

Women and Governance in South Asia: Re-imagining the State

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Introduction

This study is an attempt to understand women's perspectives on governance and citizenship through an analysis of women's political participation at the grassroots level. It has mainly focused on women's participation in formal political structures like panchayat institutions, as well as political struggles and voluntary collective mobilisation - looking at the ways in which these have altered/affected their political consciousness as well as their self-perceptions and the objective conditions of their lives. This study also tries to analyse women's political experiences, their notion of politics and governance and the ways in which they have been mediated by caste, class and rural/urban background.

In looking at concrete instances of women's political participation in diverse locales, the study attempts to explore the linkages between women's

¹ Project Coordinator - Kalpana Kannabiran. The coordinators/investigators of the three sections are as follows: (1) Women in Local Bodies: A Report from Tamilnadu - S. Anandhi; (2) Defining Citizenship: Issues in Women's Leadership in Andhra Pradesh - Kalpana Kannabiran; (3) Women and the Democratic Process in Kerala - Meera Velayudhan. The report presents preliminary observations based on archival research and field studies conducted in the South Indian states of Kerala, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh. While the field studies have all been completed, some data analysis, translations and data entry are still in progress.

The research team would like to acknowledge the many individuals and institutions without whose help and support this work would have been impossible: the elected women leaders from Kancheepuram, Vellore and Tiruvallur districts of Tamilnadu; colleagues at the Institute of Development Alternatives, Chennai; the women sarpanches of Mahbubnagar and Rangareddi districts of Andhra Pradesh; the women and men of Kalva village, Andhra Pradesh; the women and men in the 13 villages of West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh; Sarada and Sivaramakrishna of Sakthi, West Godavari; Vijayabharathi of UNDP, Kurnool; G. Satyavathi of RADS, Vikarabad, Andhra Pradesh; Amal Charles of STEP, Mahbubnagar, Andhra Pradesh;

understanding and experience of politics and governance, and the ways in which these have altered or shaped their understanding of the state, citizenship and government. Finally, it looks at what women's notions of political rights are, and what strategies they have used in furthering/realising these rights on the ground.

The project focuses on three South Indian states – Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Each has its own distinctive history, both in mainstream politics and in the sites and forms of women's political participation historically. While making for stark differences in context, the distinctness in regional histories also makes for very interesting studies in contrast. In terms of socio-political formations, the Non Brahmin Movement in Tamilnadu, communist governments in Kerala and the constant interrogation of the state by resistance movements in Andhra provide the location for issues of women and governance. Interestingly, however, across these wide

Fatima Burnad of SIREN, Arakkonam, Tamilnadu; Padmini Swaminathan of MIDS, Chennai; K.G.Kannabiran, National President, PUCL, Secunderabad; Mr S.L.S. Ahmed, Secretary, Andhra Pradesh State Election Commission, Hyderabad.; Dr. L.L.Bhavani and Dr. L. Karamchand of Gudivada for their gracious hospitality during our field trip to West Godavari.

The enthusiasm, cheer and commitment of the elected women representatives of Ernakulam, Alapuzha and Kannur made the study a joyful experience. Prof. R. Radhakrishnan Nair translated a long English questionnaire into Malayalam at short notice. Simon Britto, left activist, helped identify areas of survey in Cochin, provided vital contacts and, with Seema, helped organize a focus group discussion with dalit women. Simon Britto, Seena and Sreeja assisted in the fieldwork for the Kerala study. Aleyamma Vijayan, Mini Sukumaran, Nalini Nayak, Seena (Kerala State Planning Board), members of SAKHI Resource Centre for Women, and activists of Streevedi provided invaluable help. C. P. Jeevan was an immense support at all times.

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divergences, there is a discomfiting similarity of experience between women in politics in these three states today. While keeping an eye on the distinctness of region, the studies also address these continuities.

To anticipate the questions raised by the study, a critical issue pertains to the relationship between formal office and empowerment. While several instances disconnect the two, the fact that women in local self-government are elected to formal office, rather than being nominated, is a matter of considerable significance. Further, in many cases the absence of real control and political authority exists alongside political will and a consciousness that the reality must be transformed. Although critics of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India have cited inevitable disempowerment as justification for arguing against these provisions, the fact of having institutionalised elected office and a group of elected incumbents, who might not wield actual power but who are conscious of the need to do so, justifies the provision in our view. We need to recognise the shift, to use MacKinnon's words, from 'unconsciousness and denial and collaboration to consciousness and resistance and confrontation'.² Each of the three studies here takes different trajectories in representing this shift.

² MacKinnon, Catherine, *Feminism Unmodified*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 2.

II

Defining Citizenship: Issues in Women's Leadership in Andhra Pradesh

This project began as an attempt to define citizenship from the standpoint of women who have consciously engaged in politics at different levels. The decision to look at questions of women and governance arose directly from our experience of working with NGOs and emerging grassroots leaders, facilitating the exercise of effective leadership through training and dialogue on issues that shape civil society. In identifying these issues, we were very clear that our political purpose was to bring to the foreground discrimination and the indispensability of human rights frameworks in the understanding of civil society. The timing of our work was also significant. Having campaigned for almost two decades as a part of autonomous women's groups that were essentially non-party formations, and having forged alliances with women in politics in spaces that were free of party control, so to speak, we were now at a point where we were asserting the need and the significance of women's entry into formal bodies - elected positions being one part of this larger structure of formal politics. Needless to say, this preoccupation with governance was part of the globalisation of governance – the imperative of global governance.

What we found in the process is heartening in parts, but certain basic questions have resurfaced. In all the rhetoric of women's empowerment, literally translated in this context into political power for women, the larger field of patriarchy, with its multiple sites and complexities, has been translated as the right to political representation, the constraints thereof and the success stories. This study will attempt to look at the theoretical implications of women's experiences in politics, and will attempt to understand the ways in which the experience of women in politics is located within or outside patriarchal territories.

The Women and Governance project in Andhra focuses on three case studies, one each in the three regions of the state: Mahbubnagar district of Telangana, Kurnool district of Rayalaseema and West Godavari district of Coastal Andhra.

