

Reviewing the existing literature on Leadership: Case for Deliberations on Women leaders in Panchayati Raj Institutions

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Abstract- The concept of leadership has evolved over several decades. Such elaborate deliberations have occurred historically on the topic of leadership, that the theories and concepts have been categorized, overlaps highlighted and clubbed, besides being criticized for their relevance and applicability in contemporary situations. Women leadership holds a special place in the literature on leadership due to the social profiling and portrayal of women in a patriarchal society. Support to women by men has been encouraging and lack of support has proven to be a huge challenge for women in leadership positions, both at home for working women and in professional situations. In addition, leadership in public sector, compiled with challenges posed in rural socio-political ecology increases the complexity for efficient performance by women leaders. The current research paper is a systematic, comprehensive and elaborate review of existing literature on leadership theories, followed by peculiar attributes and experiences related to women in leadership. Subsequently, an elaborated discussion regarding women leadership in Panchayati raj institutions follows. This section includes opportunities, contributions, challenges, and the way forward for women leadership in Panchayati raj institutions. The existing research paper is expected to provide a suitable prelude for any researcher willing to undertake research on women leaders in Panchayati raj institutions based on primary data in India.

Index Terms- Leadership theories, Literature review, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Women Sarpanches.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every organization is established with a mission to accomplish certain goals. Organizational success depends upon the achievement of such predetermined goals and subsequently the long-term vision for which it was established. The success of the organization greatly depends on how is the organization led. The leader of the organization is pivotal to establishing long-term vision and accomplishment of the desired goals. A huge resource of literature is available, that deliberates upon various leadership theories that have evolved historically. Such theories have been systematically categorized and presented in a functional format so that necessary traits, skills and behavior of a good leader emerges from the literature. However, men and women in leadership roles do not face similar challenges, nor are they necessarily evaluated similarly. A comparative analysis of the available literature on women leadership is pivotal since women, hold a peculiar position in the socio-political arena in a patriarchal society. The scenarios that a women leader faces, the way she deals with it, the manner in which the way she deals is evaluated, and the overall perception of a women leader as discussed in the existing literature are different than for men. An entire understanding of the concept of leadership and in particular women leadership within the gambit of a public sector, in a Panchayati Raj institution can be very enlightening. Women leaders in public sector can become the catalyst to socio-economic changes for which the policy provisions for reservations in panchayat elections for women has been made. While this naturally provides a wonderful opportunity to incentivize women participation in political decision making, it comes with various challenges that such women leaders encounter. Existing literature quote several such scenarios associated with women leadership in Panchayati raj institutions.

The objective of the existing research paper is to inculcate an understanding of the peculiarity of women leadership, in a public sector set up, in a rural area, in the form of women sarpanches in Panchayati raj institutions. The need for the current research arises from the prospects that the current research would provide a prospective researcher a greater clarity while undertaking primary data collection-based research regarding women sarpanches in India.

Accordingly, the research paper first discusses various leadership theories, followed by women in leadership, in particular in public sector, and their political empowerment globally. Subsequently, women in Panchayati raj institutions have been discussed. This

deliberation includes, constitutional provisions in India, its implementations, challenges and opportunities faced thereby, its contributions to the rural development, and various avenues of improvement in enhancing the efficiency of women sarpanches.

II. THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership theories have advanced over several years, with changing structures of the organizations and evolving situational dynamics within which leadership traits evolved. Several researchers have compared, contrasted, categorized and analyzed theories of leadership (King, 1990; Northouse, 1999; Winkler, 2010; Badshah, 2012; Van Wart, 2013; Amanchukwu, Stanley, and Ololube, 2015; Nawaz and Khan, 2016; Haq and Anwar, 2018; Mango, 2018; Uslu, 2019). Mango (2018) has identified 66 leadership theories. Of these 66, 44 were found to be either repetitive or were consolidated in his analysis with the other 22 that are further analyzed by Mango for developing Ethical and Effective Leadership (EEL) model. While certain theories describe the situations in which leadership is proven and in the others the characteristics of a good leader are evolved. King (1990) has very systematically categorized several theories of leadership in a leadership tree, depicting the evolution of leadership theories in different eras and emphasizing the influential aspects of the theories in each era. Northouse (1999) and various subsequent editions have evolved comprehensively, covering the notion of leadership as and when the concept has itself undergone evolution. His book includes gender-related, cultural and ethical considerations, that are distinctly peculiar in nature for practitioners.

In most of the available literature, the theories cited frequently include (i) Transactional/Managerial theory, (ii) Transformational/Relationship theory (iii) Contingency/Situational/Path Goal theory (iv) The Great Person (Man) theory/ Trait theory (v) Behavioral theory/Style theory (vi) Participative theory/Democratic leadership theory and (vii) Servant leadership.

A. *The Transactional/Managerial leadership theory*

Theory associated with *Transactional/Managerial leadership* lays great emphasis on assuring appropriate structure of the organization and respecting hierarchy. Everyone in the hierarchy is given a definite clearly stated responsibility by rules. Fulfilling the given responsibility is rewarded and indiscipline is punished. When the goal is absolutely defined and is to be precisely accomplished, transactional leadership serves the purpose of precise accomplishment. However, the rigidity imbibed in such leadership does not permit innovative thoughts or independent actions, even at the cost of stagnation in the organizational expansion.

