

73RD CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT- AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN TRIBAL AND NON-TRIBAL DISTRICTS, ODISHA

*Aparajita Sarangi and
Gitanjali Mishra**

ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women is viewed as all round development in the status of women that can be realised through several inter-related and mutually reinforcing components such as awareness development in regard to Socio-Economic Status, discrimination, rights and opportunity towards gender equality, which ultimately develop their ability to plan and pursue economic activities, participate in the decision-making process at all spheres.

The present study undertakes re-examination of the relationship between the socio-economic status of women vis a vis political participation in tribal and non-tribal districts of Odisha. Besides, it also suggests suitable measures towards policy formulation for ensuring effective participation of women.

Introduction

The empowerment of women is viewed as allround development in the status of women and manifestation of their potential in all walks of life. This is realised through several inter-related and mutually reinforcing components. These are awareness building in regard to their socio-economic status, discrimination, rights and opportunity towards gender equality; skill development and capacity building in order to acquire ability to plan and pursue economic activities; participation in the decision-making process in the home as well as in the society and promoting actions for achieving gender equality. In other words, empowering them socially, economically and politically can enhance the status of women. Constitution of India confers equal rights on men and women.

Due to developmental effort, the country has witnessed improvement in the status of women in many spheres- such as health, nutrition, education, social and economic participation. But the gender disparity still persists, which is evident from declining sex ratio, insignificant participation in the economic activities and gaps in the life expectancy, mortality rates between men and women and nutritional indicators for women. Low literacy and education among females, lack of skills and awareness, social taboos and conventions and above all lack of economic independence and lack of participation in the decision-making process among them are the principal reasons for inequality between men and women. The scenario in Odisha is no different from the rest of the country. Inequality between men and

* IAS, Commissioner cum Secretary and Joint Director (MGNREGA), Respectively, Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Odisha.

women were responsible for not only lower socio-economic growth but also for a large-scale discontentment among women. Empowerment of women is, therefore, a crucial issue, which would enable women to realise their full identity and potential and contribute effectively to the growth of the society.

73rd Constitution Amendment Act 1992- A Big Leap for Political Empowerment of Women

During the post-Independence period many States in India enacted legislation to constitute Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in accordance with Article 40 of the Indian Constitution in the Directive Principles of State Policy. This Article states that the State should take steps to organise village Panchayat and endow them with such power and functions so as to enable them to function as units of local self-government. But the PRIs in many States were not uniform in structure and functions and they failed in many instances to acquire the status and dignity required for viable and responsive people's institutions due to absence of regular elections, prolonged supersession and inadequate representation of women and weaker sections and insufficient devolution of power and lack of financial resources. Therefore, there was rethinking on reviving the PRIs which resulted in constitution of different committees to study the PR systems and make recommendations to strengthen these grassroot democratic institutions. The important committees were, Balwant Ray Mehta Study Team (1957), Asoka Mehta Committee (1977), G.V.K Rao Committee (1985), and L.N Singhvee Committee (1986). All these committees recommended the need to evoke local initiatives and participation and therefore, recommended to reengineer the PRIs by giving them the Constitutional status and making them responsible for planning, implementation and monitoring of the rural development schemes. The attempt to consolidate the PR System resulted in the Seventy-third Constitutional

Amendment Act, 1992. The most notable feature of the Act is that it gave specific Constitutional mandate to the State Government for the establishment of three-tier structure for local self-governance. The landmark feature of the Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment is that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of the chairpersons and members of various PRIs has to be reserved for women. This was a big leap towards women empowerment which provided them the scope and opportunity to participate in public life as well as in the decision-making and nation-building process.

So far as ensuring women's representation in the PRIs, the State of Odisha took pioneering initiatives to implement one-third reservation of seats for women at a time, when the Union Government was still deliberating on the issue. Moreover, even among the reserved seats for SCs and STs, one-third are set aside for women candidates belonging to the SCs and STs. Another radical step was that, according to 73rd Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1992, Odisha Government had not only made one-third of the seats reserved for women, but also went a step ahead in reserving the post of vice-president for women in the Panchayats at all levels, if the chairperson elected was not a woman.

The State of Odisha has 30 Zilla Parishads (ZPs) and 314 Panchayat Samitis (PSs) and 6234 Gram Panchayats (GPs). Most of the seats reserved for women witnessed multi-cornered contest. The reservation policy at the decentralised level is a big achievement in the area of women's participation in the democratic process.

