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186

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC
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AT THE GRASS-ROOTS**

K C Smitha

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP AT THE GRASS-ROOTS

K. C. Smitha¹

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze and evaluate the emergence of women leadership in Pachayati Raj Institutions particularly after 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in Andhra Pradesh. The present paper will cover the socio-economic determinants of the elected women and its consequent influence on the emerging women leadership in Andhra Pradesh, examine how far the socio-economic aspects have impaired or given opportunities to raise the issues and other social and economic problems in a formal forum, and thereby adequately ensure the improvement in all spheres of life. This analysis establishes the fact that many myths associated with the entry of women into leadership positions that would be hindered by socio-economic profile in terms of their age, occupation, family income, land-holdings and education have been disproved.

Introduction

India has been experiencing a transition towards achieving gender parity. The influence of liberal feminism was overt, pressurize government for equal status women on par with men. Liberal feminism tries to explain the women's position in society in terms of unequal rights to participation in the world beyond the family and household. Hence the focus here is on public sphere, legal, political and institutional struggles for the rights of individuals to compete in the public market place. The thrust of the liberal feminism is public citizenship and the attainment of equality with men in the public field (Subha K. and B. S. Bhargava, 2000: 72).

It is observed that feminist scholars have been concerned about what constitutes politics, basically male have challenged the dominant hypothesis that politics is continued to be public sphere dominated by males and they maintain that traditional politics legitimate women exclusion or absence from the power spheres and also devalue women's

¹ Doctoral Student, Centre for Political Institutions Governance and Development, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Nagarabhavi, Bangalore.

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concerns. Feminists therefore argue for a redefinition of politics. An important feature of their efforts have been to proclaim the political nature of private sphere and relation between sexes which has brought traditional political sciences into question and has forced the authorities to take account of problems hitherto regarded as belonging to private life. Hence political participation of women has to be discussed and understood in this light (Kaushik, 1993: iii). Since 1980s the policies and programs have been waiving towards inclusion of gender in development approach and the concept of women participation evolved in a big way. Further it is argued that national development would be more effective with active share of men and women in all its activities. Here the issue is how to empower women?

During the first 50 years of post independence, the question of bringing women in the forefront to politics, through opportunities and capabilities was being considered time and again. Therefore in depth studies by various social and economic scholars brought to the forefront that women's participation in political decision- making is important. Only towards the end of the 20th century, our planning strategies started talking about women leadership and their empowerment. Further, in terms of government policies and programmes that we have shift the focus from the concept of women development to women participation in the social and political sphere consequently towards women empowerment. Women empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par with men to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity (Palanithurai, 2001). It is a process of redistribution of resources in the society in such a way that women get equal access and control over resources (Subha, K and B. S Bhargava, 2000: 74)

The political empowerment of women and women leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is crucial not only for the development of women themselves, but also for the availability of their creative potential that is socially important and without which, the country cannot hope for

any sustainable development. Till the early 90's India attempted to cater to the requirements of village communities by a method that required rural folk to be passive recipients of development efforts planned and delivered by people who live elsewhere mostly in urban areas. This suppressed any attempts towards local initiatives while in urban areas the post independence period has witnessed the entry of women in the fields of medicine, administration, science, law and arts. The constitutional amendment altered all this when it provided reservation for women in PRIs.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has mandated not less than 1/3 reservation for women. Reservations have been provided for women not only at the level of members, but not less than 1/3 of the chairpersons are to be women. Since the PRIs have been charged with the responsibility of preparing plans for economic development and social justice and implementing these plans and schemes with regard to fairly comprehensive list of subjects (29 subjects are contained in schedule XI), it also affords women who are elected for an opportunity of personal growth and empowerment, while creating at the same time a unique opportunity to change things in the villages. Besides, all provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act seeks to empower PRIs directly or indirectly serve to promote empowerment and women leadership in PRIs. But mere empowerment does not bring an understanding of the system of local government. It must be utilized to redesign the very substance of the decentralized system and process (Kaushik 1993; Mishra, 1997: 19; Kaur 2000: 80).

