
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF SCHEDULED CASTE WOMEN IN GRASSROOT DEMOCRACY – A STUDY

DR. S. SOMALINGAM , DR. DABBETI MAHESH

Abstract: The condition of SC women is even more deplorable than that of women in general. The Scheduled Castes constitute about 17 per cent of the country's population. They have remained socially, economically, educationally and politically backward due to caste stratification of Indian society. The present study intends to study the performance of the Scheduled Castes women's Political participation in grass-root democracy in the district of Khammam in Telangana State. The main objective of the study is to examine the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes' women representatives. To assess the impact of socio-economic conditions on Scheduled Caste's women political participation. Finally this paper reveals the Panchayat Raj system in Telangana has been a boon to S.C women to acquire leadership skills and techniques to muster the support and strengthen from all the quarters. How the Panchayat Raj bodies are best and effective grounds for the women to acquire the leadership qualities.

Keywords: patriarchal, PRI, Politicized, S.H.G,

Introduction: The introduction of universal adult franchise, establishment of democratic institutions, decentralization of power, implementation of reservations in all sectors including political sector have helped. Women in general and Scheduled Castes' women in particular to attain the ability to take part in politics and to gain access to power. The women's status and opportunities in economic and political spheres clearly indicate their political participation. Even Scheduled Castes' women are also actively participating in politics, despite some limitations. However, their role in politics is very marginal and remains traditional. They are being tied down to look after the family and domestic chores. Their role in politics has not been accepted in the same way as that of men. 'The poor participation of the Scheduled Castes women is perhaps an indication of their disillusionment with the unhealthy trends in politics with corruption and inefficiency spreading in all spheres of political activity (Hussain Khan, P. ,2009). It can be also because of their tender, graceful and soft spoken nature of Scheduled Castes women, which is unsuited to the rough Indian politics'.

The Post-independence period witnessed several women liberation movements in independent India. The political conditions in the country are more conducive for the Scheduled Castes women to take part in politics. Since the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act, 1993 onwards reservations for women in local bodies facilitated them to participate in politics. All the political parties i.e. National or regional political parties are encouraging the women in general, Scheduled Castes women in particular to participate in politics (Ghosh G.K. and Shukla Ghosh, 1997). The Scheduled Castes women aspirants however, have been chosen only on the basis of their winning competence.

The socio-economic, cultural and political patterns and trends will be influenced by these factors. The women are also part and parcel of the social setting, where the congruence of castes, communities and groups participates in the political process. The ethnic and cultural diversities found in the district are due to its geographic continuity with Telangana region, whose influence is mainly responsible for the heavy and higher level of participation, witnessed in the district politics. Many women members represented the district, state and central legislatures for more than five decades.

The Khammam district is considered a highly politicized district, where the entire National, regional political parties have a place in the district from both the extremes. The data reveals that, youth are active in politics and majority of them are illiterates. In spite of several literacy programmes, they are still illiterate. When compared to the two sub-castes of Mala, Madiga. Malas are more literate than the Madigas. It is observed that, Majority of them are working in agriculture and allied professions. Interestingly, even house wives (25.00%) are also showing keen interest in politics; even they are ready to contest any post which is reserved for women. It is also observed that, all of the respondents are fully covered by different governmental programmes such as Development of Women and Child in Rural Areas, Self Help Groups and Indira Kranti Patham programmes. These programmes enhanced the levels of self-confidence and the other hand, they were political empowered because their Constitutional rights.

Objectives & Research Methodology of the study: The objectives of the present study are to examine to analyze the socio-economic conditions of the S.C. Women in Khammam district. To assess the impact of socio-economic conditions on S.C women in

political participation, to analyze the role of S.C women leaders in local body institutions. The present study conducted primary data as well as secondary data. The primary data collected a structured questionnaire and elicited the important opinions from the respondents spread over remote mandals in the district of Khammam in Telangana State. The collected data from 300 Scheduled Castes women respondents, who were heading the village

Panchayath Sarpanches, Ward Members, Mandala Parishad Teritorial Constituency members, Zilla Parishad Teritorial Constituency members, Mandal Parishad Presidents and Muncipal Councilors of only Scheduled Castes women representatives and even the defeated and ex-local body representatives have also been interviewed. The secondary data collected by various research journals and books, researchers opinions.

