

### **Interrogating Women's Leadership and Empowerment**

*Edited by Omita Goyal*

Sage  
California  
2015

**Keywords** Leadership

**Review DOI** [10.1108/GM-08-2015-0072](https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-08-2015-0072)

*Interrogating Women's Leadership and Empowerment*, edited by Omita Goyal, is a collection of studies that focus on dimensions of empowerment of women, such as social attitudes, economic and educational empowerment and empowerment in the health sector. The editor states the book is not an ultimate collection on women's empowerment and leadership. It, however, makes crucial contributions to the field of politics, business, education, social and economic development, the women's movement, health, law, insurgency, art, music, dance, cinema, literature and craft. The book is presented in 20 chapters where the empowerment and leadership of women is discussed in the context of India.

In Chapter 1, the author discusses "understanding leadership" using examples from the women's movement in India. The chapter brings the notion of inclusiveness for leadership studies; the author focuses on the inclusion of women in both leadership studies and practices. The notion of power and politics in leadership studies for women empowerment is discussed in relation to representation and leadership of women, using an inclusive meaning of leadership. The author also recalls previous experiences in the Indian women's movement relating to leadership, and provides historical information regarding the leadership role of 67 women's studies centres in India. At the end of this chapter, the author focuses on diffusing the concept of leadership through the Internet and the new feminists.

Chapter 2 focuses on actors relevant to the empowerment of women, such as governments, funding agencies and other non-state actors which have created programmes relating to empowering women; because the author states it not clear whether the programme of empowering women has been successfully achieved or not. For this reason, the chapter introduces two programmes discussed as cases to expand on gender-based empowerment. The cases are crucial examples of practices aimed at creating an equal environment based on gender, and preventing discrimination between men and women. In the first case, the author discusses the M.V. Foundation Programme as "Empowering Women through Collective Action and Environment Programme". This case examines the main advantage of the M.V. Foundation Programme as providing knowledge on how the rationale of equal payment based on gender can be provided through official guidelines created by the programme. The author also discusses the perception of stakeholders with regards to the M.V. Foundation

---

Programme, and concludes that his case has been successful. The second case focuses on the establishment of self-help groups (SHGs) which are sponsored to support the economic activities of villages. However, the author argues that even if SHGs make contributions to the general level of economic activity, this is not enough to cover long-term contingencies. The author turns to the primary role of government in terms of large-scale employment, good infrastructure and functioning public institutions. By the same token, the second case reflects on the prevention of discrimination, such as gender gaps in achievement/outcomes, and empowering those discriminated through political leaders, governments and organisations like the M.V. Foundation Programme.

Chapter 3 pays attention to leadership in the community. The author focuses on the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) to discuss positive changes regarding the rise of women leaders in their villages, in their *mohallas* and in the country. In this chapter, the author broadly discusses SEWA through experiences of women leaders in the growing stage of this organisation. These experiences show that there are women who are natural leaders, and the leaders inspire others to action. For this reason, the chapter indicates the difficulties that the women leaders are faced with and how they overcome the difficulties in their life before becoming a part of SEWA.

Chapter 4 discusses Dalit women leaders, drawing on the author's recent research on gender, governance and politics in Kerala. The author mainly focuses on the perception of the "gentle power" of Dalit women. This perception alludes to power as neither feminine nor empowering. Discussions based on the interviews show that Dalit women hardly invoke femininity, mainly invoking their education in their situation. The chapter concludes as highlighting experiences of Dalit women in terms of indicating the changes regarding their approaches to individuals/situations after they have power. The author exemplifies the woman president of the Muslim League from northern Kerala to indicate the changes. Experience of the president shows that even though she said she would never fight an election, she contested the panchayat elections of 2010 and she was elected as a member of the district panchayat.

Following up from the previous chapter, Chapter 5 discusses the definition of Dalit women's empowerment, with consideration of the critiques of a dominant system rather than evaluating certain government policies in material terms. In this chapter, the author mainly examines the specific local language of the Dalit labouring women as a part of their intellectual empowerment. Thus, the author brings a different perspective regarding how Dalit women use the local language as a way of having a bearing on their subordinated and suppressed life by Dalit patriarchy.

