

RNI Title Code: TELENG/2017/74418

ISSN 2581-6322

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ISSN 2581-6322

# SPWI JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL WELFARE

(A Multi Disciplinary Peer-Review Bi-Quarterly Research Journal)

**Volume 4 Issue 2, April-June 2021**

*Editor*

**Dr. D. Suresh**



**SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC WELFARE AND INITIATIVES**

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Volume : 4 Issue : 2 April-June 2021

An ISO 9001-2015 Certified Journal

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## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS - A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WARANGAL RURAL AND KARIMNAGAR DISTRICTS



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**Abstract:** *Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered as a means to good governance and the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment was affected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantaged sections of the society like Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and also women. The study is an effort to know the extent of political participation of vulnerable sections. The present local governments in India after independence were set up on the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957). The present study is about women elected representatives in PRIs and the problems and prospects of the women representatives in discharging their constitutional powers and functions. The findings of the various studies of the village panchayats in several areas reveal that they have become insensitive to the problems related to women with rural backgrounds. The women who are elected are not always treated with respect.*

**Keywords:** *Women Participation in PRIs, Role of the women in PRIs, Problems and Perspectives*

### Introduction

Local Governments have a history. Mahatma Gandhi advocated Panchayati Raj as the foundation of India's political system, as a decentralized form of government in which each village would be responsible for its affairs. The term for such a vision was Gram Swaraj ("village self-governance"). Instead, India developed a highly centralized form of government. However, this has been moderated with the delegation of several administrative functions to the local level to empower elected gram

panchayats. There are significant differences between the Panchayati Raj system that was envisioned by Gandhi and the system formalized in India in 1992.

### **Status of Women**

Women constitute half of the population. The issue of the political empowerment of women has attracted global attention. The United Nations (UN) adopted the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952. UN has organized four World Conferences on Women. The fourth was held in Beijing in 1995 and it declared that women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. It also affirmed that women should have at least a 30% share of decision-making positions.

### **Importance of Women in Local Government**

Policymakers and implementers often understand development to refer to both human and economic development. According to Haq, "the purpose of development is to help people live longer, more productive, and more fulfilling lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth. Economic growth that does not put people at its centre is development without a soul". Some of the issues of human development are gender inequality, the status of women, and the consequent low level of participation of women in governance. Even the few women in governance are not able to contribute much. According to the Human Development Report (1995) "development, if not engendered, is fatally endangered". It means development to date is not sex-neutral; it is biased against the fair sex. Such engendered development, in the context of gender inequality and other issues concerning women, can be corrected only by involving more women in the decision-making or governing process.

### **Women in Government**

Data from 133 countries shows that women constitute 2.18 million (36%) of elected members in local deliberative bodies. In India, women make up only 11.8% (64 members of Parliament (MPs)) of the 542-member Lok Sabha and 11% (27 MPs) of the 245-member Rajya Sabha. There are only six female ministers in the Union Cabinet. According to the Economic Survey 2018, of the 4,118 members of legislative assemblies (MLAs) across the country, only 9% are women. But there are more than a million women elected to the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) of local governance.

### **Strategies For Women Political Participation**

However, the participation of women, in general, in politics and public life in India has been abysmally low. There is a huge gap between men and women in political activities beyond voting. Participation of women at the higher level is lower in

comparison to their participation at the lower level of the governance structure. In the domestic arena leadership and managerial skills of women are silently recognized however, they are not given space in the public arena. While other marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes got reservations in the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies, no reservation for women was given in the Constitution of India at the beginning which restricted their political empowerment.

### ***Constitutional Provisions***

Article 15 (3) to the Constitution of India empowers the State to make special provisions for women. This constitutional mandate is a recognition of the fact that women in India need to be empowered socially and economically to ensure their full participation in the social, economic and political activities of the country. However, to make use of the potential of women and also to empower them, the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 (73<sup>rd</sup> CAA) for the first time provided one-third of reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and thus ushered a new era of women's participation in the local governance in India. However, the journey of political empowerment of women in Panchayats has evolved gradually. Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report (1959) had suggested only that the 20-member Panchayat Samiti should co-opt or nominate two women interested in work among women and children.

The Ashok Mehta Committee Report (1978) recommended a two-tier panchayat system, in which the two women who polled the highest number of votes in the panchayat elections would, even if they failed to get elected, stand co-opted into the panchayat. Where no women contested elections, and two women known to be active community workers, could be co-opted.