Role of PRIs and Government 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 (Mathew 1994; Palanithurai, 2002). 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.

One of the very special features of this constitutional amendment is that it contains what Buch (1998) describes as 'guarantee of representation is for the earlier marginalized group and that happens to be women'.

Elected women might become role models for other women and for the adolescent girls. Even in a country as large as India, there is a significant number and cannot, but revolutionise and transform things in what was till recently a static rural society. 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. Sadly, there were some other problems too that were never addressed or discussed by PRIs, in which women were absent. In this context, a very large number of Indian rural women and children suffer from malnutrition caused by imbalanced diet, non-availability of safe drinking water and sanitation, and ultimately the tangible impact of this shift of focus can hardly be over emphasised. In general, the disabilities against which women at the PRIs level take a battle are astonishing. 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.

Table 1: State-Wise Distribution of Elected Women Members (2003)

S.No.	States	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti		Zilla Parishad	
		Elected Women	Per cent	Elected Women	Percent	Elected Women	Percent
1	Andhra Pradesh	68736	24.81	4919	25.17	364	24.94
2	Arunachal Pradesh*	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Assam	7851	33.45	746	34.73	117	30.0
4	Bihar	40553	25.90	4065	25.93	410	26.08
5	Goa	457	31.76	0	0	17	34.0
6	Gujarat	1312	24.93	1180	27.04	274	27.29
7	Haryana	18356	25.14	842	25.73	109	25.77
8	Himachal Pradesh	6822	26.89	562	25.32	87	25.74
9	Jammu & Kashmir*	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	Karnataka	35,922	40.21	1375	38.87	339	36.45
11	Kerala	4801	36.21	629	38.40	105	34.20
12	Madhya Pradesh	106491	33.82	2159	33.44	248	33.79
13	Maharashtra	77548	30.39	1,407	32.84	658	31.62
14	Manipur	611	35.48	0	0	22	36.07
15	Orissa	31,414	26.41	2188	26.0	296	25.74
16	Punjab	27,108	35.68	813	32.78	89	31.90
17	Rajasthan	39,450	25.66	1,908	26.63	364	26.53
18	Sikkim*	322	26.95	0	0	29	23.97
19	Tamil Nadu	26,181	26.86	1,770	26.94	173	26.37
20	Tripura	1,895	33.33	106	35.45	28	34.15
21	Uttar Pradesh	2,30,865	37.95	18,580	35.82	788	37.06
22	Uttaranchal	18,041	6.89	1133	35.13	119	34.49
22	West Bengal	11,497	22.46	1,923	22.42	156	21.58

Source : Panchayati Raj Update ISS Information and Documentation Centre, Bangalore.

* Zero indicates that Panchayati Raj elections were not conducted.

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. The table 1 above provide the information on women's representation in various states in the post reservation period at different levels of PRIs.

Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions in Andhra Pradesh (AP)

Many experts on the subject of grass-root democracy believe that 1/3 reservation paved way for women to exercise their political rights in local self-governance and created an enabling environment for women's participation in the grass-root politics. Though women issues have been politically neglected and women were being treated as second-class citizens, with less attention paid for removal of inequality and subordination and grievances redressal, the fact that, women entry into provincial politics to certain extent challenge the social stigmas attached to political power (Kaushik, 1993). This necessitated a constant search for ways and means to empower, promote awareness and increase the participation of women in the decision-making levels of PRIs. Notwithstanding, women panchayati members in Andhra Pradesh have made attempts to break these social barriers and raise their voices.

