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VOTER'S PERCEPTIONS ON THE FUNCTIONING OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Keeping in view of the socio-economic backwardness of women the Parliament of India enacted 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992. The noble idea behind this enactment is to politically empower the rural women at grass-root level. As per the new Constitutional Amendment Act, the Andhra Pradesh State Legislative Assembly passed Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act in 1994. The Act reserved 33 percent of seats to women at three- tiers of rural local bodies. But in practice women representatives are not free in discharging their constitutional duties. They became 'Dummies' in the hands of their male family members or village leaders or faction leaders. Large number of elected members of the local bodies especially women are not actively participating in the meetings of the local bodies. So, the present study is a humble attempt to disclose various pros and cons in the functioning of women representatives at grass-root level in drought-ridden and faction-ridden Ananthapuramu District of Andhra Pradesh.

Key Words: Institutional Building, Performance, Rights, function.

INTRODUCTION

The most striking participation of women in politics is found at the grass root level. Through the 73rd and 74th amendments in constitution of India, women were given one third reservation in rural and urban local governments. Women have certainly been empowered through this legislation. Participation of women in "Panchayati Raj" institutions (i.e. local self governments) in rural areas has been recognized as a step towards equality. In the beginning, it was thought that the rural women are illiterate, backward, conservative and are just shadows of their male counterparts. But very soon, after the "Panchayats" were formed, these women "sarpanches" (i.e., chairpersons) were found to understand all the proceedings of Panchayat and to know their power. They are also supervising with more efficiency and honestly the works done by the Panchayats for better arrangements in the villages. In urban areas also, at local level the strategy to empower women has began after



the 74th Constitution Amendment which ensures 33 percent reservation for women corporators. One after another, the country's 89 municipal bodies are witnessing a rise in the number of women corporators and celebrating women as Mayors. It is hoped that women Mayors will bring a different perspective to people's issues, restore some decorum to proceedings, and influence changes in the civic agenda too. Elected women representatives are attending the meetings of the municipal bodies actively, and are the members of its various committees.

Women in Indian Democratic Process in local politics and they have proved themselves courageous, brave, patient and capable to deal with all sorts of political deals. According to the women Mayor of Bombay, "officials believe that women are not as corrupt as men and that definitely helps". What helps too, she asserts, is her patience and preservice, qualities abundant in women.

One third reservation in the local bodies of rural and urban areas has provided extraordinary opportunity to women for their entry into politics which was otherwise not available. The selection of seats for reservation is done by draw of lots. A large number of women have been able to get entry in the political stratum through the legislation at the center and state levels. In these local bodies, the constituencies are smaller, the number of voters is lesser, voters are easily approachable, door to door campaigning is possible and hence women candidates have been participating with greater efficiency.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

