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Political Empowerment and Inclusive Development of Tribals through PRIs- A Study in Gajapati District of Odisha

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ABSTRACT

Tribal development as a subject has been an important area of inquiry in the social sciences. Among tribals, the Saora (Saura) community constitutes numerically the largest group in Gajapati and Lanjia Saora is considered most primitive in this area. The saoras are one of the oldest known tribes of India. They are called by various terms such as Savaras, Sabaras, Saura, Saora etc. The Indian Constitution has made certain proper provisions to uplift and improve the condition of this lower stratum of the society. The central Government and Planning Commission have carried out a number of polices, allocated huge money and provided support to State governments with regard to the welfare and development of Scheduled Tribes. This paper presents the empirical findings political empowerment and inclusive development of tribals through PRIs in Gajapati district of Odisha

Key Words : Political empowerment, Inclusive development, Tribals, Indian constitution

INTRODUCTION

People's participation is the process of empowerment of the deprived, marginalized and the excluded. The Government has special concern and commitment for the well-being of the Scheduled Tribes who suffer as a Group due to their social and economic backwardness and relative isolation.

Objectives:

In this backdrop the purposes of this study are:

1. To find out the general Socio-Economic conditions of the Tribals.
2. To know the level of Political Participation among Tribals through PRIs and PESA Act.
3. To assess the contribution of Panchayatiraj institutions towards the development of the tribal communities.
4. To develop suggestive measures to improve the scenario.

Hypotheses:

The following hypotheses have been formulated and they are to be tested from the data collected in the field:

1. No development is possible without political empowerment.
2. No development is possible without inclusion of the tribals in the entire process of development.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected from 300 respondents from Soura and Lanjia Soura tribal communities in Gajpati district of Odisha. The primary data was collected through a structural questionnaire by applying a simple random sampling method. The secondary data comprises various references with already published and unpublished sources from such as research papers, articles relating to tribes and PESA Act, books and websites for the review purpose.

People's participation in the political process can

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better be understood in four senses[1] (i) participation in decision-making (ii) participation in implementation of development programmes and projects, (iii) participation in monitoring and evaluation of development programmes and projects and (iv) participation in sharing the benefits of development.

By participation we mean direct involvement of people and not indirect involvement through their representatives. In a vast country like India direct participation of people is possible only at local level. In most of the developing countries the so called 'representatives' of the people are most likely to represent the rich rather than the interest of the (deprived, poor as well as backward) poor majority.[2] Marsden and Oakley[3] consider that meaningful participation in concerned with achieving power *i.e.* the power to influence the decision that affect one's livelihood. Participation has long been acknowledged as the central theme of democratic governance, where citizens enjoy the right to participate in governance. In a political structure where freedom and equality are granted to the people, citizens can engage in political activities, at least to the extent of voting in elections and even further, they have the option to participate in a political party organisation. Political participation, therefore, may be defined as 'those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government authorities or the policies of the government'.[4]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From Table 1, it reveals that Tribal have very poor awareness regarding the electoral process of the Gram Panchayats. They have very little knowledge about the voting age, the period of elections, the provisions of political rights, and the reservations of seats for Tribals in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Assemblies and Parliament. So, from this survey, we are quite clear that long after India's independence, the Tribal have little awareness about the electoral process of the country. [5]

In the age of globalization media, both print and visual, is an effective source for gathering and disseminating information. But Tribals are far behind regarding gathering information through media. Till now they depend upon the local leaders, family members in

Table 1 Awareness of tribal representatives: (N=300)

Sr. No	Questions	Respondents saying 'yes'	%	Respondents saying 'yes'	%
1.	Do you know that the voting has been reduced from 21 years to 18 years?	260	86.66	40	13.33
2.	Do you know that elections are conducted in every five years?	289	96.33	11	03.66
3.	Do you know that a citizen who is 18 years of age can vote in the election?	278	92.66	22	7.33
4.	Do you know that when you are 21 years of age you can contest in the election?	80	26.66	220	73.33
5.	Do you know about the provisions of political rights?	48	16	252	84
6.	Do you know that there is a Gram Panchayat in your locality?	300	100%	00	00
7.	What is the name of your Sarpancha?	285	95	15	5
8.	Do you know that there is a Block Development Officer who looks after the Development of your Gram Panchayat?	70	23.33	230	76.66
9.	Do you know that seats are reserved for SC/ST/ Tribals in Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samitis, and Assemblies and Parliament?	80	26.66	220	73.33

