



Grass roots democracy and women empowerment in Odisha, India: A case study of Bahanaga block in Balasore district

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Abstract

This research has examined the participation of women representatives in Panchayati raj institutions and to find out the means to strengthen democracy in the context of the area under study. This paper aims to make an attempt to highlight the performance of the women representatives and to identify the problems faced by them. However, research has found various challenges like illiteracy, poverty, interference of official members, upper caste dominance, proxy of the male members, etc. faced by women representatives. Empirical scientific method has been used in this research work. Multistage sampling method has been used for collecting primary data. The findings are that, most of the women are aware of their duties and responsibilities, yet few of them are not aware because of their background of illiteracy and poverty and depended upon their male members of their family. After all, paper also suggests some remedial measures the better empowerment of women in which will strengthen democracy in the periphery in a globalized world. The objective of my study is to understand the impact of reservation for women so far as their capacity building in Panchayati raj institutions is concerned in the area under study. In this context, it is pertinent to state that reservation for women in Panchayati raj institutions is an attempt to grass roots democracy in Odisha. Hence, the focus of the study has been on working of democracy in Odisha, importance of empowerment for women in Panchayati raj institutions and its implementations, the provisions of 73rd amendment act of the constitution and the ground realities in the study area.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj Institutions, women participation, grass roots democracy, reservation, empowerments

Introduction

The self-governing autonomous village panchayats were the institutional expression of the ancient concept of self-rule or grass roots democracy. After the implementation of 73rd Amendment Act the study of grass root democracy has assumed much more importance in India in general and Odisha in particular. Political participation is indispensable to the ground of women empowerment and is one of the medium of achieving gender equality and justice. The principles on which the idea of democracy is laid propound equal rights to women along with men, but institutionally the hallmarks of democracy have satisfactorily achieved these guarantees in 2011 the reservation for women was raised to 50 per cent in panchayati raj institutions in Odisha. It is argued that women's participation in decision making bodies brings certain positive changes in political discourse, social climate of political life, policies, culture, behaviour, political attitudes, policy priorities and decision making roles (Palanthurai, 2005) [1].

Structure of the paper

In this paper the aims and objectives will be first dealt with. Next, methods of study will be taken up. The paper writer discusses reservation for women and empowerment. Researcher intends to highlight the role of grass roots democracy in women empowerment in Odisha. Then the most important part that is some case studies in Odisha with reference to women empowerment at the grass roots level in Bahanaga block will be discussed. This will include socio-political perceptions of the women representatives of sample panchayats in the area under study. Finally, this will be followed by conclusion.

Objectives of the study

- The objective of the paper writer is to examine the impact of reservation for women so far as their capacity building in panchayati raj institution is concerned in the area under study.
- The objective is also to identify the constraints encountered by the women representatives of panchayati raj institutions during the performances of their duties.
- To suggest measures for further strengthening panchayati raj institutions and empowerment of women.

Methodology of the study

This paper is the result of a combination of both primary and secondary data collected for the sake of an M. Phil work. Empirical-scientific method has been used in this research work. The primary data have been collected through prepared questionnaire which divided into three parts viz., respondent personal profile, respondent political background and representatives view regarding role and performance. Interview of the respondents have been conducted through the multistage sampling. With the help of a structured schedule primary data have been collected from 40 no. of women representatives out of 207 women representatives of Bahanaga block. Interview has been taken from 3 sarpanches, 5 panchayat samiti members and 2 zilla parishad respondents and 30 ward members from 4 sample gram panchayats of Bahanaga block. Few case studies were also prepared to understand the women's perception of political representation. Their perception regarding the role performance of women representatives have been analysed. For the formal structure of panchayati raj secondary data

have been collected from books, journals and internet sources.

Reservation for women and empowerment

The 73rd constitutional Amendment has created space for women in political participation and decision making at the grassroots level by providing that 1/3rd of the seats are reserved in all over the country. Before 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into existence the government of Odisha has adopted some important provisions such as reservation for women, SC, STs, in its existing Panchayati Raj Acts. Subsequently, Orissa Panchayati Raj Acts were further amended for full conformity with the constitutional amendment. Elections to Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis in Orissa were held before 73rd Amendment came into force. Accordingly, Orissa became the first state to introduce one third reservation for women in Panchayats. The state conducted elections for panchayat Raj institutions in 1997 and implemented 33% reservation of seats for women in PRIS at a time when the center was still only deliberating on this issue. But politically it is too early to assess their impact on governance.

Studies on village Panchayat in Odisha found that women entered into politics due to mandatory provision of reservation. Most of the women are from the non-political background and entered into politics due to persuasion by their family members or pressure from the village community. It is also seen that husbands and extended family members influence the women representatives in taking decisions. In most of the cases the women representatives are ignored and they are invariably influenced by family members. But while continuing in their positions women who reluctantly entered into politics showed great maturity in outlook, enthusiasm, increasing political consciousness and increasing perception of their role and responsibility.

The 50% reservation for women in panchayati Raj institutions is an important part of this empowerment of women. To further strengthen the effort of elected women representatives, the government should provide greater security to women from the anger of powerful vested interests who try to harm and harass them in various ways. Moreover, government and voluntary organizations together should jointly make an attempt in building the capacity of the elected women representatives.

