

# Empowerment of Scheduled Tribes Women Leaders in Panchayat Raj in Nanded District, in Marathwada Region : A Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

*Mahatma Gandhi rightly stated about India and importance of villages in India because India is a country of villages. The development of rural India is the development of the country. Article 40 of the Indian Constitution provides for the development of rural India by establishing a Panchayat Raj system for decentralization of power.*

In the last forty years of efforts for decentralization of power. The expected development of rural areas gained momentum, so the Central Government amended the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution in 1993 to ensure regular elections, women and OBCs reservation, importance of *Gram Sabha* and creation of financial resources. This has increased the participation of the people in the local bodies. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment has proved to be a milestone in the development of rural areas. The researcher has worked on the same topic with broad area including Nanded and Hingoli district of Marathwada region to UGC under the minor research project. The further study is continued with analytical study through a questionnaire on whether tribal women in Nanded district have been empowered through local self-government bodies in the current work.

**Keywords:** Gramsabha, Grampanchayat, Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Raj, empowerment, village etc.

The change is natural process. Human development is the witness of continues change in nature, human development. Since independence, India has undertaken various initiatives for the improvement in the socio-economic conditions as well as women empowerment in India. In this context, the Constitution guarantees socio-economic and political equality and the provision of equal rights for availing different opportunities to all social groups of population, especially scheduled tribes women. Increasing emphasis has also been placed on initiating variety of development schemes and welfare programs to maximize the participation of scheduled tribes' women in different activities. Various legal reforms and resolutions in the form of social Acts have also been introduced to improve the social status and empowerment of scheduled tribes' women in the Indian social system. However, little progress has been visualized in the participation of women in different activities.

Recognizing the unsatisfactory progress, that has been achieved to improve the socio-economic status of scheduled tribes women, it has increasingly been felt desirable that involving rural scheduled tribes women in any political system and ensuring their participation in the activities of such institutions, including in matters related to certain decision-making process, would be instrumental in improving the socio-economic status and political empowerment of scheduled tribes women. With the same assumptions, the introduction of reservation policy is in favour of scheduled tribes women in the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions. This has been an important Government intervention to maximize

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the participation of women in different activities in villages at Panchayat levels.

This study relates to Panchayat Raj Institutions with particular reference to the '*Empowerment of elected scheduled tribes women representatives of Gram Panchayat*' in rural local self-government. Though, in Maharashtra the *Panchayati Raj System* is based on three tier system as:

- (a) *Zillah Parishad (Z.P.)*
- (b) *Panchayat Samiti*
- (c) *Grampanchayat*

The current study focused on the basic tier i.e., *Gram Panchayat*. This is to be done with a view to explain the basic units of Local Government in Maharashtra. There is scope for people's participation and particularly for scheduled tribes women's representation. It is very difficult to study in detail the whole system of *Panchayat Raj*, as the subject covers vast area. In this study an attempt is made to analyze the empowerment of scheduled tribes' women representatives in *Gram Panchayat*. So, the title of research problem for this research article is Empowerment of scheduled tribe's women leaders in *Panchayat Raj* in Nanded district, in Marathwada Region: A Case study.

### **The Problem**

India is known as the land of villages and even now majority of her population live in the villages. In India, scheduled tribes women have been deprived for various kinds of opportunities and advantages by our traditional society for the past several centuries. Discrimination against women is commonly observed in providing opportunities of socio-economic development, participation in different activities and development programmes and availing the opportunities of various facilities, which are directly or indirectly linked with bringing improvements in the life style and the quality of life, because of prevailing several social and cultural backwardness. Besides this, women are also denied the rights in the decision-making process of their family affairs on account of several social and cultural constraints imposed by their family and the continuation of traditional system of the society. Restrictions are also imposed on participation of scheduled tribes' women in certain social and cultural programmes and even in moving

outside the households for certain purposes. Due to these underlined problems imposed by Indian traditional form of society against women and their participation in different economic activities like education, employment, political system etc. have remained very poor even after six decades of independence. The socio-economic conditions of scheduled tribes' women in rural areas have been found to be even more serious and unsatisfactory in urban areas on account of the social and cultural backwardness of the society. The traditional form of society has a distinct male bias while women are generally marginalized. In fact, the women are seriously exploited by men for certain purposes although most household related activities are only performed by scheduled tribes' women in rural areas.