Objectives of the Study : The paper has the following objectives:

- ☛ to assess the level of awareness among the elected women members about their roles, responsibilities and various development programmes; their participation in the activities of the Panchayat

- ☞ to critically analyse the extent of participation of women members in the decision-making process and
- ☞ to suggest suitable measures to ensure their effective participation in the activities of the PRI and the decision-making process.

Research Design

Selection of the Study Area and Respondents :

A multi-stage mixed sampling design was adopted for the study. The sample comprised 2 ZPs, 4 Panchayat Samitis (PSs)- 2 from each of the ZPs and 16 Gram Panchayats (GPs) -4 from each of the PSs. The criterion for selection of the districts was that one should be from among the Scheduled Tribe (ST) districts and the other from among the non-ST districts having women member as president of ZP. In each of the sample districts, two blocks were selected- one from among the ST and the other from non-ST blocks, having a woman chairperson. Four GPs having women-sarpanch from each of the sample blocks were selected following SRS technique. From each of the selected PRIs at different levels, 4-5 women members including the chairperson were selected to collect information on their socio-economic profile, level of awareness, participation and decision-making powers. The samples (elected women representatives) were selected as 64 numbers @ 4 per Gram Panchayat, 20 numbers @ 5 per Panchayat Samiti and 10 numbers @ 5 per Zilla Parishad.

The district of Keonjhar belongs to the Northern Plateau region of the State. The sex ratio of the district stood at 977 which is better than the State average. The district belongs to the scheduled area having an ST population of 44.52 per cent and SC population of 11.49 per cent of the total district population. The district shares 5.33 per cent of the Odisha's land mass and accounts for 4.26 per cent of the total population. Puri district belongs to the fertile coastal plain area of the State. The sex ratio of

the district stood at 968 which is lower than the State average. The district has negligible percentage of ST population (0.27 per cent), but has a significant composition of SC population (18.56 per cent). It shares 1.96 per cent of the Odisha's land mass and accounts for 4.08 per cent of the total population.

The literacy percentage of the State stood at 63.61 while the corresponding figures are 59.75 in tribal Keonjhar and 78.40 in the non-tribal Puri district. The male -female difference in literacy is quite significant in both the districts (Census 2001).

Data Analysis and Interpretation : The information on the level of socio-economic status, level of awareness on PR system, level of participation in the PRIs activities and decision-making process, perception of the respondents and perception of male PRI members and officials on women's empowerment due to their involvement in the Panchayats were obtained through well-designed interview schedules.

The socio-economic status (SES) of the respondents were assessed on the basis of information relating to the family structure, educational level, type of dwelling house, value of the household's assets, income of the respondents and her husband and their (respondent and her husband) membership in local organisations. The qualitative data on these aspects were converted into scores according to socio-economic status (SES) scale (Parek & Trivedi, 1965). Similarly, scores on the attributes of the respondents such as 'Awareness', 'Participation', 'Decision-Making' were computed as per the scoring procedure. On the basis of average scores the attributes were classified as 'poor' if average score is less than equal to 50, 'fair' if the average score is between 50-60, 'good' between 60-70, 'very good' between 70-80 and 'outstanding' if the score is greater than 80. These average scores were also analysed following appropriate statistical techniques such as

frequency tables, computation of descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, median, and mode. In order to test the significance of difference between the levels of the attributes of tribal and non-tribal districts, 'Z' test for large sample was applied.

In order to assess whether the attributes- 'awareness', 'perception' and 'decision-making' are independent of the level of education, family income and caste have been studied by constructing Bivariate Frequency Tables and applying Chi-square test for independence of attributes.

Findings of the Study

Socio-economic and Political Profile of the Respondents: The age composition of the elected women PRI members revealed a younger age composition in both the tribal and non-tribal districts. About 30 per cent of the respondents are in twenties and 43 per cent in thirties and 27 per cent in forties.

The caste composition revealed socially and economically backward characteristics with about 44 per cent belonging to SCs and STs and about 40 per cent to OBCs. The SCs and STs are represented in the PRI bodies more than their proportions in the population.

More than two-thirds (60.65 per cent) of the respondents have education only up to primary level which reflected low educational level amongst the women PRI members. However, 24.5 per cent of the respondents have education up to high school level.