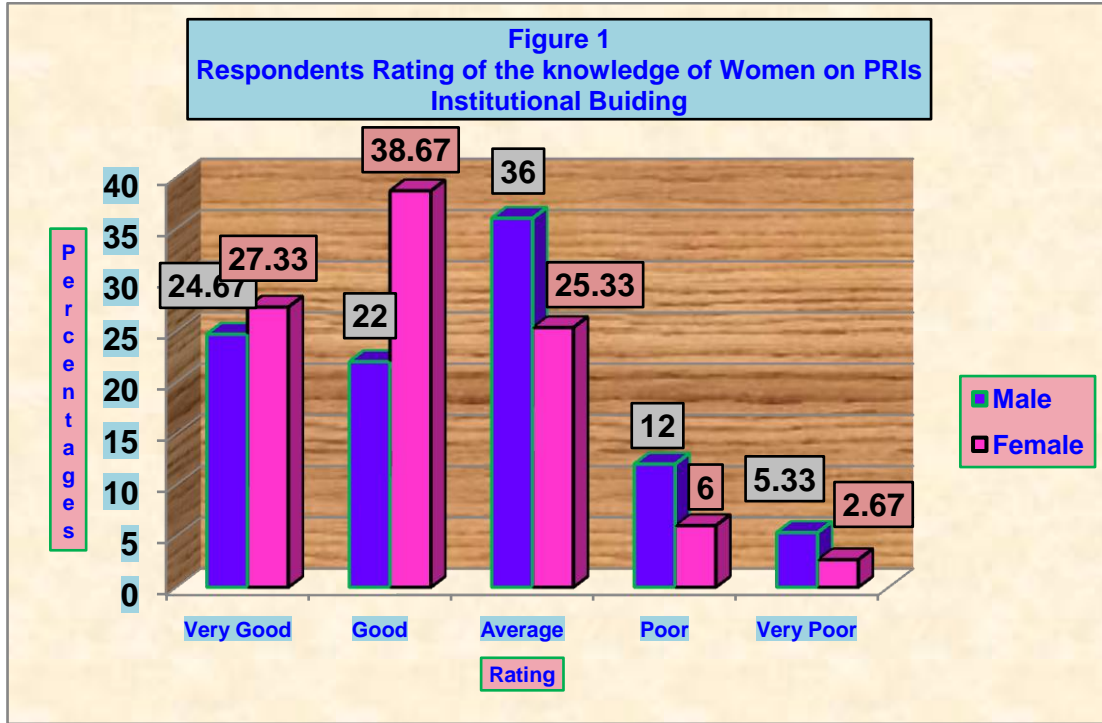
1. To estimate the style of functioning of sample women representatives by analyzing the views sample voters.
2. To suggest measures for the improvement and strengthening of Panchayat Raj Institutions with a special emphasis on women.

SAMPLE DESIGN

For in depth study on the functioning style of women representatives and voters perceptions on their functioning, the sample consists of 300 voter respondents.

RATING OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES KNOWLEDGE ON INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING OF PRIS

The ratings given by sample respondents on the knowledge of women representatives on institutional building of PRIs are presented in figure 1.