Table 2.1: Population and Sex Ratio in Three Districts, Andhra Pradesh

		Population	Men	Women	Sex Ratio*
Mahabubnagar	Total	3,077,050	1,559,616	1,517,434	973
	Rural	2,734,858	1,383,788	1,351,070	976
	Urban	342,192	175,828	166,364	946
Kurnool	Total	2,973,024	1,522,618	1,450,406	953
	Rural	2,204,924	1,128,618	1,076,306	954
	Urban	768,100	394,000	374,100	949
West Godavari	Total	3,517,568	1,764,091	1,753,477	994
	Rural	2,789,015	1,399,926	1,389,089	992
	Urban	728,553	364,165	364,388	1001

* The sex ratio for the state is 972.

Source: Census of India 1991, *District Census Handbook*, for Mahabubnagar, Kurnool and West Godavari

Table 2.2: Literate Population in Three Districts, Andhra Pradesh

		Population	Men	Women
Mahabubnagar	Total	735,244	514,448	220,796
	Rural	555,112	404,464	150,648
	Urban	180,132	109,984	70,148
Kurnool	Total	966,974	659,794	307,180
	Rural	591,883	428,765	163,118
	Urban	375,091	231,029	144,062
West Godavari	Total	1,584,065	888,381	695,684
	Rural	1,159,169	654,450	504,719
	Urban	424,896	233,931	190,965

Source: Census of India 1991, *District Census Handbook*, for Mahabubnagar, Kurnool and West Godavari.

Table 2.3: Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Population in Three Districts, Andhra Pradesh

		Total	Scheduled Caste		Total	Scheduled Tribe	
			Men	Women		Men	Women
Mahabubnagar	Total	542,380	276,017	266,363	227,405	116,871	110,534
	Rural	512,480	260,563	251,917	223,671	114,808	108,863
	Urban	29,900	15,454	14,446	3,734	2,063	1,671
Kurnool	Total	518,108	265,918	252,190	56,455	29,201	27,254
	Rural	415,736	213,812	201,924	45,453	23,258	22,195
	Urban	102,372	52,106	50,266	11,002	5,943	5,059
West Godavari	Total	629,233	317,507	311,726	84,648	41,160	42,488
	Rural	555,410	280,368	275,042	77,474	38,491	38,983
	Urban	73,823	37,139	36,684	7,174	3,669	3,505

Source: Census of India 1991, *District Census Handbook*, for Mahabubnagar, Kurnool and West Godavari.

Methodology

Both the duration of the project as well as its scope do not allow for a consistent representative sampling of specific groups in each of the districts that might enable a comparative inter-regional perspective on issues related to political participation. The study, therefore, instead of looking for a representative sample, has attempted to look at issues of participation and governance in the 'margins', as it were – not, for instance, at groups that might constitute the typical subalterns in each region, but those that constitute unlikely ones. A closer look at the composition of the case studies would serve to illustrate this point. Before looking at the case studies, however, it is important to note that an attempt has been made to look at issues of citizenship and governance as they emerge in three different locales: tribal, dalit and minority [Muslim] on one axis, and formal political structures, self-help groups and struggles for land rights on another. In terms of methodology, each component of the study has used a different methodology, depending on which tools would most effectively address the questions being raised in the study in each specific locale.

The three case studies that were conducted were as follows:

- (1) Women sarpanches belonging predominantly to scheduled castes, and to a lesser extent to backward castes and scheduled tribes, in Mahbubnagar district of Telangana. The methodology used was a comprehensive survey through a questionnaire that explored women's responses to status indicators.
- (2) Women, predominantly Muslim with a scheduled caste minority from Kalva village in Kurnool district of Rayalaseema, who have organised themselves into self-help groups and taken up village development so effectively that they were awarded the UNDP Race Against Poverty Award a few years ago. The methodology used was detailed interviews and extended interaction with different women in the village.
- (3) Women from 13 villages in West Godavari district of Coastal Andhra, all belonging to the Koya tribe, who spearheaded a struggle against the appropriation of tribal lands by non-tribal people in the district. The methodology used was detailed interviews and focus group discussions with women who participated in the struggle, as well as archival research that looked at the history of land struggles in the area. Given the number of villages to be covered, this part of the

study did not involve extended casual interactions with members of any particular village, but rather took the form of two-hour meetings in each village, in which between five and twenty women and an equal number of men participated.

Survey of women sarpanches in Telangana

The Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh occupies a specific place in the regional history and politics of Andhra Pradesh. Apart from being drought-prone and underdeveloped, Telangana has also the history of the first armed communist uprising in the country, first against an extremely oppressive Nizam's rule, and immediately after against the newly independent Indian state in the 1940s. Later, in the late 1960s, the Telangana movement raised several questions relating to hegemonising moves by the dominant castes of Coastal Andhra, in regard to cultural and political aspects of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Other indicators are: among the mandals that record the lowest literacy rates, 35 are in the Telangana region, 14 in Coastal Andhra and 2 in Rayalaseema. This has to be seen in light of the fact that the Telangana region alone accounts for roughly half the population of the entire state. In agriculture, Telangana has a cultivable area of 6,402,358 hectares as compared to 4,633,304 hectares in Coastal Andhra. Of this, 28.33% of the land receives canal irrigation in Coastal Andhra, whereas only 4.17% of cultivable land in Telangana has any access to canal irrigation. The picture is the same irrespective of what indices of development are used.⁵

In this context, the Telangana has also had an extremely rich history of mass uprisings and peoples' struggles against caste, feudalism and extremely repressive and militarised state regimes. The articulation of politics has therefore of necessity engaged with alternate visions of the state and new definitions of citizenship. Looking at local self-governance in this context therefore also helps us to understand how the regional identity of the people of the region frames their politics and their daily lives - and also perhaps how this regional identity is gendered.

The panchayat system has undergone several changes consequent to recommendations of various communities since the 1950s. These changes have been aimed at streamlining the system as well as addressing questions related to more effective decision-making, participatory planning and development.

⁵ Vishweshwer Rao, P.L., 'Telangana Today: A Status Paper', in S. Simhadri and P. L. Vishweshwer Rao, eds., *Telangana: Dimensions of underdevelopment*, Centre for Telangana Studies, Hyderabad, 1997, pp. 56-66.

