



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

## Political Science

### WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL BODIES OF ANDHRA PRADESH

**KEY WORDS:** Women, Political Participation, Local Bodies, Andhra Pradesh

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#### ABSTRACT

The paper critically analyzes as well as evaluates the emergence of women leadership in Pachayati Raj Institutions particularly after 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in Andhra Pradesh. It also covers the socio-economic determinants of the elected women and its consequent influence on the emerging women leadership in Andhra Pradesh and examines how far the socio-economic aspects have impaired or given opportunities to raise the issues and other social and economic problems in a formal forum, and thereby adequately ensure the improvement in all the spheres of life. This analysis establishes the fact that many myths associated with the entry of women into leadership positions that would be hindered by socio-economic profile in terms of their age, occupation, family income, land-holdings and education have been disproved. Moreover, it uses state-level variation in the implementation of the 73rd amendment in India to observe the relationship between political reservations for women in local government. Finally the constraints on female representatives and their level of effectiveness in executing pro-female policies given the political and social environment are examined.

#### INTRODUCTION

The term 'political participation' has a very wide meaning. It is not only related to 'Right to Vote' but also simultaneously relates to participation in decision-making process, political activism, political consciousness etc. Women participate in voting, run for public offices and political parties at lower levels more than men. To combat gender inequality in politics, the Government has instituted reservations for women in local governments. Women comprise more than 50 per cent of the world's population, yet they are consistently and copiously underrepresented as voters, political leaders and elected officials. But, there is almost universal agreement that gender equality is one of the ultimate developmental goals, as well as a major driver of human development. A certain ratio of women in political participation and decision-making positions is colossal crucial, not just for equity reasons, but also for immensely incorporating women's perspectives into policy and decision-making and amply achieving the envisaged positive changes (Praveen Rai, 2011).

Gender inequality leading to deprivation of power among women continues to be a political reality in India today. Women are perpetually excluded from decision-making at every rung of the ladder, starting from the household to the top layer of policy making. Although the Constitution of India attempts for removing gender inequalities by interdicting discrimination based on sex and class, and enshrining fundamental rights for all citizens, women still have only *de jure* rather than *de facto* access to these rights. There is no denying the fact that greater participation of women in the political process would be a pre-condition for their economic and social emancipation. However, even though a significantly large number of women vote in the country, on the contrary, only a few of them assume the reins of power. Paradoxically, though women have held the posts of President and Prime Minister as well as Chief Ministers of various states in India, the country ranks 20th from the bottom in terms of representation of women in Parliament (World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, 2012).

True democracy is a system which in Abraham Lincoln's words is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. The problem of low participation of women is of special concern for democracies and without changing that true democracy can never be achieved. Women's participation in decision-making is essential for women's interests to be incorporated into governance. It has been

widely experienced that governance structures which do not provide for adequate participation of women, often suffer from state interventions which are neither inclusive nor democratic. Including women, especially in local governments are an essential step towards creating gender equal opportunities and gender sensitive policies. Since women have different needs and perspectives on social and political issues, it is important to involve women in governments to incorporate all of the societal viewpoints in policy and decision-making processes. Women are actively involved in household and community work and hence well aware of real issues faced by common people. This gives them insight and perspective which can be instrumental in sustainable overall development (Besley, Pande and Rao, 2005).

#### Reservation For Women

In addition to devolving powers to the Panchayat, the 73rd Amendment also required one-third of the GP Ward Member positions, as well as one-third of the Pradhan positions, to be reserved for women. Seats and Pradhan positions are also reserved for the two disadvantaged minorities in India, "scheduled castes" (SC) and "scheduled tribes" (ST), in the form of mandated representation proportional to each minority's population share in each district. Reservations for women have been implemented in all major states except Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (which have only reserved 25 per cent of the seats for women in the 1995/96 elections). Reservation has drastically increased the number of women in the village councils. **WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIAN POLITICS: HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The movement for women's suffrage began in the early 1900s in response to a national movement for suffrage, even though vast majority of neither men nor women had a right to vote the British colonial rule before 1947. After Indian independence from Britain, the Indian Constitution in 1950 officially granted women and men suffrage. Prior to universal suffrage, provincial legislatures had granted women the right to vote. Madras was the first to grant women's suffrage in 1921, but only to those men and women who owned land property. The rights granted in response to the movement towards suffrage were limited to qualifications of education and property ownership, including property ownership of husbands. This excluded vast majority of Indian women and men from voting, because they were poor. This changed in 1950 when universal

suffrage was granted to all adult Indian citizens (Mithra, 2009).

