

Panchayati Raj and the Empowerment of the Disadvantaged

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ABSTRACT

Political Participation of the Disadvantaged sections was advocated to make the mainstreaming of the Socially Disadvantaged sections like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to experience partaking in decision making process and also to experience Empowerment in the real sense of the term. The 73 rd Amendment to the constitution paved way for the reservation for SCs, STs in Local Self Government. This paper focuses on the emergent leadership at Gram Panchayat level, their entry, perceptions, Political attitude and their Performance appraisal so as to examine the empowerment they experience as heading the Gram Panchayats. This paper draws the conclusion that the SC & ST Sarpanches though hailing from poor economic and illiterate background, could emerge within a short span of time as Sarpanches manifesting fair levels of Political awareness and Attitude. Given the constraints, the strides made and the achievements registered by these Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Sarpanches through Panchayat is certainly commendable and also indicative of their Empowerment.

1. Introduction

The stratification of Indian Society on Caste dimension has resulted in a segmental division of the society arranged in an hierarchy of castes with relative access to precious resources of society like Power, Honour, Status with Brahmins at the top and the Sudras at the bottom each with hereditary occupation and societal obligation. Each of this segment had a claim of relative degrees of Purity and Pollution that governed their social interaction and societal obligation.

There was the fifth division of Caste of 'Panchamas' or the so called 'Untouchables' confined to the outskirts of the village because of the defiling occupation of tanning of animals and burial of the dead. Max Weber called them as the 'Pariah People.' As generations passed by, these restrictions became very rigid and the Panchamas were never allowed only inside the village at specific timings as their very presence, even their shadow was believed to pollute the other castes. The condition of the 'Panchamas' or the so called 'Untouchables' or the 'Pariah' people was one of 'deprivation', 'Social Exclusion' and extreme marginalization and dehumanization.

The 'Tribes' who were inhabiting the hills and forests were socially secluded people with their own culture and religion. On the political consolidation and the geographical unification brought about by the British empire in India brought these isolated Tribes into the mainstream society. The British who ruled India for more than 150 years, tried to ameliorate these disadvantaged sections by introducing secular education to them for their progress. It brought some change but not their upliftment. The real effort began when the Indian Government tried to uplift the downtrodden with constitutional provisions of the Government of India act of 1935 increased the number of enfranchised Indians the proportional suffrage rights of women and relaxed some of the previous qualifications.

Independence brought forth the promise of actual liberation and equality. The constitution pledged the nation to achieving a just society, based on the principles of equality and dignity of the individual, and proclaimed the right to political

and legal equality as fundamental rights of all Indians. The guarantee against discrimination in employment and office under the state offended the avenues to offices of power and dignity.

2. Empowerment of the disadvantaged in India

India as a welfare state is committed to the welfare and development of its people in general and of the marginalized sections in particular. The government has special concern and commitment for the well being of the Socially disadvantaged group's i.e. the Scheduled caste (SCs), the Scheduled tribes (S.Ts.) the other Back ward classes (BCs) and Women. These groups have passed through the process of welfare and development during the past seven decades.

Initially, the Welfare programs provided were directed to provide a few basic curative and rehabilitative services. Now, these are oriented towards providing social justice and empowerment to the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society. Hence, it is no more welfare rather empowerment of the disadvantaged sections. The responsibility for empowerment of the targeted groups in India is being shared between Central and State governments. The Central Government is responsible for formulating the related policies and programs besides coordinating and promoting implementation of different schemes launched by different states.

Taking into cognizance the relative backwardness of these weaker sections of the society, the constitution of India guarantees, equality before the law (Article 14). It also empowers the state to make provisions for reservations in appointments or posts in favor of backward classes of citizens (Article 16(4)). It empowers the state to appoint the commission to investigate into the into the conditions of Socially and Educationally Backward classes (Article 340), (R.V.K. Naidu 2004).

The mid-1980's saw the term 'Empowerment' becoming popular and widely used in the field of development. In grass

root level programs and policy debates alike, empowerment has virtually replaced terms such as welfare, upliftment, community participation and poverty alleviation to describe the goal of development and intervention. Empowerment has become the key solution to many social, economic, political, educational and environmental problems.