B. *The Transformational/Relationship leadership theory*

The Transformational/Relationship leadership refers to the relation between the leader and his subordinates, whereby the leader inspires subordinates to achieve a common goal, by himself demonstrating high moral values in pursuing the common goal. Leaders serve as mentors and develop a positive work culture in which the team-members feel motivated to work, since the leader also takes care of the growth of their employees in the process. The self-motivation of the leader becomes contagious and inspires all to become leaders too.

C. *The Contingency/Situational/Path-goal theory*

The Contingency/Situational/Path-goal theory suggests that the leadership traits differ between different situations and are contingent in nature. These theories suggest that the success of leadership process depends on how well a particular situation is handled. This requires that either a leader adapts to deal with a particular situation or an appropriate leader suitable for a particular contingent situation is instituted. It suggests that depending on the internal and external variables facing a situation, an appropriate decision-making style of leadership needs to be adopted. Hershey and Blanchard's Situational Theory, the Evans and House Path-Goal Theory, and Fiedler's Contingency Theory are some of the experts who devised these and associated theories.

D. *The Great Person (Man) theory / Trait theory*

The Great Person (Man) theory / Trait theory rests on the idea that a leader is born, and cannot be made, trained, taught or groomed to be a leader. Certain inherent qualities, skills and traits, appearing naturally in a person makes one a leader and thus that person deserves to be in a leadership position. Different literature suggests different inherent traits identified in such born-leaders like confidence, social skills, intelligence, and wisdom, among others. Thus, it relies on the philosophy of '*nature*' as against '*nurture*'. While trait theory is quite similar to the Great Person theory, the distinguishing aspect is that the Trait theory focuses on certain personality qualities and behavioral traits of the leader as against psychological traits discussed in Great Person theory.

E. *The Behavioral theory/Style theory*

The Behavioral theory/Style theory is exactly the opposite of the Great Person theory. In it, the theory suggests that it's the behavior of a person and not the inherent characteristics of a person that makes one a leader and thus leaders '*can be made*' and are '*not born*'. The theory suggests that the manner in which a leader acts or behaves defines success. Some of these styles identified by those who propounded this theory primarily include, task-oriented or people-oriented behavior. It suggests that in a decision-making situation a task-oriented leader will focus on solutions in processes while a people-oriented behavior will focus on solutions emanating from people. This behavior or working style of the leader can be easily learnt from, imbibed and imitated and thus it rests on the belief that leaders are not born, but made.

F. The Participative theory / Democratic leadership theory

The Participative theory / Democratic leadership theory suggests that leaders involve sub-ordinates in the decision-making processes by inviting inputs from them in that particular situation. Everyone's involvement in an open, honest environment, facilitates seeking inputs for the ultimate decision to be made by the leader. Involvement of all team-members, is expected to give a greater sense of ownership to the decision taken, and thus a better performance is expected in terms of leadership success.

G. Servant leadership theory

The Servant leadership refers to that style in which the leader empathizes with sub-ordinates and is concerned for their well-being, particularly for 'have nots'. While it is cautioned that such a leader does not act as a servant of the people whom he serves but a servant of the larger vision. Pursuing that larger vision, the leader cares for the people of the organization and community.

All of the above-mentioned theories have been described by several researchers (King, 1990; Northouse, 1999; Winkler, 2010; Badshah, 2012; Van Wart, 2013; Amanchukwu, Stanley, and Ololube, 2015; Nawaz and Khan, 2016; Haq and Anwar, 2018; Mango, 2018; Uslu, 2019).

To achieve short term focused goals, transactional theory may prove to be more purposeful, whereas for achieving long term vision, that requires creative thinking, transformational leadership, servant leadership or democratic leadership styles may prove to be more fruitful. Some leaders blessed with team comprising of other team-members as equally capable leaders may opt for *Laissez-faire* leadership, thereby allowing everyone to freely act in the manner they deem fit to achieve organizational goals. Instead of worrying whether a leader is born or made, what is rather more important is how are the expected organizational goals achieved by any person even irrespective of whether one holds a particular high position in hierarchy or not. Hence, as suggested in the situational leadership, either a leader should be able to handle any situation well or the appointment of anyone who is suitable to be a leader in a particular internal (within the organization) or external (outside the organization) situation may serve the purpose of achieving certain organizational goals. Situations may arise due to changes in internal factors or external factors. Different situations, different people, and different aspirations may require a leader to adapt oneself appropriately.

Mango (2018) clarifies that the traits, characteristics, behaviors and leadership styles adopted by leaders with good or bad purposes can be deceptively similar. Honoring the importance of ethics in all stages of leadership Miller (as cited in Mango, 2018) has given SERVE which is an abbreviation of a leadership model indicating the characteristics that a leader should possess. SERVE stands for: See the future (Institutional practices), Engage and develop others (People practices), Reinvent continuously (Institutional practices), Value results (Outcomes) and relationships (People practices) and Embody values (Character). Hence, it is important to identify distinct characteristics between leaders of highly rewarding, motivating societally beneficial organizations and leaders of terrorist organizations and others involved in anti-social activities. In fact, Mango rightly suggests that even those involved in usual businesses of daily life, if act unethically, it results into financial scandals. Accordingly, he propounded the Ethical and Effective Leadership (EEL) model.

