

Changing Women Leadership in Rural India

Sarita Singh*

Women are said to be the key agents of change in transforming rural India and ensuring sustainable development. As the workforce in agriculture is largely of women, empowering women by nurturing their leadership skills becomes extremely crucial for economic productivity. They have the potential to be active agents to drive socio-economic development in the rural society. More women in leadership roles can positively transform rural India, as it provides them an opportunity for personal growth, earn a livelihood and contribute to their community. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the changing women leadership in rural India. It has been shown that women leadership is contributing a lot to the development of rural society in India.

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1. Introduction

In human society, there are always some people who are talented, distinguished in their field and have the ability to create.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, D. A. V. (PG) College, Dehradun, Uttarakhand (India) E-mail: <saritasingh.work@gmail.com>

The general public usually follows them. There is a saying in the Sanskrit language, “Yatha Mahajanah Gatah Sahapanth” which means where the distinguished men go, that is the path. Along with the decision comes responsibility for its consequences. Therefore, the decision making ability is less developed in the common man because he is afraid of taking responsibility. Therefore, such persons, whose decisions have an effect in their field of work, are called leaders, elite, elite, elite, elite or elite of that society. Their role in the society is very important from the sociological point of view. The study of any society is incomplete without the study of leadership.

2. Concept of Leadership

Leadership is the act of influencing people towards a desired goal. This goal is considered auspicious for all. In general, what is called leadership is precisely analyzed in the context of sovereignty. Sovereignty is an action or reaction that influences the thoughts and actions of another. Although the methods of influencing can be flattery, suggestion, persuasion, taunting and corporal punishment of many types and intensity. Thus, leadership can be seen as a power-plan to influence, change and control the behavior and thoughts of other individuals. Leadership is an informal but important instrument of social control. Leadership is a process of established interaction between individuals in a small or large group that leads to a higher rate of acceptance of the following four things :

1. Common values and goals,
2. The ‘circumstances’ in which the members interact,
3. Leader and
4. Other people (i.e. those who follow him).

In this way, the process of leadership is called a process of social control. Therefore, leadership is a special type of behavior towards a group which gives a sense of dominance of the leader over his followers. Therefore, it develops in the collective situation and it is the dominance developed due to the patterns of interaction between the leader and the followers, on the basis of which the leader directs and controls the behavior of the followers. In the words of MacIver and Page (2007), “By leadership we mean the capacity to persuade or to direct men that comes from personal qualities apart from office.”¹ According to LaPiere (1939), “Every social interaction involves some degree of focalization of attention, however transitory, upon one

member. That person, is for the moment the leader of the situation. Quantitatively and qualitatively the other members react more to him than he does to any one of them.”² Similarly, in the words of LaPiere and Fransworth (1936), “Leadership is behaviour that affects the behaviour of other people more than their affects that of the leader.”³ In brief, we can say that leadership refers to the influence of the leader on his followers and his (the leader’s) ability to direct and control them. Leadership has been regarded as a process of interpersonal stimulation.

3. Women Leadership in Rural Society

Rural society has maintained some of its characteristics since time immemorial. Many western scholars have described Indian villages as a self-sufficient small republic. This does not mean that the Indian village never had any relation with the outside world. Villages have always been connected with the outside world through cultural festivals, marriage ties and interaction with the officials of the monarchy. The meaning of calling them self-reliant republics is that they have been mostly independent in their internal governance system. Therefore, in relation to the discussion of rural leadership, naturally following three question arises :

1. Who were the traditional rural leaders in India?
2. Who are the rural leaders in contemporary India?
3. If there is some difference between these two circumstances, what factors are responsible for that?

3-1 Traditional Women Leadership in Rural Society

Being a country of villages, rural leadership has an important place in India. This is the reason why many scholars have tried to understand rural leadership. In this direction, the effort of S. C. Dubey is noteworthy, who has studied the traditional and contemporary rural leadership in depth. Following them, the traditional rural leadership can be described.

