Socio Economic Profile of Women Panchayat Representatives in the Post 73rd Amendment Scenario: A Case Study of Khurda District of Odisha

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Abstract: One of the significant steps taken by India for empowering women is the enactment and implementation of the 73rd Amendment Act. Through this Act, in part VIII of the constitution, some provisions have been inserted. Art 243 D in this part states that not less than one third of the total number of seats shall be reserved for women (including scheduled castes and scheduled tribes women)

Accordingly, the Orissa Govt. passed the Orissa Gram Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 1994 and made it effective from 18th April, 1994. But prior to it, during Chief ministership of Biju Pattanaik 33.3% reservation for women in PRIs during 1992 election had already been introduced. After implementation of 73rd Amendment Act, elections have already been held for five times i.e.in 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017. In 2012 reservation for women has been extended to 50 % and accordingly elections have been held onwards.

Keywords: PRI Representatives, Reservation, Sarpanch, Seventy Third Amendment Act, Ward Members, Women Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

The present study addresses the changing status (economic and social) of rural women in the political process in India. The major variables in social field which have been examined are (1) age (2) caste (3) religion (4) marital status (5) education (6) language (7) type of family (8) number of children. The major economic variables which have been examined are (1) occupation (2) annual income (3) ownership of land.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is the result of a combination of both primary and secondary data collected for the sake of a doctoral work. With the help of a structured schedule and personal interview primary data have been collected. The respondents are elected Women Sarpanch and ward members of Gram panchayats because the reservation of women sought to be secured in the 73rd Amendment and subsequent provision have been taken up for their political empowerment. The number of sample respondents elected in 2012 panchayat election comprising of sarpanchs and ward members is 136. In depth interview of some representatives of panchayat samitis and gram panchayats have been conducted. In the district under study three blocks viz. Balianta, Chilika, and Jatani have been taken up for investigation.

Socio-economic Profile

Socio-economic background has a significant impact on everybody's life. In case of a decision maker, the socio economic profile moulds his attitudes, preferences, and policies. Social background is highly significant in relation to leadership because not only it impacts the lifestyles, values, and inspirations but also the tenacity of leadership to sustain and struggle for power and authority in an ascriptive society like ours. Thus the knowledge of a man's early life can help explaining his behaviour in public office. A politician's values and convictions are profoundly influenced by his environment. Study of the socio-economic background of women PRI members enables one to know whether they are well equipped to discharge their duties and responsibilities.

1. Age Pattern

Age symbolizes both physical and mental growth of a man. It is pointed out that age has an important bearing on the nature and extent of political participation (Acharya, 2008). It is further opined that ruling is an art involving a high degree of judgment, which can be acquired mainly through experiences (Pandit 1984).

On the basis of data collected from the respondents, they are arranged in the following table with the age wise breakup.

Table 1, Age of Respondents

Sl No	GP	Age										Total	
		Within 30 Years		31 – 40 Years		41 – 50 Years		51 – 60 Years		61 above Years			
1	Balianta	3	(6.00)	30	(60.00)	12	(24.00)	4	(8.00)	1	(2.00)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	10	(21.74)	14	(30.43)	17	(36.96)	5	(10.87)	0	(0.00)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	13	(32.50)	9	(22.50)	10	(25.00)	8	(20.00)	0	(0.00)	40	(100)
	Total	26	(19.12)	53	(38.97)	39	(28.68)	17	(12.50)	1	(0.74)	136	(100)

From the study, it is found that majority of the respondents (35.12 %) belong to the middle age. The percentage of leaders belonging to older age group is very meagre i.e. 2.38 %. Only Balianta block represents the older group. In Balianta 60 % of respondents belong to age group of 31-40, in Chilika it is 30.43% and in Jatani it is 22.50 %. Next age group which is numerically superior is 41-50. In Chilika 36.96 % belong to this group, in Jatani it is 25 % and in Balianta it is 24 %. In Jatani 32.50 %, in Chilika 21.74 %, and in Balianta only 6 % of respondents are within 30 years of age. In Jatani 20 % of respondents, in Chilika 10.87 % and in Balianta 8 % belong to the age group of   51-60.

      A careful scrutiny of the table reveals some interesting observation. They have revealed during the interview, for the fear of being exploited at young age, women come to public life at a relatively later age. Balianta tops the list of avoiding that age of representatives from 60 % of respondents belong to the age group of 31-40. It also tops the list of the aged person seeking representation.