National Perspective Plan for Women (1988) recommended a 30% reservation for women in these bodies. Meanwhile, some states had already proceeded to provide reservations for women. In 1985, Karnataka introduced a 25% reservation for women in the Mandal Praja Parishads, with a further reservation for women belonging to the SCs and STs. Andhra Pradesh, too, had in 1986 provided for reservation of 22-25% for the Gram Panchayat (GP), with two women to be co-opted in the Panchayat Samitis, in addition to the elected women members.

Article 243D of the Constitution of India introduced through the above-mentioned 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA provides that one-third of the total number of seats and offices of the Chairpersons in PRIs at each level shall be reserved for women to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. Such reservations of seats and offices of the chairpersons for women are also within the reservations for SCs and STs in all three tiers of PRIs. That means not less than one-third of all seats and offices reserved for SCs and STs.

Although 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA provides for only 1/3rd reservation for women in PRIs, as many as 19 States (Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh,

Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu) have raised reservation of seats and offices of chairpersons to women to 50%.<sup>4</sup> Efforts are on to increase the reservation from 1/3rd to 1/2 all over India. There are approximately 13.45 lakh Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in PRIs which constitute 46.14% of total Elected Representatives (ERs).

### **Achievements of the Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions**

Due to patriarchy and the perceived threat of males losing their domination of the political system, the potential and achievements of elected women in PRIs were not recognized in the beginning. They were dismissed as proxies of their husbands and other male members of their families and at times as proxies of elites in the village. Their capacity to understand the process of governance and to lead the affairs of panchayats was questioned. However, many women elected representatives have made their mark in bringing positive changes in their areas.

For example, woman Sarpanch of Chandsamand Gram Panchayat (GP) in Karnal district of Haryana has developed a three-pound system under MGNREGA with the purpose to treat the greywater and further use the same for gardening, kitchen gardening and irrigation purposes. For the beautification of the ponds, a green belt has been developed around the pond. Dhauj, another woman-headed GP in Haryana has taken several initiatives towards the empowerment of women. Among these are skill development of women and girls, bridging the digital divide through mobile computer training institutes, motivating and orienting school girls on their rights, campaign against Purdha/Ghunghat (veil) system etc. An MBA graduate who quit her corporate career with one of the country's biggest telecom firms to become the sarpanch of Soda GP in Rajasthan has been working ever since to ensure clean water, solar power, paved roads, toilets and a bank to the village.

Woman Sarpanch of Dhani Miyan Khan GP in Haryana built a training centre for women and ensured that every village child went to school. Under her guidance, her village won many awards for its good sanitary conditions, zero dropout rates and the best sex ratio among all villages in Haryana. Former investment banker, woman Sarpanch of Dhunkapara GP in Odisha launched a campaign to revive traditional folk art in her village and ensured that the benefits of the various government schemes reach the needy and deserving people. She has introduced the benefits of the Public Distribution System to her village, which wasn't known to most people. Now they avail wheat, kerosene and other items at subsidized prices. She also started a major literacy campaign for women in the panchayat where only signatures would be recorded for official applications, instead of thumb impressions. Her work was recognized internationally when she was selected to be a part of the International Visitors Leadership Program by the US Consulate to speak on the importance of transparency and accountability in the government.



Woman Sarpanch of Abdullah Badkheda returned from the United States and is now working towards making her GP a model GP by ensuring the most effective implementation of government schemes. Under the leadership of its woman Sarpanch, Khetri GP in Assam has achieved 100% institutional delivery, 100% immunization, near 100% drinking water coverage, sanitation coverage and 80% all-weather road connectivity in the GP. Apart from that, organizes regular health camps, organized legal literacy camps for women and provided shelters to victims of domestic violence and destitute women. Woman Gram Pradhan of Namkhana GP in West Bengal has ensured functional standing committees on women and children in her GP. She has emphasized SHG formation, joyful learning and nutritious food for the children. Her GP maintains records and contact details of women out-migrating for work.

Pattanaik (2010) studied the functioning of EWRs in many panchayats and found “it is clear that women’s leadership in panchayats is transforming India. These elected women-now role models to the other women in their communities- are altering the development agenda to address issues critical to village life. The success stories number in millions. Women throughout India- from Orissa to Assam to Uttar Pradesh to Bihar- are ensuring that roads are repaired, electricity is brought to their villages, schools are built, latrines installed, medical services are available, water sources are made safe, local savings groups are formed, and the list goes on and on”.