Andhra Pradesh (AP) was one of the first two states in India to establish the PRIs in the year 1959. The State Legislature created a three-tier Panchayati Raj (PR) set-up under Andhra Pradesh Praja Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959, provided for co-option of two women. The Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Act (APGPA), 1964, governed the composition and functions of the Gram Panchayat in Andhra Pradesh. This Act provided for reservation of two seats for women if the total strength of the gram

panchayati is 9 or less, 3 seats if the strength is between 10 and 15 and 4 seats if the strength is more than 15 (Mishra, and Singh, 1993: 39). It is clear that the Act ensured between 22 per cent to 25 per cent of representation of women in these bodies. In the middle level bodies, till 1986, women's representation was governed by the Andhra Pradesh Praja Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act of 1959, which provided for co-option of two women for each samiti in addition to the possibility of women members finding membership in PS through the electoral process. Based on the recommendations of Ashok Mehta Committee Report, the Mandal Praja Parishad, Zilla Praja Parishad Abhivrudhi Mandal Bill was introduced in legislative Assembly in July 1986 which completely altered the PRIs set-up in AP and in 1987, a new reservation set-up was introduced for Backward Caste (BCs) and Women, i.e., 9 per cent . Thus, women got further encouragement to share the democratic decision-making process of PRIs.

Keeping in view the New Constitutional (73rd) Amendment Act of 1993, state government of Andhra Pradesh has enacted a new Law thereby making the previous PR system in-operative. In this new arrangement, the representation of women at Gram Panchayat (GP) level was 33.84 per cent, at Panchayat Samiti (PS) level it was 37.01per cent, and at Zilla Parishad (ZP) level it was 33.38 per cent after reservation (2001), which demonstrated visible enhancement of women's participation especially in the rural areas to get access to decision-making process thereby contribute for economic development, social reconstruction and distribution of scarce resources.

As reservation opened new avenues for rural women to empower themselves, hopefully political power would enable numerous women to improve their socio-economic conditions, participatory abilities and thereby tap leadership potentialities. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine the question of women leadership in PRIs with special reference to the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh (AP).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to present an assessment of the emerging pattern of women leadership as a result one third of reservation of political positions to the women in PRIs. The role-played by the women leaders and their responsibility for the success or failure at PRIs. Besides, this study also aims at the following objectives: To investigate the relevance of socio-economic factors in promoting the emergence of women leadership in PRIs.

Sample Size and Area of the Study

The area selected for the present study includes Panchayats coming under Yadamuri Mandal Parishad, Pichattoor Mandal Parishad and Madanapalli Mandal Parishad of Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh. The unit of inquiry is three-tier system of Panchayati Raj (PR), which include Zilla Parishad (ZP), Mandal Parishad (MP) and Gram Panchayat (GP). Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used for collection of data. As regards to sample strategy (Table 2), a survey was adopted covering 16 elected women ZillaParishad Territorial Constituency (ZPTC) members, 12 elected women members at MP level this include one president of the MP from each of the three selected MPs and 9 Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency (MPTC) members, three from each of the selected MPs and finally at Gram Panchayat level, 9 sarpanchs, three from each of the selected MPs and 27 ward members, three from each of the three selected GPs, total 36 (see Table 2).

Keeping in view the above mentioned criteria, the Gram Panchayats selected are:, Ramapura, Appambattu and Karoor GPs from Pichattoor MP (Tirupathi -Revenue Division) Thelarapalli, Dalavaipalli and Dasarapalli GPs from Yadamuri MP (Chittoor Revenue Division) and Chinnathippasamudram, Kothavaripalli and Kondamarripalli GPs from Madanapalli MP (Madanapalli Revenue Division).

Table 2: Sample Selected

Respondents	President	ZPTC Members	MPTC Members	Ward Members
Zilla Panchayat	1	16	-	-
Mandal Panchayat	3	-	9	-
Gram Panchayat	9	-	-	27
Total	13	16	9	27

Collection of Data

In addition to the study of literature that is relevant to the theme, the data primarily consists of the following aspects (i) Awareness and the attitude of the elected women representatives at various levels in PRIs and (ii) Separate pre-tested schedules were personally canvassed to a sample of respondents such as elected women representatives at ZP, MP and GP levels to obtain their views and opinions. In addition to this a personal discussion was also held with each.

The secondary data was collected through review of literature, books, magazines, periodicals, journals and official documents on PRIs including various reports of committees, and the Acts relating to PRIs in AP. In addition to this, information was gathered from journals like Economic and Political Weekly, Kurukshetra, Yojana, Indian Journal of Public Administration, social action, journal of rural development etc. Similarly, data was also collected from the office of ZP chittoor and the offices of the three selected MPs and GPs in chittoor district.

