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RESEARCH ARTICLE

LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN THROUGH PANCHAYAT GOVERNANCE (A CASE STUDY OF ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES OF PRAKASAM DISTRICT OF ANDHRA PRADESH)

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Abstract

Women's participation in politics has been an issue of discussion in recent years. The dominance of caste, culture and patriarchy has resulted in ignorance among women about public life. The process of women's participation in local governance is in the transitory stage and needs to be carefully scurried to bring about an improvement in the better participation of women in rural politics. The leadership of women at grassroots democracy level still requires validation for effective participation. The goal of enlightening rural women will be achieved only if women are brought up to a level where they can participate in all walks of life. The goal of political equality can be achieved through women's involvement in the process of empowerment. The objective of this study is to examine the political status of women in the local institution of Grama Panchayat in the Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh in India. 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution has been given a space to women to enable them to participate in the village development through gross root governance. It is seen in recent local body elections that the huge number of women is being elected to panchayat institutions. However, it is observed that lack of leadership is being created various types of problems while performing their legitimate roles in the public sphere. This paper deals the poor leadership faced by the women elected representatives from the coastal area of Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh. The findings revealed that the political participation of women in the functioning and the electoral process of panchayats are not satisfactory at the grassroots democracy. A parochial society and low level of education are responsible for their inactive participation in the rural local democracy.

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Introduction:-

Women's leadership is crucial in the effective implementation of any development project. Majority of schemes and projects fail due to lack of women's involvement in its planning and implementation.

Gender discrimination is an ongoing debate worldwide. Women's participation in politics has been an issue of discussion in recent years. The dominance of caste, culture and patriarchy has resulted in ignorance among women

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about public life. The process of women's participation in local governance is in the transitory stage and needs to be carefully scurried to bring about an improvement in the better participation of women in rural politics. The leadership of women at village level still requires validation for effective participation. The concept of women's participation in grassroots political institution remains a formal due to the absence of education, exposure and opportunities. The goal of enlightening rural women will be achieved only if women are brought up to a level where they can participate in all walks of life. The goal of political equality can be achieved through women's involvement in the process of empowerment at grass-root democracy.

Women need decision-making capacity and ability to take part in the community and national activities. Women leadership in panchayat governance is crucial not only for the development of women themselves but also for the availability of their creative potential for the development of society. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 has given a positive response to their involvement and participation to the realization of women's leadership and encouraged women to participate in the democratic process at the lower tier of political institution. The low education, ignorance, casteism and rigid patriarchal norms are subjected to exploitation at the hands of officials and the society dominated by male.

In the above context, it is important to analyze the nature and extent of women's leadership in the rural democratic process. The present paper is an attempt to measure the magnitude of women leadership and changing gender composition after the introduction of reservation for women in Gram Panchayat governance. In democratic set up, people need to wider participation irrespective caste, colour, creed and gender. The system of decentralization through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) was introduced by the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992. As women consist of half the total population, their participation in local governance is essential to make democracy successful at the lower tier of the panchayat. The question of their participation arises due to their long-standing neglected social status in Male-dominated Indian society. (Alok Pandey, 2009) [1]

A developing democracy needs the wider participation of women in grassroots politics is essential to make democratic governance successful. (Artatrana Gochhaayat, 2013) [2]. Leadership assumes significance and wider proportions in a democratic system, particularly at the lower level of governance. In the context of the rural situation, particularly in backward societies, the problem of leadership has acquired much importance in terms of the introduction of community projects, land reforms, decentralized local administration and selection of beneficiaries etc., which aim at the reconstruction of rural society into a large extent. It is believed in the constitution may well depend upon the type of leadership available at the grassroots level. (Yashoda T. 2007) [3]. Women's entry into the rural political system would ensure a change in the political system of the village, the perceptions of women and develop grassroots leadership among women. (Snehalata Panda, 1995) [4]. To facilitate people's participation in governance, new leadership also needs to be facilitated. This includes marginalized leadership sections of Dalits, tribals and youth. The social, economic, cultural and psychological aspects prevent the emergence of leadership in these groups. Strengthening women's leadership in the social-economic and political sphere becomes essential for removing gender inequality and facilitating women's empowerment (Alok Pandey, 2009) [5].

Significance of the study:

The question of the political leadership of women in rural India has assumed a considerable significance after introducing the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. This historic Amendment resulted in one-third reservation for women to take part in the democratic political process at the local body institutions. Women's leadership in political bodies at various levels is the need of the hour. The leadership of women in public life will be able to gain equal access to control over the political process. Research studies on the subject of the leadership of elected women's role in political bodies must provide an insight into the nature of their participation as well as the obstacles to their effective participation.

A silent revolution takes place in the rural Andhra Pradesh after 73rd enactment as it becomes significant to study leadership of women role in the panchayat governance in the Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh state. The government of Andhra Pradesh has taken a historical step to enhance the percentage of reservation for women from

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one-third to at least 50 per cent in elections held in 2013 in the 3-tier rural local bodies. The study intends to bring out issues around this milestone step and all those major hurdles for the leadership of women in the public sphere. It is expected that the finding will help policy-making agencies to take suitable measures to streamline the process of women leadership and to promote women participation with an active and energetic role in the development of overall panchayat governance.