India Spend study 2017 in six districts of Tamil Nadu has found that 60% of women elected representatives of PRIs are functioning independently of their male family members or colleagues.

### **Challenges Before Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions**

The elected Women Political Executives in Panchayati Raj Institutions are facing many challenges they are given under:

**Patriarchy:** Except for a few tribal societies, particularly in the northeast, Indian society, in general, continues to suffer from patriarchy. Many EWRs continue to work as a rubber stamp for their family members and also at times as proxies of rural elites. Their male co-workers show insensitivity and refuse to cooperate. The burden of household responsibilities, purdah (veil) system and domestic violence negatively affect their functioning.

**Caste System:** Hierarchical caste system in rural India makes it difficult for women from SC and ST communities to function independently and effectively. Community or Khap Panchayats functions parallel to panchayats and pressurizes EWRs to act in a particular way.

**Lack of Cooperation from Line/Sectoral Departments:** women, particularly the first-timers find it very difficult to deal with officials of block/district administration and line/sectoral departments. Bureaucratic apathy and corruption are rampant which makes these women demotivated and disenchanted from the Panchayati Raj. People’s



expectation to deliver coupled with non-cooperation of administration frustrate these EWRs so much so that many times they are unwilling to contest for the next term.

**Inadequate Capacities:** The majority of women enter into public life for the first time and do not have enough knowledge and skills to handle the affairs of panchayats. Training programs conducted by government training agencies are unable to cover all elected representatives in time. A large number of ward members do not get an opportunity to attend any training in their entire term. At times they are also not allowed by their family members to travel and stay alone during puts constraints on women. However, educational criteria introduced by a few states such as Rajasthan and Haryana have brought educated women and girls to Panchayats who are learning fast and can function effectively.

**Rotation of Terms:** The policy of reservation for only one term and rotation of reserved seats and posts of chairperson also hinders consolidation of leadership qualities among women as it takes time for them to learn the skills of handling and negotiating various conflicting interests within the panchayat. By the time they learn this skill and start functioning effectively, their term is over. The main reason behind there not being elected to PRIs cited by women is the de-reservation of seats and offices of chairpersons. So far only five States namely Chattisgarh, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and Karnataka have already made provisions for two-term reservations of seats and offices of chairpersons.

**Encroachment and Non-Payment of Taxes/Fees:** Elected representatives in general and especially women face resistance from the community if they want to remove encroachment from panchayat land/properties. Many times, they are subjected to violence from powerful elements of society. Many rural households do not want to pay taxes and fees on time while expecting panchayats to deliver public services and goods in time. The insistence of women is resisted at times by violent protests.

**Two-Child Norm:** A few States are continuing with the two-child norm for contesting panchayat elections. In rural areas, women hardly have any say in the number of children in the family and such laws restrict their entry into panchayats.

**Inadequate Women Panchayat Functionaries:** Elected women representatives are more comfortable with women functionaries. However, there are very few women panchayat functionaries. Patriarchal mindsets make it difficult for women to freely interact with male functionaries at times when it is required.

To help women overcome these challenges to be able to contribute effectively in bringing positive changes in rural areas, the Government of India along with State Governments has undertaken several initiatives.

### **Initiatives of Government**

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), commissioned a Study on elected women representatives in Gram Panchayats. The study was based on a nationwide survey

and its report was released on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2008. This Study helped analyze various issues related to women and it also investigated their socio-economic profile, tracked their political careers and examined the quality of their post-election participation in terms of performance of their roles and responsibilities.

To bring about 50% reservation for women in Panchayats in all States, a Constitution Amendment Bill namely the Constitution (One Hundred and Tenth Amendment) Bill, 2009 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2009. However, the matter was not taken up presumably because of other important businesses in the House. The present government has also tried to revive this proposal.

