

Participation and Discussion of Women Leaders in Panchayath Raj Institutions – a Study of Telangana State

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ABSTRACT

The main of this paper is to know the periodicity and frequency of attending general body meetings of PRI by women leaders, their participation and discussion and topics discussed on the issues in general body meetings of Gram Sabhas. The researcher collected the data using an interview schedule from three revenue divisions of Mahabubnagar district (Mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool and Narayanpet). The findings of the study shows that most of the women leader know about the General Body (GB) meetings, which are held once in about three months. According to them, they frequently attend the meetings, participate in the GB meetings & discuss on various issues. The major discussions held at the meetings are on providing drinking water, hygiene, education & Mid-day meal programme, public sanitation, construction of CC roads & buildings, rural electrification, etc. The decisions taken at the meetings are with the consensus of the majority of the members present at the time of meetings. It concludes that due to implementation of the reservation system and being implemented at rural level under 73rd CAA, in order to make Indian women more vibrant and participatory on large scale the reservations system should be extended to all the legislative bodies from rural to national.

Keywords: Participation, Women Leaders, PRI, General body meetings, Gram Sabha.

INTRODUCTION

“If an ancestral treasure lying buried in a corner of the house unknown to the members of the family were suddenly discovered, what a celebration it would occasion. Similarly, women’s marvelous power is lying dormant. If the women of Asia wake up, they will dazzle the world.” (Mahatma Gandhi, Message to Chinese Women, July 18, 1947)

In the Panchayat Raj system, Gram Sabha meetings play an important role in taking collective decisions in a democratic manner on what developmental activities have to be taken up and which one has to be given priority over others, etc. Gram Sabha is also termed as ‘watch dog’ to supervise and monitor the functions of the elected leaders in villages. These meetings are held at regular intervals to prepare village development plans and also to review the implementation of the past decisions/resolutions. The participation of women in Gram Sabha meetings is considered important as they know clearly the actual needs of requirements of the family and when they participate in such meetings, they will suggest and ask for taking up programmes that would benefit the community.

The researcher intended to find out whether the female Surpanches / MPTC members are attending Gram Sabha/General body meetings regularly and what are the discussions taken place in the meetings; important issues for well-being of the village people, etc.

Research questions:

1. What is the periodicity and frequency of attending general body meeting of the PRI by women leaders in Mahabubnagar district of Telangana state?
2. The women leaders did not participate and discuss the issues in general body meetings of Panchayat Raj institutes at Mahabubnagar district.
3. What are the major topics discussed in General Body meetings of the PR institutions of Mahabubnagar district?
4. The PR institutions did offer any training programmes for newly elected women leaders of Mahabubnagar district.

Objectives:

1. To know the periodicity and frequency of attending general body meetings of PRI by women leaders.
2. To find out whether the women leaders participate and discuss the issues in general body meetings of PRI.
3. To identify the topics discussed by the women leaders in general body meetings of PR institutions.
4. To know whether the training programmes arranged for newly elected women leaders of PRI.

Scope of the Study: The study is restricted to three revenue division of Mahabubnagar district i.e., Mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool and Narayanpet. The respondents of the study belong to Sarpanches and MPTC only. The rationale of taking up the period of 4th Local Body Elections-2013 is the focus of the study. Further, the study is focused only women leaders of the study area and participation and discussions in Gram Sabhas.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Shireen Parveen and Md. Iftexhar Hussain (2024)¹ highlighted the importance of long-term impact assessments, intersectional analyses, and innovative approaches to address the challenges, advocating for a more inclusive and gender-sensitive governance framework aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. It is opined by the researchers that despite significant strides, persistent barriers such as patriarchal norms and resource disparities persist, necessitating sustained efforts to foster the meaningful participation and empowerment of women in PRIs.

Sweety Supriya (2024)² found that empowering local governance and promoting female leadership have led to enhancements in women and child health outcomes, as well as bolstering women's empowerment at the grassroots level in Bihar.

Ankit (2023)³ discussed the socioeconomic and political backgrounds of the elected panchayat members, including men and also discussed the determinants of women participation. Despite a sudden 'shock' of an increase in their numbers, elected officials and the general public

perceive women's participation as limited. It is challenging for women to come out and speak in front of men due to patriarchy and other forms of social construction, such as the veiling of women's faces, the stereotype of women as shy, personal dynamics and caste. As a result, the husband, father, or brother of the elected woman member at the panchayat level are forced to make decisions on her behalf.

Sharma (2023)⁴ emphasized the limited knowledge and comprehension of the constitution among women, the author suggested that a significant number of them are uninformed about the functioning of Gram Panchayats and often make voting choices based on the influence of their families.

