

Hindrances of Women Participation in Panchayati Raj Institution: A Study of Nilgiri ITDA Block of Balasore District in Odisha

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I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURES

In Indian politics Panchayati Raj institutions have the responsibility to give good governance in rural areas. Representation of women in Panchayats is as an effect of 73rd Constitutional Amendment which advocates for one-third to 50 per cent of the seats to women members in Gram Panchayat. It was a historical decision in different initiatives of women empowerment through political means because the socio-economic status of women in patriarchal society of India is still disheartening. On April 24, 1993 Panchayati Raj was inaugurated, after the 73rd Amendment Act came into force it has been an uncertain and rolling journey for Panchayats. If the overall scenario of Panchayats was largely despairing, another disquieting aspect is that almost one half of rural population (women) was virtually kept out of Panchayat arena. In the traditional Caste Panchayats, Village Panchayats and in the British Scheme of local governments women remained entirely excluded.

At the outset, women's involvement in PRIs was dominated by two inter-related themes: representation of women in these bodies and effectiveness and outcome of their participation. There was one convenient scope for the dominant caste/class leaders to install their family women such as wife; mother as their yoke and the very purpose of the policy was led to fall flat. It took 43 years to realize and recognize that women are yet another disadvantaged group and they also require a solution to their discrimination. Women have received a preferential consideration and that too only in the sphere of political representation and that again in local governments

The system of governance in India is changed in the last fifteen years with the implementation of quotas for women in local parliaments, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI's).

Reservation of a formal seat is not the same thing as the possibilities for an active participation. In a context of poverty this situation is even more obvious. As Hust discusses, in India most women undeniably lag behind men; women are less educated, less exposed, more dependent, and command lesser capabilities than the men. However the theoretical response to the question of the possibilities for women's effective power is quite scarce. The term "proxy women" is often used in the same way as "token", of elected women with only formal power. The concept has been defined as "figurehead elected women representatives who are supposed to do the bidding of male members of the family rather than take their own decisions".

It is common that the husbands of the members used to accompany them (women) when they come to attend the meetings. Many Sarpanmaches were illiterate and only able to put their signatures on official papers. Regarding their roles, the study revealed that they were almost insignificant in the functioning of Gram and Block Panchayat bodies. As they belonged to better off families in the villages, they do not work outside their homes. They agreed to stand for elections due to family pressure and also the decision of their community and not because they were keen to do so. The reservations provided by the Government had forced them to contest elections; provision of reservation has not led them to participate in decision-making in local bodies. Majority of women reported that they were not informed or invited to the meetings. While other were hesitant in participating in meetings in the presence of a large number of elder members. However, they have to forego their day's wages or household duties just to identify beneficiaries as to convey what the gram Panchayat would do in future.

The objectives of the study:

The main objective of the study is to understand different hindrances for tribal women participation in political process at grass root level.

The main hindrances for Tribal women political participation are as follows:

In this study a sample of 50 Tribal Women PRI leaders from the Nilgiri Tribal Block were interviewed and main hindrances are pointed out as follows.

1) Awareness:

Table 1: Number of Times Respondents Elected to Panchayats No.of times elected

Number of Times Respondents Elected to Panchayats <i>elected</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Percent</i>
first time	39	78
second time	4	8
third times	7	14
	50	100

Source: Computed

It was observed Table No 1 that 78 percent of the respondents are representing their GP for the first time, only 8 per cent are representing their GP for the second time and rest 14 percent are representing their ward for the third time. Thus majority of the members are first entrants to Panchayats and hence are less experienced. In-depth analysis prevailed that only 5 per cent were aware of the 73rd constitutional amendment. The awareness about discharging the responsibilities was also very much varied as only less than one fourth (21 per cent) shared their role in identification of the problem of the GP, though 40 per cent EWR said that they raised problem in the meeting and the problem have been solved. Around one fourth (24 per cent) opined that their role is to link people to Government Projects & schemes, whereas 5 per cent Tribal leaders thought that their role is to take initiation to complete the incomplete project.

