

Women Empowerment through Panchayat Raj Institutions in Ranga Reddy District of Telangana State

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“It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing”-Swami Vivekananda

“I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved”-B.R.Ambedkar

ABSTRACT:

The Constitution (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act, 1993 has been considered as a Magna Carta in the history of Panchayati Raj system in India. It paved the way for the new pattern of leadership at the grass roots level. The future of PR system depends upon the quality of its elected representatives. The status of PR leaders can be utilized to find out their position in the hierarchy of rural society. The Statutory reservation of seats for woman in Panchayati Raj bodies has provided an opportunity for their formal involvement in the development and political processes at the grass root level thereby increasing the political participation of women and further enabling them to influence the decision making process in the local governments . So, this kind of political participation is not that thing for which all these years over decade's women had been struggling. Even now it is visible that women are not free from the chains of patriarchy. Therefore, this study is an effort to show how even after decades of the implementation of the panchayat raj act and its provision of reserving seats for women the role of women in panchayat raj institutions is perceived and what are the factors which were obstructing their participation. In order to understand what women are perceived as, it important to understand about what constitutes “women”. This paper focus on Women empowerment through panchayati Raj institutions in Ranga Reddy district of Telangana.

Keywords: Magnacarta, Women Empowerment, Pnchayati Raj Institutions, Local Governments.

Introduction:

The progress of India is possible only when the people living in the villages become politically conscious. This progress is bound up with the progress in Indian villages. If the progress of the Indian villages is taken forward, then there will not be obstacles for India to be a strong nation. Panchayat raj institution is one of those means through which India can go ahead by making the villages politically conscious which is further connected to the progress of Indian villages. Gandhi strongly believed that these village panchayats should play an integral part in the Indian government, ideologically, organisationally and functionally the panchayat raj system constitutes

the most significant socio-economic and politico-administrative phenomena. The panchayat raj institution is considered as an excellent epitome of decentralization at the grass-root levels for development. Though they paved a way for the women to participate actively in all the spheres like education, employment, and politics long back, the essence of their struggle seemed reality only due to the formulation of panchayats and allotting women 33.3% reservation. There is no doubt that the panchayats were successful in the diffusing the empowerment of the women to the grass root level but, the question to be answered is that how effective is this participation, are the women candidates facing any problems in breaking the barricades set by the culture, religion and society which are limiting their active participation in decision making, is this kind of participation a boon to the aspiring women candidates or is just an another version of the discrimination.

After attaining independence, various measures were initiated and are still in operation for improving the socio-economic status and empowerment of women in India. The Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the constitution has the special bearing on the status and empowerment of women. The constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities of socio-economic development and betterment of living through providing freedom of speech, personal liberty to participate in all kinds of welfare, social political and economic activities to all Indian citizens so as to establish an egalitarian and prosperous society. The political equality through the institution of adult franchise, equality in matters relating employment and appointment with any public office, and to prohibit discrimination practices on account of religion, sex, dissent and place of birth for providing certain opportunities are some of the additional constitutional provisions and measures for providing equal chances of bringing improvements in the socio-economic status of both men and women.

Review of Literature:

Sivanna N and Gayathridevi K.G., (2012) in their paper examine the situation of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) at various levels - political, social, economic and personal. More particularly, it aims to understand the ways in which the EWRs use their agency to address and negotiate issues like feminisation of invisibility, proxy governance and politics of exclusion. The paper also critically looks at the participation and performance of women and thereby attempts to understand the process of their attaining confidence in undertaking responsibilities in the public sphere. The paper, while documenting the women's participation in Panchayats, discusses such criticisms levelled against these women. Examples are the beliefs and prejudices that there is proxy rule in the panchayats by these women; it is their husbands or other male relatives who exercise power and responsibility on their behalf. The findings of the study reveal that there is dearth in literature as to and inadequate understanding of, the ways by which women have succeeded in combining their multiple roles in performing their duties in the panchayats. The study on which this paper is based, significantly demonstrates that at best, these women have been inevitably travelling between genuine participation and proxy participation. It was observed that women's contribution, true to their rights, has to come from their knowledge and further empowerment and not by mere affirmative action in their favour alone. Only this inner

transformation and learning can make them contribute better towards democratic decision-making and participation and also lead to substantive difference from what they are today.

