

Leadership Behaviour Among Tribal Women: A Critical Review of Literature

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Abstract

Leadership behaviour has been studied across disciplines like psychology, sociology, anthropology, development studies and has acquired prominence due to its significant role in social transformation, community development and collective decision-making. Leadership has been researched to a considerable extent in terms of organizational and political dynamics, whereas leadership among tribal women remains a less explored paradigm. Research on leadership has been informed by theoretical constructs emanating from western organizational theories which may not be entirely relevant to unraveling indigenous or tribal leadership dynamics. Tribal women leaders are characterized by their unique status in a given socio-cultural context that is influenced by various factors, such as gender, ethnicity, community, participation and related socio-economic determinants. Leadership among tribal women needs to be examined by looking at an eclectic mix of theoretical paradigms that can address the multi-faceted dimensions of leadership behaviour. This review seeks to explore leadership theories, indigenous leadership, psychological aspects of leadership behaviour, leadership identity, gender and leadership, and tribal women leadership studies to identify gaps in scholarship and emphasize relevant paradigms for examining tribal women leadership in India.

Keywords: Leadership Behaviour, Tribal Women, Indigenous Leadership, Self-Efficacy, Leadership Identity, Empowerment.

Introduction

Leadership, as it is commonly discussed, broadly refers to a process that can influence others, guide everyone to move toward the same goal, and collectively push progress forward. It has long broken free from the narrow framework that used to frame leadership as a set of unique traits exclusive to individuals holding formal positions.

Today, scholars studying leadership all view it as a complex social phenomenon. Unlike the past belief that "leadership is an innate ability of certain individuals", no one exhibits leader-aligned behaviors without reason; those guiding words and actions do not emerge out of thin air, but are generated through the interactions of the individual, the group, and the surrounding environment. This perspective is drawn from the research of (Northouse, 2022; Yukl, 2013).

Precisely for this reason, leadership behaviors cover a very wide range. They include not only what leaders do and what decisions they make, but also how they communicate and how they manage interpersonal relationships. Whether it is the specific actions of leading and advancing projects, the

decisions that determine important directions, or even the usual way of chatting with team members to convey information, or the methods to coordinate conflicts between each other, all of these fall within the scope of leadership's functions.

One point must be clarified: leadership in tribal communities is often different from the set of practices commonly seen in mainstream institutions. Leadership in tribes mostly relies on the trust of all members of the community, shared responsibility among everyone, and alignment with the cultural values that the community has inherited for many years. It is not sustained by power and hierarchical authority, as is the case with the leadership models of mainstream institutions.

Tribal women leaders play a crucial role in tribal communities as agents of change, development, and transformation. Despite the significance of tribal women leaders, there is a paucity of research on the psychological and socio-cultural factors that influence leadership behaviour of tribal women. An in-depth review of the literature is, therefore, required to highlight the key factors that influence leadership behaviour among tribal women and explore gaps in the literature.

Evolution of Leadership Theory

The study of leadership has been approached from different theoretical frameworks. Leadership research was initially dominated by trait theories whereby researchers postulated that leaders differ from non-leaders due to the presence of certain traits. One of the earliest theorists of leadership is Thomas Carlyle who advanced the "Great Man" theory of leadership. Carlyle (1841) argued that leaders are not born but made. Carlyle's theory was based on the idea that great leaders exert great influence on society. However, trait theories of leadership were criticized for inconsistencies in empirical studies.

Modern trait theories of leadership emerged from Stogdill's (1948) review and meta-analysis of leadership literature. Stogdill's (1948) argued that leadership is a function of situational factors and leader attributes. However, Judge et al. (2002) concluded from their meta-analysis that there is a consistent relationship between personality traits and leadership emergence. Extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and emotional stability were found to be positively associated with leadership emergence. Bono and Judge (2004) found that personality traits predicted transformational leadership behaviour through their influence on interpersonal skills.

