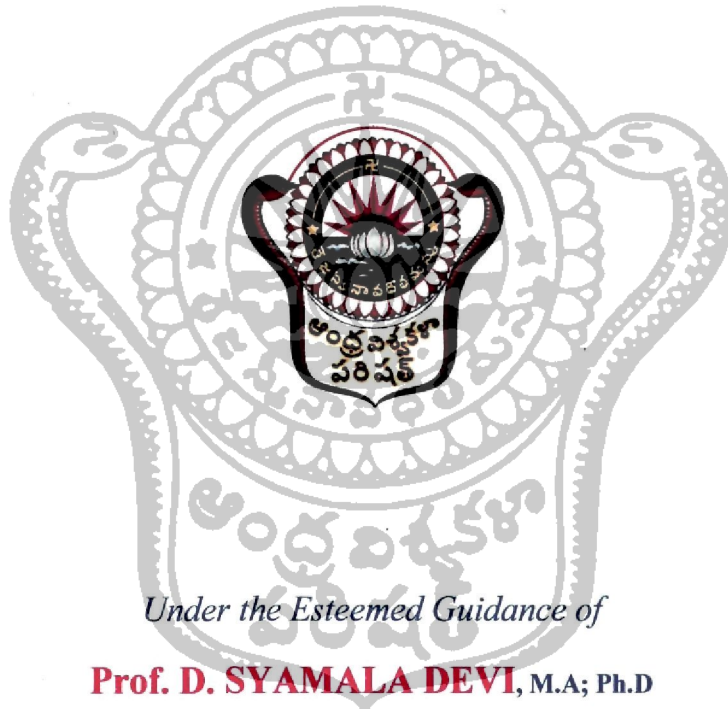


POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

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CHAPTER VIII

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION



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The Present Study is mainly focused on the Political Participation and Leadership of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. In order to fulfill the objectives some Key Concepts like Awareness, Interest, Involvement and Participation were chosen. Awareness includes the Constitutional /Awareness, Awareness on Panchayati Raj Practices and Procedures. The collected data was analyzed to study the Interest, Involvement and Participation. The researcher also planned to study the “Political Participation and Leadership of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions” in the area of study. These key concepts are useful in need of Political Participation and Leadership of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. In this chapter the researcher mainly discussed the importance of various key concepts of Political Participation and Leadership of Women analysed the major findings of the study and also provided the suggestions.

1. Majority of the respondents in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu do not have Constitutional Awareness. But yet it is significant to find that in Paderu Tribal divisions, the Awareness levels are quite low when compared to Visakhapatnam (Urban), Narsipatnam (Rural) divisions. There is slight difference in Awareness levels according to their age, occupation and income. No significant difference was identified in the case of caste. Significant value was identified in the case of Education. Because majority of the respondents were uneducated and due to this reason education has its impact upon their responses. No significant difference was identified in the case of caste.



2. Majority of the respondents in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu do not have Awareness about Panchayati Raj Procedures and Practices. But yet it is significant to find that in Paderu Tribal divisions, the Awareness levels are quite low when compared to Visakhapatnam (Urban), Narsipatnam (Rural) divisions. There is a slight difference in Awareness levels according to their age, occupation and income. No significant difference was identified in the case of caste. Significant value was identified in the case of Education. Because majority of the respondents were uneducated and due to this reason education has its impact upon their responses.
3. Majority of the respondents in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu do not have interest towards Gram Sabha Meetings. But yet it is significant to find that in Paderu tribal divisions, the interest levels are quite low when compared to Visakhapatnam (Urban) and Narsipatnam (Rural) divisions. There is slight difference in interest levels according to their age, occupation and income. As there are an overwhelming majority of uneducated respondents in Paderu division their interest in Gram Sabha Meetings is very low. There is significant difference in their interest levels. No significant difference was identified in the case of caste.
4. Majority of the respondents in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu have low involvement in decision-making independently. But yet it is significant to find that in Paderu tribal divisions, the involvement levels are quite low when compared to Visakhapatnam (Urban) and Narsipatnam (Rural) divisions. There is a slight difference in involvement levels according to their age, occupation, and income. No, significant difference was identified in the case of caste.



