

CHAPTER – VIII

SUMMARY CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The Panchayat Raj is a striking feature of Indian Democracy. From the Balwant Rai Mehta report 1957, to the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution 1993, the strengthening of Panchayat Raj Institutions has passed through several stages. The 73rd Amendment is a milestone in itself because of its intention to strengthen the Panchayat Raj by making the local women a part of it. The basic structure of the Indian Constitution which rests on the tenet of democracy will be successful at higher level when it is reinforced at grass root level.

8.2 Summary

The study is an attempt to understand the implementation of the 73rd amendment and also if women's literacy complements political empowerment at the grass-root level focusing on the four mandals in Srikakulam district namely, Amdalavalasa, Tekkali, Santhabommali and Seethampeta.

Srikakulam is a backward area and the people are mostly traditional bound. However the last decades of the 20th century has changed the situation to some extent, and slowly there are some visible changes for the better. Statistics disclose the increasing

literacy levels of women and the perceived change in the attitude of the people. Many eminent women leaders have hailed from Srikakulam District. To name some, K. Pratiba Bharathi from Etcherla a consecutive five time MLA and also Speaker of the undivided Andhra Pradesh Assembly, Ms. Kili Kruparani from Tekkali, was M.P. 2009-2014, K. Bharathi from Tekalli was MLA from 2009-2014. Srikakulam district is divided into the local bodies, that is, municipalities in urban area and panchayat raj in rural area. The Panchayat Raj institutions consist of Zilla Parishads followed by Mandal Praja Parishads and Gram Panchayats. The entire district Srikakulam is divided into Mandals under the control of Zilla Parsihads. Each Mandal is divided into a number of villages. The villages in a Mandal are controlled by Mandal Praja Parishads. Similarly the village is headed by a Sarpanch.

8.3 Conclusion

On the basis of this study the following findings are made and for an easy understanding the findings are divided under three headings:

- i. The operationalization of the one-third reservation of seats for women in all the gram panchyats in the 1995, 2006 and 2013 elections of the 4 mandals namely, Amdalavalasa, Tekkali, Santhabommali and Seethampeta.

- ii. The realization of the one-third reservation of women for the office of the sarpanch in the above mentioned 4 mandals and
- iii. The relation between literacy level and women empowerment in the above mentioned 4 mandals.

i. The operationalization of the one-third reservation of seats for women in all the gram panchyats in the 1995, 2006 and 2013 elections of the 4 mandals namely, Amdalavalasa, Tekkali, Santhabommali and Seethampeta.

a.) At the outset it is pertinent to recall the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 Article 243(D) (3) which states “Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.”

In other words, every gram panchayat is a component by itself, wherein ‘not less than one-third the of women reservation’ has to be implemented. Tables presented in chapters IV, V, VI and VII pertain to the data on the implementation of the 33.3% reservation for women taking every gram panchayat in the mandal as the component for implementing the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act. It is evident there was an inconsistency and lapses in allotting wards for women.

Nevertheless, it is imperative to state here that the analysis in the above mentioned chapters shows that a small amount of corrections were made in the implementation method for the 2006 election as the disparity in allotting wards for the women was narrowed down when compared to the 1995 election.

b). But the Extension Training Officer (ETC) told the researcher that during the 1995 and 2006 election it was the mandal which was taken as the component and not the gram panchyat to implement the 33.3% reservation for women. They themselves admitted they did this because they did not understand how to reserve one-third of wards exclusively for women. Thus due to their incomprehension they took the mandal as a unit for implementing the 73rd reservation quota. And also that there was some local politics involved. They were not willing to divulge more information on this aspect. But they did own up to say that for the 2013 election they were given strict instructions that election guidelines should be followed stringently.