Leadership theories categorically identify the national culture as a highly influential variable affecting leadership styles. Hofstede (2001) suggests that the culture of the nation and / or between different groups of people affects the way certain decisions are taken by leaders considering distinguishing aspects associated with differences in language, skills, behavior, feelings, ways of local thinking, feeling and values. National culture affects both employers and employees and thereby organizational culture (Hofstede, 1980; Newman and Nollen, 1996). Culture affects leadership through distinguishing aspects like differing traits, conscious or unconscious behaviors, values, significance of outcomes, and interpersonal relationships (Newman and Nollen, 1996). Hofstede (1989, 2001) identified, masculinity and femininity as one of the four dimensions affecting national culture. Haq and Anwar (2018) note that while most of the literature on leadership originates from western countries, philosophers and researchers, the need to evolve leadership related theories and thereby traits, behaviors, styles of leadership, prevalent in the Asian continent is suggested as proposed area of research.

Mango (2018) categorizes leadership theories and identifies certain traits, characteristics, and skills expected of a good leader. While mentioning the ones identified by Mango and several other authors (King, 1990), citing an all-inclusive comprehensive list has been attempted here. A good leader is expected to be possessing:

- (i) certain traits like intelligence, high cognition level, vision or farsightedness, social support, will, character, self-confidence, charisma, influence (whereby influence can be sourced from various sources like power, knowledge, appearance, etc.), effectiveness, focus, empathy, self-motivation, reciprocity, decision-making, risk-taking, emotional intelligence (including self-actualization, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-determination), alertness, initiative, perseverance, knowledge regarding various aspects associated with tasks to be performed to achieve the said goal, being ambitious, extraversion, courageous, and physical energy, among others.
- (ii) certain skills like communication skills, negotiation skills, adaptability, time-management, team-building, articulation, monitoring skills, performance evaluation skills, skills necessary to deal with different types of people, effective delegation and goal-setting, and
- (iii) should behave in the most suitable manner like democratic, autocratic, participative, or a combination of these, with different types of people with whom a leader deals with simultaneously depending upon the situational requirement

However, authors like Badshah (2012) cite that the concept of leadership is 'more observed but less understood'. Uslu (2019) has provided a critical appreciation to most of these and other theories of leadership, suggesting that these theories either are repetitive, presenting same aspects in newer forms or are expected to be applicable everywhere as in the place of origin, which need not necessarily be true. Badshah (2012), while describing the historical evolution of the leadership theories, is skeptical of its relevance and applicability in the changed contemporary scenarios.

III. WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Traditionally literature in research has dwelt less than 10 percent on topics related to women leadership (Lyness and Grotto, 2018). Although, in contemporary times, several researchers have focused on leadership by women, related perceptions, and outcomes of processes with women in leadership (Cheung and Halpern, 2010; De, 2005; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Lyness, and Grotto, 2018; Ridgeway, 2001; Tamerius, Duerst-Lahti and Kelly, 2010).

Women in leadership face constrained expectations, inhospitable conditions, less support and respect while performing tasks, bias in assigning tasks focused on career development, bias in nomination for sponsored career development training, bias in opportunities for job diversification for strategic skills enhancement, in favor of males (Lyness, and Grotto, 2018; Ridgeway, 2001). This ultimately leads to women falling prey in terms of remaining lesser eligible for senior positions in the organizations. When women succumb to gender stereotypes, it may also result in self-doubts about their own capabilities as a leader, thereby self-constraining the leadership opportunities. Lyness and Grotto (2018) cite researches that conclude that women internalize self-blaming more when they are made to believe that performance evaluation is meritorious, but it is actually under the influence of ambiguous gender inequality in favor of males. Women undervalue and men overvalue their own performances. In contrast, Lyness and Grotto (2018) also identify certain facilitators for women leadership like national culture moving in favor of gender equality, particularly in the work-force; efficient and successful performance of women leaders serving as evidence; top-down support from top-management in favor of females climbing the hierarchy at all levels of management – elite to middle level of management; strategic recruitment drive in favor of greater recruitment for females; women with self-efficacy and high self-esteem; positive professional experiences of males with female leaders in the past, explicit support of top management to tackle identified restrictive barriers to women empowerment; among others.

Women leadership traits are also expected to be largely peculiar in favor of democratic style and interpersonally oriented style, in contrast to the autocratic and task-oriented style of men (Eagly and Johnson, 1990; De, 2005). De (2005) asserted that differences in leadership styles between men and women are attributed more to the masculinists behaviour in an organization as compared to the biological or social practices. Lyness and Grotto (2018) indicate that the socio-cultural stereotype representing men as breadwinners and women as caretakers, influence the differentiating stereotypes associated with male and female leadership. They also highlighted several researches that relate leadership associated responsibilities more with stereotypical masculine male characteristics than with feminine female characteristics, making male more eligible for leadership positions.