The elected women PRI-members were primarily housewives (80 per cent) and engaged in low productive areas such as cultivation and agricultural labour. A miniscule of them was engaged in business or jobs. The occupational structure of the husbands was also characterised by low productive activities like cultivation, agricultural wage employment and daily casual

labour. The income level of the respondents and the husbands depicted a very low economic profile where three-fourths of the respondents have a meagre monthly income less than or equal to ₹ 500, half of the respondents' husbands have a low monthly income of less than ₹ 1000. The non-tribal Puri district depicted a better picture than the tribal Keonjhar district. One-sixth of the respondents have no houses and 50 per cent have kutchra houses. In terms of values of assets such as land, agricultural implements, cattle and electronic goods, the scenario is also not encouraging. About one-seventh were landless, 43 per cent have land value worth less than/equal to ₹ 20,000. About one-third of the respondents do not own cattle and two-thirds have cattle worth ₹ 5000 or less. About 87.23 per cent respondents and 63.66 per cent of respondents do not possess any agricultural implements and electronic goods, respectively. The occupational structure, monthly family income of the respondents and the possession of different types of assets such as land, cattle, agricultural implements, electronic goods and type of dwelling houses depicted a low socio-economic profile of the respondents.

The elected women PRI members were found to be associated with organisations such as Self-Help Groups, Watershed Committees, Village User's Committees and other committees. Nearly 40 per cent were not members of any such organisation. However, members have acquired some minimal knowledge on the Panchayati Raj System due to their reference to print and electronic media and political/local meetings.

The classification of the respondents according to socio-economic status on the basis of average score and some descriptive statistics of the average scores are furnished in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. According to the SES score, 89.5 per cent of the respondents belonged to poor, 7.4 per cent fair and 3.2 per cent good SES category.

Table 1 : Classifications of the Respondents According to Socio-economic Status Scale

District	N	Percentage of Respondents According to Socio-economic Status on the Basis of Average Score				
		Poor (≤ 50)	Fair (50-60)	Good (60-70)	Very Good (70-80)	Outstanding (> 80)
Puri (Non-ST)	47	89.4	4.3	6.4	0.00	0.00
Keonjhar (ST)	47	89.5	10.5	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	94	89.5	7.4	3.2	0.00	0.00

The mean score was 31.81, the median 27.59 and the mode 17.24. The low values of the central tendencies revealed a poor socio-economic status of the respondents. The normal Z test for large sample for significance of difference of mean scores of Puri and Keonjhar

districts revealed no significant difference between the SES of women PRI members of the tribal and non-tribal districts. The high value of the C.V of the scores indicated that there is high degree of variations in the SES among the respondents.

Table 2 : Descriptive Statistics of Average Scores of Respondents on SES

District	N*	Min.	Max.	Range	Mean	Med.	Mode	S.D	C.V.	Normal 'Z'
Puri (Non-ST)	47	13.79	68.97	55.18	32.03	27.59	17.24	14.69	45.86	
Keonjhar (ST)	47	10.34	58.62	48.28	31.85	32.76	37.93	12.74	40.00	0.61
Total	94	10.34	68.97	58.63	31.81	27.59	17.24	13.68	43.01	

* N = Sample Size.

Training is an important component for capacity building but it was found that about four-fifths of the respondents have not received any training. This important aspect has been neglected and needs proper attention. But due to their exposure to print/ electronic media, political meetings, interaction among members, they have been able to acquire whatever knowledge they have on the Panchayati Raj system.

Level of Awareness of Elected Women PRI Members

The awareness of the women PRI members on PR system was assessed by putting them 26 questions on different aspects of PRIs such as election procedure, meeting procedure, administrative matters, financial matters and

developmental activities. The responses were given scores- 1 for correct and 0 for wrong response. Then the average scores of individual respondents on percentage scale were computed to have an objective view on the level of awareness.

While the women PRI-members were found to have better awareness on some aspects of the Panchayati Raj System, their awareness on some other aspects was lacking. They have very good awareness on election procedure, administrative matters and developmental activities undertaken in the area. But their awareness was found grossly inadequate on meeting procedures, financial matters, funding provisions under developmental schemes of the Government.

