

Profile, Perception and Performance of the Lady Sarpanches of Odisha: A Study of Two Districts

Sukanta Behera¹ & Prof. Shyam Sundar Acharya²

¹Research scholar, P.G dept. of Social Science, F. M, University, Balasore -Odisha

²Adjunct Professor, P.G dept. of Social Science, F .M. University, Balasore- Odisha

Abstract : *The status of lady sarpanches is dependent on their education level and occupational background. Of the two districts of Odisha i.e, Balasore and Mayurbhanj under study in the former which is a coastal district the educational attainment of the lady sarpanches is higher than that of their counterparts in the latter i.e , the hilly district of Mayurbhanj. The article regarding the profile and perception of the lady sarpanches is the product of a doctoral work carried on during the period from 2011 to 2014. The lady sarpanches perceive the officials as the main stumbling block in the developmental work. The sarpanch respondents point out that tribal lady sarpanches' functioning is not very much different from that of the general caste and lower caste counterparts. The sarpanch respondents further perceive that the lady sarpanches are overwhelmingly influenced by their husbands in the official work. This situation can be transformed for the better by raising the educational level of lady sarpanches, imparting necessary training to the lady sarpanches who are new entrants and SC/ST lady sarpanches especially.*

Key Words: *Lady sarpanches, Perception, Profile, Performance ,Political, Management skill, Role , Status .*

Introduction:

Status of woman can be assessed in different ways like the extent of a woman's access to social and material resources within the sphere of family, community and society or her authority or power within the family/ community and the prestige commanded from other members or her position in the social system distinguishable from, yet entangled with , other positions The extent to which woman has access to knowledge, economic resources and political power as well as the degree of autonomy she enjoys in decision-making and making personal choices at crucial points in her life- cycle also determines her status. When a specific group in a society is deprived of facilities

availed by others they are considered as being marginalised. Since time immemorial women are found to have been discriminated against. Hence empowerment of women is a challenging issue. It has been realised that human society is not gender-just. Women have been marginalised in all ages and all places (Jena-2010). This paper is an attempt to study the empowerment of women in the context of 73rd Amendment of the Constitution of India from the perspective of reservation for them in the PRIs and the resultant enhancement of their status.

Structure of The Article:

The structure of the paper is as follows; First an introduction is given. This is followed by the methodology adopted in the doctoral work of which this paper constitutes a part. Then the educational, economic and political profile of the lady respondents is to be presented. Next the perception of the lady sarpanches and that of the SC/ST lady respondents is to be explained. This will be followed by an analysis of the perception of the sarpanches regarding the role performance of the sample lady sarpanches . The paper will end with a conclusion.

Methodology: This article is the product of collection of primary data for the purpose of a doctoral work pursued during the period from 2011-2014. Primary data have been collected with the help of a schedule from 70 no. of sarpanch respondents of both the districts of Balasore and Mayurbhanj i.e, 30 no. from the former and 40 no. from the latter. The two districts are adjoining districts in the state of Odisha. Balasore is the coastal district and more developed socially and economically than the hilly district of Mayurbhanj inhabited mostly by the tribals. Among the sample respondents the lady sarpanches' number is 38. i.e, 15 drawn from Balasore and 23 from Mayurbhanj.. Their profile i.e, socio-economic and political ones along with their perception on vital issues has been recorded

and analysed. In Balasore district 9 no. of sample lady sarpanches are drawn from SC/ST category and in Mayurbhanj district 15 no. of lady sarpanches are drawn from the same category. They have been interviewed regarding their perception of the groups acting as stumbling blocks etc. All the respondents through the schedule were asked to assess the performance of the lady sarpanches.

Profile of the Lady Sarpanches:

EDUCATIONAL PROFILE:

Women and girls receive far less education than men. This is mainly due both to social norms and fear of sexual abuse. India has the largest population of non-school-going working girls.

India’s constitution ensures free primary school education for both boys and girls up to the age of 14. This goal has been repeatedly reconfirmed, but it is yet to be realised. Parents’ reluctance to educate daughters is at the centre of the problem situation of women. There are several reasons of parents not educating their daughters. Foremost is the view that education of girls brings no returns and that their future roles, being mainly reproductive and perhaps agricultural labour, call for no formal education. Socio-cultural reasons, infact, are found to be very important ones for not attaching value to girls’ education by the family and society (Seth-2001).