Objectives of the study:-

1. To study the socio-economic status of rural elected female leaders.
2. To examine the comparative profile of a different sample of women leaders in the Grama Panchayat.
3. To explore the awareness, leadership, decision making power and their involvement in the democratic process.
4. To explore the problems that discourages the participation of female leaders among all categories of women.

Methodology of the study:-

In Andhra Pradesh women constitute of little more than 50% of the total population. Their socio-economic status has been relatively low, and they are discrimination in all walks of life. Women have been restricted to their home and being suppressed and deprived to get fair treatment from the male-dominated society. The present study attempted to learn the extent of the political leadership of women in the functioning as well as the decision-making process of panchayats and their problems. The study was undertaken in February 2018 using a sample of women respondents from 19 Grama Panchayats of Markapuram Division in Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh

This research paper is based on primary and secondary sources of data. The main objective of the study is to do an analysis of the leadership of the women in Markapuram Revenue Division of Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh in India. Of the three divisions in Prakasam District Markapuram, Revenue Division is considered a backward area. (Chief Planning Officer 2016-2017). Markapuram Revenue Division comprises 76-gram panchayats. In those 36 grama panchayats are headed women sarpanches. There are 380 ward members in the 76 Grama Panchayats. The primary source of data was collected by conducting personal Interviews. The secondary source data related to Panchayat representative's data was collected from the district panchayat office (DPO) and journals and publications.

In the present study, an attempt has been made to understand the social background features of the women leaders in the Grama Panchayat of Prakasam district the state of Andhra Pradesh. This empirical work is based on the Primary data collected from women representatives elected in 2013 in the western part of Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh. The data were collected during 2018, February while conducting thesis work on women empowerment through village panchayat in the Prakasam district. This study focused on understanding the role of elected women leaders at the Grama Panchayat level. There are around 350 women representatives in the Gram Panchayat spread over three mandalas under the Markapuram Revenue Division of Prakasam district. The researcher collected primary data from 76 women representatives, including 19 presidents 14 Vice-Presidents, and 43 members were selected for an in-depth study on the basis of multi-stage stratified random sampling. After the collection of data from sample respondents, it has been systematically processed, classified and converted into Tables in the sample and accordingly analyzed. It should be noted that the data have been entirely processed on the basis of the community (caste group) of the women representatives. The researcher has drawn 20 women samples from OC, 30 from the BC, 22 from the SC and 4 from ST category as sample respondents with an intension to measure their leadership and other qualities in the extension of their empowerment.

Here, it would be necessary to deal with a brief profile of Prakasam district location, which is the area of the present investigation. Prakasam District formed on 02-02-1970 with Ongole as a headquarter by carving out portions of Ongole Revenue division from Guntur, Kandukur Revenue division from Nellore district and Markapur Revenue division from Kurnool. The district was renamed as Prakasam in 1972 in memory of the great freedom fighter late Sri Tanguturi Prakasam Panthulu also called as Andhra Kesari, who was chief minister of the composite Madras State and the first chief minister of Andhra Pradesh State.

The district was bounded by the East: Bay of Bengal, West: Kurnool district, North: party by Guntur and Mahaboobnagar Districts, South: party by Nellore and Cuddapah districts. The district is located in a tropical region between 14-57'-00" to 16-17'-00" Northern Latitude and 78-43-00' to 80-25'-00" Eastern Longitude. The central

part of the District comprises large tracts of low shrubs and Jungle diversified with rocky hills and stony plains and is a unique feature of the district. The Markapuram Division, which is a western portion of the district, is purely an upland area.

Area, population and other related particulars

The District covered an area of 17,626 sq.kms with a density of 193 persons per sq.km. It is much more in size in the area when compared to other districts of Andhra Pradesh. The district has covered a coastline of 102kms. Spread over in 10 Mandals. According to 2011 census, there are 1093 villages in the district, of which 1058 are Revenue Villages, and the rest of 35 are forest villages. In those 1093 villages, 1002 villages are inhabited, and the remaining 91 is un-inhabited villages. The Mandals in the district are not homogeneous in terms of the physical characteristics, natural resources and potentialities. The total population of the district is 33, 97,448 as per the 2011 census: It stands for 6.88 of the total population of the state and is placed 9th position in the size of the population. The district has 16, 82,684 female population, and this constituted 49.53 per cent and 6.83 per cent of the state female population.

The rural population of the district is 27, 33,866 and it comprises 80.44 per cent of the district population and 7.86 per cent to that of state rural population. Similarly, the urban population of the district spread over in 9 towns is 6, 64,582 comprising 19.56 per cent of the district population and 4.55 per cent of the state urban population.