5. Majority of the respondents in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu have medium level Participation in Panchayati Raj Developmental Activities. There is a slight variation in their responses regarding age, education, occupation and income. No, significant difference was identified in the case of caste. There is close relation between Interest and Participation under my study.
6. Majority of the respondents in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu have low initiation in solving the public problems. It is interesting to observe that an overwhelming majority of respondents in Paderu tribal divisions had low initiations in solving of public problems when compared to Visakhapatnam (Urban), Narsipatnam (Rural) divisions.
7. Majority of the respondents have come from poor family background because of the 1/3rd seats of reservation for women. No significant difference was identified in the case of caste. There is no difference in their responses according to their age, education, occupation and income.
8. Majority of the respondents did not raise their voice regarding local problems in the local body meetings in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu. In Visakhapatnam (Urban) division the percentage of respondents who raise their voice regarding local problems in the local body meetings are more when compared to Narsipatnam and Paderu tribal division.
9. An overwhelming majority of the public felt that illiteracy as the reason for the poor performance of Women Sarpanches in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
10. Majority of the public opined that training is essential to improve the performance of Women Sarpanches in Panchayati Raj Institutions.



11. Majority of the Public said that there is husband and family members influence on Women Sarpanches in decision-making in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Accordingly the researcher fixed certain parameters (Awareness, Interest, Involvement and Participation). In this present study researcher made an effort to find out the political participation and leadership of Elected Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Mere Political Participation of Elected Women Representatives is not enough but they have to possess leadership qualities and abilities in order to fulfill their responsibilities in a full pledged manner. In our political scenario there are many Elected Women Representatives in the state legislature and in parliament where they did not have sufficient leadership qualities and do not have awareness about the procedures and practice of the political system. They are not actively participating in the developmental activities carried out in their constituencies. Similarly they are not showing interest towards attending Gram Sabha Meetings and taking decision independently.

Accordingly the researcher fixed certain parameters (Awareness, Interest, Involvement and Participation) within the limits to carryout empirical enquiry. Researcher tried to find out whether the Elected Women Representatives are really possessed the leadership qualities or simply, participation in the political system in Visakhapatnam District of Andhra Pradesh.

Awareness was considered as a pre-requisite for the successful implementation of Developmental Activities in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Unless the level of Awareness of Elected Women Representatives is heightened, the Panchayati Raj Institutions may not function effectively. Our analysis shows that the level of awareness constitutional as well as procedures and practices of Panchayati Raj Institutions of Elected Women Representatives is determined, to a great extent, by their educational attainment. Majority of our respondents are not aware of the



constitutional and institutional awareness meant to safeguard their interests. Tanu Rathee Sushila Dahiya and Singh. S. P (2002)¹⁰ conducted a study in two villages of Hisar district, Haryana, India in 1999 to ascertain rural women's (n=110) awareness about the reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and to find out the relationship between the level of awareness and certain socio-economic factors. The study revealed that 42.73%, 34.55% and 22.72% of the respondents had a low, medium and high level of awareness, respectively. Respondents with higher educational attainment mass media exposure, socio-economic status and income as well as those that are cosmopolitan and has a political background had better awareness about the Panchayati Raj system compared to their counterparts. The study did not focus on participation and perception levels.

It was observed that caste has not shown any significant difference in any of the awareness aspects of Elected Women Representatives. In the overall observation we concluded that below 35 years aged respondents, 40,000-50,000 income group respondents, with cultivators as an occupation and Graduation respondents have higher Awareness, Interest, Involvement and Participation. When compared to their counterparts in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu. Further, the division wise result also indicates that in the Visakhapatnam (Urban), and Narsipatnam (Rural) respondents have more awareness, when compared to the respondents of Paderu (Tribal) division.

Awareness generates interest. Majority of our respondents in the three divisions have low interest towards Grama Sabha meetings and training classes taking initiative in solving the problems of public in their respective active areas. It is interesting to note that when compared to Visakhapatnam (Urban), Narsipatnam (Rural) and in Paderu (Tribal) divisions. The Elected Women Representatives have very less interest towards the above said aspects. It



indicates the necessity of promoting the interest of Elected Women Representatives. In order to perform their activities effectively and there by attain their objectives. Nambiar (2001) in her study of 'Making the Gram Sabha Work' noted the difference utilities in organizing the Gram Sabha. Majority of women reported that they were not informed or invited to the meetings. While others were hesitant in participating in meetings in the presence of a large number of elder members. However, they have to forgive their day's wages or household duties just to identify beneficiaries as to convey what the gram Panchayati would do in future. In this context, the present study was undertaken.