The following two tables with regard to the educational status of sample sarpanches in general and women sarpanches in particular make the point clear.

TABLE NO-1 (A) : The educational qualification of sample Sarpanches:

Educational Qualification Of Sarpanches								
Name of the Districts	Total no. of Sarpanches	Primary	Matric	+2Arts	+3Arts	M.A	Professional/Technical Qualification	Total
Balasore	30(100%)	8(26.6%)	8(26.6%)	4(13.3%)	8(26.6%)	2(6.6%)	00	30(100%)
Mayurbhanj	40(100%)	10(25%)	17(42.5%)	7(17.5%)	5(12.5%)	1(2.5%)	00	40(100%)

Table- 1 (B) : Educational Qualification of sample women Sarpanches:

Name of the districts	Total no. of sarpanches	Primary	Matric	+2 Arts	+3 Arts	M.A	Professional/ Technical Qualification	Total
Balasore	15(100%)	6(40%)	3(20%)	2(13.33%)	4(26.66%)	0%	00	15(100%)
Mayurbhanj	23(100%)	7(30.43%)	11(47.82%)	5(21.73%)	0%	0%	00	23(100%)

In table no1(A) 26.6 % of respondents in Balasore are found in primary education category. Among the ladies as depicted in table 1(B) 40% of respondents are in that category. In +3 arts category 26.6% of respondents are found in table 1 (A). Among the ladies 26.6% are also observed to be in that category. No lady sarpanch is found with M.A qualification in the district. In case of Mayurbhanj district 25% of sarpanches in general are found in primary education category. Among the ladies 30.43% are found in this category. In +3 arts category 12.5%

of respondents are found in table 1 (A). Among the ladies however no one is found with either +3 arts or M.A qualification.

The above tables show the extent to which women and male respondents are educationally equipped in both the districts. Obviously Balasore district has got an edge over Mayurbhanj in this respect. The lower educational status of the lady sarpanches in both the districts becomes very clear when one compares the two tables (A) and (B) of table no. 1.

TABLE-2: OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE LADY SARPANCHES :

Name of the districts	Total no. of lady sarpanches	Housewife	Agriculture	Others
Balasore	15(100%)	13(86.66%)	1(6.66%)	1 (6.66%)
Mayurbhanj	23(100%)	20(86.95%)	3 (13.04%)	Nil

An analysis of the table shows that in the district of Balasore 13 no. (86.66%) of respondents are

drawn from housewives’ background. Only one lady sarpanch is found to be involved in

agriculture and another lady was found tending goats. In Mayurbhanj district 20 no. (86.95%) of respondents are found to belong to housewives' background the remaining 3 no. (13.04%) of respondents is drawn from agricultural background. It shows that most of the housewives have occupied the post of sarpanch in the period under study. This makes obvious the low economic status and dependence of the lady representatives

on the male members of the families who continue to be the breadwinners .

FIRST ENTRY INTO POLITICS:

Local bodies like Panchayati Raj Institutions help the process of building up of leadership from bottom upwards. Election to PRIs would enhance the status of an individual (Acharya-2006).

Table-3: Time of Entry into Politics
The respondents were asked the time of their entry into politics.

The answers are presented in the following table.

Name of the districts	Total no. of the women sarpanches	(2002-2007)	(2007-2012)	(2012)
Balasore	15(100%)	2(13.33%)	2(13.33%)	11(73.33%)
Mayurbhanj	23(100%)	Nil	8(34.78%)	15(65.21%)

This table shows political participation of women as sarpanches in both Balasore and Mayurbhanj districts. The tenure of a Sarpanch of the gram panchayat is five years. When the term is covered then fresh election is held according to panchayat election rules and regulation .In this context the field study has covered three terms of election of Sarpanch of the above district. In the district of Balasore 2 no. (13.33%) of lady sarpanches were elected in the period 2002-2007, 2 no. (13.33%) of sarpanches were elected in the period 2007-2012 and 11 no. (73.33%) Of sarpanches were also elected in the year 2012 . In the district of Mayurbhanj 8 no. (34.78%) of sarpanches were elected in the period 2007- 2012 and 15 no.(65.21%) of sarpanches were elected in the year 2012.