Therefore the researcher while also considering the mandal as a unit made the following observation-----except for the lone omission of Amdalavalasa and that too in the first 1995 election, it is seen that only 26% of the reservations was put into operation i.e. a shortage of 7%. Whereas, the data for the 2006 election shows in all the 28 gram

panchayat the reservation policy was followed. The figure of the 2013 election tells of the exact implementation of the 50 % of reservation.

Tekkalli mandal data analysis revealed from the study, that in 1995, the reservation policy adopted in this mandal was appropriate to the 33.3% quota. In the 2006 election, all of the 27 gram panchayats, followed the reservation policy. And, in the 2013 elections the 50% reservation policy was followed in line with the reservation policy.

Santhabommali mandal presents a similar picture. In the 1995 election all the 33 gram panchayats, followed the reservation policy. In the 2006 elections again the 34 gram panchayats, also followed the reservation policy. For the 2013 election analysis it is seen that the stipulated 50% reservation was implemented.

Seethampeta mandal data for all the 24 villages was not available for the 1995 election. Information for 8 villages only, was available. Yet the researcher studied this mandal as it is a tribal or agency area, which is located in the interior of the Srikakulam district, and it, would be interesting to study the level of women empowerment of this remote area, when compared to the other three which are plain areas. Seethampeta mandal though a tribal area with a culture of its own does not offer a very different analysis. The data available for the 1995 election of the 8 villages' shows all the village

panchayat the reservation policy was followed, In the 2006 election, where the data for all the 24 villages is available it is seen all the village panchyats implemented the reservation policy, Furthermore in the 2013 election similar to Amdalavalasa, Tekkali and Santhabommali mandals, also in Seethampeta the 50% reservation was adhered to. Therefore, it can be said that the 33.3% of reservation was implemented on the condition that the mandal is taken as the unit of implementation of the 73rd amendment Act.

ii. The realization of the one-third reservation of women for the office of the sarpanch in the 4 mandals:

It is viewed in the 1995 sarpanch election in Amdalavalasa there was a void of 13%. Out of 24 sarpanches only 5 women were elected. While in the 2006 elections the 33.3% of reservations was properly implemented. Similarly the 2013 election displays the exact implementation of 50% reservation.

Tekkali mandal of a total of 27 sarpanches 9 were elected. Revealing the allocation of 33.3% with regard to the sarpanches in the 1995 and the 2006 elections was adhered to. And in 2013 election the 50% was also adhered to.

Here again like Amdalavalasa mandal the Santhabommali mandal the 1995 election data shows a shortfall of 3 %. From a total

of 33 sarpanches in 1995, only 10 women were elected. In the 2006 sarpanch election in which out of 34 women, data shows that 11 were elected. This shows that the reservation policy was followed. Similarly in the 2013 election, 50% reservation was adopted in Santhabommali mandal.

Seethampeta mandal the data for the number of sarpanches elected during the 1995 election is not available. But the 2006 and 2013 sarpanch elections the reservation of 33.3% and 50% were followed.

iii. The relation between literacy level and women empowerment of the 4 mandals

Despite the fact that that the percentage of women has increased formally, that is quantitatively, it is also noteworthy to see if their presence is felt in decision-making, that is qualitatively.

The importance of education in bettering administration in the Panchayat Raj Institutions cannot be denied. It is rightly recognized that education is the most important input for the development of an individual's, society and a nation. The educationist, sociologist, economists, scientist all over world insists that education is the best way to empower women as they become aware of their rights. So the question arises if the literacy level amongst women is above average,

then by default, it should reflect in political empowerment. The general understanding is that women in Panchayat Raj Institutions are women belonging to the less educated group and these women take up political career as an extension of their domestic role.

To examine the issue of political empowerment of the women the scholar took into consideration the literacy level of the women in the four mandals.

