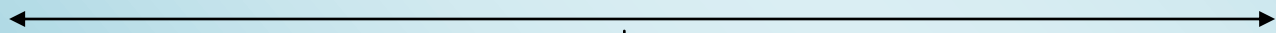


North Asian International Research Journal Consortium

*North Asian International Research Journal of
Social Science & Humanities*

Chief Editor

Dr Rama Singh



Publisher

Dr. Bilal Ahmad Malik

Associate Editor

Dr. Nagendra Mani Trapathi

Honorary

Dr. Ashak Hussain Malik

NAIRJC JOURNAL PUBLICATION

North Asian
International
Research Journal Consortium



Welcome to NAIRJC

ISSN NO: 2454 - 9827

North Asian International Research Journal Social Science and Humanities is a research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi, Urdu all research papers submitted to the journal will be double-blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in Universities, Research Institutes Government and Industry with research interest in the general subjects

Editorial Board

J.Anil Kumar Head Geography University of Thirvanathpuram	Sanjuket Das Head Economics Samplpur University	Adgaonkar Ganesh Dept. of Commerce B.S.A.U, Aruganbad
Kiran Mishra Dept. of English,Ranchi University, Jharkhand	Somanath Reddy Dept. of Social Work, Gulbarga University.	Rajpal Choudhary Dept. Govt. Engg. College Bikaner Rajasthan
R.D. Sharma Head Commerce & Management Jammu University	R.P. Pandday Head Education Dr. C.V.Raman University	Moinuddin Khan Dept. of Botany SinghaniyaUniversity Rajasthan.
Manish Mishra Dept. of Engg, United College Ald.UPTU Lucknow	K.M Bhandarkar Praful Patel College of Education, Gondia	Ravi Kumar Pandey Director, H.I.M.T, Allahabad
Tihar Pandit Dept. of Environmental Science, University of Kashmir.	Simnani Dept. of Political Science, Govt. Degree College Pulwama, University of Kashmir.	Ashok D. Wagh Head PG. Dept. of Accountancy, B.N.N.College, Bhiwandi, Thane, Maharashtra.
Neelam Yaday Head Exam. Mat.K..M .Patel College Thakurli (E), Thane, Maharashtra	Nisar Hussain Dept. of Medicine A.I. Medical College (U.P) Kanpur University	M.C.P. Singh Head Information Technology Dr C.V. Rama University
Ashak Hussain Head Pol-Science G.B, PG College Ald. Kanpur University	Khagendra Nath Sethi Head Dept. of History Sambalpur University.	Rama Singh Dept. of Political Science A.K.D College, Ald.University of Allahabad

Address: - Dr. Ashak Hussain Malik House No. 221 Gangoo, Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, India - 192301, Cell: 09086405302, 09906662570, Ph. No: 01933-212815, Email: nairjc5@gmail.com , nairjc@nairjc.com , info@nairjc.com Website: www.nairjc.com

“SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF DALIT WOMEN IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE”- with reference to Kandhamal District of Odisha

DR. M.G.BAGE

Reader, Department of Sociology, Utkal University,

And

MR. ANANGADEV SINGH

PhD, Research Scholar, Utkal University

ABSTRACT

Dalit women's entry in politics is perceived as a threat by the dominant caste groups as it means securing entitlement to public resources. Gender based inequalities perpetuated by patriarchal power relation and intensified by caste discrimination result in structural inequality. The structural inequality and powerlessness will only be addressed by strengthening the marginalised groups. India is a Constitutional Democracy which is why politics becomes a key for socio-economical emancipation of Dalit women. Panchyati Raj Institutions have always been considered as a means to good governance and 73rd Constitutional Amendment was effected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantaged section of the society like schedule caste, schedule tribes and women. The present study was an effort to know the situational analysis of dalit women in local self-governance and the problems / challenges faced by them. The universe of the present study is comprised of Dalit women representatives in Three Tier Panchayat Raj Institutions of Kandhamal district of Odisha. The respondents opined neither the reservation for women nor their actual presence in the Panchayath has become any more sensitive to the problems related to the village women. A majority of the respondents revealed that financial assistance is a necessary ingredient for their self esteem, proper effective trainings for their independent functioning and their committed concern and approach to the needs and urges of the people of the area. Bringing women into power is not only a matter of equity, of correcting an unjust and unrepresentative system political restructuring is the key to economic growth with justice. Only when women succeed in getting larger political decision-making power, they can use it to formulate necessary enactments and safeguard to eliminate gender bias, which would therefore pave way for securing economic power as well. Therefore, gaining of political power is a prerequisite without which other societal injustices can never be rectified.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the devastating effects of the caste system on the educational, social, economical status and political participation situational analysis of Dalit women. It highlights the harsh reality of the suppression,

struggle and discrimination of Dalit (SCs/STs) women face in their day to today lives. The hardships of Dalit women are not simply due to their poverty, economical status, or lack of education, but are a direct result of the severe exploitation and suppression by the upper classes.

We see many examples of brave Dalit women who being quite aware of the horrifying truth and despite the heavy odds still strive to put an end to their suffering. Ruth Manorama, an active member of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the National Alliance of Women, once stated that in a male dominated society, “Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class and gender” in which she sums up the plight of Dalit women, highlighting the fact that Dalit women are a distinct social group and cannot be masked under the general categories of “Women” or “Dalits” (News Archives).

In Ancient India (3200-2500 B.C.), the caste system was non-existent since even the most learned men were good householders and had varied occupations. The women of ancient India were just as superior as men in learning, education, and intellect. The choice for her mate was according to her own wishes and marriage was practiced after the coming of age. She attended parties, competitions, and religious functions as she wished. The remarriage of young widows was also a common practice.

In Odisha, women constitute a very little bit less than 50 percent of the state’s total population. Despite some favorable traditional values and customs and emergence of powerful women personalities, the position of the women is not very rosy. Their socio-economic status is, however, relatively low and they are discriminated in all walks of life. For centuries, women have been confined to home and suppressed and deprived of their rights to get a fair treatment from the male dominated society. Empowerment of women has, therefore, been one of the major issues in Odisha.