Table-01 – The Respondents Caste details (Education –wise)

Education Caste	% Illiterate	% Primary	% Secondary	% Inter/Degree	% P.G.	% Professional	% Total
Mala	17.69 20 (19.41)	26.54 30 (32.60)	33.62 38 (58.46)	17.69 20 (64.51)	1.76 02 (66.66)	2.65 03 (50.00)	100.00 113 (37.66)
Madiga	44.75 81 (78.64)	33.14 60 (65.21)	13.81 25 (38.46)	6.07 11 (35.49)	0.55 01 (33.34)	1.65 03 (50.00)	100.00 181 (60.34)
Maladasari	33.33 02 (1.95)	33.33 02 (2.19)	33.34 02 (3.08)	-	--	-	100.00 06 (2.00)
Total	34.33 103 (100.00)	30.68 92 (100.00)	21.66 65 (100.00)	10.33 31 (100.00)	1.00 03 (100.00)	2.00 06 (100.00)	100.00 300 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey.

The Table-01 indicates that, nearly 34.33 percent of the respondents are still Illiterates. Nearly 50.00% of the respondents completed their School Education. Interestingly 10.33% of the respondents are completed Inter/Degree Education. A meager 1.00% of the

respondents are complete their Post Graduation. Interesting observation is made from this table Mala's are more than the Madigas. It can be observed that, irrespective of their educated status and professions majority of them are participating in elections.

Table-02 – The Respondents Occupation details (Caste –wise).

Occupation Caste	% Agriculture Labour	% Agriculture	% Petty Business	% House-wife	% Different Occupations	% Total
Mala	53.98 61 (39.10)	14.15 16 (36.36)	1.76 02 (22.22)	26.54 30 (40.00)	3.57 04 (25.00)	100.00 113 (37.66)
Madiga	50.82 92 (58.97)	14.36 26 (59.09)	3.31 06 (66.66)	24.86 45 (60.00)	6.65 12 (75.00)	100.00 181 (60.34)
Maladasari	50.00 03 (1.93)	33.33 02 (4.55)	16.67 01 (11.12)	-	--	100.00 06 (2.00)
Total	52.00 156 (100.00)	14.66 44 (100.00)	3.00 09 (100.00)	25.00 75 (100.00)	5.34 16 (100.00)	100.00 300 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey.

The Table-02 shows that, nearly 66.00% of the respondents are working Agriculture Labour and Agriculture Profession. Interesting observation is made from this table 25.00% of the respondents are House Wife's are showing keen interest in Politics.

Table - 03 The Respondents responses about their positions

Age Response	% 18-25 yrs	% 26-35 yrs	% 36-45 yrs	% 46-55 yrs	% Above 55 yrs	% Total
Awared	9.13 19 (82.60)	42.30 88 (68.75)	40.38 84 (73.68)	6.73 14 (46.67)	1.46 03 (60.00)	100.00 208 (69.33)
Not awared	4.37 04 (17.40)	43.47 40 (31.25)	32.60 30 (26.32)	17.39 16 (53.33)	2.17 02 (40.00)	100.00 92 (30.67)
Total	7.68 23 (100.00)	42.66 128 (100.00)	38.00 114 (100.00)	10.00 30 (100.00)	1.66 05 (100.00)	100.00 300 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey.

The table-03 devoted to explain the respondents' knowledge about their powers and functions. The data analyzed in the table reveals that, nearly 70.00% of the respondents are fully aware of the powers and

functions of their positions. It is also observed that roughly about 30.00% of the respondents are not aware of the duties and functions of their positions

Table - 04 The Respondents (Caste - wise) party affiliation.

Party Affiliation	% Congress	% TDP	% CPI (M)	% CPI	% CPI (ML)ND	% Total
Caste						
Mala	57.52 65 (51.18)	11.50 13 (18.05)	21.23 24 (34.78)	7.97 09 (36.00)	1.78 02 (28.57)	100.00 113 (37.66)
Madiga	30.93 56 (44.09)	32.59 59 (81.95)	24.86 45 (65.22)	8.83 16 (64.00)	2.79 05 (71.43)	100.00 181 (60.34)
Mala Dasari	100.00 06 (4.73)	--	--	--	--	100.00 06 (2.00)
Total	42.33 27 (100.00)	24.00 72 (100.00)	23.00 69 (100.00)	8.33 25 (100.00)	2.34 07 (100.00)	100.00 300 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey.

