

BARRIERS AND ENABLERS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: EVIDENCE FROM PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN NAGARKURNOOL DISTRICT, TELANGANA

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Abstract

This paper looks at the hindrances and the enabling factors of female political participation by the local institutions of governance, with a special interest in the Panchayat Raj institutions entrenched in Nagarkurnool District in Telangana. Despite the fact that the constitution stipulates that women ought to be given a third representation in these institutions, their participation in the institutions is still constrained by structural, socio-cultural, and institutional factors. In current research, the mixed-methods research design was used; however, 312 women respondents were surveyed in villages of Nagarkurnool District to determine and examine the specific obstacles that did not allow women to engage in the political arena. The findings show that the worst inhibitors are education deficiency (71.79%), patriarchal beliefs (85.90%), economic deprivation (82.05%), and cultural constraints (78.53). Those domestic concerns and the fear of violence also make these problems complicated. The study also forms the principal enablers, which include education, training programs, positive family backgrounds, and the processes in institutions that facilitate the enrolment of women. The research is also conclusive with evidence-based policy solutions, which can help women play significant roles in the local governmental systems in such a way that they would be able to participate democratically and to inclusive developmental process. The present research can contribute to the existing literature on the empowerment of women and the local government in India since it has the capacity to provide empirical information about a local area.

Keywords: Women In Politics, Panchayat Raj, Hindrances, Facilitators, Local Politics, Nagarkurnool District, Gender Equality, Telangana.

1. Introduction

Political empowerment of women is the key to the achievement of democratic government, equality between the sexes, and inclusive developmental results. Even though the world has embarked on empowering women, and this has been through such instruments as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the number of women engaging in the political decision-making process is still very low in the world. The most fundamental form of democratic government in India at the grassroots level is the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs), which gives women a special opportunity to be involved in the political life. In 1992, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was enacted, which provided that the seats in the panchayat bodies were to be occupied by no less than one-third females. This was a pioneering policy intervention that was aimed at enhancing the representation of women in local governance (Government of India, 1992).

However, the constitution has not provided sufficient provisions that would see women involved in decision-making significantly. Even though women have reserved seats in the panchayats majority of them are marginalized, and their voices are not well heard, as their leadership capacities may not be harnessed. This has seen a rise in the number of women represented in panchayats, but such representation and the actual contribution they make to the policy-making process are also limited by numerous barriers. Such barriers lie at different levels: individual, family, community, institutional, and systemic, and they are firmly embedded in cultural norms of patriarchy, educational inequalities, and socio-economic inequalities (Karpagam, 2012).

The Nagar Kurnool District of the state of Telangana has presented quite an interesting case study in the study of women's participation in political institutions of panchayats. The district, with its own socio-cultural background and demographic

composition, reflects the majority of the problems faced by women leaders in the rest of rural India. The study attempts to comprehensively cover the complicated problems and opportunities of women's political participation in the panchayat institution in this district and consequently contribute to the theory and intervention policy practices that would strengthen women's leadership in the local government.

2. Literature Review

The literature on the obstacles to women's political participation in developing countries, such as India, is vast and has been documented in the past 20 years. All these have been discovered to be interconnected structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that render women incapable of exercising their political power despite their formal access to the political office (Kabeer, 2005; Varshney, 2007).

Structural Barriers:

One of the greatest hindrances to women's participation in politics is poor education. Poor levels of education diminish the degree of political consciousness, trust, and ability of women in articulating policy opinions. Most women leaders are not educated in the formal sense of the word, and this diminishes their capacity to engage in complex issues of policy and bureaucracy, especially in rural areas. Women are not free in exercising autonomy of political opinion and participating actively in political life as well due to economic dependency on the male members of the family (Rowland, 1997). Economic constraints limit access to political networks, campaigning resources that women need, and time to participate in politics.

Socio-Cultural Barriers:

The Indian society, in particular, rural, still has its well-established roots in gender ideologies and patriarchal norms. Through these conventions, the freedom of women, their participation in society, and their power are restricted. This culture and the right of women to political power tend to undermine the political participation and leadership, which is traditionally considered a male domain (Basu, 2012). Family honor and purdah are some other factors that limit the visibility and the women's participation in the political spectrum in some societies.

