



PARTICIPATION AND AWARENESS OF ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN PRIs

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Abstract

The present research paper is aimed to deal the awareness and participation level of elected women representatives in the PRIs in East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh. About 144 elected women representatives of various cadres are selected for the study and their views is presented in tabular manner. It is found that the woman representation is basically depends on reservations. Most women file their candidature for elections to PRIs not out of their own will, but due to the pressure of husbands, sons or other male member of the family or the village or due to the pressure of some political party; but those who contested as independents have had the credit of working for the people of their locality. The women elected representatives are aware of the objectives of the PRIs. Majority are involving in the Poverty Alleviation Programmes. It is suggested that the government should provide special grants and provisions as an encouragement to them towards under take welfare programmes effectively and to participate in local government activities.

Keywords: Directive Principles, Fundamental Rights, Women Status, grass root organizations, Panchayat Raj Institutions, poverty alleviation

By and large the fast track route has entailed the adoption of gender quotas. Quotas have had a significant and positive impact on the number of women represented in national legislatures around the world (Drude Dahlerup, 2003). Besides, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. However, the demand for greater representation of women in political institutions in India was not taken up in a systematic way until the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) which published its report in 1976. The CSWI report suggested women representation in political institutions especially at the grass-roots level is needed. The National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988 also suggested about 30 per cent quota for women is introduced at all levels of elective bodies. The consensus around this demand resulted in the adoption of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution in 1993 which is the landmarks in the history of the political participation of women. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 gives formal constitutional recognition to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and reserves 33 per cent of seats for women in PRIs. This helped to the dramatic rise in the number of women in the PRIs by 2007 and brings a sea change in the position of women as they make them participate in the political and social institutions exercising their power of articulation and voting. The number of women contestants in Parliamentary elections has not increased significantly over the years. Political parties are still reluctant to field women candidates at national level. In the early days of the Indian republic, the number of women representatives was a mere 22, which was a lowly 4.4% of the total seats in the Lok Sabha. The sixth Lok Sabha in the year 1977 saw an all time low of just 19

women representatives. The twelfth Lok Sabha had 44 women i.e. 8.8% of the total. From the records available over the years, since Independence, it is seen that the strength of women in the political field as reflected in State legislatures remained at an average of 3 % to 5% of those elected. At the level of Parliament, the position of women members has varied between 5 to 7% till recently. The number of women in Lower House in the election year 2004 is 8.1 percent (44 of 543). The Number of Women in Upper House, both elected and appointed, in the election year 2006 is 10.7 percent (26 of 242). There is no constitutional quota for the Union Parliament in India. There is political party quota for electoral candidates. For example, the Indian National Congress (INC) has a 15% quota for women candidates. In 1996, the 81st Amendment proposed to reserve one-third of the seats in the House of the People and the State Assembly for women under a constituency-rotation system. The women's reservation bill was introduced by parliament by the United Front Government in 1996 after the major political parties supported it in their election manifestos. However, the bill has not been passed by parliament. Another proposal from 2003 suggested converting 181 of the lower house seats into double-member constituencies to elect one man and one woman from each constituency. This proposal has not been passed. However, there is Constitutional or Legislative Quota, at the Sub-National Level, that is, 33% of seats in all local bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities) are reserved for women according to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. This includes the provision that 33% of the seats reserved for the scheduled classes etc shall be women. There are no legal sanctions for non-compliance.