Odisha has gradually transformed from Women in Development to Gender and Development in the policy approaches. Affirmative action policies are developed to reach the goal of inclusive democracy and sustainable development. At state level special measures have been designed to ensure women’s participation, development and empowerment. These changes in awareness, expertise, policies, laws and women’s voices are efforts of many actors. At grass-roots though translating these is very important.

The concept of local self Government is a very old model in India. It attained its pinnacle under the later Cholas or the Imperial Cholas of Tanjore. It declined under the onslaught of feudalism during Muslim rule and was revived under the British period, with Lord Ripon’s Resolution in 1882. After Independence, the Gandhian ideal of Grama Swaraj greatly influenced the constitution makers. India being the land of the village emphasis’s for the creation of village panchayats. Restoration of panchayats to their pristine glory has been an article of faith during our freedom struggle. Hence with the drawn of independence and framing of the constitution of India, Article 40 was incorporated in the constitution. It runs as follows: “*the State should take steps to organise village*

¹ Rout. Dr.B. and Sahu, N.T. (2012). “Women Participation in Rural Local Self-Governance System in Odisha: A Constitutional and Reservational Perspective” in Odisha Review, February-March: 55. www.ijhssi.org

panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as the units of self Governments”.

2. DALIT WOMAN IS DALIT WITHIN DALIT COMMUNITIES

The caste system in India is structured as a four-tiered socio-econo-political system determined by familial line. The system is classified in four varnas prescribing occupation along with the social status; in sinking order Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (merchants) and Sudra (servants). Untouchables, or Dalits, were the people so low in social status that they were not included in the caste system; outcastes. The term ‘Untouchables’ refers to their traditional degrading and ‘impure’ occupations that often involved handling dead matter of faeces, resulting in them being considered polluting in themselves – they were not to be touched (Pareek 2010)².

The Dalit is ‘unclean’ from birth; is considered perpetually filthy and can never escape his status. According to Hindu scriptures, what is pure must be separated from what is unpure (Ghose 2003 cited in Pareek 2010, 3). Following that logic, the impure and Untouchable Dalits are forced to live in segregated areas of villages and refrain from touching (and therefore ‘defiling’) common resources as power supplies and water sources (Dalton 2008, cited Pareek 2010, 4). Rajawat (2004, Pareek 2010, 4) states that it is undeniably shameful to be considered ‘Untouchable’, and that the practice of Untouchability which leads to higher caste people avoiding Dalits presence, can itself be regarded as an act of shaming³.

The practice of Untouchability is forbidden by law in the Indian constitution, but the social stigma, discrimination and social exclusion of Dalits remains both on an institutional and personal level even today. Akhter et al. (2007, Pareek 2010, 5-6) asserted that the systematic exclusion has subjected the majority of Dalits to persistent poverty. Therefore, Dalits are suffering from the double burden of being poor and being Dalits. For Dalit women, the situation is even worse, as they suffer from the triple oppressions of being poor, being female and being female Dalits. Dalit women numbers 80.517 million, or approximately 48 per cent of the total Dalit population, 16 per cent of the total female population and 8 per cent of the total Indian population. (Government of India, National Census of India 2001, Final Population Totals 2004, cited in NCDHR 2006, 31).

All available data on the status of Dalit women’s rights to education, health and work participation, indicates that they are subjected to lower levels of enjoyment of these rights as compared both to non-Dalit women and men, and Dalit men. There exist, however, very little current data regarding women’s experiences of descent-based

²Baxi, Upendra. and Bhikhu, Parekh (eds). (1995b.) “Crisis and Change in Contemporary India”, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

³Bhalla, A. and Lapeyre, F. (1997). “Social Exclusion: Towards an Analytical and Operational Framework”, Development and Change, Volume 28, pp. 413-433)

violence and discrimination – the available data is classified either by gender or caste, but does not include both factors and the relations between them. Caste based Untouchability, discrimination and violence is extensively researched and documented, but mostly with referring to Dalits as one single group, not illuminating the specific intersection between descent, occupation-based identity and gender identity in the experiences of Dalit women (NCDHR 2006, 33)⁴.

According to the “broken man” theory of Dr. Ambedkar, Dalits are those who were out of the Varna System of the Hindu Society (Agarwalla, S. 1994: XI). Dalit is not a caste; it is a constructed identity (Bharati, S. 2002). In the 1973 manifesto of Dalit panther movement in Maharashtra revived the meaning of Dalit. It includes members of SCs, STs, the landless and poor peasant, women and all those who were exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion (Murugakar 1991:237 in Kumar, V.2009:64). The term Dalit is emerging gradually. There is a large discourse in Dalit literature on the term. For my study purpose, I restrict the definition of Dalit as SCs of Maharashtra⁵.

Dalits specifically in village India suffer severe forms of humiliation, stigmatization and exclusion even today. Caste prejudices and discrimination against Dalits is a social fact (Kumar, V. 2009:65). Historically Dalits have been excluded from enjoyment of social, economical, cultural, civil and political rights. This is due to the customary restrictions imposed on them by the social hierarchy being born into so called ‘impure, polluted caste’. Vivek Kumar locates Dalit women on the basis of their structural positioning, occupations performed and the societal treatment. He argues the specificity of Dalit women. Dalit in general are treated in an inhumane ways and Dalit women are marginalized even further in three folds on the basis of Caste, Class and Patriarchy. Dalit women are raped, beaten up and paraded naked to break the morale of the whole community. This Intersectionality of caste-based patriarchy makes Dalit women, Dalit within Dalits⁶.