It is also observed that gender affects the performance evaluation differently for men and women, with criteria decided for women to be stricter than those for men, especially when the standards set are subjective in nature (Ridgeway, 2001; Lyness and Grotto, 2018). Although, Tamerius, Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (2010) highlight that the methodologies to assess the performance are more likely to be biased in favor of males and against females, with most of the tools to assess performance being created by males and a disregard to attributes of the process that are important and might involve women more, particularly in legislative decision-making processes. As illustrated in Lyness and Grotto (2018), if the organization appreciated working for longer hours as an assessment criterion, it worked in favor of males having non-working wives to support them with family responsibilities. However, it was difficult for women to move up in the hierarchy with such performance criteria, whereby they are societally invariably burdened with care-taking responsibilities, especially as mothers unlike their male counterparts who are in their early parenthood responsibilities. Women were observed to be taking 90 percent times leaves for care-taking as a mother. Even if the women employees attempted to meet the expectations of time demanded, they were more likely to be stigmatized for attempting to meet personal responsibilities. It was also noted that international organizations showed a favoritism for males while recruiting due to their perception that women may not be willing to move internationally for a task as an expatriate. Although notably, Lyness and Grotto (2018) observed that women had better prospects of career advancement in a male-dominated industry with a male senior mentor who would provide legitimacy for women progression, in contrast to such prospects in male gender balanced industry. They also suggested that women-led institutions were positively perceived by stakeholders like investors (based on cultural belief that women wisely choose household purchases), co-workers (on the grounds of efficiency), and consumers (citizens favoring gender egalitarianism) in contemporary egalitarian societies. Thus, researchers have observed that organizations with elite women leaders perform successfully (Lyness and Grotto, 2018).

Researchers also observe that women who defy and challenge the status quo expected behavior of compliance by being assertive are penalized (Ridgeway, 2001). Women are societally perceived as low in status. When these gender norms are defied by assertive women leaders, it is seen by the society as violation of expected status and thus trigger backlash. Even if women show agentic leadership traits, stereotypically expected of males, women are preferred less during hiring as compared to men with similar traits, even-though the demand for the job would require agentic leadership traits. Women were also more likely to be penalized during performance evaluation, due to the perceptions of performance evaluators that women are culturally expected to share greater burden of family care taking than men. Women are perceived to be performing lesser effectively than men and are thus likely to be rated negatively more often (Lyness and Grotto, 2018). Such negative ratings cumulate over a period of time serving as a greater disadvantage for career progression for women.

Researchers also suggest solutions based on their finding to the problems they identified in their research (Lyness, and Grotto, 2018). Cheung and Halpern (2010) suggest that initially self-encouragement and self-efficacy combined with family support led a woman to achieve greater leadership positions. Once the woman leader reaches a position where she can influence policies, she introduces more women friendly policies, thereby encouraging more women leaders by cushioning against negative stereotypes against women leaders. Women in senior leadership positions also tend to become role models for women in lower cadres (Cheung and Halpern, 2010). Lyness and Grotto (2018) cite some researchers who suggest that women may adopt participatory leadership styles which may be in conformity with gender-stereotyped socio-cultural characterization of women to avoid backlash. It is contrasted with greater number of researchers

suggesting that women should adopt agentic leadership as required by the roles they need to perform as a leader giving them legitimate power. Avoiding agentic leadership traits may be looked down upon as incompetency and might result in losing an opportunity to enhance the status of women as leaders. Consequently, it is suggested that finding a right balance between warmth and competence may be the key strategy that a woman leader may adopt (Lyness and Grotto, 2018). Besides, women need to enhance their self-confidence, especially while doing self-analysis of her own performance rather than worrying about how people will perceive her leadership traits. It has also been noted that women who survive elite leadership positions for long, tend to be more qualified and prove to be effective than their male counterparts. Women may facilitate other women to climb the hierarchy ladder, once achieving elite leadership position (Lyness and Grotto, 2018). These processes may eventually cumulate to reach a mass that is enough to influence the opinions of males in favor of females, thereby enhancing the status of women in the society too. Kanter (1977) propounded a tokenism theory suggesting that once females compose more than 15 percent of the work place representation, the token number, they are less likely to face problems associated with gender inequalities. However, subsequent studies do not necessarily ratify the said gender-neutral theory by Kanter and instead present the prevalence of gender issues as a much more deep-rooted concern demanding greater interventions than merely increasing a tokenized number of women (Zimmer, 1988; Stichman, Hassell and Archbold, 2010).

A. Women in leadership roles in public sector

Van Wart (2013) focuses on how leadership theories can be viewed from the requirements of administrators in a public sector, as differently from corporate leaders or political leaders. He suggests that while the definitions, characteristics and outcomes of effective leadership can be very comprehensive in the available literature, practitioners may find it overwhelming and difficult to comprehend and implement the concepts for achieving desirable outcomes. Public sector leaders may be required to deal with very different situations like natural or man-made crisis occasionally and influencing people to achieve common goals quite frequently. Besides, a private sector works with a prime objective of profit-making, whereas public sector services are often oriented towards social activities. There are legal pressures to perform and remain accountable in public sector, whereas in private sector it is obligatory but often not legal. Transparency in all actions is regulated and most of this knowledge is in public domain, in contrast to that in private sector. Van Wart highlights the challenges faced by public sector leaders that are unique to public sector like fiscal financial pressures, competition in providing services by market forces, skepticism of employees, varying and competing demands of beneficiaries to be fulfilled optimally and simultaneously, lack of trust by the citizens, among others. Fernandez, Cho and Perry (2010) mention that in the public sector there are several factors that affect the success and effectiveness of leadership besides the effectiveness of the leader, like constrained resources available to introduce organizational change or implementation of strategies to achieve expected goals. Trottier, Van Wart, and Wang (2008) observed that in public sector, while transactional theory-based leadership gained more popularity in ratings, followers insisted on transformational leadership. Although Van Wart suggests occasions where a leader must adapt himself to the situation and accommodate transformational leadership too. Van Wart (2013) suggests the importance of networking, internet induced tech-savvy communication skills, adaptability for different leadership styles in different situations as pivotal to success in leadership in public sectors. Fernandez, Cho and Perry (2010) suggest that an integrated leadership approach (integrating, task, relation, change, diversity and integrity – oriented leadership) had positive effect on the performance of several US federal sub-agencies. Murphy et. al. (2017) suggests that public sector requires adaptive leadership to deal with complex environment that mostly exists in public sectors. They suggest through six complex case studies that leadership in public sector projects requires duality (instead of dualism) with twin functions of administration and adaptation both acting as contradictory and complementary. To cite Murphy et. al. (2017) “Enabling leadership is required to *both* maintain a sense of stability in order to coordinate, structure, and control organizational activity (administrative) and generate the conditions for innovation, change, and transformation”. Franken, Plimmer, and Malinen (2019) suggest that while employee resilience to challenges being faced is pivotal to organizational success, public sector faces several challenges while satisfying the needs of different stakeholders. Paradoxical leadership is suggested as a solution for assuring employee resilience by balancing competing structural and relational demands.

