



## Women In Local Self Governance – A Leadership Perspective

### KEYWORDS

Elected Women Representatives, Gram Panchayat, Reservations, Local Self Governance and Leadership

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### ABSTRACT

*Women's participation in local self governance is based on the leadership qualities, self-confidence and their self-esteem. Increase in knowledge and economic self-sufficiency will motivate them to take part in all aspects of decision-making. The barriers in leadership participation are caused by the stereotypes. This attitude results in assigning women's influence to the private circle and men's to the public sphere. Every citizen of a country both men and women have rights to take part in the policy making local bodies of their own country. The women's empowerment and their autonomy and the improvement of their socio economic condition and political prominence are essential for the achievement of apparent and responsible governance in all areas of human life. The present study focused on the involvement of the elected women representatives in the leadership processes in gram panchayats of Tiruverambur block in Tiruchirappalli district.*

### INTRODUCTION

Involvement of women's participation in leadership and decision making political process is essential for the sustainable economic growth and social development of any country. The Panchayat Raj Institution is the traditional way of local self-governance system in India, which dates back to more than 1000 years of its existence.

Women constitute about half of India's population. Women have been an integral part of social structure not only because of their importance in the perpetuation of human race but also by virtue of their significant contribution to socio-economic progress, virtually. Despite this, women have been subjected to discrimination because of the gender-bias in the social outlook and social practices resulting in denial of equality of status and opportunities in social, economic and political spheres.

### ROLE OF PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN DEVELOPING WOMEN LEADERSHIP

While studies affirm the need for the policy of reservation for women, in many PRIs headed by women, not only has the participation and leadership made an impact on grass-root governance, it has also shattered many of the supposed myths such as inability to handle power and responsibility outside their homes. The political empowerment and assumption of leadership role resulting from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, therefore, has had an impact in two socio-political areas. There is, first of all, a visible improvement in the administration and delivery of services at Gram Panchayat (GP) level mainly, or of greater focus on the felt needs of the people, greater transparency, greater reliance on horizontal linkages and greater participation of people particularly women members of the village community. Secondly the Amendment has made possible the creation of political space, which has enabled women to attain social status, confidence and to alter the age-old strange hold of repressive tradition.

Elected women might become role models for other women and for the adolescent girls. It is not that women have succeeded in every PRIs but a large majority could do it and that is what makes it exhilarating. Documenting the changes that have occurred, several researchers, political analysts,

NGOs, journalists, both Indian and foreign, have observed that within the village the funds are better utilised, and the focus of the PRIs has shifted from political power games practicality to making arrangements for drinking water, school education, health care and dealing with problems relating to sanitation and fuel. Leadership (Political empowerment) has undoubtedly begun and will logically reach its fullness and this will definitely help in the abolition of inequitable and unjust laws and social practices.

Observation of women leadership positions in some states of India, particularly the women representation in panchayats, after reservation shows that, a large number of women belonging to the different castes and communities have been elected as members and chairpersons in the PRIs. Although the Amendment has mandated one third reservation for women as members as well as chairperson at different tiers of PRIs in a number of states, but women as members have captured more than one third seats.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Significance of the Study

Now women have been an integral part of our nation's social structure. Their role is very prominent in our society on account of the fact that they perpetuate human race and are significant contributors to nation's socio economic progress and for their family. Notwithstanding, women are subject to discrimination, ill-treatment and all types of abuses. In most cases they have been confined to the four walls of their houses and to do domestic work to the patriarchal society.

#### Scope of the Study

The present study is done on the involvement of elected women representatives' through their leadership in the study area. In this study the focus of attention has been mainly to secure responses from women's representatives of panchayat system with specific emphasis on their views regarding the leadership perspective in the panchayat raj institutions.

#### Main objectives of the study

1. To understand and report the socio-demographic background of the elected women representatives to Gram

Panchayats of the area under study.

2. To study the leadership skills of elected women members in study area.
3. To study the problems and difficulties faced by the elected women representatives of Gram Panchayats related to leadership.
4. To suggest suitable measures for the effective leadership contribution of women in Gram Panchayats.

**Research Design**

The main purpose of the study is to know the level of leadership among elected women representatives in Panchayat Raj Institution. It is also intended to understand the extent of leadership power in the Panchayat Raj Institutions, hence the researcher has adopted descriptive research design for this study.

**Universe**

The universe of the study comprised of elected women representatives of village panchayats in Tiruverambur block of Tiruchirappalli district numbering 69.

**Sample**

In order to collect data, 66.7 % of the elected women representatives were selected from the universe. In this study, simple random sampling was adopted by using lottery method with replacement. Hence, the sample size is 46.

**Tool Used**

Leadership Scale which consists of 35 statements with 2 sub-dimensions was developed by J. William Pfeiffer and John E. Jones, in the year 1974. The internal consistencies for the scale was found to be = 0.500.