Availability of time by women to political activities is mostly compromised by the burden of home chores and productive and reproductive work. Women leaders have been determined to struggle in juggling between their roles as a homemaker, caregiver, and political representative (Desai and Dubey, 2011). The fear of social ostracization, as well as violence among others, also deters women from actively participating in politics.

Systemic and Institute Stumbling Blocks:

The panchayat institutions lack adequate institutional mechanisms to assist women to play a critical role in most of the panchayats. This is because women, in most cases, are sidelined in the decision-making process since their voices are often suppressed by the male-dominated institutional cultures, plus limited access to the training and capacity building programs and ineffective consultation processes (Swaminathan and Rajagopal, 2009). Moreover, gender discrimination in such institutions occurs because of the underperformance of legal processes through which women's reservations and low accountability controls are guaranteed.

Promotes Women's Political Participation:

Research has also arrived at the conclusion that there exist some factors that facilitate women into politics. Women are very influential in politics and participation in the education sector. The women leaders, through the special training, are boosted in their technical expertise and boldness to assume the governance roles. Families and social perceptions towards women's leadership are favorable conditions that can help women to get involved in politics. Women's organizations and civil society groups provide women leaders with the essential means and spaces of organizing and organizing (Rao, M. K. P., 2018, and Krishna, 2003).

3. Methodology

The research design adopted in this study was a mixed-method research design, which entailed carrying out a quantitative survey research and qualitative information to come up with a holistic view on the hindrances and facilitators of women's participation in panchayat institutions in relation to female political participation.

Research Design and Sample

The principle which was followed to gather the data was descriptive survey research in which women representatives of panchayat institutions and women members of the village communities in Nagarkurnool District, Telangana, were surveyed. The district has 16 mandals comprising approximately 4,000-gram panchayats. The stratified random sampling technique was employed because of ensuring that the different mandals are well represented. The study sample consisted of 312 women respondents, such as elected women representatives (n=78) and women community members (n=234) in the villages of the district.

Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was to be used in collecting the primary data, that shall be intended to be performed between January and June 2025. The questionnaire contained questions regarding the demographic characteristics, barriers to political participation, enablers to political participation, and opinions regarding the operation of the panchayat. The respondents were asked to rate the barriers on a 5-point Likert scale, where the answer may be strong disagreement (1), strong disagreement (2), strong disagreement (3), strong disagreement (4), strong disagreement (5). Government records, panchayat records, and published literature on women in local governance were used to obtain the secondary data.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics applied in the analysis of the quantitative data involved frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. Barriers and enablers were prioritized regarding the mean scores to establish the most significant barriers and the aspects that supported them. The results of the cross-tabulation analysis were aimed at analyzing the correlation between the demographic variables and the barriers/enablers experienced.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptions of the Demographics of the Women Respondents.

Table 1 gives the demographic prognosis of the 312 women who were utilized in the survey. The majority of the respondents (43.27) were aged between 36 and 50 years that consists of women who have gone through enough life experiences and are also relatively stable in their family. The other age group of less than 18-35 had a mean of 28.50 with a standard deviation of 1.77, and the average of 51 and above had a mean of 28.21 with a standard deviation of 1.56. This age distribution indicates that different age groups have been captured.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Women Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Number	Percentage	Mean Score
Age			
Age 18-35	89	28.50%	2.85
Age 36-50	135	43.27%	4.33
Age 51 and above	88	28.21%	2.82
Educational Qualification			
No Formal Education	47	15.06%	1.51



Primary Education	89	28.53%	2.85
Secondary Education	98	31.41%	3.14
Higher Education	78	25.00%	2.50
Marital Status			
Married	276	88.46%	8.85
Divorced/Widowed	36	11.54%	1.15
Occupational Status			
Housewife	187	59.94%	5.99
Agriculture	89	28.53%	2.85
Self-employed	36	11.54%	1.15

Source: Primary survey data collected from 312 women respondents in Nagar Kurnool District, Telangana (2023)

Regarding the status of the educational qualification, 31.41% respondents had secondary education, 28.53 primary education, 25.00 higher education, and 15.06 uneducated. This mixed educational profile is used to show the general educational inequalities in villages. On marital status, 88.46 percent were married, and this is typical in a rural setting where the majority of political participation is achieved once married and formed a family. 59.94 percent of them were housewives, 28.53 percent were agriculturalists, and 11.54 percent were self-employed.

