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PANCHAYTI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA - A STUDY OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL BODIES OF WARANGAL DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

In the early history of Indian civilization, we find some evidences of villages being the basic units of social and economic life and the existence of some kind of village government. The local affairs of each village were carried out in an open assembly.¹ And subsequently in the medieval period, the system of local self-government continued to be more or less the same. Local self-government is the fulfillment as well as the foundation of democracy. It is at once the home and the nursery of democracy. It can nurture people's interest in their community and provide a channel of participation in the management of local affairs. Local government is an integral part of the three-tier system of government in our country, being at the bottom of a pyramid of governmental institutions with the national government at the top and the state government occupying the middle position. Local government operates both in rural and urban areas. In fact, local government is more important in the daily life of a citizen than the state or central government. Article 40 of the Constitution clearly lays down that the, "States shall take steps to organize village panchayats and to endow them to function as units of self-government."

KEYWORDS: Civilisation, Democracy, Local Self government, Village panchayat,

INTRODUCTION

Local government system has existed in India in every phase of its history. The grass root system had shown a peculiar identity and stability despite frequent changes of power at the super structural level. Local self-government is the fulfillment as well as the foundation of democracy. It is at once the home and the nursery of democracy. It can nurture people's interest in their community and provide a channel of participation in the management of local affairs.² In fact, Local self-government occupies an important place in the political system. It not only takes care of the primary needs of citizens but also enables them to learn the basics of governance. It is for this reason that it is an

inevitable part of modern democracies. Local government is an integral part of the three-tier system of government in our country, being at the bottom of a pyramid of governmental institutions with the national government at the top and the state government occupying the middle position. Local government operates both in rural and urban areas. In fact, local government is more important in the daily life of a citizen than the state or central government. Thus, it is important here to know some historical background of these institutions in our country.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the early history of Indian civilization, we find some evidences of villages being the basic units of social and economic life and the

existence of some kind of village government. The local affairs of each village were carried out in an open assembly.³ And subsequently in the medieval period, the system of local self-government continued to be more or less the same. However, the system was quite different in the Mughal period. The representative character was abolished and the whole administration of a city was placed in the charge of a nominated government official known as the 'Kotwal', magisterial functions, including the control over police and intelligence.⁴ As a result, the local self-government institutions remained stagnated throughout this period. The modern system of local government owes its origin to the British Raj. Lord Ripon's Resolution on local self government of 18th May, 1882 marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of local self-government in India as it laid the foundation of the system that exists even today.⁵ His resolution envisaged a network of local bodies for the administration of both rural and urban affairs. It recommended local boards throughout the country divided into two-tiers, district boards and tehsil panchayats.⁶

The institutions of local government established in the early period which included institutions like Municipal Corporations, Municipal Boards in the urban areas and Panchayats and District Boards in rural areas find their entry in article 40 of our Constitution⁷ Article 40 of the Constitution clearly lays down that the, "States shall take steps to organize village panchayats and to endow them to function as units of self-government. As a result, all the state governments have established both the urban and rural self governing institutions in their respective states.

There are two types of local government units in the country. These can be grouped into two broad categories i.e. Rural and Urban. The Rural Local Government consists of a three tier structure of local bodies popularly known as Panchayati Raj. It operates at three different levels including the Districts, the Blocks and the Villages.) These bodies have their own organization and area of operation, in the urban area, we have bodies which are termed as Municipal Corporations for bigger cities and municipal boards/ councils/ committees for small cities and towns. For cantonment areas and notified areas, there are separate boards/committees. Now we will discuss in brief the forms of local bodies in the rural and urban areas' separately.

WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ

In India, participation of women in political process has a long history. In the early Vedic period Women actively participated in public affairs. They had full freedom for spiritual progress and intellectual development. They were free to attend

and visit public assemblies and social gatherings.⁸ According to Sumana Pandey, during the early Vedic period, women enjoyed relatively high position in Indian society. In later Vedic period the status of women was declined considerably.⁹

With the advent of Muslim Turks, social rules and norms towards women became more rigid. Social evil practices such as the system of early marriages, *Purdah* system, *Sati* system, the practice of polygamy, dowry system and female infanticide slowly and gradually started taking roots and women lost most of the rights and privileges and got confined to the four walls of their family lives. During the Mughal period, seclusion of women was looked upon as a symbol of respectability among the higher classes.