Significance

There is an immense factual criticism on women involvement in politics and decision making due to lack



of self interest, so far monopolized by the men folk, they are sedentary/ unwilling to participation in politics. It is impossible to describe rural women of Indian villages in a single frame because of their heterogeneous character. A large part of rural women lead a sedentary life at the grassroots level. They belong to landless, agricultural labour, marginal farmer, artisan and service caste households (Narayan Banerjee, 1999). Majority of them are socially, economically and politically backward communities and belong to artisan and service castes like potters, blacksmiths, basket makers, oil crushers, washer men, barbers, scavengers etc. Their social, political, literacy and quality levels are low when compared to their male counterparts. These women do not possess skills required for participation in socio-economic and political activity because of their social taboos and customs. In such conditions they naturally do not find time for participation with their differing levels of perception and awareness in grassroots democracy. It is rightly point out that (Friedman 1992), if an alternative development is to advocate the social empowerment of the poor, it must also advocate their political empowerment (This includes work with women in government at national and local level, party politics as well as supporting women's involvement in NGOs and women's movement). Thus, the present study is focused on the participation, perception and awareness of elected women representatives in PRIs.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to deal the political participation, organizational perception and awareness of elected women representatives under the study in the PRIs in the study area.

Research Design: The study is taken up in the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. Of the 57 mandals in the district, 4 each in the 4 revenue divisions of Kakinada, Peddapuram, Rajahmundry and Amalapuram, total of 16 mandals was randomly selected (table 1). In each revenue division, 2 women ZPTC members and 2 women MPP members represented mandals were selected. Out of these 4 mandals, from each mandal 8 women MPTC members, 8 women surpanches and 16 women ward members have been selected on the basis of the listing method under each category from the lists of members available with the records of the office of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Zilla Parishad, East Godavari District, Kakinada. The Panchayat mandals selected for the study and the number of members from each mandal in the 4 revenue divisions under the study has been shown in table 1.

Table 1 - Selection of Sample Respondents (N=144)

S. No.	Revenue division	Mandal	Political status/ category *					Total
			(I)	(II)	(III)	(IV)	(V)	
1	Kakinada	Samalkot	-	1	2	2	4	9
		Pedapudi	-	1	2	2	4	9
		Tallarevu	1	-	2	2	4	9
		Karapa	1	-	2	2	4	9
2	Peddapuram	Peddapuram	1	-	2	2	4	9
		Jaggampeta	1	-	2	2	4	9
		Yeleswaram	-	1	2	2	4	9
		Gandepalli	-	1	2	2	4	9
3	Rajahmundry	Anaparthi	-	1	2	2	4	9
		Kapileswara puram	1	-	2	2	4	9
		Kadiyam	-	1	2	2	4	9
		Alamuru	1	-	2	2	4	9
4	Amalapuram	Ambajipeta	1	-	2	2	4	9
		Allavaram	1	-	2	2	4	9
		Sakhinetipalli	-	1	2	2	4	9
		I. Polavaram	-	1	2	2	4	9
		Total	8	8	32	32	64	144

*Note: (I). ZPTC; (II). M P P; (III) M P T C; (IV) Sarpanchs; (V) Ward Members

The study covers the Panchayat representatives elected for 2001 elections. The study makes use of both primary and secondary data Care has been taken while selecting the elected representatives. For the purpose of collecting primary data, the research tools used included a pre-structured interview schedule meant for eliciting information from the sample respondents of women participants of the study, the technique of observation; and Personal discussion. Data analyzed in percentage method.

Summary results of the study

Respondents' Choice for Contest in PRIs: The most crucial obstacle in the way of real political empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj occurs at the stage of the filing of the nomination for candidature itself to contest for elections. As per the observations of the study, most women file their candidature for elections to PRIs not out of their own will, but due to the pressure of husbands, sons or other male member of the family or the village or due to the pressure of some political party

Table 2 - Respondents' Choice for Contest in PRIs

Sl. No.	Choice for Contest	No. of Respondents					Total
		Ward Members	Sarpanch	MPTCs	MPPs	ZPTCs	
1	Personal Interest	14 (21.87)	6 (18.75)	9 (28.12)	2 (25.00)	1 (12.50)	32 (22.22)
2	Persuasion by Family members	18 (28.13)	13 (40.63)	10 (31.25)	4 (50.00)	4 (50.00)	49 (34.03)
3	Pressure from Village adults	19 (29.69)	5 (15.62)	4 (12.50)			28 (19.44)
4	Pressure from the Political Party	13 (20.31)	8 (25.00)	9 (28.12)	2 (25.00)	3 (37.50)	35 (24.31)
	Total	64 (100.0)	32 (100.0)	32 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	144 (100.0)