Socio-Economic Background of Elected Women Leaders

A leader is a person, whose guidance and direction are supposed to be accepted by the rest of the people in the community. Leader signifies a blend of personal characteristics of the leaders and the social setting in which they are placed. In fact, patriarchal culture and social structure which are dominant in India seem to inhibit women's participation in

local governance through PRIs. And often they are excluded from playing legitimate and active roles in rural community life owing to social and institutional constraints (Baviskar, 2005: 337). In this context, analysis of the socio-economic background of the women members is important in shaping the nature and level of participation and this in turn relates to leadership, which implies that some of these factors are important in determining the nature of women's leadership in political institutions and a prerequisite for the understanding of the thought or behavior of women members of PRIs.

In this context, an attempt is made to analyse the socio-economic background of women leaders. Specifically to find out whether the socio-economic factors correlates to age, caste, religion, education, occupation, income, landholdings and assets have any significant impact in determining the emergence of women as leaders in PRIs of Chittoor District in Andhra Pradesh particularly as an aftermath of 73th Constitutional Amendment Act. The socio-economic background shows considerable variations in their age, religion, caste, education, land ownership, occupation and monthly income.

Analysis of the Data and Observations

Analysis of the women leaders in relation to the PRIs by taking into account the multiple determinants influencing PRIs power structure (the age, religion, Caste, education, type of the family, land-ownership etc) has been presented in this section. The major findings drawn from the analysis can be enumerated as here under:

Age of Women Leaders (Respondents)

Age is one of the determining attributes for the emergence of women leadership, particularly that of village leadership (Srivastva, 1967: 27). Traditionally, age is considered an important factor in respect of one's status and prestige, particularly in rural societies; it was once the privilege of the older people to occupy the various key positions in the villages (Bhargava, 1972:80; Mehta 1972). But now it is observed that,

though always leadership especially in rural areas is still continued to be dominated by the aged, however empirical studies indicate that the emergence of young leaders (about 52 per cent at both ZP level and MP Level) is in increasing trend in PRIs (see Table 3). A majority of the women leaders, at the ZP level are in the age group of 26-35 years and they constitute nearly 52 per cent, and about 48 per cent of the MP level women leaders come under the same category. Those who are in between 38-45 years constitute 25 per cent at ZP level and about 38 per cent at the MP level.

We can conclude that some important reasons attributed for the emergence of many young women leaders, and the probable reasons for this may be (i) the reduction of age limit of voters from 21 to 18. (ii) reservation of seats and (iii) aged women don't compete with young women (iv) they are relatively free from the burdens of household chores and childcare and (v) off course greater physical mobility.

Table 3: Age of Women Leaders (Respondents)

Age in Years	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
18-25	-	-	-
26-35	23(47.91)*	10(62.50)	33(51.56)
36-45	18(37.50)	04(25.00)	22(34.38)
46-45	07(14.58)	02(12.50)	09(14.06)
55 and above	01(2.08)	0(0.00)	01(1.56)
Total	48(100.00)	16(100.00)	64(100.00)

*Figures in parentheses are percentage.

These emerging women leaders would be predominantly the first generation entrants to public/political life. This argument is sufficiently supported by the studies of Athereya and Rajeswari (1998: 13) Kittur (1992: 163) and Buch (2000b) Baviskar B.S (2005: 333) and Singh

(1991: 51) where they have found that the provision of reservation for women in PRIs has led to increasing emergence of women leadership.

Religion

It is apparent that religion plays a vital role in the numerical dominance that determines the women leadership (see Table 4).

Table 4: Religion of Women Leaders (Respondents)

Religion	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
Hindu	42(87.50)	16(100.00)	58(90.63)
Muslim	01(2.08)	-	01(1.56)
Christian	05(10.42)	-	05(7.81)
Total	48(100.00)	16(100.00)	64(100.00)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

One of the very interesting aspects to note here is that at ZP level, all the respondents belong to Hindu religion, and at MP level they constituted nearly 86 per cent. Only one is muslim and the remaining 5 are from chirstian religion. It has been noticed that the Hindu women leaders predominantly dominate the PRIs in study area. This representation might be proportionate to their respective population.