For capacity building of elected women of PRIs, the MoPR has been making continuous efforts by launching and implementing various schemes like Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Yojana (RGSY); Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan (PMEYSA); capacity building component of Backward Region Grants Fund (BRGF), Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA) and recently launched Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSa). These schemes also have a strong component in the capacity building of women. For example, the objectives of PMEYSA were to enable women Panchayat leaders to come together to (a) articulate their problems as women Panchayat leaders, (b) discuss issues regarding the institutional mechanisms for their empowerment, (c) come up with a charter of issues to be mainstreamed into policy and advocacy support so that their concerns are addressed by the process of development adopted by the State and the three-tier PRI system, and (d) form an association of the women with elected office bearers and with the cascading representation of women from the district level and divisional level women organizations. For the capacity building of EWRs in PRIs, the National Capability Building Framework (NCBF) of the MoPR has recommended customized training programs based on training needs assessment. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) in collaboration with the MoPR has undertaken a countrywide program of training the EWRs in various areas like engineering (building of roads, drains, latrines etc.), finance, social development, education, health, and environment among others.

States have also been taking steps to build capacities of EWRs in PRIs. For example, the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) Jharkhand has created a special Women's Resource Centre for the capacity building of EWRs. Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) has conducted training of Elected Women Standing Committee Chairpersons on leadership. The government of Madhya Pradesh under its Umaria pilot made a short and intensive field-based intervention of four months duration aimed to enhance leadership skills of women GP Sarpanches in the tribal majority district of Umaria. The government of Maharashtra organized a nonresidential training program at the doorstep of elected women representatives in the villages of their residence under its Kranti Jyoti project.

For effective utilization of Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) grants, MoPR has developed model guidelines and a manual for the preparation of holistic participatory Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP). Subsequently, all States have also developed their state-specific guidelines with provisions for the active participation of women in the planning process. To ensure women's participation in decision-making, States have been provided financial and technical assistance by MoPR for capacity building of women and SHGs on the preparation of GPDP.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as an important support institution for elected women representatives of PRIs. In Kerala where Kudumbashree has promoted the active SHG movement, a very high proportion of elected representatives are from SHGs backgrounds. Learning from this, National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) has successfully facilitated PRI- SHG/CBO convergence project in several states including Assam, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. The project envisages developing a strong community cadre and local institutions to improve the reach and quality of public service delivery. MoPR has issued an advisory to all State Governments in 2016 to ensure PRI-SHG/CBO convergence. Among other things, this advisory suggests developing an institutionalized framework for the Gram Panchayat-SHGs interface, the inclusion of SHGs/ federations in community-based monitoring of schemes and projects of GPs. Sumit Bose Committee on Performance-Based Payments for Better Outcomes in Rural Development Programs has observed that SHGs being active organizations of women can hope to link up with elected women representatives in a mutually beneficial partnership. Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India to has issued a comprehensive advisory and guidelines in May 2018 on panchayat – SHG convergence at GP level. Among other things, the advisory expects SHGs to help GPs conduct gender status studies and ensure the gender needs of the community and reflect these in local plan/GPDP; enrol women as members of SHGs and groom them as community resource persons.

MoPR has organized special events like the orientation of women's Sarpanches at the national level. One such event was organized at Vijaywada in 2016 for women Sarpanches from Fifth Schedule Areas. Such events not only serve as an opportunity for capacity enhancement but also networking with women of other States and regions.

MoPR has also issued various advisories to States concerning women. All the State governments and UT administrations were advised to impress upon PRIs to ensure the safety of women and women Sarpanch's, particularly those belonging to the weaker sections. They should not be physically harmed, assaulted or humiliated in any manner. Discrimination of any kind against them should not be allowed to remain unheeded and be resolved expeditiously. To put a curb on the cases of proxy attendance by relatives of women, States have been advised to issue an order that the officers, in whose presence such meetings are held, should be proceeded against departmentally. MoPR has also issued advisories to States to instruct GPs to celebrate international

women's day on 8<sup>th</sup> March and to involve SHG women and women SwachhataDoots actively in these celebrations.

### **Statement of the Problems**

The reservation for women in PRIs provided by 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA and subsequent increase in the quota by States has brought an unprecedented huge number of women in the governance arena in India. Women's political empowerment of such magnitude is among the best in the world. A quarter-century has passed since the abovementioned Act came into force and in most of the State's fourth or fifth generation of Panchayats is in place. Women leadership in Panchayats which started with a shaky beginning has definite signals of getting well established and recognized.

