

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN PANCHAYATI RAJ IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to report on socio-economic determinants of women leadership in Panchayati Raj in Odisha. Orissa was the first State to implement the Constitutional Amendments related to Panchayati Raj and held elections in 1997. The objective of the study is to assess the socio-economic determinants of women participation in local government across Odisha. The methodology chosen followed a two-pronged strategy, including quantitative and qualitative approach. The study thus adopted random sampling from across three Panchayats from each district/block comprising three EWR's from Ward Member and Sarpanch Category followed by one PS member and one ZP member in each district. The study findings follow a logical flow presenting their broad profiles, the age groups they belong to, chief occupations and sources of income, educational backgrounds, the caste and religious group to which they belong and the type and size of families they hail from. All these attributes provided the necessary background to understand the trends of awareness, participation and performance of elected women representatives. Finally, the impact of elected women representatives' participation in their own and in their community's development is evaluated.

Introduction

Odisha is one of the 29 States of India. It attained statehood in 1936 on the basis of language but the princely States were merged after 1948 to form 13 districts. Later

in 1990, these districts were bifurcated to form 30 districts having 314 blocks. As per the 2011 Census, there are a total of 51,349 villages. According to Census 2011, the total population of Odisha is 41,947,358 out of which male and female are 21,201,678 and

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20,745,680, respectively. In 2001, total population in Odisha was 36,804,660 in which males were 18,660,570 while females were 18,144,090. The total population growth in this decade was 13.97 per cent while in previous decade it was 15.94 per cent. The population of Odisha forms 3.47 per cent of India in 2011. Literacy rate in Odisha has seen upward trend and is 73.45 per cent as per 2011 population census. Of that, male literacy stands at 82.40 per cent while female literacy is at 64.36 per cent. The population density of Odisha is 269 per sq km which is lower than national average 382 per sq km. Sex Ratio of Odisha is 978 i.e. for each 1000 males, which is below national average of 940 as per census 2011. The Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of the State of Odisha is 8,145,081. This constitutes 22.1 per cent of the total population of the State and 9.7 per cent of the total tribal population of the country.

Panchayats are organised in a three-tiered structure from the village to the district level. Above the district level are the State and the Central ministries for Panchayati Raj. The Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj is responsible for the work of advocacy for, and monitoring of, the implementation of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act. The Ministry ensures that the States hold timely elections, set up State Finance Commissions and implement their recommendations, constitute District Planning Committees and empower them suitably to ensure grassroots level planning to effectively feed into State and Central-level planning. A major task of the Ministry is to ensure that the State Governments/

Union Territory Administrations devolve funds, functions and functionaries to the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the spirit of the Constitutional provisions. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj is also responsible for formulation and implementation of an Action Plan for seeing PRIs to emerge as "Institutions of Local Self-Governance" and secure economic development and social justice in their respective areas.

Methodology

The objectives of the study are:

1. To map the socio-economic profile of elected women leadership in Panchayati Raj
2. To document the political career and emerging leadership of elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions
3. To gauge the socio-economic determinants of participation of elected women leadership in Panchayati Raj.

A combination of various research techniques was adopted in the present study. The methodology chosen followed a two-pronged strategy, including quantitative and qualitative approach. This was done with a view to producing a richer set of findings. The quantitative survey was conducted to obtain precise and mostly pre-coded responses from each respondent individually across three-tier Panchayati Raj in Odisha. The structured schedules used in the survey offered many benefits, e.g. biases were controlled and probable errors reduced. On

the other hand, the qualitative method generated information that was used to corroborate the quantitative findings. This chapter comprehensively details the approach, objectives, broad indicators and sampling strategy adopted for the study.

Research Approach : The study was undertaken in four phases as presented in Figure 1. The first three phases were preparatory in nature, followed by the main survey. In the first phase, a comprehensive desk review was carried out, which included a review of literature, internal group discussion and analysis of the secondary findings. The purpose of this background study was to obtain a complete understanding of Panchayati Raj Institutions, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the emerging socio-economic determinants of women participation by women in

Panchayats, their roles and participation levels. With this knowledge, the study moved to the next level of developing a log-frame. In this phase, the appropriate research tools were identified, as also the indicators to measure the different dimensions of the study. This exercise enabled the research team to secure greater control over, and a better understanding of, the issues under review. The research methodology and tools were then taken to the field for pre-testing. The pre-testing was done in one district. The pre-testing helped in establishing confidence in the methodology and facilitated the firming up of indicators. From this phase, the study migrated to the main phase, which included field survey and monitoring, preparation of data entry programme, data entry, preparation of analysis plan, analysis of data, and finally report writing.

