



WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS A STUDY IN PRAKASAM DISTRICT OF ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA

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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 womens 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 womens 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.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Women across the world have experienced social transformation in recent years. In the present times women have been offered greater opportunities than before both at national and international level. Positive changes can be seen by women holding executive positions and taking up leadership roles not only in political front but as social reformers as well. Historically also women have always been accepted and appreciated as indomitable force in shaping & setting the pace, direction & structure of social and economic advancement in a social system.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act's reservation provision has brought a large number of women into PRIs, which has made an impact. Due to the fact that elected women frequently act as proxies for men's views at the councils, being advised by their male relatives, increasing the representation of women has not necessarily led to a mere gender analysis of the issues confronting local governance, but has necessarily raised the profile of women leaders, their needs, and interest in the policy agenda. Women may make a difference in grassroots leadership through participation in PRIs. But there is lack of empirical evidence to purview the function of women leaders in holistic perspective. Therefore, it was felt that there is need to analyze the pattern of leadership, leadership style executed by them, constraints faced while performing their leadership role and their self concept as well.

Leadership from women is essential for every development effort to succeed. Due to a lack of women's participation in the planning and execution stages, most initiatives and projects fail.

Gender discrimination is an ongoing debate worldwide. In recent years, one of the most prevalent topics of conversation has concerned the participation of women in political life. Women are more likely to be ignorant about matters pertaining to public life as a result of the dominance of patriarchy, culture, and caste systems. The process of women's engagement in local administration is currently in a transitional stage, and it must be hastened in a cautious manner in order to bring about an improvement in the improved participation of women in rural politics. At the level of the village, the leadership of women still needs to be validated before they can participate effectively. Due to a lack of education, exposure, and chances, the idea of women's participation in grassroots political institutions is still seen to be a formality. Only if women are educated to the point where they are able to engage in all aspects of life will it be possible to realise the objective of enlightening rural women. According to a study conducted in the Prakasam region of Andhra Pradesh, India, the goal of achieving political equality can be accomplished by the participation of women in the process of empowerment in panchaytiraj institutions.

Women are largely barred from holding political office around the globe. "Although women constitute half the population, only 3.5% of the world's cabinet ministers are women, and they hold no ministerial positions in many countries of the world. All political systems, regardless of ideology, or form, routinely deny women formal political status. A restricted definition of politics would include any activities in which political actors interact with traditional political institutions including parties, parliament, trade unions, and governments. The Nationalist struggle, the Tehbhaga movement, and the Telangana battle against feudal exploitation are just a few examples of contexts where women played active political roles that are left out of this definition. Women



participated in these movements by leaving the safety of their homes and venturing out into the public sphere, where they could more directly challenge the structures of authority that shaped their daily lives.

“It is now a well recognised proposition in women’s studies/movement that all spheres of lives involving any relationship is political, that many millions of women are silently waging a struggle against the patriarchal and feudal forces that seek to confine and contain them. That, however, weak a woman may appear to be, she has much political awareness, and that it is not the lack of political consciousness of her human or political rights, but the vicious circle, the trap into which she is placed and from which she is not able to extricate herself that is responsible for her low participations in formal politics.”

Since the public and private worlds are inextricably linked, politics must broaden to encompass this dynamic. Everything that has an effect on women's sense of self and their place in society must be viewed as political. We can start to see the ways in which women have been a part of political life in our nation if the artificial distinction between public and private is removed from discussions of women's political engagement and their role in democracy.

2. LITERATURER REVIEW

Dr.Subhasish Chatterjee, 2016, In the present scenario the rural development through Panchayati Raj Institute is considered to the foremost agenda in India. In this research article author has attempted to discuss about the rural leadership and their work for rural development in the neglected area. In addition to that it has also been tried to explore the passion of various rural developments works of women as Panchayati leader.

Smita Agarwal, 2015, In order to understand the performance of a woman panchayat leader, the ethnography method was used, including formal and informal interviews, and also data collection from administrative offices. The entry of women in the rural political sphere makes them a part of the socio-political power structure where they are expected to deliver, and their participation in structure also provides them with an agency to act. Highlighting the role of context, this chapter also indicates how the variables of motivation and personal traits help women function as effective leaders.