According to Dube⁴ there were three categories of traditional leaders in the Indian villages :

- Cultural leaders (such as Pandits, priests etc.),
- The land-owning feudal lords (such as old vassals or persons belonging to the dynasty who were the landowners of a particular village or area) and
- Traders and moneylenders.

Thus, from the traditional point of view, there were three sources of power of leadership—one, the caste system on the basis of sacramental purity, second, relations with the feudal dynasty and third, economic splendor.

According to Yogendra Singh,⁵ three categories of traditional leaders appear in Indian villages on the basis of zamindari system, village panchayat and caste panchayat—*first*, the head of the village, who was often related to the feudal class on the basis of lineage and land ownership. It was powerful in sight. He used to bear the responsibility of maintaining order in the village, doing justice and protecting the village in times of external aggression. He used to give proper directions even at the time of natural calamity or accidental calamity. Thus, he was an amalgamation of all the three roles of police, judge and fighter in the village. He used to take the advice of the family heads of the village in the performance of his works. Thus, the form of a village panchayat also remained functional. *Second*, Brahmins, priests or priests were the main sources of rural power structure for ritual functions based on the caste system. Apart from this, each caste also had its own Jati Panchayat whose Choudhary also functioned on the basis of lineage. The mutual affairs or cultural festivals of a specific caste used to come under the function of this caste panchayat. *Thirdly*, that moneylender class can be taken which along with trade used to do the work of loan transactions in the village. Although their position was not impressive in terms of political power, yet they maintained dominance in the village on the basis of their economic power.

It is clear from the above discussion that traditionally the leadership in rural India has been centered in the hands of men. Due to illiteracy, purdah system, social restrictions, etc., the place of women was limited only to the household. Earning money from the point of view of employment was also considered as the work of men and they expected women to stay at home and take proper care of children and other family members. It is not that women did not have leadership qualities, yet they were denied any kind of participation outside the home. Being a male-dominated family, older men held an important place not only in the families but also at the community level, and they also provided leadership at the local level. It is so necessary that the women of the family who were traditional rural leaders had a higher status than other women of the community and they played an important role in giving direction to women related to social life and beliefs.

3.2 Contemporary Women Leadership in Rural Society

After the attainment of independence, the process of democratic decentralization was started in which local self- government was encouraged through the lowest unit of democracy – the village panchayat. Based on the recommendations of Balwantrai Mehta, formed in 1959, the Panchayati Raj system was started, but the initial stage of Panchayati Raj proved to be a complete failure because the main reason for this was that instead of the backward classes, the power went in the hands of the upper and special sections of the village. had to go. In fact, at that time the situation was such that for the upliftment of those classes, the system of Gram Panchayati Raj was started, only those classes were kept away from the management work of Panchayati Raj. One of these sections was also of women. Later on, it was decided to make the backward classes and women partners in the appropriate sense of decentralization of power.

As a result of the provision of one-third reservation for women in Panchayats through the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution, at present there are about one million women working in the structure as chairpersons and members. This is a large number and certainly this has led to visible changes in the urban-rural system so far. This political empowerment of women is not only necessary for the development of women, but it also exposes their creative potential suppressed for centuries in front of the society. A lot of surveys have been done in the past regarding the role of women in Panchayati Raj, whose basic conclusion is that the misconceptions which were prevalent in the society about the political efficiency of women, were removed by the women panchayat presidents on the basis of their work efficiency and working style. Is done. Due to this the male class has started to understand their importance and the resistance that women had to face in the beginning has started decreasing now.

Elected women have become role models for other women and adolescent girls. Now most of the rural women present their problems to the appropriately elected women panchayat presidents and members and women panchayat pradhans are presenting appropriate solutions to those problems on the basis of their political rights and their personal experiences. These Panchayat Pradhans are controlling the rural problems, along with this, they have also started their campaign against social evils in many areas.

There are thousands of women who have worked for rural development after taking over the leadership of Panchayats. Has carried forward many social and economic works. Just a few years ago, in the Panchayati elections held in Uttar Pradesh, more than 50 percent women had declared themselves victorious in the elections and become leaders, which had a positive impact on rural development, especially women and child development programmes.

