



Constraints analysis of women leaders

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

During the first 50 years of post-independence, the question of bringing women in the forefront to politics, through opportunities and capabilities was being considered time and again. Therefore, in depth studies by various social and economic scholars brought to the forefront that women's participation in political decision making is important. Only towards the end of the 20th century, our planning strategies started talking about women leadership and their empowerment. Further, in terms of government policies and programmes that we have shifted the focus from the concept of women development to women participation in the social and political sphere consequently towards women empowerment. Women empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition at par with men to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity (Palanithurai 2001). It is a process of redistribution of resources in the society in such a way that women get equal access and control over resources (Subha and Bhargava 2000). The political empowerment of women and women leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is crucial not

only for the development of women themselves, but also for the availability of their creative potential that is socially important and without which, the country cannot hope for any sustainable development. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has mandated not less than one-third reservation for women. Reservations have been provided for women not only at the level of members, but not less than 1/3 of the chairpersons are to be women. Besides, all provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act seeks to empower PRIs directly or indirectly serve to promote empowerment and women leadership in PRIs. But mere empowerment does not bring an understanding of the system of local government. It must be utilized to redesign the very substance of the decentralized system and process (Kaushik 1993, Mishra 1997, Kaur 2000). The discourses, procedures, structures and functions of governance are, in general, heavily skewed in favour of men. Women and men do not have equal social, economic and legal rights. Women still lack independent rights to own land, manage property, conduct business or even travel without their husband's consent. Women continue to have poor command over a range of productive resources including education, land, information and financial resources. Limited access to resources and weaker capabilities constrain women's power to influence resource allocation and investment decisions at home, in their community and at national level (World Bank 2001). PRI in India offers opportunity to women to change the face of leadership at the grass-root level, so that they become empower to take decisions for not only their own welfare but also for the welfare of society as a whole. In spite of these changes in social structure with new face of leadership, women as empowered leaders are hard to be accepted by their male counterparts. Social inhibitions, limited exposure, low literacy rate are some of the factors which debar them to emerge as successful leaders.

The present study on constraints analysis of women leaders at the grass-root was undertaken to study the socio-personal and economic characteristics of women leaders and delineate the constraints faced by women leaders in PRIs.

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The study was carried out during 2009-2010 and 2010-11 in Udham Singh Nagar, Dehradun and Tehri Garhwal districts of Uttarakhand state which has thirteen districts and mainly divided into two divisions, i.e. Kumaun and Garhwal. The state has varied topography and is geographically divided into high hills, medium hills and plains. Social composition of villages in Tarai region is markedly different from the hill region of Uttarakhand. As population in Udham Singh Nagar is dominated by other migrated communities like Punjabis and Bengalis. So, district Udham Singh Nagar was purposively selected to find out the socio-cultural differences which might have influenced the participation and rights in PRI system. From Garhwal region, two districts, namely Dehradun and Tehri, were selected as they represented medium hills and high hills of Uttarakhand. Another reason for its selection was that Dehradun is more developed in terms of infrastructure and other resources, whereas in Tehri district most of the villages are remote with poor infrastructure facilities and less resources. Selection of these three districts had given a broader picture of role of women leaders under PRIs. After the districts selection, three blocks from each district were selected by chit method of simple random sampling. Thus from district Udham Singh Nagar, Rudrapur, Sitarganj and Bajpur blocks; from district Dehradun, Vikasnagar, Doiwala and Sahaspur blocks; and from district Tehri Garhwal, Jaunpur, Chamba and Narendranagar blocks were selected for the present investigation. Thereafter, lists of all the Elected Women Representatives especially Pradhans' from the selected blocks of all these districts were procured from districts headquarters. Total number of women leaders in all the selected three districts was 325. The census method was used to select the respondents from the selected blocks. From each district investigator tried to contact all the women leaders. However, due to some reasons the total number of women leaders contacted from the selected blocks were 200. Some of the respondents could not be contacted as they were not available at the time of interview. Data were collected with the help of pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule. Observation and focused group discussion method were also used to support the quantitative data.

Socio-personal and economic characteristics of women leaders

The results depicted that majority of the respondents found in the age group of 31 to 46 years had primary education (52%) and belonged to general caste (45%). Joint families (73%) were observed maximum with large family size (66%) and 62.5% had *pucca* house. The study also revealed that all the respondents, i.e. 100% were housewives and belonged to agricultural background. Majority of the respondents, i.e. 87.5%, possessed land less than one hectare and belonged to marginal category. The highest number of women respondents 63% were found in the annual income of medium income category (₹ 25 589 to 43 641). Most of the respondents

97.5% were elected first time, whereas very few of them got elected twice or thrice under the PRIs. The extension agency contact (57.5%), mass media exposure (76%), information seeking behaviour (64%) and information sharing behaviour (63%) were observed to be of medium level. Sixty three per cent respondents had medium level of socio-economic status.