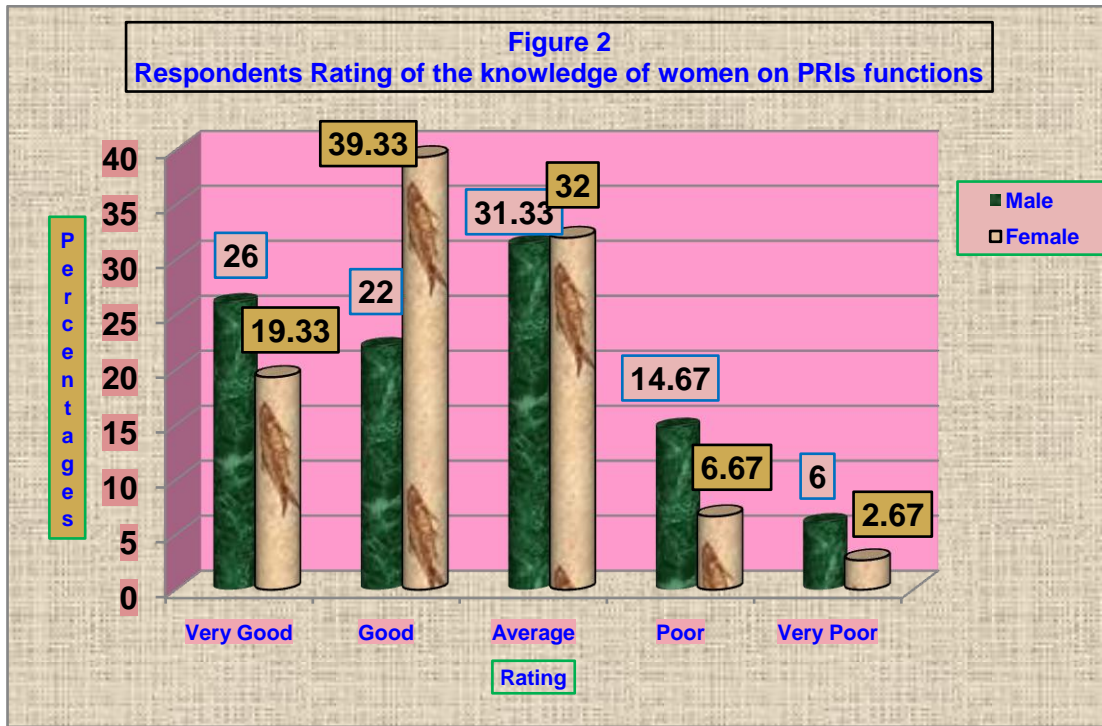


It is clear from figure 1 that female sample given good ratings to women representatives, compared to male sample. Around 66 per cent of female sample has given very good to good scoring on the knowledge o women representatives on institutional building. On the other hand nearly 46.67 per cent of male sample has given very good to good rating. Average ratings were given by 36 per cent and 25.33 per cent of male and female sample respectively. About 12 per cent and 5.33 per cent of male respondents assigned poor and very poor ratings to the knowledge of women on PRIs institutional building. Poor and very poor scoring is assigned by 6 per cent and 2.67 per cent of female sampling. It is graphically presented in chart 5.7.

In all, nearly 30.67 per cent of sample assigned average scoring to women knowledge on PRIs institutional building. About 30.33 per cent has given good and 26 per cent has given very good ratings on the knowledge of women on institutional building of PRIs. Poor and very poor ratings were assigned by 9 per cent and 4 per cent of sample respondents.

RATINGS ASSIGNED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES ON PRIS FUNCTIONS

The performance of representatives depends on their knowledge on the powers and the functions of the post, which they are holding. As such the sample respondents were asked to give their ratings to women representatives on their knowledge of PRIs functions. The responses were registered and presented in figure 2.

