

STATUS OF WOMEN IN GROSS ROOT POLITICS – A STUDY OF KHAMMAM DISTRICT IN TELANGANA STATE

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Abstract: The present paper explores the status of women in grass root politics – A study of Khammam district in Telangana state. India is a democratic country. Our Indian constitution ensure right equality. Women are considered equal to that of men in all aspects. Now a days we see women in all sphere of life such as education, technology, civil services, space and politics. The Panchayati Raj Act 1992 (73rd constitutional amendment Act) came in to effect granting not less than 33% reservation for women in gross root level.

Keywords: PRI, SHG's.

Introduction: After independence, the introduction of universal adult franchise, establishment of democratic institutions, decentralization of power, women said to have established their to take part in politics and to gain access to power. In recent times, though there is a general agreement for the women to be given equal status and opportunities in economic and political spheres, the fact is that their role still remain traditional and being tied down to look after the family and domestic chores. Their role in politics has not been accepted in the same way as that of men. Democratic political process are generally validated on the basis of the levels of political participation of different sections of the population of a given society. In the present society, women have obtained social, economic and political rights and are trying to play a positive role in the development of society. Thanks to the emergence of the new type of women's organization; women's groups are initiating a second wave of women's movement in the country, (Biju M.R.1998).

Women in recent times are voluntarily coming forward to join in politics and try to grab the power or positions. All this kind of awareness is due to the liberal education, modernization and social advancement of the society (Desai, Neera 1985). The women folk are tremendously displaying and demonstrating their willingness and acceptance to take up the responsibilities of the political and social systems. Modern women leadership successfully broke the centuries old barriers. To the issues which are coming in their way of advancement, they are boldly and courageously confronting them and meet the challenges with great determination (Evelin Hust, 1983).

Now-a-days women have spread into many fields and the glamour of politics remains one of the most alluring to the women folk. To translate their dreams into reality, they have chosen Panchayat Raj bodies as their battle field. Although, there is a little scope to lead the local bodies, they gain experience and knowledge about the dynamics of the politics, (Bhargava, B.S.1979).

Introduction of Panchayat Raj system in Andhra Pradesh has been a boon to Andhra Pradesh women to acquire leadership skills and techniques to muster the support and strength from all the quarters. Panchayat Raj bodies are best and effective grounds for the women to acquire the leadership qualities, (Chandra Sekhar, B.K ed 2000). Enlightened and educated coupled with economically sound position and with the help of their families, friends and entrenched social position paves the way for their entry in the politics. Many of the studies reveal this pattern of women leadership in the local bodies. Thanks to the policy of reservations for the women in local bodies, those who do not have all this kind of support, they are also getting the fair deal in local bodies. But very few in number could reach the heights of leadership ladder. Even those who are in Panchayat Raj leadership, they were sponsored by the political parties. Political parties are also patronizing the women folk to get the support of the half of the population. At times, political parties are trusting the women leadership in the Panchayat Raj bodies. This kind of leaders could not sustain for a longer time, (Chaya Datar, 1985).

Objectives and Methodology: To analyse the objectives of the present study are to examine the Socio-economic background of the sample respondents and to determine their socio-economic conditions in Khammam district, to enquire into their levels of political participation and their role performance, to examine the impact of their socio-economic conditions influence on empowerment of women.

The present study conducted primary data as well as secondary data. The primary data collected a structural questionnaire in the district of Khammam in Telangana State. The collected data from 300 women respondents who were heading the (Ward Members – 134, Sarpanches – 110, Mandal Paraishad Territorial Constituencies – 34, Mandal Parishad Presidents – 10, Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituencies – 11 and Zilla Parishad President-01) of women political leaders were taken on random basis

as a sample for this study. The secondary data researchers opinions. collected by various research journals and books,

TABLE -1: The particulars of respondents' (Caste & Education wise)

Details CASTE	Illiterate		Primary Education		Secondary Education		Under Graduation		Total	
		%		%		%		%		%
O.C	4	8.51	20	42.55	19	6.33	4	8.51	47	100.00
	(2.82)		(20.00)		(42.22)		(8.51)		(15.67)	
B.C	41	50.00	26	31.71	10	3.33	5	6.10	82	100.00
	(28.87)		(26.00)		(22.22)		(10.64)		(27.33)	
S.C	25	43.86	23	40.35	7	2.33	2	3.51	57	100.00
	(17.61)		(23.00)		(15.56)		(4.26)		(19.00)	
S.T	72	63.16	31	27.19	9	3.00	2	1.75	114	100.00
	(50.70)		(31.00)		(20.00)		(4.26)		(38.00)	
TOTAL	142	47.33	100	33.33	45	15.00	13	4.33	300	100.00
	(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)	

* Source: Field Survey

The data presented in the table -1, 47.33 percent of the respondents, cutting across the caste lines are illiterates. The all pervasive poverty, social inhibitions, social structure of the village life and inaccessibility of educational institutions are the main reasons for their hapless illiteracy. The rural girl children have the onerous responsibility of taking care of their siblings in the absence of their parents, who are mostly away in search of their livelihood. This is another reason for the cause of their illiteracy.

