



# Role of Tribal Women in Local Bodies—A Study of Telangana State

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**Abstract:** The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have long been recognized as vital tools for promoting good governance, and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment was introduced with the aim of enhancing governance and creating political opportunities for marginalized sections of society, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women. A significant aspect of this initiative is the adoption of policies aimed at expanding the political participation of women and tribal women in PRIs. Under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, a provision was made for 33% reservation for women at all levels of PRIs across rural India. To ensure effective leadership by women representatives within these organizations, of 33% of the positions as per panchayat raj act but fifty percentagae seats were reserved for women in Telangana state for women representatives. This move is crucial for the socio-economic progress of communities and for integrating women into the mainstream of national development. Empowering rural women is particularly significant for the development of Telangana. The empowerment and autonomy of women, along with the advancement of their social, economic, and political status, are essential for achieving ideal governance, administration, and sustainable development across all aspects of life. It is evident that power dynamics of hinder women from leading fulfilling lives, operating at various levels of society, from personal to public spheres. Therefore, initiatives aimed at empowering women and ensuring their active participation in governance are crucial steps towards achieving inclusive and equitable development.

Keywords: 73rd Constitutional Amendment, Scheduled Tribes, political opportunities, reservation, leadership

## INTRODUCTION:

Despite comprising more than half of the population in any country, women's contribution to politics is often minimal compared to men. The political status of women refers to the level of equality and opportunities enjoyed by women in sharing power and the importance society gives to their role in the political system. Equality and active political participation go hand in hand. Supporting women in the political arena is crucial for the advancement of women. Their political involvement entails not only exercising the right to vote but also power-sharing, co-independent decision-making, and co-policy making at all levels of government.

The equal status of women in every sphere is intricately linked to a nation's progress and development. Women's political participation goes beyond their involvement in the electoral and administrative processes. It involves activities that empower them not only to make decisions but also to influence the views and behaviors of those who have the capacity for independent decision-making. Participation in grassroots organizations can provide women with experience in democracy and empowerment, laying the foundation for democratic life in society as a whole. Through participation at the local level, they can gain knowledge and awareness of their own social, economic, and political circumstances and learn how to address them. The discussion above highlights several significant factors

of women's participation, including: Involvement in Panchayat activities through attending Panchayat meetings and standing committee meetings, and women participation in elections and doing service beneficiaries for various development activities in their respective areas.

Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide legitimate power in a democratic government. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice but also a fundamental requirement for women's advancement. Without the active participation of women at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development, and peace cannot be achieved. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional Amendment Acts has brought drastic change in local body elections, and it has provided 33% reservation seats for women. Therefore this act has been given a boon to the women in politics.

## PROFILE OF TELANGANA

Telangana State reflects its deep-rooted reliance on Panchayats, which have historically served as the backbone of Indian villages. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation, envisioned each village as a Republic or Panchayat with significant powers, emphasizing that independence must begin at the grassroots level. This vision was realized through the establishment of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system, ensuring people's participation in rural development. The constitutional amendments of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments have had a profound impact on nearly 600 million Indian citizens across 500,000 villages. Notably, the representation of women in various levels of political activity has increased significantly, from 4-5% to 25-40%.

Geographically, Telangana State spans an area of 1,14,840 square kilometers, bordered by Andhra Pradesh to the south and east, Maharashtra to the north and northwest, Karnataka to the west, and Chhattisgarh to the northeast. It comprises ten districts, including Hyderabad, Khammam, Nalgonda, Warangal, Karimnagar, Medak, Nizamabad, Adilabad, Mahabubnagar, and Ranga Reddy, with the current count being 33 districts. In Telangana state there are 10,909 revenue villages and Gram Panchayatis 12,769, Municipalities were 129, and Municipal Corporations 13 in these seats fifty percent were reserved for women folk, Member of Parliament 17, Member Legislative Assembly 119 and Member of Legislative Council are 40 in Telangana State respectively.

The scheduled tribes, also known as original inhabitants or Adivasis, are recognized as one of the most economically deprived and marginalized groups within the population. They predominantly inhabit remote and isolated regions, engaging in primitive occupations, practicing animism, and maintaining nomadic habits. In Telangana, they constitute approximately 9.34% of the total population, totaling around 31.77 lakhs, with 89.05% residing in rural areas and 10.05% in urban areas. Their literacy rate stands at 49.51%, compared to the state literacy rate of 66.46%.

There are 32 tribal groups in the state, including four Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) such as the Kondareddies, Chenchus, Kolams, and Thoties, residing in districts like Khammam, Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda, Ranga Reddy, and Adilabad. Among these tribes, the dominant ones include the Lambadas, with a population of 20,46,117, followed by Koyas (4,86,391), Gonds (2,97,846), and Yerukalas (1,44,128).

## TRIBAL WOMEN IN LOCAL BODIES:

In Telangana, tribal women play a significant role in local bodies, particularly in the Panchayati Raj institutions. The Panchayati Raj system in India has reserved seats for women, including those from Scheduled Tribes (STs) as per proportionate to their population seats were reserved, to ensure their participation in grassroots governance. Tribal women's representation in local bodies helps in addressing issues specific to their communities, such as land rights, access to education, healthcare, and socio-

economic development. Their inclusion also promotes gender equality and empowers marginalized groups. Through their participation, tribal women bring unique perspectives and insights into policy-making and development planning, ensuring that initiatives are inclusive and responsive to the needs of tribal communities. In scheduled area only tribal's will be represent in panchayat positions as per PESA resolutions. Women folk will be given reservations as per their population especially for scheduled tribe women.