Dalit women number 80.517 million or approximately 48 percent of the total Dalit population, 16 percent of the total female population and 8 percent of the total Indian population (Irudayam, A. Mangubai, J. Lee, J. 2006:1). Dalit women make majority of unorganised labourer in urban settings and landless labourers in rural. Systemic violence is built in to the structure of the dominant society, which doesn't acknowledge the basic human rights of Dalits. Dalit women's entry in politics is perceived as a threat by the dominant caste groups as it means securing entitlement to public resources. Gender based inequalities perpetuated by patriarchal power relation and intensified by caste discrimination result in structural inequality. The structural inequality and powerlessness will

⁴ National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). (2006). “Alternate Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)”, New Delhi

⁵ Ambedkar.(1989). “Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches”, vol. 5, Department of Education, Bombay: Government of Maharashtra.

⁶ Review of WCP in 7 LSGI. (2006). undertaken by Sakhi Women's Resource Centre, “for the department of Local Self Governance”.

only be addressed by strengthening the marginalised groups. India is a Constitutional Democracy which is why politics becomes a key for socio-economical emancipation of Dalit women.

In this light the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act plays a significant role. There has been increased political participation of the marginalized groups (SCs, STs and women). Formal participation and involvement of SCs, STs and women has increased in local Government. There is a need to undertake a reality check on this. Does formal participation means actual representation of Dalit women? Is the process of political participation inclusive and empowering? Does assertion of Dalit women leads to atrocities as they are 'not meant to participate'? These questions portray a need of research and study the field of political participation and its newly entered entity 'Dalit women'. At academic level, I believe there is an urgent need to study the experiences of Dalit women participating in politics. Hence I take up this task.

In Indian society, the Dalits woman is not treated as a human being. Both economically and socially, these women are marginalized. They are helpless beings and their life is cheap and unimportant in this caste society. They are the victims of caste, class and sex. For the majority of women in India, the greatest problem is that of survival. Poverty, dowry murders, widow burning, female infanticide have assumed new dimensions with modernization and technological advancement. The rural Dalit women face more atrocities from the upper caste men and women⁷.

The plight of Dalit woman is clearly expressed in the phrase of 'Triple Dalit' or 'Thrice Dalit' – being a woman, being a poor woman, and being a Dalit woman (Dalton 2008). Dalit women is, like their male counterparts, subordinated by poverty and caste, but at the same time they are also subjected to the patriarchal power that makes them vulnerable to exploitation and domination not only by upper castes, but also by Dalit men (Shah et al. 2006). A similar description is expressed by Rawat (2006) who points out that Dalit women suffer from double disability in the Indian society. The first disability of being woman is doubled with the caste tag over their head (ibid.).

Shah (2006) point out that, in all states, an overwhelming majority of Dalit women work outside of their homes – mostly with labor connected to agriculture, which is known for exceptionally low wages (ibid., Ruwanpura 2005, 23). In addition to working outside, Dalit women also have the sole responsibility of running the household; tending to domestic chores as cooking and cleaning, raising children, fetching water, collecting fuel and fodder and tending livestock or land (ibid. 121). In the lives of Dalit women, two aspects are of specific concern; sexualized form of oppression, and gendered labor that provides occupations in which Dalit women are even more vulnerable to Untouchability than Dalit men (Shah et al. 2006, 120). Women in Kerala reported that they feel forced to give in to sexual advancement by their male employers, thus having to silently accept being sexually harassed, in fear of losing their jobs. If the case becomes public, the blame will fall on the Dalit woman alone (ibid. 120). Sexual harassment does also take the form of molestation and rape, and as a mean of oppressing Dalit men – by violating their 'property' (ibid. 124). Dalit women are also exposed to discrimination and violence

⁷Vol 4. No. 3(July-Sept, 2014)

while executing the domestic chores, and especially while herding livestock alone or at public places as by the water source (ibid . 121)⁸. In this society they have no safety and security. Any time the upper caste men can use them the way they like. Untouchability is forgotten here, if an upper caste man wants, he can to rape a poor, pale, weak, unhealthy, dark, voiceless Dalit woman. There is no end in India for the sexual violence against Dalit women.

3. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In Odisha it has been observed that alcoholism, low literacy and poverty are all responsible for violence against women in ST areas. Alcoholism amongst men has affected the family's quality of life as more expenditure on alcohol means an increase in women's work load. Women's frustration and inability to cope with this situation is reflected in her status. Wife battering by alcoholic men is never reported .The police data collected from these Districts was so low in comparison to the field situation that it was irrelevant for use in analysing the situation. It is obvious that the violence against women is hampering the empowerment process and women's coping capability remained low. The under reporting of crimes is also because some cases are also settled by the community, especially the caste panchayats with the settlement being chiefly economic compensation.

In Odisha the data on crime collected under the National Crime Records Bureau covering 95.91,000,00 tribal populations (Odisha) the percentage share of rape as a crime was 9.6%. In case of arrests by police 1043 persons were arrested for rape, 938 charge sheeted and 9.8% were under investigation. The cases of rape disposed by the Courts (conviction) were a meager 4.9% while 16.4% were acquitted. Trial pending was 78.4%. Of the 3855 persons under trial (including those from previous years, 718 cases were completed while 3135 remained pending. 174 persons were finally convicted (India, National Crime Record Bureau, 2012).

According to the National Family Health Survey-2 (NFHS-2, 1998-99), at least two in every seven married women in Odisha have experienced domestic violence since the age of 15 years, and at least one in eight has experienced domestic violence in the past 12 months⁹. Some of the reasons for domestic violence are suspicion of fidelity, unfaithfulness, not respecting the in-laws, and going out without informing the husband. Apart from domestic violence, women in general are subjected to non-domestic violence (with rape being the major one) at different points of time in their lives. Others include eve-teasing, and sexual harassment at the work place. Accurate figures on cases of violence against women are hard to get, since some of these cases remain unreported. Some researchers are of the opinion that the number of unregistered cases is very high, more than that of the registered cases. Whatever the situation may be, the overall reported cases of violence against women in Odisha have increased by 139 per cent, from 1,999 cases in the year 1990 to 4,774 cases in the year 2000, as per the Crime Branch Police, Government of Odisha (Table 6.8). The total cases of violence against women have shown positive annual growth rate in all the 11 years between 1990 and 2000. The annual growth rate is

⁸Shah, G., Mander, H., Thorat, S., Deshpande, S., Baviskar, A. (2006). "Untouchability in Rural India", Action Aid India, New Delhi, Sage Publications.