The role of grass roots democracy in women empowerment in odisha

The Indian constitution provide part 4, the directive principles of state policy, article 40 for the setting up of village panchayats. But this is non-justifiable. Political participation and grassroots democracy have been strengthened considerably by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment (1992-1993), that have created new democratic institutions for local governance. It provides reservation for women in panchayati raj system set up two ways:

- a. For the office the members and
- b. For that of the chairperson.

With the advent of this Act, India till 2018 has more than 500 district panchayats, around 5,100 block panchayats and more than 2,25,000 village panchayats, approximately 90 municipal corporations, 1,500 municipal councils, and 1,800 Nagar panchayats. And there are also 6, 81, 258 women

elected to Gram Panchayats: 37,109 women to panchayat at the intermediate level and 3153 women panchayat at the district level. Role of PRIs in women empowerment can be highlighted by many ways like; women are taking up the challenge and gearing themselves up to enter politics at the lower level in the spirit of self-governance as committed citizens. Through the experience of the Indian panchayati raj institutions, more than one million women have actively entered into the political life of India. Reservation for women in Panchayats (chairman and members) up to one-third seats. Women's issues have come to the forefront at the local level and consequently state and national level. PRIs through women can work on the creation, development and promotion of Self Help groups, cooperatives, MSMEs for better employment and livelihood options in rural areas. Women leaders in the panchayati raj are transforming local governance by sensitizing the state to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice. Through PRIs, women are changing governance are evident in the issues they choose to tackle; water, alcohol abuse, education, health and domestic violence. Women are also taking action against child marriage and child domestic labour, whilst promoting girl-child education. Also, women have used their elected authority to address quality health care as critical issues. If there is the good side of PRI in women empowerment, there is some slackness also. It was sad but not shocking to find that even the functions and duties of Gram Sabha are not known to a large majority of respondents. In a bold move with far reaching impact on electoral politics at the grass-root, the Odisha Government has made 50 percent reservation for women in Panchayati raj institution to achieve Gender equality in the representation in Panchayati raj bodies. The state legislature unanimously gave its nod to the Odisha Panchayat Laws (Amendment) Bill 2011, by amending the Odisha Gram Panchayat Act, 1964, Odisha Panchayat Samiti Act and the Zilla Parishad Act enhancing the quota for women from existing 33% to 50% in February 2011 in the three-tier Panchayat bodies (The Economic Times, 8.4.2011). By amending the Panchayat laws, the Bill also provided reservation of the seats and office of the Chairpersons for two terms as it was felt that the operation of single term did not attract more candidates. The experience of first term would be useful in the second term for the women to prove themselves as the true representative of women as well as the entire community. It was implemented in the Panchayati Raj elections in February-March 2012. This was being done in view of the efficiency, abilities and success shown by women in various spheres and in order to take forward and empower the women in decision-making process at local self-government. However, those examples of women's empowerment in Odisha are very scanty. It requires a lot for their empowerment. Balasore district consists of 289 gram panchayats. It is to be found that 12 blocks are divided through the number of gram panchayats. So far as Bahanaga block is concerned there are 24 gram panchayats out of which 4 gram panchayats have been chosen for collecting primary data.

Women empowerment at the grass roots level in bahanaga block

Bahanaga block is one of the coastal block in Balasore district. As per the government records, the block code of Bahanaga is 97. The block has 174 villages and there are total 32765 homes in this block. It is located 24 km towards

south from district headquarters of Balasore. It is also a Tehsil headquarter. Bahanaga is also surrounded by Soro Tehsil towards west, Oupada Tehsil towards west, Nilagiri Tehsil towards north, Remuna Tehsil towards north. Bahanaga block village is situated near National Highway 16. This Highway making it as a commercial hub. A part of the block is on the seashore of the Bay of Bengal, 10-12km east away from the block headquarters. The climate is temperate of this area. As per census 2011, Bahanaga population is 138369. Out of this, 71265 are males whereas the females count 67104 here. This block has 16334 children in the age bracket of 0-6 years. Out of this 8511 are boys and 7823 are girls. Socio economic background of the women representatives in this block is moderate. After getting 50 % reservation in PRIs that women are engaged in their participation at grass roots level but still they are not empowered themselves because of poor education and lack of control over productive resources so far as the study is found in the concerned block.

Targeted pri representatives and their socio-economic profile

Socio-economic which includes the following variables like age, caste, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, annual income.

Table 1: Age wise breakup of Sample representatives

SI. No	PRIs Name	21-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	Above 50	Total
1	Saud	2 (20)	3 (30)	2 (20)	3 (30)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	2 (25)	4 (50)	2 (25)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	1 (12.5)	6 (75)	1 (12.5)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	3 (42.85)	Nil (0)	7 (100)
5	P.S. member	1 (20)	2 (40)	2 (40)	Nil (0)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. member	Nil (0)	1 (50)	1 (50)	Nil (0)	2 (100)
7	Total	8 (20)	18 (45)	11 (27.5)	3 (7.5)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

It can be seen from the table no. (1) that **Saud** Gram Panchayat 2 (20%) of the respondents belonging to the age category of 21-30 years. Sequentially, 3 (30%) of the women representatives have placed to the age category of 31-40 years. 2 (20%) women representatives belong to the age group of 41-50 years. In this Gram Panchayat 3 (30%) women respondents have above 50 years' age.