In 1983 there was a reorganisation of revenue divisions in Andhra with mandals being constituted as new administrative divisions. Ten to fifteen villages were grouped into one mandal, and a total of 1,104 mandals were formed in the state. The three-tier system in Andhra Pradesh therefore consists of the village or gram panchayat, the mandal parishad and the zilla (district) parishad. At each of these levels again there is a structure. The village panchayat, for instance consists of the sarpanch, the upasarpanch and ward members – all of whom are elected – and the gram sabha consists of all people domiciled in the village. This study looks at women in leadership positions at the village level, i.e., women sarpanches.

Table 2.4
Women in Local Self-Government, Andhra Pradesh

	Total GP/MPP/ZP	Total Members	Women Members	Women Heads
Gram panchayats	20,538	220,538	73,513	6,846
Mandal parishads	1,092	14,303	4,776	361
Zilla parishads	22	1,092	361	7

Source: A.P. Rural Academy, Training Manual for Mandal and District Level Elected Representatives, Hyderabad, 1996.

In Table 2.6 below, although State Election Commission records show a total of 434 members, we have found a detailed breakdown for only 298, hence the discrepancy between figures in this particular table and Table 2.5.

A survey was conducted of 266 women sarpanches in one district in Telangana. This part of the study was conducted with the collaboration of STEP, an NGO in Mahbubnagar district. The basic framework of this questionnaire was developed at the National Institute of Advanced Study, Bangalore, for a comprehensive study on the status of women in Karnataka. While retaining the questionnaire with minor modifications, a whole section on political participation has been added. The entire questionnaire was discussed with the field investigators in Mahbubnagar before it was finalised. The difference (in our view an important one) between the Karnataka study and the present one, is that while the former administered the questionnaire

Table 2.5: District-wise Profile of Sarpanches in Andhra Pradesh

Region	District	Sch Areas	Mandals	Gram Panchayats	S.C.		B.C.		S.T.		U.R.		UNSP.	
					Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Telangana	Mahbubnagar	-	64	1,314	75	153	174	334	38	58	147	274	-	-
	Rangareddi	-	33	679	36	65	62	127	6	23	38	80	76	157
	Warangal	59	50	1,015	65	120	117	205	42	90	75	187	-	-
	Adilabad	225	52	867	21	59	42	109	17	30	40	82	77	156
	Karimnagar	-	58	763	22	59	78	149	2	8	29	93	102	175
	Medak	-	45	1,059	60	134	146	291	14	30	105	220	-	1
Rayalaseema	Nalgonda	-	59	1,152	65	149	156	309	32	76	98	226	2	2
	Khammam	370	47	746	29	54	33	134	17	25	45	92	-	-
	Nizamabad	-	36	719	44	70	102	190	13	32	74	134	13	3
	Cuddappah	-	50	835	49	76	71	122	-	5	143	279	-	-
	Chittoor	-	65	1,340	7	37	132	248	96	189	212	392	-	-
	Kurnool	-	53	897	52	98	-	14	105	216	121	221	11	37
Coastal Andhra	Ananthapur	-	63	989	46	77	87	184	8	24	119	266	58	84
	Visakhapatnam	244	42	976	11	18	45	98	1	4	52	103	99	277
	Vizianagaram	81	34	930*	14	16	42	94	7	21	22	37	2	1
	Srikakulam	16	37	1,113	32	69	220	383	13	32	89	175	16	40
	East Godavari	121	57	949	53	103	91	182	2	6	94	193	27	56
	West Godavari	45	45	886	45	100	86	160	3	12	112	234	14	39
	Nellore	-	46	968	71	161	94	189	27	63	109	214	4	9
	Guntur	-	57	1,028	51	98	67	153	5	45	195	327	-	-
	Prakasam	-	57	1,049	60	140	76	143	3	23	192	340	-	-
	Krishna	-	48	968	58	126	108	194	4	19	137	269	-	-
	TOTAL	1,161	1,098	20,312	966	1,982	2,029	4,012	455	1,031	2,248	4,438	501	1,037

* 592 panchayats have no elected office bearers.

Source: Andhra Pradesh State Election Commission, Hyderabad

Table 2.6: Mandal-wise List of Women Sarpanches in Mahbubnagar District

S.No	Mandals	No. of Women Sarpanches	S. No	Mandals	No. of Women Sarpanches
1	Kodungal	5	32	Makthal	6
2	Bomarpeta	6	33	Narra	5
3	Kosgi	5	34	Chinna Chintakunta	4
4	Doulatabad	5	35	Atmakur	4
5	Damaragidda	7	41	Tadoor	5
6	Maddur	8	42	Telkapalle	4
7	Koilkonda	4	43	Uppunuthala	3
8	Hanwada	6	44	Achampeta	2
9	Navabpet	8	45	Balmoor	3
10	Balanagar	8	46	Lingal	3
11	Kodurg	5	47	Peddakothapalle	4
12	Farooq Nagar	6	48	Kodair	4
13	Kothur	3	49	Gopalpeta	3
14	Keshampeta	3	50	Wanaparthi	4
15	Talakondapalle	4	51	Pangal	5
16	Amangal	5	52	Pebbair	6
17	Madgul	4	53	Gadwal	4
18	Vengoor	5	54	Dharur	6
19	Veldanda	4	55	Maldakal	5
20	Kalwakurthy	3	56	Ghattu	6
21	Midgil	6	57	Ieeja	4
22	Thimmajipeta	3	58	Waddepalle	4
23	Jadcherla	4	59	Irikyal	6
24	Bhoothpur	2	60	Manupadu	6
25	Mahbubnagar	6	61	Alampur	5
26	Addakal	5	62	Vepangandla	5
27	Devarkadara	4	63	Kollapur	4
28	Dhanwada	5		Total	298
29	Narayanpet	5			
30	Uttoor	4			
31	Maganoor	6			

to village women in a cross-section of villages in Karnataka, the present study attempts to map the responses of elected women leaders to tested status indicators for women. In doing this we hope to be able to look at the linkages between women's status and questions of leadership.