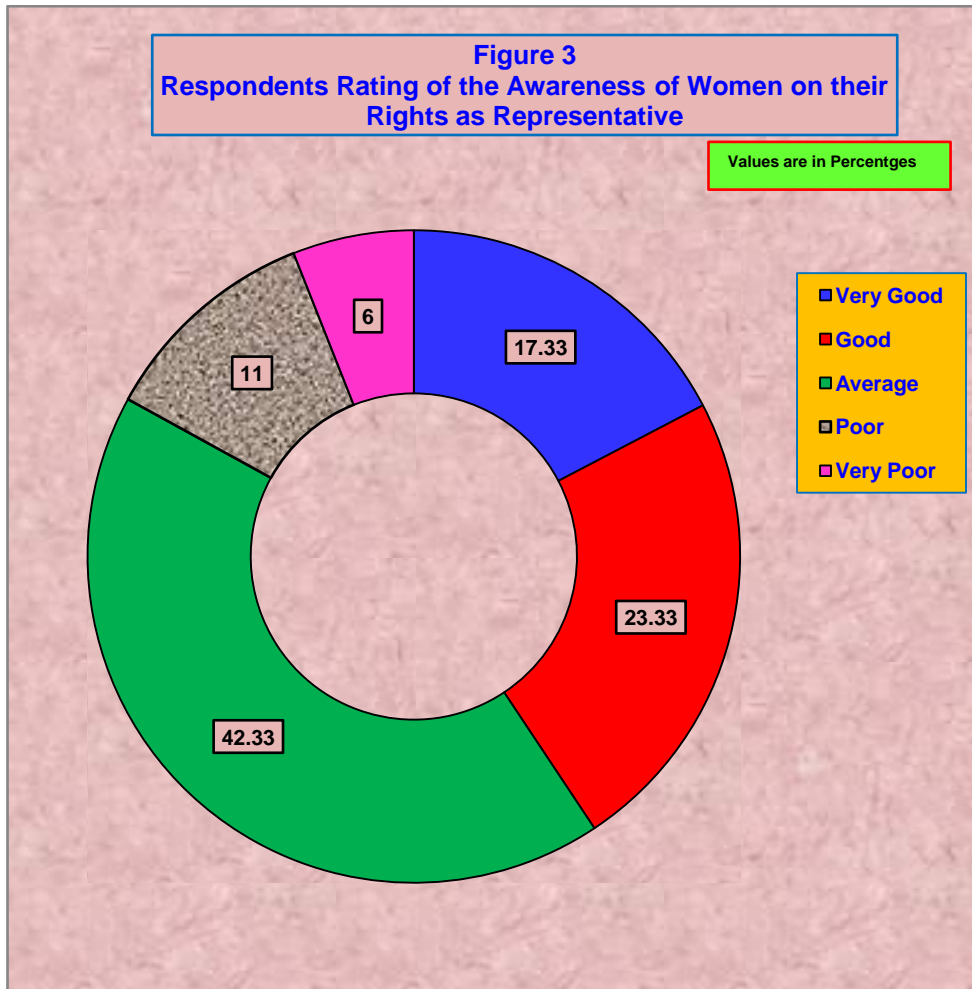


It is evident from figure 2 that good number of both male and female sample has given average ratings on women representative knowledge of PRI functions. To be more precise, 32 per cent of female and 31.33 per cent male sample has given average ratings. About 26 per cent and 19.33 per cent of male and female sample assigned very good scoring. Good scoring was assigned by 39.33 per cent of female and 22 per cent of male sample respondents. Poor scoring was assigned by 14.67 per cent of male and 6.67 per cent of female sample. Nearly 6 per cent of male and 2.67 per cent of female sample assigned very poor scoring to the knowledge of women representatives on powers and functions of PRIs. It is clearly depicted in chart 5.8.

Of the total sample, 31.67 per cent assigned average rating, 30.67 per cent assigned good and 22.67 per cent assigned very good ratings on the knowledge of women on PRIs powers and functions. Poor and very poor ratings were assigned by 10.67 per cent and 4.33 per cent of the sample.

RATINGS ASSIGNED TO WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES ON THEIR RIGHTS AS REPRESENTATIVES.

The representatives of the people not only assigned duties but also entitled to certain rights. The knowledge of women representatives on their rights in the opinion of sample respondent people is presented in figure 3.