So far **Nuapur** Gram Panchayat's women representatives age criteria is concerned, we find that 2 (25%) respondents have been enlisted under the age category of 21-30 years. In accordance with samples 4 (50%) women representatives have encircled to the age group of 31-40 years in this Gram Panchayat. 2 (25%) respondents belong to the age group of 41-50 years. Finally, there is no women representative who belongs to above 50 years' age group.

Similarly, **Khantapada** Gram Panchayat's women representatives age category is considered in the same way as, 1 (25%) respondent has been found under the age group of 21-30 years. The 75 percentage women representatives are under the criteria of 31-40 years of age group. Respondent has placed the age category of 41-50 years. There is no women respondent above 50 years of age group in this Gram Panchayat.

At **Bahanaga** Gram Panchayat's 2 (28.57%) respondents are belonging to 21-30 years of age group and the same as respondents are under 31-40 years' age group. 3 (42.85%) respondents have been found under the age category of 41-50 years. There is no representative more than 50 years of age group in this Gram Panchayat.

In **Bahanaga** block there is 1 (20%) Panchayat Samiti respondent who belongs under 21-30 years of age group. There are 2 (40%) Panchayat samiti women representatives are pertaining to the age group of 31-40 years and also same number of representatives that is 2 (40%) in figure, are found to the age group of 41-50 years. There is no women representative above 50 years of age group in this Gram Panchayat.

This block also includes two Zilla Parishad women representatives, 1 (50%) Zilla Parishad respondent is enlisted under the age group of 31-40 years and the another 1 (50%) representative is identified under the age group of 41-50 years. There are no Zilla Parishad members under the category of 21-30 years of age group and above 50 years of age group in this block. On a comparative basis it is found that most of the women representatives that is 18 constituting 45% is found in the age category from 31 to 40 years. It is also found that only Gram Panchayat representatives are above fifty years than that of Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti representatives in this block.

Table 2: Caste wise breakup of women representatives in sample panchayats

Sr. No.	Pris name	Ur	Bc	Sc	St	Total
1	SAUD	4 (40)	2 (20)	3 (30)	1 (10)	10 (100)
2	NUAPUR	NIL (0)	1 (12.5)	7 (87.5)	NIL (0)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	2 (25)	2 (25)	4 (50)	NIL (0)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	1 (14.28)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	7 (100)
5	P.S. Members	1 (20)	2 (40)	1 (20)	1 (20)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Members	NIL (0)	1 (50)	1 (50)	NIL (0)	2 (100)
7	Total	8 (20)	10 (25)	18 (45)	4 (10)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

The table (2) represents the caste wise breakup of representative panchayats of **Bahanaga** Block. In compliance with collected data, **Saud Gram Panchayat** area includes unreserved elected women category is of 40%. BC category is of 20%. SC category is 30% and ST category constitutes 10%.

So far as on the report of given data of **Nuapur Gram Panchayat** is concerned, it is seen that nobody belongs to unreserved category. 12.5% elected women representatives of this panchayat are in BC category. An overwhelming majority of the members in the Gram panchayat are drawn from SC category which stands at 87.5%. There is no ST category of elected women representative in that **Gram Panchayat**.

In this way if **khantapada gram panchayat** is considered, it is to be found 25% of representatives are in each of unreserved and BC category. 50% of the representatives are observed to be in SC category. Here is no ST category of elected women representative in particular **Khantapada Gram Panchayat**.

In **Bahanaga Gram Panchayat** the unreserved category is found to have 14. 28%, likewise, both BC, SC and ST

category of elected women respondents are exactly same in percentage what is 28.57% in figure.

Panchayat Samiti member constitutes 20% unreserved category, 40% belongs to BC category. SC and ST category are having similarly in 20% each.

There is no elected women Zila Parishad representative from unreserved category. Both BC and SC category

respondents are exactly same in figure 50% each. There is no ST category of Zila Parishad women member in this Block. Total no. of women sample representatives in Bahanaga block is of 8 (20%) under unreserved category analysed in my study. Total BC category is of 10 (25%) is found in this block. Total SC category is 18 (45%) and ST category is 4 (10%) has been found in this block.

Table 3: Marital status of the Respondents

SI. No.	Name of PRI	Married	Unmarried	Dissected/ Separated	Widowed	Total
1	Saud	10 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	8 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	7 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	7 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	7 (100)
5	P.S member	5 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	5 (100)
6	Z.P Member	2 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	2 (100)
7	Total	40 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

Table (3) shows that, all the sample women representatives of PRIs do not carry the status of unmarried, dissected/separated, and widows are not found in the given

data of Bahanaga block. On the other hand, we may say that all the women representatives are having their marital status in the Bahanaga block.