2. Caste

In Indian society and polity, caste plays a dominant role. In traditional Indian society, upper caste people were ruling and enjoying important positions in the social and political ladder. The gradually traditional system is collapsing but caste system is still in vogue. Caste continues to play a major part in political sphere starting from the distribution of tickets to holding party posts and occupying public offices.

Table 2, Caste of Respondent

SL No	GP	Caste								Total	
		SC		ST		OBC		General			
1	Balianta	15	(30.00)	4	(8.00)	17	(34.00)	14	(28.00)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	16	(34.78)	2	(4.35)	15	(32.61)	13	(28.26)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	8	(20.00)	4	(10.00)	13	(32.50)	15	(37.50)	40	(100)
	Total	39	(28.68)	10	(7.35)	45	(33.09)	42	(30.88))	136	(100)

The study reflects more OBC representation (33.09 %) than that of general category (30.88 %). From the study it is obvious that this maximum representation from OBC is because of their proportionate population. The representatives of SC category are 28.68 % and ST representation is 7.35 %. In OBC representation Balianta tops the list with 34 %. More SC representation is found in Chilika block (34.78 %) and Jatani represents less (20 %) SC representation. In Jatani there is more representation (37.50%) from general candidates. Balianta represents less number (28 %) of general candidates. In ST representation Jatani represents maximum with 10 % and Chilika represents minimum with 4.35 %.

3. Religion

Religion is deep rooted in the minds and souls of Indian people. Karl Marx's notion that religion is like opium to the people is truly significant here. This loyalty to religion plays a prominent role in politics. It determines the voting behaviour of the people.

Table 3, Religions of Respondents

SL No	GP	Religion										Total	
		Hindu		Muslim		Christian		Buddhist		Others			
1	Balianta	48	(96.00)	2	(4.00)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	46	(100.00)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	38	(95.00)	1	(2.50)	1	(2.50)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	40	(100)
	Total	132	(97.06)	3	(2.21)	1	(0.74)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	136	(100)

In the analysis of religion, it is found that 97.06 % of respondents belong to Hindu religion which is the dominant religion of the sample district. Muslim representation is 2.2 % and 0.74 % belongs to the Christian community.

Thus, majority women PRI representatives belong to Hindu community. Chilika tops in Hindu representation and Jatani represent the lowest. Jatani is the only block which represents the Hindu, Muslim and Christian community. In Balianta there is representation from Hindu and Muslim communities only.

4. Marital Status

Marriage is significant for the sustenance of human society. As women play a crucial role with regard to it, society gives them a special status. In a country like India occasionally women prefer to be unmarried. Marriage may violate Plato's idea of communism of wives albeit for philosopher kings, but essential for sustenance of every society.

Table 5.4: Marital Status of Respondents

SL No	GP	Marital status				Total	
		Married		Un-married			
1	Balianta	46	(92.00)	4	(8.00)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	45	(97.83)	1	(2.17)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	38	(95.00)	2	(5.00)	40	(100)
	Total	129	(94.85)	7	(5.15)	136	(100)

The study shows that 94.85 % of respondents are married and only 5.15 % are unmarried. It implies that voters repose faith on married leaders than unmarried ones. The analysis of study shows that highest number of married women representatives belong to Chilika with 97.83 %, and least representation is from Balianta with 92 %, while Jatani represents 95% which is almost same as the total representation of the married category.

5. Education

Education helps a man in responding to challenges and changes in his life. As the role of women is very important in the development of the society, women education should be given priority by both the government and civil society. Proper and sufficient education of both the sexes ensures a nation's growth and sustainable development.

Sharma (2008) adds that education, especially among women, is a cornerstone for social development to improve the prospects of the general welfare of society. Education would empower women to achieve many social, psychological, economic and political dreams which are denied to her customarily. Education would actually accord women certain advantages in areas where they have traditionally lacked access or differential rights.

Table 5, Education of the Respondents

SL No	GP	Education												Total	
		Illiterate		Upto Matric		Intermediate		Degree		PG		Other			
1	Balianta	4	(8)	38	(76)	4	(8)	2	(4)	2	(4.0)	0	(0)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	7	(15)	36	(78)	3	(7)	0	(0)	0	(0.0)	0	(0)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	3	(8)	33	(83)	3	(8)	1	(3)	0	(0.0)	0	(0)	40	(100)
	Total	14	(10)	107	(79)	10	(7)	3	(2)	2	(1.5)	0	(0)	136	(100)

The study depicts that the percentage of the PRI representatives with post-graduate qualification is 1.5%. Balianta is the only block having Post-graduate representatives. The percentage of graduation category and intermediate category are 2% and 7% respectively. In Balianta 4 % and in Jatani 3 % of respondents belong to a graduate category. There is no representation from Chilika in this category. In intermediate category both Balianta and Jatani represents same representation with 8 % and in Chilika it is 7 %. A maximum number of representatives (79 %) is found to be under-matriculates. Jatani represents the highest representation from under matriculate category with 83 %. The percentage of illiterate PRI representatives is 10 %. Chilika represents the highest number of illiterate representatives with 15%. Chilika lags behind in terms of the educational qualification of the representatives. The present study reveals that at grass roots level highly educated women are not interested to enter into politics.