Empowerment connotes the process by which power is gained, developed, sized, felicitated or given (Webster's Dictionary). Empowerment may be broadly defined as control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology (Battiwala 1995) Empowerment therefore is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces which marginalized and the disadvantaged sections in a given context. K.C. Sharma, (1991)

Empowerment signifies welfare, access, conscientisation, participation and control. Education and health care to governance and economic policy, activities, which seek to empower poor people, are expected to increase, development opportunities, enhance development outcomes and improve people's quality of life. Perceptions of being empowered across time, culture and dominates of persons life. In India, a low caste woman currently feels empowered when she is given a fair hearing in a public meeting, which is comprised of men and woman from different social and economic groups

Andre Beteille (1999) defined empowerment as "a way of addressing the problem of rights and creating a situation where they enjoy the rights and also participate in the social economic and political decision making process".

The aim of empowerment is to address the role powerlessness plays in creating and perpetuating personal social problems. It can be distinguished by its focus on developing critical awareness increasing feelings of collective and self efficiency and developing skill for personal, inter-personal or social change.

The existing literature on empowerment practice is primarily revolves around the Theory of empowerment and case examples of empowerment practice. The focus of this literature has been on definitions of empowerment practice and very few studies on emergent leadership among these disadvantaged sections. Rappaport, (1981); Zimmerman & Rappaport (1982), Martin & Rappaport (1984), Swift & Levin (1987) and the description of specific methods by Frerire, (1973) and outcomes by Butierrez & Ortega (1991). In India Macroscopic studies on Panchayati Raj in India were carried out by M.Shiviah (1976) S.P. Jain and K. K. Naidu, (1978), K. D. Gangrade (1989), K. B. Srivstava (1991), Abdul Aziz (1994), Susheela Kaushik (1995), Palanithurai et.al (1997), Gaiha Raghav (1996), and few Microscopic studies were attempted by R.V.K.Naidu (2004) Yamuna Devi (2005).

The political empowerment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe Sarpanches was not adequately examined in depth on the Leadership in the context of a changing Socio-Economic and Political Scenario resulting from the era of Globalization and after. The empowerment in terms of the change in the perceptions, attitudes as exhibited by the Sarpanches heading the in local self government in the context of post modern era was never been attempted. In the absence of sociological studies to examine the processes, factors and causes that operate in the entry of SC and ST Men and Women into Local self Government in the changing Socio-Economic scenario, their perceptions, performance Self

appraisal of Sarpanches is what this present empirical study is trying to study and document the the processes and factors in operation and the nature of empowerment as experienced by these Men and Women from Disadvantaged sections who are heading the Gram Panchayats in the backward Anantapur district of Rayalaseema region in Andhra Pradesh.

3. Objectives

This research Paper seeks to examine the following objectives

1. To draw the Socio-economic Political profile SC & ST Sarpanches and the process of their entry into Panchayats.
2. To examine their Performance self-appraisals, awareness and political attitude and to know the degree of Empowerment

4. Method of study

This empirical study was carried out on a Sample of 113 SC and ST Sarpanches drawn by using Random Sampling from among the 225 SC & ST Sarpanches occupying the Gram Panchayats in the Anantapuramu district of Andhra Pradesh.

5. Findings and Discussion

- 1) It was found that majority of the respondents, 61.1 per cent of them are in the group of 30-50 years. The average age of the Sarpanches on the whole was calculated as 43.47 years.
- 2) It can be seen that Women Sarpanches outnumber male members both among SCs and STs. Women entering Panchayati Raj is a sign not only of the empowerment of the Women in general but also the empowerment the most disadvantaged among the disadvantaged SC & ST women, who for long excluded from the social and political sphere.
- 3) It is observable that 57.52 per cent of the Sarpanches are illiterates and 27.43 per cent had Primary to Upper primary levels of education.
- 4) It was only 15.04 per cent who had Secondary level and above.
- 5) The study found that 79.65 per cent of the Sarpanches are from nuclear families, while 20.35 per cent are still living in Joint families.
- 6) The marital status of the SC & ST Sarpanches reveals that 91.15 per cent of them are married and currently living with their spouses.
- 7) The occupational distribution of the respondents clearly states that 61.94 per cent of them are Manual labourers. It was found that 26.54 per cent are involved in agriculture and allied occupations and most of them are from lower economic rung with low levels of earning.
- 8) It was observed that 66.37 of the Sarpanches have opined that their entry was due to the provision of reservation and while the rest 33.63 per cent felt that being a Sarpanch is a status enjoyed in the past and would reclaim it or to have a respectable status for which they have entered Panchayati Raj.
- 9) The respondents clearly indicated that 76.11 percent of them had cited the Reservation provided for SCs &