At a very general level, the groups conducting the survey reported on the responses the survey elicited among the sarpanches. Most of the responses seemed to reiterate accounts of women functioning primarily as proxies for men in their communities, or of women being in such a disempowered situation that they were not able to be effective leaders. While not taking these responses as final, and asserting the need to look at the results thrown up by the questionnaire, these reports for us underscore the linkages between social status and leadership. A point to note here is that the women whose responses were being reported to us by the investigating team were women from scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and some women from backward caste communities who had little or no access to formal education. Added to this is the fact that these are women from the most backward region of the state. The multidimensionality and complexity of political participation cannot be greater than in the Telangana. This is why a status study of sarpanches becomes relevant. A look at responses to status indicators gives us more concrete correlates of power in specific contexts and thereby also correlates of effective governance.

Of a total of 434 women incumbents in the gram panchayat system (refer Table 2.5 for details) in Mahbubnagar, the present survey covered 266 women.

Table 2.7
Distribution of Women Sarpanches
according to Caste and Religion (respondents only)

Caste/religion	No. of respondents
Scheduled caste	32
Scheduled tribe	12
Backward caste	68
Christian	2
Muslim	3
Hindu (caste not reported)	145
No information	4
Total	266

Of these 266 respondents, 248 reported owning some land, while 251 owned a house. In addition, 183 women reported owning animals, 134 jewellery and 146 owned work implements of various kinds. The survey attempted to explore political participation through several multiple choice and open-ended questions. On exercising the right to vote, 110 women sarpanches reported that their husbands decided who they should vote for, and only 34 of them had actually cast a vote themselves. 265 of them had contested and won the election at the village level only once, and none had ventured beyond the village to the mandal or zilla parishad. Having won the gram panchayat election, 132 of the 266 sarpanches surveyed reported membership of mahila mandals, political parties and/or other support groups/collectives. Of these memberships, mahila mandals were the most popular, with 88 women reporting membership. The next in popularity was political parties, with 65 women reporting party membership. Further, having participated in the elections and won, several of these women had taken an active part in campaigning for other party candidates.

In the course of their work, they felt that women would be more sensitive to women's interests (only one woman out of 194 felt this is not necessarily true), and most of these women reported campaigning for women candidates in elections at the local level. 156 women reported that women could transform the political culture, while 53 felt they did not have the power. Several of these women said they met with other women in the village and discussed their problems, irrespective of whether they could actually effect change. Among the issues most commonly discussed at these meetings were dowry, child marriage, domestic violence, high prices and divorce. Rape, although discussed, was not a frequent topic of discussion, while religion and remarriage did not figure at all. This is to be seen alongside responses to a question 'of what significance is religion in your personal life', to which 98 stated that it plays a very important role, while 61 said that religion plays no role in their personal life.

A few general observations from the field data and interactions with women sarpanches during the course of this study will be a useful starting point. Being the most backward region as well as the centre of radical political activity, the Telangana interviews proved unusually difficult. For one thing, while it was practically impossible to have one-to-one interviews with the women sarpanches, filling the questionnaire becoming a collective activity that all those present pitched into. This has to do both with the questionnaire itself being an object of curiosity, and the investigating team and the respondents having very different perceptions of the public and the private. In several instances, either the husband or a son would answer for the woman,

irrespective of whether the question was about overt politics or personal detail.

The questions about personal detail sought to establish the degree of control over household affairs and reproductive life. While the *thandas* or tribal settlements exhibited a greater degree of autonomy, the situation of scheduled caste women sarpanches was far from enviable. At a meeting of women sarpanches convened as part of this study, a scheduled caste woman spoke of her extreme vulnerability and inability to do anything in her village as being directly linked to her caste and economic status. An upper caste landlord coveted the post, but he could not contest because the constituency was declared reserved for scheduled castes. In order to retain control, he filed the nomination on behalf of his scheduled caste bonded labourer. The constituency was then declared reserved for women. So he got the labourer's wife to file her nomination. And that is how she got elected. All decisions are conveyed to her through her husband, and she is summoned by the landlord from time to time to report on her activities.

Several scheduled caste women reported that they did not attend village meetings, and signed cheques that were brought to them at home. Although the practice of having a village officer as co-signatory to cheques had been discontinued officially, this was not communicated to the women sarpanches who were largely non-literate. Male co-signatories, they reported, often demanded more than 60% of a cheque amount as a bribe in order to sign. However, what was extremely significant in the telling of experiences of disempowerment was the perception of powerlessness and an extreme unhappiness with their current situation. This led these women elected representatives, theoretically privileged citizens, to interrogate the state's complicity in their denial of citizenship, thus destabilising received definitions of democratic order.

Self-help groups in Kalva village, Kurnool district, Rayalaseema

Over long periods Congress-I dominated Rayalaseema, a dry region that touches the Karnataka border, which is now known for its extremely violent, faction-ridden politics. This politics has for over two decades involved the complete derogation of human rights for women. There are several reasons for locating a case study in Kurnool district. As has been said earlier, this is an area with a tradition of violent politics, and a virtual absence of women as significant actors in the mainstream political field. And yet resistance movements and efforts at community mobilisation have thrown up women of courage and political will.

The initial decision to include Kalva in our study came from the announcement that the sarpanch, a Muslim woman, had won an international award [the UNDP Race Against Poverty Award] for her work. We had at that time no idea of the demographic profile of the village, or indeed the mandal, and even less of an idea about who were the motivators of rapid socio-economic change in the village. Our initial decision, therefore, was to look at this part of the study as complementary to the survey of sarpanches. It was meant to be an in-depth study of one gram panchayat under the leadership of a woman sarpanch. Within hours of reaching the village, we realised that the study had instead to focus on self-help groups that functioned completely independently of the gram panchayat, the latter playing only a secondary role in village development. Our notions of leadership changed as well. We were no longer looking for a single woman who had spearheaded change, but at a group of women, 300 in number, who together took the future of the village into their hands, and decided to shape their destinies. What to us was initially an 'interesting' fact, a Muslim woman in a leadership position in a region which is not associated with a strong minority presence, turned out to be a completely unexpected demographic profile of an entire mandal. Kalva and three other villages in the Orvakal mandal have a 90% Muslim population. The Muslim population in the entire mandal is as high as 30%. The census, however, records only the proportion of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population, so the demographic profile is unexpected.