Similarly, disadvantages in employment and other activities linked with the betterment of life are commonly observed in the case of scheduled tribes women on account of the socio-cultural constraints imposed by their family. At the same time, restrictions imposed on scheduled tribes women to utilize their rights independently and restrictions on their movements are further imposing limitations to avail the opportunities of gainful employment of women. The discrimination against women in employment which is largely practiced as a result of social values tends to place scheduled tribes women in a secondary position and under the subjugation of men.

To recognize the unsatisfactory progress that has been achieved to improve the socio-economic status of scheduled tribes' women in the past, it has increasingly been felt desirable those involving rural scheduled tribes women in the political system and ensuring their participation in the activities of its institutions, including the matters related to decision-making process would be instrumental in improving the socio-economic status and political empowerment of scheduled tribes women. In view of these assumptions, the introduction of reservation policy in favour of scheduled tribes women in the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions has therefore, been an important government intervention for maximizing the participation of scheduled tribes women in different activities at *Gram Panchayat* levels and thereby to improve their socio-economic status.

Gender inequality which the society has inherited as an age-old malpractice is not likely to vanish only by enacting a law or issuing a whip. Sexual inequality has much deeper roots traditionally, socio-economically, educationally and psychologically which make it as a man made complex problem that needs effective measures for its early redressal.

Therefore, it is imperative to study all aspects of the social problems being faced by the scheduled tribes' women while discharging their responsibilities as a participant (Representative) or a chairperson in newly constituted *Gram Panchayat*. With new scenario of providing recent administrative and financial backup and co-ordination, scheduled tribes women's present mode of working as shown by their initiative, administrative acumen, leadership strengths and weaknesses, decision-making and ability etc. need to be investigated in detail so as to make recommendations to ameliorate the existing impasse and to facilitate empowerment of scheduled tribes women as a whole.

In this light, the present study has attempted to examine various issues related to the implementation pattern of reservation policy and its awareness among women, the nature of participation of scheduled tribes' women members in different meetings, activities and various development programs of *Gram Panchayats*, social reform and welfare activities.

### Main Objectives of the Study

It is with a view to making an in-depth study of the Empowerment of Scheduled tribes Women Representatives in *Gram Panchayats*, Z.P., and *Panchayat Samiti* that this study was undertaken. Among other objectives, the specific objectives of the study are as under:

1. To understand and report the socio-economic, educational background of the elected scheduled tribes' women representatives to *Gram Panchayats* of the area under study.
2. To study and assess the level of awareness of the elected scheduled tribes' women members about their roles and responsibilities and various development programs.
3. To study the involvement of elected scheduled tribes women members in decision-making.

4. To study the problems and difficulties faced by the elected scheduled tribes women representatives of *Gram Panchayats*.
5. To suggest suitable measures for the empowerment of women in *Gram Panchayats*.

### Hypotheses

- (a) The Socio-economic status of the individual and the family influences the empowering process; within this, the social status might have more positive bearing than the economic status, while a higher economic status alone may not have much impact, better social and economic status definitely leads to higher degree of participation.
- (b) An external environment that is conducive in terms of providing better opportunities, freedom of expression, mobility and access to information and resources etc., gives more scope for women representatives.

### Methodology

In the completion of the Research, the researcher used of Survey, descriptive, Analytic methods have been adopted.

**Study Area:** *Nanded District in Maharashtra Historical Background of Nanded:*

The district has an area of 10,502 km<sup>2</sup> while according to 2011 census its population is 3,361,292 of which 27.19% were urban. The Godavari River flows through the district. Nanded District lies in the eastern portion of Marathwada region, which corresponds to Aurangabad Division of Maharashtra. The district is bounded by Nizamabad, Medak and Adilabad districts of Telangana on the east, by Bidar District of Karnataka falls on the south, by Parbhani and Latur districts of Marathwada on the west, and Yavatmal District of Maharashtra's Vidarbha region on the north. The influence of Telangana, Karnataka and Vidarbha can be seen on the language, behaviour and general conduct of the people of Nanded.