In Chapter 6, the author focuses on the participation rate of women in workplaces with regard to various international reports, such as Gender Gap Reports of the World Economic Forum. Sector differences are brought to the fore and the chapter looks at financial services and insurance (the greatest percentage of women workers) and mining and agriculture (lowest percentage of women workers) based on the employment percentage of women, to indicate inequalities amongst genders and discrimination. Also, the author elaborates on the obstacles faced by women to become leaders in companies, noting as reasons the lack of access to training for career development and the failure of workplaces to be gender-sensitive.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 focus on women in relation to education and professional positioning as professional public leaders. In Chapter 7, the author discusses women's equality and empowerment in higher education, highlighting male dominance in the

---

sector and addressing two myths based on research on gender and leadership in universities. The first myth relates to the objectivity and neutrality of organisations in giving women places in higher positions. The second myth is about women's unproblematic access to higher education. The author challenges this by characterising women in higher education as outsiders and disadvantaged: "the others", or double deviants, views that are contrary to popular belief. The chapter also compares the role of networks in the success of male academics and highlights the few number of women in leadership positions at top-level management in universities. The author gives examples of male networks, stressing their lobbying activities and power in academia, and discusses capacity building of women managers in higher education through Sensitisation, Awareness and Motivation (SAM) workshops. The chapter presents positive experiences of women from interviews to some who attended these workshops. Chapter 8 focuses specifically on gender and professions, looking at the history of women doctors in India, from consulting male doctors to being a woman doctor. The chapter discusses the main reason to start training women doctors as being the consequence of the continued existing tradition of purdah and a decline in popularity of births at home. Some examples are brought forward of early women doctors such as Kadambini and Chandramukhi Basu, who graduated from the University of Calcutta in 1882. In Chapter 9, the author discusses woman leaders in Indian politics, posing a paradox regarding the dilemma of powerful woman politicians in top political positions and the low participation rate of women in politics. The chapter highlights the impact of women political leaders on national politics and governance, and using an evidence-based approach, it presents a framework to understand woman leaders and the low participation rate of women in national politics. Based on the scarce research about women leaders and management of political parties, the author presents an historical overview of the roles and impact of women leaders in the national politics of India, using specific examples of woman leaders such as Sonia Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj and Mamata Banerjee.

Chapters 10 and 11 focus on the writing of women in/by Indian women. Chapter 10 brings in the importance of history to examine two texts that were written by Indian social activist Mahasweta Devi about women who were situated differently in time and place. The chapter focuses on Devi's representation of two women to raise the role of gender in the narration of other histories rather than the history of the 1857 uprising. By this way, the author discusses the success of women in the art of storytelling which covers historical information due to the dominance of men in history writing. Chapter 11 introduces the growing body of work by Dalit feminist women writers, with the aim of opening up a dialogue between scholars and activists to discuss Universalist claims of the women's movement and the perspectives of Dalit scholars and activists. The author accomplishes this by discussing some readings from Dalit feminist women writers, for instance the author examines writing of Kumud Pawade to point out experiences regarding caste issues of women in India. For this reason, the chapter brings the perspective of Dalit feminist women writers in terms of emphasising experiences of Dalit women regarding the caste issues in India.

In Chapter 12, the author focuses on women who have an influence on changes in handloom sectors in terms of adapting the vision of revitalised crafts to a reality since India's independence. The focus of this chapter is on the histories of these women, which has remained largely unrecorded. The chapter has two stated aims: to examine and

identify the impact of women within the sector borders, and to point out changes in progress when considering the development on social, cultural, political and economic landscapes. To achieve the aims, the author firstly focuses on the pioneering work of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, which rejuvenated and vitalised crafts and craftspeople across India, because she brought new perspectives to the crafts, challenged hierarchies and reached out to craftspeople due to being appointed the Chairperson of the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB) from 1952 to 1967. Following on the work of Chattopadhyay, the author gives examples of other women in the field, such as Pupul Jayakar, to provide a clear understanding with regard to influences of women on changes in the sectors.

Chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16 shift the attention to women in the arts, including dancing, cinema and music. Chapter 13 examines women's leadership in the arts, focusing on Rukmini Devi Arundale, the dancer whose multifaceted cultural and aesthetic legacy has seen her classed as a philosopher who shaped modern India. In addition, the chapter provides examples of other women leaders in arts, such as Indian dancer-activist Mallika Sarabhai. The chapter, however, emphasises the importance of Rukmini Devi for both the arts and society in India, because India as having a context in terms of caste and class systems had many obstacles for the women who wanted to perform an art. Thus, the chapter mainly argues the role of Rukmini Devi, who remains the most important woman due to her achievements which are empowering not only women but also the arts and society itself. In Chapter 14, the author examines women performers in the Bombay Film Industry from 1925 to 1947. The chapter is introduced as creating knowledge on three kinds of women who were dominant in the cinema sector; all of whom have been categorised in relation to their origin before coming to the film industry. The author also brings the Butler approach to the concept of gender, and discusses what gender is. The main contribution of this chapter, in addition to the examples of women actresses in cinema, is to highlight the involvement of women in the economic sphere and beyond the fields popular for women's employment in the 1930s, such as education, medicine and social work. Chapter 15 focuses on Sheikh's paintings in the political domain, discussing the links between her work, feminist thought and the women's movement in India. The author explores the invention of the woman Indian artist in an Indian context, arguing how the contemporary women's movement in 1970s was successful through the raising of the issue of dowry deaths, rape and women's health at the national level which constituted an aggressive media campaign regarding women's issues and created developments in women's arts such as painting. In Chapter 16, the author emphasises women leadership in Hindustani classical music. The main reason for writing this chapter is explained as portraying women leadership in Hindustani classical music, which has a largely male dominance. Also, the chapter addresses the importance of true women leaders in this field, who make a great contribution to empowerment and acceptance of women in Hindustani classical music through excellence in their profession.