Table 1 indicates that only 22.22 percent of the elected women representatives contested for political recruitment in the PRIs with personal interest. The remaining sample women under the study contested either due to persuasion by family members or the pressure from village adults, and pressure from the political party. Of these, those who sought recruitment through persuasion by family members constitute 34.03 percent of the sample. The remaining 19.44 percent of the women elected representatives contested due to pressure from the village adults and 24.31 percent due to pressure from the political party. Those who are persuaded by others act as “proxies” or rubber stamps.

Party affiliation of the representatives: A Political Party is probably the most potent instrument in facilitating political participation. Its role is partly expressive and partly instrumental. The party is a powerful reference group in its own right for the party candidates and influences the electorate during the elections to vote for the party candidate. It has been observed that people who affiliate with a party get more benefits than those who do not have affiliation with a political party. More often, the impact of political party and its policies are visible on the party candidates. Hence women elected representatives affiliation with the political parties, and the nature of affiliation with the political party has been studied.

Table 3 - Respondents' Party Affiliation

Sl. No.	Party affiliation	No. of Respondents					Total
		Ward Members	Sarpanch	MPTCs	MPPs	ZPTCs	
1	I.N.C.	19 (29.69)	10 (31.25)	8 (25.00)	3 (37.50)	2 (25.00)	42 (29.17)
2	T. D.P.	24 (37.50)	13 (40.62)	14 (43.75)	5 (62.50)	6 (75.00)	62 (43.06)
3	B.J.P.	2 (3.13)	-	1 (3.13)	-	-	3 (2.08)
4	C.P.I.	3 (4.68)	1 (3.13)	2 (6.25)	-	-	6 (4.17)
5	C.P.M.	-	-	1 (3.12)	-	-	1 (0.69)
6	Others	16 (25.00)	8 (25.00)	6 (18.75)	-	-	30 (20.83)
	Total	64 (100.0)	32 (100.0)	32 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	144 (100.0)

Table 3 indicates the respondents' affiliation with the political party. Among the women elected representatives under the study, 43.06 per cent of the sample is affiliated with the TDP; 29.17 per cent with the INC, 4.17 per cent with the CPI, and 0.69 percent with the CPM. The persons affiliated with the Communist parties put together constitute less than 5 per cent. Curiously, 20.83 percent of the sample represents the Independents and the remaining 2.08 per cent of the women representatives are affiliated to BJP. It is learnt from the informants that the women representatives who did not get the party tickets of either the then ruling TDP or the INC contested as Independents. Those who contested as

independents have had the credit of working for the people of their locality. Hence, there is the presence of more number of Independents in the local elections from the women category. This shows that the regional party in the state is predominant in the PRIs and at the State levels. The Indian National Congress constitutes the second largest group.

Awareness on PRIs' Objectives and Roles: PRIs look for achieve the objectives of democratic decentralization to accelerate socio-economic development and usher in equity and social justice by a model of self-governance. The objectives of this system are: to execute and implement schemes and programme to meet the local needs, to mobilize people, to channelise their energies towards socio-economic reconstruction and to involve them in all the activities of the communities, to reducing the size of work of the higher-level government and leaving the responsibility to the concerned people to decide their destiny as per the new dispensation. The perception of objectives of a programme would lead to increased participation of women, which is an important aspect of women's empowerment. Therefore, the study identifies the perception of women elected representatives under the study with regard to objectives of the PRIs.

