



OUTSTANDING WOMEN PANCHAYAT LEADER OF INDIA: SUDHA MANIRATHINAM

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Abstract

Women in rural areas have proportionately least possessions such as personal wealth, assets, land, skills, education, information, social status, leadership traits and capabilities for mobilization, which determine the degree of decision making and power, and as a result, their dependence on men increases. The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985) was a landmark for the cause of women, wherein the concept of 'women and development' was introduced for the first time. Further the 73rd Constitutional Amendment providing 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj was now taken step to promote their role in decision making process at the grass root level.

The purpose of the research study was to understand the process of personal empowerment as experienced by individuals who were currently involved in the struggle to become empowered. This case study on empowerment looked at Mrs. Sudha Manirathinam President of the Nattarmangalam Village Panchayat in Kattumannarkoil block of Cuddalore District who has become a trail blazer in terms of village administration and women empowerment. She has earned twin distinctions: she has won the "Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar Award for 2012-2013" instituted by the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the "Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Award for 2013" instituted by the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi.

This Paper discusses the theoretical issues related to the measurement of women empowerment, and describes the findings the study in the villages. The achievement of women empowerment.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Leadership, Development, Economic Condition, Social Condition, Panchayati Raj, Literacy, Education, Political Participation of Women, Grama sabha.

Introduction

"Give me a good mother; I'll give a good nation."

~ The Conqueror Napoleon.

This bond between women and society is much closer and warmer in the Indian context.

"Women are the God's noblest creation with vast reserves of humanity in them."

~ Father of Nation Mahathma Gandhi.

Such being the eminent position of women in society, their empowerment is vital for a happy and contented humanitarian.

This is a case study of one of the best known women Leader, Achiever and Award Winner in Nattarmangalam Village Panchayat (The only Women Panchayat in India Administered also by a Women) in Kattumannarkoil block of Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu, India, analyzing the success factors which make her unique. The framework of the study follows the concept of Administration, entrepreneurship, common characteristics associated with Empowerment of Women, and the success factors such as Providing Personal Support, Encouraging Teamwork, Focusing on Goals, Helping People Work Effectively that make women Leadership unique. The results suggest that family support, dynamic personality and social ties, educational background impact highly positively and more significantly to the success of women leader.

Research Methodology

The methodology adopted for this case study involved personal interview method, using the information available in featured articles from the News Paper The Hindu, Indian Express, Economic Times, Deccan chronicle and video of Captain TV interview, Raj TV interview, Doordarshan TV interview, etc. The author has compiled the information above the sources for the case study.

Background

Mrs. Sudha Manirathinam - Dalit president and the only panchayat in India administered by all ward member women of The Nattarmangalam Village Panchayat in Kattumannarkoil block of Cuddalore District has become a trail blazer in terms of village panchayat administration and women empowerment.

Mrs. Sudha was born in 1972 at Kuchipalayam Village of Cuddalore District in Tamil Nadu. She is the daughter of Clerk in School. She has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History from Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram. After



obtaining M.A. and B.Ed. Degrees, she joined the academic profession and remained as a teacher for nearly 11 years. She was an ideal teacher who became a role model for many students. She spent the greater part of her salary for helping the needy and meritorious students who could not pursue their studies due to financial constraints. In the year 2001, She married Mr. K.I. Manirathinam, chairman-cum-managing director of the Navasakthi Township Developers Pvt. Ltd., Manirathinam also wanted to develop Nattarmangalam village panchayat, which happened to be his birth place. He started the Anugraha Trust for this purpose and has been extending moral and monetary support in the development activities of Mrs.SudhaManirathinam.

Overview of the Village

Nattarmangalam is a Village Panchayat located in the Cuddalore district of Tamil-Nadu State, India. The latitude 12.2628768 and longitude 79.5040816 are the geocoordinate of the Nattarmangalam. Chennai is the State capital for Nattarmangalam village. It is located around 225.9 kilometer away from Chennai. The other nearest State capital from Nattarmangalam is Pondicherry and its distance is 50.4 KM. The other surrounding State capitals are Bangalore 224.5 KM., Thiruvananthapuram 493.3 KM.

Nattarmangalam is a small village located in Kattumannarkoil Taluka of Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu with total 723 families residing. The population of the Village is 2151 of which 1068 are males while 1083 are females as per Population Census 2011.

The population of children with age 0-6 is 241, which makes up 11.20 % of total population of village. Average Sex Ratio is 1014 which is higher than Tamil Nadu state average of 996. Child Sex Ratio for the Nattarmangalam as per Census is 1008, higher than Tamil Nadu average of 943.