Table 4: Panchayat wise breakup of sample representative's Educational qualification

SI. No	PRIs Name	Illiterate	Primary	M.E.	10th	+2	+3	P.G.	Total
1	Saud	2 (20)	1 (10)	4 (40)	2 (20)	1 (10)	NIL (0)	NIL (0)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	NIL (0)	2 (25)	3 (37.5)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	NIL (0)	1 (12.5)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	NIL (0)	2 (25)	5 (62.5)	NIL (0)	1 (12.5)	NIL (0)	NIL (0)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	1 (14.28)	2 (28.57)	NIL (0)	2 (28.57)	2 (28.57)	NIL (0)	NIL (0)	7 (100)
5	P.S. Member	NIL (0)	NIL (0)	NIL (0)	3 (60)	1 (20)	1 (20)	NIL (0)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Member	NIL (0)	NIL (0)	1 (50)	NIL (0)	1 (50)	NIL (0)	NIL (0)	2 (100)
7	Total	3 (7.5%)	7 (17.5%)	13 (32.5%)	8 (20%)	7 (17.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

Educational qualifications of the sample representatives in the PRIs of Bahanaga Block. The (Table 4) shows that, in *Saud Gram Panchayat*, there is no representative in U.G. and P.G. category. One Panchayat Samiti member however, is found to have U.G. qualification. (20%) of the Gram Panchayat are observed to be illiterate, 10% of respondents are found to have crossed the primary level of education. (40%) of respondents in this Gram Panchayat are found to be in M.E. educational category. 20% respondents are matriculates. (10%) of the respondents of this Gram Panchayat has got higher secondary level of education.

So far as *Nuapur Gram Panchayat* is concerned, it is seen that nobody is illiterate. (25%) women representatives of this panchayat are in primary category. Most of the members in this Gram Panchayat are drawn from M.E. level of educational category as (37.5%). (12.5%) has got matriculation and (12.5%) has also had passed higher secondary. There is no graduate elected women representative in that Gram Panchayat but significantly is that only one sarpanch is found to have P.G. qualification.

In *khantapada Gram Panchayat* there is no illiterate elected women representative. This Gram Panchayat includes primary educated elected women representatives are (25%). (62.5%) of this panchayat are in M.E. standard of educational category. There is no member with matriculation qualification. (12.5%) elected women representatives are having higher secondary level of education and there is no single elected women representative in U.G and P.G level of education.

In *Bahanaga Gram Panchayat* (14.28%) elected women representatives are drawn from illiterate group. Likewise, (28.57%) elected women representatives have passed primary education. There is no representative of M.E. standard category. (28.57%) of representatives are in each of 10th and 12th standard category. No women representatives with U.G and P.G qualifications is there in the Panchayat.

Total number of panchayat samiti members of Bahanaga block are taken 5 in number as per the data is shown in figure no. (4). Among 5 elected women Panchayat Samiti representatives, one has achieved higher secondary level of education and another one member has passed only graduation, and rest three members have studied only matriculation.

There are two elected women zila Parishad representatives in this block. One zila Parishad member has passed the M.E. level of education, another one elected women Zila Parishad representative has secured higher secondary level of education.

The table (4) clearly expounds that the vast majority of respondents (32.5%) have completed the M.E level of education. Followed by the respondents (20%) who have completed the matriculation level of education. Total no. of illiterate representative's percentage is (7.5). Total primary level of educated personality is found to be in the percentage (17.5) of the sample representatives. Total no. of CHSE passed percentage is (17.5). Total no. of U.G and P.G percentage of passed respondents are exactly same in percentage what is (28.57) in figure.

In a study of ‘Socio-economic profile of women Panchayat representatives in the post 73rd Amendment Scenario: A case study of Khorda district of Odisha, Swain and Acharya, have observed that the percentage of graduation category are (2 %) and (7%) respectively. A maximum number of representatives (79%) is found to be under matriculates. The percentage of illiterate PRI representative is (10%). Chilika represents the highest number of illiterate representatives with (15%). (Swain & Acharya, 2017) [4].

Table 5: Occupational status of the Representatives

SI. No	PRIs Name	Agriculture	Landless labour	Business	House wife	Total
1	Saud	1 (10)	1 (10)	1 (10)	7 (70)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	1 (12.5)	Nil (0)	3 (37.5)	4 (50)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	1 (12.5)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	7 (87.5)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	1 (14.28)	Nil (0)	2 (28.57)	4 (57.14)	7 (100)
5	P.S. member	1 (20)	Nil (0)	2 (40)	2 (40)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Member	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	1 (50)	1 (50)	2 (100)
7	Total	5 (12.5)	1 (2.5)	9 (22.5)	25 (62.5)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

The table (5) shows that occupational status of sample representatives in the PRIs of *Bahanaga* Block. The first serial represents about women representative’s occupational status of *Saud* Gram panchayat. It is found that 10% representative possesses Agricultural pattern of income. It has also been observed that (10%) respondents are landless labour in this Gram panchayat. (70%) of respondents are housewives.

50% of the representatives are found to be housewives in the *Nuapur* Gram Panchayat. (37.5%) respondents are drawn from business background. There is no landless labour in this Gram panchayat but (12.5%) respondents are from agricultural background. However, on closer observation, it is found that women representatives who claim business to be their background state that they have land in the name of their husbands.

So far as *Khantapada* Gram Panchayat is regarded, it is found that (12.5%) respondents belong to agricultural class. No landless labour and business class respondent is found there. (87.5%) representatives belong to housewife in this Gram Panchayat. On the other hand, most of the respondents of *Khantapada* Gram Panchayat state their occupation as being housewife.

