



POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN IN TELANGANA: A STUDY OF SANGAREDDY DISTRICT

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Abstract:

Political empowerment of rural women is an important component of democratic participation and inclusive rural development. This study examines the political empowerment of rural women in the present Sangareddy District, Telangana. The study focuses on political awareness, voting behaviour, independent voting, participation in Gram Sabha meetings, knowledge of Panchayati Raj Institutions, electoral participation, and involvement in political decision-making. The study is based on primary data collected from 50 rural women through a structured interview schedule, and the data are analysed using frequencies and percentages. The findings indicate that rural women participated actively in elections, with 92 percent reporting regular voting. However, only 46 percent reported voting independently, while 50 percent never participated in Gram Sabha meetings and only 10 percent had contested an election. Political awareness was also limited, with only 18 percent fully aware of their political rights. The study concludes that although rural women have achieved considerable electoral participation, substantive political empowerment remains limited. Education, political awareness, leadership training, economic independence, and greater participation in local governance are essential for strengthening the political empowerment of rural women.

Keywords: Political Empowerment, Rural Women, Political Participation, Women's Political Rights, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Gram Sabha, Voting Behaviour, Women Leadership, Rural Development, Sangareddy District, Telangana.

Introduction

Women constitute an important part of society and their meaningful participation is essential for the functioning of a



democratic political system. Political empowerment of women refers to the process through which women acquire political awareness, confidence, decision-making capacity, leadership abilities, and opportunities to participate in political institutions. It includes not only voting in elections but also making independent political choices, participating in Gram Sabha meetings, contesting elections, holding leadership positions, expressing opinions on public issues, and influencing decisions concerning their families and communities. Historically, women in rural India have experienced several barriers to political participation. Limited education, economic dependence, and patriarchal attitudes, household responsibilities, restricted mobility, lack of political information, and dependence on male family members have affected their participation in public affairs. Although women enjoy equal constitutional rights as citizens, the existence of formal political rights does not always result in substantive political empowerment. The process of democratic decentralization created important opportunities for rural women. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 provided constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions and introduced reservation for women in local governance. Article 243D provides reservation of not less than one-third of seats in Panchayats and not less than one-third of chairperson positions for women. By 2011, Andhra Pradesh was among the states that had already provided 50 percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Rural women make significant contributions to agriculture, wage labour, household management, livestock care, and other economic activities. However, their contribution to rural society has not always been accompanied by equal participation in political decision-making. Women's participation may remain limited to voting, while their involvement in political leadership, Gram Sabha discussions, political organizations, and local decision-making may be comparatively low. The present study therefore focuses on the political empowerment of rural women in selected rural areas of the present Sangareddy region. The study examines their socio-economic background, political awareness, voting behaviour, independent voting, participation in Gram Sabha meetings, knowledge of Panchayati Raj Institutions, political participation, leadership, and decision-making.



Women Empowerment

Women empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to gain control over their lives, access resources and opportunities, exercise their rights, and participate equally in social, economic, political, and cultural activities. Empowerment is a multidimensional process involving both individual capabilities and changes in social structures.

1. Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment enables women to earn income, control financial resources, access credit, own property, and participate in productive activities. Economic independence can improve women's bargaining power within the household and strengthen their confidence to participate in public life.

2. Social Empowerment

Social empowerment provides women with opportunities for education, healthcare, mobility, social interaction, and community participation. It enables women to express their views and participate in decisions affecting their families and communities.

3. Political Empowerment

Political empowerment enables women to vote, make independent political choices, contest elections, participate in political organizations, attend Gram Sabha meetings, hold leadership positions, and influence public policy and local development decisions. Political empowerment strengthens democracy by ensuring that women's interests and perspectives are represented in governance.

4. Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment refers to self-confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness, leadership ability, and the capacity to make independent choices. A politically empowered woman should be able to express her opinion without fear or excessive dependence on others.



5. Legal Empowerment

Legal empowerment involves awareness of constitutional rights, political rights, equality provisions, property rights, and legal safeguards. Awareness of rights enables women to participate more effectively in public institutions and seek appropriate support when their rights are denied.