The Village has lower literacy rate compared to Tamil Nadu. In 2011, literacy rate of Nattarmangalam village was 76.02 % compared to 80.09 % of Tamil Nadu. In Nattarmangalam Male literacy stands at 82.91 % while female literacy rate is 69.23 %.

As per the constitution of India and Panchyati Raaj Act, Nattarmangalam village is administrated by Sarpanch (Head of Village) who is the elected representative of village.

Caste Factor

Most of the villagers are from Schedule Caste (SC). Schedule Caste (SC) constitutes 62.34 % of total population in Nattarmangalam village. The village Nattarmangalam currently doesn't have any Schedule Tribe (ST) population.

Work Profile

The total population, 1062 were engaged in work activities. 45.95 % of workers describe their work as Main Work (Employment or Earning more than 6 Months) while 54.05 % were involved in Marginal activity providing livelihood for less than 6 months. Of 1062 workers engaged in Main Work, 29 were cultivators (owner or co-owner) while 300 were Agricultural labourer.

| Particulars | Total | Male | Female |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total No. of Houses | 723 | - | - |
| Population | 2,151 | 1,068 | 1,083 |
| Schedule Caste | 1,341 | 667 | 674 |
| Other Caste | 810 | 401 | 409 |
| Literacy | 76.02 % | 82.91 % | 69.23 % |
| Total Workers | 1,062 | 633 | 429 |
| Main Worker | 488 | 0 | 0 |
| Marginal Worker | 574 | 0 | 0 |



Common Factors of Successful Leadership

Good leadership involves many common attitudes that link many of them.

- **Providing Personal Support:** Helping people to engage themselves in their work, so that they can develop a sense of self-worth.
- **Encouraging Teamwork ("Interaction Facilitation"):** Encouraging people to establish close, collaborative, successful working relationships with one another.
- **Focusing on Goals ("Goal Emphasis"):** Inspiring people to feel enthusiastic about and committed to shared goals, and motivating them to perform well.
- **Helping People Work Effectively ("Work Facilitation"):** Helping people meet goals by supporting them, and by providing resources, materials, and knowledge.

Challenges Faced by Women Leader

The main problem faced by women leader is maintaining a balance between home and work. Women who want to climb up the ladder of success should prepare to step over a few obstacles on the way up. Issues like surviving downsizing and navigating troubled economic waters impact everyone, but women in leadership often face unique challenges. Here are some of the common ones:

1. **An Uncertain Career Path:** It's an easy way to stop an employee or team member from moving up—keeping the career path foggy. Sadly, this is a tactic that many companies take. If you want to excel at leadership, move to a new position or prime yourself to start own venture, know what that career path looks like. Don't rely on guesswork! An unclear trajectory will keep you from hitting your goal.
2. **Managing Family Life:** It's no joke that women wear many hats. One big challenge to overcome is managing family life with health and career. "Finding balance" may be an overused phrase but in this case, it's crucial for the businesswoman. They have to learn which balance techniques work best for you.
3. **Unequal Pay:** Historically, women receive less pay than their male counterparts but that shouldn't be the norm. Unequal pay (getting paid less than the guy across the hall who does the exact same job) is a fact of life in some industries. Find out what women can do, if anything, to even out the pay grade.
4. **No Role Models:** Women leaders often have to pave the way for other women. One has to discover that role models are hard to find if women wants to become a leader in business. If they don't find role models in their immediate view, keep looking because they are out there! Fortunately, notable male leaders, like Virgin Founder Sir Richard Branson, have made commitments to gender diversity in the boardroom.

Success Story of Women Achiever Mrs. Sudhamanirathinam

In Nattarmangalam village, during rainy season, the rain water in the district of Ariyaloor enter the village through the streams of Vennaanguzhi, Pappakudi. At this time the houses of the people in this area are surrounded by water. The common people could not come out of their houses. They would be cut off from the outside world and other communications. They had to stay outside without food also. The government officials could not enter the village for relief work. Mr. K.I. Manirathinam and his wife Mrs. SudhaManiratnam get involved in this work. He made his wife Mrs. SudhaManiratnam to get involved in this work. He also started the Anugraha Trust for this purpose. For the past 5 years She went to every street and met the people and undertook various social reforms in the village.