According to the 2011 Census community-wise population, the Scheduled Caste population of the district is 7, 87,861 which 23.19 per cent of the district and 9.33 of the state total Scheduled Caste population. Similarly, the Scheduled Tribe population of the district is 1,51,145, and it stands for 4.45percent of the district and 5.04percent of the state Scheduled Tribe population. The decennial growth of population in the district is seen from 2001 census to 2011 census was 11.05percent. As regards the density of population is 193 per sq.km. Whereas it is recorded 308 per sq. Km for the Andhra Pradesh State. The district literacy rate is 63.08 per cent, which was lower than the state literacy rate of 67.41 per cent. The sex ratio of the district is 981 females per 1000 males as against 996 of the states as per the 2011 census with regards main workers are 14, 63,508 constituting 43.08 per cent of a total population of the district and 7.61% of the state population.

Administrative units of the District

The District has divided three Revenue Divisions Viz, Ongole Kandukur and Markapur. There are 56 Mandals which were formed on 25.05.1985 with the purpose of bringing the administration to access the people. There are four municipalities in the district viz, Ongole, Kandukur, Chirala and Markapuram. Besides another 4 Nagara Panchayats were also formed i.e., Addanki, Chimakurthi, Kanigiri and Giddalur. Ongole Revenue Division comprises of 20 Mandals, Kandukur Division constitutes with 24 Mandals and Markapuram Division formed with 24 Mandals. So far, the district has 56 Mandals. There are 1002 inhabited Revenue Villages are existing in Prakasam District. They were constituted into 1043 Grama Panchayats duly classifying them into 62 and 981 Grama Panchayats as notified and non-notified respectively.

According to the latest census, the district has a total population of 33.97 lakhs, consisting of 17.15 lakhs males and 16.82 females. The district rural population is accounted for 27.33 lakh persons, and the urban population is 6.64 lakhs persons. The total S.C population is 7.88 out of which 3.97 lakhs are males and 3.91 females. The district consists of 1.51 lakhs S.T population, out of which 0.77 lakhs are males and 0.74 females. It has a population density of 193. The sex ratio is 981 females for every 1000 males. The district literacy rate is 63.08, while 72.92 per cent in men and 53.11percent women.⁶

Table -1:- Sample framed.

Sl. No	Name of the Mandal	GP's Selected	No. of Members	No.of Sample Respondents Taken
1	Markapuram	8	42	32
2	P.Arthavedu	5	26	20
3	Cumbum	6	34	24
	Total	19	102	76

Source: District Panchayat office, Ongole

Table 2:- Distribution of Sample Respondents by Position Held.

Sl. No	Position Held	Social status				
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S.T	Total
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Member	7 (16.27) (35.00)	19 (44.19) (63.33)	14 (32.56) (63.63)	3 (6.98) (75.00)	43 (100%) (56.58)
3	President	5 (26.32) (25.00)	8 (42.10) (26.67)	6 (31.58) (27.27)	0 (0) (0)	19 (100%) (25.00)
4	Vice-president	8 (57.14) 40.00	3 (21.42) (10.00)	2 (14.28) (9.09)	1 (7.14) (25.00)	14 (100%) (18.42)
	Total	20 (26.31) (100%)	30 (39.47) (100%)	22 (28.95) (100%)	4 (5.27) (100%)	76 (100%) (100%)

Respondents by Position Held

Table 2 presents information about different positions held by the women candidates in the local body institution of Grama Panchayat in the sample study area. Of the total sample, 43 respondents (56.58 per cent) were different categories of Grama panchayat Members. Of the total four respondents from the ST community interviewed for this study, 3 are members and one Vice-President. A total of 76 respondents each 4 from one panchayat has been chosen as a sample in the study area (Panchayat term, 2013 - 2018) Care was taken to include all four categories of female sample respondents of *Open Category (OC)*, *Backward Caste (BC)*, *Schedule Caste((SC)*, and *Schedule Tribe (ST)*.

Table 3:- Distribution of Sample Respondents by Age Group.

Sl No	Age-group (in years)	Social status				
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S. T	Total
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	21-35	9 (31.02) (42.86)	12 (41.38) (40.00)	7 (24.14) (31.82)	1 (3.44) (25.00)	29 (100%) (38.16)
3	36-45	8 (25.00) (38.10)	13 (40.63) (43.33)	9 (28.12) (40.90)	2 (6.25) (50.00)	32 (100%) (42.10)
4	50 Above	3 (20.00) (19.05)	5 (33.33) (16.67)	6 (40.00) (27.28)	1 (6.67) (25.00)	15 (100%) (19.74)
	Total	20 (26.31) (100%)	30 (39.48) (100%)	22 (28.94) (100%)	4 (5.27) (100%)	76 (100%) (100%)

Age of Respondents:

Age is considered as a very important variable to be in public life. The data on women representatives' age has been presented in Table 3. On the whole, the majority (42.10 per cent) of women candidates have come from the middle age group of 36-45.

Table 4:- Distribution of Sample Respondents by Educational Level.

