

A Study on Scheduled Tribe Women and Political Empowerment of Panchayat Raj in Andaman & Nicobar Island

Dr. A. Tamil Selvi

Guest Lecturer in Political Science Department, Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya, Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar Island

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to analyse the socioeconomic and political background of the Scheduled Tribe women and political empowerment of panchayat raj in Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Their knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of the panchayat, support received from various sections of the scheduled tribe women and political empowerment and their level of performance have also been brought out. The participants were elected women panchayat belong to scheduled tribe in Andaman & Nicobar Islands. This study is based on primary evidence collected from scheduled tribe women panchayat. The result shows that middle age group and married women hailing majority in scheduled tribe community. Most of them were school dropouts and their level of education was ranging from primary school to middle school level engaged in agriculture, fishers and non agriculture labourer. This study based on the concluded that there is a strong relationship between the political empowerment of Scheduled Tribe's Women Elected Representatives and their capability in redressing the grievances of women and minorities in the village.

Key words: Women, Panchayat Raj, Scheduled Tribes and Political empowerment

INTRODUCTION

In order to ensure empowerment of women in political arena the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provided for 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in all rural

local elected bodies. Article 243-D (3) of the Act provides that not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. Article 243-D (4) of the same Act provides that the offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall also be reserved for women and such reservation shall not be less than one third of their total number of offices of the Chairperson in the Panchayats. This Act along with the ensuing State Acts on Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) also provided for mandatory provisions of the obligatory Gram Sabha meetings. These provisions have given SCs and STs in villages opportunity to participate in the political decision making. Because of affirmative actions of this Act, Scheduled Tribes women have started to occupy leadership positions in local bodies. It explains that decentralization is a democratic functioning and decision making has been an emphasis for quite some time now. Like the one same solution for a better governance for India, the recent 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution hence have been hailed as focusing the attention of the nation on the political structures and process in rural India. Their significance for the vulnerable section of the countryside society and their participation in the

operation of these structures (Susheela Kaushik, 1993).

The tribal women of West Bengal are not ready to compete for places like Panchayat raj. They are not confident to contest elections. They considered themselves as a passive recipient of whatever comes from governments. Male members of families have responded to questions asked by interviewers in the open air, and in some cases, tribal women have not even been exposed (Maitreyi Choudhuri 2003).

He highlighted the importance of 73rd Constitutional Amendment to empower women leaders. According to the author, the 73rd amendment rightly assigned political right to women to contest, to be elected as leaders and to decide for the public. However, there are disruptions to empowerment functions, such as controlling responsibilities of men, husband, and relatives at home. There are many hurdles for women to overcome (Girish K Mishra 2002).

It explains the PRI under the 73rd constitutional amendment is a radical departure from the earlier system in the sense that now reservation facility is made to the SCs and STs at the all the three levels of the PRI. As per the percentage of their numerical strength as a result tribal and Dalit representatives found in large number at all the levels, they are from different social and demographic background their level of education is low. However, in spite of similarity, the reason of their entry in the panchayat politics, style of functioning achievements and the process of empowerment may be different due to different cultural context (S. N. Chaudhary 2004).

It points out that panchayat raj has been the support of Indian villages since the beginning of the recorded history. Gandhiji's dream of every community being a republic or panchayat having powers has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three tier panchayat raj system to enlist people's participation in rural construction. 73rd amendment is a

revolutionary step to achieve Gandhi's concept of gram swaraj (A.K. Sinha, 2004).

The comparative analysis of schedule caste and schedule tribe elected women panchayats presidents from Tamil Nadu. Groups faced the experience of caste-based discrimination and gender discrimination. According to the study, Schedule caste women presidents were better than schedule tribe women in executing their power. In most cases, women representatives are functioning as a proxy to their family, community, upper caste, wealthy groups, local politicians, etc. The study suggested provision of education, training, and the need for women to organize themselves with organizations to overcome their proxy role (Tharmalingam V. S. 2013).

