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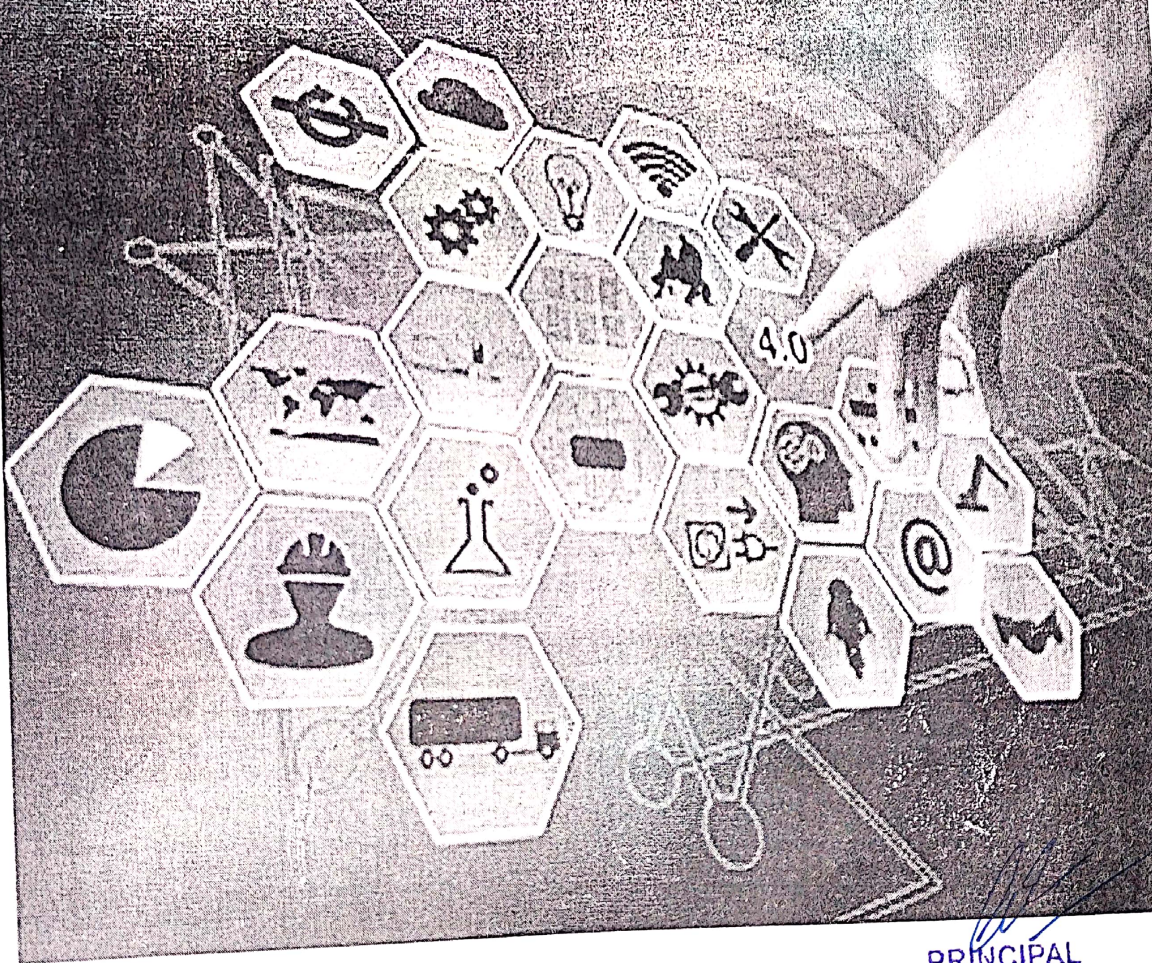
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ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE EMPOWERMENT OF SCHEDULED TRIBE WOMEN IN PRIS

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ABSTRACT

In India, scheduled tribe women have been marginalised in each sphere of life since several centuries. Discernment 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 due to prevailing several social and cultural backwardness. There are lot of restrictions are also imposed on participation of scheduled tribes' women in certain political, social and cultural sphere. Due to these underlined problems imposed by our traditional form of society against women their participation in different economic activities like education, employment, political system etc. have remained very poor even after seven decades of independence.

