

## WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

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**Abstract:** Women's equal participation in local governments and decision-making processes is critical for creating gender sensitive policies and for promoting sustainable development. Article 40 of the Constitution clearly lays down that the, "States shall take steps to organize village panchayats and to endow them to function as units of self-government. Local self-government is the fulfillment as well as the foundation of democracy. Local government is an integral part of the three-tier system of government in our country, Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, which seems to have provided some real basis for bringing women into the power structure at the base of the Panchayat level. This study aims to explore the context of gender and leadership in governance, posing a question of how far women leadership capacity has been enhanced through contemporary administrative reforms. It examines the possibilities and challenges in women's involvement in local administration in Telangana. Women have been empowered with greater political and administrative participation through 'learning by doing'. However, the unsatisfactory situation exists because of socio-political, economic, and cultural as well as personal development issues. In addition to willpower and some extra efforts of their own, locally organized training programmes can empower women and make the political and administrative process of governance more progressive and inclusive

**Keywords:** Governance, Administrative Reform, Leadership, Women, Local Governance.

**Introduction:** Leadership plays an important role in administration and in political institutions. Today the crisis of political institutions in India is the crisis of leadership. The dynamics of leadership, its socio-economic origins and social consequences have always attracted sociologists, social psychologists, political scientists and historians. But there is no unanimity on the precise meaning of the term leadership among the social scientists. Hence the concept of leadership has been variously defined by various social scientists. Literally, leadership means to lead, to excel, to be in advance, to guide others, to be the head of an organization, to hold command, etc. For example Fairchild defines leadership as "the act of organizing and directing the interests and activities of a group of persons, as associated in some project or enterprise, by a person who develops the co-operation through securing and maintaining their more or less voluntary approval of the ends and methods proposed and adopted in their association. In the political context village leadership has been defined on the basis of reputation, action or position. The leadership is essential in interactional phenomenon between the leader and the followers.

The relationship between the leaders and the followers is one of the several forms of interpersonal relationship which are formed to satisfy some of the defined goals of the leaders and followers belonging to the some social system. Encyclopedia of the social sciences defines it in these words, "A leader, however, is one who is respectively perceived to perform acts of leading. "One who leads is a leader" is the general definition of a leader.

**Review of Literature:** Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay in her book entitled, "The Status of Women in India" has traced the evolution of women's role in Indian society from ancient to modern times. In her views the women in Vedic period enjoyed a high status and participated equally in the social, religious and political affairs of the country.

Veena Mazumdar in her book entitled, "Status of Women in India" describes the status of women in India [2]. In the study "Women and Indian Nationalism", Veena Mazumdar and Leela Kasturi discuss the various issues relating to women in the context of British rule, social reform and Indian National Movement and Women's participation in it.

Manikyamba, P. in her book "Women in Panchayati Raj Structures" discusses the achievements and shortcomings in the working of Panchayati Raj since 1959, The author identifies the factors responsible for rural women's marginal visibility in development programmes.

Geeta Balachandran, in her book, "The Women who made it to the top at the Grassroot" found government action for women's emancipation or equality neither effective nor adequate unless women themselves become more aware of their rights and responsibilities. Despite their numerical strength women occupy a marginalized position in society and their role in political structure has virtually remained limited. G. Palanthurai in his book, "New Panchayati Raj System at Work in Tamil Nadu" discusses that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution for achieving economic development and social justice by performing planning exercise at the grassroot levels will be

possible with the active participation of the women. The work brings out the details of the mind set of the elected local body leaders and the bureaucrats who are working in the local body institutions.

**Objectives:** The main objectives of our study are in brief to examine and analyse:

- The socio-economic and political background of women leaders.
- Knowledge and Awareness among women leaders.
- Value Attitudes and value perceptions of women leaders on various socio-economic issues.

Participation of women leaders in socio-economic development of the country.

**Methodology:** The data for this study who has been collected through secondary sources. Among secondary sources the data has been collected from official records of the Election Commission of India, official documents of Local Bodies, written records of village panchayats, tehsil offices, B.D.O. offices, Municipal Corporations and Municipal Committees/Council offices, Census Report, published and unpublished reports, Journals, Books and Newspapers.

**Panchayati Raj Institutions:** The term 'democracy' literally means the rule of the people. It is derived from two Greek words Demos (people) and Cratos (rule). Greek philosopher Cleon defined democracy as power of the people [4]. Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy is very close to its literal meaning. To him democracy is a government 'of the people by the people and for the people'. Local self-government is regarded as an integral part of democracy. The institution of local self-government was thought of as an instrument to bring decentralization. Participation at grass root level also translates the dream of Gandhiji into reality. "My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic independent of its neighbors for its vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual judgment" [4]. Panchayat has deep roots in Indian history. It was in existence since ancient period having an effective control over the administrative, civic and judicial matters of the village community. In Mughal period, each panchayat was autonomous in its own sphere and exercised powers of local taxation, administrative control, justice and punishment. However, in between ancient, medieval and modern periods, the growth of panchayats had ups and downs. It was only with Mayo's Resolution of 1870 which gave impetus to the development of local self institutions by enlarging their powers and responsibilities. In 1873, Charles Trevelgan advocated building up a 'pyramid' pattern of

representative councils, from village to councils. Then came the famous resolution of Lord Ripon in 1882, which provided the much needed democratic framework to these institutions. After independence, Panchayati Raj system was accepted in our constitution under Article 40, which gives directions to the states for the establishment of panchayats. Article 40 of the Constitution enjoins on State Governments the desirability of organizing village panchayats and endowing them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. Almost all the states were quick to introduce these bodies in their respective states.