But in the subsequent elections Mayurbhanj has surpassed the district of Balasore. A few lady sarpanches in both the districts are found to have previous political experience.

PERCEPTION OF THE LADY SARPANCHES:

Sarpanch is the key functionary in the rural local self-government. The fabric of the PRIs is woven around his/her personality .It is, therefore, very appropriate to ascertain the perception of the Sarpanches of the areas under study. Their perceptions are moulded by their socio-economic background and also subjective factors like; personality. Their modus operandi i.e, their way of actions are to a large extent determined by their perceptions. It is to be mentioned that the sex of the Sarpanches is an important variable in shaping their attitudes and perceptions.. It is well-known that on some crucial issues the perceptions of the ladies or the fair sex differ with that of the male counterparts (Mohanty-2012).

A comparison shows that so far as the election of 2002, is concerned no one was elected from Mayurbhanj. So the respondents at least, two of them belonging to Balasore are found to be more experienced than their Mayurbhanj counterparts.

Table-4 : Lady Sarpanches' Perception of the Groups Acting As Stumbling Block:

Name of the districts	Total no. of the sarpanches	Yes			No
		Officials of the panchayat	Upper caste male members of the panchayat	Others	
Balasore	15(100%)	8(53.33%)	7(46.66%)	0%	0%
Mayurbhanj	23(100%)	15(60%)	8(40%)	0%	0%

The field data reveal that in the district of Balasore 8 no. (53.33%) of lady Sarpanches perceive that lady sarpanches basically are faced with some problems posed by officials of the panchayat system during the course of their official work. 7 no. (46.66%) of sarpanches also face hurdles created by uppercaste male members of the panchayat.No respondent is found in the category

of facing no problem. In the district of Mayurbhanj 15 no. (60%) of sarpanches perceive that basically lady sarpanches are faced with some problems created by officials of the panchayat system during the performance of their official work 8 no. (40%) of the sarpanches also face hurdles created by uppercaste male members of panchayat and no sarpanch holds that he did not face any problem.

Table-5 : Lady SC/ST sarpanches' perception of the groups acting as stumbling block:

Name of the districts	Total no. of the sarpanches	Yes			No
		Officials of the panchayat	Upper caste male members of the panchayat	Others	
Balasore	9(100%)	5(55.55%)	4(44.44%)	0%	0%
Mayurbhanj	15(100%)	9(60%)	6(40%)	0%	0%

The field data reveal that in the district of Balasore 5 no. (55.55%)of lady sc/st Sarpanches perceive that lady sarpanches basically are faced with some problems posed by officials of the panchayat system in the performance of their official work. 4 no.(44.44%) of sarpanches also face hurdles created by upper caste male members of the panchayat .In the district of Mayurbhanj 9 no. (60%) of sarpanches perceive that basically lady sarpanches are faced with problems created by officials of the panchayati raj structure during the performance of their official work 6 no. (40%) of

the sarpanches also face hurdles created by uppercaste male members of panchayat .Both the tables (no.4 and no. 5) reveal that lady sarpanches point their accusing fingers at the officials mainly and the uppercaste male members next. . The lady sc/st sarpanches of both the districts toe the line of the lady sarpanches in general. The lady sarpanches in general and the SC/ST lady sarpanches in particular of Mayurbhanj surpass their counterparts in Balasore is giving vent to their grievances against the officials.

ROLE PERFORMANCE OF THE LADY SARPANCHES :

Table-6 : Functioning of Tribal Lady Sarpanch.

Another serious question was put to the respondents. They were asked that in view of the elevated position of women in a tribal society, whether the lady tribal Sarpanch functions in a more efficient way vis-à-vis general caste and lower caste counterparts. The answers given by them are displayed in the following table .

Name of the districts	Total no. of the sarpanches	Yes	No
Balasore	30(100%)	10(33.33%)	20(66.66%)
Mayurbhanj	40(100%)	18(45%)	22 (55%)

The field data reveal that in the district of Balasore 10 no. (33.33%) of the sarpanches perceive that lady tribal Sarpanch functions in a more efficient way than their general caste counterparts. ,20 no.(66.66%) of sarpanches have replied in the negative .In the district of Mayurbhanj 18no. (45%) of sarpanches hold that lady tribal Sarpanch functions in a more efficient way vis-a-vis general caste and lowercaste counterparts, 22 no (55%) of sarpanches gave negative remarks about it.