Constraints faced by women leaders in PRIs

Several constraints had been encountered by the women leaders while taking up their responsibility as leaders. For the present study, the constraints have been classified as social, economic, political, administrative and psychological. In order to study various types of constraints, items were collected under each category and respondents were asked to give their response on a five point continuum.

Social constraints, viz. social taboos, superstitions, unhealthy traditions and customs which was ranked first followed by inhibition in speaking in front of elders second, lack of support from male members and lack of support from female members had ranked third, 'Selfish motives of panchayat members' ranked fourth, 'Lack of available time' had ranked fifth, 'Interference by family members and others' got sixth rank, 'Dependency on husband or male members for decision makings' was ranked seventh and 'Abusive or harsh language' used by fellow member was ranked eighth (Table 1). The results of the study reflected that women leaders still viewed social taboos, superstitions, unhealthy traditions and customs with their inhibition of speaking before elders, lack of support from male and female members as the major constraint. Therefore, women leaders found it difficult to break the traditional values and had to work in closed society. Our findings support the findings of Purushothaman *et al.* (2000), Nambiar (2001) and Kaul and Sahni (2009) who reported that women still faced physical violence and abuse from their male counterparts in the *Panchayats* and they were hesitant to attend such meetings in the presence of large number of elder members.

Table 1 Ranking of items under social constraints

N = 200		
Social constraints	Mean score values	Rank
Social taboos, superstitions, unhealthy traditions and customs	4.06	(i)
Lack of support from male members	3.72	(iii)
Lack of support from female members	3.72	(iii)
Inhibition in speaking in front of elders	3.82	(ii)
Abusive or harsh language	3.44	(viii)
Interference by family members and others	3.60	(vi)
Selfish motives of panchayat members	3.65	(iv)
Dependency on husband or male members for decision makings	3.52	(vii)
Lack of available time	3.62	(v)

Table 2 Ranking of items under economic constraints

N = 200		
Economic constraints	Mean score values	Rank
Lack of knowledge on account keeping	3.49	(iv)
Improper utilization of available funds	3.48	(v)
Lack of awareness about economic institutional support	3.67	(ii)
Poor management of funds	3.72	(i)
Decision about money matters is taken by male members alone	3.50	(iii)

Economic constraints (Table 2), viz, Poor management of funds was ranked first followed by lack of awareness about economic institutional support ranked second, decision about money matters was taken by male members alone' was ranked third, lack of knowledge on account keeping was ranked fourth and improper utilization of available funds was ranked fifth. The most significant constraints were poor management of funds and lack of awareness about economic institutional support. Other constraints like Decision about money matters is taken by male members only and poor knowledge on account keeping were more or less having same values. The results therefore showed that women leaders did not have any exposure on management of economic resources. The findings are in line with the findings of Anandhi (2002) and Niranjana (2002) who found women elected representatives with no economic entitlements and were often under the control of those who owned and controlled resources.

Political constraints, viz. Gender disparity in power relation was perceived highest followed by lack of local

Table 3 Ranking of items under political constraints

N = 200		
Political constraints	Mean score values	Rank
Lack of local political support	3.79	(ii)
Gender disparity in power relation	3.81	(i)
Harassment and exploitation of women by officials	3.49	(viii)
Disagreement in the female panchayat leaders by male members	3.59	(vi)
Feeling of inadequacy for taking leadership roles	3.68	(iii)
Poor guidance and lack of support from male members due to their vested interest	3.67	(iv)
Women leaders are often criticize by their male counterpart	3.57	(vii)
The political provisions in gender leadership are either not implemented or encroached by men, if implemented	3.60	(v)

political support was ranked second, feeling of inadequacy for taking leadership roles was ranked third, poor guidance and lack of support from male members due to their vested interest was ranked fourth, the political provisions in gender leadership were either not implemented or encroached by men, if implemented' was ranked fifth, disagreement in the female panchayat leaders by male members' was ranked sixth, women leaders were often criticized by their male counterpart' was ranked seventh and harassment and exploitation of women by officials was ranked eighth as evident in Table 3. Based on the empirical fact it can be said that women leaders are still not accepted by their male counterparts and gender disparities existed in power relations and poor support from political parties. The fact could also be supported by the observation made by the researcher while conducting in depth interview with women leader who belonged to Tehri Garhwal as she experienced a lot of opposition from her male counterpart for being elected as leader. The findings support the findings of Kaul and Sahni (2009) who mentioned that women leaders revealed non cooperation that they primarily faced on the basis of gender disparity.

Administrative constraints, viz. Corruption in system perceived hindrance to their work was ranked first followed by conflict among members or factionalism was ranked second, poor acceptance of decisions by male members was ranked third, difficulties in discharging duty was ranked fourth and lack of ability to take decisions was ranked fifth (Table 4). The investigator during the Focus Group Discussion with selected women leaders and informal interactions found that there was misutilization of funds and sometimes they faced difficulties for the release of funds allotted for development of activities. Village factionalism and poor acceptance of decisions by male members showed gender biasedness as they never accepted women as efficient leaders. These findings are in line with findings of Mayaram (1999) and Nambiar (2001) who found that women leaders were hesitant to speak in meetings because of frustration of not being heard and there were many instances of illiterate women unwittingly colluding in corrupt activities when manipulated into signing cheques or doctored accounts statements.