Tamerius, Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (2010) observed that while significantly different observations could not be made when women voted for any bill in favor of women welfare, but whenever women did hold public offices, women welfare was efficiently sought. Unlike traditional methods of assessing women legislators’ involvement in feminist bills, it was observed that in activities that needed more involvement of policy makers, women played a significant role compare to men, leading to women welfare legislations. Since the government organizations are considered to be male dominated, such institutes are rated higher for males in leadership positions than female leaders (Lyness and Grotto, 2018).

Several international institutions have recognized the importance of good governance in public sector. IFAC & CIPFA (2014) have provided a comprehensive comparison of the indicators of good governance identified in the public sector. OECD (2023) also suggest various normative approaches to assess good governance in public sector. UN has identified a set of eight principles of good governance: 1. Rule of Law, 2. Transparency, 3. Participation, 4. Responsiveness, 5. Consensus Oriented, 6. Equity and Inclusiveness, 7. Effectiveness and Efficiency, and 8. Accountability (UNESCAP, n.d.). These have been further simplified for a pragmatic use in public sector by Mangham (2022). *Rule of law* should have clearly defined code of governance liable to its stakeholders (in public sector the taxpayers) and its strict compliance should be adhered to. Clearly and appropriately assembled, third party audited information once a year, and its easily accessible sharing with the public assures *transparency*. Open communication and continuous engagement with the stakeholders and engaging work culture for employees are the essentials to assure *participation*. Risk assessment, preparedness towards different types of risk associated scenarios and still be prepared to handle unprecedented risk scenarios that a public sector may encounter (like the pandemic), is explained as *risk-responsiveness*. Since public sector deals with and is accountable to various stakeholders and

in diverse scenarios, frequently organizing opportunities to listen to them and address their concerns within the purview of assigned responsibilities and liberties to a public sector so as to reach an optimum consensus is referred to as being *consensus oriented*. Huge diversity in the team, and accessibility for employees and larger community members induce *equity and inclusiveness*, which in turn is more likely to benefit the public sector to fulfill the expectations of the stakeholders. *Effectiveness and efficiency* call for public sector to be cost-effective and sustainable in their operations, through well-qualified and capable workforce collectively aspiring to achieve effectiveness and efficiency. *Accountability* towards various governing stakeholders, both internal and external requires diligent transparent audits, besides protecting confidential data although externally audited to assure transparency (Mangham, 2022). Since public sector is not necessarily an organization with the objective of profit making, but is rather service oriented, these governance principles and their implementation imbibe in a public sector, due professionalism in the operations of a public sector organization.

B. Political Empowerment of Women

Political empowerment of women is mentioned as one of the four important equally weighted key indicators identified by World Economic Forum report (2022). Political empowerment is considered pivotal to resolving issues associated with women. A strong association identified between women’s political empowerment and economic empowerment, the two factors where the gender gap is most persistent, can collectively and cumulatively resolve these dual challenges of women empowerment. In contrast, if women are less politically empowered, they may not be able to empower other female leaders. Government mandated women quotas and cultural factors in favor of women leadership had a positive influence on a greater number of women in leadership positions (Lyness and Grotto, 2018). World Economic Forum’s (WEF) Global Gender Gap (GGG) Reports have been published for last 16 years since 2006. It measures gender gap across four criteria namely, (i) Economic Participation and Opportunity, (ii) Educational Attainment, (iii) Health and Survival, and (iv) Political Empowerment. Interestingly, it is startling to note that while political empowerment remains globally the worst performing criterion, in India it is the best performing criterion. While India ranks overall 135th (with a score of 0.629 out of 1 representing perfect gender equity) out of 146 countries ranked by WEF, India’s rank in terms of political empowerment is 48th (although score is very low at 0.267 out of 1). While Iceland topped the list in terms of political empowerment with a score of 0.874, it was the lowest score amongst all four criterion’s top ranked countries listed by WEF. India ranked higher than some countries like Australia, Singapore and China in terms of political empowerment.

