

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Scheduled Caste Women Representative in PRIs

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Abstract

Panchayats have been an energetic and strong identity of Indian village since the beginning of available history. Gandhiji, the Father of the Nation, in 1946 had aptly remarked that the Indian independence must begin at the bottom and every village ought to be a republic with Panchayats manning powers. Gandhi's dream has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to ensure people's participation in rural reconstruction. The present descriptive study was conducted in the State of Haryana. The Researcher had selected a total of 320 women PRI representatives comprising 242 Panches, 53 Sarpanch, 20 Panchayat Samiti members and 5 Zila Parishad members from different levels and were interviewed. The study found that majority of the respondents were Illiterate, ignorant, and secluded in purdah system. They belonged to the low socio-economic group.

Keywords: Socio-economic status, panchayati raj institution, decision-making

Introduction

The women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country, but their involvement in politics is insignificant as compared to men. Many psychological, social and physical factors hold women back from active political involvement. If we want to enhance the status of women, we have to give opportunity to them for active participation in politics. In the democratic country if we provide platform for decision-making and empowerment, the nation will progress in general but position of women will increase with specific active political involvement. (Nandal, 2013) ^[1].

The socio-cultural practices in the society to a large extent determine the status of women. Historically women are supposed to carry forward the traditional norms and values in the society. The process of socialization that they undergo in their families does not permit them for non-traditional roles.

Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act provides good opportunities for women to have active participation in grass-root politics. The Act also open new chapter for over-all development of women through their decision-making and enlightenment of their rights and duties. Accordingly, Constitution of India provides equality based on socio-economic and political justice to all. It also maintains the dignity of men and women equally. Adult franchise provides right to men and women to participate in the politics by right of voting. In this regard, Article 14 provides equality, substantive as well as procedural. Article 16(2) forbids discrimination in respect of any employment at office under the states on the ground of sex, race, caste, religion, decent place of birth, residence of any of them. Article 39(c) provides right to adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally. Article 39(d) mentions 'equal pay for equal work' both for men and women. According to article 39(c)

there is provision of protection of health and strength of worker-men and women and children from abuse and entry into a vocation unsuited of their age and strength. Article 2 provides just and human conditions of work and maternity reliefs.

The Constitutional rights are to serve instruments for achieving equality of status and opportunity in all spheres. Equality in all spheres is inseparable from active political participation and involvement. This means not only using rights to vote but also power sharing, decision making and co-policy making at all levels of government. Women's participation does not mean only the mobilization of power to solve their problems, it is much more necessary to apply the women's point of view in policy making which affect the whole society.

Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana

The position of women in Haryana is not better than their counterparts in the rest parts of the country. Haryana came into existence on 1st November, 1966. Before attainment of state-hood, it was a backward region of Punjab. Since 1966, there has been great deal of modernization and economic growth. The State government is making tremendous efforts for the upliftment of the status of women. But in spite of this women's status in Haryana continued to be low. Decline in status of women is reflected in the low sex ratio, illiteracy, ignorance, lack of participation in employment opportunity, high mortality rate, female foeticide and increasing dowry deaths.

Kaushik, S. (1995) ^[2] observed that many urban and rural males believed that a majority of rural women being illiterate, could only fix their thumb impression for the sake of political participation. Family pressures, presence of elder members,

social taboos, and illiteracy are the determining factors for their less participation in PRIs.

Gopalan, S. (1995) ^[3] in her article entitled 'Women in Panchayati Raj' discussed that SC/ST women were generally less literate, and more deprived. There was strong need to motivate them to access to leadership in PRIs.

Arora and Prabhakar (1997) ^[4] in their article entitled 'The 73rd Amendment and Panchayati Raj: Some Pre-requisites' had described that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act is a landmark and milestone in the history of India. One of the salient features of 73rd Constitutional Amendment, according to them, sought about reservation for various sections of society like SC, ST and women.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the present research was to study the socio-economic status of Scheduled Caste women representatives involved at three different levels in Panchayati Raj Institution in the selected area.

Research Methodology

The universe of present study was Haryana. It was decided to select total four districts one from each division i.e., Yamunanagar, Karnal, Gurgaon and Jind. The decisions for taking total four districts have been made with the hope that other selected, SC women leaders and members representatives working at different levels from the selected districts will represent the overall state.

The present study was conducted over a period of three years which was descriptive and diagnostic in nature. The researcher had used sample survey method to conduct the current study. First of all, total four districts one from each specified division were selected. The selection of above four

districts, i.e., considered on the basis of different socio-economic characteristics and geographical locality of the districts so as to have representation of the study area from every corner of the universe and researchers convince.