Political Empowerment of Rural Women

Political empowerment is an important aspect of women's overall empowerment. In a democratic society, women should not be viewed only as voters but also as active citizens and decision-makers. Their participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions can contribute to greater attention to issues such as drinking water, sanitation, education, healthcare, roads, employment, welfare programmes, and women's safety. The constitutional reservation system created opportunities for women to enter local political institutions. Before 2016, the area that is now Sangareddy was governed under the administrative structure of erstwhile Medak District. Therefore, the political empowerment of rural women in this region needs to be examined in the context of the Panchayati Raj system existing at that time rather than through later Telangana-specific legislation. The presence of women in elected positions, however, does not automatically guarantee political empowerment. Effective empowerment requires women representatives to understand their responsibilities, participate in meetings, communicate with government officials, express their views, and exercise independent authority. Family influence, social pressure, lack of education, and limited political experience may affect women's ability to exercise their formal political positions.

Review of Literature

1. **Kudva (2003)** examined women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions and observed that political reservation created new opportunities for women to enter local governance. However, education, family support, political awareness, and access to information influenced the effectiveness of women's participation.



2. **Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004)** examined the effects of women's representation in village governments in India. Their study showed that the presence of women leaders could influence local development priorities and public goods, demonstrating the importance of women's representation in local decision-making.
3. **Duflo (2005)** discussed the relationship between women's political representation and development and emphasized that increasing women's presence in political institutions could influence public policy and development priorities.
4. **Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India (2011)** reported that Article 243D provided at least one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and noted that several states, including Andhra Pradesh, had introduced 50 percent reservation for women.
5. **Government of Telangana (2014)** reported differences in rural and urban educational indicators across the state. For erstwhile Medak District, rural literacy was 56.00 percent compared with 78.6 percent in urban areas, illustrating the educational disadvantage faced by rural populations.

Objectives

1. To study the level of political awareness and political participation among rural women in the present Sangareddy region.
2. To examine the participation of rural women in elections, Gram Sabha meetings, and local political decision-making.
3. To identify the major factors influencing the political empowerment of rural women and the challenges faced by them in political participation.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in selected rural areas of the present Sangareddy District, A total of 50 rural women were selected for the study using a convenience sampling method. The respondents were selected from rural households to understand their political



awareness, voting behaviour, participation in local governance, and decision-making. A structured interview schedule was used for collecting primary information. The collected data were organized into tables and analysed using descriptive statistics, mainly frequencies and percentages. The study is descriptive and exploratory in nature and focuses on the political empowerment of rural women.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Age Distribution:

Age Group	Number	Percentage
20–40 Years	22	44%
41–60 Years	24	48%
60 Years and above	04	08%
Total	50	100%

The age distribution shows that 24 (48%) respondents belong to the 41–60 years age group, while 22 (44%) belong to the 20–40 years group. Only 4 (8%) respondents are 60 years and above. The majority of respondents therefore belong to the economically and socially active age groups.

2. Marital Status:

Marital Status	Number	Percentage
Married	39	78%
Widow	08	16%
Unmarried	03	06%
Total	50	100%

The data shows that 39 (78%) respondents are married, while 8 (16%) are widows and 3 (6%) are unmarried. The high proportion of married women indicates that household and family responsibilities may influence their participation in political and community activities.



3. Literacy Status

Literacy Status	Number	Percentage
Literate	31	62%
Illiterate	19	38%
Total	50	100%

The findings show that 31 (62%) respondents are literate and 19 (38%) are illiterate. Literacy is an important factor in political empowerment because educated women may have greater access to political information, newspapers, government notices, and knowledge about elections and public institutions.

4. Occupation

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Agriculture	14	28%
Wage Labour	21	42%
Small Business/Self-Employment	07	14%
Household Work	08	16%
Total	50	100%

The occupational profile indicates that 21 (42%) respondents are engaged in wage labour and 14 (28%) are involved in agriculture. Seven (14%) are engaged in small business or self-employment, while 8 (16%) are primarily engaged in household work. The data shows that a considerable proportion of rural women depend on labour-based occupations.