However, women have still not been able to realize their full potential as they face many challenges including patriarchy, inadequate capacities and self-confidence, rotation of terms etc. The government of India and State governments are making sincere efforts to strengthen women through various initiatives of capacity building, promoting the network of women, Self Help Groups-PRI convergence etc. Much more is desired to be done to further strengthen the hands of women in the future. Among these are nationwide 50% reservations, rotation of terms only after a minimum of two terms, timely induction and refresher training, exposure visits, mentoring and handholding of women in PRIs. With various governmental and non-governmental initiatives, it is for sure that women in PRIs would contribute their best in achieving the national goals of Samridha Bharat (prosperous India) and Sashakta Bharat (empowered India) and the seventeen global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to which India is committed.

### **Importance of the Study**

Including women in decision-making/governance is an associate essential step towards making gender equality and gender-sensitive policies. Since women have different desires and views on social and political problems, it is necessary to involve women in decision-making/governance to incorporate all of the social group viewpoints in policy and decision-making processes. Through their active involvement in decision-making/governance is unit well aware of problems. Due to this and the need to produce a citizen base to run in elections, women politicians will be active advocates of women's problems among their colleagues in the local government and of mainstreaming gender views in policies.

Politics specialists additionally highlight the importance to notice that gender views ought to be integrated into policies and government designing not solely by women politicians, however additionally by their male counterparts. To try and do this, the Politics specialists suggest sensitizing and coaching native government

workers. In the light of the above discussion, the research has framed the following objectives and hypotheses to trace out the role of the women in Panchayat Raj Institutions in two districts Warangal Rural and Karimnagar in a comparative way.

The main objectives of the study area:

1. To study the socio-economic background of the selected women Sarpanches
2. To analyze the ability of elected women Sarpanches in articulating the interest of the women to the decision-makers and aggregating such interests for alternative policy formulations as well as policy implementation.
3. To make a scientific probe into the role of women sarpanches in Panchyati Raj Institutions of Telangana
4. To enquire into the role of women sarpanches in matters functioning of the Gram Panchayats.
5. To provide suitable suggestions for improving the role of the women sarpanches.

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been formulated which shall guide us in course of our analysis. Our chief hypothesis is **The Role of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions- A Comparative Study of Warangal and Karimnagar Districts.**

Under the above principal hypothesis, the following sub-hypotheses have been formulated:

1. Most of the women political executives are married.
2. Women prefer to become political executives to solve the local problem and to represent the cause of women in the PRIs Meeting.
3. Women political executives depending on male political executives in the execution of their power in PRIs meetings.
4. Women political executives are capable of articulating and aggregating women's demands and public opinion to the policymakers and in the PRIs meetings.
5. Women political executives are capable of managing the functioning of the PRIs.
6. Women political executives effectively play their role in matters of the developmental work of their locality.
7. Women political executives maintain close relations with political executives as well as with government authorities.
8. Women sarpanches are mostly guided by their male counterparts.

## Research Methodology

Empirical and evaluative methods have been adopted for this study, for this purpose administered a questionnaire to respondents. Personal interviews have been conducted to collect primary data. Available literature has also been reviewed to collect secondary data.

## Scope of the Study

The study has tried to evaluate the role of women political executives in the Panchayati Raj Institutions of the Karimnagar and Warangal Rural districts. Further, the researcher focused on the role of elected women political executives during the 2019 Panchayati Raj elections. The study merely focused to evaluate the role and performance of women sarpanches in solving their problems.

## Sampling

For the study, Warangal Rural and Karimnagar districts have been taken as the study areas. In 2019 about 386 sarpanches are elected in Warangal Rural and 311 in Karimnagar districts. The following table gives a clear picture of the elected women sarpanches in selected districts.

**Table 1: Elected Women Sarpanches in Karimnagar and Warangal Rural District during 2019 elections**

Caste of the Elected members	Warangal Rural District		Karimnagar District	
	Total Elected Members	Women Elected Members	Total Elected Members	Women Elected Members
<i>Total</i>	386	191	311	158
UR	148	75	156	78
BC	67	33	73	37
SC	57	27	78	40
ST	114	56	4	3

Source: <https://tsec.gov.in/dashboardresults.se>

As per the Telangana State Election Commission, about 349 candidates are elected as Sarpanches of which 54.72% are representing from Warangal Rural and 45.27% from Karimnagar districts. Concerning the individual district, 49.48% are women candidates who are elected as sarpanches in Warangal Rural district and 50.80% in Karimnagar district. Regarding the caste of the elected women sarpanches, out of the total unreserved seats 39.26% in Warangal Rural and 49.36% in Karimnagar, 17.27% and 26.41% are Backward Classes, 14.13% and 25.31% are Scheduled Castes and 29.31% and 1.89% respectively.