Sl. No	Educational Status	Social status				Total
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S.T	
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Illiterate	5 (15.62) (25.00)	12 (37.5) (40.00)	13 (40.63) (59.09)	2 (6.25) (50.00)	32 (100%) (42.11)
3	Primary	6 (28.58) (30.00)	10 (47.61) (33.33)	3 (14.29) (13.64)	2 (9.52) (50.00)	21 (100%) (27.63)
4	High school	7 (41.17) (35.00)	5 (29.41) (16.67)	5 (29.42) (22.73)	0 (0) (0)	17 (100%) (22.37)
5	College	2 (33.33) (10.00)	3 (50.00) (10.00)	1 (16.67) (4.54)	0 (0) (0)	6 (100%) (7.89)
	Total	20 (26.31) (100%)	30 (39.48) (100%)	22 (28.94) (100%)	4 (5.27) (100%)	76 (100%) (100%)

A higher percentage of women leaders found from BC category in the young age group of 21-35 (40.00%) and 36-45 (43.33%). A considerable percentage (19.74) of women leaders belonged to older people found in the sample study. It is found that the women of most active age category, i.e., young age and the middle age groups have come forward to participate in public life. It is observed from the study that the local body provides new blood with a chance to utilize their capacities in the rural governance

Educational Status

Education is a very significant element in many ways, as it facilitates to aware knowledge about their powers and functions of governance. An educated woman will have a better vision and helpful to understand the Panchayat Raj System. It is a widely accepted that the overall literacy rate of women is very low in rural Andhra Pradesh. This reflects their educational backwardness of women Sarpanches and Ward members in the present study area. Now a day's educational status has a strong bearing on leadership performance. The field data in Table 4 shows that a majority (42.11%) 32 of the women candidates were illiterates from all caste groups in the sample study area. Next highest per cent (27.63) of women respondents had primary education. With regard to no education among marginalized is concerned, a higher percentage is found between SC and ST categories of women leaders, i.e., (59.09 and 50.00). As per as high school and a college education is concerned, none contributed from ST community. The study clearly reveals that only six respondents constitute nearly 8 per cent studied up to college level. Regarding post-graduation education, no respondent was found in the study area. As per the Bhargava B.S and Vidya K.C (1992)⁷ study, the women representatives of PRIs on the whole lag behind men representatives in their educational level. Lack of education manifests itself in their relatively low degree of involvement in the decision-making process.

Sl. No	Occupational Status	Social status				Total
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S. T	
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Housekeeper	8 (25.81) (40.00)	12 (38.72) (40.00)	10 (32.25) (45.45)	1 (3.22) (25.00)	31 (100%) (40.25)
3	Labor	5 (15.15) (25.00)	13 (39.39) (43.33)	12 (36.36) (54.55)	3 (9.10) (75.00)	33 (100%) (42.86)

4	Business	7 (58.33)	5 (41.67)	00 (00)	00 (00)	12 (100%)
		(35.00)	(16.66)	(00)	(00)	(16.88)
	Total	20 (26.31)	30 (39.48)	22 (28.94)	4 (5.27)	76 (100%)
		(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)

Table 5: Distribution of Sample Respondents by Occupational Status.

Occupational Status

Occupational status is one of the most important variables in determining the socio-economic profile of the elected women representatives in the grassroots political institution. Financially, rural women have always been depended on her family. Table 3 provides data on the occupation level of the women leaders. The respondents were categorized into three groups as per their occupation.

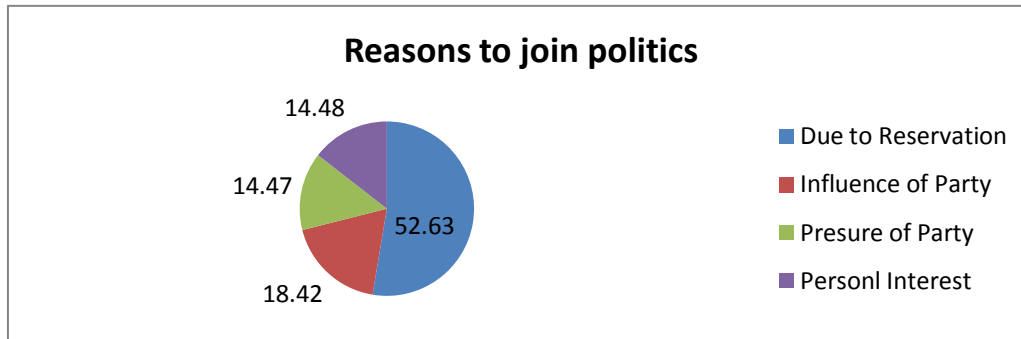
The data shows that most of the women candidates (42.86 per cent) have been involved in agriculture-based labour work with their family. As per a house- maker is concerned, a good percentage of (40.25%) respondents reported in the sample study area. It is interesting to note that, no SC and ST women leaders found under business activity in the sample population. A considerable percentage (35.00%) of sample respondents have been found doing business in the open category. They were assisting their family in business activity. It has observed thefrom the table that most of the women leaders were found meager economic activity.

Table 6:- Distribution of Sample Respondents by Their Reasons to Join Politics.