5. Membership in Self-Help Groups

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	36	72%
No	14	28%
Total	50	100%

The data shows that 36 (72%) respondents are members of Self-Help Groups, while 14 (28%) are not members. SHGs provide



opportunities for women to interact with other women, participate in savings and credit activities, obtain information, and develop confidence and collective action.

6. Awareness of Panchayati Raj Institutions

Response	Number	Percentage
Fully Aware	11	22%
Partially Aware	22	44%
Not Aware	17	34%
Total	50	100%

The findings indicate that only 11 (22%) women are fully aware of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Twenty-two (44%) have partial awareness, while 17 (34%) have no awareness. This indicates that political and civic education was an important requirement for rural women during the study period.

7. Casting Vote Regularly

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	46	92%
No	04	08%
Total	50	100%

The data shows that 46 (92%) women reported that they regularly cast their votes, while 4 (8%) did not. The high voting rate demonstrates that rural women participated substantially in the formal electoral process.

8. Casting Vote Independently

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	23	46%
No	27	54%
Total	50	100%

The findings show that only 23 (46%) women reported voting independently, whereas 27 (54%) did not. This indicates that although women participated in elections, many were influenced by family members or other social factors when making voting decisions.



9. Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings

Participation	Number	Percentage
Often	08	16%
Sometimes	17	34%
Never	25	50%
Total	50	100%

Only 8 (16%) respondents reported frequent participation in Gram Sabha meetings, while 17 (34%) participated sometimes. Half of the respondents, 25 (50%), never participated. This indicates that direct participation in local governance was limited.

10. Have You Ever Contested an Election?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	05	10%
No	45	90%
Total	50	100%

Only 5 (10%) respondents reported having contested an election, while 45 (90%) had never contested an election. The findings indicate that political participation was mainly limited to voting rather than electoral leadership.

11. Participation in Political Meetings

Participation	Number	Percentage
Regularly	06	12%
Sometimes	17	34%
Never	27	54%
Total	50	100%

The findings show that only 6 (12%) respondents regularly participated in political meetings. Seventeen (34%) participated sometimes, while 27 (54%) never participated. This suggests that political organizations and public political discussions had limited participation among rural women.

12. Involvement in Family Political Decisions

Response	Number	Percentage
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Response	Number	Percentage
Actively Involved	10	20%
Sometimes Involved	16	32%
Not Involved	24	48%
Total	50	100%

Only 10 (20%) women were actively involved in family political decisions, while 16 (32%) were sometimes involved. Nearly half, 24 (48%), were not involved in political decisions within the family. This reflects the influence of family structures on women's political autonomy.

13. Awareness of Women's Political Rights

Response	Number	Percentage
Fully Aware	09	18%
Partially Aware	21	42%
Not Aware	20	40%
Total	50	100%

The data indicates that only 9 (18%) respondents were fully aware of their political rights, while 21 (42%) had partial awareness. Twenty (40%) women were not aware of their political rights. The findings highlight the need for political and legal awareness programmes.

14. Confidence in Speaking in Public Meetings

Response	Number	Percentage
High Confidence	08	16%
Moderate Confidence	21	42%
Low Confidence	21	42%
Total	50	100%

Only 8 (16%) women reported high confidence in speaking in public meetings. Twenty-one (42%) had moderate confidence and another 21 (42%) reported low confidence. Lack of confidence can restrict women's active participation in Gram Sabha and other public institutions.



15. Perception of Improvement in Women's Political Participation

Response	Number	Percentage
Improved Significantly	11	22%
Improved to Some Extent	25	50%
No Significant Improvement	14	28%
Total	50	100%

The data shows that 11 (22%) respondents believed that women's political participation had improved significantly, while 25 (50%) believed that it had improved to some extent. Fourteen (28%) did not observe significant improvement. Overall, the findings suggest that women perceived some positive changes in political participation, although major barriers continued to exist.

Key Findings

1. **Age Profile:** The majority of respondents are in the 41–60 years age group (48%), followed by 20–40 years (44%).
2. **Literacy:** About 62% of the respondents are literate, while 38% are illiterate. Educational limitations remain relevant to political awareness and participation.
3. **Occupation:** Wage labour is the major occupation, accounting for 42%, followed by agriculture at 28%. Economic dependence may influence women's political autonomy.
4. **SHG Membership:** A majority (72%) of women are members of Self-Help Groups, providing opportunities for collective interaction and social participation.
5. **Political Awareness:** Only 22% are fully aware of Panchayati Raj Institutions, while 34% have no awareness.