At present, the social status of women is changing. The new environment that they are getting due to the active participation of women in the Panchayati Raj system is not only setting new dimensions of progress and development for them, and at the same time curbing the domination of the male society and helping them understand that. Playing the role that rural women of India are not weaker than men at any level and their role in rural development should not be ignored in any way.

Women have made a successful attempt to prove their ability to lead themselves as efficient administrators by stepping out of the boundaries of the house as soon as they get the opportunity. A strong example of this is the Barmer district of Rajasthan. Before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, no woman was elected to the post of Sarpanch in all the Panchayat elections held in Barmer district. But after the new Act came into effect in 1995, elections were held in this district in which 129 (33.99 percent) women sarpanches were elected out of the 380 gram panchayats of this district. Similarly, in these 380 gram panchayats, 4,170 ward panches were elected in which about 1,390 were women.

According to the available statistics, there are 2,60,512 PRIs in the country, 2,53,268 village panchayats, 6,614 intermediate panchayats, 630 district panchayats, approximately 31.0 lakh of elected members of PRIs out of which 13.75 lakh are women representatives. Rs. 54077.80 crore were allotted by FFC as basic grant and 6609.33 crore as performance grant in 2019-20. Capacity building and training to the elected representatives of PRIs and other stakeholders has been the main thrust of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.⁶

3.3 Factors responsible for Change in Women Leadership

It would also be necessary to mention here that many processes and factors that originated in independent India are responsible for the changing forms of rural leadership. Chief among them are :

democratization based on universal adult franchise, new institutions of Panchayati Raj based on decentralization of power, politicization, industrialization, secularization, spread of education, programs for the upliftment of scheduled castes and women, community development schemes, increasing social mobility due to the spread of transport and communication, role of political parties, sanskritization among lower castes and tribes, formation of cooperative societies, legal steps of land reform and abolition of dynasties and landlord class and Sarvodaya movement (Gramdan, Bhoodan, etc.). Combined with all these factors, the traditional social stratification of rural India is changing and new leadership has emerged in which women also have significant participation.

Many eminent sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists have studied the current rural power structure and leadership on the basis of field studies of different villages in their respective perspectives. These scholars include both indigenous and foreign. Mainly, the studies of Andre Betelle, Yogendra Singh, S. C. Dube, M. N. Srinivas, L. P. Vidyarthi, B. R. Chauhan, T. K. Oommen, Oscar Lewis, Adrian Meyer, Kathleen Gough are important from this point of view. According to these scholars, Indian village leadership is going through a phase of significant changes from the structure point of view. The major changes seem to be the following :

1. The hereditary leadership or aristocracy is declining in rural India. The traditional Mukhiya, Lambardar or Patel posts are no more. Their place has been taken by the Gram Pradhans, Panchs and Sarpanches elected by the Gram Panchayat or Nyaya Panchayat, in which the number of women is also increasing.
2. The democratic process is influencing new political alliances in the village and the resourceful persons (both men and women) of the lower castes are also trying to join the leadership class of the village. The principle of sacramental purity based on religious rituals is fading away and being replaced by secular elements such as education, economic prosperity and political affiliation.
3. Traditionally, the village was dominated by older men and men, but now the aristocracy often consists of young men and the rule of compulsory representation of women in panchayats in most states has also allowed women to enter the rural power structure. The doors have been opened.

4. Contemporary rural leadership, since it is not based on caste, family, sex or age, therefore also loses its authoritarian character. In its place, a democratic form is developing in which women are playing a major role.

All the above facts reveal the changing conditions of traditional rural leadership. At the same time, these facts also show that women are playing a major role in emerging leadership.

4. Conclusion

It may be concluded that the rural women can be recognized as leaders, change agents and entrepreneurs in their communities. This is the reason as to why support for women's ventures and their empowerment as 'strategic protagonists of local economic development' in rural India. It is evident that rural Indian women are starting to take leadership positions as masses have started believing in their leadership abilities. It is also clear that women's leadership in panchayats is transforming India.

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