Nandal Vikas (2013) conducted a study on the sample of 50 women respondents from village Anwali District Sonipat, Haryana, India. Stratified sampling technique was adopted for selecting the sample from different wards of the village. Interview Schedule was used to collect primary data from the respondents. Analysis revealed that the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women was not satisfactory. Participation level of women in Gram Panchayats only limited, only to remain as voter. As per the study some of the women respondents even do not know the functioning of Gram Panchayat. In Gram Panchayat election their husband and family decided that to whom that have to give vote, women do not have their own choice.

Ashok Kumar H., and H. M. Mohan Kumari (2014) in their paper presents the structure and functions of Panchayat raj Institutions. It also highlights the social composition of elected members and their participation in the decision making process in PRIs. According to authors the inhibiting factors for effective women participation in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) are many and diverse. Such factors will help us to suggest practical ways to overcome some of the limitations in evoking women's participation. It is not only important to pass laws and Acts of political issues; it is also equally important to find out in which such laws and Acts can be effectively implemented.

Pramod Kumar Ray (2015) in his paper focuses on the Odisha scenario of women empowerment in Panchayat raj and unfolds the insight story, the continuance of gender discrimination in the local bodies of the state. The author concludes that the provision of reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institution has brought great changes in the status of rural women, which include empowerment, self-confidence, political awareness and affirmation of identity. Mere affirmative action by means of legislation will not solve the problem; a barrier free enabling environment is the need of the hour.

Statement of the Problem

Keeping in view of the socio-economic backwardness of women the Parliament of India enacted 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992. The noble idea behind this enactment is to politically empower the rural women at grass-root level. As per the new Constitutional Amendment Act, the Telangana State Legislative Assembly passed Telangana State Panchayat Raj Act in 2018. The Act reserved one-half of the number of wards reserved for Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes and one-half of the unreserved wards for Women, in each Gram Panchayat. The reservation of wards for Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes and Women shall be by rotation as far as practicable, commencing from the first ordinary election held under this Act. But in practice women representatives are not free in discharging their constitutional duties. They became 'Dummies' in the hands of their male family members or village leaders or faction leaders. Large number of elected members of the local bodies especially women are not actively participating in the meetings of the local bodies. So, the present study is a humble attempt to disclose various pros and cons in the functioning of women representatives at grass-root level in RangaReddy District of Telangana State.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To understand the role of women in politics in general and in Panchayat Raj Institutions in particular.
2. To assess the impact of Panchayat Raj Institutions membership on the socio-economic empowerment of women.
3. To identify the factors that hinders the process of Women's political empowerment at grass-roots level.
4. To understand the perception of rural women on women's empowerment.

Methodology:

The present research paper is descriptive in nature and based on both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The researcher has used a questionnaire to seek all the needed information regarding the women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rangareddy district. The collected data has been tabulated and analyzed to get the better results of the study. The pace the study, data from various articles and reference books has also been taken.

Sample Size

The study is based on the random and convenient sampling technique. The researcher has selected 100 women representatives from different areas of Ranga Reddy district who represent or ever represented in Panchayati Raj institutions i.e. in Zila Parishad, Mandal parishads and Village Panchayats.

A Profile of the Study Area:

Ranga Reddy district is a district in the Indian State of Telangana. The district headquarter is located at Lakdikapool, Hyderabad. The district was named after the former the former deputy chief minister of the United Andhra Pradesh, K.V.Ranga Reddy. The district shares boundaries with Nalgonda, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri, Hyderabad, Medchal Malkajgiri, Nagarkurnool, Mahabubnagar, Sangareddy and Vikarabad districts. The district will have 5 Revenue divisions namely Chevella, Ibrahimpatnam, Rajendranagar, Kandukur and Shadnagar. They are sub-divided into 27 mandals. The district will have 415 Gram Panchayats and 20 Mandal Praja Parishads, one Zilla Praja Parishad and 7 Municipalities. According to the 2011 population census, Rangareddy districts has a population of 2,446,265, of which 1,254,1184 were males and 1,19,081 were females. The Sex Ratio was 950 per 1000 male population. The rural population in the district was 1,026,113 (41.95%) while the urban population was 1420152 (58.05%). The literacy rate was calculated to be 71.95%, higher than the state literacy rate of 66.54%