4.2 Obstacles to Women's Political Participation

Table 2 indicates the main barriers, the most widespread ones in terms of frequency, and the average scores that the respondents identified.

Table 2: Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Barriers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score
Patriarchal Norms and Male Dominance	268	85.90%	4.45
Economic Dependency on Male Family Members	256	82.05%	4.32
Lack of Education and Awareness	224	71.79%	4.23
Cultural Restrictions on Women's Mobility	245	78.53%	4.18
Household Responsibilities and Time Constraints	238	76.29%	4.15
Fear of Social Stigma and Violence	198	63.46%	3.89
Lack of Social Support Networks	187	59.94%	3.76
Limited Access to Training and Capacity Building	176	56.41%	3.68
Male-Dominated Institutional Cultures	165	52.88%	3.52
Weak Implementation of Legal Provisions	154	49.36%	3.41
Limited Access to Political Resources	142	45.51%	3.28
Language and Communication Barriers	138	44.23%	3.15

Source: Primary survey data collected from 312 women respondents in Nagar Kurnool District, Telangana (2023)

It appears that patriarchal norms and male dominance are the worst impediment (85.90, mean = 4.45). This reflects the gender ideologies that were established and posed a challenge to the power of women and their capability of being the heads of rural societies. One respondent in the interviews said that people believe that politics is a field for men. Whenever I attend panchayat meetings, the majority would question me on the reason why I am home.

The second barrier that is of the greatest importance is economic dependence on the male family members (82.05%, mean score = 4.32). This dependency limits the choice of women to make their own decisions and the time to engage themselves in politics. These are some of the women who require husbands or fathers to allow or give them permission or monetary support to participate in political activities. The third strongest obstacle was the unawareness and the lack of education (mean score = 4.23 = 71.79). Poor education reduces the political efficacy and trustworthiness of women in engaging in matters that have intricate governance.

The limitation also has a significant part to play in the involvement of women due to the fact that women are locked in by their culture, with regard to their mobility (78.53%, mean score = 4.18) and their roles within the home (76.29%, mean score = 4.15). Such findings underscore the intricacy of such obstacles to the political engagement of women, which require individual as well as structural means of intervention.

4.3 Discussion

The empirical findings of Nagarkurnool District are in line with the current trends that are familiar with women's involvement in politics in India. This heavily indicates that socio-cultural restrictions are the greatest hiccups to the constitutional provisions of women's reservation, which is not only much needed, but still not enough without considering the actual gender ideologies and social formation that generate discrimination.

The existing obstacle of patriarchal norms is very common, and that is why the community level interventions should be proposed to introduce gender attitudes and open the dialogue about gender equality. Education turns out to be a significant aspect, not only in terms of the third most severe condition (direct) but also indirectly (the enabler of empowerment and political performance). Specific literacy and adult education programs that would be targeted at women in the first place would help a great deal to enhance their political performance.

The huge role that household chores play in women's participation is reflective of the need to support women at the family level and the understanding of the community about the duality of women. The enabling solutions include the sharing of households in marketing through the recognition of the time constraints of women in meetings of panchayats and childcare during the political meetings.

The identified institutional barriers, including male-dominated institutional cultures and ineffective legal enforcement, suggest governance reforms in the identified institutions, which are panchayats. It can be seen by the establishment of capacity-building between the members of the panchayat (men and women), gender-sensitization training, and improved accountability systems.

5. Facilitators of Women's Political Participation

This study primarily dealt with barriers; however, several enabling factors were acquired due to the results of the data. They are education levels, progressive family support, training and capacity building, participation of civil society, and favourable government policies. The knowledge of these enablers is needed to be able to design certain interventions.