The objective of the study an attempt has been made to analysis of data and information collected for the study to expose the Scheduled Tribe women and political empowerment of panchayat Raj in Andaman & Nicobar Island. The data has been collected through structured interview schedule. Percentage analysis is applied to know the personal profile, socio-economic conditions, and political scenario of the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Political Empowerment is a multidimensional concept which is influenced by different parameters. Respondents' age, education, marital status and social conditions, their attitude, perception, and government initiatives are the major factors cause political empowerment of Scheduled Tribal women. Hence studying about the respondents' personal profile is very important to understand the status of their empowerment politically of Panchayat Raj. The present study concerns age, marital status and education are the basic information about the respondents. In this context, the researcher used percentage analysis to understand the personal profile of the tribal women.

Table: 1 Personal Profile of the Respondents (Sample Size 50)

Variables	Classification of the Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Age Group Level	18 – 30	04	08.00
	31 – 40	22	44.00
	41 – 50	18	36.00
	51 and Above	06	12.00
	Total	50	100.00
Educational Qualification Level	Illiterate	12	24.00
	Primary Level	23	46.00
	Middle School Level	15	30.00
	Higher Secondary Level	00	00.00
	Graduation and Above	00	00.00
	Total	50	100.00
Marital Status Level	Un Married	00	00.00
	Married	49	98.00
	Widow	01	02.00
	Divorce and Separated	00	00.00
	Total	50	100.00

Source: Primary data

This table 1 shows that a maximum of 44 per cent of respondents are in the age group of 31 to 40, followed by 36 per cent of respondents in the age group of 41 to 50 years, 12 per cent are in the age group of above 51 years and only 8 per cent of respondents are in the age group of 18 to 30 Years. Since the study conducted among the elected representatives of tribal women for Panchayat raj, age is one of the criteria to empower. Therefore majority of the respondents involved in present study are between the ages of 31 to 50 years. Education is a key to make changes in the development of scheduled tribes socially and economically and it is not stressed by all means of strategies. From the above table, it is clear that the maximum of 46 per cent of respondents are educated up to primary level followed by 30 per cent are completed up to middle level education, and a reasonable number of respondents 24 per cent are illiterates. From this result it is evidenced that still tribal women are far away from getting education up to higher level, though they are contesting Panchayat level elections. Despite the government initiating a lot of attempts to equalize the availability of education among both male and female, still there is a big gap in between the tribal male and tribal female. Regarding the marital status, 98 per cent of the elected representatives of the tribal women are married and only 2 per cent widow. Marital status is another parameter

which acts as a boost the tribal women to take part in the local body elections.

Table 2 shows that maximum of 48 per cent of respondents are depended on agricultural work like collection of paddy, Rabi, banana and root crops, followed by 38 per cent of are fishing, 12 per cent is represented by the respondents who are non – agriculture, and only 2 per cent are engaged other works. Regarding the employment status, 54 per cent of the respondents are employed for daily wages, 36 per cent are worked for weekly wages and only 6 per cent are getting work for monthly wages. It is noted that 4 per cent of the respondents are initiated their own business as self-employees. In terms of family income per month, it is observed from the table that total of 68 per cent of the respondents' family income is Rs. 10001 – Rs. 20000 among them half of the respondents are earning Rs. 20001 and above per month as family income. A notable segment 24 per cent of respondents' family income is Rs. 5001 to Rs. 10000, and minimum of 8 per cent is represented by respondents who earn family income per month as below Rs. 5000. Among the total of the respondents 56 per cent of them are felt economically insecure and 44 per cent are perceived positively about their economic security. The table further elaborates that there are 64 per cent of the respondents are not borrowed money from another person or institution, only one third of the respondents are borrowed money from financial sources.

Out of them 40 per cent are borrowed money from banks. Further the table highlights that 38 per cent of the respondents are spending about Rs. 5001 to Rs. 10000 per month, followed by 34 per cent are spending Rs. 10001 to 15000, 24 per cent are spending below Rs. 5000, and

minimum of 4 per cent are spending Rs. 15001 and above per month. In referring the spending pattern of the respondents, 48 per cent of them are spent for food, 34 per cent are spent for education, and 18 per cent are spent for health per month.