Borah (2022)⁵ underscores the significant influence of education on both social development and political empowerment, demonstrating that education enables women to become more involved in politics and more empowered.

Praveen Kumar (2021)⁶ explored the challenges and opportunities faced by women in Panchayati Raj institutions, analyzes the impact of their participation on local governance, and identifies strategies to enhance women's empowerment.

Titty Varghese (2019)⁷ conducted a study to identify the challenges of women in political leadership positions. Findings from the study reveal that there is considerable progress in women's equality in the leadership role; however, there are certain crucial obstacles that still exist for women to be active in the political realm.

Shivani Phukan (2016)⁸ attempted to examine the nature and effectiveness of women's participation at grass root level decision level making process. The study found that in one hand political awareness, education, training and increasing level of confidence have contributed towards women's participation on the other hand societal and cultural constraints, economic dependence on male, lack of local financial resources, interference of political parties, lack of support from women's groups hampering women's participation to a great extent.

Mishra and Sam (2016)⁹ presented evidence from Nepal, suggesting that women's participation in decisions regarding their healthcare, significant household expenditures, and familial visits escalates based on their land ownership status.

Shashi Kaul and Shradha Sahni (2009)¹⁰ revealed that neither the reservation for women or their actual presence in the Panchayat have become any more sensitive to the problems related to the village women. The women who are elected are not always treated with due respect. Many elected women complained that their suggestions were not considered seriously nor were they consulted while decisions were being made. Some felt that their views were ignored only because they are women. At times they were pressurized by their husbands to approve their decisions made by the male dominated Panchayats.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the present study the researcher collected the data from the elected women leaders of Panchayat Raj Institutions of Mahabubnagar district using a simple random sampling

technique. The participants for this study are Surpanches and MPTs. The three Revenue Divisions of Mahaboobnagar (Mahaboobnagar, Nagarkurnool and Narayanpet) are selected. The collected data was processed using MS-EXCEL Sheet, and analysed using (SPSS) and the percentage analysis results were incorporated in table form.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A Panchayath shall meet for the transaction of business as often as may be necessary and at least once in six months at the office of the Panchayath/Parishath. The data in the following table explains the conducting of general body meeting periodicity in Gram Sabha.

Out of 90 respondents, 80 (90%) respondents have stated that the General body meetings are held once in three months. Further, 8 (8.9%) of them did not have an idea about conducting general body meetings.

Table 1: Periodicity of General Body Meetings Conducted

Periodicity	Every one month	Two months	Three months	Six months	No idea	Total
Count (%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.1%)	80 (88.9%)	1 (1.1%)	8 (8.9%)	90 (100%)

Source: Field data

Only 1 (1.1%) respondents stated that the meetings are held in every two months and an equal number of respondents stated that the General body meetings are held once in six months. Therefore, it is found that the General body meetings are held once in three months.

In this regard the researcher interacted with an elected women Surpanch Mrs. Kavitha, Bomraspet Village of Mahaboobnagar and she confessed that she would attend only three meetings in a year on Flag Hoisting (Independence Day and Republic day), women's day and self-government day at school. Practically she depends on her father. Not only she but also some of the elected women leaders have no knowledge about the importance of General body meeting. Even a few of the members have no idea or difference between the Grama Sabha and the General body.

Gram Sabha meeting held at the Gram Panchayath at least twice a year i.e. once in the month of April or May and another on October or November headed by the Gram Surpanch. Generally Gram Sabha meetings held in the way of a semi-structure process. General body meeting held quarterly in a year at Gram Panchayath and Mandal Parishath.

To know whether the women leaders in the present study are attending or not to the Gram Sabha/ General body meetings, the data collected is presented the following table.

Table 2: Women Leaders Attending the Meetings

Attending the meetings	Yes	No	Total
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Count (%)	89 (98.9%)	1 (1.1%)	90 (100%)
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Source: Field data

It is observed from the above table that most 89 (98.9%) of the respondents are attending the meetings of PRIs in Mahabubnagar district, except a negligible number of respondents 1 (1.0%) said no.

Table 3: Frequency of Attending Meetings by the Elected Women Leaders

Frequency of Attending the meetings	Rarely	Now and then	Frequently	Total
Count (%)	10 (11.1%)	7 (7.8%)	73 (81.1%)	90 (100%)

Source: Field data

Table 3 reveals the frequency of attendance by the elected women leaders and the results states that more than eighty per cent (i.e., 81.1%) respondents attend the PRI meetings frequently, 10 (11.1%) of them attend rarely and 7 (7.8%) of them attend now and then. As such it can be said that majority of the respondents attend the PRIs meetings frequently.

