



‘EMPOWERMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTE AND SCHEDULE TRIBES THROUGH PANCHAYAT RAJ’

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Abstract

In the Recent days men and women are showing much interest towards political power. Involvement of the youth in Politics has been growing day by day over the decades. But, political involvement of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe has been very low. Their economic and social disadvantage over centuries has resulted in political impotence and least participation. Least number of SC and ST only appeared in the politics before and after the Independence. Soon after the independence Indian constitution provided opportunity for political participation through reservation in political system. Reservations, special provisions for SC and ST, welfare measures have given boost to the disadvantaged communities for developing their economic efficiency and it in turn was promoted interest for political participation. Andhra Pradesh is one of the pioneering states which empower the disadvantaged section of people and empowering the weaker section people through participating local governance. The present paper highlights the empowerment and political attitude of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Sarpanches in Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh.

Key words: Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, Empowerment, and Attitude.

Introduction

Involvement in the politics by the youth has been growing day by day. But, political involvement of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe is very less. Least number of SC and ST only appeared in the politics before and after the Independence. Soon after the independence Indian constitution provided Reservations for the SCs and STs to enable them to catch up with the mainstream society. Reservations in the educational, economic spheres were made to ensure the overall emancipation of the disadvantaged sections so to hasten the process of their emancipation and integration in the system mainstream society on par with other sections of society. The land mark 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments paved way for the Panchayati Raj system to the rural area, while 74th amendment brought Municipality system to Urban India. These amendments paved way for Reservations for the SCs, STs, and BCs, in the Local self-Governments. It was realized that the desired results would be possible only when these sections participate in the decision making process. Political empowerment was advocated to empower them to assert themselves and to participate in the decision making process to trigger overall development of the disadvantaged sections like the SCs, STs.

Andhra Pradesh is one of the pioneering state which empower the disadvantaged sections of people and also empowering the women who remained outside the realm of politics before. The number of elected representatives at all levels of panchayats shows that representation at least in terms of numbers has increased. The provision for proportionate reservation to all tiers of Panchayats has now brought in nearly six lakh elected representatives of SCs/STs. They not only have membership in proportion to their population in Panchayat area, they also head as chairpersons in Panchayats. The Constitution has reposed faith in the SCs to be able to participate in public sphere effectively. As elected representatives they can directly participate in public decision-making. As Gram sabha constituent members they can



articulate their concerns, take part in the planning of development programmes and allocation of resources, as well as seek accountability from the PRIs. It was expected that this would hopefully change the adverse bias in policy formulation progressively bring Inclusive development.

Political Participation of SCs in PRIs

Participation represents an expression of human agency. In an electoral system, people engage in political activities to influence decision-making processes and policies to bring in the desired socio-political change. Since the last decade of 1990s, the meaning, nature and scope of public participation have shifted considerably. Earlier political participation meant voting, standing for elections or supporting candidates. Now the focus is on agenda of good governance implying increased influence of the people including poor and marginalized people such as SCs/STs over wider decision-making processes; and also increased responsiveness of governments to their voices.

Participation in Decision-Makings

As Gram sabha members, participation of Scheduled Castes has been nominal and proxy. It is because of mainly two reasons: one, existing social realities and power equations; and the other high level of ignorance among SCs. Since most of them are not aware of their role in the formation of village plan, they remain silent in the meetings. The simplistic appeals for increased political participation of SCs in gram sabha generally overlook some ground realities such as the timings of Gram Sabha meetings, problems of quorum and procedures adopted for finalizing development plans and projects, the quality of deliberations and manipulation of discussions by dominant groups, helplessness of poor wage workers to lose a day's wage, illiteracy and lack of awareness of the new system of governance. The progressive provisions of the 73rd Amendment Acts cannot be realized unless social prompting and social support is provided to marginalized sections. Unfortunately, except for some civil society initiatives, no institutional support mechanism exists to encourage and support the effective participation of Dalits in the gram sabha meetings. Wherever civil society organizations have undertaken gram sabha mobilization campaigns, the participation levels of Dalits increased both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

Role of Traditional (SCs & STs) Panchayats

The traditional caste Panchayats still continue to influence the process of local governance as they have social sanction. It often acts either in tandem with the elected Panchayats or in some cases ignoring them totally in order to enforce its traditional codes. Examples of traditional caste Panchayats putting up barriers for effective functioning of local self-governance institutions are numerous. For instance, a striking feature in Panchayat elections everywhere has been the struggle to usurp grassroots level power by desperate social groupings using caste to polarize people.