Sl No	Reasons to Join Politics	Social status				Total
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S. T	
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Due to Reservation	11 (27.50) (55.00)	16 (40.00) (53.33)	10 (25.00) (45.45)	3 (7.50) (75.00)	40 (100%) (52.63)
3	Influence of Family	7 (50.00) (35.00)	2 (14.28) (6.67)	4 (28.58) (18.18)	1 (7.14) (25.00)	14 (100%) (18.42)
4	Pressure of Party	1 (9.09) (5.00)	6 (54.55) (20.00)	4 (36.36) (18.18)	0 (00) (00)	11 (100%) (14.47)
5	Personal Interest	1 (9.09) (5.00)	6 (54.54) (20.00)	4 (36.37) (18.18)	0 (00) (00)	11 (100%) (14.48)
	Total	20 (26.31)	30 (39.48)	22 (28.94)	4 (5.27)	76 (100%)
		(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)

Respondents Reasons to Join Politics

The women in rural areas still confined mostly to domestic chores. The decision of women candidates to participate in local politics and push them into the election has been influenced by various factors. Elected women representative's responses on factors influenced to enter Grama Panchayat governance is reported in Table 6. A good percentage of the women candidates 40 (52.63%) have been entered into as new entrants in politics by reservation policy for women provided by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment which was earlier totally a male domain.

Figure-1: Respondents Reasons to Join Politics

With regard to the influence of family is concerned 14 (18.42%) respondents from all categories reported. As per a personal interest variable is concerned, it is interesting to note that of the total sample, a small percentage (14.48) of all types of respondents were contested on their own. Of the total ST community category sample, a major chunk of respondents 3 (75.00%) are elected on reservation provision. The data reveals that legislation regarding 50 per cent mandatory reservation policy has paved the way to enter the large size of women particularly marginalized women.

A considerable (14) respondent (18.42 per cent) felt that due to getting into public life by the support extended by family members. 55.00 for OC, 53.33 for BC, and 45.45 for SC women candidates opine that reservation policy is very much benefited. Majority of women candidates are in the political sphere because of reservation policy and support of their family. It is evident from the table that many of the women leaders contested local election due to other reasons than self-interest. Kumar Das (2009)⁸ study also reveals that non-high caste women leaders combined dominated the grassroots politics

7. Attending Panchayat Meetings

Women respondents were asked about their punctuality in attending Gram Panchayat meetings have been reported in Table 7. On the basis of their responses, their contribution is grouped as regularly, sometimes, rarely and never. It is a positive step as the majority of the respondents were attending panchayat meetings. It is evident from the data that of the total sample respondents 19 (25.00 per cent) women candidates have been attending panchayat meetings on a regular basis. As per as never attending respondents are concerned 12 out of 76 reported in the sample study area. These respondents do not attend the meetings because the chairpersons do not inform about the meetings in time, dislike to attend and heavy domestic work. This practice is seen in mostly opposition groups and party. It is observed from the study that non-attendance of a meeting by women candidates are attributed to the traditions of orthodox rural society.

Table 7:- Distribution of Sample Respondents by Nature of Attending Panchayat Meetings.

Sl. No	Attendance to meetings	Social status				Total
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S.T	
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Regularly	7 (36.85) (38.89)	8 (42.10) (33.33)	4 (21.05) (22.22)	0 (0) (0)	19 (100%) (25.00)
3	Sometimes	5 (19.23) (27.78)	10 (38.47) (41.67)	9 (34.61) (50.00)	2 (7.69) (50.00)	26 (100%) (34.21)
4	Rarely	6 (31.58) (33.33)	6 (31.58) (25)	5 (26.31) (27.78)	2 (10.53) (50.00)	19 (100%) (25.00)
5	Never	2 (23.08) (14.29)	6 (46.15) (20.00)	4 (30.78) (18.18)	0 (0) (0)	12 (100%) (15.79)
	Total	20 (26.31) (100%)	30 (39.48) (100%)	22 (28.94) (100%)	4 (5.27) (100%)	76 (100%) (100%)

Knowledge on GP Affairs

The data presented in Table 8 reveals that women candidates' level of knowledge about Panchayat activities. As per knowledge about panchayat affairs is concerned, most of the sample respondents have not been aware. It is said that there is a poor understanding of about fifty per cent reservation among all categories of women. Only one had knowledge about the reservation of seats for women. Nearly 13 per cent of women candidates were knowledge relating to functions, source of income. It is evident from the Table that a large majority of them do not have knowledge issues relating the local governance.

Vikas Nandal, (2013) [9] in his study found that representatives have very less awareness and have very little knowledge about the Panchayati Raj Institutions. They have very little knowledge about the Panchayati Raj Act 73rd Amendment, powers and works of the gram panchayats, sources of income of gram panchayats.

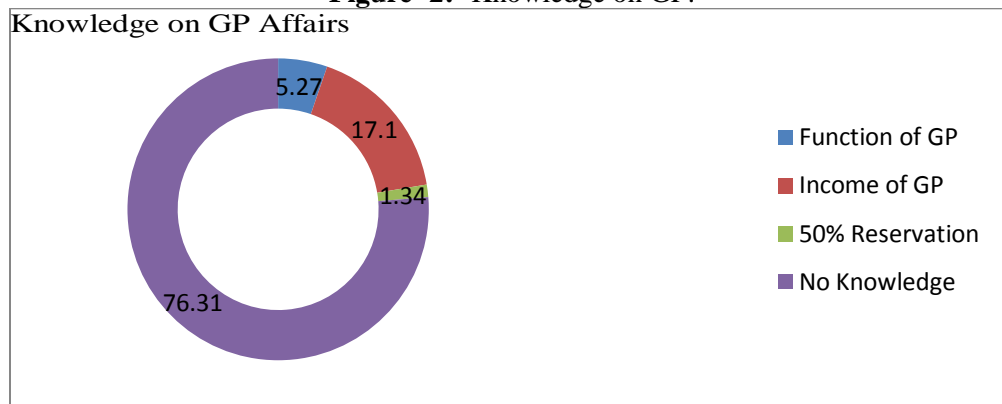
Figure -2:- Knowledge on GP.