Over the past three decades, women’s groups have rapidly gained prominence as rural social and financial institutions, particularly in South Asia. In India, many women’s groups programs are implemented through self-help groups (SHGs). SHGs are groups of 10–20 women that meet at regular intervals to deposit money into a group-held account from which loans can be requested in times of need. These groups are typically formed by women who live close to one another and are ethnically and economically homogenous (Baland, Somanathan, & Vandewalle, 2011; Sharma, 2001).

SHGs reaching maturity are provided linkages to bank accounts and lines of credit, federated into higher-order collectives, and provided a range of other inputs – information on agricultural practices, inputs into these practices, trainings on livelihoods activities and so on - depending on the government entity or nongovernmental organization (NGO) that facilitates their formation. More recently, their role has expanded to include creating health and nutrition awareness, generating demand for various government programs, ensuring transparency in the implementation of government schemes, and tackling social issues ranging from dowry and domestic violence to gender- and caste-based discrimination (Chen, Jhabvala, Kanbur, & Richards, 2007 cited in Desai & Joshi, 2013; Kumar et al., 2019).

SHG programs in India have deliberately targeted women not only due to their low status in society relative to men, but also because women’s SHGs have proved to be successful and sustainable (Parida & Sinha, 2010). As a result of their reach – these groups currently reach more than 50 million households across the country (NRLM, 2020) – donors and policymakers are increasingly interested in using SHGs as platforms for service delivery, as collateral substitutes that help to build other forms of capital, and as vehicles for women’s empowerment.

Kumar et al. (2018) develops a conceptual framework linking women’s group-based programs to health and nutrition outcomes among women and assert that women’s groups can be socially empowering; they help build social capital by creating a comfortable space where women can voice their opinions and share experiences with fellow members, often achieved through group-building exercises that teach listening skills, build trust, and enhance participation. Many group based programs also lend themselves to interventions that emphasize collective action. For example, using group platforms to deliver participatory learning and action (PLA) strategies enables members to effectively identify shared problems, plan strategies, act together, and assess impacts (Harris-Fry et al., 2016; Kanani, Singh, Baqar, Mahajan, & Belwal, 2015); this approach is distinguished from others that simply transmit information to members but do not necessarily build community capacity to act collectively.

3. INDIAN WOMEN IN PANCHAYAT SYSTEM

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the role of women in Indian politics past and present. It briefly outlines the extent and nature of their political participation before independence. This chapter also assesses the position of involvement of women in the political and electoral processes at different levels during the post-independence period and their role in the various political institutions. The reasons for their limited participation in the politics are also discussed along with the emerging trends in this respect.

Since 1980s there has been increasing concern for improving the conditions of women and achieving their even progress in different fields including politics. Women though constitute half of the population they were neglected in all aspects for several centuries besides being denied opportunities and scope to march forward in any direction along with men.



3.2 Women Participation in National Movement

Under the impact of several factors women started participating in the National Movement from 1920s onwards in good number along with the men. Infact, the influence of Gandhi was widely considered as the primary motivating factor that encouraged women of all sections and regions to participate in the freedom struggle in one way or other. A number of women who were educated took active part in the activities of the Congress Party. They used to attend the annual sessions of the Congress Party and participated in the deliberations. Some of them occupied key positions in the party organization. In 1917, Annie Beasant became the President of the Congress Party while Sarojini Naidu in 1925.

The role of women in the National Movement gradually increased under the leadership of Gandhi as they started taking active part in all the activities taken up by him. They came out of their houses to participate in various activities such as meetings, rallies and processions, development of Khadi industry, anti-liquor movement, propagating the message of Swadeshi, and so on. The notable women leaders who played leadership roles during the nationalist movement included Sarojini Naidu, Durga Bai Deshmukh, Sucheta Kripalani, Swarupa Rani, Parvathi Davi, Hansa Mehta are so on.

4. DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND ELECTORAL POLITICS IN ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA

4.1 Introduction

India is a Union of States, according to its Constitution, with state power distributed between a (federal) government at the Centre and the governments of the constituent States. The importance of the States lies not merely in their vast territory or population, but in their distinct social structure, well-developed languages, culture and history. This tremendous diversity gives rise to different patterns of politics in different States. The government at the State level is responsible for most of the usual functions of a government, such as making laws on a wide variety of matters, their execution, maintenance of law and order, adjudication, commerce, industry, agriculture, education and health.