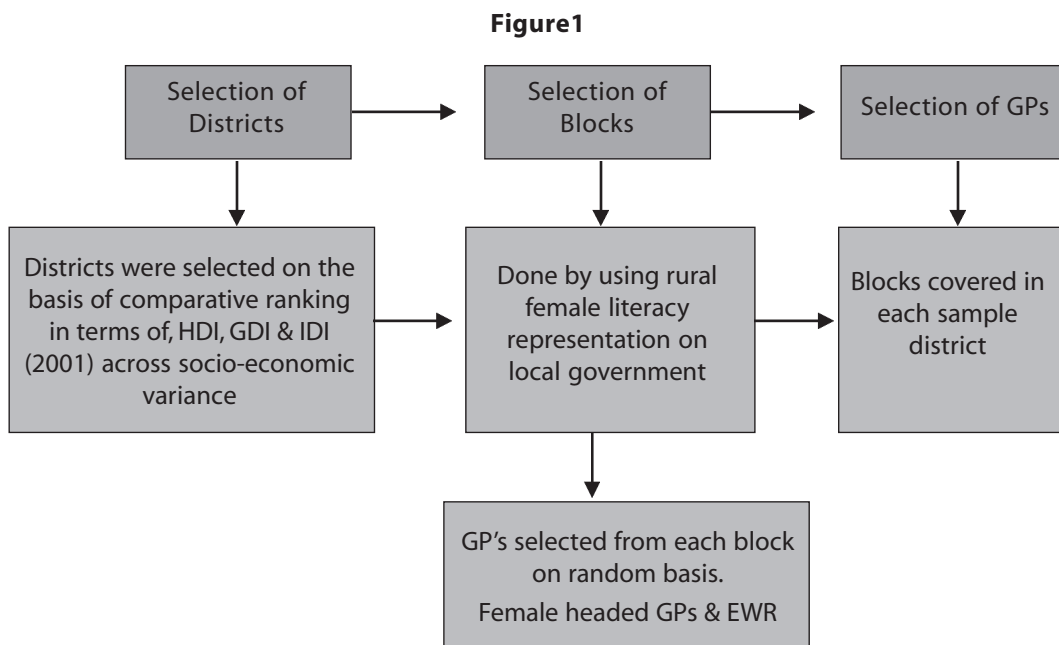


Table 1 : District-wise Comparison of HDI, GDI and Infrastructure Development Index, 2001

S.No.	Name of the District	Human Development Index (Range-0 to 1)		Gender Development Index (Range- 0 to 1)		Infrastructure Development Index (Assuming Index Value of State as 100)	
		Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Ganjam	0.551	20	0.518	15	119.15	6
2	Mayurbhanj	0.639	9	0.621	6	88.31	22
3	Bhadrak	0.646	8	0.497	21	119.80	5
4	Odisha	0.579	-	0.546	-	100	.

Research Tools vis-à-vis Target Respondents:

As part of the study methodology, it was decided to carry out both quantitative and qualitative surveys with identified target respondents. For the quantitative survey, it was decided to interview sarpanch, samiti members, ward members & Z.P members (female) as per the scope of the study. For the qualitative survey, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with local voting community, local informal groups (Both Sex).

The following schedules were devised for the Quantitative Survey:

- Schedule for Sarpanch/Ward Members.
- Schedule for PS Members & ZP Members.
- Schedule for FGD with community/informal groups

Table 2 : Study Universe and Sample

Name of the District	No. of Blocks	No. of Z.P. Constituencies	No. of P.S. Constituencies	No. of GPs	No. of Wards	No. of Voters
Bhadrak	7	28	193	193	2,970	932,757
Ganjam	22	69	475	475	6,943	2,007,368
Mayurbhanj	26	56	382	382	5,253	1,399,243