Table 8:- Distribution of Sample Respondents by Knowledge on Panchayat.

Sl. No	Respondents Knowledge on Panchayat	Social status				
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S.T	Total
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Aware of Functions of GP	2 (50.00) (10.00)	1 (25.00) (3.33)	1 (25.00) (4.55)	0 (0) (0)	4 (100%) (5.27)
3	Aware of the Source of Income of GP	5 (35.72) (25.00)	6 (50.00) (20.00)	2 (14.28) (9.09)	0 (0) (0)	13 (100%) (17.10)
4	Aware of 50 per cent Reservation	0 (0) (0)	01 (100) (3.33)	0 (0) (0)	0 (0) (0)	01 (100%) (1.34)
5	Not at all	13 (22.41) (65.00)	22 (37.94) (73.34)	19 (32.76) (86.36)	4 (6.89) (100)	58 (100%) (76.31)
	Total	20 (26.31) (100%)	30 (39.48) (100%)	22 (28.94) (100%)	4 (5.27) (100%)	76 (100%) (100%)

Table 9:- Participation in Decision- making.

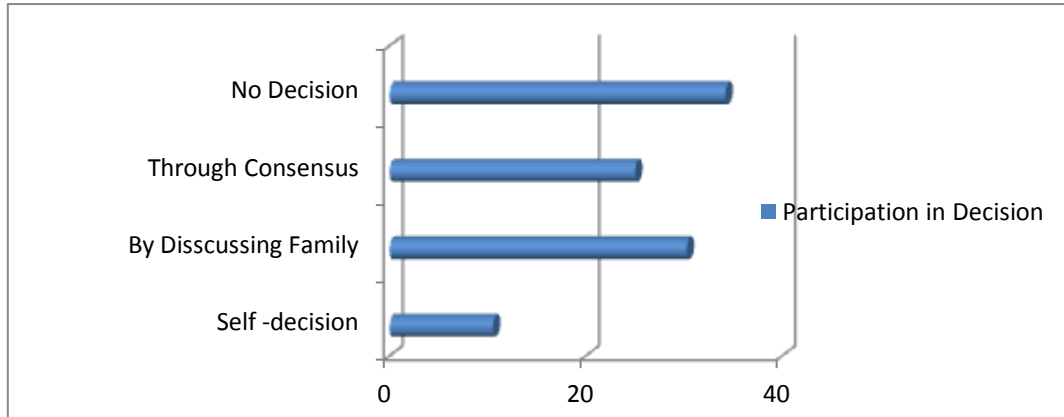
Sl. No	Respondents Decision	Social status				
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S.T	Total
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Self- decision	2 (25.00) (10.00)	2 (25.00) (6.66)	3 (37.5) (13.63)	1 (12.5) (25.00)	8 (100%) (10.52)
3	By discussing Family	4 (17.39) (20.00)	9 (39.13) (30.00)	9 (39.13) (40.90)	1 (4.35) (25.00)	23 (100%) (30.27)
4	Through Consensus	6 (31.58) (30.00)	9 (47.36) (30.00)	3 (15.78) (13.63)	1 (5.28) (25.00)	19 (100%) (25.00)
5	No decision	8 (30.77) (40.00)	10 (38.47) (33.33)	7 (26.92) (31.81)	1 (3.84) (25.00)	26 (100%) (34.21)
	Total	20 (26.31) (100%)	30 (39.48) (100%)	22 (28.94) (100%)	4 (5.27) (100%)	76 (100%) (100%)

Participation in Decision- making

Participation in rural governance through decisions is considered significant for women empowerment. Respondents were asked to respond on the decisions taking while exercising their legitimate role in Grama Panchayat aspects in the Table 9. It shows from the above data that a majority of elected women leaders 26 (34.21%) from all categories are not acted in decision- making process relating to panchayat affairs. This is the heist percentage as per as the no decision is concerned. With regard to self-decision is concerned, only a very little (10.52 per cent) of women respondents have been reported. The women leaders act on their own without depending on others is found more in SC category (37.5 per cent) and take independent decisions. In the category of women leaders of BC and SC (39.13%, 39.13%) who were taking decisions with the support extended of their spouses.

A good number of respondents (23) constitute 30.27 per cent were taking decisions in relation to their role as representatives after discussing with on their spouses and family members. Of the total sample from open category 40.00 per cent of women leaders did not participate in any Grama Panchayat activities. It is also found that women candidates who are attending panchayat meetings also admit that they are not involved in the process of decision – making process.