Since SC women panchayat leaders were working at all three levels at Panchayati Raj Institution in the rural area. Therefore, in the second phase an attempt was made by adopting stratified random sampling method to select SC women Panchayati Raj leaders from all three level of Panchayati Raj Institution leadership. Hence, first of all for selection of village Sarpanches, 50 percent of total 107 SC women Sarpanches from all four selected districts have been drawn randomly. Similarly, in order to select SC women Panches who were associated with the Sarpanches at the Gram Panchayat, it was decided to select 25 per cent of total 968 SC women Panches randomly from all selected districts of the divisions.

Further, at the IInd level i.e., block level, for selection of SC women leaders of Panchayati Samiti, from all 40 working SC women members in different Panchayati Samiti, 50 per cent of SC women members were selected randomly for interview. Accordingly, in order to know the participation and freedom of SC women Chairman at the Panchayati Samiti level all the presently working chairmen were taken for interview.

Similarly at district level, i.e., IIIrd level of Panchayati Raj Institution, it was decided to select all working SC women members of Zila Parishad. Since as per statistical report, there was no representation of SC women as president at Zila Parishad, so at this level, the responses of only SC women members had been taken for data analysis and discussion.

Table 1 given below provides detailed information regarding the number of Scheduled Castes women panchayat leaders selected from districts for final interview.

Table 1: Scheduled caste women panchayat leaders selected for interview.

Category	Yamuna Nagar		Karnal		Gurgaon		Jind		Total SC Women leaders	Total Selected SC women
	Total SC women leaders	Selected SC women leaders	Total SC women leaders	Selected SC women leaders	Total SC women leaders	Selected SC women leaders	Total SC women leaders	Selected SC women leaders		
Gram Panchayat										
Panch	336	84	251	63	153	38	242	57	968	242
Sarpanch	27	15	25	13	30	15	20	10	102	53
Panchayat Samiti										
Member	11	5	11	6	8	4	10	5	40	20
Chairman	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Zila Parishad										
Member	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	5	5
President	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	375	15	288	83	192	58	260	74	1215	320

In the current study, tools of data collection used were interview schedule, observation, and secondary data used for the collection of information for the study. Since it was a diagnostic descriptive study, the subjects of the study were interviewed to have accurate and adequate information. An interview was conducted with the help of a schedule containing a set of questions, which included informal conversation and interpretation. Observation was used to ascertain many facts, which were not answered by the respondents.

All the data collected after the study with the help of interview and schedule was properly analysed with the help of code book and master chart, which was indicated in different

forms.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Scheduled Caste Women Representative in PRIs

Different studies conducted by various researchers indicate that women have an effective contribution in rural Haryana in rearing and caring of children in and outside the home. Accordingly, for the sake of earning women go outside their homes in fields, factories & shops etc. With the passage of time a lot of changes have occurred in socio-economic and political life of Haryanavi women. Political rights of women have been realized with the introduction of 73rd constitutional amendment Act called Panchayati Raj Act 1994 in Haryana.

This act brings a ray of hope for active political participation of women in rural scenario. This act provides an ample opportunity to women specially belongs to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

Therefore, attempts to focus on the general profile especially the socio-economic profile of SC women Representatives, in order to express the general profile of respondents, their age, education attainment, marital status, age of marriage, profession, family composition, and land holding, etc. had been discussed.

Age: For the purpose of analyzing the relationship of age with Panchayati Raj women leadership, age had been considered as an important variable which was classified into four categories i.e., 25 to 35 years, 35 to 45 years, 45 to 55 years and 55 and above years. Table 2 presented the data on the age group of respondents covered in the study.

Table 2: Age and status wise distribution of SC women PRIs leaders.

Age Group (years)	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
25-35	50(20.67)	7(13.20)	6(30.0)	3(60.0)	66(20.62)
35-45	96(39.66)	19(35.85)	8(40.0)	2(40.0)	125 (39.06)
45-55	68(28.0)	14(26.42)	6(30.0)	-	88(27.50)
55 & above	28(11.58)	13(24.53)	-	-	41(12.82)
Total	242(100)	53(100)	20(100)	5(100)	320(100)

Figures in brackets shown percentage.

The findings of the present study also corroborated the findings of Singh, D.R. (1995) [5] and Tekchandani, B. (1998) [6], who observed that majority of women leaders come from 25 to 45 years age group.