During the last 50 years of its existence as a republic, States have come to occupy an increasingly important place in India's political system. The political processes at the State level became significant after the breakdown of Congress dominance in the late 1960s. With the emergence of the State-based parties in the 1980s, there has been growing divergence in politics at the State and Central (federal) levels. Different party systems have taken shape in different States and the electoral outcomes have begun to differ from State to State in the last two decades, bringing a great deal of diversity among the States too (Manor, 1988). The emergence of coalition governments since 1989, in which the State parties became important partners, brought the State to centre stage. The onset of liberalisation policies from the early 1990s further increased its prominence. National and international financial institutions and agencies, companies and industrial houses began to deal directly with the States, whose governments have assumed an active role in the development of infrastructure in the State, determining a host of policies in accordance with the priorities of the ruling party at State level.

It is almost clichéd to describe India as a highly plural society characterised by tremendous socio-cultural and economic diversity, continuously undergoing radical changes. The bewildering variety of political forms at the State level would lead observers of Indian politics to think of it as in a state of perpetual flux, or 'pattern less', or a chaos out of which one could make little sense. To some extent, Indian politics today may be better comprehended by looking at the national politics as a cluster or coalescence of diverse State politics. Of course, there is a two-way interaction between the State and Central politics: while the States operate within the national policy framework and political situation, the Centre functions within the limitations imposed by the dynamics of State politics.

At the time India became Independent, the country faced, to use the phrase of Rajni Kothari (1970), the challenge of simultaneous change. It took upon itself the daunting tasks of reforming social structure, promoting agricultural and industrial development, and fostering democratic political institutions, all at the same time. The Constitution was a social covenant in democratic socialism, as it assured to its people liberty, equality and social justice, and elections have become the main agency through which democracy has been strengthened in the country. Commentators of Indian politics have observed that such a situation gave rise to both political development as well as political decay. New sections of people have been mobilised into the political firmament, participation of people in politics has been made possible on an increasing scale and activists and leaders have been recruited and nurtured. At the same, demands from the newly mobilised sections of people have increased on the state. There have been attempts to strike a balance between the claims of diverse segments of society for political power, social wealth and other opportunities, which were often conflicting. This has proved to be a difficult exercise in recent years.

5. RESULTS AND STUDY

Table. No.5.1 Table showing the sources of inspiration

Sources of inspiration	Number	Percentage
Family members	57	21.2
Husband	60	23.5
Political party	93	36.5
Village leaders	24	10.6
Self	66	25.9