The PRIs meetings are generally conducted in a regular periodicity and the members of the Panchayath attend along with Panchayath Secretary, chaired by the Surpanch. The table 5.3.4 illustrates the participation of women leaders in Gram Sabha meetings and participate in discussions on development activities.

Table 4: Participation and Discussion of Women Leaders

Sl. No.	Participation	OC	OBC	SC	ST	Total
1.	Yes	7 (38.9%)	23 (47.9%)	3 (25.0%)	4 (33.3%)	37 (41.1%)
2.	No	11 (61.2%)	25 (52.1%)	9 (75%)	8 (66.7%)	53 (58.9%)
	Total	18 (20%) (100%)	48 (53.3%) (100%)	12 (13.3%) (100%)	12 (13.3%) (100%)	90 (100%) (100%)

Source: Field data

It is observed from the above table that majority (58.9%) of the respondents are silent on their participation in the General body meetings. However, 41.1% of them opined positively that

they attend the PRIs meetings and participate in discussions. Out of 37 respondents who expressed that they participate in discussions, 47.9% of the from OBC category, 38.9% of them are from OCs, 4 (33.3%) of them ST category and 3 (25.0%) of them are from SC category. It is found from the study that nearly sixty per cent of them did not respond, whereas only about forty one per cent of the women leaders have confirmed that they participate in PRIs meetings and discussions.

It is also explored to find out the frequency of the elected women leaders participation in the discussion in PRIs meetings and the data collected on this aspect is presented in the below given table.

Table 5: Frequency of Participation in Discussions

Sl. No.	Frequency of participation	OC	OBC	SC	ST	Total
1.	Rarely participate	0 (0.0%)	2 (10.5%)	1 (16.6%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (8.1%)
2.	Frequently participate	7 (87.5%)	15 (79.0%)	5 (83.4%)	3 (75.0%)	30 (81.0%)
3	Sometimes participation	1 (12.5%)	2 (10.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (25.0%)	4 (10.9%)
	Total	8 (21.6%) (100%)	19 (51.3%) (100%)	6 (16.2%) (100%)	4 (10.8%) (100%)	37 (100%) (100%)

Source: Field data

It is observed that 30 (81.0%) out of 37 respondents were participated frequently and discussed on issues of Gram Sabha. 4 (10.9%) participated and discussed in meetings and remaining 3 (8.1%) participated rarely during the meetings throughout its deliberations. Those who participated frequently and discussed in the meetings, majority are from OCs and their percentage is 87.5%, 83.4% SCs are also have taken part in discussions frequently, 79.0% of OBCs also have taken participation and 75.0% of the women respondents from ST community also participated frequently. This shows that more than eighty per cent of the women respondents participated frequently and discussed on the villagers issues for their development.

In the present study, the researcher draws the opinions of the elected women leaders on the issues discussed in General body meetings. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Issues Discussed in General Body Meetings

Sl. No.	Topics discussed in Grama Sabha GBM	OC	OBC	SC	ST	Total
1.	Public sanitation and hygiene	2 (28.5%)	6 (27.2%)	1 (33.3%)	2 (40%)	11 (29.7%)
2.	Drinking water supply	4 (57.1%)	5 (22.7%)	1 (33.3%)	3 (60%)	13 (35.1%)
3.	Rural electrification, Construction of buildings	1 (14.2%)	9 (41%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (29.7%)
4.	Education / Mid-day meals	0 (0.0%)	2 (9.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.5%)
	Total	7 (19%) (100%)	22 (59.4%) (100%)	3 (8.1%) (100%)	5 (13.5%) (100%)	37 (100%) (100%)

Source: Field data

It is observed from the data in the above table that 13 (35.1%) of the respondents have discussed on the drinking water issues in the Panchayath general body meetings, probably it is the major concern of the villagers. The other major issues discussed at the Panchayath meetings in the decreasing order are: public sanitation & hygiene (29.7%), rural electrification and construction of buildings (29.7%), the education & mid-day meals (5.5%).

The data on the type of decisions taken at the PRIs meetings is presented in table 7.

The respondents have expressed that the decisions taken in the Gram Sabha/General body meetings are accepted by majority of the respondents and their percentage is 86.5%, a small section of respondents 10.6% of them are not able to state whether the decisions taken are through majority consent or unanimously and it is neutral and only one respondent have stated that the decisions are taken unanimously.