In the first phase, she met the aged people and religious people to render their support for the development works in the village. She also met all the men in the village and requested their support and co-operation to make Nattarmangalam village as the best village in the whole of India. All the people in the village extended their willingness to do anything for the development of their village. It was decided that able and suitable Panchayat ward members should be selected as Panchayat representatives. She insisted that the people to elect the Panchayat representatives without the differences of caste or creed.

At the second stage, the people wanted to appreciate Mrs. SudhaManiratnam for her social work and wanted to elect her as the Panchayat leader without any competition or election. They conveyed their opinion to Mrs. SudhaManiratnam. And she was selected as the Panchayat Leader of Nattarmangalam without conducting an election. So she decided to resign the job. She met the people in the village and asked for their support. She informed the common people that women should hold the important posts of ward members. She said that the ward members should also be selected without election just as she was selected. She also decided that all the ward members should be women.

The following Nine ward members were selected unopposed. Ward 1 T. Deepa, Ward 2 S. Muthulakshmi, Ward 3 E. Latchiya Veeramani, Ward 4 T. Anjalidevi, Ward 5 S. Kannagi, Ward 6 T. Radha, Ward 7 S. Tamilarasi, Ward 8 K. Vembu, Ward 9 T. Visalatchi. K. Vembu was selected as the assistant leader. Nattarmangalam is the first village in India where all the Panchayat representatives are women. It is significant that all of them were selected without election.



There were many challenges faced by Mrs.SudhaManiratnam as Panchayat President in the village. This village was without development for the past 20 years. Therefore The Panchayat leader Mrs.SudhaManirathinam decided to face the challenges first and started her work. She told the Panchayat representative that they should be ready to work hard, because they should achieve the goals of five years well developed village in India and get the appreciation of the President and Prime Minister. As a result of their effort and hard work, the people were united and there are no disputes or quarrels among the people. In the past, the people of Nattarmangalam were involved in all kinds of violences, but now people are ashamed to go to the police station and are avoiding disputes among themselves.

The women are working at the same level with man in this village. The Panchayat leader has paved way for Self Help Groups, so that women can earn for their families income. More than 30 Self Help Groups are functioning at present. Through these groups, many cottage industries have been started, which give income to many individual women. There are self Help Groups for men also, where they can get bank loans for their businesses. Through the effort of the Panchayat, leader, a bank branch was opened in the village. 25 years ago, the Indian Bank was determined to adopt this village and make developments. But there were no initiatives taken and the village became a forest area without proper cleaning of bushes. The village people give respect for hard work and have involved themselves in cleaning the bushes, without any jealous they create competition among themselves for the development of their village.

Due to the effort of the Mrs.Sudha Manirathinam, greater importance is given for education. It is instructed that children belonging to each and every family should compulsorily go the school. They are closely monitored. As a remembrance of Kamarajar, who was a great initiative in the education of Tamil Nadu, much importance is given to the government middle school. The students are encouraged to study well and special prizes were given to those students who were excellent in studies and they also conduct various competitions to develop their talent in all the fields. Uniforms and Note books are given freely to students. She also take all the necessary steps to provide free education for 6th to 12th standard students. Anugraha Trust gives free uniforms for students and Rs.2,000 for the student who gets first mark in +2 public examination.

Success Mantra for a Women Achiever Mrs. Sudha Manirathinam First Panchayat Leader's Opinion

The former first Panchayat leader Kandasamy Muthaliar, who is aged 85 years says that it is very special that women run the Panchayat. This is the only one village in India having this special feature, that there are 723 families and they are provided basic requirements like drinking water facility, street light facility, proper road facility etc., yet they are being provided concrete houses with hygienic individual toilet facility by our Panchayat President . We also feel proud to say that there are no huts in our village. Many facilities were given to students, like free uniforms and note books, now school is very clean with drinking water facilities. We visited Delhi Our Panchayat leader took 500 people to Delhi. We saw the parliament building and attended the Tamil Assembly Meeting.

To lead a hygienic and disease less life, she arrange AIDS AWARENESS, PLASTIC AWARENESS, DENGU AWARENESS, MEDICAL CAMPS, etc., once in two months. Every week she gives awareness for all the children and grown up people about how to use toilets at home. To bring a good and peaceful environment she built an "Integrated women Sanitary Complex" for the village women and guest from other villages. Her aim is to make our panchayat healthy and wealthy.

Village Library is being run neatly. Water tank is being cleaned and chlorinated by the panchayat every 15 days. Income and expenditure of the village panchayat is being expressed before all the people. To develop our village and individual earning, they do some important works like making new irrigations water shed management under the scheme of MGNREGA. At the end of each working day, they learn many things through ADULT EDUCATION.

