

WOMEN COMMUNITY LEADERS IN MANIPUR: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Today women in Manipur are playing an important role in promoting peace and development in the state. The study was undertaken to find out the reasons for women to take up leadership roles and identify the leadership qualities that have enabled them to promote peace in Manipur. The study also aimed at understanding the challenges faced by women leaders and their achievements. Perceptions of women from the community regarding the role and contribution of the selected women leaders in their community were also sought. Designed as a descriptive study, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used for data collection. Majority of women leaders were middle aged and educated up to class twelve. Nearly all of them were self-employed. All the women leaders considered that their confidence and ability to take initiatives on local issues helped them to be selected as community leaders. Most of the women did not get any formal training in leadership skills. The women had several leadership qualities which included ability to learn and adapt new knowledge and skills, empathy and credibility. Women leaders stated that women in Manipur had to face violence, sexual harassment and threat to livelihood. This motivated them to raise their voice against social and political problems in their community and mobilize the community action against such issues. They also provided support to community women in pursuing their livelihood. Women leaders reported that they did not get desirable support from any organization. It was concluded that women leaders were a very useful resource and played an important role in Manipur society. They could be a vital link between the government and the community to help in better implementation of development programmes and services for the people of Manipur. This would go a long way to promote peace and development in the state.

Keywords: Women leaders, Development, Community, Manipur.

Introduction: Leaders are persons who are selected by the people in terms of ability of their special interest or fitness to work on some phase of local development programmes. Leaders has been spontaneously considered or chosen as a being influential in a specific situation. A leader is the one who can help the associate's members of the groups, as an individual she/he accepts the responsibility for thinking through problem and working out solutions that are need to be discovered. Alan (2007) proposed that a leader is "a person who influences a group of people towards the achievement of a goal". Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic and political structure of any society. According to Bernard (2000) defined " leadership as a particular type of power relationship characterized by a group member's perception that another group member has the right to prescribe behavior patterns for the former regarding his activity as a member of a particular group. "Leadership in essence is simply influencing the attitude and actions of one or more persons, leading towards the achievement of some purpose or goal" (Dubey, 2008). It is process of influencing the behavior of the individual in a given situation. It also means that there is direct face to face contact between a leader and follower. All leadership positions require having a real concerned that is consciously and unconsciously. Leaders are persons who having some characteristics such as appearance, voice, per-

sonality, and ambition. Leadership reflects a relationship between people and group members.

According to Patil (2013) the community leader's considerable influence is often executed by individuals who take no formal leadership roles within the community. Community can be defined in many ways, as a group of people living in same area and they live together for some common purpose of goal or accomplishment in their life. They may be having the same occupation, religion, language or culture. The community worker needs to identify the community leader who can help the development process for the community.

Leadership is a vital element of the whole process of community. This is essential as the community and it is necessary the local people should carry forward the work for development in the community. Each community may have more than one leader. They have different ideologies, which can directly affect the community development process. Community leaders help to bring out many voices to add collective power and strength to an issue. Community leader is a key to bring change in a community that are widely felt, and that reflects the wishes of the people, who are directly affected by problem. The community leadership qualities and involve them in all social activities. Sometime the community organization needs to orient them and if required then they train them for participating and leading the social issue. It all is important aspect for community development.

Today, women leaders are taking a lead role in the promoting peace and development in Manipur. Peace is very important as bring safety security to the people. It is the basic human need. Several organisations have contributed to women's development and social change in the Manipuri society. Women leaders become more powerful and play an active role in Manipur society.

Leaders serve their community. They protect freedom, preserve peace, and ensure prosperity for as many people as possible. Leaders pave the way for their followers by visioning, building trust, motivating them and acting together. So, any successful society or organization working for community development is dependent on effective leadership. Women leaders in Manipur strive for achieving a balance in their personal and professional life.