In 1950, universal suffrage granted voting rights to all women. This was enshrined in Article 326 in the constitution. India is a parliamentary system with two houses: Lok Sabha (Lower House) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House). Rates of participation among women in 1962 were 46.63 per cent for Lok Sabha elections and rose to a high in 1984 of 58.60 per cent. Male turnout during that same period was 63.31 per cent in 1962 and 68.18 per cent in 1984. The gap between men and women voters has narrowed over time with a difference of 16.7 per cent in 1962 to 4.4 per cent in 2009 (Chief Electoral Officer, Voting Percentage in Various Lok Sabha Elections).

Voter turnout for national elections in the past 50 years has remained stagnant with turnout ranging between 50 and 60 per cent. State elections have seen a growing trend in women's participation, and in some cases, women's turnout is exceeding male turnout (Rukmini, 2014). Increased turnout of women was reported for the 2012 Vidhan Sabha elections (legislative/state assemblies) with states such as Uttar Pradesh reporting 58.82 per cent to 60.29 per cent turnout. In the 2013 assembly elections, women's overall turnout was reported to be 47.4 per cent and male turnout was 52.5 per cent. Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Daman and Diu, and Pondicherry all reported higher turnouts among women than men in 2013 (Election Commission of India, 2013). The presence of women in local governments serves as an encouragement for other women to enter diverse professions and leads to breaking stereotypes of women's roles in society and public space. People had gained lot of confidence in women as good public administrators and local government representatives after seeing women making a positive difference in other people's life. The society acknowledges the sincerity and utmost commitment of women to their duties and their resistance to criminalization of politics. The measurement of women political participation is essential to identify the need of policy intervention to improve the same. The process of capturing women participation at the local level is an evolving area and efforts are on to improve the present situation.

### Women Reservation Bill

India experienced centralization of planning which resulted in higher inequality in political decision making at the various levels. While Government was deeply concerned of issues of gender equality, women were not always a part of such decision making. Although, India has seen women participating in politics as the longest serving Prime minister, as chief ministers of various states, members in national parliament and state legislative assemblies in large numbers, yet the occurrence of such incidents has not been commensurate to their population. For enabling better women participation in active politics, governments are trying to put in reservation for women but have not been successful in true terms due to non-support from some of the regional parties. Back in history, one of the prominent members of freedom struggles, Sarojini Naidu rejected reservation for women, citing that women are not weak, timid and meek. She claimed that the demand for granting preferential treatment to women is an admission on her part of her inferiority and there has been no need for such a thing as the women have always been by the side of men. The issue of women's reservation again came to limelight in 1973 with voices recommending reservation for women in at least one third of the seats and eventually statutory women's panchayats at the village level were recommended to take care of the neglect of women in rural development programs through 73rd & 74th constitutional amendments in 1993.

Women's Reservation Bill or the Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, is a pending bill in India which proposes to

reserve 33 per cent of all seats in the Lower house of Parliament of India, and in all state legislative assemblies for women. The seats to be reserved in rotation will be determined by draw of lots in such a way that a seat shall be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections. Women's Reservation Bill was passed in Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010. But Lok Sabha could not clear the bill due to resistance of some regional parties on certain provisions of the bill.