Only 15 percent respondents cutting across the caste lines completed their secondary education. A meager 4.33 percent of respondents completed their graduation. The above analysis indicates that literacy rate among women –folk in rural areas, beyond primary level is very less. But their illiteracy did not prevent them from participating in the active politics. In the course of time, their future generation will certainly improve their educational skills, paving the way for better services for the society.

TABLE -2 : The respondents' details of caste & occupation wise:

Detail s CASTE	Agricul ture		Busin ess		Advoc ate		Agricult ure Labour		Other s		Total	
		%		%		%		%		%		%
O.C	44	93.62	1	2.13	-		2	4.26	-		47	100.00
	(28.39)		(14.29)				(4.26)				(15.67)	
B.C	36	43.90	4	4.88	1	0.33	31	37.80	10	12.2	82	100.00
	(23.23)		(57.14)		(100.00)		(65.96)		(43.48)		(27.33)	
S.C	11	19.30	2	3.51	-		40	70.18	4	7.02	57	100.00
	(7.10)		(28.57)				(85.11)		(17.39)		(19.00)	
S.T	64	56.14	-		-		41	35.96	9	7.89	114	100.00
	(41.29)						(87.23)		(39.13)		(38.00)	
TOTAL	155	51.67	7	2.33	1	0.33	114	38.00	23	7.67	300	100.00
	(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)	

* Source: Field Survey

According to table-2, indicates that, 57 percent of the respondents are from S.C & S.T categories. Because of the reservations in local bodies, provided to them through the 73rd constitutional amendment Act, they are able to take part in electoral politics. . Since half of the population of the district is from S.C and S.T communities, their number is obviously reflecting high in politics. Similarly 40 percent of the

respondents are from O.C and B.C categories. Unlike the S.C and S.T categories, they are financially, educationally and politically enlightened. They are also showing interest in politics and participating in local body elections. In view of the aforesaid reservations, (73rd amendment) they can't contest elections beyond their permissible percentage

TABLE -3 : Who have helped the respondents to join politics (caste-wise)

Respo nses CASTE	On my own %		Family Members %		Well-wishers %		Party Leaders %		Others %		Total %	
	O.C	1 (25.00)	2.13	12 37.50	25.53	—		34 (72.34)	72.34	—		47 (15.67)
B.C	2 (50.00)	2.44	9 (28.13)	10.98	1 (100.00)	0.33	70 (148.94)	85.37	—		82 (27.33)	100.00
S.C	—		1 (3.13)	1.75	—		56 (119.15)	98.25	—		57 (19.00)	100.00
S.T	1 (25.00)	0.88	10 (31.25)	8.77	—		102 (217.02)	89.47	1 (100.00)	0.88	114 (38.00)	100.00
TOTAL	4 (100.00)	1.33	32 (100.00)	10.67	1 (100.00)	0.33	262 (100.00)	87.33	1 (100.00)	0.33	300 (100.00)	100.00

* Source: Field Survey

TABLE-4: The respondents' (age wise) responses about the party affiliation;

Response AGE	Congre ss	%	TDP	%	CPI(M)	%	CPI(ML)	%	CPI	%	Total	%
18- 25Years	4 (2.99)	28.57	4 (4.60)	28.57	3 (6.25)	21.43	1 (20.00)	7.14	2 (7.69)	14.29	14 (4.67)	100.00
26-35 Years	78 (58.21)	49.68	45 (51.72)	28.66	21 (43.75)	13.38	4 (80.00)	2.55	9 (34.62)	5.73	157 (52.33)	100.00
36- 50Years	41 (30.60)	38.68	35 (40.23)	33.02	20 (41.67)	18.87	—		10 (38.46)	9.43	106 (35.33)	100.00
51 & above	11 (8.21)	47.82	3 (3.45)	13.04	4 (8.33)	17.39	—		5 (19.23)	21.75	23 (7.66)	100.00
TOTAL	134 (100.00)	44.67	87 (100.00)	29.00	48 (100.00)	16.00	5 (100.00)	1.67	26 (100.00)	8.67	300 (100.00)	100.00

* Source: Field Survey

From the data presented in table-3, reveals that, the majority i.e.87 percent of respondents have felt that it is the party system that helped them to join politics. The party leaders have no option except to find out the suitable candidates from the different caste groups in the wake of 73rd constitutional amendment Act. The considerable number of respondents' i.e.33 percent have got family members behind them to make them enter politics. Only 4 respondents

entered politics, on their own. Given the present political atmosphere of the times and the deep surge of identity among the people, it is natural that even among the women there are some we have got self motivation. Exception only proves the rule. This is valid cutting across all caste groups.

