

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT FOCUS ON PANCHAYATI RAJ  
INSTITUTIONS**

**(A STUDY ON SELECTED MANDALS IN WEST GODAVARI DISTRICT)**

*By*

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## **CHAPTER-VII**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The present Study is mainly focused on Women empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions as a case study on selected mandals in West Godavari district. Some Key concepts like Awareness, Interest, Involvement and Participation were chosen and collected data was analyzed to study them. Awareness includes the Constitutional Awareness and Awareness on Panchayati Raj Practices and Procedures.

Women constitute a vital part of society. They have been relegated to the background, shackled by patriarchal traditions and customs. Though their contribution in terms of physical effort, income generation etc., is highly significant, their involvement in decision-making and economic security is insignificant. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Eswar Chandra Vidya Sagar have campaigned for emancipation of status of women in our country. The condition of women has shown improvement gradually since independence. Yet, the change is not substantial. It has been realized that change in condition of women has to be brought about by women themselves. Women have to be empowered to bring about change in their status which will branch out to changes in society too.

Women's empowerment has been increasingly recognized as a crucial factor for any country's holistic and sustainable development. Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. It is also the process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices into desired actions and outcomes.

There are four types of Empowerment: Educational, political, social and economic empowerment. They are not mutually exclusive but tend to be mutually reinforcing. They should not be studied in isolation but as inter-related dynamics. Women's empowerment process should include the following:

1. Decision making power
2. Access to information and various resources
3. Availability or range of options
4. Ability to exercise assertiveness
5. Involvement in growth process and changes
6. Ability to change others perceptions by democratic means.

Women empowerment has been a priority area of government policies and has been part of the Five-year plans since their inception. Initially, the plans were welfare-oriented. The VIth Plan saw a shift from welfare to development approach with thrust on health, education and employment. It was the VIIIth plan which focused on women empowerment, mainly at the grassroot levels, through PRIs. There was emphasis on need for women's participation in planning and implementation. NCMP sought to empower women politically, socially and economically. There was a shift from mere "income" poverty of women to "multi-dimensional" approach to poverty and well-being. The need for skill development through training for women to increase their employability and exploit their collective power to use economic opportunities was recognized.

Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered as means to good governance at grassroot level and are a good example of democratic decentralization. Providing representation to women in Panchayatis leads to empowerment of women. The Panchayati, being the local level of governance can become a breeding ground

for women leaders. It provides them opportunities to gain self-confidence and gain hands-on experience. It enables them to directly participate in decision-making in development process. As more women are entering the field of politics, women's issues are being brought to the forefront at the local level and then consequently at state and national level. Presence of women in PRIs is sensitizing the state to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice. They are changing governance by tackling issues like water supply, education, health, alcohol abuse, sanitation and violence towards women. Women are becoming more articulate and aware due to active and continued participation. They are attending training sessions and are active in discussions. Participation in PRIs represents gender equality in society. Women's participation in policy making is one of the important sources of women empowerment.

## **7.1 Major Findings**

The analysis of sample data showed that most of the respondents were above 40 years, and above 50 years in the case of sarpanches. Younger women were few and elected as ward members. Most of the respondents are married and belong to joint families, mainly housewives and self-employed. Most reported primary education; some secondary and a few college levels. None reported professional qualifications. The respondents reported family support and education which enable them to focus on their work. Most of the respondents are from middle income families; among the sarpanches a few of them are from high income households. The caste-wise distribution of respondents shows that BCs and SCs form the majority while STs are almost negligible.

Most of respondents' families have members in politics and are affiliated to political parties, mainly TDP and YSRC. The family members are actively involved in various activities in the village in the areas of sanitation, health and education, which are core areas in the village development.

Most of the respondents were elected on reservation category seats, especially women reservation category. Most of them reported that the decision to enter politics was their own and the reason they joined politics was service motto and passion for politics.

Almost all ward members and Sarpanches prepared well before attending council meetings and had complete knowledge of financial position of Panchayati. They are well aware of the AP Panchayati Act and have knowledge of National funding of local bodies. This shows the dedication, commitment and interest they have towards their official duties. They also proposed agendas in meetings on health, sanitation and empowerment of poor women. They stated Sanitation, Poverty alleviation, Infrastructure, Self-help groups as priority areas for development in their village/ward.

On being elected, the agendas proposed by majority of them are health & Sanitation, village development and empowerment of poor women. Most households in the village do not have individual toilets and open defecation is rampant. Awareness of water pollution and resulting health issues seem to have triggered interest in these areas. Interest in sanitation has been encouraged by the government's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan program.

The main qualities which respondents report facilitated their performance are self-confidence, self-initiative and education. Support and Cooperation of family members was cited by the respondents as a family-related facilitating factor.

Although our Constitution had established equality of men and women in matters of rights and opportunities, women have to face many obstacles like tradition, prejudice, social and economic conditions etc. This is marked in the gendered division of labor which restricted women primarily to the domestic sphere of life.

Women in politics or any field face constraints, but can be empowered by facilitating factors. Most respondents reported facilitating factors like family support, reduced family responsibilities and sufficient financial resources and Family's social standing that helped them to perform well. Most of the respondents reported that they did not face constraints at the Panchayati, community and family level while performing their functions. Almost 70% of respondents reported facing all the cited policy constraints like unpredictable rotation of seats and two-child norm policy for contesting elections. These are serious constraints as they can discourage the EWRs from performing to their potential and also barring capable candidates from contesting elections on flimsy grounds. A few reported indifferent attitudes of government officials. But, in general, the respondents reported that they have been able to overcome the constraints through will power, determination and tact.