In this way *Bahanaga* Gram Panchayat is drawn from this point of view, (14.28%) of respondents are found to have maintained agricultural background. (28.57%) of representatives in this Gram Panchayat are found to be in touch with business activities. It is also observed that there is no representative of landless labour in this Gram Panchayat. (57.14%) representatives of this Gram Panchayat involve themselves in their family as housewife.

In *Bahanaga* block there is no panchayat samiti member who belongs to landless labor as per the shown data in the table no. (5). 20 % of Panchayat samiti member in this block is observed to do agriculture. (40%) of women representatives of Panchayat samiti equally each category engages themselves in housewife and business activities.

Consequently, total no. of women representatives of *Bahanaga* block drawn from Agricultural category is of 5

(12.5%). Total landless labor of this block is (2.5%). Total Business class representatives of this Block is 9 (22.5%). Finally, housewife representatives reside in figure of 25 (62.5%) out of 40 (100%), that is maximum in occupational status in this block.

Income in Indian Rupees per Annum

Table 6: Annual income of the PRI representatives of sample panchayats

SI. No	PRIs Name	(Rs.6000-10000)	(Rs.11000-30000)	(Rs.31000-100000)	(Above Rs.100000)	Total
1	Saud	5 (50)	1 (10)	2 (20)	2 (20)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	3 (37.5)	2 (25)	3 (37.5)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	5 (62.5)	2 (25)	Nil (0)	1 (12.5)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	3 (42.85)	1 (14.28)	Nil (0)	3 (42.85)	7 (100)
5	P.S. Member	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	2 (40)	3 (60)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Member	Nil (0)	1 (50)	Nil (0)	1 (50)	2 (100)
7	Total	16 (40)	7 (17.5)	7 (17.5)	10 (25)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

Table (6) represents Annual income of the sample representatives of PRIs in the *Bahanaga* block. In *Saud* Gram Panchayat, it is found that half of the respondents 5 (50%) are having the income of (Rs. 6,000-10,000) per Annum. This is followed by 1 (10%) member having income from (Rs. 11,000 to 30,000) per annum and 2 (20%) members are in the category of (Rs. 31,000-1,00000) per annum. Only 2 (20%) of the respondents are having an annual income of (Rs.1,00000) and above. 3 (37.5%) of the representatives are having income of (Rs. 6,000-10,000) per annum.

In the same way at *Nuapur* Gram Panchayat 3 (37.5%) of the representatives are having income of (Rs. 6,000-10,000) per annum. 2 (20%) respondents are having income of (Rs. 11,000-30,000) per annum. 3 (37.5%) of the respondents are having the income range from (Rs. 31,000 to 1,00000) per annum. Finally, there is no respondent whose income in the category of above (Rs. 1,00000) per annum in this Gram Panchayat.

From this account, *Khantapada* Gram Panchayat is considered from the different level of income status of women representatives. 5 (62.5%) respondents earn an income of (Rs. 6,000 up to 10,000) per annum. 2 (25%) representatives are having their income from (Rs. 11,000 to 30,000) per annum. There is no representative whose income is from (Rs. 31,000 to 1,00000) per annum. 1 (12.5%) respondent has the income level above 1 lakh per annum in this Gram Panchayat.

At *Bahanaga* Gram Panchayat, 3 (42.85%) respondents having income of (Rs. 6,000 to 10,000) per annum. 1 (14.28%) respondent has her income level from (Rs. 11,000 up to 30,000) per annum. There is no single respondent in the income range of (Rs. 31,000 to 1,00000) per annum. In this Gram Panchayat 3 (42.85%) representatives have their income above (Rs. 1,00000) per annum.

There is no single Panchayat Samiti representative whose income level is from (Rs. 6,000 to 10,000) and from (Rs.

11,000 to 30,000) per annum Consecutively. Only 2 (40%) respondents have their income from (Rs. 31,000 to 1,00000). Most of the Panchayat Samiti members 3 (42.85%) are earning more than (Rs1,00000) respectively. Zilla Parishad representative does not have income range from (Rs. 6,000 to 10,000) per annum. 1 Zilla Parishad representative in this block to has been found income from (Rs. 11,000 to 30,000) per annum. Thus it is found that the income standard of Zilla Parishad member is better than other Panchayat representatives in this block.

On the whole maximum number of Panchayat representatives that is 16 constituting 40% is found in the category of annual income from (Rs. 6,000 to Rs. 10,000). 10 members that is 25% are found to be in annual income category (above Rs 1,00000). Thus it is also found that the income standard of Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti is better than that of Gram Panchayat representatives.

Socio-political perceptions of the women representatives of sample panchayats in bahanaga block

Influence to a great extent the perceptions of the respondents. Perception is a subjective factor which varies from person to person. Yet on the basis of perceptions the panchayat representatives can be divided into several categories. Hence, in this Chapter an attempt has been made to correlate the socio-economic profile of the sample representatives and that of their perceptions.