Post 73rd amendment, the introduction of reservation policy in favour of Scheduled Tribes women in the Panchayati Raj Institution clearly specified that the government intervention for increasing the participation of scheduled tribes women in different activities at Gram Panchayat levels and thereby to progress their socio-economic status. 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 programmes of Gram Panchayats, social reform and welfare activities. This research carried out at Nanded and Hingoli Districts in Marathwada region of Maharashtra State.

KEYWORDS : Scheduled Tribe, Women, Local Self Government, Leadership, Gram Panchayat

INTRODUCTION

Since independence, various initiatives have been undertaken for improving the socio-economic conditions and empowering women 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 programmes for maximizing 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.¹ However, little progress has been visualized in the participation of women in different activities.

The term 'Scheduled Tribe' first appeared in the constitution of India. Article 366(25) defined Scheduled Tribes as "such Tribes or Tribal community or parts of or a group within such Tribes or Tribal community as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribe for the purpose of the constitution". Article 342 prescribes procedure to be

followed in the matter of specification of Scheduled Tribes. As per the census of India 2011, there are about 104281034 Schedule Tribe persons in India, which constitute about 8.62% of India's total population. Out of which 5.2 crore are male and 5.1 are females.²

Political exclusion of women, Scheduled Tribes and other deprived sections of the population is closely related to their marginal status in different domains of life space. A long history of exclusion from political power needs many favourable conditions to struggle for the dominant social order. Although generalisations regarding the nature of constraints on tribal women are not desirable, there are certain factors that are fundamental in achieving political power. These include sustainable development, pro-tribal policies, access to resources, and human resource development. While tribal women were living at subsistence levels it is more likely that they do not exhibit the 'ideal' level of political efficiency. These women were most concerned with meeting basic survival needs. Their geographical isolation compared to the non-tribals adds to the already existing constraints separating them from the larger socio-economic canvas, and reducing their access to resources, information and

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knowledge.

Tribal women's inclusion in local governance has often been inflated as political empowerment. Part of the reason for this is that the reservation of seats is not considered as a means to enable political participation. It is rather seen as an end in itself. However, changes in women's political role are not automatic. By itself the reservation for Scheduled Tribes or other disadvantaged sections has limited potential³. But it manifested the increase number of scheduled tribe women in political arena.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To study and assess the level of awareness of the elected scheduled tribes women members about their roles and responsibilities and various development programmes.
- 2) To study the involvement of elected scheduled tribes women members in decision making.
- 3) To study the problems and difficulties faced by the elected scheduled tribes women representatives of Gram Panchayats.
- 4) To suggest suitable measures for the empowerment of women in Gram Panchayats.

METHODOLOGY

In Maharashtra the Panchayati Raj System is based on three tier system, Zillah Parishad (Z.P.), Panchayat Samiti and Grampanchayat. This study is focused on the basic tier i.e., Gram Panchayat. In this study, empirical methods have been adopted. Descriptive element is included. An unstructured questionnaire had been administered by way of interview to the elected scheduled tribes' women representatives of the twenty five, selected Gram Grampanchayat, five Panchayat Samiti and four Zillah Parishad in Nanded and Hingoli District of Marathwada Region in Maharashtra. A sample of 255 women members of gram Panchayats was randomly drawn from the members list of 32 gram Panchayats. Another sample of 40 male members and 30 officials was also randomly drawn from the same member's list to study the attitude of men towards women. The individual profile is derived by looking at factors such as age, caste, religion, marital status, type of the family, educational level, occupation and annual income of the respondents. The observation of the Gram Panchayat meetings and discussions with officers and elected scheduled tribes' women representatives at various levels have been made along with collection of data from Primary Sources. The elected male representatives and officials of the thirty-two selected Gram Panchayats have also been interviewed.

The selection of respondents was through random sampling. The sample covered a cross-

section of the elected male representatives and officials aimed at collecting information on their knowledge, experiences and views about the functioning of the scheduled tribes' women representatives in the Gram Panchayats.