⁹National Family Health Survey-2, (NFHS-2), (1998-99). Govt. of India.

especially high in the period 1993 - 1996. The violence and crimes committed against women are of various forms and include rape, molestation, eve-teasing, kidnapping/abduction, dowry suicide/ homicide, dowry torture, and immoral trafficking. Of the 38,205 total reported cases between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of molestation was highest (35.23 per cent), followed by dowry related violence (25.37 per cent), rape (15.55 per cent), kidnapping/ abduction (10.17 per cent), and non-dowry related cases (9.60 per cent). However, during 2000, cases of atrocities on women such as rape, eve-teasing, kidnapping/abduction, and immoral trafficking have decreased in relation to the previous year, whereas an increase was noticeable in the case of molestation and dowry related violence.

As per the information supplied by the Home Department, Government of Odisha, there were 725 rape cases reported in the year 2003 compared to 790 cases in 2001. Similarly, 183 eve-teasing cases were reported in the year 2003 compared to 201 cases in 2002 and 191 cases in 2001. There is also a decline in the number of kidnapping/abduction of women cases, as 421 cases were reported in 2003 as compared to 440 cases in 2002 and 431 cases in 2000. The annual growth rate of registered rape cases is positive for all the years except 2000. The average annual growth rate of rape cases registered in Odisha during 1990–2000 is 11.14 per cent, which is higher than the average annual growth rate of rape cases in India (4.8 per cent during 1990–98). In the year 1999, the highest numbers of rape cases were registered in Mayurbhanj district (Annexure Table 34) and the annual growth rate of rape cases is higher in Nayagarh district. Of the 816 cases reported in 1999, 779 cases (95.47 per cent) were found true, but only 382 cases (46.81 per cent) were charge-sheeted and only 3 cases (0.37 per cent) were convicted. The very low rate of conviction may have indirectly encouraged criminals to commit such crimes against women.

Some facts regarding rape in Odisha are as follows (Das 1994b; Das and Das 1992):

- (i) In one-fourth of rape incidents, the accused are men from the same village;
- (ii) The accused could be distant strangers or close relatives;
- (iii) The reaction to rape cases is spontaneous, but transitory;
- (iv) Women's organisations do not show a dogged determination to fight cases to their logical end;

And (v) The press plays a half-hearted role, as it dramatizes events and then leaves them abruptly according to its convenience. Incidents of molestation in the state have increased from 280 in 1990 to 1661 in 2000, with an average annual growth rate of 6.32 per cent. Apart from rape and molestation, eve-teasing of women, particularly the younger ones, is a regular phenomenon in Odisha. It has been found that in the 1990s incidents of eve teasing have increased in the state with an average annual growth rate of 5.62 per cent. Like other crimes committed against women, incidents of kidnapping/ abduction in Odisha have also increased from 295 to 358 between 1990 and 2000 with an average annual growth rate of 3.47 per cent.

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 has banned the practice of dowry. However, the practice of dowry still continues. Harassment of women for dowry is a serious social concern. Dowry related violence is of three types, viz. dowry suicide, dowry homicide and dowry torture. In Odisha, a total of 9691 incidents of dowry related violence were registered between 1990 and 2000, as compared to 330 during 1983– 89. Of this, 5.40 per cent

were dowry suicides, 30.89 per cent were dowry homicides and the remaining 63.70 per cent were incidents of dowry torture. According to official records, there has been a marked increase in the annual growth rate of dowry related violence every year with the exception of 1999. The average annual growth rate of dowry related violence during the 1990s was 16.46 per cent. The incidents of dowry homicides and dowry tortures are continuously increasing, while the incidents of dowry suicides have fluctuated between 30 and 71 during this period.

The important facts about dowry-related violence in Odisha are as follows:

- i. Dowry-related deaths are very low in tribal districts;
- (ii) The percentage of dowry related deaths is higher in rural areas than in urban areas;

Table no. 1: Reported Cases of Violence Against Women in Odisha:

Type of violence cases	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Rape	250	309	326	405	422	562	617	683	796	918	753
Molestation	912	944	902	1064	1123	1238	1281	1363	1418	1555	1661
Eve teasing	-	-	106	131	150	140	169	176	194	183	154
Kidnapping abduction	295	299	252	314	295	325	468	405	446	426	358
Dowry suicide	60	71	49	45	43	39	37	54	55	30	41
Dowry torture	176	214	252	376	488	565	710	727	901	875	889
Non-dowry	215	183	168	207	302	377	405	413	499	445	452
Immoral trafficking	11	9	12	8	13	24	16	11	11	26	18

Source: *Human Rights Protection Cell; and Crime Branch of Police, (1990 – 2000) Government of Odisha.*