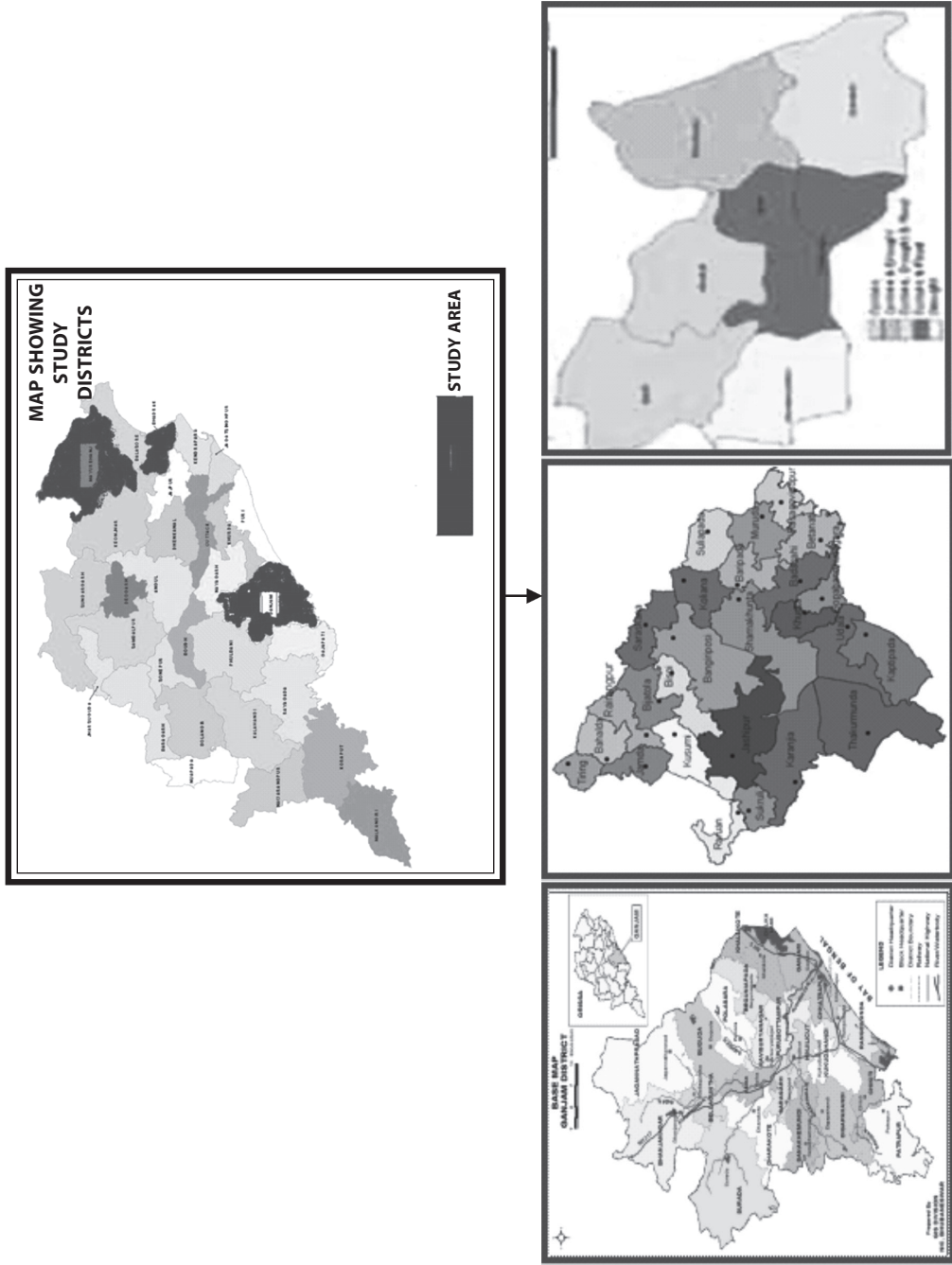
The study thus adopted, random sampling from across three Panchayats from each district/block comprising three EWR's from ward member and sarpanch category followed by one PS member and one ZP member in each district. Further, the research

focuses on EWR's for sampling as respondents. Though the blocks and Panchayats are selected as following, a second line of respondents are also noted for managing the gaps while undertaking actual field survey.

Table 3 : Study Sample Survey

District	Block	Panchayat	ZP Member	PS Member	Sarpanch	Ward Member
Ganjam	Chatrapur	Bicharipali	1	1	1	1
	Chatrapur	Potalmapur			1	1
	Ganjam	U.D.S			1	1
Mayurbhanj	Udala	Patasahani	1	1	1	1
	G.B Nagar	Titia			1	1
	Khunta	Bangara			1	1
Bhadrak	Bhadrak	Gujidarada	1	1	1	1
	Chandaballi	Tentulidiha			1	1
	Bhandaripokhari	Ranjit			1	1
Total Number of Respondents			3	3	9	9

Figure 2 : Study Location (Map)