Participation:

Table -2
Distribution of respondents according to Participation (Sample -50)

Sl No	Participation in Panchayat Activities	No of respondents	Percentage
1	No Participation	32	64
2	Active Participation	18	36
	Total	50	100

Source Computed

The participation of the women was recorded in terms of members of SHG, members in the committees of GP and attendance at the meetings of GP or member of any other local organization. Table No 2 shows that 64 per cent respondents didn't have any sort of participation and out of those who have any participation only 36 per cent participate regularly and are active. As reported by the respondents, the key causes mentioned for poor participation of respondents includes male dominance, lack of political experience and gender discrimination.

Source of Inspiration:

Table -3
Distribution of respondents according to Inspiration of Respondents (Sample -50)

Sl No	Source of Inspiration	No of respondents	Percentage
1	Husband	27	54
2	Family Members	17	34
3	Village Leaders	6	12
	Total	50	100

Source Computed

Table No 3 indicates the sources of inspiration of respondents into the public life due to the influence of varied factors, such as self interest, compulsion of family members and others. It is evident from the Table No 3 that husband encouragement (54per cent) was the principal factor responsible for large-scale induction of women into Panchayats. It is clear that, husband and family members (34 per cent) and village leader (12 per cent) played an important role in motivating women to enter in Panchayati

Decision making:

The ability to think and take independent decisions is an important dimension in the empowerment process. It also depends to a large extent on the social and cultural background of the individual as well as the values of the society. Better level of awareness and providing opportunities for participation in public sphere combined with an enabling environment could lead to effective decision making among women. The barriers in women participation are also hindering them in decision making due to which only one third (34 per cent) responded about their active involvement in decision making.

Male dominance:

Table -3
Distribution of respondents according to their Male dominance
(Sample -50)

Sl No	Source of Inspiration	No of respondents	Percentage
1	Husband	22	44
2	Gender discrimination	16	32
3	Self- making decisions	7	14
4	Have no capacity to handle decision making independently	5	10
	Total	50	100

Source Computed

Although the male members encouraged them fighting election but once after getting elected the male members (husband of elected women representatives) take advantage by keeping them out of important meetings and attending the meetings in place of respondents and implement their decisions. Some respondents also felt that their views are ignored only because they are women. Husbands (44 per cent) handle their work and pressurized them to approve their decisions. 32 per cent says that gender discrimination exists in Panchayat. The male dominance is proved by the fact that only 14 per cent respondents told that they are handling issues independently in wards and panchayats, while 10 per cent respondents were in the view that they don't have the capacity to handle issues independently in their constituencies.

Women empowerment:

Tribal women PRI leaders are getting limited opportunities and freedom to participate in socio-cultural and educational activities. The women among upper castes and those belonging to economically well-off families have more participation in the panchayat activities as compare to other backward castes and poor women. However, on the issue of women empowerment the voice was strong as 57 per cent has favored it. Also, 43 per cent told that they are handling issues independently.

Educational level of Tribal women PRI leaders according to Caste

Education is such a powerful parameter, which is necessary for any value judgment, any political participation or any decision making. In traditional society control & access of any decision making lie in the hands of the elder people. By the study of age (figure 9) we would try to find out whether in this variant society baton of the relay race of Panchayat leadership has been handed over to the younger group by the elder group or not. This illustrates that the educational level of WERs in age group (25-35) is lower. EWR from both blocks have low level of education majority of them were only primary educated and only 2 percent member is graduated in both blocks, it clearly indicates that the participation of respondents with below secondary education tends to be more in local governance. The age group 45-55 has more percent in primary education. Age group, 36-45 yr, is average percent in all level education. It is an accepted fact that the overall educational status of female is quite low in all the GP

It is an accepted fact that the overall educational status of female is quite low in all the GP. It is further observed that participation in panchayat meeting according to caste, OBC is majority to participation in panchayat meeting 39 percent , SC and ST have same level of participation 27 percent , the GEN is less participate in panchayat meeting so that it clear that the OBC member is more participate in meeting as compare to other

Does Caste influence decisions making?

