conducted for 13,097 villages in Andhra Pradesh state in all four phases as per the election schedule. Elections were not conducted for Vijayanagaram district in first phase election.

Table-3

Election results in all the districts including unanimously elected.

S.No	Name of the District	Party Supported		
		YSRCP	TDP	Others
1	Srikakulam	956	185	10
2	Vijayanagaram	762	160	33
3	Visakhapatnam	734	184	43
4	East Godavari	768	149	100
5	West Godavari	644	165	73
6	Krishna	680	168	64
7	Guntur	744	162	29
8	Prakasam	837	155	14
9	Nellore	787	128	18
10	Chittoor	1,161	188	20
11	YSR Kadapa	696	71	24
12	Kurnool	770	173	26
13	Anantapur am	843	175	13
Total		10,382	2,063	475

Source-SEC

Third Phase Election-

In the second phase elections were conducted for 3328 panchayats in all the 13 districts in Andhra Pradesh. In the second phase the supporters of ruling party won 2,649 seats, TDP supporters won 538 and 40 seats won by Bhartiya Janata Party(BJP) and Janasena Party (JSP). Others won 98 seats. Elections were not conducted for 3 seats in this phase also.

YSR Congress Party Sways Highest Across the State

The results showed that the Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is in the people's hearts and it cannot be erased so easily with a vicious campaign. YSRCP bagged 263 sarpanch posts out of 337 that went to polls in the first phase in Guntur district. TDP supporters won 69 villages which around 20% of the total villages. However, TDP did not make gains as it expected. TDP has lost its stronghold. Ruling party believes that their welfare and development creativities and their challenging operation approach worked in their favour in the elections. In tune with the commitment to women empowerment and social justice, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has given 728 posts of Chairpersons and Director of BC Corporations, 368 are women, and additionally, one of the Deputy Chief Ministers and the home Minister are the women.

To check malnutrition and anaemia among pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children aged between 6 to 72 months, the government has brought in YSR Poshana plus and YSR Sampoorna Poshana schemes to provide supplementary nutrition through anganwadi centres. The government has also brought in many schemes focussing on financial empowerment of women such as YSR Cheyuta, Kapu Nestham and Aasara, Programmes introduced.

TDP President and former Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's plans of reviving the party's fortunes in the state received a blow following the party's defeat in the elections. TDPs poor electoral shows particularly is also a set back to its agitation for Amaravati as the capital city. Close to two years after coming to power, the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) handed at another crushing defeat to the TDP and the BJP-Janadana Party (JSP) alliance by winning majority of Gram Panchayats Which went to polls in four phases. The TDP leaders were left questioning what went wrong with the party at the ground level.

As soon as the counting was began it was clear by initial trends that the YSRCP was heading towards a major victory in local body polls. The people showed their confidence in Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and his welfare schemes.

In the statements of State Election Commissioner (SEC) in print and electronic media expressed satisfaction in conducting the polls in all four phases in smooth and peaceful manner.

CONCLUSION-

In some states the Panchayat Samitis have been given the power to approve the Panchayat budget, distribute certain funds to it. However, the state governments has the power of control over Gram Panchayats. In reality, the Gram Panchayats in almost all the states have not been successfully in performing these functions, their performance to this date has been unsatisfactory. Now rural women are getting empowered and this predicts well for the health of the Gram Panchayats.

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