**Analysis of Data**

The data collected for the study was subjected to appropriate statistical analysis using SPSS. Both descriptive and inferential statistics was applied.

**Limitations of the Study**

The researcher did have some limitations. They are as follows:

- 1) Study conforms itself to the region of selected geographical area.
- 2) Some women did not cooperate and their responses remained partially unrevealed.
- 3) Some of the women were afraid and hence, at the time of interview they refused to express their genuine responses.
- 4) Some women were suspicious of the intentions of the investigator and they did not respond properly.
- 5) Most of the respondents were disturbed by phone calls and other household activities which affects the continuity of the data collection.

**ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Table No. 1: Distribution of the respondents by their Socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics	Variables	Frequency (n=46)	Percent age
Age	Below 40 Years	12	26.1
	41 - 45 Years	23	50.0
	Above 46 Years	11	23.9
Educational Qualifications	Primary Education	24	52.2
	Middle School	21	45.7
	High School	1	2.2
Type of Family	Joint Family	6	13.0
	Nuclear Family	40	87.0
Monthly Income	Below Rs. 5000	12	26.1
	Rs. 5001 - 10000	32	69.6
	Above 10001	2	4.3

Socio-demographic characteristics	Variables	Frequency (n=46)	Percent age
Occupation	Business	27	58.7
	Private	19	41.3
Community	Schedule Caste	12	26.1
	Backward Class	34	73.9
Religion	Hindu	45	97.8
	Christian	1	2.2
No. of Children	1 Child	6	13.0
	2 Children	16	34.8
	3 Children	14	30.4
	4 Children	7	15.2
	5 Children	3	6.5
Member in Self Help Group	Yes	30	65.2
	No	16	34.8

The above table reveals that majority of the respondents (50%) are falling between the age group of 41 – 45. The majority of the respondents (52.2%) have studied upto primary school education. A vast majority of the respondents (87%) are hailing from nuclear family system. A majority of the respondents (69.6%) reported that their monthly income falls between Rs. 5,001 to Rs. 10,000/-. A majority of the respondents (58.7%) informed that their occupation is business. Majority of the respondents (73.9%) are from Backward Class category. An absolute majority of the respondents (97.8%) are from Hindu religion. Most of the respondents (34.8%) having 2 children and majority of the respondents (65.2%) are active members of the local Self Help Groups.

Table No. 2: Distribution of the respondents by their Panchayat Raj Institution Profile

PRI Profiles	Variables	Frequency (n=46)	Percentage
No. of Times Contested in the Local Body Election	1 Time	35	76.1
	2 Times	8	17.4
	3 Times	3	6.5
No. of Times Elected	1 Time	39	84.8
	2 Times	7	15.2
Reason for Contesting in Local Body Elections	Self Interest	9	19.6
	Family's Completion	2	4.3
	Community Completion	23	50.0
	Women's Completion	12	26.1
	General	18	39.1
Quota of Selection	General - Women	16	34.8
	SC / ST Women	1	2.2
	SC / ST	11	23.9
	Affiliation to Political Parties	Yes	40
Discriminated being Women	No	6	13.0
	Yes	34	73.9
	No	12	26.1

It is seen from the above table that a vast majority of the respondents (76.1%) were contesting in the local body elections for the first time and 84.8% of the respondents were elected for the first time in the local body elections. Most of the respondents (50%) expressed their opinion that the local community's compulsion is the reason for contesting in the local body elections. Most of the respondents (39.1%) elected from general quota. An absolute majority of the respondents (87%) were associated with political parties. A majority of the respondents (73.9%) informed that they were discriminated being women by other male PRI members.

Table No. 3: Distribution of the respondents by their Perceived Levels of Leadership

Leadership	Frequency (n=46)	Percentage
<b>Concern for people</b>		
Low	20	43.5
High	26	56.5
<b>Concern for Task</b>		
Low	20	43.5
High	26	56.5
<b>Leadership Total</b>		
Low	18	39.1
High	28	60.9

It is evident from the above table that majority of the respondents (60.9%) have perceived high levels leadership, with regards to its sub dimensions majority of the respondents have perceived high levels of concern for people (56.5%) and concern for task (56.5%).

Table No. 4: Association between the respondent's affiliation to political party and their perceived levels of Leadership

S. No	Affiliation to Political Party	Leadership		χ <sup>2</sup>
		Low	High	
1	<b>Concern for people</b>			3.657 df=1 P<0.05
	Yes	13	23	
	No	7	3	
2	<b>Concern for Task</b>			6.935 df=1 P<0.05
	Yes	12	24	
	No	8	2	
3	<b>Leadership Total</b>			8.961 df=1 P<0.05
	Yes	10	26	
	No	8	2	

It is seen from the above table that there is a significant association between the respondent's affiliation to political party and their leadership and its sub dimensions concern for people and concern for task.