Education

Education played a vibrant role for personality and character building of an individual. Education also played an important role for increasing the leadership pattern in a democratic society. The studies of Manikymba (1989) [7], Mehta, S.R. (1972) [8], Sharma, S.S. (1979) [9], Lewis, O. (1954) [10], Narain, *et al.* (1976) [11] revealed that education had a positive correlation with rural leadership.

Table 3: Educational Status of SC women PRIs representatives (N=64).

Educational Status	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
Primary	26(81.25)	5(45.45)	8(50.0)	-	39(60.09)
Middle	4(12.05)	2(18.18)	1(6.25)	3(60.0)	10(15.62)
Matric	2(6.25)	3(27.28)	6(37.50)	2(40.0)	13(20.31)
10+2	-	1(9.09)	1(6.25)	-	2(3.98)
Graduate	-	-	-	-	-
Total	32(100)	11(100)	16(100)	5(100)	64(100)

Figures in bracket show percentage.

It was observed that Scheduled Caste women leaders in Panchayati Raj Institutions had low educational background. It was found during interview that these PRIs leaders involved in politics because of reservation policy. They had less economic resources to fulfill schooling even for their

children. The above-mentioned observations of the present study also correlated with the findings of Tekchandani, B. (1998) [6] that majority of women belonging to scheduled castes and backward castes were illiterate in comparison to those belonging to upper caste.

Table 4: Marital status of SC women PRI leaders.

Marital Status	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
Married	217(89.68)	43(81.1)	18(90)	5(100)	283(88.45)
Unmarried	0	0	0	0	0
Widow	22(0.09)	10(18.9)	2(10)	-	34(10.62)
Divorced	3(1.23)	-	-	-	3(0.93)
Total	242(100)	53(100)	20(100)	5(100)	320(100)

Figures in bracket show percentage.

It was observed from the Table no.4 that none of the leaders was unmarried, and majority of respondents belonged to married category. The findings of the present study were corroborating the findings of Tekchandani, B. (1998) [6], Singh, S. (1997) [12], Singh, D.R. (1995) [5] that married women were more prone in rural panchayati raj institution.

Marital Age

Women's age at the time of marriage was an important indication of their social status. During the data collection, it was found that in rural Haryana girl's age at the time of marriage is settled by physical maturity of girl not by the age minor or adult category of age. Table 5 mentioned below show age at the time of marriage:

Table 5: Marital age of respondents SC Women PRI leaders.

Marital Age	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
Adult	87 (35.9)	28 (52.83)	13 (65.0)	2 (40.0)	130 (40.62)
Minor	155 (64.1)	25 (47.17)	7 (35.0)	3 (60.0)	190 (59.38)
Total	242(100)	53(100)	20(100)	5(100)	320(100)

The data in the Table 5 clearly revealed that most (59.38 per cent) of elected representatives were minor at the time of marriage followed by 40.62 per cent who were adult at the time of marriage.

Family Composition

"Several studies have indicated the relationship between rural leadership and size of family". Singh, D.R. (1995) [5] revealed that majority of the leaders of Scheduled Caste live in nuclear families but they have their origin in large joint families.

Table 6: Family composition of SC women PRI leaders.

Types of Family	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
Nuclear Family	156(64.46)	37(69.31)	17(85)	4(80)	214(66.88)
Joint Family	86(35.54)	16(30.19)	3(15.0)	1(20)	106(33.12)
Total	242(100)	53(100)	20(100)	5(100)	320(100)

Figure in bracket show percentage.

Size of Family

Here in this study, the researcher has grouped the number of members in different sizes i.e., up to 4 members size, 5 to 7 members and above. The information classified in this regard have been presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Size of family of SC women PRI Leaders.

Size of family	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
Up to 4 members	47(19.42)	23(43.40)	4(20.)	1(20.0)	75(23.43)
5-7 members	133(54.96)	20(37.73)	12(60.0)	2(40.0)	167(52.18)
Above 7 members	62(25.62)	10(18.87)	4(20.0)	2(40.0)	78(24.39)
Total	242(100)	53(100)	20(100)	5(100)	320(100)

Figures in brackets show percentage.

Number of Children

Table 8: Classification of SC women PRI leaders according to number of children in family.

Number of Children	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
Up to 2	79(32.64)	12(22.64)	04(20.0)	1(20.0)	96(30.0)
3 to 4	75(31.00)	23(43.40)	08(40.0)	3(60.0)	109(34.07)
More than 4	88(36.36)	18(33.96)	08(40.0)	1(20.0)	115(35.93)
Total	242(100)	53(100)	20(100)	5(100)	320(100)

Figures in brackets show percentage.