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

1. Kushal Sharma and S.N. Mishra, Problems And Prospectus of Rural Development in India (Uppal publishing House, New Delhi, 1983) p. 3-4. 2.
2. For details see, D. Marsden and P. Oakley's Contribution in Radical Community Development In The Third World, in M.G. Craig et al. (eds) 1982 pp-153-56.
3. D. Marsden and P. Oakley's Contribution in Radical Community Development In The Third World, in M.G. Craig et al. (eds) 1982 pp-153-56.
4. Conway, M. M. (2000): Political participation in the United States, 3 edn., Washington, CQ Press.
5. *Field study*

this regard. 41.66% of respondents said that it is the community leaders, family members/neighbors seem to be the primary source of information. Only 18.66% had access to information via media such as newspapers, radio and television. The rest 32.33% of the Tribal relied solely on political party and local leaders for information. Only 7.33% were made of the Constitutional political and electoral process through the officials of Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis (Table 2)[6].

Awareness levels of the respondents about the Political Institutions:

Table 3 shows that respondents have very less awareness about the Panchayati Raj Institution. They have very little knowledge about the Panchayati Raj Act 73rd Amendment, power and works of the Gram Panchayats, sources of income of Gram Panchayats and reservation of seats PRI's, assemblies and parliament. So we found less awareness of the respondents about various issues of PRI's and constitutional bodies (Table 3)[7].

Reason for contesting elections:

Out of the total respondents 250 were elected representatives consisting of Sarpanchas/ Samiti members and Ward Members. Separately they were asked questions regarding the reason for contesting elections. 19% of the respondents wished to help people in the society and to work for the development of the concerned village. 7.66% respondents mentioned that they had pressure from the family (Table 4)[8].

It is observed that though they have a desire to serve people, but the most of the Tribal entered the panchayat Raj Institution due to persuasion by their family members

Table 2 : Source of Information of the Tribals for political participation

Source of Information of for political participation	Respondents	Percentage
Through Community leaders, family members/neighbors	125	41.66%
newspapers, radio and television	56	18.66%
Through Political parties/ Local leaders	97	32.33%
officials of Gram panchayats/Blocks	22	7.33%
Total	300	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

Table 3 : Awareness levels of the Respondents about the Political Institutions

Awareness	Respondents Saying Yes	Percentage
Knowledge about the Panchayati Raj system/ Assembly /Lok Sabha	131	43.66%
Knowledge of the members of Panchayat/Block/Zila Parishad/ OLA/Parliament	54	18%
Power and Works of Panchayats / Assembly /Lok Sabha	86	28.66%
Seats reserved for SC/ST/Tribal in PRI's, Assemblies and Parliament?	29	9.66%
Total	300	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

Table 4 : Reason for contesting (elected representatives –N0.250)

Reason	Frequency	%
Hold power	91	30.33 %
Help people in society	57	19%
Pressure from family members	53	7.66%
Pressure from party	56	18.66%
Non-availability of other suitable alternative representative	43	14.33%
Total	300	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

6. *Field study*
7. *Field study*
8. *Field study*

and pressure from the village community, pressure from political party and their personal interests.

Freedom of speech and expression:

Majority 202 (67.33%) of the respondents had complete freedom of expression in the meetings. They were not found meek or mute; they usually raised their point and view in the Panchayat/Block meetings. 98(32.66%) respondents expressed that they were not free to put forth their view points. Caste disparity was found to be the major reasons for not entertaining their view points as higher caste members view points were preferred Panchayats/Block meetings. Regarding reasons for not entertaining views 164 (54.66%) respondents gave their view that they had no interest due to ethnic or community discrimination and 136 (45.33%) respondents were of the view that due to caste disparity they did not entertaining their views (Table 5)[9].

