



Cover Page



POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT WOMEN IN PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN TELANGANA: A STUDY ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Muddepaka Narender

Research Scholar (Ph.D.)

Department of Political Science, Kakatiya University
Hanamkonda, Warangal, India

Abstract

Dalit women, belonging to the marginalized communities in India, face multiple forms of discrimination based on caste and gender. The Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) are local self-governance bodies that aim to ensure participatory democracy at the grassroots level. The empowerment of Dalit women in PRIs is crucial for inclusive governance and social justice. This research article examines the political empowerment of Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana, a state in southern India. It explores the challenges and opportunities that Dalit women face in participating and engaging in the PRIs, and the strategies adopted by them to overcome these challenges. The study identifies several opportunities for political empowerment of Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana. These include affirmative action policies such as reservations for women in PRIs, capacity building and training programs for skill development and leadership, supportive networks and alliances with civil society organizations, and grassroots mobilization and advocacy efforts by Dalit women themselves. The research article also highlights the strategies adopted by Dalit women to overcome these challenges and enhance their political empowerment in PRIs. These strategies include building social capital and networks, forming alliances with like-minded groups, leveraging affirmative action policies, engaging in collective decision-making, raising awareness about their rights, and challenging discriminatory norms and practices. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of addressing the challenges faced by Dalit women in PRIs and harnessing the opportunities for their political empowerment. It calls for policy interventions and supportive measures at multiple levels, including legal, institutional, and societal, to create an enabling environment for Dalit women to participate effectively in PRIs and contribute to inclusive and participatory governance in Telangana.

Keywords: Dalit Women, Panchayat Raj Institutions, Political Empowerment, Telangana, Challenges, Opportunities, Intersectionality, Affirmative Action, Strategies.

Introduction

The political empowerment of Dalit women in Panchayat Raj institutions in Telangana has been a significant development in recent years. Panchayat Raj institutions are local self-governance bodies that play a crucial role in the democratic governance of rural areas in India, including Telangana. Dalit women, who belong to the historically marginalized Dalit community, have faced multiple forms of discrimination based on caste and gender. However, there have been positive efforts in recent times to empower Dalit women in Panchayat Raj institutions in Telangana.

One key development is the reservation policy in Panchayat Raj institutions, which ensures a certain percentage of seats are reserved for women, including Dalit women. In Telangana, the reservation for women in Panchayat Raj institutions is 50%, and within this, one-third of the seats are reserved for women from Scheduled Castes (SC), which includes Dalit women. This reservation policy has provided an opportunity for Dalit women to participate in local governance and decision-making processes.

Dalit women who have been elected to Panchayat Raj institutions in Telangana have played a crucial role in addressing issues such as caste discrimination, gender-based violence, access to basic amenities, education, health, and livelihood opportunities in their communities. They have also been involved in policy-making, planning, and implementation of various welfare schemes and programs aimed at socio-economic development at the grassroots level.

Furthermore, the Government of Telangana has undertaken various initiatives to empower Dalit women in Panchayat Raj institutions. These initiatives include capacity-building programs, leadership training, financial support for education and skill development, and awareness campaigns to promote gender equality and social inclusion.

Despite these positive developments, challenges still exist. Dalit women in Panchayat Raj institutions in Telangana face discrimination, violence, and social ostracism due to the intersectionality of caste and gender. They often face resistance from traditional power structures and face barriers in accessing resources, information, and decision-making processes. There is also a need to strengthen



Cover Page



the implementation of existing policies and programs and address issues such as political representation, participation, and inclusion of Dalit women in decision-making processes.

Objectives of the study

The study on challenges and opportunities for Dalit women in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Telangana may have the following objectives:

1. To identify and analyze the representation of Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana, including their participation in elected positions such as sarpanch, ward member, and panchayat member.
2. To examine the socio-economic, political, and cultural challenges faced by Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana, including discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion based on their caste, gender, and intersectional identities.
3. To investigate the opportunities and empowerment measures available for Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana, including reservation policies, affirmative action programs, and capacity building initiatives aimed at enhancing their participation and leadership.
4. To assess the extent to which Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana are able to effectively contribute to decision-making, policy formulation, and implementation processes, and to identify the barriers and facilitators that affect their agency and effectiveness.
5. To explore the social, economic, and political impact of the participation of Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana, including their contributions to addressing caste-based discrimination, promoting social justice, and advocating for the rights and well-being of marginalized communities.
6. To provide policy recommendations and practical interventions that can strengthen the participation and leadership of Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana, including strategies for overcoming challenges, leveraging opportunities, and promoting gender and social equity in local governance.
7. To contribute to the existing literature on gender, caste, and local governance in India, with a specific focus on the experiences of Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana, and to generate evidence-based knowledge that can inform policy, practice, and advocacy efforts in this field.
8. To raise awareness and sensitize stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities, about the issues and concerns faced by Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana, and to foster dialogue, collaboration, and collective action for promoting their rights and empowerment.