The classification of the respondents according to the scores and some descriptive statistics of the scores are furnished in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. Nearly one-fourth have poor or fair awareness while three-fourths have good/very good/ outstanding level of awareness. Interestingly, the level of awareness of the respondents in the tribal Keonjhar district was significantly better than the non-tribal Puri district. In spite of the overall low educational

However, in certain areas, the awareness of the respondents was found lacking and there is certainly need for bridging the gap and increasing the level of awareness of the respondents who are found lacking it. In view of the divergence between the districts, area-specific approach has to be formulated to increase the awareness level of the respondents.

The mean average score, the median score were computed as 73 each and the value

Table 3 : Classification of the Respondents According to the Level of Awareness

District	Percentage of Respondents According to Level of Awareness on the Basis of Average Score of the Respondents					
	N	Poor (≤ 50)	Fair (50-60)	Good (60-70)	Very Good (70-80)	Outstanding (> 80)
Puri (Non-ST)	47	14.89	17.02	21.28	17.02	29.79
Keonjhar (ST)	47	4.26	8.51	21.28	10.64	55.32
Total	94	9.57	12.77	21.28	13.83	42.55

of the modal score was 69. The high value of statistical averages indicated better level of awareness among the PRI-members. However, the co-efficient of variation, i.e., the measure of variability, was 21.73 indicating high variability in the level of awareness of the women PRI members. Level of awareness in the tribal

Keonjhar district was fairly better than the non-tribal Puri which was evident from higher level of mean scores of Keonjhar.. The normal 'Z' test for large sample revealed significant difference between the level of awareness of non-tribal Puri and tribal Keonjhar districts.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Average Scores of Respondents on Awareness

District	N	Min.	Max.	Range	Mean	Med.	Mode	S.D.	C.V.	Normal 'Z'
Puri (Non-ST)	47	38.46	96.15	57.69	69.07	69.23	73.08	15.96	23.11	
Keonjhar (ST)	47	23.08	100.0	76.92	77.01	80.77	69.23	14.91	19.36	2.49
Total	94	23.08	100.0	76.92	73.04	73.08	69.23	15.87	21.73	

Participation of the Respondents in the Activities of the PRIs

The level of participation of women PRI members on different activities of the PRIs was assessed by canvassing a questionnaire of 47 questions on different activities such as business of the Panchayat, developmental activities and

community mobilisation. In order to assess the level of participation of the women PRI respondents, their responses to different activities were given scores- "0" for non-participation and "1" for participation' and their average scores on percentage scales were computed.

The level of participation of women PRI members was not found to be encouraging. In carrying out the Panchayat business, the participation was a mixed one. While in some areas such as circulating notice about meetings, participating in the meetings, women members actively participated, but in important activities like discussions of the annual budget and expenditure of the Panchayat, the participation has been poor. In the developmental activities, while the respondents have better participation in the creation of infrastructure, their participation was lacking in areas like preparation of developmental plans, resource mobilisation, etc. The community mobilisation is an important activity for effective local self-governance. But

in the organisation of community programmes like immunisation, eye camps, health camps, literacy campaigns etc., the participation of women PRI-members was found unsatisfactory.

The classification of the respondents' participation according to the percentage scores and some descriptive statistics of the scores are furnished in Tables 5 and 6, respectively.

The analysis revealed that 39.36 per cent of the respondents have poor participation (less than 50 per cent marks), 26.60 per cent have fair participation and slightly more than one-third have good, very good and outstanding participation in the PRIs activities.

Table 5 : Respondents' Classification According to Level of Participation in the PRIs' Activities

District	Percentage of Respondents According to Level of Participation on the Basis of Average Score of the Respondents					
	N	Poor ($< =50$)	Fair (50-60)	Good (60-70)	Very Good (70-80)	Outstanding (> 80)
Puri (Non-ST)	47	48.94	19.15	8.51	19.15	4.26
Keonjhar (ST)	47	29.79	34.04	14.89	10.64	10.64
Total	94	39.36	26.60	11.70	14.89	7.45

The high value of CV (29.19) revealed that level of participation of individual respondents widely varied among respondents. It is required that all the women PRI-members should participate uniformly for smooth delivery of services. The mean average scores of the respondents on participation was found to be 54.53, the median and the modal scores were 51.06 each. The mean average score in tribal

Keonjhar (57.58) was slightly higher than that of non-tribal Puri (51.47). In order to know whether this difference was significant or arised due to sampling fluctuation, the normal 'Z-statistic' was computed as 1.88 which is less than the tabulated 'Z' value of 1.96 at 5 per cent level of significance. Thus, there was no significant difference in the level of participation of women PRI members of Keonjhar and Puri districts.