Closely associated with 'interest' and 'Participation' is the key concept 'involvement'. Awareness, Interest and Participation ultimately had to 'Involvement'. Involvement is considered as an important aspect in carrying out Panchayati Raj Activities effectively. Our analysis shows that Elected Women Representatives are not involving themselves effectively in making decision independently. They are depending on their husband and the other members of the family for making decisions. Majority of the respondents are not involving themselves in making decisions, independently in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu. It is quite interesting to find that in Visakhapatnam (Urban) division there is high involvement 25%, when compared to Narsipatnam (Rural) division 15.63% and Paderu (Tribal) division 3.85%. It is understood that in Paderu (Tribal) division the involvement of Women Sarpanches is quite low. Further it is concluded that below 35 years aged respondents, with Cultivations as an Occupation and Graduate respondents have more involvement when compared to their counterparts. Usha Narayan (1996), confirms that the main position of 73rd constitutional amendment involves the participation of women as voter, women as members of political parties, women as candidates, women elected members of PRI's taking part in decision making, planning implementation and



evaluation. She stressed that reservation provisions are providing to guarantee for their empowerment

Participation manifests itself in the actual involvement of an individual, directly or indirectly in a particular activity. It is a psychological disposition of an individual towards the system, the issues and the process. Participation in this sense makes the activities of the system successfully.

Participation of Elected Women Representatives in the 3 divisions Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu Medium in terms of Panchayati Raj Developmental Activities and Raising their voices regarding local issues. In the overall observation we concluded that below 35 years aged respondent, 40,000-50,000 income group respondents, with Cultivation as an occupation and Graduate respondents have higher Participation when compared to their counterparts in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu. Further, the division wise result also indicates that in the Visakhapatnam (urban) and Narsipatnam (Rural) respondents have more participation, when compared to the respondents of Paderu (Tribal) division. Educated Women Sarpanches shy away from asserting themselves to get their legitimate dues from the Government. Male prejudice still acts as a severe obstacle in the path of participation of Elected Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Developmental Activities. Males, especially in the rural societies consider it disgraceful on the part of the Women Sarpanches to go out in the public and demand for their rights. The traditional and conservative taboos are still there for which women believe that if they actively participate in such developmental activities, lack of motivation, dampen the enthusiasm of the Women Sarpanches so far as participation is concerned. Radha S and Choudhury B R (2002)⁸ examines the nature and extent of women's participation in Panchayati Raj in Kerala, India, in the discharge of



financial, social and administrative functions and the overall impact that their participation have made on local development. Data were obtained from 181 respondents (121 women and 60 men) from 35 Panchayats in the study area during January 2000. The study also relied on secondary sources of data. It was noted that the socio-economic background of the women representatives such as age education, family and other general factors, have a great bearing on their performance in the local bodies. The political parties consider women members a liability and they were allotted positions when pressured by bigwigs in the party. In addition there are problems of character assassination and sexual violence, Caste gender and empowerment and self – development factors also influenced their relative performance.

Political Participation and Leadership of Women Sarpanches in terms of Awareness, Interest, Involvement and Participation led to the conclusion that their performance is not up to the mark in Panchayati Raj Activities due to low awareness, particularly of constitutional and legal provisions resulting in loss of interest which ultimately lead poor involvement and insignificant participation.

In this context, the present study took up an analysis of the perception of Elected Women Sarpanches of the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as the perception of public on the performance of Women Sarpanches. Perception here refers to the views, beliefs and attitude of an individual towards a particular aspect. The study also tried to know the perception of public towards the political participation and leadership capabilities of Women Sarpanches in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Majority (70.4%) of the Public opined that Women Sarpanches were not aware of new Panchayati Raj legislations and Panchayati Procedures as well as Practices. Whereas 30% of the



public express the view that they are aware of new Panchayati Raj legislation and Panchayati Procedures as well as Practices.

Majority (79.2%) of the Public said that the women Sarpanches are not having interest and consequently, they are not attending to the meetings. Whereas 20.8% of the Public viewed that they are showing interest towards the Gram Sabha Meetings.

Majority (76.80%) of the Public opined that the women Sarpanches are not taking decisions independently and they depend upon others. Whereas 23.20% of the public viewed that they are taking decisions independently.

An overwhelming Majority (80%) of the Public felt that women Sarpanches are not actively participating in Panchayati Raj Development Activities. Whereas 20% of the public viewed that they are actively participating in Panchayati Raj Development Activities.