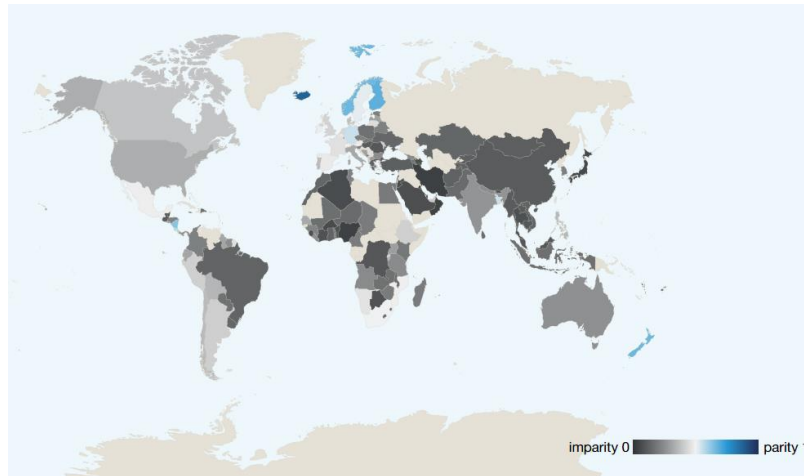
Considering that India, China and US are the three most populous countries in the world, it may be fair to compare the performance of the three countries on various attributes of political empowerment estimated for the three countries in WEF report. Following table compares indicators of political empowerment for India, China and US.

Table 1. Comparison of indicators of political empowerment of India with China and US

Criteria	India	China	US
Total Population	1.38 bln	1.41 bln	0.331 bln
GDP per capita	\$6,170	\$16,320	\$60,290
Population Sex ratio	0.92	0.95	1.02
Political Empowerment rank	48	120	38
Political empowerment score	0.267	0.113	0.332
Percentage of women in Parliament (Wgt 0.31)	14.9	24.9	27.9
Rank (Women in Parliament)	118	80	61
Score (Women in Parliament)	0.175	0.332	0.387
Percentage of women in Ministerial Position (Wgt 0.247)	9.09	3.23	46.15
Rank (Women in Ministerial position)	126	139	14
Score (Women in Ministerial Position)	0.1	0.033	0.857
No. of years with female head of the state in last 50 years (Wgt 0.443)	14.87 yrs	0.18 years	0 years
Rank in Female head of the state	8	71	78
Score in Female head of the state	0.423	0.004	0
Year in which women received right to vote	1947	1947	1965
Number of times female headed the state	2	0	0
Percentage of total seats held by women in upper house	12.2	n.a.	24

Source: Extracted by authors from World Economic Forum (2022)

Figure 1: Global Gender Gap in terms of Political Empowerment



Source: World Economic Forum, 2022

Gender Gap in terms of political empowerment was measured using three indicators (i) Percentage of women in Parliament (with a weightage of 0.31) (ii) Percentage of women in ministerial position (with a weightage of 0.247) and (iii) Number of years during the last 50 years when a female was the head of the state – either as a Prime Minister or a President (with a weightage of 0.443). While as can be seen from table 1 and Figure 1, India performed poorly as compared to China and US in terms of the first two sub-criteria, the weightage of the third sub-criteria being the highest and due to zero or negligible score in the third sub-criteria for China and US, the overall rank of India for Political empowerment was highest amongst the three most populous countries of the world. While the definition of the ‘female head of the state’ includes prime-ministers and presidents’ both, the number for India being two is surprising. Smt. Indira Gandhi served as the prime-minister of India for four terms (<https://inc.in/congress-sandesh/tribute/indira-gandhi-s-four-tenures-as-pm>). While if the number of presidents is to be included then the count would add two more women who served as President of India during the said tenure, namely Smt. Pratibha Patil and Smt. Droupadi Murmu. If four terms of Smt Indira Gandhi as prime-minster and two terms of women presidents are added, then by the definition of WEF, it sums up to 6 instead of 2 as suggested in WEF (2022). In contrast, United States has not had in its entire history, even a single woman President. In fact, since its independence on July 4, 1776, it took several years until 1920, and as suggested in WEF 1965 (for Black men and women) (<https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/the-fight-for-womens-suffrage>, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/when-women-got-right-to-vote-united-states>) for United States to confer on all of the women citizens, a right to vote as per WEF, 2022. While India cannot be forever boastful of the past legacy of having a woman Prime minister, but should instead put sincere and committed efforts to increase women’s seats in parliament and should charge more women with ministerial positions. Since these two are at the core of policy decision making, involvement of women in such leadership roles can enhance the prospects of more effectively resolving women’s issues.

Also, it is worth noticing from the current research perspective, that India’s is a federal structured government, and local government like the Panchayats do have a 33 percent reservation for women. Ignoring such local nuances of the governance, one might fall prey to believe that gender gap in political empowerment is greater. In India, not only Parliament seats, but seats in Legislative assemblies, local governments like municipalities, municipal corporations and Panchayats can assure a trickle down of political empowerment to women in a more localized framework.

According to the latest available information in 2019 Lok Sabha (synonymous to Lower-house of the Parliament) elections, 14.4 percent of women were elected out of the total seats available (78 out of 543). In Rajya Sabha (synonymous to the Upper-house of the Parliament) in 2021, the number of women members either elected or nominated included 12.24 (29 in number). In the state legislative assemblies as on 31/12/2021, states with very low women representation include Mizoram (0) Nagaland (0), Jammu and Kashmir (2.3), Karnataka (3.14) and Manipur (3.33), and states with high women representations include Chhattisgarh (14.44), West Bengal (13.7), Jharkhand (12.35), and Rajasthan (12) (PIB, 2022). In Panchayats, the local rural governments at village level, according to Clause (3) of Article 243D of the Constitution, one third of the seats are to be reserved for women. However, it was cited that about 20 states, including Gujarat reserved 50 percent of the seats for women in Panchayat elections. State Panchayati Raj Acts are governed as a State (provincial) subject under the Seventh Schedule of Constitution of India (PIB, 2020).