Table 6 : Descriptive Statistics of Average Scores of Respondents on Participation in the PRIs' Activities

District	N	Min.	Max.	Range	Mean	Med.	Mode	S.D.	C.V.	Normal 'Z'
Puri (Non-ST)	47	23.40	89.36	65.96	51.47	51.06	51.06	17.33	33.67	
Keonjhar (ST)	47	36.17	91.49	55.32	57.58	55.32	55.32	13.89	24.12	1.88
Total	94	23.40	91.49	68.09	54.53	53.19	38.30	15.92	29.19	

The real empowerment of women will take place only when women are adequately represented in the PRIs, they become aware of the system and actively participate in the activities of the PRIs.

The participation of women-PRI respondents in the activities of local self-governance was grossly inadequate. Moreover, the variations found in the level of participations of the respondents signify that, some elected women PRI-members are participating in some activities and some are not though cohesive and coherent participation in the activities by all elected women PRI-members is necessary to deliver the benefits to the people.

Participation in the Decision-making Process

Participation of women in the decision-making process is an important parameter for assessing the empowerment of women. The level of participation of women PRI members in the decision-making process at the house-hold level and PRI level was assessed by canvassing a questionnaire of 31 questions relating to decision-making at the household level, decision-making at Panchayati Raj level such as interference, conflict management, administration, financial aspects, etc. In order to assess the level of participation in the decision-making process of the women PRI respondents, their responses to different activities were given scores- "0" for non-participation and "1" for participation' and their average scores on percentage scales were computed.

It is encouraging to find that 97.87 per cent of the women PRI members take decision in sending children to school, 93.62 per cent opined that they are giving equal privileges and freedom to their daughter (93.62 per cent) and 89.23 per cent have freedom to decide about family planning. But in other aspects of household matters the findings are not very encouraging. Half of the women PRI members said that their opinion is not sought for in

domestic matters, they did not have the freedom to express their feelings and experience at home (44.68 per cent), their 'going out of home' is not appreciated by the family members (70 per cent) and they have to take permission of household/other family members (54.26 per cent) to move out of home.

As regards their participation in the decision-making process at the Panchayat level, a majority of the female PRI respondents (65.96 per cent) admitted that their husbands do interfere in their decisions and 70.21 per cent expressed that other male PRI members tried to influence their decisions.

Majority of the respondents (62.77 per cent) expressed that female members were not actively involved in the decisions of the Panchayats. Scenario in both the districts was similar. This is really an issue of serious concern and can be considered as an impediment in the path of empowerment.

Exploration was made about their ability of conflict management. Majority of the respondents said that they are able to resolve conflicts during Gram Sabha meetings (59.57 per cent) and during Panchayat meetings (72.34 per cent). In this aspect the tribal Keonjhar district depicted a better picture than the non-tribal Puri district.

The abilities of the women PRI members in the administrative matters was studied. About 62 per cent said that they were able to get the task done by their staff, 71.28 per cent said that they were able to conduct meetings as per the procedures, 44.68 per cent able to enforce disciplinary actions. The comparison revealed that the women PRI respondents of the tribal Keonjhar were ahead of the non-tribal Puri district in this regard. However, 19.15 per cent expressed that resolutions were passed against their decisions- 25.53 per cent in Keonjhar and 12.77 per cent in Puri.

The scores of the respondents on participation in the decision-making process both at the household and Panchayati Raj level and some descriptive statistics are presented in Tables 7 and 8. The average scores of the respondents in percentage scale were computed and the respondents were classified according to their level of participation in the

decision-making process both at the household and PRI-levels taken together. It was found that 19.15 per cent of the respondents have poor participation (average score < 50 per cent), 17.02 per cent have fair participation (average score 50 to 60 per cent), 63.83 per cent have good, very good or outstanding participation in the decision-making process.