Reaction to the non-cooperation of MLAs, MPs and Officials (n=300):

The respondents who had no freedom of speech in panchayat meetings gave out the reason of their disinterest in such meetings due to factors like, their inability in motivating the MLAs, MPs and Officials, frustration of not being heard and some of the members keeping away because of non-cooperation.

Table 6 reveals that out of total respondents, 13.33% respondents did not find support from the MLAs, MPs and Officials, during panchayat meetings and while not being supported, they try to motivate them to their best. 37.33% of them felt frustrated and 14.66% of them remain absent from meetings as they felt useless to attend the meeting, if their views were not taken into considerations. It is observed that Tribals were hesitant to attend such meetings because of frustration of not being heard and are only to communicate to the beneficiaries the plan of action of gram panchyat.[10]

Problems faced from the officials and Non-Officials:

Regarding the question of problems faced from the officials and Non-Officials out of the total respondents, 23 (7.66%) stated that they face problems from other Sarpanch/elected members of PRIs due to their self-motive. They argued that the panchayat members were exclusively guided by their personal interest. Whereas seven respondents argued that they primarily face non cooperation due to gender/caste (as a tribal) discrimination. 72 (24%) even faced abusive language from the high caste group counterparts when they place their views for the development purpose of the area in the Panchayat Samiti meetings (Table 7)[11].

Ways to overcome constraints:

The local tribal representatives adopt numerous methods to overcome constraints. An average number 29(9.66%) of respondents reported that they motivated the Panchayat members to inculcate the interest for a positive approach in the overall interests of the area. 56(18.66%) respondents reported that they built

Table 5 : Freedom of speech and expression in meetings for development (N=300)

Freedom of opinion		If no, Reasons for not entertaining views	
Yes	No	No interest due to community discrimination	Caste Disparity
202 (67.33%)	98(32.66%)	164 (54.66%)	136 (45.33%)

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

Table 6 : Reaction to the non-cooperation of local/ general political leaders

Reaction	Frequency	%
Non-cooperation of the MLAs, MPs and Officials	40	13.33%
frustration of not being heard	112	37.33%
Remain absent from meeting	44	14.66%
Gender/ Caste Discrimination	104	34.66%
Total	300	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

9. *Field study*
10. *Field study*
11. *Field study*

confidence among themselves to face such situations and dispose of matters even difference in a positive manner. 25(8.33%) respondents revealed that they regularly attended the meetings to keep themselves updated and 92(30.66%) opined that they opine that they avoid the situation reason being that it was all futile exercise to push the matter any further (Table 8).

Stumbling blocks in Family/from the community:

90(30%) respondents faced constraints from own Tribal organisation. 24(8%) the respondents believed that the family had no progressive or a social standing in the community. The families were still taboo ridden and victims of ignorance and guided by old traditions. 31(10.33%) of the respondents stated that family members do not help them in chores, so chores act as constraint in their work. Whenever they take up Panchayat works and role seriously, some oversight in work responsibilities will only be inevitable simply because they will not be able to devote the same amount of time and energy compared to when they were not Panchayat members. 45(15%) respondents faced constraints from organization interference in their work; still 110(36%) respondents faced lack of support by family that is the organisation did not support them economically (Table 9).[12]

Ways to overcome constraints:

It is revealed that a majority of the elected representatives admitted that their community members discouraged them from attending the meetings or hindered their activities. In most cases, it is the traditional leaders

Table 7 : Problems faced from the officials and Non-Officials (N=300)

Problems faced from the officials and Non-Officials	Frequency
Abusive language by high caste counterpart in Panchayat Samiti meetings	23(7.66%)
Self-motive of Sarpanch/Block chairman /elected members of PRIs	79(26.33%)
Interference of block officers	28(9.33%)
Lack of support from non-Officials	64(21.33%)
gender/caste/community discrimination	72(24%)
Inhibitions in speaking in front of officers.	34(11.33%)
Total	300(100%)

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

Table 8 : Ways to overcome constraints (N=300)

Ways to overcome constraints	Frequency
Regularly attended meetings to keep themselves update	25(8.33%)
Participated in discussion at village level	98(32.66%)
Building confidence among the people	56(18.66%)
By motivating Panchayat members	29(9.66%)
Avoid the situation	92(30.66%)
Total	300(100%)

