

Summary of the Minor Research Project

Project Title: Empowerment of scheduled tribes women leaders in Panchayat Raj in Nanded and Hingoli district, in Marathwada Region: A Case study

Since independence, various initiatives have been undertaken for improving the socio-economic conditions and empowering women in India. Various legal reforms and resolutions in the form of social Acts have also been introduced to improve the social status and empowerment of scheduled tribes' women in the Indian social system. However, little progress has been visualized in the participation of women in different activities. This study relates to Panchayat Raj Institutions with particular reference to the 'Empowerment of elected scheduled tribes women representatives of Gram Panchayat' in rural local self government.

In the present study from the survey from March 2013 to Mar 2015, conclusions can be drawn on the basis of empirical analysis:

- In all the twenty Panchayats, it has been found that women are fairly young in age, which indicates that the younger generation of scheduled tribes women has realized the value of political participation.
- It has been observed that the participation of respondents with below secondary education tends to be more in a decentralized democracy.
- It reveals that majority of the respondents are married and are able to balance their roles in family life and political life.
- The occupational status of the respondents' shows that, majority of them were housewives engaged in the household related activities.
- A majority of the respondents belonged to low income groups.
 - Majority of the respondents have strong consciousness of their role in Panchayats and they are capable of handling issues independently.
 - The respondents in most of the Gram Panchayats discuss village problems in meetings, interact with people to identify the needs of the community and implement developmental programmes.
 - Majority of respondents have made specific contributions in the form of taking initiative to provide basic infrastructure and water connection for ward.
 - Decision- making role is important for empowerment. Majority of the respondents have

involved themselves actively in decision making process. They have also exhibited potentiality to emerge as decision-makers.

- Large proportions of respondents present the problems in the meetings and get the approval. They are aware of their responsibilities and discharge their functions in Panchayat independently.
- A majority of respondents have shown interest in continuation in politics.

Conclusion

It is quite evident from the study that, Gram Panchayats in many places have become highly politicized. Without political patronage it is difficult in a majority of cases for both women and men members of Panchayats to get elected. This interference from political parties and their representatives has adversely affected these local bodies.

Reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has definitely set a positive trend overall. Despite the many problems and limitations women have proved that given an opportunity they are capable of becoming equal partners in the development process. To an extent women have managed to overcome their lack of access and opportunities whether pertaining to literacy, skills, mobility etc. and yet perform their roles and responsibilities as members of Panchayati Raj institutions. While reservation has provided a window of opportunity for schedule tribes women to enter the public sphere, much needs to be done to empower women in the true sense. It is important to be aware of the socio-economic and political background of the schedule tribes women who are elected to Panchayats.

Empowerment is a process and multi-dimensional. It cannot be confined to a limited sphere. Planned interventions have to be made in areas including the economic, social and political spheres for true empowerment to take place. Therefore, schedule tribes women have to be provided access and opportunities to the basic rights such as literacy, legal and ownership rights etc. Political empowerment can be better sustained if women have at least a degree of economic independence.

The 73rd constitutional amendment and the reservation policy for women undoubtedly have set a positive trend. schedule tribes women in large number have been able to create and occupy space in the public sphere. It has given them greater visibility as well as mobility. Schedule tribes Women have also been able to enter other sectors and actively participate in local organizations. This has changed the perception and outlook of schedule tribes women and

given them greater self-confidence.

Women have gained better status both in family and outside. Family members and men in many instances perceive schedule tribes women in a more positive way.

In the context of gram Panchayat, more reforms and structural changes are needed that would actually delegate powers and responsibilities to elected women members. Sensitization of men, both officials and elected members is very essential for schedule tribes women to be able to function effectively. Sharing and co-operation by both men and schedule tribes women would result in better designing and implementation of activities for the benefit of all.

At the same time women need to gain greater role clarity and strike a balance between their household and official responsibilities. While men have to be sensitized to be supportive in this, women need to bring about shifts in their attitudes and outlook.

Unless all these processes take place simultaneously and on a continuing basis empowerment of women in gram Panchayats would remain a buzzword without translating into reality. There is a lot of scope and potential for schedule tribes women to emerge as leaders and decision makers and play a key role in the development and good governance of local institutions. It requires dedicated and committed efforts by all concerned.

Suggestion

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

1. Men's hostility, indifferent attitude and domestic responsibilities are the major constraints in empowerment of schedule tribes women. Therefore, political awareness programmes should make schedule tribes women understand their rights and the benefits.
2. There is the need for regular orientation and training programmes that will help to increase the political and management skills of women in Panchayats. Being politically skillful, they will be able to understand and assimilate diverse political opinion, participate intelligently in political debates and analyze issues to make useful decisions.
3. A long-term solution to women's participation in political activities rests in greater awareness about their role, responsibilities and entitlements.
4. Participatory approaches need to be adopted.
5. Expansion of information, education and development of communication skills of women.
6. Empowerment as a process requires multi-dimensional efforts and holistic interventions.

This requires concerted and sustained efforts by all

7. Sensitization of men, both officials and elected members is very essential for women to be able to function effectively.
8. Sharing and co-operation by both women and men would result in better designing and implementation of activities in Panchayats.
9. Women members have to be provided access to the basic rights such as literacy, legal and property rights etc.
10. Contribution by women members should be recognized and appreciated in public spheres.
11. Political empowerment of women need more support from officials and the public.

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