Table 7 : Classifications of the Respondents According to Participation in the Decision-making Process

District	Percentage of Respondents According to Level of Participation in the Decision-making Process on the Basis of Average Score					
	N	Poor (< =50)	Fair (50-60)	Good (60-70)	Very Good (70-80)	Outstanding (> 80)
Puri (Non-ST)	47	17.02	23.40	19.15	17.02	23.40
Keonjhar (ST)	47	21.28	10.64	29.79	31.91	6.38
Total	94	19.15	17.02	24.47	24.47	14.89

Mean average score of the respondents in the decision-making process was found to be 65.85. The median and modal scores were computed at 70 each. Higher values of central tendencies indicated better participation of women PRIs in the decision-making process. But this should be borne in mind that the high value of mean score was based on their participation in the decision-making process both at the household level and PRI level. However, a segregated look on their participation in the decision-making process at the household level

and PRI-level has been presented clearly in the above paragraph. The high value of C.V.(24.28) indicated wide variations in the level of participation in the decision-making process among the respondents. The mean average score in non-tribal Puri was 67.31 per cent and that of the tribal Keonjhar (64.40 per cent). However, the normal 'Z-statistic' for difference of mean revealed that the scenario of women empowerment in the decision-making process is quite similar in both the districts (Table 9).

Table 8 : Descriptive Statistics of Average Scores of Respondents on Participation in the Decision-making Ability

District	N	Min.	Max.	Range	Mean	Med.	Mode	S.D.	C.V.	Normal 'Z'
Puri (Non-ST)	47	33.33	100.00	66.67	67.31	66.67	60.00	17.48	25.97	
Keonjhar (ST)	47	33.33	83.33	50.00	64.40	70.00	73.33	14.40	22.36	0.88
Total	94	33.33	100.00	66.67	65.85	70.00	70.00	15.99	24.28	

Association 'Between the Attributes'

The association between the attributes have been analysed through the Pearson's Bivariate Co-relation analysis by the use of SPSS

(Statistical Package of Social Science). The correlation co-efficient have been computed for both the districts combined and presented in Table 10. The socio-economic status of the

respondents got positive co-relation with the level of awareness, level of participation, and level of participation in the decision-making process of the respondents. These co-relation co-efficient are highly significant at 1 per cent level. The awareness of the respondent has also

got significant co-relation with the level of participation of the respondent at 1 per cent level of significance. The 'Awareness' and 'Participation in the PRIs' activities' are significantly co-related at 1 per cent level. But the awareness and decision-making do not exhibit any association.

Table 9 : Bivariate Pearson's Correlation Co-efficient Between the Attributes (Both the Districts Combined)

	SES	Awareness	Participation	Decision-making
SES				
Awareness	.329** (.001)			
Participation	.515** (.000)	.522** (.000)		
Decision-making	.429** (.000)	.201 (.052)	.562** (.000)	

* * Co-relation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 – tailed).

* Co-relation is significant at the 0.5 level (2 – tailed).

Study of Inter-dependence of Attributes

An exploration was made whether there is inter-dependence between factors of socio-economic status such as education, caste, and family income with attributes such as Awareness, Participation and Involvement in the decision-making process. Chi-square tests for independence of attributes have been applied on the pairs of attributes like, 'Awareness & Education', 'Awareness & Family Income', 'Awareness & Caste', 'Participation & Education', 'Participation & Family Income', 'Participation & Caste', 'Decision-making & Education', 'Decision-making & Family Income', 'Decision-making & Caste'.

The bivariate frequency analysis for each pair of attributes reflects that the level of education and family income has a direct bearing on the level of awareness. But the level of awareness of the respondents was independent of the caste. Similarly, the level of education of the respondents and the level of participation of the respondents in the PRI activities are inter-dependent. But the level of participation in the PRI activities is independent of the level of family income and caste of the respondents. Besides, the level of education has a bearing upon the

participation of women PRI members in the decision-making process at the PRI level and household level. But the caste and income level have no bearing upon the participation in the decision-making process. It emerged that in a State like Odisha education is the most important determinant, which influences the level of awareness, the level of participation in PRI activities and the level of participation in the decision-making process of the elected women PRI members. The level of participation in the Panchayat bodies and the level of participation in the decision-making process of the elected women PRI members is independent of family income and caste.

Summary and Suggestions

The overall participation of the women PRI-members in the activities of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the recent elections was found to be very much inadequate. Each of the attributes- 'Awareness', 'Participation in the activities of PRIs', 'Participation in the decision-making process', has significant positive co-relation with the SES. Further, a deeper analysis revealed that the level of participation of the respondents (women PRI-members) in the PRI activities and in the decision making process depend upon the 'level of education', but independent of 'family income'

and 'caste'. This made it clear that level of education is the most important determinant of the level of participation.