### Panchayati Raj Reforms

Indian Constitution made provisions relating to the establishment, powers and responsibilities of the panchayats through the 73rd Amendment in 1993 with three tier system, viz. panchayats (village governance bodies) at the village, intermediate and district levels in every state, except provision of skipping intermediate level in states with less than twenty lakh population. The states have been empowered through law for the composition of panchayats. The reform provided for reservation of both seats and leadership positions for the Scheduled Castes, tribes and women. A normal duration of five years for panchayats has been provided with the authority of preparing the electoral rolls and conducting elections in the state Election Commission. The state government is also empowered for making laws providing criteria for disqualification of candidature from panchayat elections and also to legislate with respect to maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and their audit.

Apart from providing political empowerment, the Panchayati Raj reforms endow the panchayats with necessary powers and authority for enabling them to function as institutions of self-government. This has helped all the sections of the society particularly the weaker sections including women to take part and to share the responsibility of governance and development at least at the sub-district levels. As the legislation provides for reservation for women, the number of women elected representative at local level has sharply increased. In India 30-50 per cent of local level elected representatives are women. For improving the level of participation by women in deliberative bodies the government of India, in 1992, amended the constitution (73rd and 74th amendments) that would reserve a third of the seats in the Panchayats (local governments) including the chairpersonship of these local bodies for women (Molyneux, 1994).

### Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions in Andhra Pradesh (AP)

The 1/3 reservation paved way for women to exercise their political rights in local self-governance and created an enabling environment for women's participation in the grass-root politics. Though women issues have been politically neglected and women were being treated as second-class citizens, with less attention paid for removal of inequality and subordination, women entry into provincial politics to certain extent challenge the social stigmas attached to political power (Kaushik, 1993). This necessitated a constant search for ways and means to empower, promote awareness and increase the participation of women in the decision-making levels of PRLs. Notwithstanding, women panchayati members in Andhra Pradesh have made attempts to break these social barriers and raise their voices. Andhra Pradesh (AP) was one of the first two states in India to establish the PRLs in the year 1959. The State Legislature created a three-tier Panchayati Raj (PR) set-up under Andhra Pradesh Praja Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959, provided for co-option of two women. The Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Act, 1964, governed the composition and functions of the Gram Panchayat in Andhra Pradesh. This Act provided for reservation of two seats for women if the total strength of the gram panchayati is 9 or less, 3 seats if the strength is between 10 and 15 and 4 seats if the strength is more than 15 (Mishra, and Singh, 1993). It is clear

that the Act ensured between 22 per cent and 25 per cent of representation of women in these bodies. In the middle level bodies, till 1986, women's representation was governed by the Andhra Pradesh Praja Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act of 1959, which provided for co-option of two women for each samiti in addition to the possibility of women members finding membership in PS through the electoral process. Based on the recommendations of Ashok Mehta Committee Report, the Mandal Praja Parishad, Zilla Praja Parishad Abhivrudhi Mandal Bill was introduced in legislative Assembly in July 1986 which completely altered the PRIs set-up in AP and in 1987, a new reservation set-up was introduced for Backward Caste and Women, i.e. 9 per cent. Thus, women got further encouragement to share the democratic decision-making process of PRIs.

Keeping in view the New Constitutional (73rd) Amendment Act of 1993, state government of Andhra Pradesh has enacted a new Law thereby making the previous PR system in-operative. In this new arrangement, the representation of women at Gram Panchayat (GP) level was 33.84 per cent, at Panchayat Samiti (PS) level it was 37.01 per cent, and at Zilla Parishad (ZP) level it was 33.38 per cent after reservation (2001), which demonstrated visible enhancement of women's participation especially in the rural areas to get access to decision-making process thereby contribute for economic development, social reconstruction and distribution of scarce resources. As reservation opened new avenues for rural women to empower themselves, hopefully political power would enable numerous women to improve their socio-economic conditions, participatory abilities and thereby tap leadership potentialities.