Table 7: Attendance in the Meetings of Panchayati Raj Institutions

Sl.No.	PRIs Name	Never	Sometimes	Always	Total
1	Saud	Nil (0)	2 (20)	8 (80)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	Nil (0)	1 (12.5)	7 (87.5)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	8 (100)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	Nil (0)	1 (14.28)	6 (85.71)	7 (100)
5	P.S. Member	Nil (0)	1 (20)	4 (80)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Member	Nil (0)	1 (50)	1 (50)	2 (100)
7	Total	Nil (0)	6 (15)	34 (85)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

Table (7) represents Representative’s attendance in the meetings of PRIs. In Saud Gram Panchayat (20%) respondents had not attended meetings regularly in Panchayati Raj Institution as they opined. (80%) respondents did give their opinion that they had come to the meetings regularly, whenever the Panchayat meetings took place. In khantapada Gram Panchayat all sample representatives attended the Panchayat meetings regularly. After taking everything regarding representative’s attendance in the meetings of PRIs, it is to be found that 6 (15%) representatives had attended the meetings occasionally. There is no single representative, who did not have any attendance in the meetings of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Table 8: Opinion Regarding the Attendance of Women Representatives

Sl.No.	PRIs Name	Regular	Occasional	No Attend	Total
1	Saud	4 (40)	6 (60)	Nil (0)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	6 (75)	2 (25)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	6 (75)	2 (25)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	4 (57.14)	3 (42.85)	Nil (0)	7 (100)
5	P.S. Member	3 (60)	2 (40)	Nil (0)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Member	2 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	2 (100)
7	Total	25 (62.5)	15 (37.5)	Nil (0)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

Table (8) shows that opinion regarding the attendance of women respondents. 25 respondents (62.5%) are found to have attended the Panchayati Raj meetings regularly. (37.5%) representatives that is 15 in number had come to the meetings occasionally. There was no single respondent, who did not attend in the meetings of PRIs in this Block. Occasionally, 2 (40%) of the Panchayat Samiti member had come to the meetings of Panchayati Raj Institution, but Zilla Parishad respondents had attended the meetings regularly

Table 9: Giving Opinion in the Meetings

Sl. No	PRIs Name	Yes	No	Total
1	Saud	9 (90)	1 (10)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	8 (100)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	8 (100)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	6 (85.71)	1 (14.28)	7 (100)
5	P.S. member	5 (100)	Nil (0)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Member	2 (100)	Nil (0)	2 (100)
7	Total	38 (95)	2 (5)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

Table (9) represents women respondent’s giving opinion in the meetings of Panchayat Raj institution. In Saud Gram

Panchayat, it is to be found that 90% respondents had given their opinion in the meetings of Panchayati Raj Institution. Only 1 representative (10%) is found to have taken help of others to understand anything because of her illiteracy.

So far Nuapur Gram Panchayat is concerned, it is to be found that cent percent sample respondents had given their opinion in the meeting of Panchayati Raj Institution. In Khantapada Gram Panchayat (100%) respondents had expressed their opinion in the meetings of Panchayat Raj Institution. Bahanaga Gram Panchayat (85.71%) respondents had given opinion in the meetings of Panchayati Raj Institution.

All Panchayat Samiti member had given vent to their views in meetings of Panchayati Raj Institution. All Zilla Parishad member had also given their judgement in the Panchayati Raj Institution meetings.

Over all, (95%) respondents had given their opinion in the meetings of Panchayati raj institution. 2 respondents (5%) had not given their opinion because of their low level of education and they had taken help of others during the meetings to understand different issues.

Table 10: Opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives

Sl.No.	PRIs Name	Male Representative	Upper Caste Representative	Official Member	Outside Male Except Representative	No Oppose	Total
1	Saud	4 (40)	1 (10)	Nil (0)	1 (10)	4 (40)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	3 (37.5)	1 (12.5)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	4 (50)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	4 (50)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	1 (12.5)	3 (37.5)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	1 (14.28)	1 (14.28)	5 (71.42)	7 (100)
5	P.S. Member	2 (40)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	1 (20)	2 (40)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Member	Nil (0)	1 (50)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	1 (50)	2 (100)
7	Total	13 (32.5)	3 (7.5)	1 (2.5)	4 (10)	19 (47.5)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

Table (10) shows that opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives of Bahanaga block. In *Saud* Gram Panchayat 4 (40%) respondents are found to claim male representatives were the opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives. 1 (10%) respondent who claimed upper caste representatives were the opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives. 1 (10%) respondent declared that outside male members that is who are not members in the PRIs, was the opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives. 40 per cent respondents that is 4 no. of representatives affirmatively told that nobody had opposed to the empowerment of women representatives in *Saud* Gram Panchayat.

In *Nuapur* Gram Panchayat 3 (37.5%) respondents revealed that male representatives are the opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives. It is noticed that 1

(12.5%) respondent had assertively told that upper caste representatives were the opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives. 4 (50%) respondents affirmatively disclosed that nobody was the opposing forces to the women empowerments. In *Khantapada* Gram Panchayat 4 (50%) respondents affirmatively disclosed that male representatives were as the opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives. 1 (12.5%) respondent assertively proclaimed that outside male member that is other than representatives were identified as opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives. 3 (37.5%) respondents confidently disclosed that nobody was the opposing forces to the empowerment of women representatives. So far as *Bahanaga* Gram Panchayat is concerned, 5 (71.4%) respondents assertively expressed that nobody was opposed to the idea of women empowerment.

