

# Participation of Tribal women in Panchayati Raj Institution in Odisha.

## ABSTRACT:

Odisha is a land of villages. So, rural development is the main pillar of Odisha's development. Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered as a means to good governance and 73rd Constitutional Amendment was affected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantage section of the society like schedule caste, schedule tribes and women. The prime objectives of Panchayati Raj Institutions are to eradicate poverty, uplift standard of living of people living in rural areas and bring about a healthy society by creating awareness for hygiene, sanitation, eradication of illiteracy and to ensure social justice to the rural people. The present study was an effort to know the extent of participation of women elected representative in Panchayat and the problems faced by them. The women who are elected are not always treated with due respect. Many elected women complained that their suggestions were not considered seriously nor were they consulted while decisions were being made. Some felt that their views were ignored only because they are women. At times they were pressurized by their husbands to approve their decisions made by the male dominated Panchayats.

**Keywords: Women, Participation, Panchayati Raj, Governance.**

## Introduction:

Women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country. But their involvement in politics is insignificant compared to men. Political status of women implies a degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in sharing of power and importance given by the society to the role of women in the political system. The equality and active political participation are inseparable. Participation of women in political arena is integral to the advancement of women. Their political participation means not only using the right to vote, but also power-sharing, co-decision-making, and co-policy-making at all levels of governance of the state. Women's equal status in every sphere is inextricably linked to country's progress and development.

Political participation of women is broader than their participation in the electoral and administrative process. It refers to activities not only formally empowered to make decisions, but also intends to influence the attitudes and behavior or those who have powers for decision-making. Participation in grass-root organizations can give them experience in democracy and empowerment. It will become the foundation for democratic life in the society as a whole. Through participation at the local level, they can gain knowledge and awareness of their own social, economic and political conditions and learn to address them. The discussion made above explicates some important variables of participation. They are: 1. Participation in Panchayat activities through attending Panchayat meetings, standing committee meetings. 2. Participating in the selection of beneficiaries for the various development schemes.

A significant move in this regard is the adoption policy to enlarge the base of political participation of women and Tribal women in PRIs. The amendment namely 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional amendment provided for 33% reservation to women at all levels of PRIs covering the rural India. To see that women representatives, perform as leaders of these organizations 33% of the posts of Member, President and Vice-President was earmarked for women representatives.

The principle of democratic decentralisation needs to be promoted both in political and economic spheres. People need to have the right to participate in the decision-making process and for this an appropriate institution at the grassroots level is essential. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have emerged to serve this purpose. The objective of PRIs is to act as an instrument of self-education for people and involve them in the decision-making process so as to ensure proper implementation of policies and programmes meant for their development.

### **Objectives of the study:**

In this context, the present study will be undertaken out to meet following specific objectives:

- To identify the problems faced by women members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- To Identify the decision making in tribal areas.
- To know the obstacles for women in participation the Panchayati Raj Institute and role performance in panchayat.
- To study the socio-economic background of the respondents,
- To know the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women in PRI's.

### **Methodology:**

In order to make an analytical study the data have been collected from both the primary and secondary sources. The required primary data and information have been collected through interview method from the study area. On the other hand, the secondary data and information have been collected from different statistical records of the Government of Odisha, Statistical Handbook, various local bodies, different books and journals, published Research papers and articles, etc. Hence, the study is analytical and mainly based on secondary sources of data.

### **Constitution provision for women:**

After The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution, which were passed by the Parliament in 1992 and rectified in 1993, Panchayati Raj Act, which not only, provided autonomy to the grassroots but it also provided reservation of one-third of seats for women in every Panchayat and municipality, not less than one-third seats shall be reserved for women belonging to scheduled casted and scheduled tribes. This may be allotted by rotation from the constituency to constituency. Till the enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments no one was sure about the role to be played by the women in the process of development of the society and women themselves. there was 33 per cent reservation for women among elected representative to the local government. This has been a big achievement in empowerment of women. It provided opportunity for women to actively participate in the decision-making processes of their locality. Holding of periodic elections to the local bodies has been made mandatory as well as so that there is democratic renewal of reservations from time to time. India highlights the constant daily struggles of tribal communities and the severe limitations placed on women in formal public life. The Orissa State government and the India Central government have introduced a number of important measures to 'empower' women in India. For example, the National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women, a 33% reservation for tribal women in local politics was passed in the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992, and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was developed in 2001. India has also signed a number of international conventions that aim to ensure the rights of women.