- STs and about 11.50 per cent cited protecting the family interest as their main consideration forcing their entry into Panchayati Raj.
- 10) The Political participation history is predominantly is less only 35.60 per cent on their Parental side and 32.74 per cent on their Spousal side, that were predominantly at Village level and while in very few cases at Mandal level political participation.
 - 11) It was only 16.56 per cent Sarpanches who could confidently say that they are able to do by themselves, while 52.21 per cent said that they take the help of Village Secretary and 13.27 per cent said that they take the assistance of other members.
 - 12) It was observed that 76.99 per cent of the Sarpanches are aware of the Tree Taxes and Cess as the main source of income for the Panchayat,
 - 13) Among the Sarpanches, 53.10 percent said that the finances as sufficient, while 46.90 per cent opined as insufficient to meet the needs of their Gram Panchayats.
 - 14) It is heartening to observe that 55.75 per cent could say with confidence that they carried out all the four - Janmabhoomi, DWCRA, Jawahar Rojgar Yojana and Weaker Sections development schemes in their respective Panchayats, which they claim as the concrete achievement while in office.
 - 15) Regarding the awareness of different Government Functionaries who are connected to Panchayati Raj, 68.14 per cent could say the Village Secretary and 31.86 per cent said both Village secretary and Mandal Parishad Development Officer as key persons connected to Panchayati Raj.
 - 16) It was found that 76.11 per cent have said they had undergone Panchayat Raj training.
 - 17) It was found that 59.29 per cent of the Sarpanches had rated their performance as Certain achievement while 23.01 per cent or the respondents felt that their tasks were left unfulfilled
 - 18) It is heartening to find that 60.18 per cent of the respondents are in politics as first generation leaders. There are 17.70 per cent of them who are second generation and 22.12 per cent of the Sarpanches who are Third generation leaders,
 - 19) Men and Women Sarpanches belonging to Scheduled Tribe background have highest average empowerment scores of 23 out of 27 points; While SC-Men and Women have got an average score of 20 points.

- 20) On the whole those Sarpanches who are in between the ages 20-50 years amounting to 71.6 per cent showed high empowerment scores.
- 21) The analysis of the Political Attitude examined with an attitude scale reveals that the attitude exhibited by the SC & ST Sarpanches is by and large Fair level of Political attitude, scoring in the range of 50-75 points. The second observation is that Men scored slightly higher attitude scores compared to women. ST Sarpanches showed better average scores than their SC counter parts.
- 22) Sarpanches in the ages 20-50 years, 71.68 percent of them obtained Average attitude scores ranging between 51- 54 points, which is classified as having a 'Fair' Political attitude. The rest showed Moderate attitude.

6. Conclusion

This paper draws the conclusion that the political reservations have opened the doors of Local Self Government for the SC & ST Men and Women to enter positions of power and to partake in the decision making process. The hereditary channel of emergence is being replaced by a reservation system enforcing equality of opportunity paving the way for the entry of predominantly first generation younger leaders of Panchayati Raj, who show greater self confidence. It can be certainly said that a beginning has been made in the right direction in the Empowerment of these disadvantaged sections through Panchayati Raj. Though hailing from poor economic and illiterate background, these Sarpanches could emerge within a short span of time manifesting fair levels of Political awareness and attitude. Given the constraints, the strides made and the achievements registered by these Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Sarpanches through Panchayat are certainly commendable and it is indicative of their Empowerment.

**TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SARPANCHES BY AGE**

Sl. No.	Age group in years	No. of Sarpanches							Percentage
		SC			ST			GT	
		M	F	T	M	F	T		
1	20-30	4	5	9	1	2	3	12	10.62
2	30-40	14	19	33	3	4	7	40	35.40
3	40-50	8	12	20	4	5	9	29	25.66
4	50 and above	14	13	27	2	3	5	32	28.32
5	Total	40	49	89	10	14	24	113	100.00

TABLE NO. II
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SARPANCHES BY THEIR LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Sl. No.	Levels of Education	No of Respondents							Percentage
		SC			ST			GT	
		M	F	T	M	F	T		
1	Illiterates	23	36	59	2	4	6	65	57.52
2	Primary	7	5	12	2	4	6	18	15.93
3	Upper Primary	5	4	9	2	2	4	13	11.50
4	High School	4	1	5	2	2	4	9	7.96
5	College	1	3	4	2	2	4	8	7.08
6	Total	0	49	89	10	14	24	113	100.00

TABLE NO. III
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SARPANCHES ON THE BASIS OF OCCUPATION

Sl. No.	Occupation	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Agriculture	30	26.55
2	Business	7	6.19
3	Petty jobs	6	5.31
4	Manual labour	70	61.95
5	Total	113	100.00