Analytical Framework of the Study: The view of women's empowerment as emerged from the above is a multi-dimensional one. It involves social equality through redefinition of women's status in existing patriarchal and social power structures that can offer them freedom from impediments imposed by age old customs, beliefs and practices governing status and treatment towards them and ensuring them greater say in social and political spheres. The present study has taken note of such a broader view of empowerment of women, which receives little or no attention in most studies restricting themselves to mere presence in PRIs. This study laid stress on the role women played in and the resultant change occurred in their knowledge, skills and attitudes. As the main objective of the present study is to find out as to how women's 'participation' in PRIs proves to be 'empowering'; the term 'participation' was conceptualised in three ways subsuming in some form the broader view of empowerment as outlined above: symbolic or physical presence in Panchayat meetings, substantive contribution, and development of women members themselves. Thus, the study represents a departure from the earlier trend. These emerging women leaders are predominantly the first generation entrants to public/political life due to provision of reservation for women in PRIs. Further, effective socio-political participation is possible with adequate education and determined by the general attitude of society towards them.

Hypotheses: The following specific hypotheses were also tested through the present study:

- The women in larger number than before are participating in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- More women from weaker sections are now participating in Panchayati Raj Institutions than before.
- The structural constraints (i.e. age, sex, caste, etc) no longer inhibit women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Women are more inclined to avail of opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills as tools for their empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Variables: Following independent and dependent variables were studied as part of this project:

- a) **Independent Variables:** Caste, age, education, marital status and family & political background, and training exposure.
- b) **Dependent Variables :** In order to provide insights into the question as to how far women's participation proves to be empowering, a broader view of participation and empowerment was taken covering at least three conceptualisations, namely, symbolic presence, substantive role reflected in the influence women exert on decision making processes, and internal or developmental as expressed in the enhanced confidence, abilities and capabilities of women that help them to play their role more effectively (Jain, 1998).

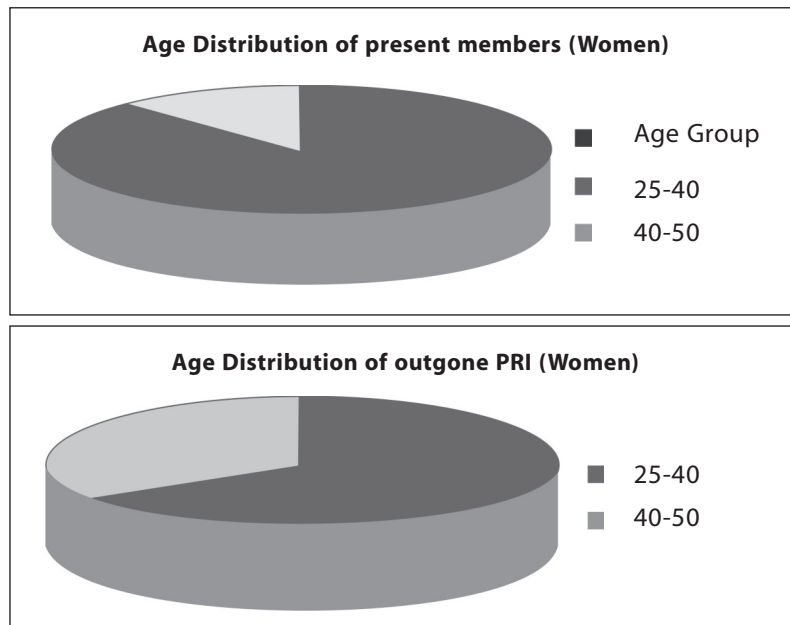
Limitation : The sample is too small to be generalised and therefore, indicative about factors and trends determining EWR participation in PRI. Poor literacy of the respondents limits respondent's ability to articulate and present respective perception. Most of the respondents were first time entrants, thus lack in-depth knowledge on PRI fund, functions and functionaries. Almost 40 per cent of the respondents from present EWRs & 25 per cent from outgone representatives are not aware about fundamental role, rules and responsibilities of, as PRI members.