Caste is another important parameter to guess the type of leadership according to social stratification. It denotes the members' placement, access and control in panchayats. Scheduled Tribe Women members reported that problem is related to gender, self confidence and upper caste pressures. Upper Caste members of Panchayat always dominate over them regarding the decision making.

Does family structure influence decisions making?

Family is vital parameter for measuring social background of the leaders and type of family influence nature of women's to handling issues independently because it build up one's attitude, preference pattern and political outlook. It indicates the class in which the leader belongs to. Both parameter nature of issues handling and family type connect each other so there is an analysis of these parameter in this study. The study reveals that less respondents handle issues self and more respondents work with the support of other. But in nuclear respondents get the scope to work independently. Hence it clearly indicate nuclear family member work self as compare to joint family because in joint family there are lot of social constraint.

IV. CONCLUSION

The result of the above study shows that the reservation for women can be an important impetus to women's empowerment in India in village level but it is not a guarantee for participation of the elected women. The goal of women's empowerment cannot be accomplished only by giving reservation, the other social and demographic factors also influencing the PRI leaders to participate and work actively in local self governance. To expedite and speed up this process it is essential to implement some supplementary policies which encourage the self-confidence of women, build their negotiation skills and remove operational obstacles in their participation and decision making. On the basis of the present study it cannot be stated that women are categorically empowered but also it cannot be denied that they have gained a certain extent of authority and confidence as a direct outcome of the women reservation in Gram panchayat.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above study following specific recommendations can be made for the empowerment of women through their effective participation in political processes:

- 1. Setting up Panchayat Resource Centres (Help-desk):** Panchayat Resource Centers in every block can be set up which can create awareness of the common people and PRI functionaries on developmental issues. This resource center should also be used as a help desk to the PRI leaders for getting relevant information, all the Govt. circulars translated in local language and other relevant information so that the women functionaries can read it.
- 2. Radio and other media as a tool for awareness creation and feedback:** A 15 minute radio programme in the local language should be broadcast every week, covering subjects like the role of panchayats in providing basic services and their monitoring, planning and budgeting, identification and verification of the BPL list, micro planning, domestic violence, legal provisions relating to the rights and protection of women, social practices and their impact on women. At the end of each programme, a dedicated telephone line can be allowed so that listeners can call with their queries. Besides that media both print as well as electronic can play an important role in creating awareness in the rural society. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice
- 3. Exposure visits and expansion of training:** Exposure visit to WER to the Panchayats where women Sarpanch are doing good work can be visited so that they should get encouragement to do good work. Studies on women in politics have emphasized that contact with outside world makes women more alert and also active in the political process. There could be two ways of doing it. Firstly, interaction between enlightened rural women and illiterate elected one's should be encouraged. Secondly, these women could be taken out to the urban areas also and their interaction with educated urban elected women representatives be arranged.
- 4. Attitudinal Change:** It is evident that men's attitude towards women's entry into politics has begun to change from that of total rejection to limited encouragement and in some cases even to active encouragement. This trend needs to be strengthened through orientation courses and training programmes for officials and elected representatives, both men and women. Besides there is a need to train the women leaders at regular intervals to enable them to manage the responsibilities assigned to them in the Panchayats at all the levels.
- 5. Women Organization:** The women should also be encouraged to organize themselves. The Mahila Mandals, Self Help Group in the village can be effective instruments to mobilize them for this purpose. Some successful women's organizations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging the women's participation in social and political activities. The Government should provide finances and infrastructure to some of the deserving and successful women organizations to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives. The leaders of women's movement in the country could also take up this task. They too can provide support to sensitize the rural women.
- 6. Incentives:** Incentives play an imperative role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making. It has been noticed that there are certain very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Panchayats, who have been successfully implementing the developmental schemes 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 and their success stories and good practices will get replicated.

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