(iii) More than 90 per cent of dowry-related deaths occur in joint-family settings; (iv) In most of the cases, parents of victims register complaints; (v) There are more dowry-related deaths among women in the 19–25 year age group and most of the deaths are within five years of marriage; (vi) The majority of the dowry-related deaths take place among upper caste Hindus, viz., Brahmin, Karan, and Khandayat, whereas dowry deaths are much lesser among Muslims and tribal communities of Odisha; and (vii) Daughters-in law are killed by burning, strangulating, beating, and poisoning (Das 1994b; Das and Das 1991). Dowry is determined, in most cases, through bargaining between the families of the bride and bridegroom with the bride's family having to bear the

financial burden. In some cases, even if the bride's family is unable to pay, they make a promise to give the money afterwards so that the marriage can go ahead. When the bride's family fails to fulfill the dowry demands after marriage, the problems start, and, in most cases, degenerates into violence against the newlywed woman, sometimes leading to her death. Another form of dowry in Odisha involves 'flow of payment'. In these cases, the bride's family, usually richer than the bridegroom's family, invests in the education of a prospective bridegroom, generally meritorious and from a poor family. This is done after the groom has given a verbal agreement to marry the girl after completing his education, which usually assures him a government job. The marriage takes place without any demand for 'stock of goods'. But this practice has stopped due to massive unemployment problem and uncertainty of jobs in the state. At present, the dowry demand is in the form of cash and goods—both movables (consumer durables) and immovables (land and building). With increasing consumerism, the nature of goods demanded for dowry has also hanged. For example, the dowry demands by a government employee of Class III level has changed from bicycle, wristwatch, and transistor in the past (in the 1950s and 1960s) to two-wheeler, colour television and refrigerator, although these goods are beyond the means of many families in Odisha.

Data illustrates the fact that despite the innumerable principles of gender equality adopted by the State Scheduled Tribe women in Odisha are affected by increasing violence causing concern especially with socio-economic and cultural trends showing disquieting trends. Vulnerability due to violence and sexual abuse among the female population requires the implementation of laws but unfortunately impunity is not an issue paid attention by the administration or judicial structures.

4. SCHEMES FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Kandhamal falls in the southern National Sample Survey (NSS) region which had the highest incidence of poverty of 87.05 percent in 1999-2000 (55th round of NSS). As per the BPL census carried out by the State Panchayati Raj Department, 78.42 percent households were reported as BPL in 1997 as against 88.62 percent in 1992. The State average for percentage of BPL families stood at 66.23 percent in 1997 BPL census. Though the incidence of poverty has come down as per 2004-05 and 2009-10 estimates, it is still very high.

Table no. 2					
Social Group wise Women Beneficiaries Covered under SGSY					
Name of Blocks	SC	ST	General	Total	Women
Balliguda	56	112	39	207	180
Chakapad	32	69	24	125	109
Daringbadi	84	174	61	319	277
G. Udayagiri	22	43	15	80	70
Khajuripada	35	63	22	120	104
Kotogada	31	61	22	114	98
K. Nuagaon	34	66	23	123	107
Phiringia	46	97	34	177	154
Phulbani	23	46	16	85	74
Raikia	29	63	22	114	99
Tikabali	31	63	22	116	101
Tumudibandha	31	63	22	116	101
Total	454	920	322	1696	1474
Source: District Statistical Handbook - 2005 Kandhamal.					

The district has been implementing several women empowerment programmes like SGSY and Mission Shakti with the intention of bridging the gender gap and empowering women. The Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) promotes self employment through Self Help Groups. The objective of the programme is to support BPL families by providing income generating assets through credit linkage and subsidy. Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) are a major beneficiary of the programme. SGSY promotes micro enterprises and self employment options and encourages women beneficiaries. Table chart 3 gives the coverage of men and women beneficiaries as of 2005. In the year 2008-09, a total of 2,744 beneficiaries were covered under SGSY. Of the beneficiaries, ST were highest followed by SC and general caste.

Special focus was given to women SHGs through promotion of suitable micro enterprises. Women beneficiaries under SGSY were 220 in 2004 and went up to 1,474 in 2005. For the year 2008-09, the physical target for the

district was 2,744 Swarojgaries (2,470 Swarojgaries in 247 groups and 274 individuals). For the year 2008-09, the action plan under SGSY focused more on women and disabled with a total financial investment of Rs. 49 lakh with Rs. 33.5 lakh credit coverage and Rs.15.5 lakh subsidy. About 1,279 women were targeted to be benefited under SGSY in 2009-10.

5. DALIT WOMEN IN LOCAL SELF - GOVERNANCE

To solve specific issues faced by women in a particular area, there is no other mechanism as suited as the Local-Self Government. Yet, within the powers of the local body, all issues of women cannot be solved. As a local government, it is the Panchayati Raj Institutions that have to address problems like drinking water, sanitation, health care etc. Besides, being a governance institution in close proximity to people, PRIs can identify locale specific problems and issues and resolve them. They are the most appropriate agency to bring other issues which they themselves cannot solve, to the attention of the state and central governments too. This can be viewed as the most important aspect of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments.

Decentralisation implies devolution of powers in its genuine sense. This in effect would lead every section of the community, including the marginalised section having a say in the decision making process. Development which was looked upon as the monopoly of a few should involve every citizen-men, women and children being partners in defining what their development is and how it should take place.

India never had a homogeneous structure of governance. A combination of native states and small panchayats ruled over this diverse country retaining cultural harmony and diversity. Independence brought in uniformity with parliamentary democracy and centralized governance. The dynamics of this kind of governance and its aftermath of procrastination, corruption and red tapism is lucid to everyone. Even a small fraction of the developmental schemes hardly reached the really deprived and needy. Women and people from the dalit and tribal communities were mere beneficiaries on the margin of this whole process.

Direct political participation of Dalit women in local governance (Panchayati Raj) is a central human right in itself and enables the realisation of a host of other human rights. Political voice and decision-making power concerning basic services, economic development and social justice are critical factors in challenging and transforming structural caste-class-gender discrimination, and enabling Dalit women to realise their fundamental rights. Political participation also demands accountability from state and non-state actors to guarantee and respect these women's equal political voice and development. This requires a transformation of power relationships both within institutions of governance and in the women's social environment.