Janata Party formed the government at the Centre, a Committee was appointed in December 1977, under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta to suggest measures for strengthening the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Committee in its report submitted in August, 1978 recommended a two-tier system with Mandal Panchayats at the base and Zilla Parishads at the top to make panchayat bodies effective and efficient instruments of rural development. The Committee recommended that two women who get the highest number of votes in Zila Parishad elections should be the member of Zila Parishad. In case no women come forward for election, two women might be co-opted. Similar provision and procedures were recommended for the Mandal Panchayat.

Government of India appointed G.V.K. Rao Committee 1985 and L.M. Singhvi Committee 1986. The G.V.K. Rao Committee recommended to make 'district' as the basic unit of planning and also for holding of regular elections to the Panchayat Raj Institutions. The L.M. Singhvi Committee recommended for devolving more financial resources to panchayats so as to make them more viable. The Committee viewed panchayats as the base for democratic and republican operations of the nation.

Before the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, the Rajiv Government at the Centre decided to move a comprehensive amendment in the Constitution of India to give a firm basis to the essential features of the Panchayati Raj. This bill was the brain child of the late Rajiv Gandhi, who strongly believed in strengthening panchayats by giving them constitutional status. This was done in the form of 64<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Bill, in 1989. The Bill, however, could not be enacted as it was not approved by the Rajya Sabha. In December the Parliamentary elections led to the Janata Dal ministry being formed at the centre under V.P. Singh. The Janata Dal government again moved the above bill in Lok Sabha with some changes in September. Unfortunately, the Janata Dal government could not survive its full term and fresh

elections to Lok Sabha were held in June 1991 which brought Congress(I) back to power under P.V.Narasimha Rao.

**Women in Grassroots Democracy:** Local government system has existed in India in every phase of its history. The grassroot system had shown a peculiar identity and stability despite frequent changes of power at the super structural level. Local self-government is the fulfillment as well as the foundation of democracy. It is at once the home and the nursery of democracy. It can nurture people's interest in their community and provide a channel of participation in the management of local affairs.

The actual function of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) which is otherwise known as institutions of rural local self governance is of greater significance now more than ever before. Institutions of rural local governance are considered as partners of the Central and State Governments in carrying out development functions. Article 243-G introduced by the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution empowers State Governments to vest powers and responsibilities with village Panchayats to prepare plans for their socio-economic development and ensure social justice to the people through implementation of different schemes with their active participation.

There is a continuous effort on the part of Government through policy-makers to evolve systems and mechanisms to enable institutions of rural local governance to perform and deliver their new roles more effectively and efficiently. The objectives of institutions of rural local self governance are only realized to the expected extent to which it is translated on the ground. But it can only be translated through proper participation of elected representatives of institutions of rural local self governance especially the women representatives.

India always had a vibrant democratic tradition at the grassroots level notwithstanding the ebb and flow of imperial destinies - a tradition which was distorted and destroyed by the advent of the British rule. Before coming to women's grassroots leadership issues it would be pertinent to trace this democratic republican tradition in its historic setting.

The institutions of local government established in the early period which included institutions like Municipal Corporations, Municipal Boards in the urban areas and Panchayats and District Boards in rural areas find their entry in article 40 of our Constitution Article 40 of the Constitution clearly lays down that the, "States shall take steps to organize village panchayats and to endow them to function as units of self-government. As a result, all the state governments have established both the urban and rural self governing institutions in their respective states.

There are two types of local government units in the country. These can be grouped into two broad categories i.e. Rural and Urban. The Rural Local Government consists of a three tier structure of local bodies popularly known as Panchayati Raj. It operates at three different levels including the Districts, the Blocks and the Villages. These bodies have their own organization and area of operation, in the urban area, we have bodies which are termed as Municipal Corporations for bigger cities and municipal boards/councils/committees for small cities and towns.

True to the ethos of the Indian national movement, the role of women in making a success of grassroots democracy has been emphasised by all national level Committees appointed to review and recommend measures to strengthen the Panchayati Raj System. The Balwantraj Mehta Committee (1957) in order to make women contributors to development and be not just beneficiaries, not only recommended assistance to women to increase their incomes and improve the conditions of their children but also cooption of women members to Panchayati Raj institutions to give them representation in the rural political institutions. However, it needs to be said that the committee thought of women's participation mainly from a welfare perspective and not so much from a power-sharing one.

It is the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, which seems to have provided some real basis for bringing women into the power structure at the base, i.e. the Panchayat level. While reserving one-third seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Panchayat area, one-third of such seats shall be specifically reserved for women belonging to SC/ST sections, provides the Act as per Article 243D(2) . Article 243D(3) provides that not less than one-third (including the women's SC/ST seats) 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.

**Conclusion:** Political participation of the women leaders of local self-governing institutions reveals that the women leaders of our study have full faith in the democratic institutions. Here an attempt has been made to know the political orientation and political participation of women leaders. On the impact of coalition government on democratic institutions, majority of women leaders of rural as well as urban felt that it would weaken the democratic institutions. It appears that coalitional model of politics has not taken deep roots in our country. The women leaders by and large are in favor of giving more representation to women in politics. In their views, greater representation in political institutions will improve the conditions of

Indian women at the grass root level. However, by and large majority of women leaders under study were found attending the meetings regularly. The level of

awareness and understanding can be compared well with the women leaders of any other state in India and in no field they are lagging behind.

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