TABLE NO. IV
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SARPANCHES BY THEIR MOTIVATED REASON FOR ENTERING PANCHAYAT

Sl. No.	Reason	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Maintain Family Status	13	11.50
2	Reclaim Family Status	8	7.08
3	Achieve Status	17	15.04
4	Reservation	75	66.37
5	Total	113	100.00

TABLE NO. V
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SARPANCHES' ATTRIBUTED IMMEDIATE REASON FOR PANCHAYATI RAJ ENTRY

Sl. No.	Reason for Entry into Panchayat	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	As Compromise Candidate	2	1.77
2	As Consensus Candidate	3	2.65
3	To Neutralize factional interest	5	4.42
4	Due to Numerical dominance	4	3.54
5	Due to Reservation	99	87.61
6	Total	113	100.00

TABLE NO. VI
DISTRIBUTION OF SARPANCHES BY POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF THEIR FAMILIES

Sl. No.	Families	Village level	Mandal Level	District level	State level	Not participated	Total
1	Family of Orientation	28 (24.78)	9 (7.96)	2 (1.77)	1 (0.88)	73 (64.60)	113 (100.00)
2	Family of Procreation	27 (23.89)	7 (6.19)	1 (0.88)	2 (1.77)	76 (67.26)	113 (100.00)

TABLE NO. VII
DISTRIBUTION OF THE SARPANCHES BY THEIR AWARENESS OF VARIOUS INCOME SOURCES OF PANCHAYATS

Taxes	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Tree taxes & Cess	87	76.99
Donation of Land and Grass Sales	18	15.93
Tree Taxes , Cess & Grass Sales	5	4.42
Fisheries and Panchayat Forests	3	2.65
Total	113	100.00

TABLE NO. VIII
PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTED BY SARPANCHES

Sl. No.	Programmes	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Janmabhoomi & DWCRA	45	39.82
2	J.B. & DWCRA & Weaker Sections' Development	5	4.42
3	J.B. & DWCRA & JRY. Weaker sections	63	55.75
4	Total	113	100.00

TABLE NO. IX
DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS WHETHER THEY HELD OFFICE SMOOTHLY

Sl. No.	Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Smooth Term in Office	94	83.19
2	No Smooth Term	19	16.81
3	Total	113	100.00

TABLE NO. X
SARPANCHES' SELF-APPRAISAL OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Sl. No.	Self appraisal	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Certain Achievement	67	59.29
2	Pending, incomplete Tasks	26	23.01
3	Failed	11	9.73
4	No Idea	9	7.96
5	Total	113	100.00

TABLE NO. XI
SARPANCHES BY THEIR GENERATION OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

S. No.	Generation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	First Generation leader	68	60.18
2	Second Generation Leaders	20	17.70
3.	Third Generation Leaders	25	22.12
4.	Total	113	100.00

TABLE NO XII
AGE AND EMPOWERMENT SCORES OF SARPANCHES

Sl.No.	Age group in year	No of Respondents	Empowerment Scores
1	20-30	12(10.62%)	23
2	30-40	40(35.40%)	22
3	40-50	29(25.66%)	21
4	50 and above	32(28.32%)	19
5	Total	113(100%)	

TABLE NO. XIII
CASTE, TRIBE & GENDER AND POLITICAL ATTITUDE SCORES

Sl. No	Caste/TribeGender	No of Respondents	Average Attitude Scores
1	SC-Men	40(14%)	51
2	SC-Women	49(46%)	50
3	ST-Men	10(9%)	56
4	ST-Women	14 (31%)	52
5	Total	113	

TABLE NO. XIV
AGE AND POLITICAL ATTITUDE OF SCORES OF SARPANCHES

Sl. No.	Age group in year	No of Respondents	Average Attitude Scores
1	20-30	12(10.62%)	54
2	30-40	40(35.40%)	53
3	40-50	29(25.66%)	51
4	50 and >	32(28.32%)	48
5	Total	113(100%)	

TABLE NO. XV
EDUCATION AND POLITICAL ATTITUDE SCORES OF SARPANCHES

Sl. No.	Levels of Education	No of Respondents	Average Attitude Scores
1	Illiterate	65(57.52%)	49
2	Primary	18(15.92%)	53
3	Upper Primary	13(11.50%)	60
4	Secondary	9(7.96%)	51
5	Inter & above	8(7.08%)	59
6	Total	113(100%)	

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