Table 4 - Respondents awareness as to PRIs' objectives and roles

Sl. No.	Perception as to Objectives	No. of Respondents					Total
		Ward Members	Sarpanch	MPTCs	MPPs	ZPTCs	
1	Aware	29 (45.31)	20 (62.50)	17 (53.13)	7 (87.50)	6 (75.00)	79 (54.86)
2	Unaware	35 (54.69)	12 (37.50)	15 (46.87)	1 (12.50)	2 (25.00)	65 (45.14)
	Total.	64 (100.0)	32 (100.0)	32 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	144 (100.0)

Table 4 indicates that 54.86 percent of the women elected representatives are aware of the objectives of the PRIs and the remaining 45.14 percent are unaware of the objectives of the PRIs. Those who attended the training programmes offered by the training institutions like APARD, NIRD etc., and claimed awareness of the objectives.

Freedom in proposing Priorities: The study found that more than 52.08 percent of the respondents under the study expressed the opinion that they do not enjoy freedom in identifying/proposing priorities as this is done by the legislators or officials. However, a considerable percentage of the sample (47.92 percent) has positive perception as to freedom (Table 5). This section of sample agrees that their proposals are considered by the legislators or officials.



Table 5 - Freedom in identifying/proposing Priorities of the respondents.

Sl. No.	Category	Perception as to freedom		
		Yes	No	Total
1	Ward Members	18 (28.12)	46 (71.88)	64 (100.00)
2	Sarpanches	23 (71.88)	9 (28.12)	32 (100.00)
3	MPTCs	17 (53.13)	15 (46.87)	32 (100.00)
4	MPPs	6 (75.00)	2 (25.00)	8 (100.00)
5	ZPTCs	5 (62.50)	3 (37.50)	8 (100.00)
	Total	69 (47.92)	75 (52.08)	144 (100.00)

Activities Taken Up: Identifying issues of the locality, raising the problems in the meetings and discussing over them are some of the important activities of women elected representatives in the functioning of the Panchayats. Women have been using their elected authority to address protected water supply, quality health care, and education as critical issues. The women Mandal Parishad Presidents, and other elected women representatives have taken steps and completed many felt needs of the people such as providing drinking water supply, street lights, concrete roads, and implementing various welfare schemes for the rural poor funded by the State government. Most of the women in the study area have learnt to keep accounts and maintain records as members of DWCRA groups from the animators. The study makes it clear that women did not focus the issues concerning women.

Weightage of activities taken up by the representatives has measured with knowledge index (K I) formula mentioned below. One mark has given to each respondent regarding activity. More index value indicates higher positive results of the concerned.

$$K.I = \frac{\text{Actual score obtained}}{\text{Total score}} \times 100$$

Table 6 - index value on identification of Priorities

Priorities	Ward Members (=64)	Sarpanches (=32)	MPTCs (=32)	MPPs (=8)	ZPTCs (=8)
Drinking Water	56	29	31	6	5
Sanitation	48	29	17	3	4
Transportation	32	18	28	5	6
Self Employment	41	19	18	4	3
Health	62	28	23	7	6
Education	51	31	30	8	7
Others	9	6	5	2	2
Obtained score	299	160	152	35	33
Total score	448	224	224	56	56
Index (=KI)	66.74	71.43	67.86	62.50	58.93

It is clear from the table 6 that the Sarpanchs have more index value (71.43) followed by MPTC, Ward Members, MPPs and ZPPs. Thus, it can be said that Sarpanch cadre to the women is most effective participative aspect at grass root organizational level to take various developmental activities.

Respondents' role in Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAPs): In the implementation of various schemes and *Poverty Alleviation programmes* of central and state governments PRIs play an important role. The benefits from any of the poverty alleviation schemes can multiply if the peoples' representatives involve themselves in the planning and implementation of the schemes because they have better perception of the needs of their people and knowledge of the local resources. Women elected representatives can plan for evolving policies and programmes related to women development. They may also pay special attention to the proper provision of amenities such as toilets to village women and proper sanitation in the villages, liquor menace, and monitoring education in the village, development of cooperatives and environmental upgradation and removal of corruption.

Table 7 reveals that approximately 66 percent of the sample respondents under the study felt their involvement in the Poverty Alleviation Programmes in the study area. The reasons may be attributed to the party affiliation and loyalties.