Since trait theories did not sufficiently explain the dynamics of leadership, leadership theorists developed behavioural theories of leadership. Behavioural theories were informed by empirical studies that sought to identify dimensions of leadership behaviour. Hemphill and Coons, (1957) identified two dimensions of leadership behaviour: initiating structure and consideration. Likert (1961) distinguished employee-centered and production-centered leadership styles. Contingency theories of leadership emphasized the role of situational factors in leadership effectiveness.

Fiedler (1967) developed the first contingency theory of leadership by arguing that situational factors moderate the relationship between leadership styles and leader effectiveness. Fielder developed the dimension of leader-member relations, task structure, and position power as factors that determine the effectiveness of leadership styles. Transformational theory of leadership emerged as a response to critiques of trait and behavioural theories. Burns (1978) introduced the concept of transformational leadership and distinguished it from transactional leadership. Transformational leaders encourage subordinates to transcend their own interests and work towards achieving collective goals. Bass (1985) operationalized transformational leadership and identified four components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Judge et al. (2004) found that transformational leadership is consistently associated with organizational performance.

In line with transformational leadership, Eagly et al. (2003) found that women leaders are more likely to practice transformational leadership behaviour. This finding is key to understanding leadership behaviour of tribal women.

Indigenous and Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Leadership

The practice of leadership varies across different communities and cultures. Leadership practice and effectiveness have been studied extensively within the frameworks of cross-cultural leadership theories. The GLOBE project is a leading cross-cultural leadership research project that sought to identify dimensions of leadership across different societies (House et al., 2004). An important aspect of leadership across different cultures is cultural legitimacy, whereby leaders gain social legitimacy by operating within the values and beliefs of a particular community.

Indigenous leadership involves leadership practice that is informed by indigenous knowledge, epistemologies, and world views. According to Wilson (2008), indigenous leadership is premised on legitimacy and trust rather authority and institutional power. Alfred (2009) argued that indigenous leadership embodies values of cultural worldview, responsibility, and self-determination. It is apparent from these definitions that indigenous leadership is a collective responsibility and differs from the leadership practiced in mainstream organizations.

Cajete (2000) noted that indigenous leaders exercise facilitative functions in their communities. Leadership theories and practice among indigenous leadership have scarcely been studied and are more focused on gender perspectives.

There is limited research on leadership among tribal women. However, general indigenous leadership perspective offers some insight into tribal women leadership. Similarly, Sinha (1980) theorized about nurturant-task leadership style that captures both interpersonal and task components of leadership. Chhokar et al. (2007) developed a model of leadership in the Indian context that is informed by Indian cultural values. It is, therefore, important to contextualize leadership theories in tribal communities to inform tribal women leadership research

Psychological Determinants of Leadership Behaviour

Self efficacy encompasses an individual's belief in his or her ability to execute certain tasks and achieve specific goals. Self-efficacy theories assume that self-confidence, self-motivation, and hard work predict leadership effectiveness. Chemers et al. (2000) found that leadership self-efficacy enhanced leadership effectiveness and leadership efficacy. Similarly, Hannah et al. (2008) found that leadership efficacy predicted leadership performance. It is apparent from these studies that self-efficacy facilitates leadership enactment among individuals.

Emotional intelligence has been considered as a key predictor of leadership effectiveness. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, assess, and regulate emotions (Goleman, 1998). Leaders who are high on emotional intelligence are able to negotiate effective social networks that facilitate effective organization. George (2000) argued that emotionally intelligent leaders create positive emotional climates that are cooperative and trusting. An empirical study by Harms and Credé (2010) found that emotional intelligence is positively associated with transformational leadership behaviour. Thus, emotional intelligence plays a critical role in effective leadership.