The Table-4 shows that, a majority of the respondents are from Madiga community. A considerable number of the respondents are from Mala community. However, a negligible 2.00% of the respondents are from Mala Dasari community. As per the analysis of the data, nearly 43.00% of the respondents across all the sub-communities are either supporters or political activists of Congress Party. This study also indicates that, all the Harijan sub-castes are supporting Congress party. Infact, they are the basic structure for the Congress party. It is also observed that, after the emergence of MRPS (Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti) Harijans on sub-caste lines are divided. Even after the division of Malas are rallying with Congress party and also

majority of the Madiga sub-caste are also supporting the Congress party with a view to bifurcate the reservations on sub-caste lines. For this purpose Constitutional Amendment is necessary. Hence, majority of the Madiga's are also supporting Congress party.

It is also observed that, the parallel regional political party in Andhra Pradesh is also a strong contender for political power in the state. Madiga sub-community is supported by Telugu Desam party. For the classification of sub-communities' reservations should have constitutional status. An observable feature of the study is that, CPI-(M) party is also very much popular among both the Mala and Madiga sub-communities. Because communist party is an

ideological oriented party and they fight per minimum daily wages of agriculture labour. Even CPI party is also very much popular because of their valiant fight for landgrab movement, house sites movement etc.. To some extent, they are the

crusaders of the down trodden sections particularly Mala, Madiga sections. Because of these two communities are supporting communist parties. Only a few handful people from both sub-communities are supporters of CPI-(ML) ND party.

Table - 05 The Respondents' (age-wise) responses about their enter into politics.

Age Response	% 18-25 yrs	% 26-35 yrs	% 36-45 yrs	% 46-55 yrs	% Above 55 yrs	% Total
Political Leaders motivation	5.53 13 (56.52)	42.55 100 (78.12)	40.42 95 (83.33)	10.21 24 (80.00)	1.29 03 (60.00)	100.00 235 (78.33)
Family members motivation	18.86 10 (43.48)	45.28 24 (18.76)	20.75 11 (9.64)	11.32 06 (20.00)	3.79 02 (40.00)	100.00 53 (17.66)
Self inspiration	--	28.58 02 (1.56)	71.42 05 (4.38)	--	--	100.00 07 (2.35)
Friends motivation	--	40.00 02 (1.56)	60.00 03 (2.65)	--	--	100.00 05 (1.66)
Total	7.68 23 (100.00)	42.66 128 (100.00)	38.00 114 (100.00)	10.00 30 (100.00)	1.66 05 (100.00)	100.00 300 (100.00)

* Source: Field Survey.

The above data reveals that, most of the respondents about 235(80.00%) respondents across all the age groups they were motivated by the political leaders for their enter into politics. Only a meager number of respondents are from the age group of 18-25 youngsters inspired by the political leaders entered into politics. More than 35 members from the age group of 26-50 years entered into politics to contest the elections. It can be concluded that, majority of the respondents are under the influence of political leaders. However, a considerable educated respondent also entered into politics with the encouragement and support of their family members. That's why in local body elections, youngsters contested and won the elections and are successfully discharging their duties.

Table - 06 The Respondents' (age-wise) knowledge about the 33% women reservations are allocated for in local bodies.

Age Response	% 18-25 yrs	% 26-35 yrs	% 36-45 yrs	% 46-55 yrs	% Above 55 yrs	% Total
Awared	8.33 23 (100.00)	45.28 125 (97.65)	40.21 111 (97.36)	5.79 16 (53.33)	0.39 01 (20.00)	100.00 276 (92.00)
Not awared	--	12.50 03 (2.35)	12.50 03 (2.64)	58.33 14 (46.67)	16.67 04 (80.00)	100.00 24 (8.00)
Total	7.68 23 (100.00)	42.66 128 (100.00)	38.00 114 (100.00)	10.00 30 (100.00)	1.66 05 (100.00)	100.00 300 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey.

The table-6 deals with the respondents' knowledge about 33% of women reservations in local bodies. The analysis of the data indicates that, a majority of the respondents across all the age groups are aware of the 33% reservations that are allotted for them. However, a negligible percentage of the respondents are not aware of the 33% of the reservations in local body elections. It can be observed that, almost all the respondents irrespective of their age group are more conscious about their plight and rights. And they are also demanding their due share in politics. Infact, it is a welcome feature for the women-folk, because they are raising their voice against the male chauvinism even in the field of politics.