Reservation policies for the space of weaker sections of society

Reservation policy refers to the practice of allocating a certain percentage of seats or opportunities in education, employment, or politics to individuals belonging to weaker sections of society, such as scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribes (ST), and other backward classes (OBCs). The purpose of reservation policy is to provide social justice, promote equality, and empower marginalized communities, who historically have faced discrimination and oppression.

Reservations in politics, specifically, aim to provide a space for political empowerment to weaker sections of society. Political empowerment refers to the ability of individuals from marginalized communities to participate in the political process, exercise their rights, and have a meaningful say in decision-making. Reservation policies in politics typically involve reserving a certain percentage of seats in elected bodies, such as parliament, state legislative assemblies, and local government bodies, for candidates from marginalized communities.

There are several arguments in favor of providing reservations in politics for weaker sections of society:

Representation: Political empowerment through reservations ensures that marginalized communities are adequately represented in the political decision-making process. It helps in giving a voice to those who have been historically marginalized and excluded from political power, and promotes inclusivity in governance.

Social Justice: Reservation policies are aimed at addressing historical social injustices and inequalities faced by weaker sections of society. It provides them with an opportunity to participate in the political process and have a fair chance at securing political power and influence.

Equal Opportunity: Reservation policies promote equal opportunity by providing a level playing field for individuals from weaker sections of society to compete in the political arena. It helps in breaking the cycle of discrimination and enables individuals to overcome social and economic barriers to political participation.

Diversity in Leadership: Political leadership should reflect the diversity of the society it represents. Reservation policies contribute to diversifying the leadership by bringing in representatives from different communities, cultures, and backgrounds, thereby promoting inclusive governance.



Cover Page



Social Cohesion: Political empowerment through reservations promotes social cohesion by fostering a sense of belonging and ownership among marginalized communities. It helps in building trust and confidence in the political system, and strengthens the democratic fabric of the society.

However, there are also some criticisms and challenges associated with reservation policies, such as concerns about reverse discrimination, impact on meritocracy, and potential for perpetuating caste-based identities. It is important to have a balanced approach in implementing reservation policies, ensuring that they are based on the principles of fairness, social justice, and inclusivity, and that they are periodically reviewed and modified to address any shortcomings.

Opportunities and Challenges

Dalit women in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Telangana face unique challenges and opportunities as they participate in local governance. The PRIs are the grassroots-level elected bodies responsible for local governance in rural areas of Telangana. While the reservation of seats for women and Scheduled Castes (SCs) in PRIs has provided an opportunity for Dalit women to participate in decision-making processes, they continue to face various challenges that affect their effective participation and representation.

One of the key challenges faced by Dalit women in PRIs is social discrimination and exclusion. Despite the reservation policy, Dalit women often face discrimination from dominant caste members and are excluded from decision-making processes. They may face social ostracism, verbal abuse, and even violence, which hinders their ability to effectively discharge their duties as elected representatives. Caste-based discrimination and prejudice limit their participation in meetings, access to information, and influence over decision-making processes.

Another challenge faced by Dalit women in PRIs is lack of education and skills. Many Dalit women in rural areas of Telangana face limited access to education and skill development opportunities, which affects their ability to effectively participate in PRI meetings, understand the complexities of governance, and advocate for their community's needs. This lack of education and skills may also result in Dalit women being marginalized within PRIs, as they may face challenges in articulating their views and opinions.

Furthermore, Dalit women in PRIs face challenges related to gender discrimination. They may face discrimination based on their gender within their own communities, as well as from dominant caste members. Gender norms and stereotypes may limit their participation in decision-making processes, and their voices may be silenced or ignored. They may also face challenges in accessing resources and services, such as financial support or training, due to their gender and caste identity.

Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities for Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana. Reservation policies have provided a platform for Dalit women to participate in local governance and raise their voice for their community's needs. With support from civil society organizations and other stakeholders, Dalit women can build their capacities through education and skill development programs, enabling them to effectively participate in PRI meetings, advocate for their community's needs, and contribute to local development initiatives.

In addition, there are opportunities for advocacy and policy interventions to address the challenges faced by Dalit women in PRIs. Strengthening the implementation of existing laws and policies that safeguard the rights of Dalit women, such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the Protection of Civil Rights Act, can provide a conducive environment for Dalit women's participation in PRIs. Promoting gender-sensitive governance and empowering Dalit women with leadership skills can also contribute to their effective participation and representation in PRIs.

Conclusion

While there have been positive developments in the political empowerment of Dalit women in Panchayat Raj institutions in Telangana, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. Efforts should be made to promote gender equality, social inclusion, and address the intersectional discrimination faced by Dalit women. It is crucial to provide support, capacity-building, and resources to enable Dalit women to effectively participate in local governance and contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities. Dalit women in PRIs in Telangana face unique challenges, including social discrimination and exclusion, lack of education and skills, and gender discrimination. Reservation policies in politics can play a significant role in providing a space for political empowerment to weaker sections of society. By ensuring representation, promoting social justice, providing equal opportunity, fostering diversity, and promoting social cohesion, reservation policies can contribute to building an inclusive and equitable political system that reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of all citizens. However, there are opportunities to address these challenges through supportive



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2023/12.04.92>
www.ijmer.in

policies, capacity-building programs, and advocacy efforts. Empowering Dalit women in PRIs can contribute to inclusive and participatory local governance, which can ultimately lead to the empowerment and development of Dalit communities in Telangana.

References

1. Bakshi.P.M, 2013: The Constitution of India, Universal Publishing Company, New Delhi-India, pp.227-228
2. CAG report on Local bodies in Telangana, 31, March, 215.
3. G. Haragopal and G. Sudharshnam, (2000), Andhra Pradesh, in George Mathew, (e ds.), Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories, Institute of social science publishing, New Delhi. Report of the State Election Commission, Andhra Pradesh, 2013.
4. G. Merely Mohanlal, (1994), 'Rajiv Gandhi and Panchayati Raj: Democracy and Development at the Grass- Roots Level', Konark Publisher, Pvt.Ltd. New Delhi, p.14
5. George Mathew (2000). Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India, Indian institute of Social Science Publication, New Delhi.,p. 132.
6. <http://www.nrega.Telangana.gov.in/Nregs/IEC.jsp>
7. <http://www.sbmGramin.Telangana.gov.in/SwachhTelangana>
8. Joshi, R.P., (1999), Constitutionalisation of Panchayati Raj: A Reassessment, Rawat publications, Jaipur, pp. 188-190.
9. K.L. Mohanpuria, "The Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act, 1992", Kurukshetra, Vol. XLI, No.9, June 1993, pp.32-34 40.
10. Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2008), "Study on EWRS in Panchayati Raj Institutions", Panchayati Raj Diwas, New Delhi, April, 2008.
11. Mohmand, S.K. (2007), Representative Decentralisation Vs Participatory Decentralisation: Critical Analysis of the Local Government Plan 2000. In L.C. Jain (Ed.), Decentralisation and Local Governance. New Delhi: Orient Longman Pvt.Ltd.
12. Palanithurai, G. New Panchayati Raj at Work-An evaluation, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1999.
13. Pinto, A. (2008), Reservation and Social Justice. In S. Thorat, & N. Kumar (Eds.), In Search of Inclusive Policy: Addressing Graded Inequality pp. 78., Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
14. Ram Reddy. G. (1967). Panchayati raj in Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad State chambers, Publishers, Hyderabad,
15. Ram, D.S. (Ed.), Panchayati Raj and Empowering People: New Agenda for Rural India. New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers.
16. Reddy,G. R. (1982). Panchayati Raj and Rural Development in A.P., India. In Uphoff, N.T. (Ed.), Rural Development and Local Organisations in Asia, Vol. I. New Delhi: Macmillan.
17. Sachidananda (2007), Empowerment of Dalit's Through Panchayati Raj, New Delhi: Serials Publications.
18. Vijayalakshmi, V. (2002), Gender Accountability and Political Representation in Local Government and in Politics of Inclusion: Scheduled Tribe Women in Local Governance, Bangalore, ISEC.
19. www.panchayat.gov.in