Socio-Economic Background of the Women Representatives: Women's empowerment is keenly associated with socio-economic factors such as age, caste, education, occupation, social status etc. It is pointed out that the present day village panchayats consist of more youthful members. In field study have pointed out that due to the 73rd Amendment Act, a large number of women have been elected to local bodies and their participation has increased. Some of the key factors affecting women's participation in Panchayati Raj institution in Ranga Reddy district are as:

Education: It plays a vital role in shaping the pattern of women's participation in politics. It also opens the door in life which is essentially social in character. In case of Ranga Reddy the entire women representatives are educated and no longer dependent on family members.

Table- 1 Education of Women Representatives

| S.No | Educational Status | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Primary | 08 | 0.8% |
| 2 | Middle | 20 | 20% |
| 3 | SSC | 25 | 25% |
| 4 | Graduate | 42 | 42% |
| 5 | Post Graduate & Above | 05 | 0.5% |
| | Total | 100 | 100% |

The data given in the above table shows that, all the women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions are educated and a significant number of women representatives (47%) are graduate and Post Graduate. This indicates a positive relationship between women's participation and education in Ranga Reddy district.

Caste: It is one of the dominant factors of rural politics. Today in spite of new contents of political democracy in India, it still remains a central element of politics at the grassroots level as well as upper levels.

Table- 2 Caste of Women Representatives

| S.No | Cste | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | General | 08 | 0.8% |
| 2 | Scheduled Caste | 20 | 20% |
| 3 | Scheduled Tribe | 25 | 25% |
| 4 | Backward Class | 42 | 42% |
| 5 | Other Backward Class | 05 | 0.5% |
| | Total | 100 | 100% |

The above data indicates that traditional leadership pattern has changed and women's from weaker sections have ensured their participation in local politics. There are only 30 percent women representatives from upper section and remaining (70%) are from Sc's, BC's and OBC's. To conclude, woman from all sections of the society are participating in local politics in Ranga Reddy district.

Occupation: Today it is one of the dominant factors affecting the woman's participation in rural India. Field study has pointed out that rural leadership emerges from families with well reputed occupations.

Table 3- Occupation of Women Representatives

| S. No. | Occupation | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Agriculture | 50 | 50% |
| 2 | Business | 02 | 0.2% |
| 3 | Service | 20 | 20% |
| 4 | Laborer and Artisans | 28 | 28% |
| | Total | 100 | 100% |

The table 3 shows that most of women representatives (50%) belong to agriculturist families and 28 percent are from laborer class. Only 22 percent are from business and services doing families. Thus, agriculture as the main occupation is playing a key role to determine the participation of women in rural politics.

Family Income: Actually, economic status is a powerful determinant of rural leadership. Therefore, most of the scholars have pointed out a positive relationship between family income and political participation.

Table 4- Family Income of Women Representatives

| S.No. | Range of Family Income (Monthly) | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Below Rs. 10,000 | 40 | 40% |
| 2 | Up to Rs. 20,000 | 30 | 30% |
| 3 | Up to Rs. 30,000 | 15 | 15% |
| 4 | Above Rs. 30,000 | 15 | 15% |
| | Total | 100 | 100% |

The data given in table 4 shows that a large number of women representative (40%) belong to the lower family income strata and 30 percent from middle income group. The same number (30%) is from the high middle or higher family income group. It indicates that a large number of women representatives still belong to the lower and middle family income groups in Ranga Reddy.

Social Status: Most of the studies done in the field of rural politics have indicated that there is a positive relationship between social status and political participation in rural areas.

Table 5- Social Status of Women Representatives

| S. No. | Ranking | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|---------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | High | 20 | 20% |
| 2 | Middle | 60 | 60% |
| 3 | Lower | 20 | 20% |
| | Total | 100 | 100% |

The data given in table -5 shows that 80 percent women representative belong to lower and middle social state. Therefore, high social status is no longer helpful in the emergence of women leadership in Rangareddy district. It may be possible due to reservation of seats for women at all levels of Panchayati Raj institutions. The women's participation from all sections of the society has been ensured through the policy of reservation of seats for women from Sc's/ST's category.