Because of 1/3rd seats of reservation SC and ST women are getting seats and participating in politics. It is observed that they are having support from their family members and local forward caste leaders. Though they are elected in an actual practice, unable to perform their duties effectively. Illiteracy as the main drawback the performance of Women Sarpanches. The study also indicated that an overwhelming (80%) of the Women Sarpanches were illiterates. That too in the tribal division like Paderu the situation is worst as a result they were not able to develop individuality and take decision independently.

Though the elected women representatives face innumerable problems while discharging their duties, they continue their struggle to succeed in their mission. But their perception of their self and their desire vary from individual to individual and from group to group.



It is learnt from the study that the training programmes helped women to have a better understanding of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Hurdles of the Political Participation and Leadership of Women in Panchayati Raj Institution:

(^{AC} Though the women, after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment have got the right to be elected to Panchayats their actual participation is very limited. It has been revealed by the women representatives of different categories that they are not treated on at par with members either by the members of the institutions or by the officials. Their views are not given proper weight age on many occasions. It is found that in most of the areas, though there are reserved seats for women, many women do not come forward to contest the election because of being illiterate and anticipating the problem of communicating the officials for addressing the grievances of her constituencies.

One major limitation on the participation of women is that Indian rural society is still so structured that it is not easy for women to have time for work outside the home in addition to home making. Labour saving devices, processed goods, water and fuel facilities, services for removal of garbage, crabs and day-care centers for children is required to liberate women from being restricted to traditional household tasks. Very few women have the time or inclination for politics, most women leave politics to men. They consider politics to be 'dry' and rough for women.

The greatest deterrent to women's active participation as candidate is the increasing expenditure of election. The families are still not prepared to finance the elections of their women from family funds, though they would do so for the men. This factor not only makes it



difficult for women, who have very limited independent economic resources to participate but completely eliminate those who are below the poverty line from entering the arena. This situation leads to the dominance of the women belonging to upper castes and classes in these positions.

More often women hesitate to participate actively because of the threats of violence and character assassination which have increased recently.

It is often seen that husbands and family members influence the women representatives in taking decisions in most cases the women representatives are ignored and they are invariably influenced by male family members. Women members depend considerably on their men-folk for decision-making. The male relatives of women representatives are sometimes taking active part in their official activities. Not only this even as voters they act as 'rubber stamp' of their male counterparts and vote for the person or party, their husbands, fathers, brothers tell them to vote for.

Thus reservation under Panchayati Raj for women is at present in the transitional phase and women are not adequately empowered in practice to play an effective role, because of social, economic and political factors. Their participation in decision-making is very low. The government should take some measures to ensure women participation in Panchayat's effectively.

There is a need for comprehensive and meaningful training programmes for women representatives to perform their constitutional duties and responsibilities as members of Panchayati Raj Institutions. They are ill informed about power procedures and functioning of



these bodies. The kind of role they have to play and the problems they are likely to face in male dominated political institutions should be taken care of through training.

It has been noticed that there is a close relationship between literacy and political awareness. The states which have registered a maximum mobilization of women generally have a high female literacy rate. Efforts should be made to provide functional literacy to female Panchayati members. The general literacy level of female should be increased. Muslim and tribal women show a lower level of participation both as voters and candidates. However, women of scheduled castes and other intermediary groups reveal a higher participation rate.

The Study showed that there are capacitated leaders concentrating on enhancing their capacity. They have aspiration to win the next election. They are always busy meeting the people and familiarizing themselves with the people. They consider the Panchayati Raj Institutions as a launching pad for their political career. Though their number is very small they are certainly the models for emulation. While performing their duties, they see response of the people, based on which they have a desire to continue in office. Such capacity and aspiration need to be developed among those who are at the initial stage in the political process by exposing them and make them to the successful.

There are another category of women leaders who are unable to meet the challenges of their role and unable to bear the pressure of the Society and Family. They have either expressed their desire to neither withdraw from public life nor continue in office. These leaders were brought to the public life by force by their husbands or family members. Most of the women leaders have stated that they have been facing problems in the local body institutions, because of the interference of their husbands. The women leaders of Panchayats on their own cannot explain



this factor to their husbands. In most of the cases the relationship between the leader and the kith and kin has to undergo a change in the whole process of Panchayati Raj Institutions. This could be made through behavior modification training of family counseling.

Another interesting development is that a large number of women are being trained in the self help groups and have been moved of this power domain in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Women leaders of this type have come to the public sphere and they will continue to keep their hold over the institutions. Therefore, participation in social and economic activities need to be encouraged in the rural areas.