Under psychological constraints the results showed

Table 4 Ranking of items under administrative constraints

N = 200		
Administrative constraints	Mean score values	Rank
Lack of ability to take decisions	3.64	(v)
Corruption in system	3.79	(i)
Conflict among members or factionalism	3.72	(ii)
Difficulties in discharging duty	3.67	(iv)
Poor acceptance of decisions by male members	3.71	(iii)

Table 5 Ranking of items under psychological constraints

Psychological constraints	N = 200	
	Mean score values	Rank
Low self esteem	3.54	(iii)
Lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation	3.53	(iv)
Lack of confidence for decision making	3.50	(v)
Recognition, contribution and appreciation are rarely given to women leaders for their contribution	3.55	(ii)
Patriarchal attitude of male members inhibit their participation	3.56	(i)

(Table 5) that there was no significant difference that existed among items. However, ranking has been done on the basis of numerical values. The rank order of psychological constraints viz., Patriarchal attitude of male members inhibit their participation was ranked first followed by recognition, contribution and appreciation were rarely given to women leaders for their contribution was ranked second, low self esteem was ranked third, lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was ranked fourth and lack of confidence for decision making was ranked fifth. The results revealed that women leaders suffered with patriarchal attitude of male members, lack of recognition, low self esteem, lack of self confidence and motivation. It might be due to the reason that women did not receive enough training to build up their self confidence and self esteem and they expressed the need for conducting such trainings exclusively for women. These findings support the findings of Kumtakar's (1999) who revealed that the majority of women leaders admitted that patriarchal attitude of the male members inhibit them to participate in meetings.

The suggestions or recommendations have been made in view of the expressed opinion of the respondents, observations of the investigator and the inferences drawn from the study. A strategy has been drawn based on the findings for capacity building of women leaders on various aspects. The findings regarding education of the women leaders showed that majority of the women leaders had primary education. As education provides empowerment, therefore, there is need to initiate adult education programme which can further strengthen their abilities. Investigator's observation revealed that young women leaders performed better and were more enthusiastic to bring about change in their *panchayats*. So, young women leaders should be encouraged to take leadership positions. Based on the findings of the study, it can be said that social taboos, superstitions, unhealthy tradition and customs inhibit women to participate in various developmental activities. Thus, there is need to change the traditional outlook of the society by imparting different educational and training programmes

for changing the face of leadership at the grass-root level. As women leaders of the study area mentioned that patriarchal attitude of the male members inhibit their participation in the *panchayat* activities. Therefore, especially male leaders should be exposed to the gender sensitive issues so that they can recognize the contribution of women in their respective leadership role. Training should also be organized for women leaders for recognizing their self worth by enhancing their decision making ability. Women leaders who were selected as a leader to work for the development of the society did not have any exposure of management of economic resources. So, there is need to organize capacity building programme for management of economic resources. A minimal number of respondents were found having interaction with other supporting departments and outside world. So, some mechanism needs to be developed to improve their interaction between the various outside agencies, government officials and non-government officials. Researches on women leadership at the grass-root level and women in politics have emphasized that contact with outside world made women more alert and active in the social and political process. It has been noticed that there were certain very active and enlightened women leaders at the grass-root level of *Panchayats*, who have been successfully doing the developmental work very effectively and have ensured overall development of their constituencies. Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicizing their leadership qualities and honoring them in public meetings. It will certainly encourage other women representatives. Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making. Hence, in order to increase the effective participation of the women leaders, they should be given more honorarium because in the study area most of the leaders complained that they were devoting more of their time in doing *panchayat* work and their honorarium was too less according to the work assigned to them.

In Indian Constitution, women has got equal rights at par with men and as a result more than one million women in India have been elected in the institutions of local self governance. These women represent diverse background as rich and poor, literate and illiterate, oppressed and backward etc. In Uttarakhand also rural women in PRIs although have been given 50 per cent reservation and they have taken their leadership roles but they yet have to go a long way by overcoming various social, economic and psychological barriers to bring about transformation and change in the rural society as visualized by them.

SUMMARY

A study was conducted during 2009-2010 and 2010-11 in three districts of Uttarakhand State, viz. Udham Singh Nagar, Dehradun and Tehri Garhwal on 200 women leaders especially Pradhans who were selected through census

method. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect the data from the respondents. The results of the study revealed that various constraints, viz. social taboos, superstitions, unhealthy traditions and customs, poor management of fund, gender disparity in power relation, corruption in system and patriarchal attitude of male members were the main ones encountered by the women leaders while carrying out their responsibility under social, economic, political, administrative and psychological categories.

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