IV. WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS

A. Constitutional provision for women reservation in Panchayat elections

Since almost two decades in April 1993, the 73rd amendment of the Constitution of India executed 33 percent reservation in the local village level governance in Panchayat elections. This was not only a revolution of decentralization of power suited to satiate more localized needs, but also the beginning of a new era of ensuring political participation by women. It being the States’ prerogative, 21 states further extended the reservation for women up to 50 percent through State Panchyati Raj Acts, passing through state legislative assemblies (The citizens bureau, 2022; Yadav, 2022). It was also believed to pave way for women’s reservation in state assemblies and parliament, although that could yet not be materialized. In certain states it has been noted that women cannot contest for panchayat elections beyond 50 percent seats reserved for them by the state and is being subjected to litigations in the courts (The Citizens Bureau,

2022). Under this act, the Panchayat is given certain amount per villager which is used for largely predefined or identified developmental purposes at the village level. It leaves very less freedom with the Sarpanch to be able to spend the money as per the localized requirement. Although, some states like Kerala, offer much bigger funds to be accessed by panchayats to spend as per the localized requirement. Sarpanches are mobilized into block level meetings, whereby representatives of various allotted group of panchayats assemble for allocation of tasks, finances, feedback and understanding of various processes (PIB 2020). Several NGO supported initiatives have also spearheaded this movement of educating women about their rights in the Panchayat elections (Outlook, 2022). Lawrence and Chakravarty (2017) cite researchers who mention reservations as a crucial policy intervention for political empowerment of women in India.

B. Opportunities in the introduction of the reservation policy

Several fears were contemplated while launching the said provision like women Sarpanches (head of the Panchayat) would be a mere 'rubber stamp', 'dummies' or 'puppet' in the hands of their husband. They presumed that the husbands / family members would operate Panchayat as the proxies for their wives. Hurdles to women sarpanches included questionable devotion of time and effort by women amidst their household responsibilities, ignorance of processes or illiteracy amongst women (Down to earth, n.d.). Sharma (2016) also cites several researches depicting the low status of women in the patriarchal society, and worsening scenarios for women belonging to low social hierarchy or poor economic conditions. While in those cases where women sarpanch were successful, support has come from their villagers and families, primarily husband to motivate their wives to shoulder greater responsibilities. Husbands with prior experience are also guiding sarpanch wives to achieve greater heights. Educated women entering the arena is increasing the respect and faith of women leadership further (The citizen bureau, 2022).

Sharma (2016) vividly explores that elderly women were more socially empowered to be able to gain political empowerment and were also socially more mobile in public spaces to comfortably be a part of panchayat meetings and make decisions. Thus, elderly women were better placed in a societal setup to undertake the role performances of woman sarpanch legitimized mostly at household level too (Sharma, 2016).

C. Contribution of Women Sarpanches in Rural Development

It has resulted in improvement of efforts to enhance education through support to anganwadis, schools, primary health centers, clearing of pensions and war veterans through panchayats, implementation of family sensitive needs, resolve issues related to water and sanitation, creation of renewable source of fuel and energy like creating bio-gas plants, and creating local public utilities like roads, more recently with implementation of COVID protocols, among others (Down to earth, n.d.; The citizen bureau, 2022; Rao, 2022; Priebe, 2017, Makwana, 2009). Sathe et al (2013) found that in Maharashtra state of India, in the villages with women sarpanch the public services delivery was better as compared to the villages with male sarpanches. It was observed that women were more available to listen to the local concerns unlike men, attended block level meetings without husbands (which may be seen as a revolution considering the patriarchal stereotypes that can be more prevalent in rural areas), more honesty and transparency in the processes inducing more efficient and corruption-free utilization of allocated funds, working with more efficiency while using funds optimally, etc. (Down to earth, 2022, The citizen bureau, 2022). As against male leaders, when women take charge as leaders in rural areas by becoming Sarpanch in Panchayats, it has drastic social impact too. They successfully break social barriers while assuring their legitimate equal rights, become bold and extrovert, overcome social stigma, and fight against social evils that target women like dowry, removal of 'purdah' (whereby a woman covers her head and face when in public/in presence of males of the extended family or society) system, water-fetching efforts, anti-liquor consumption social movements, fighting drug addiction and product abuse among youth of village at times supported by mafias, fight against corruption even at micro-level, sarpanch woman leader supporting women to become ward members, economically empowering women by establishing restaurant run by women serving cuisines made from locally available ingredients (Down to earth, n.d.; The citizen bureau, 2022, Rao, 2022; Sharma, 2016, Makwana, 2009). In a study in the state of Maharashtra it was observed that in the villages with women sarpanch the women of the villages participated more democratically as compared to the democratic participation by women in villages with male sarpanch (Sathe et al, 2013). Priebe (2017) categorically observed that villages in Maharashtra with sarpanch from lower socio-economic strata were more successful in terms of delivering outcomes through better participation from women in the village as compare to villages with women sarpanch belonging to economically better off families. Hence, the research concludes that the reservations for women in panchayat elections have contributed greatly to the political empowerment of women specially to those belonging to the disadvantaged groups by giving them effective voice and opportunities. In the process of functioning as a sarpanch in a village, they have shown boldness, extrovert nature on becoming leader, but to support the social causes. Hence it appears to be as suggested by a Lyness and Grotto (2018), a combination of 'right balance between warmth and competence'.