Biju Patnaik, the most dynamic chief Minister of Odisha was most emphatic about participation of women in the Panchayati Raj System. He announced that for the first time in the history of Independent India those women will be given 33 percent reservation in the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions. And true to his word, he saw to it that the Odisha Zilla Parishad Act of 1991 and the Gram Panchayat Samiti Amendment Act of 1992 were passed by the Odisha Assembly that provided for 33 per cent of reservation for women including Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women. For the first time more than 25 thousand women were elected to various Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samities and Zilla Parishads. It was further provided that one-third of Zilla Parishads would have exclusively women Chairpersons. In the case of the Panchayat Samities and the Gram Panchayats, one of the two offices- bearers, i.e., Chairpersons of Vice-Chairpersons must be women. Chief Minister Biju Patnaik also emphasized that all the elected representatives of the PRIs should receive adequate political and administrative training. It must be pointed out that Odisha Government's policies on reservation of women were followed by many other state governments in India that culminated in the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts to the Constitution. It also adds to the credit of Mr. Patnaik that after a lapse of eight years. It conducted elections to Gram Panchayats in the year 1992 for 5264-gram Panchayats in state. When the devolution of powers envisaged in the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act and the women empowerment scheme implemented in the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act and the women empowerment scheme implemented, these were already incorporated in the vision of the then Chief Minister of Odisha Biju Patnaik. In Odisha, the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment Act and its important provisions were incorporated through confirmatory legislation and fresh elections were held in 1997. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution has conferred constitutional status to PRIs. Over the past five decades, PRIs have emerged as the powerful institutions in bringing about rapid and sustainable development and socio-economic transformation in rural Odisha.

The role of women leaders in developmental process is a mixture of some sort of harassing and meaningful. It is found that, due to illiteracy and poor socio-economic status, the women leader could not assert influence on the decision-making process. Through reservation has made women able to participate in the electoral process of the local self-governance system in a large way. Women leadership has come under immense pressure due to the criminalizing panchayat election including harassment and murder.

Due to social tradition of male superiority, women leaders are not getting any chances to defend their voice before elderly male persons. They are feeling shy while talking in a meeting. Women leadership faced tremendous pressure in their normal functioning as power hungry male members did not accept them at par.

The percentage of women at various levels of political activities increased dramatically, but it is found that women were just rubber stamps either in the hands of their family members or in the hands of their senior party members. However, the above instances do not mean that women leaders in panchayati Raj System in Odisha became failed. In Odisha, women made the panchayat different. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of 1993, providing reservation for women at grassroot levels, has gone long way in the empowerment of Indian women.

The Odisha Nari Samaj(ONS), a state level federation of 55 block level tribal women's organization has made its presence felt during the last panchayat elections, as 1,226 of its nominees selected through ONS has not only succeeded electorally, it has also trained these women on the PR system and equipped them to make their panchayat a model of development. source of the ONS claimed that candidates picked by Nari Samaja had contested as independents. They have own 89 sarpanch posts, and 1,065 ward member posts. Thread, the Odisha based training institute which initiated these organizations 12 years ago had trained over 1100 tribal women intensively in three phases and exposed another 1500 men and women to a number of workshops on

panchayati Raj. The 55-block level tribal women's organizations selected these tribal women and some men for contesting 2007 panchayat Elections, supported their social and development activities in the villages for last two years. Thus, the grass-root level tribal women's organizations communities have now come out successful to be actively involved in the political process ensuring active participation in the decision-making through panchayati raj (Achievement News, 21 March 2007)

It is reported by the then state Election commission Mr. Sanjiv Chandra that in the last panchayati raj elections (2007) in Odisha, 32,100 ward members, and 101 Sarpanches have been elected uncontested which was a very good sign of communities reposing faith on community leadership without difference. Portraying the Gram Sabha as the "heart" and Gram panchayat as the "brain" of the PRS, he said that "Gram Swarajya" can be realized through this PRIs and Odisha Nari Samaj. Tribal women organizations in the political parties need to be kept out and this can be done if organizations and service minded outfits as well as individuals take position at the grass-root level. A nationwide study on elected women representatives (EWRs) commissioned by Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2007-08 had concluded that the earlier notion of women being mere proxies for male relative have gradually ceded space to the recognition that give the opportunity to participate in the political system, women are as capable as their male gender issues but also address the developmental needs of the community as a whole and also issues such as health, sanitation, early of women (information given by the Minister PR Sri V. Kishore Chandra Deo in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha).

