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A study of women's political participation in a gram panchayat: With special reference to chowdoor gram panchayat, Mahabubnagar District, Telangana State

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Abstract---This research aims to examine the degree to which women participate in panchayats' operation and voting process. 100 women from Telangana's Mahabubnagar District's Chowdoor Gram Panchayat in Nawabpet Mandal participated in the research in March 2022. The study found that women's political engagement in the Panchayat election process was adequate. Still, women lack interest in politics when it comes to assembly and parliamentary elections. Women's backwardness is due mainly to a male-dominated society, culture, and a lack of education.

Keywords---Gram Panchayat, rural women, Women participation, 73rd constitutional amendment act.

Introduction

Participation in the democratic process, as well as policymaking, is referred to as Political Participation. It may be said that political engagement allows the goals and needs of citizens to be reflected in policymaking. When it comes to “political involvement,” it's usually defined as acts that will enable citizens to impact how regulations are set or develop public policy^[1].

These efforts include voting, gathering information, discussing, holding a meeting, organizing rallies and demonstrations, and interacting with politicians. Women constitute at least half of the population in every country. Women are less active in politics than men are. Many social, psychological, and physical barriers impede

women's political engagement. This applies to both local and national politics. Democracy cannot progress if half of its citizens' energies are devoted only to the kitchen. "The Indian Constitution ensures gender equality via various regulations and legislation. It was assumed that these rights would naturally translate into political advancement for women in the nation. Men and women make up about half of the state's population. However, their socioeconomic status is low, and they experience prejudice in many aspects of their existence." [2] Women have been wrongfully oppressed and subjugated for years by a patriarchal society, and they now confront new problems.

"Women's political engagement cannot be considered in isolation from the broader situation of women in society, however, despite their enormous power, women are marginalized in the political system. According to Herbert Mc. Closky [3], participation is the primary way consent is obtained or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are rendered responsible to the ruled. Political theorists such as J.S. Mill [4], Rousseau [5], and Bentham [6] have fiercely pushed for people's engagement in many aspects of political life."

As Noorjahan Bava[7] said, "direct and indirect citizen engagement in public affairs is the lifeline of a participatory democracy." "In this Gram Panchayat, members are responsible for economic planning, agricultural and resource development, education, and health monitoring, household industry monitoring, and animal husbandry, among other tasks."

Objectives of the Research:

- To determine how rural women engage in various actions, from "decision-making to exercising their right to vote in the Gram Panchayat."
- To recognize the leadership capabilities of women.
- To find out whether women are willing to participate in the Panchayati Raj system's election process.

Review of Literature

Chatterjee, M. D. (2022)[8]. Entitled his work "Gender Equity and Inclusive Participation of Women: With Special Reference to PRIs." The purpose of this paper is to study gender equity in PRJs. Gender equality defines participation, a fair playing field, and assures. "Gender equity" is a concept that refers to issues such as an equal opportunity for men and women. The preamble, basic rights, fundamental responsibilities, and directive principles of the Indian Constitution all uphold the notion of gender equality. The "73rd Amendment Act" has provided women the ability to participate in the allocation of resources in an equal, just, and equitable way. According to the "73rd Amendment Act," "equality" has been replaced by "equity." Gender equity was the driving force behind the "sustainable transition and inclusive development of modern, well-functioning society and the inclusion of everyone." The goal of the modification was to help women and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds advance.

Sharma, G., & Ariya, P. S. (2021)[9]. Entitled their study "Political Participation of Women in Panchayats: A Comparative Study of Raigang and Islampur Blocks of Uttar Dinajpur District, West Bengal, India Issues and Trends." This research is

an effort to investigate the socioeconomic situations and “experiences of the elected women representatives of Raiganj and Islampur Block Gram Panchayats and their engagement in various sectors of grassroots politics.” Academics, social workers, and policymakers in India have all taken notice of the growing importance of women's empowerment in recent years. Women's representation in PRIs has increased dramatically since the Panchayat system and local body reservations for women were implemented. Even though empowering women is not a simple process, the patriarchal society, social institutions, and the women's representatives themselves must alter their mindsets and work harder. In today's political climate, serving as a female representative might be challenging because of a lack of adequate understanding, lack of education, a heavy reliance on family, etc. A field survey was used to gather all of the data needed for the investigation.

Sultana, N. M., & Geetha, V. J. (2020)^[10].entitled their work, “Political participation and decision making of women representatives in gram Panchayat: A Micro-Level study.”This paper aims to analyze the political involvement and “decision-making capacity of women representatives in gram Panchayat.” Women's financial well-being is directly linked to their participation in Panchayat political races. For impoverished women, it is more prudent to focus on their regular labour than on governmental matters. It was hoped that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment would encourage improved administration and provide political space for marginalized groups like “Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Women.” Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been seen as a path to excellent administration.