The respondents have taken up their responsibilities enthusiastically and have been able to perform due to facilitating factors like family support, community support and cooperation from colleagues. Majority of them being educated, and from families with political background, they are able to find their way around easily in this

field. These women have shown determination and will power by overcoming various constraints and interacting with their colleagues and officials.

Their assessment of various government policies and schemes gives an insight into the working of government machinery at the grassroots level. They have also given various suggestions to improve the functioning of Panchayati Raj bodies to help them perform better and also improve welfare of the people.

The respondents feel that government should increase funds and regularly consult with women organisations. Their knowledge on government policies, programmes, benefits and services is good. Most of them have given very good ratings for government policies, benefits and programmes. But only relatively lower number have given good ratings for government services. They have taken up innovative measures for development of their ward/village but feel restricted by lack of funds. Their main sources of information are TV and newspaper. Most of the respondents have poor knowledge of IT and feel it is a handicap. They have to be provided training in this area.

Most of the EWRs being housewives and from joint families, will have got some of their managerial skills and empathy into their job. These women are used to teamwork and getting other members to cooperate with them and also being able to interact with people across different age groups and temperaments. Their working style will be just an extension of that in their household.

The researcher during the field visit informally interacted with some male members present. She inquired about their opinions of the performances of EWRs to see their attitudes towards these women. Being a male-centric society, it is expected

that the men will not accept subordination to women or women in public sphere and have a low opinion of women's skills and capabilities. Most of the men appeared to have a good opinion of the women's skills and performance. They felt that having women on board would bring more women-centric issues and agendas to the table. These may have been overlooked as men may not have much knowledge of these issues.

It is more than two decades since the enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act in 1994. There has been a gradual change in society over time. With rapid progress in communications and transport resulting in increased levels of knowledge and awareness, this must have resulted in change in societal attitudes, especially male attitudes towards women. This is clearly a very healthy sign for democracy which is based on equality.

The AP Panchayati Raj Act has set the pace for women empowerment by reserving quotas for women in Panchayati elections. More than 50% of seats are being represented by women. Being elected is not a sign of empowerment as numbers are not enough to give women a voice. They should be given a facilitating environment to empower them and involve them in decision-making. To quote Neil Armstrong, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." This is also similarly a small step but nevertheless a giant leap for women empowerment.

## 7.2 Hypotheses Results:

Sl. No	Hypotheses	Result
H1	Women sarpanches and women ward members may have less awareness regarding the rules, regulations and procedures of Panchayati Raj Institutions.	Rejected
H2	It is perceived that Women representatives are not interested in attending Gram Sabha meetings	Rejected
H3	It is usually perceived that majority of Women sarpanches and women ward members come from non-political background, and so they do not actively participate in the Panchayati Raj development activities.	Rejected
H4	It is perceived that women seek the help of the males in the family to carry out their political functions.	Rejected
H5	It is perceived that Women sarpanches are not able to take decisions independently by them	Rejected

## 7.3 Suggestions

Reservation of seats for women in contesting elections is a small step toward women empowerment. This initiative has to be followed by more strengthening measures for empowerment. Some suggestions have been put forward with regard to women's empowerment in India. If these suggestions are considered and implemented, the status of women will improve not only in socio-economic but also in political sphere.

1. Education is mandatory as literacy will lead to more awareness and access to information. This can empower women in all spheres. Educated candidates will be able to understand the complexities and try to find solutions.
2. Government reforms and policies must encourage gender equality.

3. Supportive services like crèches, maternal care must be provided; and benefits for women and child, both financial as well as material, must be provided.
4. Media and women's organizations should strive to create social and political awareness by eliminating social, economic constraints to enable women to utilize their full potential.
5. Periodic and intensive training through workshops must be conducted, especially as we find new entrants into the field. Moreover, society is constantly changing and the elected members have to be updated with the changes.
6. There must be significant representation of women in all national bodies like planning commission. This will allow the needs of women to be prioritized and put in proper perspective.
7. Women must be assured of equal opportunities for work at all levels and equal pay and not be marginalized.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

Women empowerment is a term which is being used regularly. For development and progress of any society, women, who form around half of the population, need to be empowered socially, politically and economically. Involvement in decision-making areas and active participation in various development programmes will empower them to contribute to society. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional amendment Act has provided for 33% reservation quota seats for women in PRIs. This has been increased to 50% by most states. Though this is a path-breaking legislation, it does not necessarily guarantee women empowerment. Increase in numbers has to be followed up by creating a facilitating and supporting environment for these EWRs to enable

them to perform to their potential. This requires not just making more policies and laws but reviewing their effectiveness periodically. Women organisations have to be consulted before Government introduces any policies and legislations for women-oriented programmes and schemes.

Researcher has observed that the female sex ratio is higher in selected mandals than the district and state levels. Even the literacy levels are very high in the district. The number of women wards members and sarpanches are above 50% of total elected members. This is more than the stipulated 50% reservation of seats for women candidates. Researcher may conclude that better female sex ratios, higher literacy rates and sound economy provide a facilitative environment for women to enter the political field and sustain.

### **7.5 Further Research**

West Godavari is a fertile area with an agricultural economy. The rural population has had a long history of local self-government and most of the households are well-off. The results of this study may not hold good for other districts of the state. The increasing number of women in politics is a very encouraging sign, but, sometimes, the women candidates may be a proxy for male members of the household who want to make use of 50% reservation for women.

We will have to choose members with at least 5 years of political experience if we really want to study the actual empowerment of women. We can measure the actual levels of empowerment over time and especially if they have worked in different capacities. We should also make comparative studies among villages which are developed and less developed. This will show if the environment in the village has an impact of women's empowerment.