Motivation theories help in understanding the underlying motives that drive leaders to leadership roles and processes. According to McClelland (1961), there are three basic motives that influence human behaviour and leadership, these are the motive for achievement, power, and affiliation. Motive for achievement is described as the desire to accomplish difficult tasks. The motive for power reflects the need to influence or dominate others and affiliation motive reflects the need for social contacts. According to McClelland and Boyatzis (1982), leaders who are high on socially acceptable power motive are more effective than leaders who are more concerned with dominating others. In community-based leadership, it is expected that leaders may be motivated by collective goals and values towards promoting community development. Datta and Gailey (2012) found that women leaders are more motivated to lead their communities to achieve social and collective goals.

Leadership identity involves the extent to which individuals define themselves as leaders and the extent to which they are perceived as leaders. Leadership identity is viewed as a process because individuals engage in various social activities that determine their status as leaders. DeRue and Ashford (2010) argued that leadership identity entails the interactive processes between claim and grant of leadership roles in social relationships. Similarly, Hogg (2001) postulated that leadership effectiveness is predicated upon the extent to which leaders internalize and perform group and intergroup identities. Leadership identity among tribal women may present unique leadership challenges as women engage in multiple social identities. According to Ely et al. (2011), women leaders may face identity dilemmas as they perform masculine-oriented leadership roles.

Women, Gender and Leadership Behaviour

Gender plays a critical role in predicting leadership emergence and effectiveness. There is limited research on gender and leadership in the Indian context. According to Social Role Theory, there are gender-based societal roles and expectations. Leadership roles and responsibilities are primarily given to men because they are considered more dominant and aggressive than women (Eagly & Wood, 2012). However, empirical studies show that women are equally effective leaders (Eagly et al., 2003). Role Congruity Theory elucidates why women are less likely to emerge as leaders than men. The theory

argues that women are less likely to undertake leadership roles if the role is incongruent with gender stereotypes. In congruence with these theories, studies show that women leaders are subject to more negative evaluations than men (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

However, in reality, women are good leaders because they are committed and flexible towards their followers (Eagly et al., 2003). Indian Constitution allows for political reservations for women which has promoted their political and leadership capabilities. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) found that reservation policies increased women's participation in local government in India. On the other hand, Beaman et al. (2012) found that female leaders help in reducing gender prejudices and stereotypes among community members. Thus, women are good leaders and their leadership should be promoted in the community.

Tribal Women Leadership: Empirical Evidence

There has been limited research on tribal women leadership in India. Nevertheless, the extant literature provides some information on women leadership in tribal communities. Tribal women leadership is influenced by many issues such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of education, and lack of political resources. However, studies by various authors show the leadership potential of tribal women. For example, Datta and Gailey (2012) observed that women empowerment and participation in self-help groups and social development projects increases their self-confidence, leadership, and communication skills. Similarly, Xaxa (2005) argued that cultural identity plays a critical role in leadership in tribal communities. Hence, tribal women need self-confidence and community acceptance to exercise their leadership potential.

Critical Analysis of the Existing Literature

From the review of the literature, several shortcomings and gaps have been identified. First, leadership theories have been developed within the Western context and, therefore, may not be applicable to tribal communities. Secondly, most studies on gender and leadership overlook the role of cultural identity in influencing gender differences in leadership. Thirdly, tribal communities have been studied from the perspective of socio-economic development while ignoring psychological factors that influence leadership. Lastly, there is limited empirical research on tribal women leaders in specific localities such as Surguja and Jashpur.

Conclusion

Leadership behavior of tribal women is influenced by various factors ranging from individual characteristics to tribal community factors. Modern leadership theories have shed light on leadership in general but fail to integrate leadership in tribal communities. The review of the literature indicates that individual factors such as self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, motivation, and leadership identity are integral to the practice of leadership. At the same time, communal aspects of leadership such as cultural identity and collective responsibility are key aspects of leadership behaviour in tribal communities.

The review of the literature shows that there is a need to apply an interdisciplinary approach to studying tribal women leadership. Future studies should consider applying the above-mentioned psychological constructs to understand tribal women leadership. This will add value to future research and offer a more in-depth understanding of tribal women leadership.

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