Findings

Profile of Elected Representatives in their Current Term (Distribution of Age Data on EWR's):

Age is one of the determining attributes for the emergence of women leadership, particularly that of village leadership. Traditionally, age is considered an important factor in respect of one's ability to deliver the goods, particularly in rural societies; earlier, the older people were credited to occupy the various key positions in the villages because of their cross cutting experience by virtue of their socio-economic status. But now it is observed that participation by younger generation had exponentially increased, though always leadership especially in rural areas continue to be the domain of elderly. While studying the socio-economic background of the respondents, age, education, occupation, marital status, and residence before and after marriage are considered to analyse

Figure 3 : Distribution of Age Data on EWR's



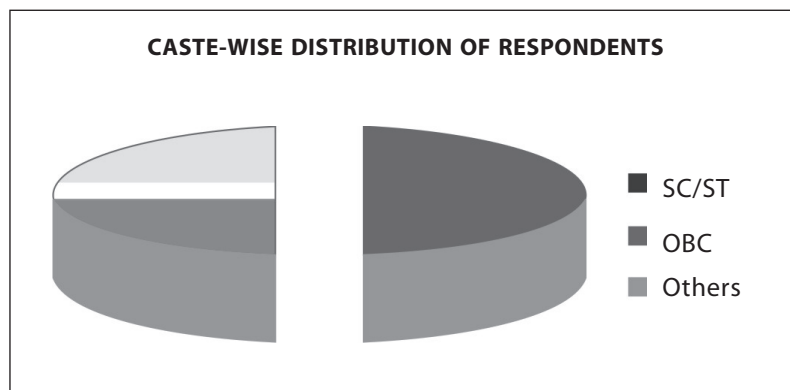
background impact on women participation and evolving of leadership. A majority of the women leaders, surveyed, were from the age group of 25-40 years. Of all the 24 sitting PRI members interviewed across three districts, only three respondents were from the age group of 40-50 (12.5 per cent). However, since the primary focus of the study was on evaluating the socio-economic determinants of women representatives in Panchayati Raj, a larger proportion community from across informal groups and voting community were covered in the survey to cross validate the findings and perception in general. Further, from the total sitting PRI members, 9 (37.5 per cent) were ward members, while the remaining 15 (62.5 per cent) were from across the sarpanches (37.5 per cent), Panchayat Samiti (12.5 per cent) and Zilla Parishad members (12.5 per cent). This distribution of respondents across the three tiers of Panchayati Raj was, more or less,

similar across all the districts. The age-wise analysis of elected representatives shows that almost 87 per cent were between 25 and 40 years, only 13 per cent of elected representatives were above 40 years of age. Sarpanch, ward members PS members and ZP members almost represented identically across age groups and all the respondents were married.

Distribution of Data on Caste of Elected Women Representatives:

The role of caste in governing rural social life is well recognised and extensively documented. The caste system tends to strengthen social impediments in development and empowerment of women and other weaker sections. The caste system is known to sustain and strengthen traditional value system and practices like restricting women to indoors, male superiority and domination and discrimination against women.

Figure 4 : Caste-wise Women Representatives



The observations concerning these factors as impediments in the functioning of elected women representatives are widely shared across the country and so also in the study area. The force of caste system is experienced more by women members of upper castes than those of dalits, scheduled

castes and schedule tribes in rural India. Caste is significant of one's status that he or she commands in the form of social status. Caste and politics influence each other. However, the same distribution across the outgoing PRI members as studied was (68:32).

Figure 5 : Income Level of Present PRI Members

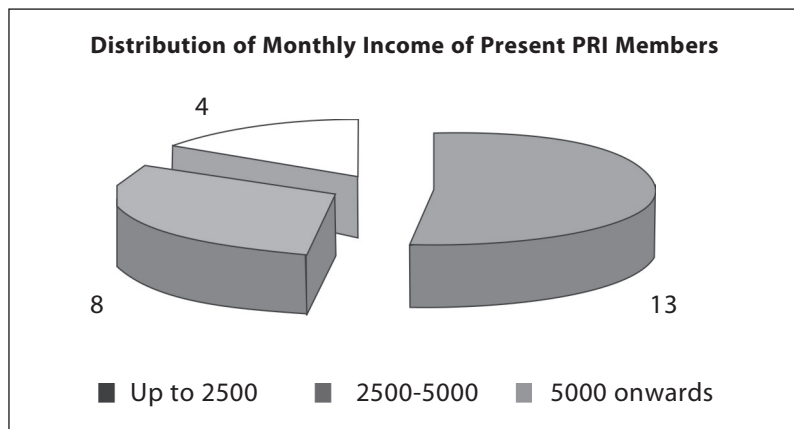
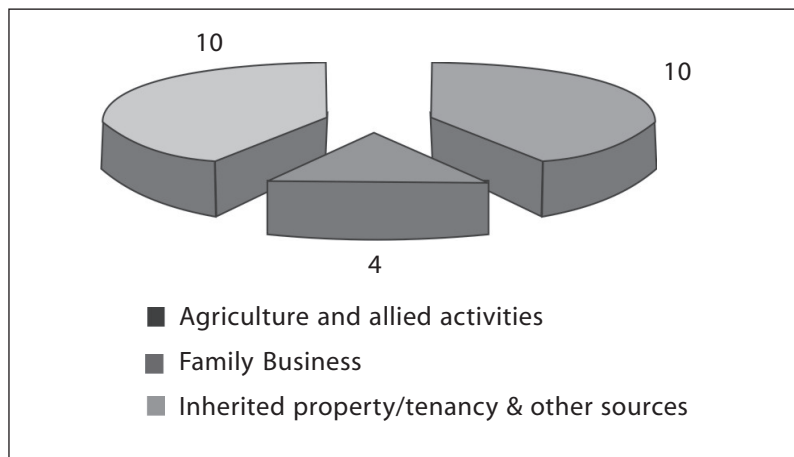