Figure -3:- Women Participation in Decision- making.



It is seen from the opposition group women, particularly other party affiliated members. A similar finding is also seen in the study of Jilly Philippa MS., and S Manimekalai N. (2011) [10] women were able to occupy leadership positions, but they were mostly confined to women's wing not general and mainstream politics and strategically important positions. The voices of and participation in decision making space in the parties have been very limited, and often women are only observed as passive participants.

Table 10:- Distribution of Sample Respondents by Their Nature of Leadership in Political Party.

Sl. No	Respondents Leadership	Social Status				Total
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S. T	
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Primary Member	19 (25.68) (95.00)	29 (39.18) (96.66)	22 (29.73) (100)	4 (5.41) (100)	74 (100%) (97.37)
3	Village level Leader	01 (50.00) (5.00)	01 (50.00) (3.34)	0 (0) (0)	0 (0) (0)	02 (100%) (2.63)
4	Mandal level Leader	0 (0) (0)	0 (0) (0)	0 (0) (0)	0 (0) (0)	0 (0) (0)
	Total	20 (26.31) (100%)	30 (39.48) (100%)	22 (28.94) (100%)	4 (5.27) (100%)	76 (100%) (100%)

Nature of Leadership in Political Party.

As per as leadership at the village level is concerned, a low percentage of women candidates contributed from all categories. Majority of the respondents were taking political party primary membership after electing Gram Panchayat. It is observed that the male members are associating membership of the political party in the Andhra Pradesh rural society. The notable aspect of this study is that only two respondents had a status village-level leader, one each from the OC and BC categories. It is interesting to note that no respondent found from Mandal level leadership in the sample study area. It is evident from the table that poor leadership is seen among women candidates in studying area.

Political Participation

A question was asked to sample respondents how their political participation was relating to the Grama Panchayat affairs is presented in Table 9. Seeking information about women candidate's responses relating activities like the involvement of political meeting, mobilization of party cadre and campaign for elections and non-participation in local government activities.

Table .11:- Distribution of Sample Respondents by Participation in Party Activities.

Sl. No	Respondents Political Participation.	Social status				
		O.C	B.C	S.C	S.T	Total
1	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Attending Political Meeting	7 (30.43) (35.00)	7 (30.43) (23.33)	8 (34.79) (36.37)	1 (4.35) (25.00)	23 (100%) (30.26)
3	Mobilization of Party Cadres	2 (22.22) (10.00)	6 (66.67) (20.00)	1 (11.11) (4.54)	0 (0) (0)	9 (100%) (11.85)
4	Campaigning for Election	0 (0) (0)	1 (100) (3.33)	0 (0) (0)	0 (0) (0)	1 (100%) (1.31)
5	No Participation	11 (25.59) (55.00)	16 (37.20) (53.33)	13 (30.23) (59.09)	3 (6.98) (75.00)	43 (100%) (56.58)
	Total	20 (26.31) (100%)	30 (39.48) (100%)	22 (28.94) (100%)	4 (5.27) (100%)	76 (100%) (100%)

As regards to political involvement, of the total sample, a comfortable majority of the women leaders (56.58 per cent) in all four categories have not been participating in any political activity. Women candidates admit that they did not come out of their houses to involve political participation. For a significant 23 respondents (30.26%) of the total sample, are involved in political meeting, while 1 respondent participated in canvassing local elections. The data shows that women leaders were reluctant to political participation due to socio-cultural constraints prevailed in rural society. It is evident from the table that women leaders depended on their family members and political party for their actions in Grama Panchayat. It is seen much higher in ST sample women leaders. It is also observed that due lack of communication skills and has less exposure to political experience.

Challenges to women leadership

A variable like age, education, occupation etc. examine whether these could have any impact on the emerging women leadership in Prakasam district. The study observed that majority of the women representatives are young and middle age and the women between the age group of 35-46 years have dominated grama panchayat politics. Earlier, older women have been found much higher in rural public life. Observing the caste factor, all categories of women combined dominated the grass-root governance, to enhance their socio-economic status due to fifty per cent of reservation introduced in the Panchayat Raj System. The overall educational status of women leaders in Prakasam district is not impressive. Thus, the study observed that women have come to the leadership position without proper education. Agriculture based labour work exclusively dominate the occupation of women leaders. The female leaders were spent time in searching daily wage labour required to work to support their families in agriculture. House-maker occupation is also found to be concentrated by the female leaders. The elected women depended on their husbands on economic aspects can be deterred the way on their acquiring leadership position. The study observed that women leaders are not economically sound, which may have affected their leadership position.

Most of the elected women leaders from all categories are first-time entrants to public life. They came to rural governance without any political background, accessibility in fact provided by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. It is observed that current women, particularly those, belong to the marginalized sections with large scale, would not have entered rural political sphere without reservation of seats. They considered it as the turning point in the process of empowerment. Women candidates are backed by family members, elites of the village and political

party to contest Gram Panchayat institution. Women leaders have been loyal to them, as they are taking responsibility of selection and nomination for a rural grassroots political institution. It is found in more elected women leaders of marginalized sections of society like SC and ST.