Traditional power structures, with the support from Panchayat Secretaries and other government officials, often manipulate the constitutional mandate and rule by proxy. The dominant caste leaders in villages, in order to control Panchayati raj institutions, tend to control remotely the SCs/ST selected representatives who are dependent on them due to various compulsions. The elected SCs/STs candidates both men and women and work according to the whims and fancies of those who 'sponsor' them. In the event of defiance or self-assertion by a SCs/STs sarpanch, the Panchayat is virtually made defunct by unique methods. Elected representatives belonging to upper caste would tactically stay away from the officially convened meetings which then cannot take place for want of required quorum.



Instances of public humiliation and even physical intimidation of SCs/STs sarpanches, including of women, have often been reported in the media.

SC Elected Representatives: Socio-Economic Conditionality

According to recent studies on Dalit Leadership in Panchayats conducted by Priya and her associates (Kumar & Rai: 2006), education, economic independence, political consciousness enabled SC/ST elected representatives to act their agency. For instance, because literacy rates were high in Himachal Pradesh (HP) and SCs/STs have taken up horticulture and improved their economic condition, the SCs/STs as elected representatives have shown confidence in exercising their agency. They have worked for their community such as providing basic facilities. The economic independence gave them the confidence to initiate a process of reordering of relationship within Panchayats. Majority of SC/ST elected representatives in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and MadhyaPradesh (MP), on the contrary, was illiterate. Widespread illiteracy made them dependent on government functionaries and higher caste representatives sitting in the same elected body. SC/ST elected representatives in UP & MP were cultivators/landless agricultural labourers. Daily pressures of occupation as well often prevented them to undertake additional governance related responsibilities. Continued economic hardships and absence of secure livelihoods pushed them to make compromises with their roles as elected leaders of local bodies.

It is a fact that inspite of the sporadic intimation of the SCs, STs, the Panchayati Raj has definitely opened the doors for the disadvantaged sections to enter Political realm at the grass root level and register their presence in the Political system. In the days of advancing literacy levels, awareness of legal redressals they are certain to assume parity with the mainstream society over the decades.

This paper tries to explore the empowerment of the Scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribe Sarpanches in the backward Rayalseema region of Andhra Pradesh.

Objectives

The present paper intends to analyze the involvement of SC & ST Sarpanches in the Panchayat Raj in the four districts of Rayalaseema Region.

The objectives of the Paper are

1. To study the Political background of the SC and ST Sarpanches.
2. To correlate the demographical variables and Social empowerment and Political attitude of SC and ST Sarpanches in Rayalaseema Region.

Method of Study:The present study was conducted on 451 SC and ST Sarpanches drawn at random from among 50 per cent of Sarpanches from four districts of Rayalaseema Region viz Anantapuramu (113), Chittoor (150), Kadapa (73) and Kurnool (115). in Andhra Pradesh state. The preset paper is depends on both primary and secondary data source. The primary data was collected from the selected sample SC/ST respondents through using pre tested Interview-Schedule. And secondary data were also collected various government reports, dailies, articles, books and internet etc.

Results and Discussions

Am empowerment scale comprising of 11 items was constructed with positive and negative statements on various aspects empowerment with a five point scale asking the Sarpanches to tick the statement



matching their opinions. These were linked to their age group, literacy level to see whether they had any impact on the level of Empowerment scores and the Political attitude.

1. It was observed that 54.77 per cent are first generation Sarpanches of which 34.82 per cent are from Chittoor Dist alone followed by Ananthapur Dist. Of the 24.61 per cent of Second generation Sarpanches Kurnool has highest no of Second Generation Sarpanches followed by Chittoor and Ananthapur districts We can find 20.62 per cent of Sarpanches who are Third generation Sarpanches. The inference here is that the change in rural leadership at Panchayati Raj shows that the old practice of Family based leadership is giving way to First generation leaders predominantly. However there are 45.23 per cent who show allegiance to past generation of leaders. The literacy and the changing conditions has brought in the change in the direction democratization. The continuance of the second and third generation leaders shows the persistence of family sentiments and old political loyalties reflecting the greater political circles of the state politics.

If we analyze district wise, Kurnool District Sarpanches 40 per cent show highest empowerment scores followed by Kadapah Sarpanches 38.36 per cent of them Ananthapur 35.40 % and Chittoor 34.5 of them showed highest scores.