The present study has been planned to identify and understand the role of women leaders in Manipur who have been able to work towards promoting peace and development in their community. Their qualities, knowledge, skills, leadership styles and achievements will help to not only strengthen them but also develop other women as leaders. Their feedback and opinions can help to identify their training and capacity building needs and suitable programmes can be developed to impart new knowledge and leadership skills for women in Manipur with the objective to promote peace and development.

Manipur is a small state in northeastern India. Manipur is divided in two parts; one is the hills and another is the valley. The climate of Manipur is largely influenced by the topography of the hilly region. According to the 2011 the total population of Manipur is 2,721,756, with 26.18% in urban areas and 73.82% in rural areas. The literacy rate stands at 79.85 per cent, higher than the national average of 74.04 per cent.

Manipur is one of the worst affected states where at least 12 insurgent outfits are active at present. Government has been imposing the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act) in Manipur today, it is the instance of shows the inability and reluctance of the government to solve the conflict with adequate political measures. Poor governance is one of the main causes for the rise of insurgency. In the interiors, governance is almost absent. Whenever it exists, it is thoroughly corrupt and inefficient. As these results, the administration is unable to deliver essential goods and services to the people, the vacuum being filled by the insurgent groups who run a parallel Government in Manipur.

Manipur has witnessed the successful role of collective women's power in the past and also in the present day. Someday, we observe every year. However it despite their major contributions in the socio-economic and political life of the state, but still they are not given their due position in society. Manipur is

the patriarchal society but women are independent and empower in their life.

A Manipuri woman's taking an important role in the socio-economic and cultural life of Manipur. Most of the Manipuri women do not stay behind the veil. They were working in both formal and informal sector such as they do the buying and selling of goods in the market. In another side, illiterate women are working in the unskilled work for livelihood base on daily wage, they did not seek work that is different from men and women do.

Leaders serve for others. The leaders create beauty in the world, lift the vision of mankind, broaden our possibilities, and deepen our life experience. They protect freedom, preserve peace, and ensure prosperity for as many people as possible. Women leaders become more powerful and played active role for the society. Women have a background factors which similar to women leaders in other to arenas: hard work, mentor support, formal and informal learning experiences, desire to grow, and strong preparation. Leadership plays a key role in structuring and functioning of any society. Leaders pave the way for their followers by visioning, building trust, motivating them and acting together. So, any successful society or organization is dependent on effective leadership. The most significant barriers faced in their career path were balancing their work life and home. It is important for many women to maintain both the traditional role in a house and her professional expectations, but mostly trying to keep everything in perspective and balance. Even they have faced a many barriers in becoming leaders. They have had to overcome stereotypes, prejudices, a paternalistic society, and gender roles determined by a conservative society (Hoyt & Simon, (2011).

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Socio- Economic Profile of the Women Leaders: Manipur has 16 districts. Women leaders from only 3 districts (houbal, Kakching and Imphal West) of Manipur were contacted. Majority of the women interviewed for the study was in the age group .30-39 years. All of these women leaders were married and two-third of them (62%) were living in joint families. Thus, most of the them were found to be their middle age and in the expanding stage of their family life

cycle. Almost all the women leaders were educated with (31% educated up to class 10, 47% were class 12th pass and only 20% of women leaders were graduates.

Women leaders had basic facilities in their homes such as drinking water, electricity, cooking gas/charcoal. It was seen that during the time of bandh or economic blockade the gas cylinder rate just goes up very high from the original prices Rs. 800 cylinder may cost as high as Rs. 1800-2000.

Concept of Self as A Women Leader: In order to understand the perception of women leaders regarding their leadership, the women leaders were asked about their own perception as a leader in their community. Maximum number of women which was 93% said that they see themselves as a leader in their community. They considered that their confidence and ability to take initiatives on any issues helped them to be selected as leaders. Nearly all women leaders were selected by their organisation on the basis of their leadership qualities. Women leaders mentioned several qualities that helped them to be good leaders. These qualities were ability to learn and adapt new knowledge and skills, empathy and trust, helpful attitude and emotional understanding. Nearly half of women leaders (53%) stated that they worked very sincerely with community groups for better livelihood opportunity and for bringing change into the community.