Recent legal and policy reforms in India to ensure the representation of marginalised social groups in decentralised governance, including Dalits and specifically Dalit women, through constitutionally mandated reservations (affirmative action quotas) in Panchayati Raj institutions bring these issues to the fore. They demand analysis to determine how Dalit women are enabled to claim their right to political participation in local governance, and the extent to which this participation is an effective tool for empowerment and realisation of

human rights for excluded social groups. Dalits are defined in this research by the criterion of the social practice of 'untouchability'. Thus, while the vast majority of the Dalit women in the research are Scheduled Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST) in their legal identity, there are also a few Dalit Christians who are not legally SC. Nonetheless, Dalit Christians are also treated as 'untouchable', and therefore Dalit, in their social identity as defined by the communities in which they live. At the same time, the more tempered words by the Dalit women panchayat representatives from Ahmedabad district are an assessment of the present political situation and indicate where change is required: formal authority does not equal political power.

5.1. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION DALIT WOMEN

Howsoever the forms of political participation are conceived; political participation represents a political action and naturally involves many social agents that act within definite structural parameters. The structures may be conceived as embedded structures, relational structures and institutional structures. Political party is only one of so many social agents associated with or responsible for political participation. There are other agents such as voluntary organisations, institutional groups and socio-cultural communities. The roles of these agents for political participation are influenced by the nature of variations in the structural arrangements. The relative significance of political party as an agent in relation to other agents is also influenced by such structural arrangements, as is the nature of political participation through the agency of political party. That historically embedded structures affect the form and nature of political participation is obvious. For instance, the emergence of such parties as Jan Sangh or Muslim League in modern India could easily be linked with the concretisation of fuzzy communal consciousness during the British colonial rule, which, for the first time, introduced census and mapping in India. As examples of the influence of relational structures on political parties one may refer to the caste conflict in Indian society or agrarian relations, the former explaining rise of caste based parties like Justice party or B.S.P. and the latter, party like the Lok Dal. From this angle the political parties ensure participation of different structurally articulated interests and ideologies. How the political parties ensure political participation also depends on the nature of the institutional structure. The nature of participation through political parties, for example, varies according to the nature of the political system. In a few modern dictatorships, such as Hitler's Germany, mass membership in a ruling party was encouraged as a way of mobilising support for government policies. Again, the institutional arrangements such as the electoral systems in a democracy influence the participating role of political parties. The world of electoral systems has been divided into three main families; Plurality-majority systems, Proportional representation (PR) systems, and semi-PR systems. The usual outcome of PR is a multi-party system and therefore offers the voters greater freedom of choice but tends to make the government less effective as the majority coalitions, in the absence of amplified majority of FPTP become highly unstable. However it would be wrong to suppose that the nature of the party-system is rigidly determined by the nature of the electoral systems. The embedded structures and relational structures have significant effect on the institutional structure in general. Take the case of India. Here we have had regular elections every five years both at national and state levels. If we want to judge the level and nature of political participation in purely institutional terms, we would count number of parties, voters' turnout, election results, number of candidates and so on with the idea that more the number, greater is the participation.

However we would miss out the massive level of political participation by party workers and non-voters to the extent we fail to recognise that elections in India is a political festival where participation is more a peaceful demonstration of public will than an exercise of individual's rational calculation that involves every stage of election: getting a ticket, the campaign, and marking the ballot. But there have been wide social and regional variations in India. When the support for the Indian National Congress evenly spread across the country, the Party got the benefit of amplified seats. But whenever the social and regional variations were mobilised by new parties, inter-district variations in electoral support reduced that benefit and made way for a somewhat multi-party system. The federal structure with its system of state level elections aided that process. We would discuss the significance of this change for political participation in subsequent section. But before that it may be of interest to have some idea about the value of political participation in a democracy.

The position of dalit women has always been a rather ambivalent one in our culture. A woman is a symbol of sacrifice and blossom of life. She prepares herself for life ahead and lives in a daze with an unexplained smile. One side, she was raised to the status of divinity and on the other side she was exploited in every aspect. There is invisibility and underestimation of women's economic contribution. The problems of inequality of status and freedom, sexual harassment, Lack of economic independence, lack of health facility, lack of access to credit, training, decision making positions which prevent women to participate in formal and informal social organizations¹⁰. A number of research findings indicate that women are the disadvantaged gender in both rural and urban areas of the country (Chen 1993; Agarwal 1994).

Table no. 3 - Nos. of Ward Member, Sarpanches, Panchayat Samiti and ZillaParishad Members¹¹ – 2012.

Odisha PRIs	SC	SCW	ST	STW	BCC	BCCW	UR	RW	Total
Ward Member	6158	9464	10074	13191	10056	13027	14620	10961	87551
Sarpanches	372	594	1168	1161	580	662	919	780	6236
P.S. Member	445	621	763	955	785	894	969	803	6235
ZillaP.Member	64	81	101	119	111	126	112	140	854

UR: Un-reserved, SC: Scheduled Castes; ST: Scheduled Tribes; BCC: Backward Class; RW: Reserved Women. Source: *State election commission, PRIs Structure 2012, Govt. of Odisha*

Women, in many societies, are often restricted to the roles inside the house, those of wife and mother. While major changes have occurred in the status of women in some parts of the world in recent decades, norms that