Table 2.8
Orvakal Mandal, Kurnool District

	Total population			SC	ST	Literates			
	Total	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Orvakal MPP	44,411	23,000	21,411	4,537	4,048	416	385	9,797	4,057
Kalva Village	3,042	1,523	1,519	69	74	161	166	454	170

Source: Census of India 1991, *District Census Handbook*, for Mahbubnagar, Kurnool and West Godavari.

Kalva: Remembering the past

Zubeda Bee, in her early- or mid-thirties, is one of the most articulate leaders in the village. Speaking about conditions in the village before the formation of self-help *sanghas*, she says:

Our village Kalva is in a corner of Orvakallu Mandalam in Kurnool district. When people, visitors, come to the village and get off the bus, they cannot see the village till they actually enter it. If someone asked, 'We have to go the village. Where is Kalva?' They would be shown the trees and the *kalva* (creek) and asked to cross it. Then they would arrive at the village. My mother-in-law, mother and other old people tell us the story of the village.

The village I was born in was Gorkallu. I am a daughter-in-law in Kalva. I was married and sent to this village when I was sixteen. It seems everything was fine in the old days. All of a sudden there was an epidemic in the village. According to custom, there was a bazaar for the Brahmins, each caste had its own bazaar according to custom. When the epidemic came it seems most of the people in the village died. They were big landlords. Even in small remote villages, those who had a little land or fields left the village and went away. They went away to Kurnool and places like that. The people who stayed back in the village were those who felt, 'If we go away somewhere, we will not be able to survive. If we leave this village and go away, we will not even get coolie work'. Only those who could not survive outside stayed on in Kalva. Nobody knew anything about education there nor did they know anything about family planning. Neither girls nor boys had any education. Not a single doctor used to come to the village. If you talk about extreme poverty, the people of Kalva experienced it.

It was in those conditions that I first came to this village sixteen years ago. Each house had 10 children or 9 children or 6 children or 5 children. This village was full of people and in ruin. No education. Even if everyone felt let's work hard and eat, there was not enough land. What little was there was not good land. If there was a little water that came in from Kalva Bugga, people who were not sick and who had half acre or an acre used it for coconut and mango trees. There was also a little paddy. If children needed new clothes to wear, or if they fell sick all of a sudden, or if they were to be married, it was impossible to get any money. Far away in Betamcherla, they used to give us money at five rupees or six

rupees interest after first deducting the interest. Also, not everyone who went would get money. We had to take a known person who would stand surety for us and get the money. It was never possible to get money at the right time. There are a greater number of Muslims in that village. There are a few scheduled caste and backward caste people. And in the houses of the Muslims, even if there was a basketful of children, the wife and children had to be kept at home. The husbands had to go out and earn wages. We had to say fine whether it was gruel or roti and stay home. Women did not know anything at all about money matters. Whatever hardships the man went through, he had to get a thousand rupees from outside. We were unconcerned because we did not know anything. We only knew how to spend it all carelessly, but never understood what money was all about.

In those conditions many people did not find work. Young boys, fifteen years of age, would take with them an eight year old and go away to Hyderabad in search of work. Many of them work in polish cutting in Hyderabad. Many of them continue to stay there with their wives and children. They come to the village once a year for Ramzan. There are about 500 to 600 people like that. The daughters, the old people and the parents are there. Girls would go to graze buffaloes and goats or just stay at home. All the SC people's houses were huts. The village was surrounded by water. The children from the SC houses would always be playing in the water, unwashed and dirty. Two children even fell in the water and drowned. If you stay to watch the children, there will be no food.

The women in this village, mostly non-literate and poor, organised themselves into groups three years ago at the initial persistence of Vijayabharathi, a UNDP project officer working the area.

Where Kurnool is concerned, the women of Kalva state unequivocally that nothing would have been possible, and their lives would not have changed at all, had it not been for two people: Jayaraj of the Rayalaseema Grameen Bank and Vijayabharathi of UNDP. It is also significant that while they do not entirely dismiss the role of the agencies these people represent, they are also very clear that the agencies were brought to their door and kept there by

these people, therefore the emotional and material bond is far greater with these people. Especially in the case of Vijayabharathi - she is seen as the person responsible for forcing them to take charge of their lives. Interview after interview refers to the fact that the women of Kalva, particularly the scheduled caste women, had no concept of cleanliness and hygiene, and their lives were characterised by a kind of despondency till Vijayabharathi came and spoke to them of the importance of bathing children and keeping them clean, and on the connection between good health and hygiene. While it is no doubt important to look at issues of governance and citizenship as they are shaped by women at the grassroots level, no less significant is the shaping of these issues by women who are catalysts of change - and gender plays a critical role in both these levels.

The levels of poverty in this village by all accounts were stark, and the scheduled caste families that were at the bottom of the village hierarchy were constantly on the verge of starvation. Scrubbing children and consciously beginning to care for them appear to be a first sign of the women taking stock of their lives. Very soon after this, the SC women organised a crèche so that infants and small children could be cared for when the mothers went to work in the fields. They could not of course afford to pay the woman who was minding the children. She did the job nevertheless till they managed to find government salaries for her and for the teacher. Only the salary structure in the government was four hundred for the teacher and two hundred for the ayah. The women decided this was unfair and pooled in two hundred from the interest on their savings, so both could draw the same salary.

Child marriage was another serious problem in the village. One of the young women we spoke with, Nagamani, had been married off at the age of nine to a man much older than her. His first wife had deserted him because he had leprosy. The accounts of this young girl are moving. She speaks of how she did not know what marriage meant:

I did not even know. I have no memory of when they got me married. Three or four years after they got me married, I became big [attained puberty]. Then after a year my mother-in-law came. She said I should stay in her house. I did not know anything. In our houses, after marriage, the girl should not sit on a cot in front of the mother-in-law. I normally sit on a cot. I did not know that I should serve food. I did not know anything. I did not know that I should give them tea when they come or that I should give them water when she came to

take me. When she came my mother told me, 'She is your *aththa*'⁶. If she was my aunt, she should be the same for my sisters. They were all just sitting around. I did not know anything. We all went together – 25 of us. My mother got me ready so she could take me. After she told my mother, my mother put my clothes together, gave me a bath, packed my clothes and all of them tried to send me off alone. I did not have toe rings or a *puste* around my neck. I don't remember whether I took them off or what happened to them. As my mother was getting me ready, I was crying, saying 'If you don't come I will not go alone'. Then my sisters beat me a lot and asked me to go. Where was I to go? I did not know anything. My mother said it was wrong to say that. Then she said, okay I will come with you. My mother and I, both of us went along with my mother-in-law. After we went there I was told the daughter-in-law must not sit on the cot, she should cook for everyone, she must serve food for her mother-in-law and father-in-law. I knew nothing about cooking. I would be playing in my house. My sisters were there. So they would do all the cooking.