2. If we analyze their political background on their Families of orientation, ie. Family born 41.18 per cent had born in families with political participation at Village level, 14.71 having political participation at Mandal level and 6.25 per cent at dist level politics. 1.47 at state level. Looking at district wise, Chittoor District and Kurnool district has more families of birth with political background than in Anantapur and Kadapah which has least persons. It. The Sarpanches families of Procreation ie families of marriage Kurnool and Chittoor District Sarpanches are married into families with political background at the village level and in Mandal level Kadapa pushes Anantapur dist to the last level in having married in politically connected families.

The point of inference here is that, Family connection, be it Family of Orientation or Family of Procreation plays a role in propelling a person into political prominence to fight election. If we glance at the data on Generation of Sarpanches, though 54.77 per cent are First generation Sarpanches, the very fact that 45.23 per cent had second and third generation Sarpanches in other words their families play a major role in their emergence and continuance in power. Though the channel is through reservation, to enter into position of power in the Rural India Panchayati Raj needs familial backing or political leaning to cash on the familial influence.

3. The Empowerment Scores seen in relation to their age shows that Sarpanches in the age group of 30-40 showed the highest average score of 25 while those in the age of 20-30 years and those above 40-50 years showed an average score of 24 points while those in 50 and above age showed the lowest average score of 21 points. Those who are in their 30s show maturity in leadership with good grasp of governance compared to other age groups. The higher the age the lesser the empowerment scores shows that with age comes friction with youth and generation conflict. The general inference here is that higher the age the lesser the average score. The lesser the age higher is the average empowerment scores.
4. The Empowerment scores if seen in relation to their literacy levels the illiterates who are about 30.60 per cent manifested lowest empower score of 20 points. Anantapur Sarpanches among whom 57.52 per cent showed the lowest scores. Kurnool Sarpanches have least percent of



illiterates. Kadapa Dist Sarpanches predominate among those with primary level of education. Highest average Empowerment score of 29 points were registered by Sarpanches with Graduate level of literacy among whom Kurnool dist predominates followed by Chittoor dist and the least in Anantapur dist. Those with Secondary level of education show an average of 27 points Kurnool who can be found ore in Chittoor Dist 41.86 per cent, followed by Kurnool 34.12 per cent . Kurnool dist Sarpanches with Upper primary level of education are 33.33 showed an average of 24 points followed by Chittoor dist with 31.15 per cent. The point of general inference from this table is that the higher the literacy level, the greater is the average empowerment scores for the Sarpanches of Rayalaseema region.

5. A political attitude scale was constructed with 15 statements both positive and negative statements on polity and politics giving five point options from Strongly agree to strongly disagree. These were assigned marks and for each Sarpanches total marks and average was computed indicating the level of attitude. This was examined in relation to their gender, age and caste/ Tribe and literacy levels.

Scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribe Sarpanches show highest level of political attitude compared to their female counter parts.

Scheduled Caste Women showed relatively less average attitude score of 52 points manifested by 46.78 per cent of women Sarpanches among whom 32.70 percent from Chittoor Dist followed by 26.54 per cent from Kurnool dist 43.43 followed by 23.22 from Ananthpur dist.

Scheduled Tribe Sarpanches though less in number manifested Average Attitude score of 53 points scoring higher than Scheduled Caste Sarpanches. Anantapur and Chittoor Dist Sarpanches scored the same average attitude scores.

Scheduled Tribe Male Sarpanches showed highest average score of 25 points in this group Chittoor and Ananthapur dist male Sarpanches are more and least found in Kadapa dist. Among SC men Sarpanches, Chittoor Dist Sarpanches predominate followed by Kurnool dist Sarpanches.

The overall inference here is that though Women outnumber men in numbers, Men exhibited higher political average attitude scores than their female counterpoints while women not lagging much behind them seemed to have come closer to them due to education and media exposure.

Conclusion

The paper draws the conclusion that the data clearly shows the enthusiastic entry of First generation SC and ST men and women into Panchayati Raj compared to earlier times and generations. Family channel continues to be the source of strength for entry as well as to be in office. The Sarpanches who are in their 30s show maturity and enthusiasm in leadership with good grasp of governance and indicated better Empowerment scores and Political attitude scores compared to other age groups. Though women outnumbered men, but in terms of Empowerment they lag little behind men. The Sarpanches of Rayalaseema manifested positive political attitude to register Social and Political empowerment and the mainstreaming is expected to more significant in the coming decades.