Figure 6 : Source of Income



Occupation and Economic Status (Distribution of Data on Source of Income of EWRs) :

As indicated earlier, respondents are classified into those falling below the poverty line (BPL) and those who are above poverty line (APL). The poverty conditions and wage employment tend to exert adverse impact on the physical presence of panchayat members since it involves losing of a day's wages and thereby making arrangement of their two-meals difficult. The economic status of the members thus becomes relevant for the study. Data showed that 6 out of 10 belonged to BPL category and a little less than 45 per cent are above the poverty line. The economic status of women is one of the major factors and sources of her social and political status. On the other hand, leadership is determined by occupation acquired from one's own skill and knowledge that significantly influences socio-political values and ideology.

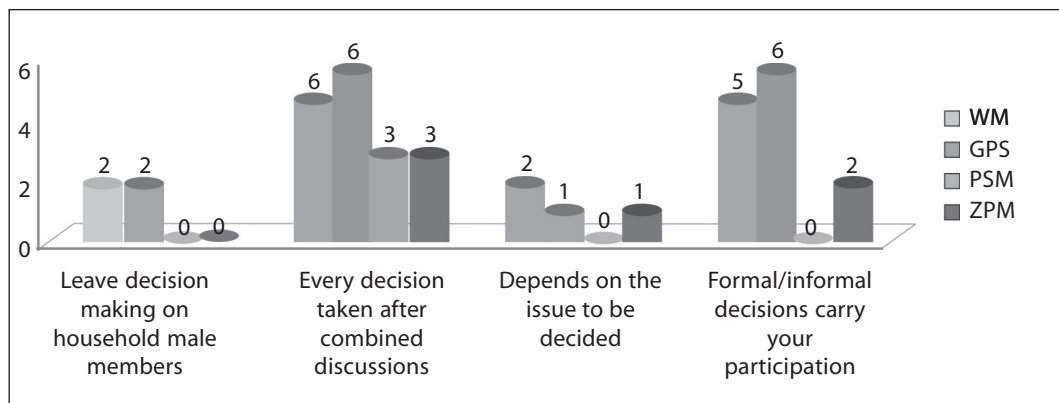
Together the economically deprived and the group able to manage the break even income, irrespective of their status as apparent were found not to be economically independent, rather dependant on income of their husband/family. However, they contribute to family livelihood/income by being involved in, unorganised income generation like being a member of self-help groups, gaining sitting allowance from public work, spending productive time in operation and maintenance of household income generating assets like cow & goat rearing, support farm activities of the family, undertake wage related works, etc. Rest 16.6 per cent of the respondents belonged to

better income group with ₹ 5-10 thousand income per month. However, 90 per cent of the respondents are found to be supported by family members and/ or husband's income and depended financially on them. An analysis of data on primary occupation by gender and position in the Panchayats shows that a high proportion of EWRs spend their time primarily in performing household tasks (51 per cent), while 32 per cent from the same were found to be spending some time in Panchayats and public related activities. Out of the remaining EWRs, the primary occupation was on farm and allied activities like dairy, poultry and goat rearing, which was more or less found across ward member category of respondents (29 per cent), labour works (12 per cent) and other occupations (8 per cent). However, sarpanches, being senior Panchayats functionaries, spend more time in executing their role, as compared to ward members. Among the EWRs, those spending their time mainly in farming were the highest in Mayurbhanj followed by Ganjam, together (88 per cent). However, none of the respondents reported farming as an occupation across the study districts (Ganjam, Mayurbhanj, and Bhadrak). The proportion spending time in household work was highest in Bhadrak (62 per cent), followed by Ganjam and Mayurbhanj, together (42 per cent). This suggests that women generally assist men directly or indirectly, but remain as housewives. It is understood that women remaining as housewives are directly concerned with the problems like drinking water, children's

education, sanitation, and child welfare and streetlight facilities. The study reveals that most of the respondents are housewives and can understand the ground realities to locate

grievances and getting them redressed by using their leadership positions in PRIs, simultaneous to their own home related engagements.