### Geographical Area

Name	Population
Geographical Area	10,502 km <sup>2</sup>
Total Population	3,361,292
Male	14.81 Lakhs

Female	13.94 Lakhs
Urban	27.19%
Normal Rainfall	901 mm
Taluka or Mandal	16
Per Capita Income	₹ 23,801
Population (1991 Census, in 1000s)	2,330
Males	1,198
Females	1,132
Density	319 per km <sup>2</sup>
Literacy	75.45%
Male Literacy	84.27%
Female Literacy	66.15%

**Demographics:** According to the 2011 census Nanded district has a population of 3,356,566 roughly equal to the nation of Uruguay or the US state of Connecticut. This gives it a ranking of 99<sup>th</sup> in India (out of a total of 640). The district has a population density of 319 inhabitants per square kilometer (830/sq mi). Its population growth rate over the decade 2001- 2011 was 16.7%. Nanded has a sex ratio of 937 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 76.94%.

**Demographics of Kinwat Taluka:** Andh is the Local Language here. Also People Speaks Indo-Aryan, Marathi, Punjabi, Urdu. Total population of Kinwat Taluka is 210,630 living in 42,189 Houses, Spread across total 250 villages and 135 Panchayats. Males are 107,337 and Females are 103,293 Total 24,878 people live in town and 185,752 live in Rural.

**Demographics of Mahur Taluka:** Andh is the Local Language here. Also People Speaks Indo-Aryan, Marathi, Punjabi, Urdu. Total population of Mahur Taluka is 86,782 living in 17,313 Houses, Spread across total 104 villages and 63 Panchayats. Males are 44,774 and Females are 42,008.

**Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Population:** As per the 2001 census, district comprised of 67689 Scheduled Caste populations and 41613 Scheduled Tribe populations. Out of the Scheduled Caste population, 33345 were male and 34344 female of the total Scheduled Tribe population 20572 were men and 21041 women.

**Discuss:** The first step towards the empowering process is to become aware about the roles, responsibilities and various development programmes. In the context of Panchayat Raj institutions, the presence of women. Schedule tribes women for over a decade as members have

provided opportunities to become aware of the Panchayat Raj system and its functions. "Increased awareness is on schedule tribes e of the most valuable means of achieving gender equality and the schedule tribes women's empowerment<sup>8</sup> (Beijing Declaration) Government introducing the reservation policy for women could be an important initiative of awareness for maximizing the role, responsibilities and participation of schedule tribes women in Gram Panchayat.

The present study has focused on measuring and evaluating awareness levels of schedule tribes women in Gram Panchayat. The interview schedule prepared a set of questions, aimed at assessing the awareness levels on the general and information relating to Panchayat.

**Table 1:** Table shows the impact of weapons rule in electing adiwasi women Sarpanch

Sl. No.		Answers			Total
		Yes	Can't say	No	
1	Women Members	09	10	81	100
2	Percentage	09	10	81	100

Table 1 show the impact of weapons rule in electing adiwasi women 81% are not agree with this, 9% are agree and 10% can't say.

**Table 2:** Table showing the reservation method is follows in electing adiwasi women

Sl. No.		Answers			Total
		Yes	Partial	No	
1	Women Members	82	10	08	100
2	Percentage	82	10	08	100

Table 2 shows information about reservation methods. 82% women are agreed with this, 08% are disagreed and 10% are not confirm.

**Table 3:** Table shows the analysis of financial aspects in adiwasi women

Sl. No.		Answers			Total
		Yes	Partial	No	
1	Women Members	30	05	65	100
2	Percentage	30	05	65	100

Table 3 shows importance of financial aspect in election 65% says financial aspect is not important, 30% says it is important and 5% are not confirmed.