In a bold move with far reaching impact on electoral politics at the grass-root, the Odisha Government has made 50 percent reservation for women in panchayati Raj institution to achieve gender equality in the representation in panchayati raj bodies. The state legislature unanimously gave its nod to the Odisha panchayat Act ,1964, Odisha panchayat Samiti Act and the Zilla Parishad Act enhancing the quota for women from existing 33% to 50% in February 2011 in the three-tier panchayat bodies (The Economics Times, 8.4. 2011). By amending the panchayat laws, the bill also provided reservation of the seats and office of the chairpersons for two terms as it was felt that the operation of single term did not attract more candidates. The experience of first term would be useful in the second term for the women to prove themselves as the true representative of women as well as the entire community. It was implemented in the PR elections in February-March 2012. This was being done in view of the efficiency, abilities and success shown by women in various spheres and in order to take forward and empower the women in decision-making process at local self-government. However, those examples of women's empowerment in Odisha are very scanty. It requires a lot for their empowerment. The Odisha PR Department and the United Nations Entity for gender Equality and Empowerment of women (UN Women) have signed an agreement for promoting women's political leadership and empowering the elected representatives in the local government. At present the programme is being implemented in six states, i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan. The main objectives of the programme are capacity building of the elected women representatives at the Gram Sabha level, research and policy advocacy to address the legal and political issues pertaining to local self -governance and evolution of a centre of excellence.

## Conclusion:

It is often argued that the women members participation in Panchayati raj activities only at the dictates of male family members and they themselves do not act independently. Over half of the male women members attending most of the panchayat meetings with a few exceptions. All endorsed that women attend more meetings now than before, and also feel encouraged to do so. Over two-third of the males reported women

members making prior preparations for attending meetings and over half of them feel that they are doing so more now before evidently, the earlier view about poor participation of women members in panchayat activities Was not endorsed by male members of panchayats. It is generally believed that the family responsibilities, social traditions and domestic duties and above all lack of education and poor understanding of the processes and functions of panchayats act as strong impediments to women participate in Panchayati raj meetings.

The migrant tribal women and girls faced a number of problems immediately after their migration to cities which included difficulty of communication in local language, residential accommodation, employment, education of children, local contacts, adjustment with city life and environment etc. The main causes of financial, physical and sexual exploitation of the migrant tribal women and girls in cities were poverty, lack of employment opportunities, lack of awareness, education, unorganized nation of labour force, misunderstanding of the local people about free sex in tribal's, and lack of community support to victims of sexual exploitation.

Besides routine household work, the tribal women work in the agricultural fields, forests for long hours. The overall output if seen in terms of number of hours of work is low. Their schedule of long working hours continues even during pregnancy, natal and postnatal stages. They have a negative energy balance, high morbidity rate, and low child survival rate. They suffer from taboos and superstitions and remain deprived of the benefits from existing development and welfare programmes.

#### **SUGGESTIONS:**

To develop or capacitate self-reliant and self-respect tribal society by strengthening the tribal community comprehensively, the government should focus empowerment of schedule tribe women and allocate separate funds throughout the five years plan. health, education and nourishment should be selected key focus areas, besides; women should be provided ample opportunities for economic development, based upon the traditional skills, women should also be provided additional skills for value additions to the produces .The government should ensure 100% literacy among the tribal women by the welfare programmes and through the five years plan, the adivasi girls, who are desirous of higher education should be provided subsidy for education like technical, the state should provide the hostel facilities for motivation. The tribal women workers, who are engaged in agriculture, construction, brick kiln etc, are unorganized; the government should protect their labour rights. and the government should make special allocation for implementation of labour laws for the schedule area to prevent the exploitation of the workers. The tribal forest land cultivators, who have been given the land entitlements, should be assisted by enhancing the yield by soil and water development process. The farmers should be provided the high yielding seeds varieties along with training to improve their agriculture. Such farmers should be provided the loan assistance for improving their agricultural productivity. So, in the light of the above analysis, it is quite obvious that a number of reasons like illiteracy, poverty, traditional family values and pattern of society, male dominance society etc. are responsible for their less participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

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