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Table -1, Age and empowerment scores of sarpaches

S.No.	Age group in years	No. of Respondents				GT	Average Empowerment Scores
		Ananthapuramu	Chittoor	Kadapa	Kurnool		
1	20 -30	12 (10.62%)	36 (24%)	13 (17.80%)	20 (17.39%)	81	24
2	30 - 40	40 (35.40%)	51 (34%)	28 (38.36%)	46 (40%)	165	25
3	40 - 50	29 (25.66%)	33 (22%)	14 (19.18%)	31 (26.96%)	107	24
4	50 - ABOVE	32 (28.32%)	30 (20%)	18 (24.66%)	18 (15.65%)	98	21
5	Total	113 (100%)	150 (100%)	73 (100%)	115 (100%)	451	

Source: Field Survey

Table -2, Education Levels and Empowerment Scores of Sarpanches

S.No.	Education	No. of Respondents				GT	Average Empowerment Scores
		Ananthapuramu	Chittoor	Kadapa	Kurnool		
1	Illiterates	65 (57.52%)	33 (22%)	21 (28.77%)	19 (16.25%)	138	20
2	Primary	18 (15.93%)	46 (30.66%)	25 (34.24%)	28 (24.34%)	117	23
3	Upper Primary	13 (11.50%)	19 (12.67%)	7 (9.59%)	22 (19.13%)	61	24
4	Secondary	9 (7.96%)	36 (24%)	11 (15.07%)	29 (25.21%)	85	27



5	College	8 (7.08%)	16 (10.67%)	9 (12.33%)	17 (14.78%)	50	29
	Total	113 (100%)	150 (100%)	73 (100%)	115 (100%)	451	

Source: Field Survey

Table- 3, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe & Gender and Political Attitude Scores

S.No.	Caste & Gender	No. of Respondents				GT	Average Attitude Scores
		Ananthapuramu	Chittoor	Kadapa	Kurnool		
1	SC – Men	40 (35.4%)	55 (36.7%)	28 (38.36%)	48 (41.74%)	171	54
2	SC - Women	49 (43.4%)	69 (46%)	37 (50.68%)	56 (48.7%)	211	52
3	ST –Men	10 (8.8%)	12 (8%)	4 (5.48%)	5 (4.35%)	31	54
4	ST – Women	14 (12.4%)	14 (9.3%)	4 (5.48%)	6 (5.21%)	38	53
	Total	113 (100%)	150 (100%)	73 (100%)	115 (100%)	451	

Source: Field Survey

Table 4, Age and Political Attitude of Scores of Sarpanches

S.No.	Age group in years	No. of Respondents				GT	Average Attitude Scores
		Ananthapuramu	Chittoor	Kadapa	Kurnool		
1	20 -30	12 (10.62%)	36 (24%)	13 (17.80%)	20 (17.39%)	81	52
2	30 – 40	40 (35.40%)	51 (34%)	28 (38.36%)	46 (40%)	165	55
3	40 – 50	29 (25.66%)	33 (22%)	14 (19.18%)	31 (26.96%)	107	53
4	50 – ABOVE	32 (28.32%)	30 (20%)	18 (24.66%)	18 (15.65%)	98	48
	Total	113 (100%)	150 (100%)	73 (100%)	115 (100%)	451	

Source: Field Survey



Table- 5, Education and Political Attitude Scores of sarpanches

S.No.	Levels of Education	No. of Respondents				GT	Average Attitude Scores
		Ananthapuramu	Chittoor	Kadapa	Kurnool		
1	Illiterates	65 (57.52%)	33 (22%)	21 (28.77%)	19 (16.25%)	138	46
2	Primary	18 (15.93%)	46 (30.66%)	25 (34.24%)	28 (24.34%)	117	51
3	Upper Primary	13 (11.50%)	19 (12.67%)	7 (9.59%)	22 (19.13%)	61	54
4	Secondary	9 (7.96%)	36 (24%)	11 (15.07%)	29 (25.21%)	85	59
5	College	8 (7.08%)	16 (10.67%)	9 (12.33%)	17 (14.78%)	50	63
	Total	113 (100%)	150 (100%)	73 (100%)	115 (100%)	451	

Source: Field Survey