After I went there I had to wash utensils, sweep the front of the house. I had to cook and didn't know how to. As soon as we reached, they gave us water to wash our feet, we washed. My mother sat on the cot. I sat on the cot. They got angry. There is no use in having brought her here. She sits where her mother sits, and they even stopped talking to my mother. Then my mother understood. Because they said if you sit on the cot like this, your child will also sit on the cot, my mother stopped sitting on the cot and sat on the floor instead. I sat on the floor too. After we had been there for two or three days they asked me to go out with them. My mother-in-law asked me to go to the market with her. I told my mother and she said I could go. We went, the two of us. As we were walking she said, you are our daughter-in-law, you should wash utensils, sweep the house, cook. You must do all this work. You sit where your mother sits. How many days will your mother stay here? She kept scolding me, I kept saying, I don't

⁶ 'Aththa' could refer to father's sister, maternal uncle's wife or mother-in-law. Here, mother-in-law.

know how to do all this work. How will I do it? You have to do it. After all you got married, didn't you? There are daughters-in-law in our house. They are doing the work, are they not? I could not reply because I did not understand anything. Then I told my mother. I don't know why, amma, but this is what she said. To which my mother said. Yes. After all she is right. And I began quarrelling with her. She brought me back home. For two years after we came back, we did not go to their house. They did not come to our house. Then they made me sit saying that I had grown up.

When she attained puberty, the in-laws came to fetch her, and her mother and sisters beat her for refusing to go. She tried to run away, and that was when Vijayabharathi found her and intervened in the matter.

Muslims in this village are in a numerical majority, 90%, and are also economically better off than the scheduled castes. Some Muslim families own land and/or petty businesses or lease land, while all scheduled caste families work as labourers. The village, perhaps the mandal itself, has witnessed a long history of discrimination against scheduled castes by Muslims, as this account from Marthamma tells us:

No officer would visit our village. If there was a dispute about land, the MRO used to be brought to the village. We would all stand in a line as if he was god. We would try to go closer to him, but they would not let us go close, the Muslims. Hey! Go that side. Far way. He is a big man. Move away. He would stand there. All around him would be Muslims. And we would be far away. That was how this village was. They used to be like that.

Consciousness and identity

In the course of organising there has been a coming together of these two groups, and a collaboration across both class and community. The village has 22 savings groups, each group consisting of people with assets and those without. While there is a consciousness of identity and community in self-perceptions of work and community life, this seems to occupy a secondary position with regard to the work of the village organisation or the Grama Aikya Sangham. The consciousness of community is very present, because there are the very visible markers of community - the *burqa* for women, and

beards for the older men. There are also very clearly demarcated circles of social intercourse. While talking to the women, for instance, we raised the question of the greater possibility of inter-community marriages in an environment where girls were not leading restricted lives, and where greater interactions are made possible by the new environment in the village. The spontaneous response was that it was just unthinkable and not at all possible. If the several extremely violent and brutal incidents in different parts of the country where there have been inter-caste/inter-community unions are taken as a marker, then, on a general level, such unions are possible.⁷ The reason behind the question was to sound out the women on the possibility of such an event, and what difference it would make to a village that was organised by women on completely new parameters.

During the week that we were in the village, we spent most of our time singing songs for the women and men. We would just go into a particular street and ask the first woman we met whether she would like to hear our songs. Actually we were not asking her - we were just telling her that we wanted to sing! And we would sing. Some days we ended up singing each song ten times in the course of the day, and there were about five songs that we chose. Since Muslim families in this village also speak Urdu, we had decided to sing a couple of Hindi songs as well, one of which was a song on communal harmony: Mandir Masjid. Toward the end of our stay in the village, we came across a family where none of the women were in the credit groups. We were told that the head of the house, an elderly man, would not allow them to join a credit group. We were telling them that they should join the groups when they fell silent all of a sudden. We looked back and saw this old man staring at us very sullenly. Then one of the younger men told us very quickly that we should sing our songs for this uncle. And before we could start, he said, 'Sing the Babri Masjid song.'

We had to think for a moment, because for us the association was not so much with Babri Masjid as with communal harmony. However we sang the song and several others as well. What happened with this brief interaction was that the question of identity, which until that point had remained at a subterranean level in our conversations with the women, began to bother us. It is true that women across class and community had come together in very significant ways, but suddenly all the cultural markers that, although very visible, had not bothered us till then - both with regard to SC women as well as Muslim women and even some BC women - began to cause unease. The

⁷ Often all-male panchayats have meted out extremely harsh punishment, sometimes even death, to offenders.

fact that it was the men whose recall of the song was associated with Babri Masjid was another question in my mind. We had sung this song several times for the women; but, while there was interest, there was no obvious association with community. At a mandal level meeting, therefore, when one of the women asked us to sing 'that Hindi song', we sang it, and then related the incident with the men, underscoring the association they made with Babri Masjid.

We asked the women why there was such a different response from them. Did Babri Masjid not affect their lives? There was an initial reluctance to speak, arising partly from the fact that 'internal matters' like community had been consciously kept out of the spaces where they came together. On hindsight, this separation is perhaps justifiable, especially in the light of the history of explosive politics in spaces where it does find a place. However, our interest was to look at the different ways in which mobilisation and identity come together, and somewhere also to search for positive instances of that coming together. It was necessary for us to find positive and empowering ways of talking about this with different groups. After an initial reluctance some women came out and said, yes, Babri Masjid did affect their lives, that for the first time they were afraid, and although they knew that their neighbours would not do anything to them, they were still unsure of what forces might intervene to destroy the peace. One woman said for the first time in her life she experienced that kind of fear. They also said their men were much more involved in the whole thing, because they used to read the news and discuss it. Since this happened before the women organised themselves, they were more or less confined to their individual families and had to experience the uncertainty and insecurity alone. The non-Muslim women did not enter into the debate at all. Finally, one young Muslim woman said, 'If something like that happens now, we will know no fear, because we are all together and we make no distinctions of class or community.' An analysis of the interviews and testimonies of women of different groups in Kalva will show that class, caste and community are indeed significant cultural markers and determinants of identity.