Table: 2 Financial assets details of the respondents

Variables	Classification of the Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Occupation Status	Agriculture	24	48.00
	Non – Agriculture	08	12.00
	Fishing	19	38.00
	Others	01	2.00
	Total	50	100.00
Employment Status	Daily wage	27	54.00
	Weekly wage	18	36.00
	Monthly wage	03	06.00
	Self-employee	02	04.00
	Total	50	100.00
Monthly wise Family Income	Below 5000	04	08.00
	5001 – 10000	12	24.00
	10001 – 20000	17	34.00
	20001 and Above	17	34.00
	Total	50	100.00
Feel of economic secure	No	28	56.00
	Yes	22	44.00
	Total	50	100.00
Borrowed money from another person/Institution	No	32	64.00
	Yes	18	36.00
	Total	50	100.00
Borrowed money from banks	No	30	60.00
	Yes	20	40.00
	Total	50	100.00
Monthly wise Family expenditure	Below 5000	12	24.00
	5001 – 10000	19	38.00
	10001 – 15000	17	34.00
	15001 and Above	02	04.00
	Total	50	100.00
Spending pattern	Food	24	48.00
	Education	17	34.00
	Health	09	18.00
	Total	50	100.00

Source: Primary data

Table: 3 Knowledge and Awareness on the Gram Sabha Meeting

Variables	Classification of the Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Knowledge on conducting the Gram Sabha Meeting	No	01	02.00
	Yes	49	98.00
	Total	50	100.00
Knowledge on implementing the decisions	No	18	36.00
	Yes	32	64.00
	Total	50	100.00
Knowledge on conducting Panchayat council meeting	No	17	34.00
	Yes	33	66.00
	Total	50	100.00
Knowledge on planning Exercise	No	24	48.00
	Yes	26	52.00
	Total	50	100.00
Knowledge on preparing the budget	No	40	80.00
	Yes	10	20.00
	Total	50	100.00
Awareness on tracking Panchayat finance	No	42	84.00
	Yes	08	16.00
	Total	50	100.00
Awareness on women oriented bank	No	09	18.00
	Yes	41	82.00
	Total	50	100.00

Source: Primary data

This table 3 shows that, it is come to know that 98 per cent of the respondents are having the knowledge on conducting Gram Sabha meeting in their villages. It is understood from the table that about 64 per cent of the respondents are agreed that they know to implement the decisions of Gram Sabha and 36 per cent of the respondents are shown no interest in this regard. It is concluded from the table that total of 66 per cent of the respondents are accepted that they have knowledge on conducting Panchayat council meeting and 34 per cent of the respondents are said they have poor knowledge in this regard. It clearly depicts that total of 52 per cent of the respondents are have the knowledge on planning exercise at the Panchayat level and 48 per cent of the respondents are not agreed in this knowledge on planning at Panchayat level.

This table presents that only of 20 per cent of the respondents are have knowledge and of 80 per cent he respondents do not have knowledge on preparing the budget. It is found from the results that the elected representatives of the tribal women need more training and practice on preparing the budgets. Table reveals that only of 16 per cent of the respondents are aware and majority of 84 per cent are not aware on tracking Panchayat finance. It is found from the results that the elected representatives of the tribal women require more awareness on tracking Panchayat finance. From the table it is clear that majority of the respondents 82 per cent are aware on the first women oriented bank and only 18 per cent of them are not aware about the India's first women oriented bank aimed at providing loans and financial services.

Table: 4 Laws and Regulations in Panchayat Raj

Variables	Classification of the Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Knowledge on Panchayat Act	No	39	78.00
	Yes	11	22.00
	Total	50	100.00
Awareness on rules of Panchayat	No	28	56.00
	Yes	22	44.00
	Total	50	100.00
Awareness on the schemes of rural development	No	40	80.00
	Yes	10	20.00
	Total	50	100.00
Awareness on reservation policy for women Panchayat election	No	43	86.00
	Yes	07	14.00
	Total	50	100.00
Getting government Orders	No	27	54.00
	Yes	23	46.00
	Total	50	100.00

Source: Primary data

This table 4 shows that, it is come to know that only 22 per cent of the respondents are having the knowledge on the Panchayat Act of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. It is understood from the table that about 44 per cent of the respondents are agreed that they aware on the rules and regulations of Panchayat and 56 per cent of the respondents are not aware on this regard. It is concluded from the table that only 20 per cent of the respondents are accepted that they aware on the schemes of rural

development and 80 per cent of the respondents are said that they have poor awareness on those schemes. The table clearly depicts that minimum 14 per cent of the respondents are have the awareness and maximum 86 per cent of the respondents are not aware on reservation policy for women Panchayat election. The table presents that 46 per cent of the respondents getting government order properly and 54 per cent of the respondents do not receive the government orders on proper time.