It is clear among the elected women sarpanches, the majority of the women are elected from unreserved seats (43.83%) and it is followed by Backward Classes (20.05%), Scheduled Castes (19.19%) and Scheduled Tribes (16.90%).

It can be observed from the data the women highly participated in Karimnagar district more than Warangal Rural in all castes except Scheduled Tribes, regarding this community is highly participated in Warangal Rural district. This figure indicates that the caste-wise demography in both districts.

For the present study 300 elected women sarpanches with a slight difference as sample based on Small Sample Techniques (Robert, V. Kerjcie and Daryle, W. Morgan 1970) the details have given in table 2.

In this connection, 300 elected women sarpanches of the different Gram Panchayats of both Warangal Rural and Karimnagar were chosen on the baste of the stratified random method from the PRI election of 2019 to administer the questionnaire. Apart from the above, a set of unstructured questions were also put to several persons of the area, through a personal interview, to know their views.

**Table 2: Sample Size**

Caste	Warangal Rural		Karimnagar		Total Sample
	Elected	Sample	Elected	Sample	
UR	75	60	78	74	134
BC	33	23	37	35	58
SC	27	22	40	38	60
ST	56	45	3	3	48
Total	191	150	158	150	300

### **Limitation of the Study**

The study was confined to the general election held in 2019 in both sampled districts. The study took the secondary data for the demographic profile of both sampled districts from the Census 2011 and form the official documents of the districts after 2016.

### **Data Collection**

This study is based primarily on the data collected through a survey conducted just after the election for Local Self-Government Institutions of 2019. To collect appropriate information, we had made a pilot survey and administered the questionnaires to some individuals of the region based on stratified random sampling. Questions were prepared in English but were translated into Telugu (Mother Tongue) for the clarity of the respondents. Based on the pilot survey, the questionnaires were modified. The researcher had to spend about half an hour with the individual respondent to complete the question answers.



## Data Analysis

When the data were collected, an elaborate codebook was prepared. Thereafter the qualitative data were converted to quantitative data and the data were posted in the code sheet. The quantitative data were tabulated and analyzed. Because of the heterogeneity of the answer pattern to open-ended' questions only those responses which could be coded were taken into account. In most cases, data have been used through frequency and percentage distributions. No sophisticated statistical methods were adopted to compute and analyze the data.

## Findings of the Study

It is found that the highest number of respondents belonged to the age group of 41-50 years i.e., 77% in Warangal Rural and 80% in Karimnagar District. Regarding the religion of the respondents, it is found that the majority of them are Hindus. Concerning the caste of the sample respondents, General and OBC respondents are found with some variation but in the case of the SC and ST castes, most of the SC (25%) respondents are found in Karimnagar and STs (30%) in Warangal Rural district. This will also reveal the demographic profile of the population in sampled districts. It is found that most of the married women were involved in political activities at the Panchayat level. It is observed that the majority of the respondents has some level of education in both sampled districts. It is found that most of the respondents were housewives. Regarding assets holding by the respondents, 71% of respondents were holdings assets of which 70% of respondents were from Warangal Rural District and 72% from Karimnagar district. It is found that most of the respondents' households belonged to above middle sections of the community (79%) and few of them were from the middle class (21%). The study found that the majority of the respondents' families are nuclear families

In the fifth chapter, it is revealed the performance and perception of the Women Sarpanches in which the levels of the service rendered by the women representatives in local bodies in the selected districts. It is found that 96% of the women became aware of the Panchayat Raj Administration during their adulthood and mostly when they were exposed to the electioneering process. It is observed that the parents, the husbands and the political parties played important roles in promoting political awareness among the respondents. Remarkably the voluntary organizations did not play the expected role in this direction and the role of media was also very negligible.

It is further observed that the women took interest in the Panchayat administration when they became adults. A few of them had such interests during their educational career. On the other hand, the husbands of the respondents, the political parties and the parents of the women created political interest among them in a large way. The peer groups, to some extent, motivated the respondents in this direction. But the media played very little role in promoting political interest among women.