Shuchi, S., & Phil, M. (2019)^[11].entitled their work, “Understanding the Participation of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) In Panchayati Raj Institutions.” The purpose of this article is to understand better how political quotas affect the involvement of women in local government. EWRs' engagement has been examined from the perspective of the public vs. private dichotomy. Inevitably, their engagement in the political and public arena is influenced by the power dynamics in the private sphere. Two key points have been made throughout the article; in the first place, how the employment of participatory tools for elected women representatives failed to ensure the authentic engagement of women in grassroots politics. For the second time, whether women were incorporated into the existing power structure or whether the current power relations were challenged emerged.

Singh, R., & Kaur, R. (2018)^[12].entitled their work, “Performance of women representatives in Gram Panchayats in Punjab: A case study of Mansa district.” In this paper, an effort has been made to examine the degree of engagement in the local administration of rural women in the Punjab province. Legal and influential Panchayat Raj Institutions were established after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which included provisions guaranteeing representation for the whole population. However, long-standing social taboos, unfavourable attitudes, and prevalent beliefs and practices have made it difficult for women to achieve full equality. An effort has been made to examine the degree of engagement in the local administration of rural women in the Punjab province. To ensure that local governments are inclusive of the people who live there,

significant efforts must be taken to include women at all levels of governance, especially in local authorities.

Politics and Constitutional Provisions for Women

In Telangana, women make up “less than half of the population.” Despite the presence of significant women personalities and favourable constitutional provisions, the status of women remains bleak. For generations, women have been confined to the house and subjugated by the male-dominated society, and denied “their right to fair treatment from the male-dominated society ^[13].”

The 73rd^[14] and 74th^[15] Amendment Acts to the Constitution of 1992 enhanced women's involvement in the Panchayati raj system. These revisions called for the reserve of one-third of seats in rural and urban local governments for women. Telangana's government has enhanced this reservation to 50%^[16].

Increasing women's economic and social standing has been a fundamental goal of all five-year plans that have addressed this issue. Despite all such constitutional protections and objectives, there has been no sufficient progress in their social position.

Coverage of Methodology and Samples

The current work relies heavily on empirical methodologies. Data was collected from the sample respondents using schedules. The researcher also interviewed the female responders in person. Secondary sources included census reports, government records, gazettes, district handbooks, and other published materials. Because it is difficult to investigate the political engagement of all women in the District, the researcher chose just one Grampanchayat in Mahabubnagar District: Nawabpet Mandal.

Profile of the District

Mahabubnagar is Telangana's most inhabited District; with 18432.00 sq. km. Palamoor is another name for it. The city was renamed Mahabubnagar in honour of Hyderabad's Nizam, “Mir Mahbub Ali Khan Asaf Jah VI (1869-1911 AD).” In terms of longitude and latitude, the District was located between 77° 15' and 79° 15'E and 15° 55' and 17° 20'N^[17]. Located in the north-eastern part of the state, the District has a 2011 population of 40, 53,028, accounting for 11.52 percent of the state's total population.

For the sake of convenience, the District has just one revenue division. A “Revenue Divisional Officer in the rank of Sub-Collector in the Cadre of IAS” or a Deputy Collector is in charge of a Revenue Division. For his particular division, he serves as a Sub Divisional Magistrate. A Tahsildar administrative officer helps with administration. Regarding the number of sections, the Sub Divisional Offices are identical to the Collectorate. They serve as intermediaries in the organizational structure. The Divisional Office continually monitors the performance of a few Mandals that make up the division.

Mandals are the divisions of the sub-division. The District of Mahabubnagar is divided into 15 Mandals. Tahsildar is in charge of Mandal. All the rights and duties of the former Tahsildar, including magisterial powers, have been transferred to Tahsildar. The Head of Mandal Revenue Office is referred to as Mandal Revenue Officer (M.R.O.) Tahsildar acts as a go-between for the people and the government in the areas under his control. Within his domain, he initiates welfare programs. When it comes to gathering information and conducting investigations, the TAHSILDAR is there to help the higher-ups. He gives input to the district administration, which aids decision-making at higher levels of management.

Profile of the Gram Panchayat

Chowdoor village has the location code or village code 575077, according to Census 2011 data. In the “Nawabpet Mandal of Mahabubnagar district in Telangana, India,” Chowdoor village is a small community. It is located 15 kilometres from Nawabpet (Tahsildar office) and 33 kilometres from Mahabubnagar (District headquarter). Chowdoor is also a gram Panchayat, according to the 2009 census. The hamlet has an area of 1344 hectares in total. Of the entire population of 2,620, 1,349 are male, while the female population totals 1,271. Chowdoor Village has roughly 480 homes [18].

Table-1: “Population of Chowdoor”

“Particulars	Total	Male	Female
Total Population	2,620	1,349	1,271
Literate Population	1,155	718	437
Illiterate Population	1,465	631	834”

Source: Census 2011

Assessment of the Respondents' Socioeconomic Context

Most of the women in the Panchayat elections and Panchayat issues were middle-aged, with 48 percent of the women in this group being in this age group. They are followed by the young age group, which consists of 31% (Table 2). Only 21% of the participants belonged to the over-65 demographic. The evidence presented in table 2 clearly shows that older women are less engaged in politics than younger or middle-aged women.