Caste

In Indian situation, caste dominates which is associated with their status (Basker, 1997: 14) and caste prescribes one's status and a person knows right from birth his position in the society (Singh, 1991: 51; Baviskar 2005: 337). It is therefore necessary to understand whether the leadership institutionalised in high caste groups has been changed due to the provision of 1/3 of reservation of seats for the women and the provision for political party based and direct elections to the PRIs.

Table 5: Caste of Women Leaders (Respondents)

Caste (Excluding Muslim)	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
SC	17(35.42)	02(12.50)	19(29.68)
BC	16(34.04)	03(18.75)	19(30.15)
OC	14(29.17)	11(68.75)	25(39.06)
Total	47(100.00)	16(100.00)	63(100.00)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

In the Table 5 at MP level, the SC and BC women leaders are almost equal in number. At ZP level, surprisingly majority of respondents (69 per cent) are from OC category. The study points out that substantial proportion of emerging women leaders are from reserved categories.

Education

The leadership pattern and sharing of power is significantly shaped by education. Further, effective socio-political participation is possible with adequate education (Srinivas, M.N, 1969: 12). The political participation of women is affected and determined by the general attitude of society towards them (Devi 1986). Lack of proper education, economic imbalances, social taboos and immobility explain why women have remained politically dormant for so long.

Table 6: Education Levels of Women Leaders (Respondents)

Level of Education	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
Not Literate	10(20.83)	02(12.50)	12(18.75)
Primary	20(41.66)	05(31.25)	26(40.62)
Secondary	10 (20.83)	03(18.75)	13(20.31)
Intermediate and above	8(16.66)	6(37.50)	13(20.31)
Total	48(100.00)	16(100.00)	64(100.00)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

As no educational qualification has been prescribed for non-officials, less than half of the respondents have primary education or even less than that. Twelve (2 at the ZP level and 10 at MP level) are illiterates and 20 per cent have secondary education. This signifies that at both levels 81 per cent are literate (see Table 6). Formal education is an important factor for the political awareness to understand various developments in terms of rules and procedures regarding women electorate, behavior of women actual functioning, the role of the elected chairpersons and representatives needed. Further, participation of women from economically well off group would not be politically active until and unless exposed to education that gives a sense of confidence and encouragement to participate actively in the politics (D'lima 1983; Manikyamba 1989: 80; Vatsyayan 2005). Similarly due to lack of education awareness, the women representatives in Panchayats are not being able to over come the narrow and conservative ideas on social customs and traditions that have an adverse effect on their political participation. Therefore, educational facilities must be made wider through special training and refresher courses to women representatives for effective participation. Education seems to be imperative for the successful implementation of rural development programs.

Occupation of Parent or Husband

Leadership is determined by occupation acquired from one's own skill and knowledge that significantly influences socio-political values and ideology. Apart from being a source of income, the occupation of a person determines the life style and the class status of that person (MacIver, 1967: 390). Majority of respondents (more than 81 per cent at ZP level and 90 per cent at MP Level) do not have any occupation. Only about 19 per cent at ZP level and 21 per cent at MP level are occupied in business. But our study indicates that very few respondents (12.5 per cent) are engaged in some or the other occupation. This suggests that women generally assist men directly or indirectly, but remain as housewives.

Table 7: Occupation of Parents or Husband

Occupation of Respondents Parents or Husband	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
Agriculture	30(69.76)	08(61.53)	38(67.85)
Business	10(23.25)	03(23.07)	13(23.21)
Professional	03(6.97)	02(15.38)	05(92.85)
Total	43(100.00)	13(100.00)	64(100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

It is understood that women remaining as housewife are directly concerned with the problems like drinking water, children's education, sanitation, and child welfare and streetlight facilities. The study reveals that most of the respondents are housewives; they can focus all attention on locating grievances and getting them redressed by using their leadership positions in PRIs.