They were denied the benefits of education and occupied a subjugated and inferior position in society. However, with the coming of British in India, things started changing. In the later part of British period, the status of women started changing with the introduction of education for women and some legal and administrative changes.

The Christian Missionaries, Voluntary organizations, British and Indian social reformers took initiatives to provide education to women and to promote their standing in the society. Social reformers raised their voice for restoration of women's lost prestige, glory and rightful place in society. In this regard, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Iswarchandra Bandyopadhyay (Vidyasagar) contributed a lot. From 1811 to 1828 Raja Ram Mohan Roy carried on a 'one man campaign' against *Sati*. It was due to the long struggle of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and other reformers that Lord William Bentinck passed the "Regulation No XVII" on 4th December 1829 which declared *Sati* illegal and punishable by criminal courts. In Bengal, Vidyasagar opened up many schools for girls. He started vigorous campaign in favor of widow remarriage. It was for his constant effort that, Widow Remarriage Act was passed by the Government in 1856. The efforts of Keshab Chandra Sen against early marriages facilitated the enactment of Civil Marriage Act of 1872. For the introduction of female education, remarriage of Hindu widows, prevention of child marriage, Debendranath Tagore established an organization called 'Samajonnati Bidhayini Suhridsamiti' which attracted prominent public figure to work for emancipation of women. He submitted a memorandum to the legislative council for removal of legal disabilities of remarry of widows. He donated a large sum, for the propagation of female education. RabindraNathTagore visualized women as great moral forces who add strength and stability to social order.¹⁰

Although men were the first to take up the cause of women, women too did not lag behind. Some outstanding women of the nineteenth century struggled against the prevalent condition and

pursued with all sincerity the object of women's emancipation. Pandita Ranabai, Ramabai Ranade, Anandibai Joshi, Francina Sorabjee, Kadambini Ganguli, Malanika Karlekar, Begum Rokea Sekhawat Hussain, Begum Sufia Kamal were constantly engaged in their efforts to raise the social position of women. They gave guidance and direction to a movement which at that time was only in an embryonic stage. Their dauntless struggle against orthodox society became a source of inspiration for many women.

The Maharashtra was the first state which introduced the provision for the nomination of one or two women to each of the three tier PRIs under its Zilla Parishad and Panchayati Act of 1961. Later Karnataka in 1983 and Andhra Pradesh in 1986 introduced the policy of reservation of 25 seats for women in Gram Panchayats and Zilla Parishads. The states like West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, and Orissa had also made the provision to reserve 20 percent to 30 percent of the total seats for women candidates in different tiers of local bodies in their respective states.

The National Perspective Plan (NPP) for women (1988) also highlighted that co-option of women in PRIs did not bring about any perceptible impact on women's participation in Panchayats. The NPP also asserted that special intervention was necessary to give more thrust and responsiveness to the policies and programmes related to empowerment of women in the participatory democracy. The final report of NPP therefore recommended for women the following policy perspectives. (a) 30 percent reservation of total seats in local governments-both panchayats and municipalities, (b) 30 percent reservation of executive heads in all PR bodies, (c) reservation of certain percentage of constituencies in lower PR tiers as exclusively women constituencies and (d) 50 percent of all grass-root functionaries would be women.

Consequent upon the recommendations of the NPP regarding reservation of seat and post for women in local governments, the 64th Amendment Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on 15th May 1989. The special feature of this Bill was 30 percent reservation of seats for women in the three tier PRIs. Despite of putting so much effort on the Bill it was not passed. The bill was defeated in the upper house. Another Bill was introduced in September 1990 but it could not be taken up because of the fall of the then government. 63 After the general elections of 1991, new government came to power and introduced the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Bill. The Bill was referred to the Joint Committee of Parliament and after incorporating suggestions of the joint committee the Bill was finally passed in Parliament on December 23, 1992 and came into force from April 24, 1993. The 73rd Amendment Act opened up a new vista in Indian politics as far as

women's political participation is concerned. It reserved constitutionally 33% of seats for women in PRIs. This Amendment aimed at making rural women not only beneficiaries of development but more importantly contributors to it.