Table 2: Age-wise distribution of Respondents

Age group (N=100)	Number	Percentage (%)
Younger age (21-35)	31	31
Middle age (36-50)	48	48
Old age (50 and above)	21	21
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 3 shows that 60 percent of women in the SC category participated, followed by 20 percent of women in the General Category and 4 percent of women in the ST category, with 16 percent of women in the OBC category also participating. As far as their societal, ethnic, educational, and economic status is involved, OBC, General, and ST women are less involved in politics.

Table 3: "Caste wise distribution of respondents"

Cast (N=100)	Number	Percentage (%)
General	20	20
SC	60	60
ST	04	4
O.B.C.	16	16
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

As can be seen in Table 4, the majority of women (37 percent) were only up to the primary level, with the middle level (30 percent) and high level 19 percent) following closely behind, and 14% were illiterates. This demonstrates how important education is for women in this region who want to become involved in politics.

Table 4: Educational qualification of the respondents

Education qualification (N=100)	Number	Percentage%
Illiterate	14	14
Primary	37	37
Middle	30	30
High school and above	19	19
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

An Empirical Study

Gram Panchayat elections are an excellent opportunity to learn about women's political engagement. I've gathered all the data I need from a random sample of 100 people. My first question is whether they participated in the previous Panchayat election's balloting. The answer pattern is shown in table 5, clearly increasing the number of women participating in the Panchayat election.

Table 5: Panchayat elections: women's participation (N=100)

S. No.	Question	Yes(Percentage)	No(Percentage)
1.	Did you participate in the electoral process of the last Panchayat election?	93(93)	7 (7)

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Gram Panchayats have been established as grass-root democratic systems, and women's election to these bodies serves as their first political experience. However, there is still a long way to go. According to the results, 93% of women participated, while just 7% of women did not participate in the Panchayat election. (Table 5) The first step toward active involvement in politics is raising one's level of political consciousness. When people are aware of something, they get interested in it, which leads to involvement. As a result, the researchers discovered how well-informed women are about the political system.

Table 6: Awareness of Women (N=100)

S. No.	Questions	Yes (Percentage %)	No (Percentage %)
1	Do you know that a citizen who is 18 years of age can vote in the election?	90 (90)	10(10)
2	Do you know that elections are conducted every five years?	95(95)	5(5)
3	Do you know that you can contest the election when you are 25 years old?	60(60)	40(40)
4	Do you know that there is a Gram Panchayat in your locality?	100(100)	00
5	Do you know that seats are reserved for omen in Gram Panchayat	94(94)	06(6)
6	What is the name of your Sarpanchs	100(100)	00

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

According to the data in table 6, women in Gram Panchayats are moderately and satisfactorily informed about the election process. They thoroughly understand the voting age, election duration, and seat reservations for women in Gram panchayats. There can be no doubt from this study, which was conducted long after India gained independence, that female voters now understand the voting process. Women's experiences with gram panchayats will also be examined as part of this research.

Table 7: Pattern of interaction between women and Gram Panchayat (N=100)

S. No.	Question	Every time (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
1	Have you ever put forth your demands before the Gram Panchayat?	12(%)	8(%)	80(%)
2	Do the Gram Panchayat members meet you	10(%)	30(%)	60(%)
3	Do you attend the meeting of Gramasabha	10(%)	35(%)	55(%)
4	Do you think that the Gram Panchayat always fulfills your demands?	23(%)	27(%)	50(%)

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

As seen in Table 7 above, women are less happy with the functioning of the Gram Panchayats, and their participation in the Gram Sabha is minimal.

Analysis of the Results:

1. Based on the data received from survey respondents, it is clear that certain women seldom engage in the voting process or the operations of Gram Panchayats.
2. As per this survey, women have a modest understanding of the election process.
3. Several women question the value of attending Gram Sabha. In Gram Sabha, a dominant faction stays active and does what they want.
4. They have little involvement with the Gram Panchayat and seldom request the Gram Panchayat about services and privileges. This is due to their lack of awareness and education level.
5. It is clear from the initial research that various factors are to blame for their apathy, lack of interest, and disinterest in political engagement.
6. The causes include illiteracy, poverty, conventional social patterns, family members' local attitudes, and, to some part, Gram Panchayats' negligent and neglectful attitude.

Conclusion

Regarding the survey's purpose, it is discovered that women's engagement in Panchayat administration activities falls short of their male counterparts. The degree of knowledge, interest, and participation in the Gram Panchayat election is good. Including political changes, constitutional provisions, and rights is insufficient; the problem is significant, and it requires reflection on the part of women first and foremost and men. We can only conceive some degree of change by a new style of thinking, an expansive viewpoint of “analysis, an objective approach, and a sensible stream of ideas, regardless of gender.”

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