On the basis of the above findings, it was observed that majority of leaders (70%) have more than 2 children while rest of them are having up to two children. This clearly showed that the adoption of family planning was not common in every family of rural society.

Occupation

Occupation is linked with status and economic condition of an individual. It was also learnt that those who had time to spare for village welfare, due to kind of occupation which they have adopted as an economic means, they were likely to join rural leadership. Keeping this point in mind, SC women leaders have been asked to describe their occupation. Responses obtained in this regard have been discussed in the following table.

Table 9: Occupation status of SC women PRI leaders.

Occupation	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
Cultivator (Agriculture)	43(17.76)	18(33.96)	2(10.0)	1(20.0)	64(20.0)
Labour	102(42.16)	8(15.1)	7(35.0)	-	117(36.57)
Housewife	90(37.19)	24(45.28)	8(40.0)	4(80.0)	126(39.37)
Paid Service/ Salaried	07(2.89)	3(5.66)	3(15.0)		13(4.06)
Total	242(100)	53(100)	20(100)	5(100)	320(100)

Figures in bracket shows percentage.

Accordingly at the panchayat samiti level 40 per cent were

labourers, 15 per cent were paid worker and only 10 per cent were cultivator or farmer. At the Zila Parishad level, significant number i.e., 80 per cent of total 5 members were housewives' occupation while 20 per cent women were cultivators. The findings of the present study corroborated with the findings of Tekchandani, B. (1998) [6] and Singh, D.R. (1995) [5].

Income

Income of a family was considered as an important criterion for determining the leadership pattern in Indian society.

Table 10: Annual family income of SC women PRIs leaders.

Annual income (approx.)	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
Upto Rs. 15000	207(85.54)	38(71.70)	12(60.0)	3(60.0)	260(81.25)
15001-30000	32(13.22)	11(20.75)	5(25.0)	1(20.0)	48(15.31)
Above Rs. 30000	3(1.24)	4(7.55)	3(15.0)	1(20.0)	11(3.44)
Total	242(100)	53(100)	20(100)	5(100)	320(100)

Figures in bracket show percentage.

The findings of the present study agreed with the findings of Singh, D.R. (1995) [5] that panchayat leader did not confine to higher income group and most of female leaders come from lower and middle-income group. Therefore, it was clear from the Table 10 that economic status is losing its significance in politics due to introduction of 73rd constitutional amendment.

Land Holding

Majority of rural population is dependent on agriculture, and allied occupation. Investment in land provides them good amount of benefit.

Table 11: Land-holding size of SC women PRI leaders.

Land holding in acres	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti Member	Zila Parishad Member	Total
	Panch	Sarpanch			
Nil	197(81.40)	29(54.72)	9(45.0)	-	235(73.44)
1-3 acres	25(10.34)	13(24.35)	5(25.0)	2(40.0)	45(14.06)
3-6 acres	17(7.03)	5(9.43)	3(15.0)	1(20.0)	26(8.12)
4-9 acres	3(1.23)	4(7.54)	2(10.0)	1(20.0)	10(3.13)
More than 9	-	2(3.78)	1(5.0)	1(20.0)	4(1.25)
Total	242(100)	53(100)	20(100)	5(100)	320(100)

Figures in bracket show percentage.

Women, SC, ST, landless labourers, marginal and small labourers' representation in rural politics has increased due to 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. The findings of Singh, D.R. (1995) [5] also agree with the present study which concluded that Panchayat leadership is no longer confined to the high land holding group but were diffused among landless and low land holding group of leaders.

Limitation of the Study

The present study is limited to only one State i.e., Haryana. Therefore, in order to have an overall impact of Panchayati Raj Institution and participation of Scheduled Caste Women in Panchayati Raj Institution in India, a bigger universe and sample size is needed which is indeed not possible by the research scholar alone without having the provision of extra

manpower and resources. Therefore, the findings of the present study cannot be generalized at the national level.

Suggestions for Further Study

In order to have overall information and knowledge about the position and participation of Scheduled Caste women PRI leaders, it is suggested to have an extensive study in India after 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Accordingly, a comparative study on participation of Schedule caste and non-Scheduled Caste women in India will provide more in depth and detailed information about the position and participation of Scheduled Caste women in Panchayati Raj Institutions after having the opportunity of reservation joined the Panchayat leadership.

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