Table 11: Self Perception of the type of change in this status

Sl. No.	PRIs Name	Prestige in the village	Powerful in the village	Economic Advancement	Enhanced Family Respect	Total
1	Saud	8 (80)	1 (10)	Nil (0)	1 (10)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	6 (75)	1 (12.5)	Nil (0)	1 (12.5)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	8 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	5 (71.42)	1 (14.28)	Nil (0)	1 (14.28)	7 (100)
5	P.S. Member	4 (80)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	1 (20)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Member	2 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	2 (100)
7	Total	33 (82.5)	3 (7.5)	Nil (0)	4 (10)	40 (100)

(Figures in Parenthesis Denote Percentage)

Table (11) represents self-perception of the type of change in this status. In *Saud* Gram Panchayat 8 (80%) respondents viewed that they felt to have been enhanced prestige because of their position in PRIs. 1 (10%) Sarpanch respondent replied that people in her village look upon her as powerful because of the fact that some or other member of her family has been in the office of PRIs without any interruption since 1992. 1 (10%) respondent in this Gram Panchayat claimed that after being elected as ward member her prestige got enhanced in family.

In *Nuapur* Gram Panchayat 6 (75%) representatives felt that after being elected as PRIs member their Prestige in the village has been enhanced. In *khantapada* Gram Panchayat the prestige of the all sample representatives is getting

enhanced in the village as they claim to be enhanced because of the position they occupy.

In *Bahanaga* Gram Panchayat two ST respondents (one ward member, another one Panchayat Samiti member) claimed that after being elected as the members of the PRIs, their family respect has increased.

It is found that three ST Representatives revealed that just on their getting elected the member of the PRIs, their family respect has been boosted. One Sarpanch of *Bahanaga* Panchayat is belonging to the ST category, expressed her self-perception as being powerful in the village.

An on overall analysis, it is found that 33 (82.5%) representatives claimed that they felt their position to be prestigious in the village. 3 (7.5%) respondents told that they have experienced increase in their status.

Table 12: Perception of Reservation for Women as Favourable to their empowerment

Sl. No.	PRIs Name	In a Great Measure	To Some Extent	Not at All	No Response	Total
1	Saud	1 (10)	8 (80)	Nil (0)	1 (10)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	3 (37.5)	5 (62.5)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	Nil (0)	8 (100)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	2 (28.57)	5 (71.42)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	7 (100)
5	P.S. member	2 (40)	3 (60)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	5 (100)

6	Z.P. Member	1 (50)	1 (50)	Nil (0)	Nil (0)	2 (100)
7	Total	9 (22.5)	30 (75)	Nil (0)	1 (2.5)	40 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis denote percentage)

Table (12) shows that perception of reservation for women as favourable to their empowerment. In *Saud* Gram Panchayat 8 (80%) respondents had given their opinion that reservation for women as favourable to some extent for their empowerment. 1 (10%) respondent told that reservation for women as favourable in a great measure to their empowerment. 1 (10%) ST ward member she had given her opinion that she was unknown about reservation for women, so that, she did not respond in that matter.

In *Nuapur* Gram Panchayat 5 (62.5%) respondents asserted their perception of reservation for women as favourable to some extent to their empowerment. 3 (37.5%) representatives were very much confident regarding the contribution of reservation to their empowerment.

In *Khantapada* Gram Panchayat 8 (100%) representatives opined that reservation is partly suitable for their empowerment. In *Bahanaga* Gram Panchayat 5 (71.42%) respondents stated their perception about reservation for women as supportive to some extent to their empowerment. 2 (28.57%) respondents positively expressed their view point on the subject of reservation for women as holding out some hope for their empowerment.

On an overall analysis, it is to be found most of the representatives displayed optimism about the prospect of reservation for women as beneficial to their empowerment. However, few of the representatives claimed their expression in connection with reservation that they qualify it by saying that it is (some extent) partly beneficial in this matter. Those who have a positive view regarding the prospect of the reservation provision that is combining “to some extent” and “in a great measure” responses are overwhelming in number (97.5%). In other words, they preponderate and those who have negative views constitute an insignificant percentage.

Table 13: Perceiving the presence of female members in the Panchayat as the proxy for the male members of their family

Sl. No.	PRIs name	Yes	No	NR	Total
1	Saud	7 (70)	2 (20)	1 (10)	10 (100)
2	Nuapur	1 (12.5)	7 (87.5)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
3	Khantapada	6 (75)	2 (25)	Nil (0)	8 (100)
4	Bahanaga	5 (71.42)	2 (28.57)	Nil (0)	7 (100)
5	P.S. member	1 (20)	4 (80)	Nil (0)	5 (100)
6	Z.P. Member	Nil (0)	2 (100)	Nil (0)	2 (100)
7	Total	20 (50)	19 (47.5)	1 (2.5)	40 (100)

(Figures in Parenthesis denote percentage)

In *Saud* Gram Panchayat 7 (70%) respondents gave their opinion positively that their husbands generally attend all the meetings and take decisions on their behalf. They expressed that women were represented in the Gram Panchayat by proxy and their male family members do all sorts of work. It was observed that *Saud* Sarpanch positively disclosed her view point that she did not have any idea about the Gram Panchayat activities as her husband proxies for her. 2 (20%) respondents negatively gave their responses that their presence was no proxy for male members.