The study reveals that women leaders are not shown interested in attending panchayat meetings. Those women who were attended accompanied to the office by male guardians such as husband, son and other family members and party leaders of the respective village. The women usually accompany male members whenever they go for Mandal and district offices to meet higher officials in relations to Panchayat affairs. Local bureaucracy is also comfortable with men to manage the affairs of panchayat rather than women. And they do not allow the women to play a key role in the grassroots political arena. It is found from field data that some of the female leaders are never attending panchayat meetings due to non-information, non-invitation as they belong to an opposition party. Some were not attending due to unattractive in the affairs of the panchayat and busy with daily domestic work and find it difficult to allot necessary time. The non-attendance of panchayat meetings has also been observed due to the tradition of the orthodox rural society. Their husbands and party leaders represent them in the meetings leading to proxy representation found in all categories of women leaders.

The study reveals that female leaders have very little knowledge about their rights and duties relating to the governance of panchayat, even completing four years of tenure as representatives. They have poor knowledge about Constitutional provisions of reservation of seats for women in Grama panchayats. Due to women leaders lack political knowledge men of their family interfere in matters relating to grama panchayat. This is because of their lack of consciousness and low levels of education. Dependence on their spouse, low level of education, lack of interest in electoral politics, and inadequate training appear to be the cause of women's low level of knowledge. In other words, they are mere instruments in the hands of their spouse and political parties relating to panchayat governance.

Participation of women in the affairs of panchayat is not a desired extent and discouraging. It is observed from the study that a number of reasons are responsible for their apathy and indifference to participate in the political institution. Socio-cultural constraints, political isolation, passive and subordinates to male counterparts stand in the way of effective participation of women in the grama panchayat politics. The study also found that patriarchal family set up and social-cultural values prevailing in the rural society such as low education, economic dependence and lack of confidence, low level of knowledge and awareness, low exposure to the public domain are responsible for low participation in panchayat institution. A majority of the respondents were taking political party membership after electing Gram Panchayat. It is observed that the male members are having membership of political party in the Andhra Pradesh rural society.

The study indicates that the domination of male members of the family, particularly their husband and local political party, have taken decisions in the Grama panchayat aspects. It is found that elected women candidates were prevented from discharging their functions as members of panchayat. The hostile environment, muscle power and expensive nature of electoral politics deprive women to enter into public life. It is said that gender disparity was found to be the major reasons and hesitant to present their views in front of the male members of panchayat. Male guardian's dominance has been prevailing unabated in the grama panchayat level, while only women members remained passive leaders. It is observed that the leaders who are not attending panchayat meetings also responded that they are not involved in the decision-making process. It is also observed that those women candidates of educated and having knowledge of panchayat affairs were more involved in the decision-making process. The data show that majority of the different respondents did not play any role in the decision-making process.

Suggestions:-

1. The marginalized elected women representatives who are engaged in livelihood activities like daily wage labour do not show interest in attending panchayat meetings regularly. So, it is required to compensate for their loss. Female leaders made more economically self-reliance.
2. The role of the family, political party and community are crucial to getting changed in the outlook of men towards facilitating women participation in the public domain. The immediate requirement is the conduction of gender-sensitive programs for all those persons involving panchayat governance.
3. Government institutions or voluntary organizations must come forward to organize women and make them active participants in the grass-root political institution. Their contribution is required to get empower them and

to make a strong and independent leader. The Self-Help Groups role is also crucial to streamline women success at the grassroots democracy.

4. The present training is inadequate for first-time elected female leaders. Leadership education required, particularly in running panchayat activities, is need of the hour. It is necessary to have such working knowledge about the matters of Panchayat. It is, therefore, highly essential to provide systematic training to emerge as powerful women leaders to understand their rights, duties, and also to tide over crisis situations when they arise for smooth conduct of Gram Panchayat. It will enhance their capacity and boost their morale in dealing with administration and handle village problems effectively.
5. To further improve the female leadership in the lower tier democratic process, proxy attendance should be strictly curbed, and it should be made mandatory for every women representative to be presented in the meetings and other affairs of local governance.
6. Political party leaders and family members of women representatives usually intervene in the functioning of Panchayats at all levels and process. The government should take strict action in such intervention of party leaders and male family members and provide a comfortable working environment for them. It is required consistent effort towards strengthening female leadership for better participation at the grass-root governance.

Conclusion:-

To sum up, in recent years, the provision of reservation for women to ensure numeric strength and their role in the local governance system has assumed considerable importance. On the contrary, undermining the capacities of women, this opportunity is in the majority of cases being utilized by their male family members and counterparts and affiliated political party, not by them. So far, the participation of women in the activities of panchayat affairs is not satisfactory. The female leaders have still not capable to utilize their full potential as they encountered many challenges such as patriarchy, low self-confidence and ignorance in Grama Panchayat governance arena. Their participation is confined to their as political representatives only. The study observed that economic independence, support from family and community is required to exercise their legitimate role in rural governance and to overcome challenges. Despite all odds imposed against them, the post-73rd Constitutional Amendment has shown an unprecedented huge number and the emerging women leadership at the rural governance in Prakasam district.

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