Nature of Work for Promoting Peace and Development: All the women leaders were interested in promoting peace and development in their community. More than half of the women leaders (56%) wanted to work for local development, reduce crime and social problems, bring change in their community and improve the status of women by empowering them. The study showed that all the women leaders worked for mobilizing the people for promoting peace and development. They wanted to bring the community together for everyone's welfare and development. About three-fourth (73%) of women leaders reported that they helped in solving the problems in their community and 64% women leaders shared that they worked in groups to promote income among their group members and they also gave free vocational training to the community women for better livelihood. The group of Maira Paibi leaders also worked in different way for promoting peace and development like boycott the alcohol shop; close the alcohol shop and gave punishment the alcohol shop owner. They also took initiative and responsibility for crime against women or other social problems and filed police complaints.

Women leaders were asked whether they were affiliated to any political party in their area. Majority of women leaders (89%) were not associated to any political party. The remaining of women leaders were

associated with political parties because they got support, fund and resources for their work from the party. Women leaders wanted local political leaders (like MLAs) to support their community and take initiative to promote development work.

Women leaders did not get any formal training in leadership skill. Some women leaders attended a training of 1-2 days in livelihood skills through NGO that they were associated with. Two-third of women leaders (62%) did not get any support from Government as well as other organisations.

Challenges Faced by Women Leaders in Promoting Peace And Development: According to the women leaders, the main causes for conflict in Manipur were the poor law and order situation, crimes against women and youth, unemployment, corruption and poor implementation of Government programs and services. These factors lead to protest in the form of economic blockade and bandh which disrupted day-by day life and caused a lot of hardship to the population in Manipur.

In Manipur, people are faced a lots of problem in term of daily income, food, daily need, etc during the economic blockade and bandh. It affects all area that road, market has been closed so no transport services, closed all the school and colleges sometimes due to this problem happened. Bandh in Manipur affect all the people very badly due to lack of daily need, cost of food grain or essentials commodities increased high. Government office has half closed or even closed due to no public transport or no run the private vehicles because Petrol pumps were either closed or have huge queues ahead of them. Most of the people forced to buy petrol and diesel from black marketers, who were charging as much as high at Rs. 130 per liter of petrol and Rs. 100 per liter of diesel. Again, medicines are not available properly. It mainly causes a big problem in people who gather their daily wages. Due to this, they are unable to earn daily income and put in hungry. Lastly it effects the economic growth in Manipur.

All the women stated that it was not easy to be a women leader as there were several challenges and difficulties because of unsafe environment and political issues. On the other hand there is patriarchal society with male dominance and discrimination among girls and boys.

Perception of A Women Leader by Women in the Community Women: The community women felt that Manipuri women leaders played very important role in promoting peace and development in community. They did not think for themselves and their family, but they just served the people in the community. It can be concluded that community women also supported to the women leaders for their role of leaders in their community. They appreciated to the performance of women leaders sometime they also

felt motivated and aspired to become as a leader in the community. So, the leaders exercised leadership on the basis of trust and frank on the followers; as a result the members could assume responsibility and take innovation actions.. One thing is that women leaders took our opinion from each member before deciding upon any new project or new opportunity, unlike men leaders who have created competition between them. Thus showing that community women accepted the leader unquestioningly and they obey the leader willingly.

It was also seen that these women leaders can be a very useful resource and an important link between the government and the community to help in better implementation of development programmes and services for the people of Manipur. Thus, it can bring peace and development to the state.

Recommendations:

- Educated middle aged women who understand local problem can be selected for training as women leaders to work for promoting peace and development in Manipur.
- To be effective, women community leaders should take up programs to empower women in her community, look after their interest and help solve local problems.
- Support from Government and local NGOs by way of providing some funds and providing facilities like Telephone, transport, safety can help women leaders to do their work better.
- Training and capacity building can help the women leaders to improve their self-confidence, leadership skills, communication skills, problem solving and negotiation skills. Such skill trainings will build the women's capacity to lead their community.

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