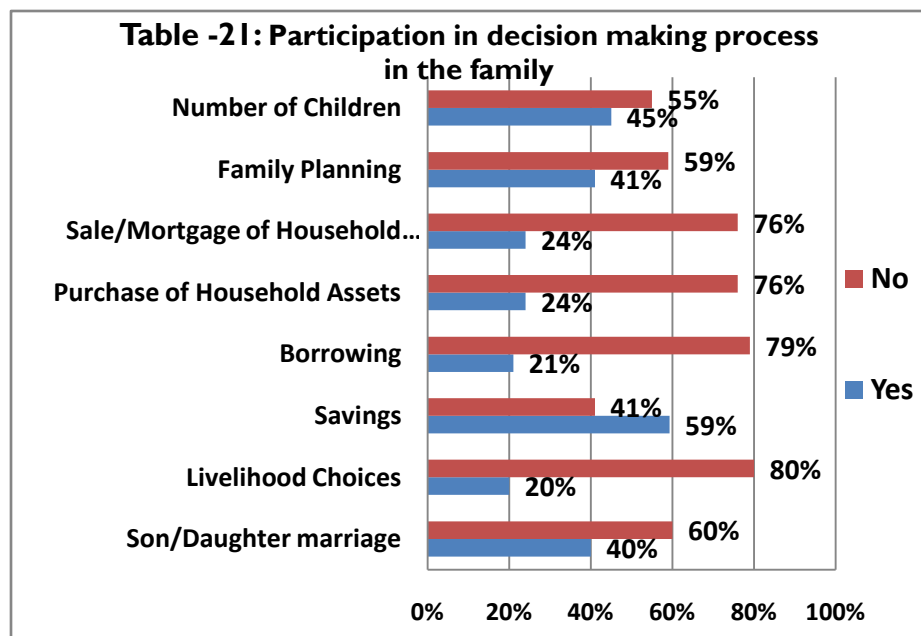
¹⁰ Agarwal, B. (1994). *"A field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia"*. UK: Cambridge University Press. Chen, M.A (1993), *"Women and Watershed Development in India: An Issue Paper"*.

¹¹ *Annual Report (2011-12)*, Panchayati Raj Department, Govt. of Odisha.

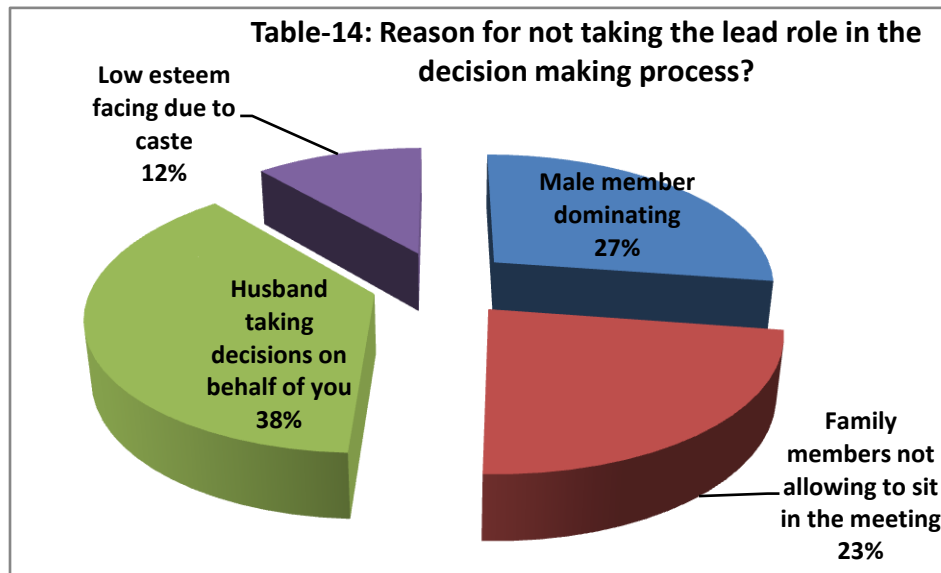
restrict women to the home are still powerful in defining the activities that are deemed appropriate for women and they exclude political life, which by its very nature takes place in a public forum. Caste has played an instrumental role in raising issues related to the more marginalized among women. In a highly hierarchical society, women belonging to the lower castes have lesser access to public fore, which is compounded by their gender. This exclusion makes it difficult for these women to represent and articulate the voices of their constituencies and their demands are often overlooked or subsumed by the dominant sections of the society. Women’s empowerment is one of the objectives of the third generation Panchayat in India. Women in India are awfully underrepresented in political institutions. The political power, access to decision making and authority are the critical prerequisites for women’s equality in the process of nation building. The 73rd amendment has mandated representation of at least one-third women through election instead, of the earlier token one or two women nominated by government or co-opted by the predominantly influential, powerful male membership/leadership of these panchayats. It is a significant step in political history of independent India. It offers at once a challenge and an opportunity for women generally and dalit women in particular to make an impact at the policy planning and programme administration level in each and every locality of our vast country.

5.2. DECISION MAKING BY DALIT WOMEN

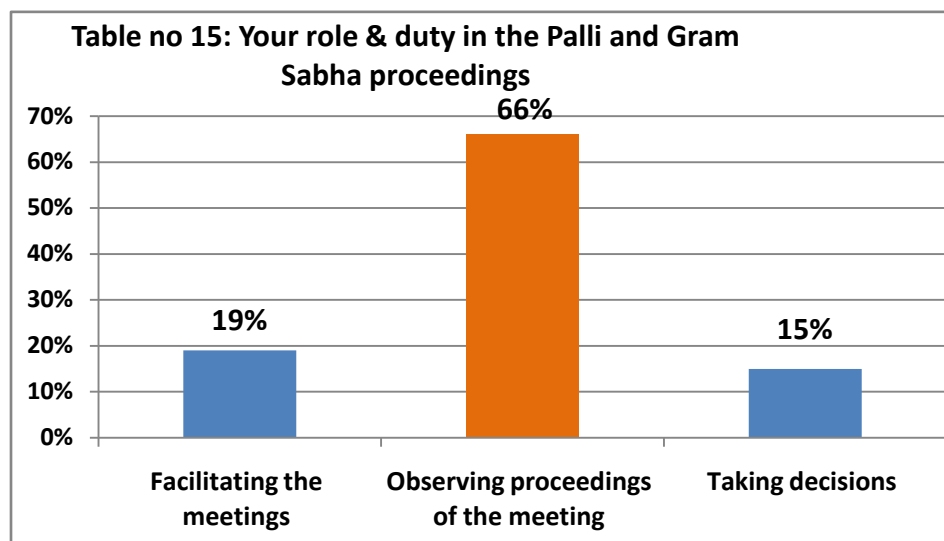
It is often argued that the women members participate in panchayati raj activities only at the dictates of male family members and that they themselves do not act independently. That data reveals that 24 percent women participate in sale / mortgage of household assets decision making, in the matter of savings women took the lead in decision making (59 percent) and while the decisions on purchase of household assets is 24% and 21% in borrowing from other sources, 45% in making number of children, 41% decision took for family planning, 40% on son/daughter’s marriage and only 20% dalit women representative to decision in livelihood choices.