Table 7: Type of Decisions in the Meetings

Sl. No.	Type of decision	OC	OBC	SC	ST	Total
1.	Unanimously	0 (0%)	1 (5.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.0%)
2.	Majority	9	16	4	3	32

		(100.0%)	(84.2%)	(66.7%)	(100.0%)	(86.5%)
3.	Neutral	0 (0%)	2 (10.6%)	2 (33.3%)	0 (0%)	4 (10.5%)
	Total	9 (24.3%) (100%)	19 (51.3%) (100%)	6 (16.2%) (100%)	3 (8.1%) (100%)	37 (100%) (100%)

Source: Field data

Those who have accepted that the decisions are accepted by majority of the respondents, i.e., hundred per cent are from OCs and STs. And 84.2% of OBCs and 66.7% of SCs confirm this. From the above description, it is found that decisions taken in Gram Sabha/ General Body meetings are accepted by majority of respondents.

An attempt is made to find out from the respondents on whether the Gram Panchayath/ Mandal Parishath meetings have discussed the important issues to the village, and the data on this issue collected from the respondents is furnished below.

Table 8: Important Issues Discussed for Welfare of People

Important issues	Yes	No	No response	Total
Count (%)	84 (93.3%)	4 (4.4%)	2 (2.2%)	90 (100%)

Source: Field data

It is observed from the study that most 84 (93.3%) of the respondents stated that they discuss important issues in General body meetings. Whereas, only a small section of respondents (4.4%) have stated that important issues are not discussed.

It is observed from the Table 9 that all the respondents (100%) have stated that there is a training facility to the newly elected women leaders of PRIs.

Table 9: Training Facility for the Newly Elected Members

Sl. No.	Training facility	OC	OBC	SC	ST	Total
1.	Yes	18 (100%)	48 (100%)	12 (100%)	12 (100%)	90 (100%)
2.	No	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

	Total	18 (20%) (100%)	48 (53.3%) (100%)	12 (13.3%) (100%)	12 (13.3%) (100%)	90 (100%) (100%)
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Source: Field data

There are three training institutions available for the elected members of Panchayath Raj Institutions and they are: (i) Andhra Pradesh Academy of Rural Development (APARD) and (ii) Technology and Training Development Centre (TTDC). From these institutions, out of 90 respondents, 49 (54.4%) got training from APARD and 45.6% are trained through TTDC.

Table 10: Institutions Offering Training Programs for Newly Elected Leaders

Training programmes	Andhra Pradesh Academy of Rural Development (APARD)	Technology and Development Centre (TTDC)	Total
Count (%)	49 (54.4%)	41 (45.6%)	90 (100%)

Source: Field data

This shows that majority of the elected women leaders had availed the training facility through APARD. From the interviews with the respondents it is also found that some of the elected women leaders visited some other institutions established at Gujarat, Karnataka, etc. to gain knowledge on the functioning of PRIs.

FINDINGS

1. The findings shows that majority (90.0%) respondents accepted that they attend general body meetings once in three months.
2. It is found that most (98.9%) of the respondents are attending the meetings and majority of the respondents attend the PRIs meetings frequently in Mahabubnagar district.
3. Then results also show that nearly 60% of them did not respond, whereas only about forty one per cent of the women leaders have confirmed that they participate in PRIs meetings and participate in discussions.
4. More than 80% of the women leaders participates and discusses on the villagers issues like: drinking water supply, public sanitation & hygiene, rural electrification, construction of buildings and education/mid-day meals.
5. It is found that decisions taken in Gram Sabha/General Body meetings are accepted by majority of respondents (86.5%).
6. All the respondents stated that there is a training facility to the newly elected women leaders of PRIs and the training programmes are conducted at Andhra Pradesh Academy of Rural Development and Technology and Development Centre.

CONCLUSIONS & SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings that, of all the respondents of the survey, most of them know about the General Body (GB) meetings of Mahabubnagar district PRIs which are held once in about three months, and that they attend the meetings frequently, participate in the GB meetings & discussions. The decisions taken at the meetings are with the consensus of the majority of the members present at the time of meetings. The major discussions held at the meetings are on providing drinking water, hygiene, education & Mid-day meal programme, public sanitation, construction of CC roads & buildings, rural electrification, etc.

It is suggested that the reservation is being implemented at rural level under 73rd CAA, in order to make Indian women more vibrant and participatory on large scale the reservations system should be extended to all the legislative bodies from rural to national. Which include Panchayath, Municipality, Mandal level, ZP level, State level and Parliament level. Women instead of asking 50% reservation 33% must be made prevalent in all legislative bodies in the entire country.

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