Party Affiliation: It plays an important role in the process of political participation. In Field study has pointed out that the political parties have an important role as catalysts in the representative aspect of the local government. Today all political parties are keenly eager to attract the rural voters and they have the main focus on women voters. Most of the political analysts consider it as a positive step to strengthen the level of women participation in local politics which would ensure the realization of women empowerment.

Table 6- Party Affiliation of Women Representatives

| S.No. | Party | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | TRS | 70 | 70% |
| 2 | BJP | 06 | 0.6% |
| 3 | Congress | 20 | 20% |
| 5 | Others | 04 | 0.4% |
| | Total | 100 | 100% |

The above table shows that 96percent of women representative are affiliated to political parties. Therefore, party affiliation is emerging as a powerful determinant of rural politics and a key factor of women empowerment through their active participation in rural politics in Ranga Reddy.

Need of Training for Women Representatives: The fact is that lack of economic, social and political empowerment of women impedes growth and poverty reduction. Today education is one of the most valuable means of achieving gender equality and sustaining process of empowerment. Moreover, the reservations of seats for woman in Panchayati Raj institutions have paved a way to women's empowerment. But still we need to enhance the participation level of women and capacity building in the changing socio-economic and political scenario of Indian politics. Therefore, here it is an urgent need of training for women representatives at the local levels for capacity building. Today women in rural areas suffer from lack of mobility and interaction. Therefore, Panchayats must be seen as a nursery of leadership for woman. That is why; the women from all communities need very special training for empowerment and capacity building.

Thus, if reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions are to lead their empowerment in real terms, socio-economic and political conditions which facilitate and encourage their participation need to be created. Now it is suggested that a due emphasis on consensus in decision-making should be adopted laid down and the important role of women representatives in the whole process should be acknowledged by society. They

should be in need based training programs for women in local bodies. Education can play a vital role in their capacity building and bring a drastic change in their socio-economic and political life.

Suggestions

There are few suggestions for the better involvement of women in Panchayati Raj for the betterment of herself as well as society.

- ❖ Women should be given education. Education will broaden their outlook and make them aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities in the society.
- ❖ An important requirement for bringing about empowerment of rural women is to bring about an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and bearing children needs to be replaced by a feeling of equal partnership between women and men.
- ❖ Women should independently join politics so that they can have a voice in the nation building and can help the cause women in general.
- ❖ There should be increased emphasis on ensuring the participation of women in the meetings of Panchayats at all the levels. This is needed to promote and enhance their leadership qualities and self-confidence. It will help them to perform better in the Panchayats to ensure their participation in the meetings. Attendance of all women must be made compulsory from Gram Panchayat to Zilla Parishad.
- ❖ The Government should provide financial support and infrastructure to women's organizations and NGOs to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives and arranging training programmes for improvement of political, social and economic knowledge.
- ❖ Proper utilization of different government policy like National Literacy Mission and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for educating the rural men and women regarding the significance of Panchayati Raj and the empowerment of women. There should be chapters on Panchayati Raj and Women Empowerment in all the classes at the school level and compulsory questions are set on these in the examination.
- ❖ The media, both print as well as electronic can play a vital role in restructuring the rural society. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.

Conclusion:

PRIs can be the first step for political empowerment of women as the confidence and understanding of polity can allow them to participate in elections to state legislatures and Parliament paving the way from 'Panchayat to Parliament'. It is the only beginning of a journey towards empowerment. The journey of women leadership in local governance is not so long. Women are still in the learning phase. It is true that only women can effectively voice their pent-up feelings, requirement and perspective in development processes. Thus preparation of women is important to voice needs and ideas of this fraction of society in development. Women in India have made much progress in the past century, they are occupying the highest offices and position. At least we are ahead of America in that respect where to date there has been no women president. But there still a need for a proper solution to the many problems. The reservations at the local level and Women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions are not enough for the Women Empowerment. We have a long way to go, but we will get there someday. Swami Vivekananda had said" That nation which doesn't respect women will never

become great now and nor will ever in future and in pursuit of making India a great nation, let us work towards giving women their much-deserved status.

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