It is very important and notable thing that they have a common burial ground for the all caste and communities. Now farmers get a lot of benefits through National bank and Co-operative bank. Then Hollow Block Bricks are being prepared by Ezhil self Help Group, they also prepare toilet thinks like cover, slab, board etc, for the use of our village and other villages also.

Immediate Salary for 100 Days Job Plan

Among the 55 Panchayats, this Panchayat is functioning very well. Salaries are paid to the labourers immediately under the 100 days job plan. Financial help is provided for the families who get their children married. The Panchayat leader and Panchayat representative attend the marriage functions.

Students Adopted

Children who have lost their parents are adopted by the Panchayat. They are given place in the children homes with free food and education.



Fine for using Plastic and Drinking Wines and Alcohol

Fine levied for buying tea in plastic cups and bags, because plastic causes cancer. They are giving cloth bags to buy vegetables.

Village without Huts

People living in huts suffer very much during rainy season. Therefore efforts are taken that all the huts are turned into concrete buildings. Panchayat is giving Rs.40, 000 aid to the poor people for constructing concrete houses in addition to the one lakh given by the government. Out of the 271 huts 113 houses are being built now.

Free Education

Free education is given from 6th STD to +2 for students, who are excellent in their studies. Students are provided play ground and parks named GANDHI PARK

Saplings Planted

3000 saplings are planted around schools and several places. A group containing 10 members is appointed to see that these saplings are taken care of and grows well.

Toilet Facilities for each House

Toilet facilities are provided for each house by the Panchayat. The materials needed to build toilets like concrete items and lids are provided by the Self Help Groups themselves.

Social Services

The Panchayat adopts the widows, physically challenged people and orphan children and help them in all ways possible.

Award Received

As a result of excellent work performance by the Nattarmangalam Village Panchayat in Kattumannarkoil block of Cuddalore District has become a trail blazer in terms of village administration and women empowerment. This all- Mrs. Sudha Manirathinam has earned twin distinctions:

- “Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar Award for 2012-2013” instituted by the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj,
- “Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Award for 2013” instituted by the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi.
- “Delhi Tamil Sangam” in Delhi.
- National Women’s Day Award .
- The Best Women Award in TamilNadu Vasan Council.
- TamilNadu & Puducherry Youth Congress Award.
- Mrs.Jayanthi Natarajan Award.
- Vishwasewak Society Award.in New Delhi
- Cancer Camp Award
- Best women award.

Addressing a press conference, the President said that Mrs. Sudha Manirathinam and her nine-member village panchayat has become a role model for other local bodies in the State. Owing to the concerted efforts taken by her team, Nattarmangalam has now become a totally a hutment-free, plastic free and a liquor-free village. Open defecation had become a thing of the past as all the 750 households were now provided with individual toilets, besides separate public toilets for men and women.

Mrs. Sudha Manirathinam further noted that the villagers had vowed not to give bribe nor take bribe. The local body had managed to mobilise private funds which it was dovetailing with the government grants to take up the development works in the village. It had built 214 houses for the victims of cyclone “Thane,” two Anganwadis and constructed cement roads in the village. After she assumed office in 2011, the number of students from Nattarmangalam pursuing higher education had gone up significantly. That the village had a common burial ground was a testimony to the communal harmony prevailing there. Though belonging to the Scheduled Caste community, Mrs.Sudha Manirathinam enjoyed the full support of the villagers and this made possible the unopposed election of all the village panchayat members, including her.

She emphatically said that the members had the backing of husbands, fathers and brothers, and as far as the administration of the panchayat was considered they were taking independent decisions. She said that it would be her endeavor to increase manifold the per capita income of the residents by energizing the Self-Help Groups and setting up small scale units.



She acknowledged the fact that her husband K.I. Manirathinam, chairman-cum-managing director of the Navasakthi Township Developers Pvt. Ltd., had been extending moral and monetary support in her endeavour.

G. Suryamoorthy, former president of the Tamil Nadu Government Officials Union, highly praised the panchayat president and her team for having received national recognition for the good work.

Conclusions

It is clearly understood that women seek fair treatment and improved compensation, and that these desires motivates them to move from management to leadership. Women's leadership can make a particularly strong contribution to the economic well-being of the family and communities, poverty reduction and women's empowerment. Nothing is impossible if the women have a desire to win. And it is this success mantra that we have learnt from the Outstanding Women Panchayat Leader of India. Despite of all odds, women leaders do exist revealing the truth that they are more acquiring than their male counterparts.