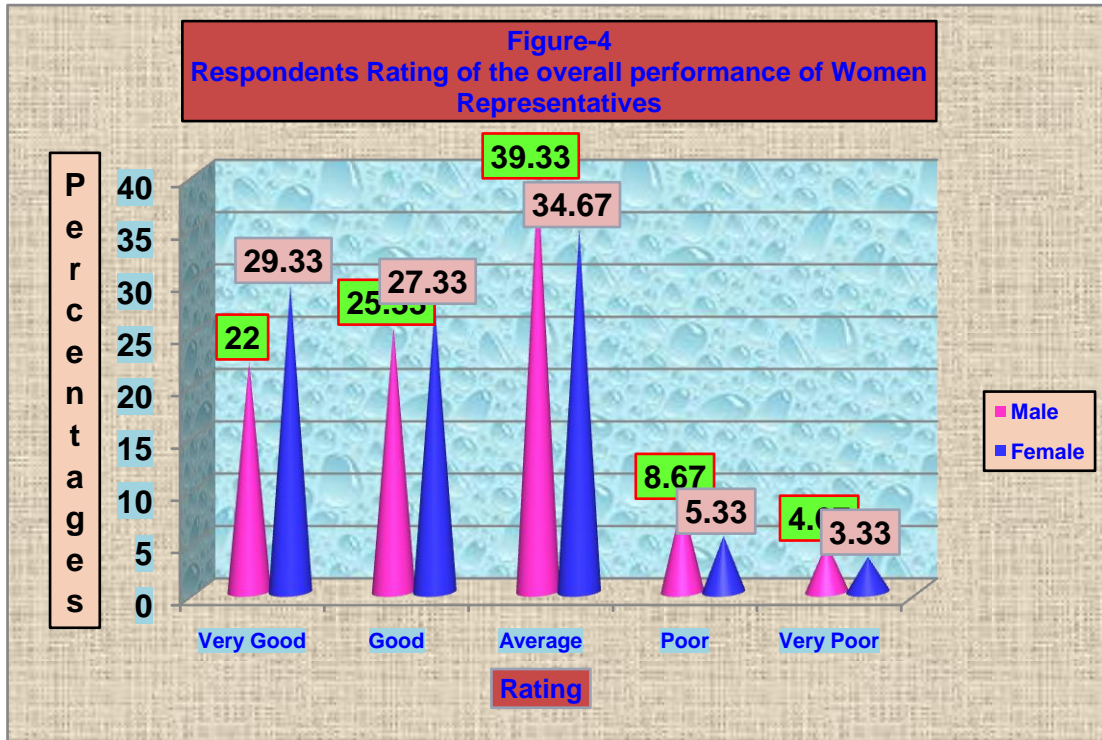


As per figure 3, nearly 46 per cent of male and 38.67 per cent of female sample assigned average ratings to the knowledge of women representatives on their rights as representatives. Good scoring was given by 26 per cent and 20.67 per cent of female and male sample. Very good rating is given by 24.67 per cent and 10 per cent of female and male sample respectively. It is clear from table that good number female sample has given very good and good ratings. On the other hand with regard to assigned poor and very poor ratings male sample are ahead than female sample. About 16 per cent of male and 6 per cent female has given poor scorings. In the same way 7.33 per cent and 4.67 per cent male and female sample assigned very poor scoring on the knowledge of women representatives on their rights as representatives.

Among the total sample, a preponderant majority i.e. 42.33 per cent has given average ratings. Good and very good ratings were given by 23.33 per cent and 17.33 per cent of sample respectively. Nearly 11 per cent and another 6 per cent assigned poor and very poor ratings on the knowledge of women representatives on their rights.

RATINGS ON THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

The ratings given by sample respondents to the overall performance of women representatives are given in figure 4.



It is clear from figure 4 that with regard to assigning very good and good ratings female sample are ahead of male sample. About 29.33 per cent and 27.33 per cent of female sample assigned very good and good scoring to the overall performance of women representatives. On the other hand 22 per cent and 25.33 per cent of male sample assigned very good and good ratings. Nearly 39.33 per cent, 8.67 per cent and 4.67 per cent of female assigned average, poor and very poor ratings. While, 34.67 per cent, 5.33 per cent and 3.33 per cent of female assigned average, poor and very poor ratings to the overall performance of women representatives. The Chart 5.10 gives clear picture.

Among the total sample 37 per cent assigned average rating to the overall performance of women representatives. Good and very good ratings were given by 26.33 per cent and 25.67 per cent of sample respectively. The overall performance of women representatives is poor as per the reports of 7 per cent of sample. Nearly 4 per cent assigned very poor rating to the overall performance of women representatives.

CONCLUSION

The obstacles in the way of women remain more or less the same as they were many years ago. The Indian society has experienced a tremendous sociological change right from the age when there were some major ills in the society, though the process of transformation is a slow one. In cities, the result of this transition are clearer, but of course, it will take some time for this trend to percolate to all parts of society and to all parts of country. There is a problem of fitting politics into the running of a home and the raising of a family, both of which are full-time jobs in a patriarchal society. The current political culture in the country makes women's participation in politics difficult. One women politician expressed her views that women are never taken seriously in politics. They have to prove themselves at every point. They have to work harder than their male colleagues and yet their bonafides are suspects and often they get no credit.

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