6. **Voting Participation:** A high proportion of women (92%) reported voting regularly, showing substantial participation in elections.
7. **Independent Voting:** Only 46% reported voting independently, while 54% did not. This indicates a gap between electoral participation and political autonomy.
8. **Gram Sabha Participation:** Half of the respondents never participate in Gram Sabha meetings, demonstrating limited direct involvement in local governance.
9. **Electoral Leadership:** Only 10% of respondents had contested an election, indicating very low participation in political leadership.
10. **Political Meetings:** Fifty-four percent never participated in political meetings, suggesting limited involvement in organized political activities.
11. **Family Political Decisions:** Forty-eight percent of women were not involved in political decisions within their families.
12. **Political Rights Awareness:** Only 18% were fully aware of women's political rights, while 40% were not aware of them.
13. **Public Speaking:** Only 16% had high confidence in speaking at public meetings, while 42% had low confidence.
14. **Overall Political Empowerment:** The study indicates that rural women had relatively high participation as voters but comparatively low participation in political leadership, Gram Sabha activities, independent political decision-making, and political organizations.

Suggestions

1. **Promote Political Awareness:** Village-level awareness programmes should be organized to educate women about voting rights, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Gram Sabha functions, and democratic participation.



2. **Strengthen Gram Sabha Participation:** Women should be encouraged to attend Gram Sabha meetings and express their opinions on local development issues.
3. **Leadership Training:** Training programmes should develop women's public speaking, leadership, communication, negotiation, and decision-making skills.
4. **Encourage Independent Voting:** Women should be provided with impartial information about candidates, political institutions, and electoral procedures so that they can make informed and independent choices.
5. **Promote Women's Electoral Participation:** Rural women should be encouraged to contest elections and participate in Panchayat-level leadership.
6. **Strengthen SHGs:** Self-Help Groups can be used as platforms for political awareness, leadership development, legal education, and collective participation.
7. **Improve Women's Education:** Adult literacy and continuing education programmes should be strengthened, particularly in rural areas.
8. **Increase Awareness of Political Rights:** Women should be educated about constitutional provisions, reservation, voting rights, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and their role as citizens.
9. **Reduce Family Restrictions:** Families and community leaders should be sensitized about the importance of women's independent participation in political and public affairs.
10. **Develop Communication Skills:** Special programmes should be organized to improve women's confidence in public speaking and participation in village meetings.
11. **Promote Economic Independence:** Skill development, employment opportunities, access to credit, and income-generating activities can strengthen women's overall bargaining power and indirectly improve political participation.



12. **Encourage Collective Action:** Rural women's organizations and SHGs should be encouraged to identify local issues and collectively present them before Gram Panchayats and other government institutions.

Conclusion

The study reveals a mixed picture. A large majority of women participated in elections, with 92 percent reporting regular voting. However, regular voting did not necessarily translate into independent political decision-making. Only 46 percent reported voting independently, while participation in Gram Sabha meetings, political meetings, and electoral leadership remained comparatively low. The study further indicates that limited political awareness, low knowledge of Panchayati Raj Institutions, family influence, inadequate confidence in public speaking, and limited awareness of political rights constrained the meaningful political participation of rural women. Although constitutional provisions and reservation policies created opportunities for women's representation in local governance, representation alone could not ensure substantive empowerment. The findings therefore suggest that political empowerment should be understood as a process extending beyond the right to vote. It includes political awareness, independent decision-making, participation in Gram Sabha, leadership, contesting elections, public expression, and the ability to influence local development decisions. The study also highlights the importance of education, Self-Help Groups, political awareness programmes, leadership training, and family and community support in strengthening women's political participation. Meaningful political empowerment of rural women requires a shift from women as voters to women as active political citizens, leaders, and decision-makers. Strengthening these dimensions can contribute to more inclusive local governance and democratic rural development.

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