The following are the **Suggestions** to improve the Political Participation and Leadership of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

1. There is need to create awareness among the rural masses about the new system, its advantage and new requirements. People in general and women in particular have to be made fully conscious of their rights and responsibilities under the new system. The mental set up of the male population in rural areas has to undergo a change to facilitate acceptance of women as equal partner in decision-making in the rural bodies. The task can be performed through a process of political mobilization.
2. The Elected Representatives of the people whether men or women would require to be trained to enable them to discharge their functions in an effective manner. The need is, of course, more for women because of their lower literacy and much less exposure to public affairs and dealings with external agencies. Hence a massive orientation cum-periodical training programme has to be launched immediately if the system is to run smoothly. Training should be continuous and spread over different phases rather than once for all.



The new tasks call for awareness, knowledge and skills, understanding of administrative procedures and sensitivity to the problems of society. G. Palanthurai (2001) in his study of Tamilnadu observed that women have come to positions in the local bodies as provisions have been made in the constitution. The outlook of the society towards the women has started changing. Author from his experience suggests that women need orientation, sensitization, capacity building, and information and counseling continuously through organizations. The ongoing experiments and experiences suggest that periodical training; orientation and sensitization can help the women leaders to perform the assigned role in a better way. He argues that the Govt. will respond to the needs of these women leaders only when social organization and groups support them.

3. A major constraint for women especially poor women is lack of time. Women from poor families work for 15 to 16 hours as wage earners. It is not fair to expect to devote time to Panchayati work sacrificing income-earning opportunities. These women should be paid a daily allowance equal to minimum wage, which might encourage them to participate actively in Panchayati activities. This provision be restricted to women from families below poverty line.
4. There is a need for removal of illiteracy among elected women representatives. For this purpose, we have to strengthen our adult education concerns with close co operation of the rural society. It should be mandatory for both female and male illiterate representatives to attend the prescribed centers. So, that they will be in a position to read and write. This has to be enacted through political will.



5. There has to be close relationship between male and female representatives. Both the sexes should have due regard vice-versa. Efforts should be made to motivate those having indifferent attitudes. Those who are on the right track should be appreciated.
6. As regards time factor, the meeting of the Panchayati Raj Institutions should be fixed in consultations with the women representatives. Their conveniences should never be ignored. Those belonging to poorer sections can be financially compensated on such days when they attend the meetings.
7. To Check the practice of not attending the meeting by the women representatives, constant motivation followed by stern action can compel them to attend the meeting themselves on regular basis. Those who are already attending should be appreciated and make use of their services in motivating others.
8. So far as confidence is concerned, it will definitely be built sooner or later, if concrete efforts are made. When they have regular association in the decision-making process and have enough say, they will ultimately have confidence.
9. As it has been observed that the male members of the families of women representatives do not allow them to attend the meetings, we are in the need to persuade them. This persuasion can be arranged through public meetings by village level workers, teachers and volunteers. To start with their relatives may be allowed to accompany women representatives. And ultimately they themselves will change their attitudes.
10. Last, but not least, there is an urgent need to involve voluntary organizations in this noble cause/task. We can assign this job to them and financial assistance can also be arranged for them out of Panchayati raj funds. These voluntary organizations will definitely prove useful in coping up with the problem, which is considered as serious. The NGO's can



help in creating congenial atmosphere. Such women representatives who really work honestly and dedicatedly should be publically honoured.

All these suggestions go a long way in strengthening political empowerment of women in Panchayati Raj bodies. In the empowerment route, participation and leadership of women at all levels has special significance especially in democratic set up. In our country the process of political empowerment had well begun when we adopted our constitution and gained momentum when the constitution was amended reserving for women one-third of seats in the local bodies, as also specified the positions of office bearers. This process is being taken to the Zenith with the introduction of 81st and 84th Constitutional Amendment bill in 1996 and 1998 in Parliament providing for one-third reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures. But both were lapsed. Thanks to the UPA Government in introducing 108th Constitutional Amendment Bill (Women's reservation bill), which is passed in Rajya Sabha in March 9, 2010 and to be passed in Lok Sabha. However, women have to improve themselves through education, take an interest in public and social affairs and become popular leaders themselves. It is imperative that they should come up by their own merits and not with the help of their male relatives. This new system of Panchayati Raj which gives importance to women's participation and leadership in formal institutions will help to rectify gender imbalances and to promote the interest of women.