In Chapter 17, the author focuses on education in terms of empowering women. The chapter presents the historical process of women's participation in education, highlighting the story of the Indraprastha Girls School, precursor of the Indraprastha College for Women. The chapter starts with discussing the role of Christian missionaries in supporting women's participation in education. The impact of the Intraprastha School is presented in terms of its practical impact on empowering women: the school was the first to provide a hostel, a library, start science class with a laboratory and a

---

college. The author also discusses the role of this school as creating a liberal ethos which prevents ideologies of oppression and gender role stereotypes. The chapter concludes by stating the importance of the school in promoting women's self-confidence and more generally confidence in women's leadership, as well as the role of the school in enabling Delhi women's global thinking.

In Chapter 18, the author focuses on inequality indicators rather than concerns between men and women. The author discusses different types of indicators for inequality, stating that social processes are not utterly equitable and this reflects different facets of well-being; the span of life, its quality and access to resources, among other factors. Chapter 18, in general, examines gender as not the only identity of a person. Also, there are other factors such as regional, religious, caste or class which can be discussed in terms of inequality. The main contribution of Chapter 18 to the gender study is to state the changes based on these factors through indicators for discrimination and development. In Chapter 18, the author creates a clear understanding of presenting indicators under the dimensions of survival, quality of survival, skill acquisition, workforce participation, control over resources, participation in public sphere and security. The author concludes the chapter by discussing methodological issues for gender studies and providing a comparison between gender-sensitive and gender-blind governance.

The last two chapters of the books focus on violence against women, first from a legal perspective and then from the perspective of the everyday experiences of witnesses. Chapter 19 focuses on the implementation of sexual assault laws in India. The author's objective in this chapter is to highlight the movement against the government resulting from the lack of the state's support and consideration for problems of sexual assault in India. The chapter proposes a process for progress that relies on providing efficiency for implementation of sexual assault laws regarding women and government practices with consideration of the Verma Committee Recommendations, which explicitly called for an amendment of rape laws, among other things. This is followed by the final chapter in the book (Chapter 20), which discusses violence against women in India, highlighting marginalised histories of violence to women based on the experiences of witnesses. From this chapter, we learn about the grim realities of violence faced by some women in India, which require urgent attention to allow positive changes to come about and to support the women overcome their voiceless status.

*Interrogating Women's Leadership and Empowerment* introduces different aspects of women's lives and professions in an Indian context. The book clearly indicates the process of empowerment and leadership, especially for Dalit women through consideration of Indian history in terms of political, economic and social contexts, and case studies. The book includes a range of topics and perhaps it attempts to cover too many fields at the same time. However, it is well-organised in terms of the presentation of discussions. The main contribution of this book is to indicate changes in women's empowerment and leadership. This makes the book a marvellous reference for the readers of *Gender in Management Journal*. However, there is still a long way to go, as further and more detailed research about women's leadership and empowerment in different countries and different fields is still needed.

**Erhan Aydin**

*Brunel Business School, Brunel University, London, UK*

---

**About the author**

Erhan Aydin is a PhD Student in Brunel University London, UK, and Research Assistant in Usak University, Turkey. He has received his MBA degree from Dokuz Eylul University, Turkey, and has three bachelor degrees in the fields of Business Administration (Eng) and International Relations (Eng) from Dokuz Eylul University, Turkey, and Public Administration from Anadolu University, Turkey. His research interests include diversity, equality and inclusion at organisations, organisational learning and forgetting. Erhan is acting as a Member of Work and Organisation Research Centre (WORC) at Brunel Business School. He is also a Member of the Academy of Management (AOM) and British Academy of Management (BAM) since 2013. Erhan is one of the reviewers of *Gender, Work & Organization*, *Journal of Organizational Change Management* and *Personnel Review*.