Self-governance: A beginning

In the course of collective mobilisation, however, there is a potential which has in fact been explored of an 'organic solidarity' (to adapt a Durkheimian concept) that is a binding and strengthening force. Looking at cultural markers, one of the women was invited to deliver a public lecture in Hyderabad. Journalists from Urdu newspapers asked her why she was still

wearing a *burqa*. Her categorical answer was 'I will not remove my *burqa*.' This is one aspect of culture that requires deeper thought. While the *burqa* in popular perception is a sign of conservatism and seclusion of women (and is in fact so in most areas), these women in Kurnool have in the course of their work delinked it from orthodoxy, seclusion and restricted mobility, and in an important sense have reduced it to a marker with cultural significance but devoid of connotations of power or dispossession. For our own repertoire of positive images of community, images that erode stereotypical constructions, the communities in Orvakal will be central.

Nagamani, along with adolescent girls in the village, have now formed *balika sanghas*, and primary on their agenda is stopping child marriage in the village. They told us that whenever they see a stranger coming into the village, they ask to which house they are going, tell them there are no girls below the age of 18 in the village [available for marriage], and that if they went ahead and married the girl they would be the losers because the girl would not be allowed to leave the village and a case would be booked against them in the police station.

As a preliminary comment we can perhaps say that the women of Kalva have addressed issues of governance and citizenship by forging an independent relationship with the state - as represented both by the UNDP (the national coordinator being an IAS officer), as well as through the district administration. The issues that they have taken as central in defining political participation and governance are, primarily, social issues that are of immediate relevance to the community. In conclusion, to quote Zubeda Bee:

Whatever you might say, if we believe that the entire responsibility is that of the sarpanch or the group leader, the village can never progress. In our villages, teachers come to the school from other villages. We have to see if they are coming on time and teaching the children. We cannot leave it to the sarpanch, saying as a village elder it is her responsibility. When we live in the village, it is our responsibility to look after all these things. Is the nurse coming or not? There are *anganwadi* schools. Is the teacher giving children the cereal or not? Is she running the centre properly? Are they making rice for our children in the schools? Are the teachers coming regularly? Are polio drops being given? Because of the *janmabhoomi* programme, so much work is coming to our village on its own. All these days they would come to us once in a while when they felt like it. Now, every scheme is coming

to us. Every official is coming, walking to our village from the mandalam. We must tell them what our needs are in the village. If we work in cooperation with them, we can do so many good things in our village. We are working like this in our village. Our village would not have got such a big award if any one person worked alone. Nobody can do this alone. It is only when everyone works together that development is possible. When you look at the village now and say that village has good buildings, the roads are good, it is not the buildings and roads. How are the people in that village? What kind of responsibilities are they taking? How are they moving ahead? These are what are important. This is what you should look for, and that is what we are doing.

'We have got a handful of earth. We must not let it go': Koya Women in West Godavari, Coastal Andhra

While the case studies in Rayalaseema and Telangana looked at the panchayat system and its relevance/relationship to efforts at mobilisation/governance by women, the study of Coastal Andhra is far removed from this context. The areas under study here are the scheduled/agency areas with a predominantly tribal population. While the issues that have been thrown up in the course of the study have undoubtedly to do with governance and citizenship, these questions can only be raised outside of the formal political system that the panchayat represents. Further, the nature of the problem in the agency areas has necessitated a complex and protracted struggle against dominant and hegemonic forces, using or attempting to use both the judiciary and the executive to reinforce existing protection granted by the legislature. While the state is theoretically an ally, the tribal peoples are also confronted with an adversarial state at every step. While there has been a rich and vibrant struggle on the ground, the struggle in West Godavari and other agency areas has also, importantly, involved a struggle for rights in courts of law. It is this complexity that shapes the participation of women in the struggle.

The struggle for autonomy: Using law courts

The AP Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 (Act 13 of 1994), passed consequent to the 73rd Amendment to the constitution, does not apply to the scheduled areas of the state. While the state government contended that the applicability

of this provision could be extended to scheduled areas by the discretion of the governor, with the specific purpose of drawing hitherto isolated tribal populations into the mainstream, a writ petition was filed by the vice president of the Gondwana Sangharsh Samiti seeking a declaration by a writ of mandamus that the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act is not applicable to scheduled areas. This petition was upheld.⁸ The petitioners argued that scheduled areas came under Schedule V of the Constitution of India as declared by the president of India. They also invoked Article 243 M of the 73rd Amendment, which specifically provides for the exclusion of tribal areas from its jurisdiction. The grounds on which the petitioners sought exclusion have been clearly stated in their affidavit.

The affidavit, filed in support of the writ petition, states that due to the large influx of non-tribals into the scheduled areas, the population of the tribals therein has decreased to a considerable extent. This has resulted in a radical transformation of the demographic composition of the scheduled areas, reducing the tribals to a minority in many parts. In spite of the protective legislation, forbidding non-tribals from owning lands in the tribal areas, more than 48% of the agricultural land in the scheduled areas went into the hands of non-tribals. There are 5,913 villages spread over 8 districts – Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam, West Godavari, East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam and Mahbubnagar – in an area of 30,293 square kilometres and populated by 33 scheduled tribes.

The total population of the scheduled tribes according to the 1991 census is 42 lakhs, accounting for 6.3% of the total population in the state. The enactment of the Panchayat Raj Act by the state of Andhra Pradesh, and its application in scheduled areas, would result in a subversion of tribal interests that were hitherto safeguarded under Schedule V of the constitution. The provision that protection by Schedule V will be limited only to those instances where the entire territorial constituency lies in the scheduled area, and also if the population of the scheduled tribes in the constituency is more than 50%, resulted in many elective positions in the scheduled areas going in favour of non-tribals. Out of the 46 Mandal Praja Parishads in the scheduled areas, only 33 are reserved in favour of the scheduled tribes. The remaining 13 were brought into the open pool as the percentage of the tribal population in them is less than 50%. The object of enacting Schedule V of the constitution

⁸ Arka Vasanth Rao vs. Govt. of Andhra Pradesh 1995 (1) *Andhra Law Times* 600 (D.B.).

is to preserve and protect the interests of the scheduled tribes in the defined areas.⁹ The writ petition argued that this objective has been watered down by the enactment of the Panchayat Raj Act, which has introduced the population norm for the purpose of reservations, which would only lead to the disappearance of the scheduled area itself over a period of time by the influx of non-tribals.