6. Language

From birth to death a human being needs to express his thinking and feeling in terms of language. It is the most vital medium of communication. Languages are learnt from family members, neighbours, and peers. It is natural that representatives having proficiency in English besides their mother tongue are likely to be more efficient.

Table 6, Language of the Respondent

SL No	GP	Odia only		Both Odia and English		Both Odia and Hindi		Odia, Hindi, and English		Total	
1	Balianta	42	(84.00)	4	(8.00)	0	(0.00)	4	(8.00)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	43	(93.48)	3	(6.52)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	36	(90.00)	3	(7.50)	0	(0.00)	1	(2.50)	40	(100)
	Total	121	(88.97)	10	(7.35)	0	(0.00)	5	(3.68)	136	(100)

Regarding language proficiency it has been found that 88.97 % of the sample respondents have command over Odia, 7.35% of respondents know both Odia and English. It has also been found that 3.68 % of respondents know Odia, Hindi, and English.

7. Type of Family

In Odisha two types of families viz. the nuclear and joint family are found. As Odisha is an agrarian state, in yester years the joint family was the major type of family system. Due to modernisation, the institution of nuclear family has become a regular feature. Table 5.7 gives details on the type of family of the respondents.

Table 7, Type of Family

Sl No	GP	Nuclear		Joint		Total	
1	Balianta	36	(72.00)	14	(28.00)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	31	(67.39)	15	(32.61)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	16	(40.00)	24	(60.00)	40	(100)
	Total	83	(61.03)	53	(38.97)	136	(100)

The above table shows that 72 % of respondents of Balianta come from nuclear families and Jatani represents only 40 % of nuclear families. Because of urbanisation and modernisation traditional joint family system is collapsing day by day. Jatani being touched by traditional household system represents highest (60 %) respondents belonging to the joint family system.

8. Family Size

Large size family is one of the features of Indian social system. Once upon a time, large families used to be regarded as symbols of social prestige. But now a day's small size family is the dominant norm. One's status is determined according to the influence of family. Table 5.8 gives information on the number of children of respondents.

Table 8: Size of Family

Sl No	GP	Child (1-2)		Child (3-4)		Child (5 & Above)		No Child		Total	
1	Balianta	35	(70.00)	11	(22.00)	0	(0)	4	(8.00)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	28	(60.87)	17	(36.96)	0	(0)	1	(2.17)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	24	(60.00)	14	(35.00)	0	(0)	2	(5.00)	40	(100)
	Total	87	(63.97)	42	(30.88)	0	(0)	7	(5.15)	136	(100)

The table 8 shows that 8 % in Balianta, 5 % in Jatani and 2.17 % in Chilika representatives have no children. 70% in Balianta, 60.87 % in Chilika and 60 % in Jatani have 1-2 children. 36.96 % in Chilika, 35 % in Jatani and 22 % in Balianta have 3-4 children. No respondent has more than 4 children. This vindicates the earlier statement that small family has become the standard practice especially in a developed district of Odisha like Khurda.

9. Economic Profile
9.1 Occupation
Women constituting one third of national labour force and a major contributor to the survival of the family, are vital part of Indian economy. In India, it is an established fact that the poorer the family, the greater in its dependence on women's income. As agriculture still remains the mainstay of the rural economy and accounts for the widest participation in India, the female workforce continues to play a major role in this sector. But in reality, they don't have control over land and other productive assets. They are deprived of being recognised as farmers. This denial is often justified in the name of tradition and women are generally referred as house wives. The following table depicts their occupational status.