There are maybe several reasons for not taking the lead role in the decision making process of the three tier panchayat raj institutions for the dalit women representatives and the data shows that 27% of male member dominating, 23% family members not allowing to sit in the meeting, 38% husbands are taking decisions on behalf of the dalit women representatives and 12% low esteem facing due to caste factors.



Bringing women into power is not only a matter of equity, of correcting an unjust and unrepresentative system political restructuring is the key to economic growth with justice. Much has been said about women elected representatives in panchayat. They were free to determine areas required more of development and financial assistance required for the betterment of the people. At the same time, there are many dalit women representatives who have taken bold initiatives and become successful. The data reflects that on the dalit women’s role & duty in the Palli and Gram Sabha proceedings only 19% facilitating the meetings, 66% observing proceedings of the meeting and 15% taking decisions.



Few Dalit women elected representatives were able to exert any substantial influence in the panchayats to ensure development benefits for their communities, though many did put forward Dalit interests. At one level, the positive development outcomes for Dalits and women that some Dalit women elected representatives achieved took the form of primarily small projects for basic amenities – roads, housing, drinking water, etc. – rather than projects that would challenge existing gender-caste inequalities such as land distribution or alternative employment opportunities for Dalits. A majority of the respondents revealed that financial assistance is a necessary ingredient for their self-esteem, their independent functioning and their committed concern and approach to the needs and urges of the people of the area.

CONCLUSION

Dalit women's progress has been painfully slow and even today they remain the poorest of the poor. In the emerging new economic order and liberalized world order the women who have lower level skills will get further marginalised. The provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendments and the Panchayati Raj Acts gave opportunities for their socio-political advancement. Guided and well-planned empowerment thus, can make them overcome the inferior status in the family and society and emerge as capable equal partners of men. Such equal participation can lead to a qualitative change not merely in dalit women's lives but in the functioning of public institutions and nature of politics in our democracy.

There are major weaknesses in the current interpretation and implementation of reservations in Panchayati Raj as well as in broader strategies to transform a society pervaded by caste-class-gender discrimination. At present, these dramatically limit the ability of the panchayats to fulfill their core objectives of equitable development and social justice.

Essentially, required reforms must recognise that political participation cannot be viewed in isolation: efforts to realise other enabling rights especially the rights to education and information, to free employment, alongside the right to equality within the family and in society must be integrated with efforts to ensure Dalit women's enjoyment of their right to political participation. Sustained systemic change requires multiple state and non-state actors at the state and national levels working together to influence formal and non-formal local institutions of power and to strengthen Dalit women's sense of confidence, skills, power and support networks. Creative ways must be explored, with Dalit women as well as Dalit men and non-Dalits, to capitalise on the success stories of Dalit women's political leadership, and cultivate their growth. Inspiring examples of Dalit women elected representatives speak of the great potential for further political and social reform through active participation in panchayat governance. Ultimately efforts must lead to a supportive environment for these women's political participation in order to transform access to and control over resources and benefits in society, as well as promote a human rights culture that itself demands accountable governance and equality for all.

Above all, the Gram Panchayats should act more actively and vigorously for the development of dalit women in order to realize them the benefits of rights, equality and justice as enshrined in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Rout, Dr.B. and Sahu, N.T. (2012). “*Women Participation in Rural Local Self-Governance System in Odisha: A Constitutional and Reservational Perspective*” in *Odisha Review*, February-March: 55.
2. Baxi, Upendra. and Bhikhu, Parekh (eds). (1995b.) “*Crisis and Change in Contemporary India*”, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
3. Bhalla, A. and Lapeyre, F. (1997). “*Social Exclusion: Towards an Analytical and Operational Framework*”, *Development and Change*, Volume 28, pp. 413-433)
4. National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). (2006). “*Alternate Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)*”, New Delhi
5. Ambedkar.(1989). “*Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*”, vol. 5, Department of Education, Bombay: Government of Maharashtra.
6. Review of WCP in 7 LSGI. (2006). undertaken by Sakhi Women’s Resource Centre, “*for the department of Local Self Governance*”.
7. *Vol 4. No. 3(July-Sept, 2014)*
8. Shah, G., Mander, H., Thorat, S., Deshpande, S., Baviskar, A. (2006). “*Untouchability in Rural India*”, Action Aid India, New Delhi, Sage Publications.
9. National Family Health Survey-2, (NFHS-2), (1998-99). Govt. of India.
10. Agarwal, B. (1994). “*A field of One’s Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*”. UK: Cambridge University Press. Chen, M.A (1993), “*Women and Watershed Development in India: An Issue Paper*”.
11. *Annual Report (2011-12)*, Panchayati Raj Department, Govt. of Odisha.
12. Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, 2013(1 May). ‘Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences finalizes Country Mission to India’, OHCHR News. www.ohchr.org
13. Varma, Sudhir, 2007, *Violence against Dalit Women in Rajasthan*. New Delhi: National Commission for Women,
14. Justice Verma et al., 2013, *Report of the Committee on Amendments to the criminal Law*. New Delhi: Government of India, Paras 34 & 46.
15. Unni, J (2009) *Gender differentials in education; Exploring the capabilities approach*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, volume 44, No.9

Publish Research Article

Dear Sir/Mam,

We invite unpublished Research Paper, Summary of Research Project, Theses, Books and Book Review for publication.

Address:- Dr. Ashak Hussain Malik House No-221, Gangoo Pulwama - 192301

Jammu & Kashmir, India

Cell: 09086405302, 09906662570,

Ph No: 01933212815

Email: nairjc5@gmail.com, nairjc@nairjc.com, info@nairjc.com

Website: www.nairjc.com

