

## A STUDY ON LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN SARPANCH IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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**Abstract:** Women sarpanch as third generation local leaders proved for the erosion of the traditional gender, caste, class roles and hierarchy but it is a long and difficult process. Women not only have to fight for their right to be more than proxy members but also to break the barriers of gender division of labor, illiteracy, low level of mobility, seclusion, lack of training and information, which still continue to exist without enough support from the power structure. Yet, with in the short span of time they have acquired the needed skills viz., self-confidence, achievement motivation, high on the aspirations, conflict resolving abilities, empathy levels paved the way to perform better at the household level and their new role in local politics where they are now expected to function as leaders.

**Introduction:** The paradigm of success of local governance has been a function of many factors in which rural leadership is of utmost importance. Thus one of the advantages of the panchayat system is that it provides an opportunity to the local leaders to move forward on the leadership scale. It is in fact a training ground for leadership aspirants. The rise of women's leadership in male dominated politics at the grass root level is a significant development through women reservation. In the coming years these new leaders are going to play a major role in shaping the panchayats. It is through this leadership all the developmental works at the local level are to be carried out. These leaders will try to engineer profound social and economical improvements by injecting new ideas, innovations, norms and values. Political development and the growth of these democratic institutions to a large extent depend on the quality of local leadership, their socio-economic background and style of functioning. Therefore it is important to study grass root women sarpanch leaders who have acquired power through democratically elected bodies and are going to be actively involved in eliciting people's cooperation in the implementation of the programmes and plans relating to socio economic development of these rural areas. Development of rural areas will depend on the leadership and its capacity and capability to meet new challenges (Rajvir and Dhaka, 2004). It is a general fact that women are not lower than men in terms of intelligence, thinking, imagination, attitude, courage and activities. Rural poverty alleviation programmes and access to micro-credits and the formation of self help groups with an accent on empowerment, participation and leadership of women could make a qualitative difference. Initially this leadership may not be assertive but with increasing awareness they are now shouldering heavy responsibilities.

**Methodology:** Ex post facto research design was followed in the investigation. The study was conducted in three districts namely Prakasam from Coastal andhra, Chittoor from Rayalaseema and Nalgonda from Telangana taking one district randomly from each geographical region with an intention to represent all the three regions differing socio-economic and working environment factors and 33 per cent of Gram

Panchayats are reserved for women in all the districts. A total of sixty women sarpanch who are in roles were selected from 15 mandals of three districts randomly..

**Computation Of Leadership Characteristics Index:**

To measure leadership characteristics, weighted index was used. During the relevancy rating of the indicators, the judges were further requested to assign weightage for each indicator in the range of 0 to 100 based on its importance in such a manner as to get a total number of 100 for all the identified relevant indicators. They were asked to consider the importance of each indicator to measure leadership characteristics, while assigning the weightage. The score obtained by all the judges for a particular indicator were added and divided by the number of judges to arrive at the weightage for the indicator. The same procedure was followed for 13 indicators. An index with 13 indicators was developed and the data collected on leadership characteristics of women sarpanch were processed and interpreted through frequencies and percentages. **Results And Discussion:** Self confidence: Self confidence on women sarpanch own abilities, resources or judgment is one of the important attributes in performing their role, where she builds first impression and identify herself with the local self government as a sarpanch. The high level of self confidence is must for performing the role of a liaison between all working departments at the given root level in particular. The low level of self confidence or high level of dependency upon others may cause less interest in work performance and may have deterrant effect on leadership. Jagat Mehta, 2003 points out that trained women representatives exhibit self-confidence, capacity for articulation and assertiveness. **Aspiration:** The possible reason for having high aspiration might be that majority among the respondents are in politics for the first time, and were young aged and looking forward to a long career in politics. In many cases women have started coming forward with the desire to do something for other women and expressed their desires to contest again for the same post and to high order posts. Majority of the respondents expressed that if the government would provide consecutive opportunity to chair the post then their aspiration will come true. Nirmalabuch (2000) pointed out that despite negative incidents, women improved in their perception, recognition,