The Telangana government, like many other states in India, has various schemes and programs aimed at empowering tribal women and enhancing their participation in local governance structures. These initiatives often focus on capacity building, leadership training, and providing support for their active involvement in decision-making processes.

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## CONCEPT OF LOCAL BODIES

The concept of local bodies refers to decentralized units of government that operate at the local or grassroots level within a country's administrative framework. These bodies are responsible for governing specific geographic areas, such as villages, towns, or districts, and they play a crucial role in delivering public services, managing local resources, and addressing the needs of local communities.

Local bodies exist in various forms across different countries, and their structures, functions, and names may vary depending on the country's political system, legal frame work, and historical context. Common examples of local bodies include municipalities, city councils, county councils, rural councils, and village councils.

The primary purpose of local bodies is to ensure effective governance and administration at the local level by bringing decision-making closer to the people. They serve as platforms for Citizen participation and engagement in local affairs, allowing residents to voice their opinions, contribute to policymaking, and hold local authorities accountable. Local bodies typically have arranged of responsibilities, which may include:

**Providing basic services:** The local bodies are often responsible for delivering essential services such as water supply, sanitation, waste management, roads, street lighting, and public transportation etc, at successful machinery at gross root level stage.

**Urban and rural development:** Local bodies play a key role in promoting economic development, infrastructure development, and environmental sustainability in their respective areas. They may undertake initiatives to improve housing, promote small-scale industries, and develop public spaces.

**Social welfare:** Local bodies may implement social welfare programs and initiatives aimed at addressing poverty, unemployment, healthcare, education, and other social issues within their communities.

**Local governance:** Local bodies are responsible for making and implementing local laws, regulations, and policies that govern various aspects of community life. They also manage local finances, taxation,

and budgeting processes as per their Gram Sabha resolutions.

**Representation and democracy:** Local bodies provide a platform for democratic participation, allowing residents to elect their representatives and participate in decision-making processes through local elections, public consultations, and community meetings the panchayat raj institutions has been facilitating the opportunity for the women.

## **ROLE OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN LOCAL BODIES IN TELANGANA**

Tribal women in Telangana play crucial roles in local bodies, such as Gram Panchayats, Mandal Parishads, and Zilla Parishads, through reserved seats and elected positions. Their involvement brings unique perspectives and insights into governance, particularly in addressing the needs and concerns of tribal communities. For example Panchayat raj Institutions provide 1,03,468 representations out of which 52,096 were elected women representations, ZPTCs are 197, MPTCs were 6,473 and 12,679 were Sarpanch positions, in Khammam district 14 Mandal parishads, 589 Sarpanch and 5338 ward members.

**Representation:** Tribal women represent their communities in local bodies, ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making processes. This representation is vital for advocating for

Policies and initiatives that address the specific challenges faced by tribal populations, such as land rights, access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

**Policy Advocacy:** Tribal women advocate for policies and programs that promote the socio-economic development of tribal areas. They work towards ensuring equitable distribution of resources and implementation of welfare schemes that benefit tribal communities.

**Community Development:** Tribal women actively participate in planning and implementing development projects at the grassroots level. They contribute to initiatives related to livelihood enhancement, natural resource management, sanitation, and women's empowerment.

**Empowerment:** Through their involvement in local bodies, tribal women gain leadership skills, confidence, and decision-making abilities. This empowerment extends beyond the realm of governance and influences their participation in various social, economic, and political spheres.

**Bridge Building:** Tribal women often serve as bridges between the government and their communities, facilitating communication, collaboration, and trust-building. They play a crucial role in ensuring that government schemes and services reach the grassroots level effectively.

**Cultural Preservation:** Tribal women in local bodies work towards preserving and promoting indigenous culture, traditions, and practices. They advocate for the recognition of tribal heritage and the protection of tribal rights.

## **CONCLUSION:**

It's a common argument that women's participation in Panchayati Raj activities is often influenced by male family members, and they may not act independently. However, recent observations suggest a positive shift; with more women attending meetings and feeling encouraged to do so. A significant majority of male respondents acknowledge that women members now make prior preparations for attending meetings, indicating an increase in their active involvement. The great changes has been found in panchayat raj institutions in Telangana state where fifty percent of seats were reserved for the women folk. Contrary to earlier beliefs, male members of Panchayats generally do not endorse the notion of poor participation by women members. Factors such as family responsibilities, social traditions, domestic duties, lack of education, and limited understanding of Panchayat processes and functions are considered significant barriers to women's participation in meetings. Tribal women, in particular, face additional challenges as they are engaged in household chores, agricultural work, and forest-related activities for long hours, resulting in low overall productivity. Their demanding schedules persist even during

pregnancy, childbirth, and postnatal stages, leading to negative health outcomes such as a high morbidity rate and low child survival rate. Moreover, they often encounter taboos, superstitions, and remain excluded from the benefits of existing development and welfare programs. Addressing these barriers is crucial for promoting meaningful and independent participation of women in Panchayati Raj activities and ensuring their holistic well-being.

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