Figure 7 : Women in Decision-making Process



Data were also obtained about respondent's perception of women empowerment through participation in PRIs. The results provide an optimistic picture emerging from the views about participation in Panchayat meetings. Data showed that over three-fourths of the respondents reported participation of women in Panchayat meetings in greater number (81.44 per cent) and with more regularity and actively (75.26 per cent). In another four areas, over three-fifths to two-thirds of the respondents reported improvement in participation level. This included greater interest in training, increased attention being paid to women's suggestions; greater importance to the opinions expressed by women members and decreased hesitation in expressing their views. The increased number of males having positive attitude towards women members and greater

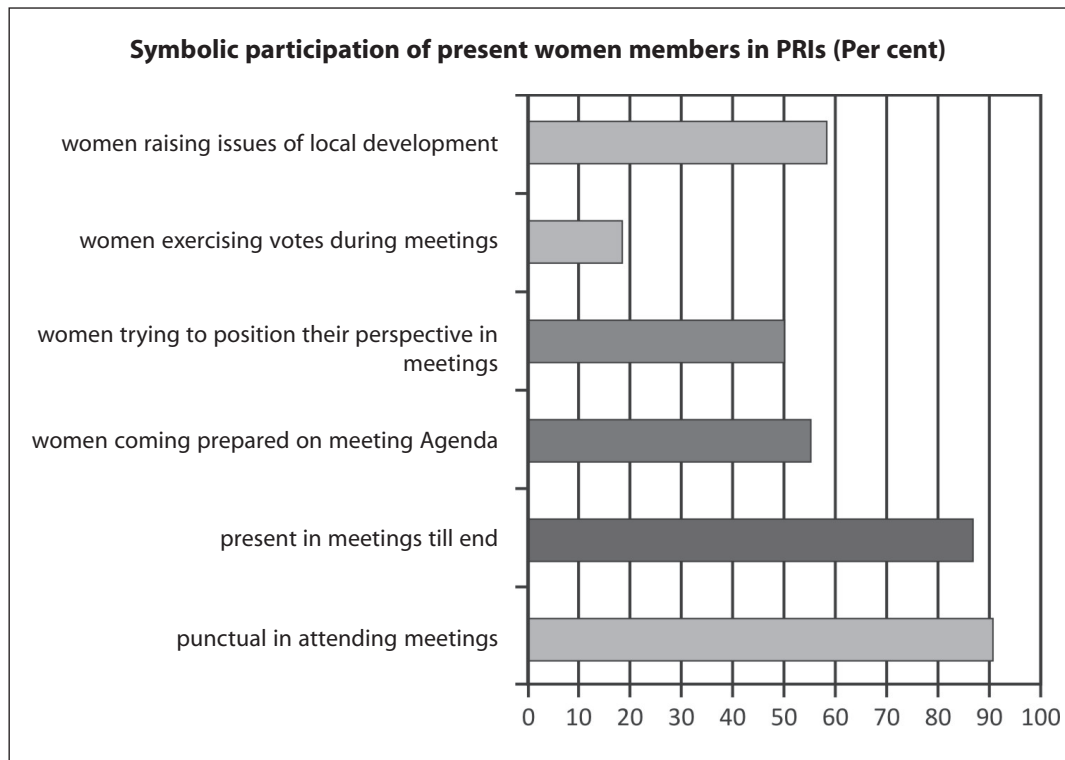
participation of women in discussions were endorsed by about half of the respondents. The areas in which greater improvement is needed included awareness about relevant laws and rules and dependence of women members on males. The external environment beyond the domain of the household forms the next level of environment or space impacting the performance of the elected representative. This space is further bifurcated into space related specifically to the professional aspect, and, the space where interaction with the community at large takes place. The community represents the socio-cultural space where increase in recognition and support from different caste groups after election may indicate positive impact and even empowerment. The same holds true for professional space also. To assess the impact of the elected representatives with reference

to this space, perceptions about change in the kind of recognition and support received from officials as well as the community was also captured by the survey. The responsiveness of the Block Panchayat and agencies of local government towards concerns raised by sarpanches reflect a positive impact. Almost three-fifths of the elected representatives interviewed said that the Block Panchayats take into account 'a lot' of the concerns voiced by them. About 64 per cent reported heightened response from local government functionaries towards issues raised by them.