WOMEN IN GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY

True to the ethos of the Indian national movement, the role of women in making a success of grassroots democracy has been emphasised by all national level Committees appointed to review and recommend measures to strengthen the Panchayati Raj System. The Balwantray Mehta Committee (1957) in order to make women contributors to development and be not just beneficiaries, not only recommended assistance to women to increase their incomes and improve the conditions of their children but also cooption of women members to Panchayati Raj institutions to give them representation in the rural political institutions. However, it needs to be said that the committee thought of women's participation mainly from a welfare perspective and not so much from a power-sharing one.

The Santhanam Committee on Panchayati Raj Elections (1965) in its recommendations for representation for special groups stated that though women cannot be called a weaker section by any tests of poverty or of social status, yet owing to traditional subjection and exclusion from public life, women, even belonging to more prosperous sections of the community, tend to keep out of it. They, therefore, recommended that "the association of women at every level of Panchayati Raj is necessary for its growth. Their active association will break the tradition of exclusion and bring about a keener political consciousness among people as a whole.¹¹ Even while recommending a minimum representation of two women members in a village panchayat, four in Samiti and eight in a Parishad, the Committee's perception of women's participation in public life was limited to the welfare syndrome and not so much their contribution to the total development of the rural area.

The 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act:-

The basic object behind the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act is to strengthen the Panchayat Raj set up in states by introducing a three tier system on a uniform basis and also by entrusting to them, powers and functions which shape them into effective units of self-government as envisaged by Article of the Constitution. The Act passed in Parliament on 24th April, 1993. It came into force from 23-04-1994 all over India. Article 243D(3) provides that not less than one-third (including the women's SC/ST seats) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such

seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

The Panchayati Raj system was adopted the three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions, namely Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad, at village, block and district levels respectively. Besides these three tiers there was one more statutory body called the Gram Sabha which was the general body of all the adult residents of a village. It has a defined legal status under the law. The Gram Panchayat was a representative and elective body consisting of elected and co-opted members. Panchayats constitute the base of the pyramid of Panchayati Raj. Panchayat Samiti was the middle tier in the hierarchical set-up of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Panchayat Samiti was the pivot round which most of the activities of Panchayati Raj revolve. The Zilla Parishad at the district level was essentially an advisory body whose main function was to maintain general supervision over panchayats and panchayat samitis and was to maintain co-ordination into different panchayat samitis of the district.¹²

Before the 73rd Amendment, the Rajiv Government at the centre decided to move a comprehensive amendment in the constitution of India to give a firm basis to the essential features of the Panchayati Raj. This bill was the brain child of the late Rajiv Gandhi, who strongly believed in strengthening panchayats by giving them constitutional status. This was done in the form of 64th Constitution Amendment Bill, in 1989. The bill, however, could not be enacted as it was not approved by the Rajya Sabha. In December the Parliamentary elections led to the Janata Dal ministry being formed at the centre under V.P. Singh. The Janata Dal government again moved the above bill in Lok Sabha with some changes here and there in September, Unfortunately, the Janata Dal government could not survive its full term and fresh elections to Lok Sabha were held in June 1991 which brought Congress(I) back to power under P.V.Narasimha Rao.

Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Bill - 1994:-

The Congress (I) Government, in Andhra Pradesh, could not conduct elections under the new Panchayat Raj setup. The terms of office of the 22 Zilla Parishads and about 1,100 Mandal Parishads was expired in May, 1992 and that of 19,000 Gram Panchayats in the year March, 1993. The Zilla Parishads (ZPs) and Mandal Parishads (MPs) were managed by special officers. In the case of Grama panchayats the terms of office of the Sarpanches calling them the person in-charge was extended. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) Government, which came into power, has introduced the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Bill which was passed by

the Assembly on March 30, 1995. The bill is amended to increase the reservations for the Backward Classes from 20 per cent to 33 per cent, the Scheduled Caste candidates from 16 per cent to 18 per cent, for the scheduled tribe candidates from 6 per cent to 8 per cent. Thus, the overall reservations would come to 59 Percent.

Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Act 2014 in Telangana:-

Whereas, by virtue of section 3 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act, 2014 (Central Act No. 6 of 2014), the State of Telangana comprising the territories specified therein has been formed on and from the appointed day i.e. of 2.6.2014.

The powers conferred by section 101 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 (Central Act No. 6 of 2014), the Government of Telangana hereby order for adaptation of the Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Land Development (Lay out and Building) Rules, 2002, issued in G.O.Ms.No.67, PR&RD (Pts.IV) Department dated.26.02.2002 as amended from time to time, which are in force as on 1.6.2014, to the State of Telangana with the following modifications.