Table 7 - Involvement in poverty alleviation programmes

Sl. No.	category	No. of Respondents		
		Yes	No	Total
1	Ward Members	38 (59.38)	26 (40.62)	64 (100.00)
2	Sarpanches	24 (75.00)	8 (25.00)	32 (100.00)
3	MPTCs	18 (56.25)	14 (43.75)	32 (100.00)
4	MPPs.	8 (100.00)	-	8 (100.00)
5	ZPTCs	7 (87.50)	1 (12.50)	8 (100.00)
	Total	95 (65.97)	49 (34.03)	144 (100.00)

Representatives views on implementation of PAPs: About 43.06 percent informants felt that the implementation of the PAPs in their locality is satisfactory. Around 19 percent each of women elected representatives felt that the implementation of programmes is good and poor. Almost 20 percent of the respondents have no idea as to the PAPs (table 8).

Table 8 - Respondents views on implementation of PAPs

Sl. No.	Category	Perception level			
		Good	Satisfactory	Poor	No Idea
1	Ward Members=64	11 (17.19)	22 (34.37)	14 (21.88)	17 (26.56)
2	Sarpanchs=32	8 (25.00)	15 (46.87)	4 (12.50)	5 (15.63)
3	MPTCs=32	5 (15.63)	17 (53.12)	6 (18.75)	4 (12.50)
4	MPPs=8	2 (25.00)	3 (37.50)	2 (25.00)	1 (12.50)
5	ZPTCs=8	1 (12.50)	5 (62.50)	1 (12.50)	1 (12.50)
	Total =144	27 (18.75)	62 (43.06)	27 (18.75)	28 (19.44)

Conclusions

It is concluded that entry of women into local government, more than the required 33.3 percent has shattered the myth that women are not interested in politics, and have no time to go to meetings or to undertake all the other work that is required in political party processes. The participation of women elected representatives in the PRIs has also highlighted the intersection between gender interests and social class, for its reservation of seats has enabled poor and marginalized women to demonstrate their deep political consciousness and interest in obtaining power. Women’s experience of PRI has transformed many of them. The elements of this transformation include empowerment, self-confidence, political awareness and affirmation of identity. Women have gained a sense of empowerment by their interaction with officials, participation in Poverty Alleviation Programmes, perceiving objectives and procedures through attending training programmes.

Women representation in local government structures does not automatically result in their informed and effective participation in the programmes implemented by the PRIs. Women elected representatives need to be politically enlightened, not only about their rights and duties but also the nature of our constitution, democratic process and values, working of democratic institutions, concept and relevance of local body administration, and various poverty alleviation programmes and policies meant for women and weaker sections. It is only through their education and awareness and not just through their mere presence that their participation can become meaningful within the PRIs.

Some women elected representatives became proactive during their second term of political leadership. Yet they feel a chance to do something for the welfare of the

people in cooperation with people and officials at the grassroots level. Women have been adjusting to the new social and political transformation in the society with their participation in the PRIs. Women irrespective of caste, economic position are taking steps on their own in a few cases and have their own priorities which are yet to be appreciated by the social and political forces in the villages.

Some of the respondents revealed that there is inadequacy of funds for the completion of some projects. The elected women representatives of the delta area villages (Amalapuram and Kakinada Revenue Divisions) revealed that funds are not available to provide and maintain protected water supply. Similarly, the elected women representatives of the upland area revealed that funds are not available to provide and maintain water resources for cultivation and drinking as well. They have also felt that shortage of funds is the cause for the insufficient supply of resources for either cultivation or drinking water in their villages. Some of the respondents also reported that the funds provided by MLAs are inadequate even to undertake a small work in their Panchayats. The study shows that women can participate in elections and can implement welfare programmes effectively with optimum utilization of local resources. The government should provide special grants and provisions to under take welfare works and encourage them to effective participation in local government activities.

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