Table No. 5: Association between the respondents opinion on discrimination experienced being women and their perceived levels of Leadership

S. No	Perceived Discrimination experienced being women	Leadership		χ <sup>2</sup>
		Low	High	
1	<b>Concern for people</b>			.092 df=1 P>0.05
	Yes	13	18	
	No	7	8	
2	<b>Concern for Task</b>			2.472 df=1 P>0.05
	Yes	11	20	
	No	9	6	
3	<b>Leadership Total</b>			4.070 df=1 P<0.05
	Yes	9	22	
	No	9	6	

The above table reveals that there is a significant association between the respondents experiencing discrimination being women and their perceived levels of leadership.

Table No. 6: Karl Pearson's Coefficient of correlation between the number of times elected and the respondent's perceived levels of Leadership

S. No	Variables	Coefficient Value	Significance
1	Concern for people	.039	P>0.05
2	Concern for Task	.017	P>0.05
3	Leadership Total	.107	P>0.05

It is inferred from the above table that there is no significant relationship between the respondent's number of times elected and their perceived levels of leadership and its sub-dimensions namely concern for people and concern for task.

Table No. 7: One Way Analysis of Variance between the varied Educational Qualifications of the respondents and their perceived levels of Leadership

S. No.	Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
1	Concern for people						
	Between Groups	G1=36.7931	4.07413	4.075	1	4.075	.298
	Within Groups	G2=36.1765	2.92052	601.229	44	13.664	P>0.05
2	Concern for Task						
	Between Groups	G1=50.7241	5.90337	136.591	1	136.591	3.839
	Within Groups	G2=54.2941	6.07006	1565.323	44	35.576	P<0.05
3	Leadership Total						
	Between Groups	G1=87.5172	7.48628	93.480	1	93.480	1.745
	Within Groups	G2=90.4706	7.01888	2357.477	44	53.579	P>0.05

G1=Primary Education G2=Middle School

**MAJOR FINDINGS**

- ❖ Majority of the respondents (50%) are falling between the age group of 41 – 45.
- ❖ Majority of the respondents (52.2%) have studied upto primary school education.
- ❖ A vast majority of the respondents (87%) are hailing from nuclear family system.
- ❖ A majority of the respondents (69.6%) reported that their monthly income falls between Rs. 5,001 to Rs. 10,000/-.
- ❖ A majority of the respondents (58.7%) informed that their occupation is business.
- ❖ Majority of the respondents (73.9%) are from Backward Class category.
- ❖ An absolute majority of the respondents (97.8%) are from Hindu religion.
- ❖ Most of the respondents (34.8%) having 2 children
- ❖ Majority of the respondents (65.2%) are active members of the local Self Help Groups.
- ❖ A vast majority of the respondents (76.1%) were contesting in the local body elections for the first time
- ❖ 84.8% of the respondents were elected for the first time in the local body elections.
- ❖ Most of the respondents (50%) expressed their opinion that the local community's compulsion is the reason for contesting in the local body elections.
- ❖ Most of the respondents (39.1%) elected from general quota.
- ❖ An absolute majority of the respondents (87%) were associated with political parties.
- ❖ A majority of the respondents (73.9%) informed that they were discriminated being women by other male PRI members.
- ❖ Majority of the respondents (60.9%) have perceived high levels leadership.
- ❖ There is a significant association between the respondent's affiliation to political party and their leadership.
- ❖ There is a significant association between the respondents experiencing discrimination being women and their perceived levels of leadership.
- ❖ There is no significant relationship between the respondent's number of times elected and their perceived levels of leadership.
- ❖ There is no significant difference among the respondents with varied educational qualifications and their perceived leadership.

**SUGGESTIONS**

Mere quotas and reservation of seats for women will not ensure the active women leadership in Panchayat Raj Institutions. Educational background, patriarchal values, lack of experience, responsibilities at home, restricted access and control over their income and other resources, restrictions to public spaces and insensitive legal system are keeping the women stay away from effective involvement in leadership processes. Most of the decisions were taken in their absence and often leaving their concerns unaddressed.

To overcome these barriers and to ensure women's involvement in leadership and empowerment, certain legal provisions should be made which mandates a minimum quorum of women in every panchayat level decision making meetings and Gram Sabha meetings. Such acts of positive coercion will help women to change their perceptions about themselves and to gain a sense of empowerment and to take part in the decision making local bodies. The researcher also recommends that the Government should make necessary amendments in the law to provide for special quorum for women in such meetings to stop the proxy attendance of their male counterparts and make sure their unique contributions to the important decisions are recognized.

**CONCLUSION**

A good combination of legal provisions, government policies, advocacy and lobbying, social action and self awareness among rural women will eventually result in elected women representatives becoming part of the mainstream panchayat raj power sharing and leadership.

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