Those who are not engaged in any occupation are depended on their parents or husband to support the family. They are mostly agriculturist and they constitute about 62 per cent at the ZP level and 70 per cent at the MP level (see Table 7). This sufficiently indicates that a majority of the women leaders have emerged from agriculture background. Despite majority of them are from agriculture backdrop it is found that occupation has absolutely no relationship with the emergence of women leadership in PRIs (Gosh 1997).

Economic Status

The economic status of women is one of the major factor and source of her social and political status. It is found that only about 20 per cent of the respondents are economically independent while 80 per cent are depended economically on their parents or husband (see table 7).

Annual Income of Respondents' Parents or Husband

Women leadership position in PRIs is influenced by factors like annual income, which decides the opportunities to contest and command respect from the people. It indicates that generally respondents belong to an average annual income category of 10,001-15,000 (see table 8). So the present women leaders are said to have emerged from an average economic strata.

Table 8: Annual Income of Respondents' Parents or Husband

Annual Income of Respondents Parents Or Husband	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
Rs 5000 below	-	-	-
Rs 5001-10000	17(35.41)	02(12.50)	19(29.68)
Rs 10001-15000	13(27.08)	06(37.50)	19(29.68)
Rs 15001-20000	03(6.25)	02(12.50)	05(7.81)
Rs 20001-25000	07(14.58)	01(6.25)	08(12.50)
Rs 25001-above	03(6.25)	02(12.50)	05(7.81)
Total	48(100.00)	16(100.00)	64(100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

Of those who are not engaged in any occupation, their parents/husband have mostly an average annual income ranging from Rs 5001-10,000 and they constitute about 30 per cent. It is highest at the MP level and more than 12 per cent at the ZP level. About 38 per cent at the ZP level respondents' parents/Husband and more than 27 per cent at the MP level are under the income group of between Rs 10,001-15,000. For details (see table 8).

Type of Family

Leadership is very much influenced by family. Joint family promote effective leadership pattern supported by social status and reputation. A majority of the women respondents (64 per cent) that is 50 per cent at ZP level and more than 68 per cent at MP level come from nuclear family (see table 9). This observation is substantiated by the findings of Singh (1991: 51) that most of the leaders come from nuclear families. This may be attributed to the change in the social system in respect to family life.

Table 9 : Type of Family

Type of Family	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
Nuclear	33(68.75)	08(50.00)	41(64.06)
Joint	15(31.25)	08(50.00)	23(35.94)
Total	48(100.00)	16(100.00)	64(100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

Land Ownership

Land ownership is identified as a crucial factor in establishing dominance (Srinivas 1966: 13), which subsequently determines the socio-economic status influencing leadership positions (see Table 10).

Table 10: Land Holding of Women Leaders

Land Holding	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
No Land	11(22.91)	03 (18.75)	14(21.87)
2.0 - 2.50	21(43.75)	07(43.75)	28(43.75)
2.51- 5.0	09(18.75)	04(25.00)	13(20.31)
5.0 - 5.01	03(6.25)	-	03(4.68)
7.51 and above	04(8.33)	02(12.50)	08(12.50)
Total	48(100.00)	16(100.00)	64(100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

A majority of respondents at ZP level (43 per cent) and 43 per cent at MP level possess land of 2 - 2.5 acres. Only 12 per cent at ZP level and 8 per cent at MP level possess land of 7.5 acres and above. Majority of respondents (75 per cent) possess land holdings and they enjoy better socio-economic status, which enables them to emerge as leaders. Respondents mostly, own dry land (46 per cent) than wet land (28 per cent). Some studies like Miglani (1993: 181) have found that those who own wetland would have upper socio-economic status that would influence the local power structure.

Decisions at Home

Decision-making capacity at home influences the women to take important decisions at leadership positions. The study reveals that nearly, 39 per cent have expressed that both wife and husband take decision jointly. This shows that women leaders can actively involve in social interaction, which will subsequently influence their political power positions as well (see able 11). As regards to important decisions taken at home, only 12.50 per cent at ZP level and 16.66 per cent at MP Level take important decision at home on their own, remaining women respondents depend on their husband. They constitute majority (50 per cent) group at the ZP level and slightly less than 50 per cent at the MP level.