### 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment

The 73rd Amendment and Women's Representation in India The passage of the 73rd amendment (Panchayati Raj) in 1993 in India has been acclaimed as an important step in the devolution of power to local governments. It established local governance at the rural level and local bodies at the village (panchayat), intermediate, and district levels with mandatory direct elections every five years (Kalsi, 2017). The amendment was intended to further the administration of development programs at the local level and improve the efficiency of resource distribution through the process of decentralization. Additionally, the amendment mandated panchayats to have at least 33% reservation for women in the council and leadership as well as reservations for scheduled castes and candidates for reserved seats would have to be nominated by their political parties and would also go through the process of campaigns and elections. The amendment required reservations to be randomly assigned to panchayats based on their serial registration number and female chairperson reservations to be rotated between panchayats every election cycle. The idea for this decentralization and women's representation at the grassroots level came to fruition because of the failure of the panchayats to be effective administrators of public service in decreasing poverty and inequality before the 1990s (Chaudhuri, 2003).

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi spearheaded the passage of the amendment and gave a speech in 1989 to promote a resurgence of focus on the Panchayati Raj. Gandhi and other elites in power made the case that centralization was leading to the delayed implementation of programs on the ground, impeding economic development, and decreasing the effectiveness of poverty reduction. The fact that the amendment was spearheaded by elites in parliament was beneficial because it was legitimized and had powerful national backing (Duflo, 2004).

However, there was no grassroots movement pushing for effective administration so states began implementation at different times and to different levels. Lack of a grassroots

movement meant that there was no ground-level push for substantive representation. Even though elites like Gandhi wanted to help the "weaker sections of society," it was hard to hold them accountable for the implementation of concrete change. Therefore, it is helpful to test women's abilities to participate effectively in order to analyze the level of true decentralization and empowerment of underrepresented groups initially promised by these elites (Gandhi, 1989).

The national government used the 73rd amendment to revitalize local government and target development with reservations and decentralization. Proponents of the amendment realized biased perceptions deter socially disadvantaged groups from breaking into politics without any affirmative action policies, thus making reservations an important part of the new amendment. Reservations for women are important because men and women have different preferences, which result in a different allocation of public goods. Minority groups, like women, are likely to provide minority or low spill over goods such as transfers, rations, and water connections, which only benefit other women. Additionally, political parties are less likely to field candidates from disadvantaged groups because they do not believe that they will win the majority vote. It was important for reservations to be included in the amendment in order to target the development of women and other minorities. As a result, after the first round of elections between 1993 and 1994, "almost 800,000 women were brought into local politics" in a country with no prior history of that level of women's political participation (Duflo, 2012).

### SUGGESTIONS

Political commitments and reservations aside, nearly all the world's women face major challenges in securing political participation at national and local levels. Women's lack of access to education and to economic and political engagements is often deeply rooted in and hampered by cultural, religious or traditional norms and values. Hence, women's empowerment not only requires socio-political reforms and technical capacity development, but also often requires men and women to change their mindset. Based on our experience, we are aware that changes in attitudes and behaviours require time and patience. Our programmes and activities are politically and culturally sensitive and must take the specific conditions in our partner countries into account without compromising on women's rights.

### CONCLUSION

Women make up more than 50 per cent of the world's population, yet they are consistently underrepresented as voters, political leaders and elected officials. Gender inequality leading to deprivation of power among women continues to be a political reality in India today. Women are perpetually excluded from decision-making at every step of the ladder, starting from the household to the top layer of policy making. The 73rd amendment to the Constitution of India in 1993 established the framework of a three-tiered local government (Panchayat) system, with regular elections every five years, throughout India. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has mandated not less than 1/3 reservation for women. Reservations have been provided for women not only at the level of members, but not less than 1/3 of the chairpersons are to be women. It is worth mentioning that the provision of reservation has truly helped women in increasing political participation throughout the state and country. It has been able to bring many positive changes in the status of rural women. It imbibed among women the qualities like the enjoyment of power, self-confidence, political awareness and affirmation of identity. However, there is still a long way to go to make women empowered and politically participative. The mere enactment of legislation and affirmative actions are not the solution. The need of the hour is to get people involved from every corner including civil society organizations, non-governmental organisations, community based

organisations, policy-makers, lawyers and most importantly family members to create a barrier free enabling environment for women.

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