Table: 5 Justice and Redress Mechanism of the Panchayat Raj

Variables	Classification of the Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Attending social justice activities	No	00	00.00
	Yes	50	100.00
	Total	50	100.00
Attending gender justice activities	No	23	46.00
	Yes	27	54.00
	Total	50	100.00
Ensuring maximum justice to the women of ST	No	01	02.00
	Yes	49	98.00
	Total	50	100.00
Women members are encouraged to speak women issues	No	11	22.00
	Yes	39	78.00
	Total	50	100.00
ST women members are permitted to speak out their issues	No	23	46.00
	Yes	27	54.00
	Total	50	100.00
Experience in organizing people for common problem	No	24	48.00
	Yes	26	52.00
	Total	50	100.00
Ever approached free legal aid cell to redress the grievances	No	22	44.00
	Yes	28	56.00
	Total	50	100.00
Seeking redressed access justice	No	10	20.00
	Yes	40	80.00
	Total	50	100.00
Effectively using the system of Justice	No	31	62.00
	Yes	19	38.00
	Total	50	100.00

Source: Primary data

Table 5 clearly shows that all the elected women are attended social justice activities; in particular 54 per cent are attended as an active participant in gender justice activities. Followed by 98 per cent of the respondents are tried to ensure maximum justice to ST women. Among the samples 78 per cent are encouraged the women members to speak out women issues, and 54 per cent of the ST women permitted to open up their problems and issues. Regarding organizing the people, 52 per cent of the tribal women are having the experience in organizing people for common problem and 56 per cent are encouraged to approach free legal aid cell to redress the grievances. Among them 80 per cent are seek redressed access justice, and only 38 per cent of them are effectively using the system of justice.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The study concludes that 44 per cent of respondents are in the age group of 31 to 40, followed by 36 per cent of respondents in the age group of 41 to 50 years, 12 per cent are in the age group of above 51 years and only 8 per cent of respondents are in the age group of 18 to 30 Years.

The study finds that 98 per cent of respondents participated actively in conducting gram sabhas meeting and 64 per cent of the respondents participated actively in implement the decisions of Gram Sabha. Respondents who have participated in the gram sabha and gram panchayat meetings are found to be more politically empowered than respondents who have not attended gram sabha and gram panchayat meetings. Moreover, 20 per cent of the respondents who are reported to have participated in preparing the budget and 18 per cent of them are not aware about the India's first women-oriented bank aimed at providing loans and financial services.

This study finds that 22 per cent of the respondents are having the knowledge on the Panchayat Act of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. 44 per cent of the respondents are agreed that they aware on the rules and regulations of Panchayat and 56 per cent of the respondents are not aware on this regard. 20 per cent of the respondents are accepted that they aware on the schemes of rural development and 80 per cent of the respondents are said that they have poor awareness on those schemes.

The study finds that 54 per cent of the respondents are actively engaged in redress of gender related grievances or gender violence in the village. 98 per cent of the respondents said they tried to ensure maximum justice to ST women. 78 per cent of the respondents are reported to have encouraged women members to speak out on women issues, and 54 per cent of the respondents are reported to open up their problems and issues in public forums. Further, 52 per cent of the respondents having had experience in organizing people for common problem and 56 per cent of the respondents said they encouraged womenfolk in the village to approach free legal aid cell to redress their grievances. 80 per cent of the respondents are reported to have sought for access to justice for women, and 38 per cent of the respondents are effectively using the system of justice. From the table analysis, it can be concluded that there is a strong relationship between the political empowerment of Scheduled Tribe's Women Elected Representatives and their capability in redressing the grievances of women and minorities in the village.

SUGGESTIONS

As a vast majority of ST ward members ignorant of the panchayat raj system, they may be given specialized training to enlighten them on the same and to motivate themselves towards the discourse of empowerment. The training thus given should focus on empowering the tribal community to given should focus on empowering the tribal community to come out of their social stigma and to make them stand in a position to compete with the general population.

Most of the ST members of the Village Panchayat, seldom elected for another term as a result of rotation of reservation of seats.

Consequently, they lose their chance to prove their mettle for another term. Hence, it suggested that rotational reservation of seats be to put an end to, so that they may get empowered initializing their experience.

Declaration by Authors

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