The literacy level of the women in Amdalavalasa mandal is 59.55%, in Tekkali mandal it is 57.32%, in Santhbommali mandal it is 46.85%. It is paradoxical that though, in these mandals the literacy rate is relatively high, the scholar has observed that the women are not keen in contesting for the sarpanch post let alone as ward members. They showed more interest in either further studies or take up vocational training or take up jobs. Regrettably, the women did not see any incentive in any sense to be a member of the panchayat raj institution. Women having education qualification and skills did not come forward to contest the elections. In the study it was seen that the less qualified women are usually elected, P.Laxmi (B.A) from Vanjangipeta and K.Padmavathi from Katyacharyulupeta the exception being two ladies from Amdalavalasa Mandal who had completed their degree. It is seen that women with just basic schooling were unable to conduct the ward meetings. None of them

were able to tell about the financial matters of the Panchayats and lack of knowledge in such matters is a big hurdle for empowerment.

Whilst, Seethampeta mandal is somewhat in contrast to the common viewpoint of literacy as the entry point to women's empowerment. Here it is seen the literacy level as being only 39.5%. When compared to the other three mandals, this mandal has the lowest level literacy level. But interestingly, the researcher found that these tribal women seemed more enthusiastic in taking up responsibilities as sarpanches and ward members. Maybe, it can be inferred that since many of these tribal women do not even have access to good education, and have no exposure to the opportunities available, as they remain in the agency area. And as such, look at ward members and sarpanches as an opening for their further growth. Recently the election commission has started training programmes in the scheduled Tribe areas to provide training for them in the democratic process. With the help of Integrated Tribal Development Authority the election commission is conducting training programmes to create political awareness among the women in Seethampeta Mandal. Now the women are slowly coming to understand the importance of election. Many of the tribal women told the researcher that now they want to enjoy the power for the benefit of their fellow tribal women.

As previously stated in Chapter VII the social set up in Seethampeta marks a different picture seen against the social set up in the plains of Amdalavalasa, Tekkali and Santhabommali mandals. What is seen here is that not many women from other castes are elected from here, be it men or women. Only 11 from a total of 239 elected women ward members and sarpanches belonged to SC and UR category from 1995 election onwards were elected. But in the other three mandals (or the plains) there is a jumble of other castes. Sometimes in the plains during panchayat meetings the elected SC and ST women have to sit amongst men and women of other castes which they feel is not liked or appreciated by those belonging to other castes, as such they feel ostracized. This social reason could also be an indicator why the women in the plains are disinclined towards panchayat institutions. Whereas in Seethampeta the representation of other castes is negligible and so the tribal women do not suffer a feeling of being not accepted amongst their peers. And this gives them some room (no matter how little) to function in their capacity of sarpanches and ward members.

For the most part it can be understood of the four mandals, from a total introvert, unwilling and unenthusiastic panchayat ward members, some of the women have come a long way in their political journey. In other cases, sitting amongst other men and just talking about the village development might not qualify for women

empowerment but for these women it certainly qualifies as a grade towards women political empowerment.

The 73rd amendment must be seen as the first and the most important step in the process of women empowerment. Nevertheless, the study reveals that it alone cannot bring empowerment. As even today the general view of the women in all the four mandals is that there is a lack of self-confidence in these women which makes room for their male interference. This dependency is a stumbling block in their empowerment. It may be concluded that for a full realization of political empowerment of women at the grass-roots, Indian democracy has still to mature, and this is because of the fact that political empowerment cannot be possible in a vacuum. The women empowerment lies in social, economic, political and education development. The political empowerment would be successful when women are empowered in other fields.

The district of Srikakulam in general and the four mandals under study is an under- developed area and a male ruled society. The traditions, cultures and customs have a strong impact on both men and women, more so women, which makes it near impossible for the women to break their vulnerableness. The social backwardness and the political backwardness are intertwined. To a large extent the

women being political empowered will depend principally on how they stand up to the social norms.