Table - 07 The Respondents' (age-wise) responses about they faced problems during their period.

Age Response	% 18-25 yrs	% 26-35 yrs	% 36-45 yrs	% 46-55 yrs	% Above 55 yrs	% Total
Yes	6.52 03 (13.04)	26.08 12 (9.37)	39.13 18 (15.78)	23.91 11 (36.66)	4.36 02 (40.00)	100.00 46 (15.33)
No	7.87 20 (86.96)	45.68 116 (90.63)	37.79 96 (84.22)	7.48 19 (63.34)	1.18 03 (60.00)	100.00 254 (84.67)
Total	7.68 23 (100.00)	42.66 128 (100.00)	38.00 114 (100.00)	10.00 30 (100.00)	1.66 05 (100.00)	100.00 300 (100.00)

Source: Field survey

The table-07 explained about the financial problems faced during their respective periods. Interestingly, out of 300 respondents 254(85.00%) of the respondents said that, they never faced financial problems while discharging their duties. However, a considerable 46(15.00%) of the respondents said that, financial problems are being faced while implementing several developmental schemes due to non release of funds from different Government agencies. Even at times on some technical grounds funds are not released in time. Hence, they faced unexplainable ordeals while discharging their duties.

It can be concluded that, the educated respondents are bold enough to discharge their duties by seeking the financial assistance and help from different Government agencies. Majority of the educated respondents equipped with negotiate skills are dealing with the Governmental agencies. Even 90.00% of illiterate women respondents were also told enough in getting the financial assistance and help for the effective implementation of several programmes. It shows that education has given them self-confidence to discharge their functions more effectively than the others.

Table - 08 The Respondents' (age-wise) responses of their performance

Age Response	% 18-25 yrs	% 26-35 yrs	% 36-45 yrs	% 46-55 yrs	% Above 55 yrs	% Total
Satisfied	8.33 16 (69.56)	45.83 88 (68.75)	40.62 78 (68.42)	4.68 09 (30.00)	0.54 01 (20.00)	100.00 192 (64.00)
Not Satisfied	16.48 07 (30.44)	37.03 40 (31.25)	33.33 36 (31.57)	19.44 21 (70.00)	3.72 04 (80.00)	100.00 108 (36.00)
Total	7.68 23 (100.00)	42.66 128 (100.00)	38.00 114 (100.00)	10.00 30 (100.00)	1.66 05 (100.00)	100.00 300 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey.

The table -08 indicates that, nearly 65.00% of the respondents expressed their satisfaction about their performances. However, a considerable number 108(36.00%) of the respondents are not satisfied with their performances because of various factors such as heavy pressure from family burdens, non-availability of funds and non-co-operation from officials and official agencies. At times, heavy political pressures from higher authorities hamper their performances. A considerable number 108(36.00%) from the age groups of 18-55 years said that, they were not impartial because it leads to poor performance. It can be concluded that, barring the age groups that admitted about their satisfactory performances, others have not performed to the optimum level. Hence, they are unhappy about their performances.

Conclusion: The caste system has not allowed Scheduled Castes to get the benefits of education and hence the opportunity to change their occupation is lost. The constitution prescribes protection and

safeguards for Scheduled Caste's either specially or by way of general rights of citizens with the object of promoting their educational and economic interests and of, removing certain social disabilities. These provisions have to some extent been beneficial to them yet social and discrimination continues to be there (Ainapur, L.S. 1986).

Scheduled Castes are highly depressed people in Indian Caste society and Scheduled Caste women are double explanted group in Caste and gender perspectives of the society. Democratic parliamentary system of India provided many provisions for uplift of Scheduled Castes including special provisions for Scheduled Castes in all spheres of life. Among them, political reservations in local bodies are very important which helped them to enter into public sphere. But after 67 years of democratic practice, two decades of implementation of reservations in local bodies are not giving much benefit to them. Because of caste oriented and patriarchal society.

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Dr. S. Somalingam, Post Doctor Fellow & Faculty Member, Department of Political Science, UPGC College, subedari, Warangal, Telangana State, Mobile No.09177909931,E-Mail: ssomalingam@yahoo.in

Dr. Dabetti Mahesh, Faculty Member, Department of Political Science, UPGC College, subedari, Warangal, Telangana State, Mobile No.09010581990