Table 9.1, Occupation of Respondents

SL No	GP	Occupation												Total	
		Farmer		Labourer		Corp		RetdGovt Employee		House wife		Other			
1	Balianta	5	(10.0)	6	(12.0)	0	(0.0)	4	(8.0)	33	(66.0)	2	(4.0)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	4	(8.7)	9	(19.6)	0	(0.0)	1	(2.2)	32	(69.6)	0	(0.0)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	9	(22.5)	6	(15.0)	0	(0.0)	2	(5.0)	23	(57.5)	0	(0.0)	40	(100)
	Total	18	(13.2)	21	(15.4)	0	(0.0)	7	(5.1)	88	(64.7)	2	(1.5)	136	(100)

With regard to the occupation of the respondents, it has been found that 64.7 % are exclusively house wives as against 15.4 % who are labourers. 5.1 % are retired government employees and 1.5 % belongs to other professions like N.G.O. activists. In Chilika 69.6 % of the respondents belong to house wife group which is the highest percentage and the lowest representation (57.5 %) of house wife is from Jatani. Chilika represents highest labour representation i.e. 19.6 %. Jatani shows more representation from farmer group (22.5 %). In Balianta 8 % respondents belong to retired government employee which is the highest representation in comparison to three blocks. Balianta is the only block where respondents belong to other professions. The table shows that the house wives of the rural areas have become active in political life in Odisha because of 73rd Amendment Act.

9.2 Annual Income
Table 9.2, Annual Income of the Respondents

SL No	GP	Annual Income										Total	
		Upto 40,000		Upto 60,000		Upto 80,000		Upto 1,20,000		Above 120000			
1	Balianta	29	(58.0)	7	(14.0)	5	(10.0)	7	(14.0)	2	(4.0)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	30	(65.2)	11	(23.9)	3	(6.5)	2	(4.3)	0	(0.0)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	24	(60.0)	8	(20.0)	3	(7.5)	3	(7.5)	2	(5.0)	40	(100)
	Total	83	(61.0)	26	(19.1)	11	(8.1)	12	(8.8)	4	(2.9)	136	(100)

The study reveals that the annual income of the respondents is very low. It is astonishing to find that, 61 % of the sample representatives have annual income limited to Rs 40,000 and only 2.9 % of the respondents have an annual income of above Rs.1,20,000. In Balianta Block annual income of respondents is far better in comparison to Chilika block as only 58 % of respondents' income is limited to Rs 40000 per annum and 4 % of respondents crosses income of rupees 1,20,000 per annum. 5 % of respondents of Jatani block have an annual income of above 1,20, 000.

9.3 Ownership of land

In India, land ownership is one of the major factors to bring power and status. Land ownership acts as an element of influence not only in community power structure but also in decision making (Acharya, 2008). For women, the ownership of land can considerably improve women's ability to bargain and gain access to credit and also achieve higher levels of productivity, but due to patriarchal ideologies, women lack control over land. Despite a large number of women being involved in agricultural and associated activities, they do not enjoy property right.

Table 9.3, Ownership of Land of the Respondent

SL No	GP	Land Owner										Total	
		Landless		Below 2 acres		2 to 4 acres		5 to 10 acres		10 acres and above			
1	Balianta	14	(28.0)	22	(44.0)	11	(22.0)	3	(6.0)	0	(0.0)	50	(100)
2	Chilika	17	(37.0)	22	(47.8)	6	(13.0)	1	(6.5)	0	(0.0)	46	(100)
3	Jatani	11	(27.5)	21	(52.5)	7	(17.5)	1	(2.5)	0	(0.0)	40	(100)
	Total	42	(30.9)	65	(47.8)	24	(17.6)	5	(5.1)	0	(0.0)	136	(100)

The study shows that 47.8 % of the respondents own land below 2 acres. 30.9 % are totally landless, 17.6 % own land of 2 to 4 acres, 5.1 % own above 5 acres and nobody owns 10 acres and above category of land. In Jatani 52.5 % of respondents have less than 02 acres of land, in Chilika it is 47.8 % and in Balianta it is 44 %. In Balianta 28 % of respondents are land less, in Jatani 27.5 % and in Chilika 37 % are land less. In terms of both land owning and financial resources, Jatani block is found to be head and shoulders over other two blocks.

A comparative study of the three GPs shows that Balianta steals a march over the other two GPs in terms of education, income and prestigious occupation like government services. But the fact remains that socio economic back ground of the panchayat representatives is not very sound.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of socio-economic back ground of women PRI leaders reveals that they are mainly house wives, middle aged women having secondary education. A high percentage of them are found to be educated though the number of representatives with post graduate qualification is negligible. Economically they are not so much sound and agriculture is their main occupation. Both economically and educationally Balianta GP is found head and shoulders over the other two GPs.

Women PRI representatives want to prove their capacity but they need time, support, resources, training, and freedom from men. If all these facilities are provided to them, the 73rd Amendment of Indian constitution will be meaningful and its objectives can be realised in true spirit.

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