In the Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Land Development (Lay out and Building) Rules, 2002,

- (1) throughout the rules, for the words "Andhra Pradesh", occurring otherwise than in a title or citation or description etc., the word "Telangana" shall be substituted.
- (2) in Rule 26 of the said Rules, for the Para substituted in G.O.Ms.No.376, PR&RD (Pts. Iv) Department, dated. 29.11.2012, the following shall be substituted, namely "The Gram Panchayat while according permissions for construction of a building intended for public worship or religious purposes shall do so subject to the following conditions;-
 - (a) Places of worship for religious purposes shall be given subject to the condition that at least 100 meters distance is maintained in the vicinity of any other such existing place of public worship;
 - (b) Land ownership shall have a clear title and be undisputed ;
 - (c) Statutory norms regarding the noise may be adhered to.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay in her book entitled, "The Status of Women in India" has traced the evolution of women's role in Indian society from ancient to modern times. In her views the women in Vedic period enjoyed a high status and participated equally in the social,

religious and political affairs of the country.¹³

Sebasti L. Raj in the study "Quest to Gender Justice" a critique of the Status of women in India highlights the problems of women, status of Indian women in comparison with the status of women in other countries.¹⁴ Premalata Pujari and Vijay Kumari Kaushik in their study "Women Power in India" describe the women's development in various parts of India.¹⁵ Vijay Agnew, in his book "Elite Women in Indian Politics" describes the historical background of women in Nationalist Movement and Women's organisation.¹⁶

Manikyamba, P. in her book "Women in Panchayati Raj Structures" discusses the achievements and shortcomings in the working of Panchayati Raj since 1959, The author identifies the factors responsible for rural women's marginal visibility in development programmes.¹⁷

"Symbols of Power" by Vina Mazumdar contains several articles on the political status of women in India. The general view which emerges is that women in India are showing signs of political awakening but their progress is hindered by illiteracy, domestic pressures, dependency on men. By and large, a few women who have emerged significantly into political prominence are those who are economically well off, and who belong to the upper strata of society. A few references to women in panchayati raj institutions have been made. However, majority of women are found to be nominated and hardly any woman stands for elections.¹⁸

Niroj Sinha¹⁹ in his book "Women as Marginals in Politics" describes an international experience that despite loud proclamations of constitutional equality between men and women, the few women who enter in politics seldom enjoy political power or are involved in decision making process.

Lakshmi Menon²⁰, in her book, "From Constitutional Recognition to Public Office" found the general attitude towards politics as an obstacle in women's participation in public life. Politics is regarded as "dirty" and education does little to encourage women to take the stigma attached to politics.

Manikyamba, P. in his book, "Women Presiding Officers at the Tertiary Political Levels" points out that a trend of revitalization in the context of political participation of rural women is evident and that the development psyche can be noticed in them. Men's attitudes towards women's entry into politics and leadership positions have also been changed. The situation has moved from one of total rejection to limited objection and in some cases active encouragement too.²¹

Profile of Warangal District:-

Warangal district's geographical area is spread over 12,846 Sq.KM. According to 2011

census reports²², the total population of the district is 32.31 lakhs accounting for 4.29 per cent of the State's total population of which 16,37,682 lakhs are males and female population is 15,93,492 lakhs. The urban population is 6,20,791. There are 1,098 officially recorded villages and out of these 1,004 villages are inhabited.

Warangal district, for the purpose of administration is divided into five Revenue divisions i.e., Mahabubabad, Warangal, Narsampet, Jangaon and Mulugu and 50 revenue mandals. The density of population is 219 per Sq.KM. The geographical area of the district is 12,846. Sq.KM. The Principal crops grown in the district are, rice, jowar and maize. The main staple food of the people is rice, which is generally grown throughout the district during both the Rabi and Kharif seasons. Besides this; green gram, red gram, Bengal gram, ground nut, chillies, cotton, maize, jowar, turmeric are the major crops grown in various parts of the district.

Warangal Urban population 2011:-

According to 2011 census, out of Warangal the total population 28.25 per cent live in urban parts of the district. Among these members 1 992,333 people live in urban areas of which males are 498,687 and females are 493,646. Sex Ratio in urban region of Warangal district was 990 as per 2011 census. Similarly, child sex ratio in Warangal district was 939 in 2011 census. Child population (0-6) in urban region was 94,363 of which males and females were 48,655 and 45,708. This child population figure of Warangal district is 9.76%. Average literacy rate in Warangal district as per census 2011 is 80.03% male and female 73.50% literates respectively.