D. Challenges faced by Women Sarpanches

While all of this success does not come without costs, women sarpanch have to bear the brunt too, in the form of resignation if suggested orders were not implemented by the supporting political party, disturbance in the usual processes of work undertaken or indulging in violence against the family by the socially upper-caste (if the women sarpanch belonged to a socially deprived group), corruption and red-tapism, bureaucratic lengthy paper-work, etc. The patriarchy is so much imbibed that a term '*Sarpanch Pati/Pradhan Pati*' (husband of Sarpanch) is coined even during elections whereby even during the campaigns for the seat reserved for women, it's her husband for whom the campaign is done in lieu of the women candidate who would actually fight the election (Down to earth, n.d.; The citizen bureau, 2022, Yadav, 2022; Rao, 2022; Sharma, 2016). In other cases, it was cited that husbands of elected women took oath while

wives were compelled to be mute spectators, while it is inviting actions against stakeholders who are responsible to assure the process is undertaken as per the law (The Citizen Bureau, 2022; Yadav, 2022). Sharma (2016) observes that while males of the family helped her in panchayat related technical and other tasks, she was either all by herself or helped by younger female family members with household chores but never by a male family member. Accordingly, the household chores were clearly demarcated as the responsibility of women and its only after the fulfilment of that role that she was available for performing the tasks of panchayat. This observation thus defined the gendered distribution with household chores as not primarily but solely the responsibility of women even if she takes additional responsibility as sarpanch. But for men the gendered distribution may help women sarpanch in her role with the responsibilities of sarpanch but not with the household chores (Sharma, 2016). The reservations for women in panchayat elections were expected to be a ladder for upward participation of women candidates in legislative assembly and parliamentary elections. Although according to a study, more than 85 percent of women explained that they participated in panchayat elections only because it was a reserved seat. They were however, restricted to progress further in state elections or Lok Sabha elections, either since they were less aspirational or they were restricted by the families or other males (Jadhav, 2020). Kumari, Sharma and Pandey (2017) attempted to identify economic, technical, administrative and personal/social/psychological constraints faced by 112 women sarpanch in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh. Amongst economic conditions bribery was considered to be the biggest constraint, non-timely disbursement of rural development program related information as the biggest technical constraint, delay in sanctions of permission to undertake programs and groupism in gram-sabha as big administrative constraints and low level of education was identified as the biggest personal constraint. Bhabhor, Kunchala and Patel (2013) attempted to assess the knowledge of tribal women sarpanch in Dahod district of Gujarat. They found that most of the women sarpanch possessed medium level of knowledge related to various attributes of economic, administrative and other functions of a panchayat system. Their knowledge was positively affected by their political contacts and mass-media exposure. Patel and Naik (2019) too found that women sarpanch possessed medium knowledge (61 percent), low knowledge (27 percent) and high level of knowledge (16 percent) regarding fundamental functions of constitutional bodies in Navsari district of Gujarat. The same research found that women sarpanch possessed medium knowledge (50 percent), low knowledge (34 percent) and high level of knowledge (16 percent) regarding sponsored program under Panchayati raj system.

E. Various avenues of enhancing efficient performance of Women Sarpanches

If women sarpanch is facilitated by a proper education, necessary training to enhance skills for communication, negotiation, government regulations and processes, self-confidence and self-efficacy, leadership and team building skills, professionalism, among others, she is much more likely to succeed instead of being deprived of her opportunity to prove her leadership skills. Kumari and Sharma (2020) identified the need for training among women tribal and non-tribal sarpanch from 112 panchayats from Bilaspur district in Chhattisgarh. They concluded that both tribal and nontribal women emphasized on the need to be trained for village development activities and economic management in panchayat as 'most needed' and training for agriculture, administration, horticulture, dairy, and extension activities as 'needed'. In terms of actual participation, they participated maximum in the training for agriculture and least in leadership development and democratic administration activities-based trainings (Kumari and Sharma, 2020). In order to perform their assigned roles better, the three most important suggestions given by the women sarpanch in a survey included providing proper administrative power to sarpanch, transparency at higher levels of organizations and unity among panchayat members (Kumari, Sharma and Pandey, 2017).

V. CONCLUSION

While several leadership theories have been historically documented, case for women leaders is peculiar. Women functioning as a leader in a patriarchal society faces several socio-political challenges unlike male leaders. Public sector operates differently than a private sector. Objective of a public sector is more service oriented and has financing provisions tied to certain causes with accountability to those specific stakeholders. While serving as a leader is difficult for women in any society, doing so in a public sector and that too in a rural area, with its own characteristics of social restrictions poses varied challenges. In such a scenario, supportive males serve as motivation and non-supportive males as a hindrance to the efficient functioning of women sarpanches. If provided necessary training to understand the processes and enhance their skills clubbed with motivational support from all stakeholders that can influence the functioning of the sarpanches, women are more likely to outperform in efficient, welfare development activities focused on rural development. Hence the existing research paper is an elaborate, and comprehensive review of existing literature on leadership, women in leadership, in public sector and particularly in Panchayati raj institutions. Consequently, this research paper will facilitate further research based on primary data collection to study the leadership traits of women sarpanches in Panchayati raj institutions.

APPENDIX

Image 1: Sarpanch-pati- Husbands in Madhya Pradesh taking oath on behalf of their elected wives



Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/political-pulse/sarpanch-pati-madhya-pradesh-women-representatives-oath-reservation-8084346/>

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