SCHEDULED TRIBE WOMEN IN PANCHYATI RAJ SYSTEM

The state of Maharashtra already had the Mumbai Gram Panchayat Act, 1958 and the Maharashtra Panchayat Samiti and Zillah Parishad Act, 1961. However, with the enactment of the 73rd Amendment Act, 1993, the state Act had to be altered to make it conform to the central Act and to incorporate its different provisions. Thus, on 22nd April, 1994 both the Acts were amended to be consistent with the central Act thereby according it a constitutional status in Maharashtra. On 23rd April, 1994 the amended Mumbai Gram Panchayat Act, 1958 and the Maharashtra Panchayat Samiti and Zillah Parishad Act, 1961 came into force in Maharashtra. Most of the provisions of the central Act such as the reservation for SCs, STs OBCs and women, election procedures etc. have been incorporated in the Mumbai Gram Panchayat Act, 1958 and the Maharashtra Panchayat Samiti and Zillah Parishad Act, 1961.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment in which a provision has been made for 33.33 per cent women's reservation is an act of positive discrimination. It has not only unpacked gender relations but also transformed the quality and thrust of local self-government. It provides opportunities for women to assert their rights over resources and have a definite say in the development process. While it enables women to develop a greater understanding of the political structures and systems of governance and how to participate in Panchayat.

Empowerment is a process by which marginalized groups recognize their powerlessness and address deprivation and discriminations in their individual capacities as well as through collective bargaining. It is also defined as a process that fosters power (that is the capacity to implement) in people for use in their own lives, their own communities and in their own society, by acting on issues that they describe as important. Above all, empowerment is the result of participation in decision-making⁴. Government introducing the reservation policy of 33% under 73rd amendment act for women could be an important initiative of awareness for maximizing the role, responsibilities and participation of women in Gram Panchayat.

FINDINGS

While analysing the responses its has been recorded that 65% Scheduled Tribe Women who are working as sarpanch agreed that they belong to non-

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political background whereas 25% agreed that they have political background. 65% Scheduled Tribe Women agreed that there is no financial aspect in election, whereas 30% agreed that financial aspect is important in election. While asking on the reservation policy in local self-government empowered the Scheduled Tribe Women, 79% favoured the statement whereas 6% were against the statement and 15 % refused to response on this.

The decision-making process is important in local self-government. Authorities have to take ample of decision to smoothen the process and help people in their livelihood. 79% ST women agreed they got freedom in decision making process, where as 7% women reacted that they do not have freedom in decision making. Increasing awareness among Scheduled Tribes about administration, scheduled tribe sarpanch women are in position to take their individual decision without support of their relatives.

When it comes to implement developmental plans, 77% scheduled women agreed that they can implement plans as a leader for holistic development of village but 12% disagree on this opinion. 69% respondents agreed that society accepted Scheduled Tribe Women as their leader wherein 21% respondents shared that society do not accept them as a leader and rest 10% denied to response on this question.

78% respondent accepted that they have knowledge of different government schemes and 12 % respondent leaders do not have the knowledge on different government schemes. Governments continuously allocating various funds for the development of gram panchayat. The distribution of these funds by government must be on equal level, 60% agreed that distribution is equal and 25% denied the equal distribution of government funds and 15% agreed partially on this statement. 70% scheduled tribe leader women knows how to utilize the government fund and 11% were not able to explain how to utilize the government fund. 65% responded that they are getting appropriate support from administration to implement policies, rules and regulations but 25% denied this point and criticized the government officials for not supporting to run administration smoothly.


It can be observed that the impact of the policy of reservation for Scheduled Tribe women at the PRIs has been a mixed one. Majority of women are first timers and constrained by centuries old factors. We cannot expect miracle overnight. Women despite working against the several constraints have shown outstanding. The experience shows that scheduled tribe women are capable of providing leadership to the people if they are given time, support, resources, training and freedom from man.

SUGGESTIONS

It has been observed that Political Awareness Programmes can make scheduled tribe women aware about their rights and the benefits. There is need for regular orientation and training programmes that will help to increase the political and management skills of women in panchayats. Participatory approaches need to be adopted. There must be expansion of structure of information, education and development of communication skills for scheduled tribe women. Contribution by women members should be recognized and appreciated in public spheres. Gender discrimination should be minimized or avoided. The reservation policy for women should be continued to ensure their empowerment through greater participation in political administration and decision making.

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