Warangal District Rural Population 2011:-

As per 2011 census 71.75% of population of Warangal district live in rural areas. 25,20,243 males and females are 12,60,594 and 1,259,649 respectively. In rural areas of Warangal district the sex ratio is as females as per 1000 males. Coming to child sex ratio for 916 girls per 1000 boys. Child population in the age 0-6 is 246,805 in rural areas of which males were 128,789 and females were 118,016. The child population comprises 10.22% of total rural population of Warangal district.

Ghanpur(station) Mandal Profile:-

Ghanpur (station) consist of 69 Villages and 28 Panchayats . Vishwanathpur is the smallest Village and Ghanpur (Station) is the biggest Village . It is in the 344 m elevation (altitude). This Place is in the border of the Warangal District and Karimnagar District.

Warangal (Orugallu) , Medaram , Khammam , Hyderabad , Medak are the near by Important tourist destinations to see.

Demographics of Ghanpur(station) Mandal:-

Telugu is the Local Language here. Also People Speaks Urdu . Total population of Ghanpur(station) Mandal is 87,619 living in 19,538 Houses, Spread across total 69 villages and 28 panchayats . Males are 44,264 and Females are 43,355

About Ghanpur (Station):-

Ghanpur (Station) is a place located in Ghanpur (Station) mandal, Warangal district of Telangana state, India. According to census information the total population of Ghanpur (Station) is 12721 living in 3016 houses, among them male population is 6762 and female population is 5959.

Elected Members in the study area:-

| Sl. No. | Desgination | No. of Memberes |
|---------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Sarpanche | 01 |
| 2. | M.P.T.Cs | 03 |
| 3. | Ward Members | 08 |
| | Total | |

Perception of the Respondents:-

Women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country. But their involvement in politics is insignificant compared to men. Many psychological, social and physical factors hold women back from active political involvement. This is true as far as the state and national level politics is concerned. In this backdrop, the implementation of the 73rd Amendment Act, granting 33.33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions gave women the opportunity to enter local politics. Presently there are millions of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. This is considered a revolution in the context of women empowerment. With this background, an attempt has been made to study the political empowerment of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, in Ghanpur (Stn) of Warangal district in Telangana State.

Focus of the Study:-

With these studies and conceptual frame of leadership our focus has been directed to the study of women leaders in local self-government institutions in the state of Telangana. Our major concern here is to examine the role perceptions and value orientation of women leaders and which socio-economic backgrounds these leaders come from. What is the social, economic and cultural frame from which women political leadership emerges? What are the social background and interest affiliation of these women leaders? We are attempting here to study or analyse the socio-economic bases of the women leaders and their knowledgeably, their awareness and the socio-economic and political values of these women leaders. In addition, our focus is on the real role of women leaders in the decision making process at the grassroot level. We feel it is important to study these grass-root level women leaders who have been provided power positions in Panchayati Raj and Municipal Institutions. Moreover, the study of women leadership at local level also carries a great political relevance since

it may throw some light on national politics and democracy at operational level. Therefore, we have chosen as the focus of our study, the women leaders who are the members of Panchayati Raj Bodies and Municipal Institutions in the state of Telangana.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of our study are in brief to examine and analyse:

- The socio-economic and political background of women leaders.
- Knowledge ability and Awareness among women leaders.
- Value attitudes and value perceptions of women leaders on various socio-economic issues.
- Participation of women leaders in socio-economic development of the country.

METHODOLOGY

The study is primarily based on empirical evidence of women leaders in Ghanpur (Stn.) of Warangal district. Random Sampling was used for the selection of women leaders. We have selected the women leaders from the Ghanpur (Stn) who were elected in the Panchayt Raj elections. In this way we have selected the women leaders. The data for this study have been collected both through secondary as well as primary sources. Among secondary sources we used the Statistical data, official records of the Election Commission of India, official documents of Local Bodies, written records of village panchayats, tehsil offices, B.D.O. offices, Municipal Corporations and Municipal Committees/Council offices, Census Report, published and unpublished reports, Journals, Books and Newspapers.

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