In *Nuapur* Gram Panchayat 7 (87.5%) respondents, in spite of being SC category, attended the Panchayat meetings regularly. Their attendance was no proxy for male members.

Among them one lady sarpanch is found to be Post Graduate in Sanskrit and her influence upon representatives made them aware of their duties and responsibilities.

It is to be noticed that in *Khantapada* Gram Panchayat 6 (75%) respondents say that male members come to the meetings because they themselves need their help.

However, it is to be found that 20 (50%) representatives gave answer positively on the subject regarding the presence of the female members in the Panchayat their male members of family were coming as proxies. It is further found that on an overall analysis 19 (47.5%) representatives expressed that no male member acted as substitute in Panchayat.

In a study conducted by *Behera* and *Acharya* on the role of sarpanch in the districts of *Balasore* and *Mayurbhanj*, it is found that in the district of *Balasore* (76.66%) of the sarpanches perceive ladies sarpanches to be usually guided by their husbands. Similarly, in the district of *Mayurbhanj* (95%) of sarpanches perceive that their directly guided by their husbands. Thus, a preponderant majority of sarpanch respondents in both the districts perceive that ladies sarpanches are guided by their husbands in their role performances. (*Behera and Acharya* 2017) ^[4].

Suggestion

- Women Representatives should be given education. Education will broaden their outlook and make them aware of their duties and responsibilities in the society. Government should make literacy drive and take stern steps in this direction.
- Orientation Programme should be conducted time to time for the representatives.
- Government should take steps for the skill development of the disadvantaged sections so that economical condition will improve and they will find representatives in PRIs.
- Empowerment of women should be the primary goal of the government. Educationally and economically they should be empowered at village level.
- The negative networking of upper caste male members and the officials in the Panchayat Raj Institutions needs to be countered.
- Violence in politics needs to be curbed because it keeps women away from politics.

Conclusion

Many of the women representatives in the PRIs are first time entrants. They are women who have seen and exercised power and authority for the first time in their lives. The PRIs act as forums where the women can practically experience the ‘learning by doing’ process and acquire an understanding of the working of the Indian democracy. PRIs provide women the center of learning for orderly conducting meeting and the way of dealing with state bureaucracy, the evolution of a culture of political participation, the creation of new forms of social mobilization, and even changes in public perceptions of the need for as well as scope for foundational change. The local governments often offer the women an opportunity to realize their skills and potentials beyond the confines of their households. Thus, the constitution’s 73rd amendment act has created considerable

space for women's political participation and paved the way for their representation in the decision making at the grass roots politics. The act lays a strong foundation for women's participation in decision making at the local level and proves instrumental in promoting women's political empowerment.

Against this background of the political status of women the India is general. The present study as in conducted in Bahanaga block of Balasore district in the state of Odisha. District of Balasore is a coastal district with higher level of literacy rate 74.04% (male 82.14%, female 65.46%). Bahanaga block which is characterized by presence of the significant percentage of SC (Scheduled caste) population is however not significant in terms of the presence of ST (Scheduled Tribe) population. Literacy rate in Bahanaga block is 74% with 68% literate females and 80% males. The block is also advanced educationally, socially and economically in comparison to other block. Hence, a modest attempt has been made by the scholar to find out the participation of women representatives in the PRIs and ascertain their perception including the perception of their own status. It is found that only Gram Panchayat representatives are in 'above 50 years'. But no representative of Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti is in this category. On the comparative analysis, it is found, in the presence of ladies sarpanches, 50% ward members revealed clearly that nobody was the opposing force to the women empowerment. On the other hand, in the absence of lady sarpancha in Khantapada Gram Panchayat male representatives are considered to be opposing forces to women empowerment. It was observed that Saud Sarpanch disclosed her view point that she did not have any idea about the G. P. activities as her husband proxies for her. However, it is found on an overall analysis that 20 (50%) representatives indicated that male members of their family were coming as proxies for the female members. it is further found that 19 (47.5%) representatives expressed that no male member did act as substitutes for the female members in the panchayats.

Government should also organize orientation courses for new entrance to the Panchayat Raj Institutions to enhance their competence in decision-making. Moreover, exchange programmes should be carried on between different stages so that PRI representatives of Odisha can go to west Bengal and Kerala and other states where Panchayati Raj Institutions are more developed. This will equity the Panchayati Raj Representatives of Odisha to gain first-hand information about the working of PRIs in other states. This will help women members who are educationally and economically backward.

To conclude finally PRIs and especially institution like Gram Sabha can help us realize our dream of direct democracy. In Odisha in the wake up the success of Niyamgiri movement, it can be pointed out how the Gram Sabhas ruled out mining of bauxite in that hill. When women have been empowered and have become gradually assertive in spite of the obstacles posed by the upper caste male members and officials as found in the area under study (Bahanaga block). One can say there is a silver lining in the otherwise dark sky. We can also take steps as suggested above so that the sky will become bright and political empowerment of women at the grass roots level can be really achieved.

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