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## 5. Tribal Women's Participation In Grassroots Level Governance: An Anthropological Study Of Sundargarh (Scheduled) District of Odisha

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### **Abstract**

India constitutes many tribal groups whereas Odisha is one of the most tribal populated state in the country. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act gave statutory status to the Panchayat in the village areas. It provides reservation for the weaker section of the population. The Parliament extended the provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act to the Scheduled Areas by passing Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 which gives autonomy to tribal communities to govern themselves through their own customary systems of self-government and also acknowledges their traditional rights over natural resources.

The present paper aims to discuss the participation of tribal women in Panchayat and Panchayat activities in scheduled areas and the barriers faced by them. The primary data was collected from Subdega Block of Sundargarh district which is come under fully scheduled area of the fifth schedule of the constitution. The total tribal population is more than 50% of the district. Anthropological methods like interviews, observation, and case study were used for the in-depth understanding of the participation of women in the study area.

The main observation of the study is that women are participating in Panchayat both elected member as well as local people in different activities but still the common people are not aware and not actively participating in the political process whereas the elected women are less aware of their role and responsibility at ground level and depends on the other officials of the panchayat education also is a major factor behind that.

**Keywords:** Tribal Women, Political Participation, Governance, Panchayats

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## Introduction

Panchayati Raj is not a recent political concept. It was present during the time from Rig Vedic Age (1200 B.C.), the self governing village bodies, which had power both executive and judicial, but after interference of Britishers in village structure and making Jamindar for revenue collection destroyed the panchayati raj system. After India got Independence the government of India had been taken several steps to restore the Panchayati raj Institution in the village level. In 1959 on the date of Gandhi Jayanti 2<sup>nd</sup> October, the first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru formally launched the new system (Panchayati Raj Institution' in Rajasthan whereas after Introduction of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) 1992, Panchayati Raj Institutions came in force permanently. This act was brought into force by a notification with effects from April 24, 1993 it has restored with a constitutional amendment act.

There are several proofs of self-governance from the different caste groups and tribal groups in the society. They have their own traditional village council which is constituted by respected elderly from their own community. They have their own customary law for the governance of the community. Orth and Ordeal are mostly used in decision-making. It has a very significant role in the tribal way of living.

This is the reason government has decided to establish another provision for the scheduled tribes in the fifth scheduled area fifth scheduled areas are those areas which are scheduled by the president of India where the tribal population is more than 50%. In this scheduled area government had decided to implement another provision which is known as the PESA Panchayat Extension to the scheduled area act 1996, which gives autonomy to the tribal for the decision-making for their own community.

The major problems faced by the tribal community are indebtedness, money lending, shifting cultivation, malnutrition etc. To eradicate all the issues Government has implemented several schemes for tribal development and trying to integrate them into the mainstream. The 'Quota' system is a major step taken by the government for giving opportunities for the tribal people in employment generation as well as in the parliament election. Due to all the reservation schemes for both the tribal man and women, they are getting a platform to be a part of the political sphere.

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Tribal women mostly involve them-self in household activities and it is also seen that their economic contribution to the family is also noticeable. Whereas if we consider the political activities of the rural tribal women that's very poor.

But nowadays the level of participation of women in all political activities is increasing day by day. The commoners are not aware that many of the benefits for them but in the case of WERs (Women Elected Representatives) it can be seen their participation and interest level but still they are also less aware about their rights.

Education plays a very important role in the participation of tribal women in grassroots level governance. Many of them are educated due to the Balika education schemes. And some of them have acquired good position in different field.

### Objective

1. To know the political participation of tribal women in Panchayati raj in the study area
2. To know the actual participation of tribal women elected representatives and barriers face by them in study area.
3. To understand the changing status of women elected representatives.

### Methodology

The present study was intended to analyse the level of participation of scheduled tribal women in the grassroots level governance, the challenges faced by the elected representatives and their changing status from Deogaon Panchayat and Subdega panchayat of Sundargarh district, which comes under the fifth scheduled area of the Indian Constitution. The data has been collected randomly with the help of the random sampling technique. Anthropological methods like interviews, participant observation, case study, and focus group discussion tools were used for data collection.

### Profile of the study area

Sundargarh district is the combination of the two ex-states such as Gangapur and Banai which form in January 1948. This is the place of the natural resources that's why it's known as the land of beauty.

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This district located in the northern part of the state and surrounded by states like Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh and districts like Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Angul, and Keonjhar of Odisha.

The population of this District is 20,93,437, Whereas the tribal population of the district is 10,62,349 constituting 50.75 percent of the total population (District Census Hand Book, Sundargarh 2011) whereas Subdega Block have 64,254 total population and among that 45,332 is the tribal population which is the 70.55 of the total population where as the female population is 22,899 and male is 22,433. Among female population, 11,874 are literate. It has 14 Gram Panchayat and 63 villages.

### Profile of the sampled District

SI No	Key Components	Sundargarh
1	Location	North
2	Landmass	9712 sq.km
3	Subdivisions	3
4	Tahasils	18
5	CD Blocks	17
6	Gram Panchayats	262
7	Villages	1727

Source: (i) District Statistical Handbooks, Sundargarh

### Profile of the selected panchayat

Dist.	Slected block	Selected panchayat	Respondents
Sundargarh	Subdega	Subdega	100 including panchayat members)
		Deogaon	100 including panchayat members)

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### **Motivational factors for Women to be a part of Panchyat & its activities**

There are many factors that are motivating to tribal women to take part in the grassroots-level governance. The first initiative was taken by the government to provide reservation to women.