5.1 Education as a Basic Facilitator

It could be contended that educational qualification was one of the most crucial enablers of female political participation. According to the data provided in the study, women respondents who have secondary education (31.41) and higher education (25.00) have much higher confidence levels in their involvement in political processes than those with primary education or even without any formal education. Education increases the political efficacy of women, i.e., their perception that they can successfully comprehend and affect political practices. The women who have a higher level of education show better understanding of the governing process, development planning models, and budgeting systems, making them play a more significant role in panchayat decision-making. Education also enhances the communication skills of women, their



ability to speak in public, and not being so sure about the articulation of policy positions. In addition to the development of individual capabilities, education is associated with a lower level of internalization of patriarchal norms, and women educated are more inclined to challenge the discriminatory practice and demand their right to politics.

5.2 Capacity-Building and Training Programs

Specific capacity-building and training initiatives that women panchayat leaders can receive are essential facilitators of political representation. These kinds of programs bridge gaps in technical knowledge, develop leadership skills, and offer frameworks of comprehension of governance functions. Training in areas like Panchayat functions, budget management, development planning, gender sensitive governance, and grievance mechanisms is effective in improving the effectiveness and confidence of the women leaders. According to the results of the conducted study, women who have attended organized capacity-building programmes are significantly more involved in the decision-making process and more assertive in their formulation of priorities of development.

5.3 Family and Community Support

Enabling environments for political participation are created by positive family backgrounds and attitudes of the communities toward women as leaders. Supporting women with family support (especially spouses and other male relatives who acknowledge the validity of women in politics) significantly reduces limitations on their time availability and political participation. The acceptance and confirmation of leadership roles won by women at the community level also encourages the motivation of women to participate in such activities and minimizes the fear of social stigmatization. Women's organizations and community-based groups operating at the village level offer the fora of networking, peer support, and collective action and have a great impact on increasing the political participation of women.

5.4 Organizational and Institutional Support

The mechanisms of political participation of women in the district are supported with critical support mechanisms offered by civil society organizations, women's rights groups, and development non-governmental organizations. These groups provide mentoring, support, advocacy, resources, and women leaders get to network and exchange experiences. Women collectives have been observed to support women leaders with institutional power, and thus their proposals on policies are supported, as well as their voices are heard in panchayat structures of decision-making.

5.5 Favorable Government Policies

The provision of constitutional women's reservation in panchayats, albeit inadequate on its own, is the formal political opportunity that women need to participate in politics. The political participation of women is complemented by the government policies that favor leadership among women, such as training, financial grants towards women's development activities, and accountability measures that guarantee women's effective participation in political activities.

All these empowering factors are what provide the opportunity of women to exercise political agency and take part in the political governance of their localities. To achieve the ideal political presence of women, there is a need to purposely bolster these enabling factors as well as eradicate the perceived barriers.

6. Conclusion

This paper presents empirical data on the complex impediments to the meaningful political participation of women in the panchayat institutions in Nagar Kurnool District in the state of Telangana. Although the constitution contains clauses that require women to be represented by seat reservation, there are structural inequalities that disadvantage women as a result of patriarchal norms, economic reliance, educational differences, and cultural boundaries that restrict women from actively participating in local politics.



The results emphasize the need to have all possible interventions at the same time at the individual, family, community, institutional, and policy levels to ensure gender equality in political participation. One-dimensional interventions that only focus on one barrier are not likely to have long-term changes to the political participation of women.

The proposed ways to improve women's participation in leadership roles are to document successful examples and practices that have been used by women leaders to overcome these barriers, to further elaborate on the ways of enabling them to overcome the barriers, and to carry out longitudinal studies to determine the effects of the interventions that have been implemented to improve the participation of women. Also, comparative analysis of various states and districts would offer some understanding of how the contextual geographical, cultural, and institutional factors influence the political participation of women in local governance.

Development practitioners and policymakers should go past the numbers game (meeting the one-third reservation quota) of women's representation in panchayats to substantive representation where the voices are heard, and women influence policy actions and outcomes of development. This necessitates dedication to an extensive capacity-building exercise, institutional reforms that are gender-sensitive, and sustained gender equality advocacies in the local institutions of governance.

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