International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Participation of Tribal Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Study in Padmapur Block

Gopinath Shabar[1], Dr. Babita Das[2]

[1]Research Scholar in Social Work, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, 751024, India.
[2]Assistant Professor in Sociology, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha,751024, India.

Abstract
Participation of tribal women is significant in promoting inclusive democracy, women empowerment and good grassroots governance. The implementation of the Panchayati Raj System and the constitutional provision of women's reservation have paved the way for tribal women to become part of the local governance structure and take part in decision-making. But mere representation of a person in the political arena does not guarantee the participation of the person in governance. Against this backdrop, the present paper attempts to study the participation of tribal women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions of Padmapur Block of Rayagada District of Odisha. It is an attempt to explore the participation of tribal women in Panchayat meetings, decision-making, community development initiatives and implementation of governmental schemes along with the various problems they face while discharging their political and administrative duties. The current study employs the descriptive research methodology and relies mostly on primary data gathered from the tribal women respondents through a structured questionnaire and interviews with the help of relevant secondary sources. The study reveals that political participation has offered new opportunities for tribal women in terms of leadership, representation and local development work despite some problems such as lack of education and training, familial, social restrictions and lack of administrative knowledge. The study conclude that the reservation has provided a vital base for the political representation of tribal women, but regular training, political awareness, family and community support, and increased opportunities for making independent decisions are needed to facilitate their effective participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Keywords: Tribal Women, Political Participation, Panchayati Raj System, Women's Reservation Policy, Local Governance, Political Empowerment, Padmapur Block, Rayagada District.

Introduction

The participation of women is one of the necessary ingredients for democratic governance since democracy becomes more representative and participative when both men and women get the chance to participate in the decision-making and administration process equally. Traditionally, the womenfolk of tribes have been left out of the mainstream political and administrative processes owing to social inequality, patriarchal attitude, lack of educational opportunities and resource endowment and marginalization of tribal communities. One major institutional development that has taken place is that of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, which granted constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj

Institutions and also made provisions for reservation of seats for women in local self-governments thereby opening doors for women and women of tribes to participate in politics and become leaders. This major development holds much importance for Odisha since the tribal women form an important element of the rural society of the state and their participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions can lead to the development of the community and representation of tribal interest. Therefore, this major development holds much significance in Padmapur Block of Rayagada District since the Saura and Kandha are two major tribal groups residing there.

Background of Panchayati Raj and Tribal Women

The Panchayati Raj Institutions are the basic framework of democratic decentralization in rural areas of India, allowing the people the chance to participate actively in local administration, planning, development, and decision making. The provision of reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions by the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, increased the representation of women in grass root level political institutions and provided chances to them for taking up leadership positions in Gram Panchayats and other local government institutions. Nevertheless, the status of tribal women needs to be considered specifically because the participation of tribal women in governance can be affected by a number of factors like education, socio-economic factors, and culture. Though reservation of seats in the constitution has helped tribal women become elected representatives, the representation through elections does not always guarantee participation. Participation means the power to attend and participate in meetings, give opinions and suggestions, influence decisions, implement development projects, represent needs of the community, monitor public schemes, and exercise powers independently. Consequently, it becomes necessary to analyze the participation of tribal women irrespective of their electoral position to find out how far the Panchayati Raj Institutions have empowered them and involved in local administration.

Statement of the Problem

The problem statement of the current research study is whether or not tribal women who get elected into Panchayati Raj Institutions are participating in decision-making and administration as independent agents of change at the grassroots level, apart from their being elected into the institution of Panchayats. Though the constitutional provision of reservation has increased the political presence of tribal women in local level institutions, the mere fact that tribal women get elected into PRIs does not mean that they are effectively or independently contributing to the process of governance. Hence, it is important to see whether the tribal women who get elected into the institutions of Panchayat Raj are able to freely express themselves, attend meetings, raise the issues and concerns of their communities, participate in decision-making, monitor welfare programs and initiatives of the government, and make an impact on the development priorities at the local level. Here, the factors such as social, educational, economic, cultural, and institutional are of importance. The study takes into consideration the experience of tribal women representatives in Padmapur Block of Rayagada District.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the level of participation of tribal women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Padmapur block.
2. To assess their role in local decision-making and community development.

3. To identify the challenges faced by tribal women representatives and the role of education, family support, and training in strengthening their participation.

Research Methodology

The current study uses a descriptive research design to analyze the participation of tribal women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and local administration. The study will be conducted within Padmapur Block of Rayagada District in Odisha, and the respondents will be the elected tribal women representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The primary data will be collected directly from the respondents through the use of a structured questionnaire and interview schedule which will aim at eliciting information concerning their participation in politics, Panchayat meetings, decision-making, community development work, administration and difficulties they face in executing their functions. Secondary data will be collected from books, journal articles, government publications, Census publications, Panchayati Raj publications, various Acts, and any other literature relevant to tribal women, local governance and administration. The gathered data will be categorized systematically and analyzed in terms of frequencies and percentages, thereafter comparative analysis will be made to highlight the similarities and differences in the participation of tribal women representatives especially between the Saura and Kandha tribes.