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

Table 9 : Stumbling Blocks in Family/from the Community

Reaction	Frequency
Faced Constraints from Tribal organizations.	90(30%)
The family had no progressive or a social standing in the community.	24(8%)
Family members do not help them in chores so household chores act as constraint in their work (In case of tribal representatives).	31(10.33%)
Still another respondent faced lack of support by Tribal organisation that is Tribal organisation did not support them economically.	45(15%)
Even the won community members for their personal views and differences did not support.	110(36%)
Total	300(100%)

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

12. *Field study(personal survey by the researcher)*

who made the decisions for Panchayat pressure for their signature or thumb impressions on the official documents (Table 10).

They adopt numerous methods to overcome constraints. An average number fifteen of respondents reported that they motivated the Panchayat members to inculcate the interest for a positive approach in the overall interests of the area. Ten respondents reported that they built confidence among themselves to face such situations and dispose of matters even difference in a positive manner. Five respondents revealed that they regularly attended the meetings to keep themselves updated and three opine that they opine that they avoid the situation reason being that it was all futile exercise to push the matter any further.[13]

Participated in the decisions making process in Panchayat/ Panchayat Samiti:

51(20.4%) of the respondents took decisions at their own level in Panchayat meetings as they opined that they are confident enough that decisions taken by them will benefit the people of their village. The reason for their indifferent behaviour in Panchayat meetings was caste discrimination for male members and gender decimation for tribal representatives. (7.33%) respondents stated that due to Lack of Confidence they do not speak. (40%) respondents were of the view that she usually stands unaware about the agenda thus could not comment on any deliberation (Table 11).[14]

Problems faced while dealing with the Administration:

82.66% of them revealed that they received support from government and administration whereas 17.33% respondents did not receive support from the administration reason being the bureaucratic domination of the administration who were either discourteous, or corrupt showing utter disregard on caste/gender basis morally, materially which also at times resulted in complete and total disassociation with the administration (Table 12).

Performance for Better Leadership:

9.33% of the respondents wanted freedom from the traditional leaders, organization and community pressure

Table 10 : Ways to Overcome Constraints

Ways to Overcome Constraints	Frequency
Motivated the Panchayat members to inculcate the interest for a positive approach in the overall interests of the area	48 (16%)
Built confidence among themselves to face such situations and dispose of matters even difference in a positive manner	92(30.66%)
Regularly attended the meetings to keep themselves updated	44(14.66%)
They avoid the situation reason being that it was all futile exercise to push the matter any further	116(38.66%)
Total	300(100%)

Table 11 : Participated in Decision Making Process in Panchayats/Panchayat Samiti (No=300)

Decision taken		If Not taken the Reason is				
Yes	No	Lack of Confidence	View are not considered	Unaware of agenda	Never attended meetings	Total
251	49	22	128	120	30	300
(83.66%)	(16.33%)	(7.33%)	(42.66%)	(40%)	(10%)	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

Table 12 : Problems faced while dealing with the administration (N=300)

Support By Government. officials		Total	If no the most problem Faced				Total
Yes	No		Corruption	Harass Language	Discourage Language	Authoritarian nature of the officials	
248	52	300	61	89	93	57	300
82.66%	17.33%	100%	20.33%	29.66%	31%	19%	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

13. Field study(personal survey by the researcher)
14. Field study(personal survey by the researcher)

Table 13 : Performance for better leadership (N=300)

Changes	Frequency	%
Traditional leaders, Tribal organization and community pressure	28	9.33%
Literacy	26	8.66%
Self decision making power	12	4%
Honorarium	32	10.66%
Village co-operation	11	3.55%
Support services	69	23%
Self confidence and self-initiative	08	2.66%
Ability to speak in public	42	14%
Orientation programme for Experience	07	2.33%
Training and workshop	30	10%
No bureaucratic administration domination	33	11%
Training for leadership skills	28	9.33%
Total	300	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

Table 14 : Factors that motivate Tribals to take part in Panchayat

Sr. No.	Factors	Frequency	%
1.	To gain Economic benefit	54	18%
2.	Family/community encouragement	50	16.66%
3.	Commitment to service	44	14.66%
4.	Transparency	48	16%
5.	Support	26	8.66%
6.	Communication Skills	78	26%
	Total	300	100%