<b>Table 1. Distribution of Women Sarpanch based on leadership characteristics</b>			
<b>S.No</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Frequency/Percentage</b>
<b>1. Self Confidence</b>			
1	Low	24-33	14(23.33)
2	Medium	34-43	20(33.33)
3	High	>43	26(43.33)
<b>2. Aspiration</b>			
1	Low	12-16	15(25.00)
2	Medium	17-21	18(30.00)
3	High	22-26	27(45.00)
<b>3. Achievement Motivation</b>			
1	Low	18-26	14(23.33)
2	Medium	27-35	19(31.67)
3	High	>36	27(45.00)
<b>4. Conflict Management and Negotiation skills</b>			
1	Low	11-16	12(20.00)
2	Medium	17-22	26(43.33)
3	High	>22	22(36.67)
<b>5. Knowledge of panchayath related matters</b>			
1	Low	16-20	11(18.33)
2	Medium	21-25	31(51.67)
3	High	26-30	18(30.00)
<b>6. Managerial abilities</b>			
1	Low	10-15	20(33.33)
2	Medium	16-21	27(45.00)
3	High	21-27	13(21.67)
<b>7. Communication skills</b>			
1	Low	11-17	21(35.00)
2	Medium	18-24	16(26.67)
3	High	>24	23(38.33)
<b>8. Empathy</b>			
1	Low	14-19	9(15.00)
2	Medium	20-25	4(6.67)
3	High	>25	47(78.33)
<b>9. Inter personal Skills</b>			
1	Low	9-14	10(16.66)
2	Medium	15-20	31(51.67)
3	High	>20	19(31.66)
<b>10. Decision making skills</b>			
1	Low	10-20	20(33.33)
2	Medium	20-30	25(41.67)
3	High	30-40	15(25.00)
<b>11. Vision</b>			
1	Low	12-16	9(15.00)
2	Medium	17-21	10(16.67)
3	High	22-26	41(68.33)
<b>12. Emotional Intelligence</b>			
1	Low	16-23	13(21.67)
2	Medium	24-31	26(43.33)
3	High	>31	21(35.00)
<b>13. Assertiveness</b>			
1	Low	12-16	20(33.33)
2	Medium	17-21	17(28.33)
3	High	22-26	23(38.33)

respect, status, confidence, and increased their aspirations. **Achievement Motivation:** Majority of women sarpanch were new entrants in to the local self government and had strong inner potential, commitment and will power to achieve their goals. Women sarpanch in the initial period of the tenure seems to have been energetic and found to be serious in discharging their roles and functions and showed their interest. It was also noticed that though women in faces of multiple roles doing maximum justice to each role with accountability and honesty. The spirit of this motivation guides them in to the right path. Hence, shown high achievement motivation.

**Conflict management and Negotiation skills:** The women sarpanch have faced many hurdles in their struggle for political space combining lack of support from administrative hassles, resource crunch, traditions and feudal social systems. The conflicts and tensions between male and female representatives is another constraint that immensely impact women sarpanch effective execution of leadership responsibilities (Charanjeev Singh *et al.* 2007). It was indicated from the results that majority of respondents had medium to high conflict management and negotiation skills. This was due to women sarpanch were actively involved in reducing the conflicts or disputes in their purview. It was further revealed that the trained women sarpanch are able to understand the relationship existing among the three tiers of panchayat and are able to manage the officials. Officials are cooperative and are sensitive and sympathetic towards women sarpanch to a large extent. Such cooperation is facilitating the women sarpanch in resolving the conflicts.

**Knowledge of panchayath related matters:** Political awareness, social participation, impact of training and their educational background might be the reason for having considerable knowledge on the powers and functions of village panchayat. It was also found that respondents who are on the roles were gained three years of experience by the time of investigation and might have acquired the knowledge on the activities of local governance.

**Managerial abilities:** Managerial abilities reflect the participation and performance of women sarpanch in local self government activities. The study revealed that majority of women sarpanch had medium to low levels of managerial abilities. The reasons ascribed were due to low planning, organizing, supervising, communication and coordinating abilities in performing various gram panchayath activities. Another plausible reason might be women are in diverse and multifaceted roles are unable to justify the political roles with in available resources.

**Communication Skills:** The probable reason attributed to the respondents high communication pattern might be that women shall keep always approachable, friendly and maintaining cordial relationship with panchayath members and villagers. This kind of behavior facilitates two way communication between respondents and

villagers which creates better understanding of each other and helps to achieve the targets. Another reason might be that they have to preside over general body meetings involving all the development departments need to deliver the guidelines, procedures and methods of development programmes to members in an effective way.