The Political status of all tribal women sarpanches is not found to be elevated. Especially in interior areas of Mayurbhanj like Bijatala ,Bisoi they are dominated by the political masters. In relatively advanced areas like Baripada the position seems to be elevated .Hence simply because the position of woman in tribal society in roughly equal to that of her male counterpart does not make her political status elevated .In many cases she is found to be dominated by the Sarpanch

pati or by the political masters. In some cases only she is found to be assertive. This is possible when she is well equipped with education and has good income. Though in the study of college girls (Acharya and Bhanj - 2012). It has been found that girl students especially drawn from tribal background are politically very ambitious and aspirants in spite of lack of adequate awareness. Yet this is to be taken with a pinch of salt in view of the above finding. However, the line of

argument that tribal college students, thanks to reservation system are politically ambitious holds good. Thus education as variable makes a difference.

The sarpanch respondents of both the districts were accordingly asked a pertinent question regarding the way of functioning of the lady sarpanches. They were asked specifically as to whether they were guided by their husbands.

Table-8 : Are the Lady sarpanches guided by their husbands ?

Name of the districts	Total no. of the sarpanches	Yes	No
Balasore	30(100%)	23(76.66%)	7(23.33%)
Mayurbhanj	40(100%)	38(95%)	2(5%)

The field data reveal that in the district of Balasore 23(76.66%) of the Sarpanches perceive lady sarpanches are usually guided by their husbands, 7 no. (23.33%) of the sarpanches have the perception that they are not guided by their husbands. In the district of Mayurbhanj respondents also hold, the same view 38 no (95%) of sarpanches in this district perceive that they are directly guided by their husbands, 2 no(5%) of sarpanches are not ready to agree with the above contention.

The lady sarpanches are found to shy away from the meetings where decisions are taken. But they do this type of activities initially. As they become more experienced they tend to participate more and more efficiently. During the field study it was found that the husbands of the lady sarpanches usually liked to accompany their wives to the place of interview. They would like to give answer on behalf of their partners. Due to educational backwardness women sarpanches take longer time to be assertive (Das-2008).

CONCLUSION:

This article gives clear information regarding educational, economic and political background of the lady sarpanches and their perception as well as role performance in the area under study. The educational attainment of the lady sarpanches is clearly low, more in case of the district of Mayurbhanj than in Balasore Their occupational status is also frustrating since most of them are found to be housewives. It becomes obvious that thanks to reservation of the post of sarpanch for women in PRIs, housewives are fielded by the families as candidates. It is quite natural that a preponderant majority of them is guided by

sarpanch pati. Finally it can be said that for their meaningful participation and effective role performance they have to be educationally equipped and their economic status needs to be enhanced through SHGs. Training can be imparted to enhance their political management, skills and this is highly essential for the lady sarpanches who are new entrants and those from sc/st background especially. The officials of PRIs need to be oriented to cooperate with the lady sarpanches. Thus all the above suggested measures can go a long way in enriching the status of lady sarpanches and enabling them to perform their desired role effectively.

REFERENCES:

Jena ,Trailokya (2010),: “Status of women in Indian society: Towards a gender responsive governance “ in Das , M and Daspatnaik, P (ed) Empowering women :Issue, Challenges and Strategies Dominant Publisher, New-Delhi ,pp-17,18.

Seth, Mira (2001): Women and Development, the Indian Experience, Sage Publication, New-Delhi, p-108.

Acharya,S.S -2006 ; Value orientation of legislative elites .Amadeus Press ,Bhubaneswar, p-118

Mohanty, Bijoyini-2012 ; Glimpses of local governance ,Kunal Books-New-Delhi,pp-412, and 415.

Acharya ,S .S and Bhanj, S (2012) “ Political socialization of tribal college girls. A case study of Mayurbhanj district of Odisha” in Anvesa an

interdisciplinary research Journal vol-7 , Issue-4,
June pp.57,58.

Das Pravakar, (2008), Working of the panchayati
raj system in India, Dreams and Rrealities, Zenith
Publication, Bhadrak, p125