**Table 4:** Table showing analysis of non-political background *adiwasi* woman will be elected as a member

Sl. No.		Answers			
		Yes	Partial	No	Total
1	Women Members	65	10	25	100
2	Percentage	65	10	25	100

Table 4 shows the information about non political background members 65% women are agree to this whereas 25% are not agree and 10% are not confirmed.

**Table 5:** Table showing empowerment of *adiwasi* woman in *Panchayat Raj*

Sl. No.		Answers			
		Yes	Partial	No	Total
1	Women Members	79	15	06	100
2	Percentage	79	15	06	100

Table 5 shows empowerment of *adiwasi* woman in *Panchayat Raj*. 79% women agreed to this, they say it empowers *adiwasi* women where as very little only 6% they are not agree to this opinion and 15% are not either both sides.

**Table 6:** Showing *adiwasi* woman's decision freedom in *Panchayat Raj*

Sl. No.		Answers			
		Yes	Partial	No	Total
1	Women Members	79	14	07	100
2	Percentage	79	14	07	100

The table 6 shows decision freedom in *Panchayat Raj* of *adiwasi* women 79% are agreed about the decision freedom that they have in *Panchayat Raj*, only 7% women say they don't have freedom about their decision and 14% women are not fixed about their decisions.

**Table 7:** Showing husband's participation of *adiwasi* woman in decision-making process

Sl. No.		Answers			
		Yes	Partial	No	Total
1	Women Members	77	11	12	100
2	Percentage	77	11	12	100

Table 7 shows husband's participation of *adiwasi* woman in decision-making process. 65% women are disagree to this opinion according to them husband

don't participate in decision-making process. 25% say that husband takes part in this process. And 10% are not confirmed.

**Table 8:** Showing the role of *adiwasi* women's leadership in *Panchayat Raj* about the development of villages

Sl. No.		Answers			
		Yes	Partial	No	Total
1	Women Members	77	11	12	100
2	Percentage	77	11	12	100

Table 8 shows the role of *adiwasi* women's leadership In *Panchayat Raj* about the development of villages. 77% women says they can implement plans as a leader for village development, 12% women are disagree to this opinion and 11% women they are not fixed about their opinion.

**Table 9:** shows the participation and impact of Marathwada *adiwasi* women in *Panchayat Raj*

Sl. No.		Answers			
		Yes	Partial	No	Total
1	Women Members	65	20	15	100
2	Percentage	65	20	15	100

Table 9 shows participation of Marathwada *adiwasi* women in *Panchayat Raj* 65% women say Marathwada *adiwasi* women participate in election and they have different impact, 15% women they say that Marathwada *adiwasi* women don't participate in *Panchayat Raj* 20% women are not confirmed.

## CONCLUSION

Scheduled Tribal Women have made good use of the opportunities provided by the reservation policy and are taking their roles and responsibilities seriously in the *Grampanchayats*. An equally positive trend is observed regarding the men's acceptance of the scheduled tribal women's capabilities and role in *Panchayats*. Gender sensitization for both men and women to bring about change in mindsets and behavior is crucial for the empowerment process.

This study states that majority of scheduled tribal scheduled tribal women entered into politics due to the mandatory provision of reservation. Most of the women are from non-political background and entered into politics due to pressure from the political party or from the self interests. The

important aspect of the study is that the scheduled tribal women who reluctantly entered into politics showed great maturity in outlook enthusiasm, increasing political consciousness and increasing perception of their role and responsibility. In this study, it is found that a majority of the *Gram Panchayats* are headed by male presidents. When awareness levels are compared with the socio-economic profile of the respondents, it is found that age, education, caste and economic status might have a bearing on the awareness levels. Education is key to empowerment and it has a definite bearing on the awareness levels. In general respondents seem to play an active role in activities such as participation in *Panchayat* meetings, discussing village problems in *Gram Sabha*, interacting with people to identify the needs of the community and an interesting revelation is that in a majority of cases it is found that women get lot of encouragement from their family members to attend Panchayat meetings. Scheduled tribal women seem to be actively participating in creating basic infrastructure at the *Gram Panchayat*. When levels of participation are compared with socio economic profile of the respondents, generally education and access to information seem to be the most significant features impacting on participation. By building awareness and creating an enabling environment to participate, scheduled tribal women would be effective in their role as members, vice-presidents and presidents in participating and implementing various activities of the *Panchayat*. Majority of the respondent's opinion is that access to information, socio-economic status and literacy rate vital in enabling effective decision-making. It finds that a majority of the respondents are actively involved in the decision-making process. To sum up, involvement of scheduled tribal women in decision-making role is an important tool for empowerment. It is found that majority of respondents have interest to continue in politics.