Political Participation of Tribal Women

Political participation of tribal women in Panchayati Raj Institutions can be gauged by virtue of their role in different aspects of governance and administration at the grass root level. It can include their participation in Gram Sabha meetings and Panchayat meetings, voicing opinions, participating in decision making, problem identification, monitoring of welfare schemes of the government, and participation in local development programmes. It may also include interaction of tribal women with government officials, voicing issues related to women and tribal communities, touring villages, and meeting people from the community to know about their requirements. All these aspects serve as a sound basis for judging the level of participation of elected tribal women in local governance.

Major Challenges

Women representatives from the tribe are faced with a variety of social, educational, economic, administrative, and geographic barriers which might inhibit their effective participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Some of these barriers include restricted educational facilities, lack of political experience, burden of domestic duties, patriarchal attitude, economic dependency, ignorance of administrative processes, limited training and capacity building programs, reluctance to speak out in society, and dependency on husbands and other members of the family in administration. Furthermore, the tough geographic situation of the tribes such as rugged hills, poor transportation facilities, and limited accessibility to villages and administrative institutions might also restrain their participation.

Findings

The findings of the research suggest that there is a substantial presence of tribal women representatives in grassroots governance, despite the fact that the extent of participation of tribal women differs along various dimensions of administration. According to the survey, 76.7 percent of Saura women and 58 percent of Kandha women stated that they monitor the government welfare schemes most of the time, implying that there is a certain engagement of elected tribal women in developmental and welfare activities rather than

them being in reserved places. Likewise, 61.3 percent of Saura women and 56.7 percent of Kandha women mentioned their participation in monthly meetings most of the time, suggesting that there is participation of tribal women in the operation of Panchayati Raj Institutions. There was also a considerable extent of community support among tribal women, where 76.67 percent of Saura women and 63.33 percent of Kandha women stated that they receive community support for development work all the time.

However, the results also point to the need for further strengthening, especially in terms of training and capacity development. While 63.3 percent of Saura women and 76.6 percent of Kandha women had said that they had been given special training for responsible administration, there were many respondents who felt that they did not receive any such training. Reservation under the Constitution has helped tribal women to become part of local governance and administration, but mere representation does not mean equal or full participation. The relatively high rate of participation among Saura women in various parameters has shown that there exist different experiences and conditions among the tribal women communities.

Suggestions

On the basis of the above analysis of the results of this study, some recommendations are proposed to empower the effective participation of tribal women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The elected tribal women representatives should participate in regular training and capacity building programs to increase their awareness regarding the administration, leadership, budgeting, development planning, and decision making in Panchayati Raj system. Programs to increase political and administrative awareness should also be held to inform the elected women about their legal rights, responsibilities, powers and duties as elected representatives. Guidance and administrative support from Panchayati Raj institutions should be increased to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively. Efforts should be made to promote independent decision making and opinion expressing of the elected representatives rather than making them dependent on husbands and other members of their families. At the same time, the support from family and community should be increased to make a conducive environment for the participation of women in local government.

Conclusion

The study finds out that the reservation policy related to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment has created an important political space for the tribal women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, but numerical representation cannot be mistaken as political empowerment. The case of Padmapur Block suggests that the tribal women representatives attend Panchayat meetings, observe welfare schemes, interact with communities and contribute to the process of development. Yet, the efficiency of their participation is highly dependent on their level of education, administration skills, experience, self-confidence, family assistance and social acceptance. It is also shown in the literature that the process of reservation could be instrumental for empowering women in politics, while patriarchal and institutional barriers might still hinder their actual political power. Thus, it becomes necessary to focus not only on representation of tribal women in Panchayats, but also on the development of their leadership potential, capacity for making decisions and administration.

References

1. Agarwal, B. (2023). Gender, presence and representation: Can presence alone make for effective representation? Social Change, 54(1), 36-53.

2. Aruna, C. (2018). Does social capital make a difference for Dalit women representatives in local self-governance? Contemporary Voice of Dalit, 10(1), 1-8.
3. Ghosh, R., Chakravarti, P., & Mansi, K. (2015). Women's empowerment and education: Panchayats and women's self-help groups in India. Policy Futures in Education.
4. Kakati, B. K. (2024). Can reservation ensure women's participation in local governance: A study among Tiwas. Journal of the Anthropological Survey of India, 73(1), 44-56.
5. Malik, G., & Nayak, S. (2025). Participatory democracy of women in rural India: A field-based experience of Palli Sabha from Odisha. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 17(2).
6. Mohanty, B. (1995). Panchayati raj, 73rd constitutional amendment and women. Economic and Political Weekly, 30(52),3346-3350.
7. Panda, S. (1997). Political empowerment of women: A case of Orissa. Journal of Rural Development, 22(4), 665-667.
8. Sharma, K. (1998). Transformative politics: Dimensions of women's participation in Panchayati Raj. Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 5(1).
9. Sukumar, N., Lal, L. D., & Mishra, V. (2019). Inclusiveness in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Journal of Social Inclusion Studies, 5(1), 72-88.
10. Sutar, A. S. (2007). Caste and patriarchy in the emerging women's leadership in panchayats: A study from Karnataka. Sociological Bulletin, 37(2).