**Empathy:** Mahatma Gandhi, who was a man of foresight, saw in women the great qualities of patience, endurance, the capacity to sacrifice and sufferings. It was evident from the results that a large majority of women sarpanch had high empathy levels the plausible reason might be that women a platform to meet people and maintains intimate interpersonal relations so that the women had an opportunity to discuss even personal problems with other women, The another possible reason is that women leaders are accessible and sensitive to the needs of villagers. The findings are in agreement with the findings S.N. Rao (2009) who felt that if a woman is a leader, people feel free to ask anything and speak without fear.

**Interpersonal skills:** A considerable number of womensarpanch expressed medium interpersonal relations. Usually women sarpanch try to help their villagers and try to avoid hurting other's feelings compared to their male counterparts. Most of the women sarpanch find time to keep in touch with villagers might promote better interpersonal feelings. Women sarpanch were expressive and show acceptance and caring behavior do maintain good interpersonal relations by showing empathetic behavior. This may be partly because being women there are less incidence of over reacting or loss of emotional control towards their PRI's officials. Results also revealed that some of the respondents had shown low interpersonal skills due to their lack of interest in the politics and have won the elections due to rotation of women reservation seat and another plausible reason might be that their performance was the result of their family members and proxies support.

**Decision making abilities:** For empowerment to be complete, one has to be psychologically, socially and economically empowered to decide about one's life (Niranjan, 2007). Enhancing decision making abilities and improving confidence would be possible only if the existing socio-cultural situations are amenable for women. In the present study majority of the women sarpanch had medium level of decision making abilities. It is a reflection of fact that women's ability to make expressions of her choice without yielding to influence of political party and proxy membership.

It was also evident from the results that one third of the respondents possessed low level of decision making abilities. The reason might be many women sarpanch belonged to the family with political background also admitted the fact that husbands/family members were highly influencing them in taking the decisions. Another reason might be that there are still majority of women sarpanch who are guided by the dictates of their male

members, hence their voices are missing from the key decisions, their skills and viewpoints often remained unheard and ignored. Women sarpanch expressed that the incidence of collective decision is compulsory while taking key decisions at the Gram sabha.

**Vision:** Vision is respondent's ability to think about or plan the future with great imagination and intelligence. Women sarpanch have different kinds of vision to be accomplished in their term, because it is their own village and their own people and willing to extend their support to change the face of their own village.

The women expressed that while taking up the responsibility as village representatives, they had a vision towards betterment of their village which however cannot be realized in the panchayat system as they have to face a volley of problems (Palanithurai, 2005). They further opined that they are working positively with a ray of hope in a challenging atmosphere hence, they need supporting base at various levels, and then their vision will come true.

**Emotional intelligence:** A perusal of the table says that women sarpanch had medium to high emotional intelligence this is because women seem to have significantly stronger skills, where they relate better interpersonally and act socially more responsible, were empathetic and solve problems more effectively. Mayer and Perkins *et al.* (2001) have rightly said that those with high emotional intelligence are better able in identifying their own and others emotions in situations and use that information to guide their own actions and resists pressure from others. People who are good at connecting thoughts to feelings may better hear the

emotional implications of their own thoughts as well as understand the feelings of others from what they say. Another reason might be being women they were more aware of their emotions than men.

While, a considerable percent of women sarpanch had low emotional intelligence due to their low self-confidence and personal abilities hence, strategies to enhance intra personal skills should be taken up through emotional intelligence programme.

**Assertiveness:** A perusal of table revealed that majority of the women sarpanch had high assertiveness this is because over time women sarpanch have become increasingly aware, conscious and assertive of their rights. In many cases they have shown their ability to express their feelings and defend their rights in a constructive manner and stand up for their beliefs. These women openly express their thoughts in gram sabha meetings as well as with government officials. They were sufficiently empowered to be able to assert themselves.

Jagat Mehta (2003) points out that the trained women representative exhibit self confidence, capacity for articulation and assertiveness. Form the results it was also shown that more or less an equal percent of respondents were low assertive due to proxy representation.

**Conclusion:** The study by and large reflects that the women sarpanch were slowly incorporating required skills thus slowly moving towards the leadership scale and changing the face of village politics. Their role in the society had never been sudden but is slow evolution towards the growth of grass root institutions.

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