The major limitations or constraints for women towards the path of achieving empowerment are lack of self-confidence, lack of knowledge of the *Panchayat Act* and household responsibilities.

An over whelming number of respondents perceive their positions in the *Panchayats* in positive light. They feel that it gives them a sense of responsibility, greater respect in family and public as well as helps them to take a keen interest in the community.

The ongoing experiment and experiences suggest that periodical training and orientation can help the scheduled tribal women leaders to perform the role better.

## CONCLUSION

It is quite evident from the study that, *Gram Panchayats* in many places have become highly politicized. Without political patronage it is difficult in a majority of cases for both women and men members of *Panchayats* to get elected. This interference from political parties and their representatives has adversely affected these local bodies.

An integrated approach is necessary to make the *Panchayats* truly democratic and strengthen good governance. Training and research institutions, concerned state and central departments have a role in strengthening the *Panchayati Raj* institutions.

Reservation for women in *Panchayati Raj* Institutions has definitely set a positive trend overall. Despite the many problems and limitations women have proved that given an opportunity they are capable of becoming equal partners in the development process. To an extent women have managed to overcome their lack of access and opportunities whether pertaining to literacy, skills, mobility etc. and yet perform their roles and responsibilities as members of *Panchayati Raj* institutions. While reservation has provided a window of opportunity for schedule tribes women to enter the public sphere, much needs to be done to empower women in the true sense. It is important to be aware of the socio-economic and political background of the schedule tribe's women who are elected to *Panchayats*.

Awareness and training programmes to a large extent have focused on general aspects relating to the functioning of *Panchayats*. As seen from the study in a majority of cases the awareness levels of women on these aspects are quite encouraging. Schedule tribes Women cannot function and play their roles effectively unless they are able to assert themselves.

Empowerment is a process and multi-dimensional. It cannot be confined to a limited sphere. Planned interventions have to be made in areas including the economic, social and political spheres for true

empowerment to take place. Therefore, schedule tribes women have to be provided access and opportunities to the basic rights such as literacy, legal and ownership rights etc. Political empowerment can be better sustained if women have at least a degree of economic independence. The 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment and the reservation policy for women undoubtedly have set a positive trend. Schedule tribes women in large number have been able to create and occupy space in the public sphere. It has given them greater visibility as well as mobility. Schedule tribes Women have also been able to enter other sectors and actively participate in local organizations. This has changed the perception and outlook of schedule tribes' women and given them greater self-confidence. Women have gained better status both in family and outside. Family members and men in many instances perceive schedule tribes women in a more positive way.

In the context of gram *Panchayat*, more reforms and structural changes are needed that would actually delegate powers and responsibilities to elected women members. Sensitization of men, both officials and elected members is very essential for schedule tribes' women to be able to function effectively. Sharing and co-operation by both men and schedule tribes women would result in better designing and implementation of activities for the benefit of all.

At the same time women need to gain greater role clarity and strike a balance between their household and official responsibilities. While men have to be sensitized to be supportive in this, women need to bring about shifts in their attitudes and outlook.

Unless all these processes take place simultaneously and on a continuing basis empowerment of women

in gram *Panchayats* would remain a buzzword without translating into reality. There is a lot of scope and potential for schedule tribes r women to emerge as leaders and decision makers and play a key role in the development and good governance of local institutions. It requires dedicated and committed efforts by all concerned.

After respect in family and public as well as helps them to take a keen interest in the community. The ongoing experiment and experiences suggest that periodical training and orientation can help the scheduled tribal women leaders to perform the role better.

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