### **A good reservation for Women**

Likewise other reservations for women, there are 33% of reservations are proving to the weaker section of the society in the Panchayati raj Institution. This is a major factor for women to be a part of the grassroots governance, due to this there are a noticeable amount of women participation can be seen and the other side, it is a motivational factor that attract the youth to be a part of the development.

### **Family Encouragement**

Women are encouraged to participate in panchayat activities at the family level. Some families with political backgrounds support women participating in grassroots governance, and those families having no political affiliations but they aware of the importance of the Panchayati Raj also support them.

**Political Environment:** during the election process all the population of the panchayat became more active and their campaign voting all inspire tribal women to be a part of this process.

### **Tribal Women's participation in Panchyat**

Women's participation in grassroots governance can be categorized into two different sections

1. Common people participation
2. Women participation through election (Women Elected Representatives)

The measures of participation of Common women and WERs mostly based on participation in the Panchayat Activities such as Gram sabha, palli sabha, voting and election process and other development activities including the level of awareness regarding their rights and benefits provided by government through panchayat.

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### **Participation in Panchayat Activities**

Tribal women of Sundargarh district are very much enthusiastic and hard worker. When it comes to the participation of common populace in the panchayat activities they are actively participating in the voting process of the panchayat due to several campaigns and local people involvement. When it comes to other activities like participating in the gram sabha and palii sabha the attendance became less in compare to the tribal men. Gram Sabha and Palii sabha play a significant role in addressing the comprehensive socio-economic development requirements of the populace, especially tribal communities.

The most discussed topics of the gramsabha are mostly on the beneficiaries identification of different programmes and schemes, promoting local level socio-economic development plans, and community resources management etc. The major reason behind the less participation of women in the panchayat activities or gram sabha is their economic condition. Most of them are working as agricultural labourers and daily wage labourers. They also think that the male member of the family is participating so there should be no need for the female member to participate.

Those have any issues or applicant of any beneficiary scheme those are only participating in gram sabha. Other women such as the Anganwadi members, panchayat members, WERs and some active member of the panchayat are actively participating in the panchayat activities and try to motivate others to participate. But when it comes to the awareness of women elected representatives it can seen the diversion. The lady sarapanch aware about the activities but the half of the lady word members are not that much aware.

The awareness level of common tribal women is less compare to the men because of the several factors. But when we are focusing on the youth women we can see the level of interest and the courage for the development programme.

Education can be a major factor behind the empower of common youth. But the more than 40 years women are not that much aware about the benefits given to them. Panchayat members are also can be a coue of the less awareness of the common people because of the low level of interest in the awareness programme of the all schemes and programme.

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### Problems faced by the Respondents in participating Gram Sabha Meetings.

Nature of Problems	Number
Distance of Gram Sabha Venue	0
Unsuitable Timing of the Meeting	50
Dominance of Elite Groups	20
No discussion on their own issues	20
Not getting benefits after several complaint	60
Not able to understand the discussion	20
Not interested	20
Not aware about the meeting	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>

Source : Field Survey

Above mentioned table indicates that what are the problem faced by the respondents to participate Gram Sabha Meeting.

#### Reason of less involvement in gram sabha

Among all the respondents 60% of them are having less Economic condition and 10% are not aware about meeting 10% are less educated and 20% have no interest to participate.

It has been seen that many tribals are participating in grassroots governance whereas if we are focusing particularly on women's participation it can be seen less in the political activities of the common people's participation, the major reason behind the less participation of women in the panchayat activities is their economic condition. Most of them are working as agricultural labourers and daily wage labourers. Whereas the involvement of the WERs noticeable in the political activities.

#### Barriers faced by Women Elected Representatives

**Social barriers** (social norms, customs and prescriptions for women are barrier to them. Prescriptions like, to be an ideal daughter-in-law, not to come late to home, with whom you return back etc.

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**Geographical barriers:** Deogaon Panchayat is situated in dense forest area so they need to return back soon. No network is available in that village, elephant attack is also a major concern during evening.

**Economic:** cost of all activities and getting less pay is one of the cause of less interest of WERs

### **Change in the life of Women Elected Representatives**

#### **Change in Confidence level**

Being in a reputed post itself increase the self confidence likewise the panchayat members also became more confident to execute their duties.

#### **Became more Professional**

To understand the village problem, puts in block level discussion, interact with other higher officers all these makes WERs more professional. Performing the panchayat duties and responsibilities boost their professional live.

#### **Change in Social life**

After getting a post socially they are getting an honor in the Panchayat. They are respecting by their community, area as well as their relatives. They have also honourable reputation in the block and district level

#### **Economic empowerment:**

It also empowers women economically and provides the platform to prove themselves and earn money.

#### **Changing perspectives of women's representation**

After being a part of the political forum it change the prospective and it not inspire youth to be a part of the political process but also change the patriarchal prospective.

#### **Changes in women political capacity**

Continuous involvement with all the political activities it also increase the political capacity of tribal women.



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### Suggestions

- Conduct Awareness programme
- Skill development and training programme for women elected representatives
- Motivation through some Awards and Honorarium to increase their interest level.

### Conclusion

Thought the reservation giving the opportunities to participate women in the local governance they are not aware about the role and responsibility at ground level and depends on the other officials of the panchayat. Women are participating in Panchayat both elected member as well as local people in different activities but still the awareness level is low in the study area. If they participate actively in the political activities it definitely bring changes in the all round development of their regions. Education plays a very important role in the participation of tribal women in grassroots level governance.

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