The researcher through questionnaire, interviews, informal interactions and observations during the course of her research work has noted the following about women's political empowerment in the universe of her study. Because of the combination of orthodoxy and ignorance on the part of ward members, it is seen that they are not forthcoming in contesting elections even from the wards reserved for women. Also the lack of knowledge and awareness of elections and electoral processes among women is a major barrier towards contesting the elections. In many cases it was observed that more than the hesitation of the women it was their male colleagues who would not allow them to work freely. Sadly, even after more than two decades of the introduction of the 73rd amendment, there are still situation where the ward member does not know on which paper she has signed. It is very unfortunate, but sometimes the ward members are misled especially where the Sarpanch is a male. Most of the information is in print media, and hence a serious handicap for a large majority of women, who are illiterates.

The Sarpanch who is the head of the village panchayat has a responsible role to play. However the study has shown that like the ward members many of the sarpanches hands are tied because of the

lack of knowledge of the roles and responsibilities they have to undertake. The sarpanch is elected directly by the people as their representative, yet it was astonishing to discover that many of the woman sarpanch role was usurped by their husbands or sons or their brothers quite blatantly. Many times the sarpanch only signs on the minute books and other administrative documents which are prepared by her male relatives (not male ward members) on their behalf.

8.4 Recommendations

On the above findings the scholar gives some recommendations for the political empowerment of women.

1. Keeping in mind the social constraints on the women, it is paramount that they should be encouraged to take part in the politics by first removing all kinds of apprehensions and fear from their mind like what will the other family members say or what will the people in the society say. In a male centric society, it is but natural that women have inhibitions in coming out of their homes and more so in the political arena.
2. Training on various aspects of the PRIs should be provided to the women members. Provisions of the 73rd Amendment, writing records, conducting meetings, maintaining community assets, financial management, understanding of bureaucratic

structure, government schemes for the rural poor, unemployed, education, public distribution system, are some of the areas in which training could be given.

3. Presently since women are not in a position to read any kind of printed material regarding their duties, it may be it may be possible to make them politically aware through documentaries. This may also lend a hand in exposing them to the development activities in other panchyat raj institutions in other parts of the country.
4. As far as possible the ward members should be elected among the women unopposed. An election naturally brings with it all the election campaign techniques, which by default gives rise money and muscle. Women don't usually like to be a part of this and this also keeps them at bay from contesting.
5. The women should be encouraged to take part in the panchayat debates. And for this it is necessary for the women to be educated. Only then can there be exchange of thoughts, ideas and debates which is the true essence of democracy.
6. Strict rules should be implemented where no outsiders can be present during the panchayat meeting. If necessary, the gatecrashers should be physically removed. This gives the women a more free atmosphere to take part in the meetings.

7. The women need some support system from the government.
The government should run crèches for the women ward members and women sarpanches children.
8. The problems at village level should be discussed by both male and female without having any gender bias.
9. Sexual discrimination should be punished at all levels.
10. A training college should be set up to provide political training to women at state level. This will give the women an opportunity to freely interact with other ward members and sarpanches.
11. Non-Governmental Organizations should work hard for the political empowerment of the women, by conducting more awareness camps.
12. Until and there is some incentive, people would not like to join any organization. Monetary incentive should be given to the ward members and the sarpanches. What they are getting now, is too little to expect any substantial commitment.
13. Salaries for the sarpanches should be enhanced from rupees 3000 to rupees 10,000.
14. Similarly the village ward members should be granted rupees 5000 per month on a regular basis

15. The Government has entrusted cheque power to the sarpanches to issue cheques to the worth of rupees 1,00,000. But this cheque power should be enhanced to rupees 2,00,000.

In the face of various restrictions it can safely be said that the increase of women in PRIs is noticeable as panchayats in India are gradually becoming gender receptive. Women have started asserting themselves leading to a new kind of situation in the society. Reservation of seats has given them an unparalleled opening and has created conditions for a sort of “social revolution” without much hue and cry. Despite various constraints, one of the significant achievements of the provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act is that it has augmented their awareness and understanding levels, and induced in them a feeling to claim for their due share in the decision-making exercise at the local level.