It is noteworthy that most of the women sarpanches contested the Panchayat election only for one time and they could win in such election. A few of them ventured to contest two to three times and won the election. Hence a few of them were politically matured. While most of the respondents were encouraged to contest the election by their husbands, a majority were motivated by the political parties. Most of the respondents to take an active part in the functioning of the Gram Panchayats after they became sarpanch. This establishes that irrespective of age, caste, educational qualifications, religion, occupational status and income, the women sarpanches acquired political awareness, interest and involvement mostly because of encouragement from their husbands, parents and political parties.

It is also found that women sarpanches mostly involved themselves in the local administration to solve local problems and to render social services. Some of them wanted to represent the cause of women in the panchayat council meetings through their participation. It is also observed that a vast majority of them devoted a major part of their time to the panchayat activities. Hence, they were sincere and duty-bound. It is very interesting and encouraging to see that 88% of the women sarpanches attended all the meetings of the Gram Panchayat. Moreover, 87% of them participated actively in the deliberations of the panchayat meetings and a good majority of them initiated resolutions in such meetings. When 66% of them projected women problems, 52% of them mentioned the problems of road and communication in their resolutions. A good number of them also pointed out health and sanitation problems. Those who raised the said issues, among them majority were more educated, experienced, aged and economically sound. It is also revealed that most often there was cooperation among the women sarpanches and as such, they were supported by the male members in getting their resolutions passed.

It is pertinent to note that our respondents were particular in representing the interests of the women in the panchayat meetings. The majority of them were concerned about the employment of women, health facilities for the women, dowry problems and maternity and child care. On the other hand, a vast majority of the respondents had good contact with the local people as they were discussing local problems with the inhabitants. In such discussions they gave priority to the issue of ration cards, Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), development works etc. to a large extent.

It is observed that 74% of the respondents very often articulated the local problems to the higher authorities of the government. As such, there was good interaction between the women sarpanches and the state government authorities in our study areas. It is exciting to note that more than 73% of the respondents said that they received full cooperation from the government officials on the issues which they placed before them. However, it is shocking to know that a vast majority of the respondents were pressurized by the political parties while playing their role as sarpanches.

A majority of them were also dominated by the Sarpanch and were bonded by the decisions of the villagers. As such, hardly the women sarpanches performed their functions independently.

In the process of our analysis, we attempted to know the problems and prospects of the Gram Panchayats existing within our study areas. It is found that 60% of our respondents felt that the Gram Panchayat was functioning effectively. The rest 40% were dissatisfied with the working of the Gram Panchayat. A good majority of them said that there was pressure and intervention by the government officials. They also said that personal interest supersedes the public interest in the functioning of the Gram Panchayat. The majority of them also felt that there was party-based work. All these contributed to the ineffective functioning of the Gram Panchayat.

Regarding the problems faced by the Gram Panchayat revealed that a vast majority of the respondents attributed to lack of technical knowledge of the elected members, ignorance about local administration on the part of the sarpanches, apathy on the part of the state government towards local problems, paucity of funds, failure in mobilizing resources by the local body and too much of political intervention as the major problems of the panchayat government.

### **Suggestions**

In the light of the findings of the study, I felt it is necessary to turn to the various suggestions which were put forth by the respondents for bringing improvement in the role of the women sarpanches in panchayat administration at this point of analysis.

It is suggested for providing technical and administrative training to women sarpanches so that they would be more efficient in managing gram panchayat administration.

It is also suggested more autonomy to Gram Panchayat for its better functioning.

Other suggestions which women sarpanches advanced include adoption of remunerative projects by the panchayat government, greater attention of the state government to the panchayat problems, provision for rewards to effective sarpanches, greater peoples' participation in Gram Panchayat activities, creation of Public Vigilance Committee and Village Alert Committee which according to women sarpanches would result in better functioning of the Gram Panchayats.

It is suggested to minimize political intervention in the working of women sarpanches, a good majority of the respondents advocated for more autonomy to these sarpanches. If these suggestions are taken into consideration, the efficiency of the women sarpanches shall improve.

I think that the suggestions made by the women sarpanches and the citizen respondents if implemented might make an important contribution to the strengthening and progress of the Gram Panchayat government and administration in Telangana State. It would also contribute towards better role performance of the women sarpanches.

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