Table 11: Decision at Home

Who takes Imp Decisions at Home	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
Self	08(16.66)	02(12.50)	10(15.62)
Husband	21(43.75)	08(50.00)	29(45.31)
Both together	19(39.558)	06(37.50)	25(39.06)
Total	48(100.00)	16(100.00)	64(100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

Awareness through Media

Acquaintance on women issues by women leaders constitute an important factor of motivation and inspiration to contest for the political positions.

Table 12: Awareness through Media

Received Information through	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
Radio	08(36.36)	05(31.25)	13(34.21)
T.V Viewing	18(81.81)	16(100)	34(89.47)
News Paper	22(100)	14(87.50)	36(89.47)
Magazine	11(50.00)	8(50.00)	19(50.00)
Total	22(100)	16(100)	64(100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

This study found that nearly 90 per cent T.V and news paper are the most popular means of gaining awareness as that of the respondents have used T.V and newspapers as means to acquaint about different issues, which are pertinent to arouse political interest (see Table 12).

Information on Various Issues

Information gathered on certain issues also acts as foremost psychological components for political participation. In this regard more than 84 per cent of respondents gather some information on issues like food and nutrition, agriculture and family planning, but they does not seem to be much interested in gathering information on issues like women rights and health (see Table 13).

Table 13: Information Received on Issues

Information Received on Issues	MP Level	ZP Level	Total
Women's rights	20(90.90)	14(87.50)	25(65.78)
Health	10(45.45)	10(62.50)	20(52.63)
Food & Nutrition	20(90.90)	16(100)	36(94.73)
Agriculture	22(100)	10(62.50)	32(84.21)
Family Planning	22(100)	16(100)	38(100)
Total	22(100)	16(100)	38(100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage

Membership in Local Level Organisations

The membership in local level organizations helps to widen the boundaries of influence and assume important role in the process of decision-making. This would enhance greater frequency for participation in local meetings, greater confidence, mobility and build better communication skills among the women (Agrawal 2003), better monitoring of social sector programs and greater transparency of working in PRIs.

The study reveals that only 25 per cent of the respondents are members, and these respondents belong to Swashakti women's group (Swarna Jayanti Programme), which shows that present women leaders are not politically oriented. Only 12.50 per cent at ZP level and 29.17 per cent at MP level have membership in local level organizations. The study therefore, would add that affiliation with local level organizations would sufficiently promote greater working skills that would contribute to reorient the Panchayat offices in favour of better local governance.

Concluding Observations

This study establishes the fact that many myths associated with the entry of women into leadership positions that would be hindered by socio-economic profile in terms of their age; occupation, family income, land-holdings and education are disproved. In fact, the field data collected here clearly substantiates that women would definitely fit into patriarchal oriented framework. Nearly, 97 per cent of women here are first generation entrants to politics. Reservation for them across social categories has contributed to this wider representation. Their profile also reflects a wider representation across social groups and includes more than 35 per cent at MP from families living below poverty line (BPL). Despite all odds imposed against them, the post 73rd Constitutional Amendment has shown emerging women leaders have moved ahead from the initial learning phase (Buch, 2000b) of their first year in 1994 and 1995 elections as they entered PRIs in a critical number for the first time. In the process, women have changed and have acquired 'New identity, recognition, assertion, confidence' besides excelling in performance (Buch 2000a; Aziz 2002; Pillai and Badari 2004; Jain 2005: 2).

The ongoing experiments and experiences thus clearly suggest that periodical training, orientation and sensitisation help the emerging women leaders to perform the assigned role much better way. When the women leaders respond to the socio-political challenges in society, they are to be supported by organizations and institutions, which are working for political empowerment of women. Whenever such interventions are made, the achievements of the women leaders are substantial and impressive that strengthens decentralised governance.

Notes

1. Proxy women are defined as figurehead elected women representatives who are supposed to do the bidding of male members of the family rather than take their own decisions. They are seen as one of the key reasons for the less than satisfactory empowerment of women within the context of the Amendments.

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