Basics to Meaningful Participation: Access to Information by EWR: There are a number of factors responsible for negligible political participation of women in India. Information plays a central role in electoral politics. Unequal access to information and other economic and non-economic resources is a barrier to women's political participation. Access to information is prospective about the opportunity for demand responsive accessibility to socio-economic development by the end user & meaningful participation to output homogeneous development, impact good institutional governance, include all sections of society and equity. The said prospective, when coupled with democratic governance is central to dissemination of information empowering delivery mechanisms.

Training Received and Capacity Building : Elected representatives' performance in

office and their ability to contribute meaningfully, to village development flow from their knowledge of laws and rules, role and responsibilities that they are supposed to deliver as an institution. It also reflects awareness of their own powers and responsibilities and their sensitisations on the criticality of their roles as elected representatives. This is the rationale for training and capacity building programmes, whether sponsored by State governments or non-governmental organisations. It has been observed that training programmes are an effective instrument of improving the ability of elected representatives to perform. Just over two-thirds (70 per cent) of the elected representatives interviewed said they had received any training or orientation after being elected either by government sponsored or NGO sponsored government initiatives across cross cutting themes and schemes. Sarpanches and ward members are, on the whole, more likely to have undergone some training (84 per cent) than ward members (60 per cent). By gender, too, a higher proportion of EMRs (75 per cent) received training in comparison to EWRs (64 per cent), however, the gender gap in this regard can be attributed to overlapping of other programmes at Panchayat and block level, women not able to find escort to training locations and attitude of members from higher category of representation that they know every thing and fail to prioritise training needs in comparison to other engagements.

Figure 8 : Participation of Women Members

From Symbolic Participation to Substantive Representation: 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's participation in Panchayati Raj meetings. In cases when women ensure their physical presence, they do not effectively participate in deliberations and decision making. As most members are married, middle aged, mother-in-laws, belonging to large sized families, they find it difficult to attend all the Panchayat meetings. Data concerning

physical or symbolic as well as substantive participation of women members are given in Table. As is evident, 9 out of 10 respondents were punctual in attending meetings and 8 out of 10 women remain present during the meetings throughout its deliberations. Clearly, the provision of reservations for women contributed greatly in increasing presence in Panchayat meetings. This is in contrast to the observation of many regarding poor attendance of women members or their representation by their husbands or male family members.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine socio-economic determinants impacting emergence of women leadership across Panchayati Raj Institutions in Odisha. Non-participation of the population and especially of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, despite over half a century of experimentation, remained a major concern of those who would like to see democratic traditions getting strong. The problem is rooted mainly in the ignorance and illiteracy of masses and socio-structural impediments that keep away women from the centre stage. The low self-esteem and lack of confidence among women combined with their negative stereotypes as illiterate and incompetence tended to obstruct their participation in PRIs as studied until now. This study establishes that nearly 87 per cent of women were between 25 and 40 years, and were first generation entrants to politics.

The view of women's empowerment as emerged from the above is a multi-dimensional one and not influenced by any single factor, rather determined by a score of factors in their transaction from being limited by and within household chores to public domain and gain leadership. However, the said transaction, no doubt is enabled by virtue of reservation while inclusion and equity are catalysed by socio-economic and socio-political determinants. It involves social equality through redefinition of

women's status in existing patriarchal and social power structures that can offer them freedom from impediments imposed by age old customs, beliefs and practices governing status and treatment towards them and ensuring them greater say in social and political spheres.

This study laid stress on the impact of socio-economic determinants on role women played in and the resultant change occurred in their knowledge, skills and attitudes confirming their ability to position themselves as local leaders. As the main objective of the present study is to find out as to how women's 'participation' in PRIs proves to be 'empowering'; the term 'participation' was conceptualised in three ways subsuming in some form the broader view of empowerment as outlined above: symbolic or physical presence in informally driven socio-economic and political activities, positioning across formal mechanisms, setting identity and recognition, gaining leadership, delivering performance, substantive contribution, and development. Further, effective socio-political participation is possible with adequate education and determined by the general attitude of society towards them. As no educational qualification has been prescribed for non-official, less than 25 per cent of the respondents have primary education or even less while 66 per cent had reached to high school level.

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