***Note:** Percentage is not equal to 100 due to multiple choices

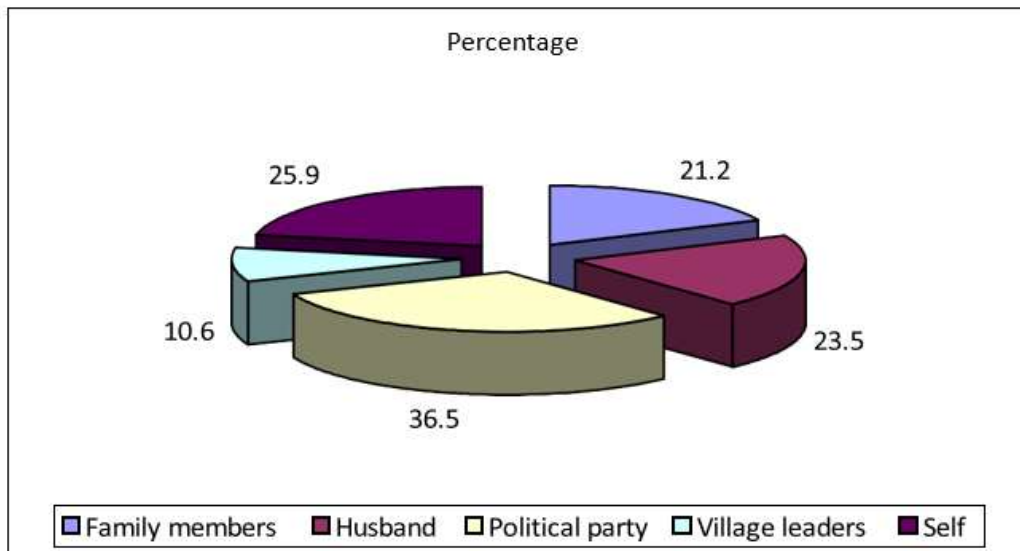


Figure No. 5.1: Sources of Inspiration

Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1 indicate the sources of inspiration of respondents into the public life due to the influence of varied factors, such as self interest, compulsion of family members and party encouragement. It is evident from the table 5.1 that party encouragement was the chief factor responsible for large-scale induction of women into Panchayats, which constitutes 36.5 per cent, while 25.9 per cent had self motivation with a deep urge to serve public. 23.5 per cent of the members were encouraged by their spouses to enter politics and 21.2 per cent were motivated by their family members. Only 10.6 per cent of the respondents were made to enter politics by village leaders. It is clear that political parties, husband and family members played an important role in motivating women to enter politics.

TableNo.5.2 Table showing the present position of the Respondents in Gram Panchayats

Present position	Number	Percentage
Member	205	82.4
Member of standing committee	29	9.4
Vice president	12	4.7
President	09	3.5
Total	255	100

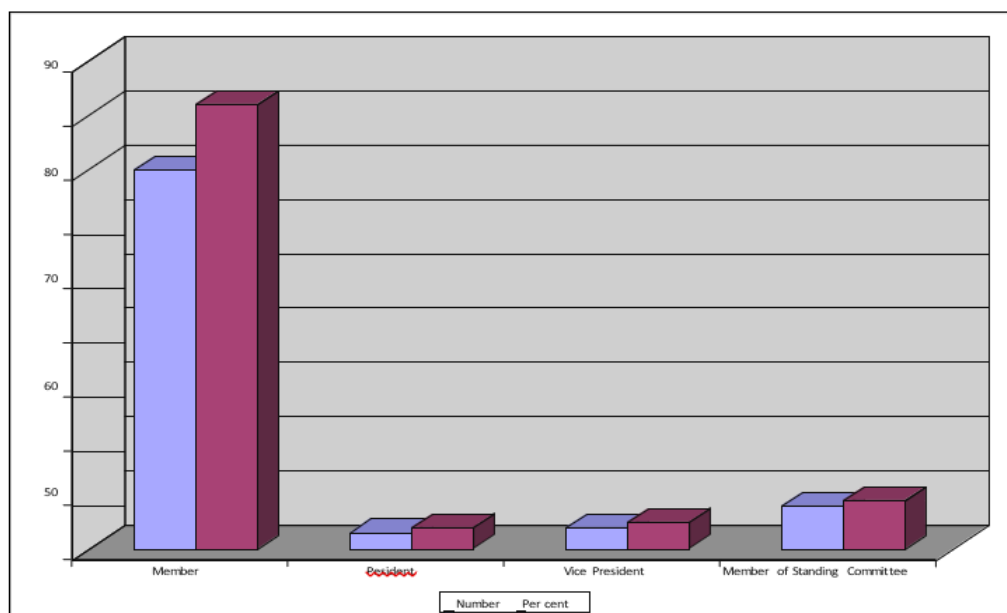


Figure No.5.2: Present Position



Table and figure 5.2 explains the present position of members in their respective gram panchayats. An over whelming majority of 82.4 per cent are just the members in gram panchayats, whereas meager percentage of 3.5 enjoy the position of presidents. Slightly less than 4.7 per cent of the respondents enjoy the position of vice-presidents. From this, it follows that a majority of the gram panchayats are headed by male presidents and minority number of gram panchayats are headed by female presidents.

CONCLUSION

To summarise, during the past few years, the provision of reservation for women in order to ensure quantitative strength and their position in the system of local administration has taken on a great amount of importance. This was done to ensure gender parity. On the other hand, their male family members, counterparts, and linked political party are the ones who are taking use of this chance the vast majority of the time, rather than them. This, in turn, undermines the capabilities that women possess. The level of participation of women in the activities and affairs of the panchayat has not yet been brought up to an acceptable level. In the arena of Grama Panchayat governance, female leaders continue to face several obstacles, including patriarchy, a lack of self-confidence, and ignorance, which prevent them from realising their full potential and using it to their advantage. Their participation is limited to that which is required of them as political representatives.

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