(Source: Personal Survey)

which would make them to perform as better leaders. Further 112.8 respondents felt that ability to speak would serve as an asset for convening public and invoke their confidence and moral support. 14% respondents preferred literacy, self confidence and skill training for performance as an efficient leader for welfare and development of the people. 3.2% respondents believe that experience, self decision making power and honorarium would strengthen their leadership qualities. Thirteen respondents preferred self initiative and organizing capacity for income generation (Table 13).[15]

Factors that motivate to take part in Panchayat (N-300):

Out of total respondents 18% reported that economic independence, 16.66% reported that family and community encouragement, 14.66% reported that they have joined politics for commitment to service, 16% reported to bring transparency in PRIs and administration, 8.66% said that it is due to support from government officials would go long way in motivating the Tribals to participate in panchayat. Respondents revealed that their dedication and commitment play an important and positive role for joining penchants (Table 14).[16]

Findings and recommendatinons:

The tribals are very ignorant about the electoral system. They are the mere instruments in the hands of the political leaders and as the survey shows, by political participation, they know only voting. The study reveals that tribals have very poor awareness regarding the electoral process of the Gram Panchayats. They have very little knowledge about the voting age, the period of elections, the provisions of political rights, and the reservations of seats for Tribals in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Assemblies and Parliament. They are far behind regarding gathering information through media. Till now they depend upon the local leaders, family

15. *Field study(personal survey by the researcher)*
16. *Field study(personal survey by the researcher)*

members in this regard. Only few had access to information via media such as newspapers, radio and television. Some are made aware of the constitutional political and electoral process through the officials of Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis.

They have very little knowledge about the Panchayati Raj Act 73rd Amendment, power and works of the Gram Panchayats, sources of income of Gram Panchayats and reservation of seats PRI's, assemblies and parliament. Majority of the respondents had complete freedom of expression in the meetings. They were not found meek or mute; they usually raised their point and view in the Panchayat/Block meetings. Few respondents expressed that they were not free to put forth their view points. Caste/ethnic/community and religion disparity was found to be the major reasons for not entertaining their view points as higher caste members view points were preferred Panchayats/Block meetings. The respondents who had no freedom of speech in panchayat meetings gave out the reason of their disinterest in such meetings due to factors like, their inability in motivating the MLAs, MPs and Officials, frustration of not being heard and some of the members keeping away because of non-cooperation. It is observed that tribals were hesitant to attend such meetings because of frustration of not being heard and are only to communicate to the beneficiaries the plan of action of gram panchyat. Few respondents reported that they built confidence among themselves to face such situations and dispose of matters even difference in a positive manner. Some respondents revealed that they regularly attended the meetings to keep themselves updated and opined that they opine that they avoid the situation reason being that it was all futile exercise to push the matter any further.

Suggestions:

Empowerment of tribals could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved.

1. Tribals should be trained in different vocational courses like handloom and textile, poultry farm, dairy farm, food and nutrition etc.
2. Awareness should be created that education only should make the tribal economically independent, solution to their life problems and make their life better.
3. The tribal teachers who understand the tribal language and culture must be posted in tribal schools.
4. The voluntary agencies, social organisations and organisations can play major roles to stimulate political awakening among tribal in general and tribal representatives in particular. Short duration camps, training workshops and orientation programmes/seminars can be conducted in rural areas to inspire the illiterate tribals to actively participate in political activities.
5. Government and civil societies should create awareness among the tribal people about the government programmes, needs and advantages of the education among tribals.
6. There is an urgent need on the part of governmental agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to muster and hearten tribal representatives to come forward and participate in the PRIs at least at the local level.
7. Due importance should be given to their ideas or views in Panchayat meetings.
8. At last, there is a pressing call for of cooperative and positive attitude of bureaucracies towards empowerment of tribal in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
9. Education will bring awareness and enhancement in the decision making power of PRIs. Utmost priority should be given to the education of tribals, which is the grass root problem.
10. The tribal development programmes ought to be linked with Panchayats for more efficient involvement of tribal and for establishing linkages between tribal representatives and development functionaries at the grassroots level.

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