The level of awareness and the level of participation have significant positive association. Therefore, the awareness of women PRI respondents will definitely contribute to an increase in the level of participation in PRIs' activities and decision-making process.

Interestingly, the 'level of education' and the 'level of family income' have a direct bearing on the 'level of awareness'. But the 'level of awareness' is independent of 'caste'.

In order to increase the level of participation, the level of education and the level of awareness of women PRI-members are required to be improved.

The women PRI-members of Odisha are characterised by low level of education but younger age composition. One way of increasing the level of education of women PRI-members is to create an atmosphere and environment so that the educated women will come forward to represent in the PRIs. The other way is to educate women PRI-members through training, exposure visits and workshops. These two things have to be done simultaneously. An intensive research study is required in order to decide the strategies to induct more educated women to participate in local self-governance.

In order to design effective training module and training programme for educating the less educated women PRI-members so that they can effectively participate in the PRI activities and positively contribute to the development process, a 'training need assessment' (TNA) is essential. The TNA will help to identify the educationally weaker groups among the women PRI-members and their training requirements. Adequate infrastructure supports in terms of hardware and software have to be created for the purpose.

Another important finding was that the awareness was found to be grossly inadequate on meeting procedure, financial matters and

funding position under developmental schemes. In order to develop the level of awareness, the area-specific approach need to be adopted. And there should be specially designed package of training programmes, workshops, exposure visits and development of IEC materials for women PRI-members.

Majority of the women PRI-members opined that the present devolution of power is inadequate and there is a need for proper devolution of power for effective participation of PRI members in the Panchayati Raj bodies. The Government of Odisha have recently taken an initiative to devolve more powers to the Panchayati Raj bodies in respect of 11 developmental departments. But there is a need to assess the specific areas of devolution of power in respect of functions, functionaries and finance in respect of different developmental programmes implemented by various departments. The perception of different stakeholders such as people, PRI-members and government officials, NGOs for evolving a realistic framework for devolution of power in respect is essential. Therefore, there is a need for intensive research in the area.

The Government is implementing a good number of schemes for development of rural people and also specifically for rural poor women. The implementation of these schemes would be successful if there is cooperation from the officials, participants and monitoring by PRI members and community. For effective involvement of women PRI-members in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the programmes, the scheme guidelines have to be made available to the women PRI-members in the regional language. There should be information counters at the Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat at offices, where detailed information in the form of brochures and leaflets about all the schemes should be available to the PRI-members and to the general public free of cost. The notice board in those offices should clearly display the list of all developmental schemes being implemented in the area.

Adequate number of manuals on ZP/ PS/ GP in regional languages should be made available to all the women PRI-members.

The other major bottlenecks in the participation of women PRI-members in the activities and decision-making process were found as 'lack of mobility', interference from family members and male PRI-members, lack of cooperation from the officials and burden of household responsibilities.

There should be attitudinal change on the part of the officials. They should see the women participation in the PRI bodies not as weakness but as strength for effectively implementing the programmes through greater involvement of the community, especially the women.

The community needs to be sensitised so that they realise that the women involved in the affairs of the PRIs are doing an important job for which they require all support and co-operation. This can be achieved through use of media services, campaigns and inter-personnel communication.

The significant finding of the study was that a sizable section of the women PRI-members have expressed their self-confidence and self-reliance. They have been able to realise their strength to participate in the public activities. This paradigm shift in the attitude of the women will definitely achieve the goal of empowerment. But the State has to support the capacity building process of the women PRI-members through appropriate interventions.

References

1. Government of India (1974), Towards Equality, Report of the Committees on the Status of Women in India, Government of India, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Department of Social Welfare, New Delhi, 1974.
2. Institute for Sustainable Development (1978), Women in Political Management and Decision Making Process, Encyclopaedia of Women Development and Family Welfare, Vol. 4, Institute for Sustainable Development, Lucknow, India, 1978.
3. Pareek, U. & Trivedi, G. (1965), Factor Analysis of Socio-economic Status of Farmers in India, *Rural Sociology*- 30(1965), 311-321.
4. Reddi, R. Gangadhar (1998), Panchayati Raj: The Challenge Ahead, *Kurukshetra*, November, 1998.