The data in the table-4 indicates the political affiliations of respondents' age wise. Generally, it is assumed that the youngsters are inclined towards the

left parties. But interestingly, majority of youngsters, i.e. 57 percent are in favor of non-left parties like congress and Telugu Desham Party. Even among the category of 51 and above years of age group, the majority have preferred the non left parties, more so with the congress party. It indicates that, there is a greater political maturity and balance, and that they are enlightened politically and exercising their

franchise with caution. Another interesting finding is that, a majority of the respondents cutting across the age groups are supporting either Congress party or Telugu Desam parties for their convenience. However, C.P.I (M) is quite popular when compared to other left parties like CPI or CPI(ML) parties in the district.

TABLE -5 : The respondents' (caste-wise) responses about domination of men-folk in politics

Responses CASTE	Yes	%	No	%	Total	%
O.C	44	93.62	3	6.38	47	100.00
	(15.77)		(14.29)		(15.67)	
B.C	80	97.56	2	2.44	82	100.00
	(28.67)		(9.52)		(27.33)	
S.C	53	92.98	4	7.02	57	100.00
	(19.00)		(19.05)		(19.00)	
S.T	102	89.47	12	10.53	114	100.00
	(36.56)		(57.14)		(38.00)	
TOTAL	279	93.00	21	7.00	300	100.00
	(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)	

* Source: Field Survey

As per the table -5, indicates that, 279 respondents out of 300 surveyed i.e. 93 percent admitted the male members of their family interfered in their (women) political activities. The interference can be detrimental to their interests depending on the extent and intent of their interference. Respondents opined that interference of male members of their family is there, because, they cannot spare their time

to participate in the meetings and other allied political activities regularly. Hence, the interference of male members is a kind of necessary evil during the initial period. As the years roll by, and as the respondents gain experience and self confidence, this practice can be dispensed with. Only then the purpose of empowerment of women in rural areas will be attained.

TABLE -6: The respondents' (caste-wise) responses about the interference of officials and politicians in their official work

Responses CASTE	Yes	%	No	%	Total	%
O.C	29	61.70	18	38.30	47	100.00
	(14.50)		(18.00)		(15.67)	
B.C	58	70.73	24	29.27	82	100.00
	(29.00)		(24.00)		(27.33)	
S.C	42	73.68	15	26.32	57	100.00
	(21.00)		(15.00)		(19.00)	
S.T	71	62.28	43	37.72	114	100.00
	(35.50)		(43.00)		(38.00)	
TOTAL	200	66.67	100	33.33	300	100.00
	(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)	

* Source: Field Survey

It is very clear that the spirit of the 73rd constitutional amendment is missing every where. But there is some hope because there are some respondents who hold their own, despite the efforts of others to interfere. That is to say, a beginning has been made in the positive direction. Let us hope that, this beginning would reach it's logical end and mend the ways of

feudal society. Interestingly, there is an instance of a lady surpanch who is not even aware of the fact that she is the surpanch. Because, she thinks her husband is the president. Given this scale of ignorance, is it any wonder that there is interference on the part of officials and politicians.

TABLE -7: The respondents' (caste-wise) responses about the financial and the other hurdles in their official work						
Responses CASTE	Yes	%	No	%	Total	%
O.C	39	82.98	8	17.02	47	100.00
	(15.73)		(15.38)		(15.67)	
B.C	72	87.80	10	12.20	82	100.00
	(29.03)		(19.23)		(27.33)	
S.C	48	84.21	9	15.79	57	100.00
	(19.35)		(17.31)		(19.00)	
S.T	89	78.07	25	21.93	114	100.00
	(35.89)		(48.08)		(38.00)	
TOTAL	248	82.67	52	17.33	300	100.00
	(100.00)		(100.00)		(100.00)	

* Source: Field Survey

The table-7 indicates that, 248 respondents i.e. 82.67 percent felt that their effort of joining politics and attempt to improve the social and economic conditions of their respective wards in villages is full of problems. Finance is the main constraint. Most of them are not aware of the financial resources at the village level. The meager amount that comes through the house taxes is quite insufficient. In certain villages, even the collection of house taxes is dispensed with as a sop for voting in favor of the respondents. Therefore, the major source of income to fund the developmental activities at the village level is through government. The state government releases funds to the Zilla Parishad of each district. This in turn channels the fund to the village level;

[the purpose for which the amount is released is clearly specified. Surpanches with political influence and clout will have better accesses to finance, where as weaklings starve. Majority of the respondents felt that they should be trained and exposed to the nuances of administration for some time during their tenure so as to serve better.

Conclusion: The women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Other hand it has been observed that, women are found to be less literate than men. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them.

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