The non-tribal farmers filed writ petitions in the High Court between 1987 and 1996, which came up for hearing as a batch in October 1997. They contended that they have enjoyed the thousands of acres being cultivated by them for the past 25 years. Their petitions challenged the inclusion of their villages in the Scheduled Areas Acts, and sought a mandamus for declaring the said inclusion as illegal and without jurisdiction. The petitions further contended that the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation No. 1 of 1959, as amended by Regulation 1 of 1970, be declared as inoperative for the villages named in the petition.

These non-tribal petitioners further contended that the tribal population in their villages is negligible, and in some instances non-existent. The dispossession of non-tribals of land in the scheduled areas, they argued, was in violation of Article 21 of the Constitution of India – the right to life. This argument was based on the stringency of laws in scheduled areas against non-tribals. It would be pertinent to note here that Regulation 1 of 1959 bars transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal, while Regulation 1 of 1970 bars transfers of land between non-tribals. The implementation of these two regulations therefore meant the complete negation of ownership and control over land by non-tribals in tribal areas.

The respondents in these petitions were the government of Andhra Pradesh; the district collector, West Godavari; the special deputy collector,

⁹ Under the Government of India Act 1935 (Chapter V) areas covered by Schedule V and VI of the constitution were referred to as excluded and partially excluded areas. The present Schedule V deals with the partially excluded areas. If we can go back in history to trace the origin of these special provisions we will find these are first mentioned in the schedules to the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874. Under this Act areas listed out in the schedules required specific treatment. The Montagu Chelmsford Commission's report also recommended the continuation of the specific treatment to people who were living in the Backward Tract. The Government of India Act of 1919 therefore authorised the governor general in council to declare any territory to be a 'backward tract' and made provision to modify laws in their application to these backward tracts.

tribal welfare; Sakthi, a voluntary organisation impleaded through a government order in 1992; and 122 tribal people who impleaded themselves through a court order in 1997. Of these 122 tribal people, 63 were women between the ages of 18 and 60 years.

Women and the struggle for land: Articulations of the state

The present study involved visits to thirteen villages in two mandals of West Godavari district: Jeelugumilli and Buttayigudem. The villages are: Panduvarigudem and Patachevulavarigudem, hamlets of Darbhagudem village, Vangavarigudem, Barrenkulapadu colony, Taatiramannagudem, Chandramma colony and Sirivarigudem hamlets of Jeelugumilli village, and Palacherla Rajavaram, in Jeelugumilli mandal; Kangalavarigudem, Kommavarigudem, and Regulagunta hamlets in Lakshmudugudem village, Bhoosarajupalli, and Marlagudem in Buttayigudem mandal.

Our attempt in the study was to explore articulations of governance and citizenship by the Koya women of West Godavari that emerged in the course of the struggle for land rights. In fighting for repossession of tribal lands, the state figures as a complex, multi-layered entity, both ally and adversary, central yet marginal, shaping local politics and being shaped by it. References to 'the state' are indispensable to any recounting of the land struggle. As has already been detailed, the struggle began as a demand for the implementation of the Land Transfer (Regulation) Act passed by the government. On the ground, therefore, it was a demand for accountability on the part of functionaries of the state. In an important sense, the state, in passing this legislation and others of this kind, makes itself an ally of the tribal population. While making this demand, however, the tribals become actively aware of the fact that 'the state' itself is a splintered entity - in fact, perhaps not *an entity* at all.

When they asked for the implementation of the legislation, the tribal women had to negotiate with two sets of functionaries - the officials of the mandal revenue department and the police. When they went to the office of the MRO, they found the non-tribal farmers in the office being entertained by the MRO. On seeing the tribal women, the MRO's first reaction was, 'Move! Move! Koya Stink! Move!' The police, who in fact were there to safeguard the rights of the tribals through the implementation of constitutional provisions, instead went into one village after another threatening to rape the Koya women if they persisted in their demands. When the threats did not dampen the spirit of struggle, cases were booked against these women and they were imprisoned for four to six weeks. The struggle has however been

successful. Thousands of acres of fertile land have been fallow for over three years now. Non-tribal farmers have not been allowed to enter any of these villages, and the Koyas cultivate as much land as they can afford, and share the produce between villages and families. Some villages cultivate jointly, while others have divided the land up with each family taking responsibility for what is under its control. All the women interviewed were however clear that they did not want joint cultivation to carry on indefinitely, because it was only when individual families had complete control over their land that they would act responsibly towards it. Having won a major battle, however, the women and men are unsure of where they should go from here. Speaking of the importance of the panchayat, one of the men in Barrenkulapadu colony said, 'Only men can be *sarpanches*. What do women know? It is because we are hot blooded and prone to rash acts that we pushed the women forward in the struggle. That was the only way we could ensure that the struggle was relatively peaceful.' Women in another village, Marlagudem, said in the presence of the men, 'If we had left matters to our men, they would have been bought over by the non-tribal farmers long ago. It was our obstinacy that sustained our gains and kept the land with us.'

Conclusion

The field studies in Andhra Pradesh point to the various ways in which women articulate questions of governance and citizenship, and the various sites in which they do this. We also get a clear sense, from our preliminary findings, of the gendering of the discourse on politics, struggle, rights and the state in these different locales. The view that, for citizenship, life itself must be rooted in land, and that taking control of objective conditions and shaping them involve, as a first step, addressing issues of social justice and welfare, and that development cannot be measured in terms of indices of wealth but in terms of indices of welfare and social equality, is significant. We hope that this study will subsequently lead to assessing how processes of disempowerment are shaped by gender and power at different levels of socio-political hierarchies.