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## **Tribalwomen's empowerment in Himachal Pradesh: A case study of Kinnaur District**

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### **Abstract**

Women are an eternal component for the growth process of any country. With the expansion of the time, the role of women in the society and nation has been acknowledged and immensely enlarged all over the world. The fact has now been comprehended with imperative predominance, that without ensuring women development, the nation development cannot be achieved. Kinnaura tribe among the Indian tribes is considered to be one of the most aware and developed tribe. To evaluate the tribal scenario after the implementation of the New Panchayati Raj present paper is devoted to understand the existing situation of the tribal women leadership, their role perception and role performance in the context of the participatory democracy. For this purpose, Kinnaur one of the tribal belts of the Himachal Pradesh selected as sample. Questionnaire was prepared and distributed to One hundred five tribal women and their views and opinion were analyzed to understand and assess the effectiveness of the PRIs after the implementation of the PESA Act in the area. Issues related to their participation in the Gram Sabha, their satisfaction with PRIs and issues related to the development are viewed in the present paper.

**Keywords:** tribalwomen's, society, nation

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### **Introduction**

#### **Conceptual Framework**

Empowerment is the most used and discussed term today. Empowerment and participation are correlated. Empowerment refers to the rising of the social, economic and political vigour of the individuals and communities. Empowerment is the process of building capacities and creating an atmosphere, which enable to fully utilize their creative potentials in pursuance of quality life. Empowerment is a multidimensional process that helps people to gain control over their society by acting on issues that they define as important. The concept of empowerment is implementation and evaluation of decision determining the functions and the wellbeing of our societies. Different scholar defines empowerment differently. Bargava and Subha, define political empowerment 'as the capacity to influence decision making process, planning, implementation and evaluation by integrating them into the political system. It implies political participation which includes right to vote, contest, campaign, party membership and representation in political office at all levels and effectively influences decisions there by leading to political'. Women empowerment is the most important aspect of the concept of empowerment of the powerless. Empowerment of women in its simplest forms means empowering women socially, economically and politically. Participation of woman in political sphere is an integral element for the empowerment of woman that helps to accrue an equal gender society in order to accelerate the progress of nation.

The participation of women in politics signifies not only the right to vote but also the sharing of power, co-decision-making and co-policy making at all the levels. The equivalent contribution of women and men in the assertion is an essential requirement of democracy and a positive stride for society, as the unanimous decision taken into an account to the need and interest of the population as a whole. Women constitute about half of India's population.

So, far the success of Indian democracy is concerned both men and women should participate in the democratic institutions of the country. But in the Indian society, the participation of women in democratic institution is not to the expected level. After Independence government took keen interest in the all-round development of women in the country for its commitment to the twin ideals of democracy and equality. In this line adult franchise, fundamental rights, fundamental duties, directive principles and others political rights ensured women equal status. Article 40 state that, "State shall take steps to organise village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to functions as units of self-government." The 73rd Amendment Act is a major step towards political empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions. The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution in 1993 gave a constitutional status of PRIs and reserved one-third of the seats for women in these institutions. No doubt various initiatives have been taken for the empowerment of women but women have had poor representation in institutional politics. But last two decades these institutions have led for empowering women in India.

### Objectives

To assess the tribal women's empowerment in terms of their participation in rural local bodies and grassroots politics after implementation of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.

### Sample and Data Collection

For the present study, both primary and secondary data was used in order to achieve the intended objectives, tribal women and local leaders Kinnaur were selected. For the collection of data questionnaires were prepared and served to women (N=105) of sample of the study

### Locale of the Study

The present study confined to the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh is situated in the heart of western Himalayas. The state came into existence on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1948 and gained full-fledged statehood on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1971 and become the 18<sup>th</sup>, state of Indian Union. At present State have twelve districts. Kinnaur district is one of them. Till 1960, Kinnaur was Chini tehsil of Mahasu district on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1960, it was declared sixth district of Himachal Pradesh. The geographical area of the district is 6401 square kilometres which forms 11.50% of the total area of the state. The Present population of district Kinnaur do not constitutes a homogenous group and display significant territorial and ethnic diversity. Kinnaur district may be divided into three territorial units. Lower. Kinnaur comprised area between Chora at the boundary of district Kinnaur with Rampur Bushahr and kalpa including Nichar and Sangla valley. The middle Kinnaur the area between Kalpa and Kanain including Moorang tehsil. The people of middle Kinnaur are of mixed racial strain. The inhabitants are Buddhists and Hindus. Himachal tribals have typical caste system. In Lahaul, Pangi and Bharmaur regions caste system is almost same as in the Hindu society. Majority of the people in area are migrants from the plains. They continued with their caste practices with few changes. In kinnaura tribe caste division is different from the Hindu caste system of four castes which is existing in other two tribal pockets. Society is mainly divided into two castes: the upper caste known as *khoshiya* and lower caste known as *chamang*. They have one more group known as *domangs* (artisan class). Later two sections are treated as untouchables within the untouchables there is also difference of untouchability. Domangs can enter in the houses of the Khoshiyas but they do not share food with them. Chmangs are totally untouchables. Khoshiyas do not have any kind of the interaction with them. They have their own customary norms to conduct the caste practices within their society. Khoshiyas enjoy higher status as compare to the Domangs and *chamangs*. Broadly on the professional classification *khoshiyas* are land owning class of the society and Domangs and *chamangs* are service providers in different fields. They are iron smith, gold smith, leather workers and also the people who play musical instruments (Bajantris). All these services are indispensable for the Kinnauras still this section is treated as untouchable by the Khoshiyas. Both the sections obey the customary laws in regulating their behavior in the society and the lower caste people have least grudges against the upper caste behavior towards them. This is accepted behavior pattern of the Kinnaura society. Economic and political system is also caste driven in the Kinnaura society. Economically Khoshiyas belong to the elite class they are land lords having large orchards. After the corporate activities in the area class. land acquisition also added to their better financial position. Some of them entered in the business activities, started transportation business and contractorship. The service class (Domangs and Chomangs) suffered economically. They used to earn their living by practicing traditional occupations and working on the land of land lords. Most of the tribal have land holdings lower castes have small holdings or patta. Land acquisition and the corporate activities have not proved beneficial to the unskilled labour in the area. Their living before the projects was dependent on the multiple patty economic activities before. Corporate world and their activities created multiple problems for them. They are not able to compete with the skilled labour of plains. With the effect of the liberalisation and globalization locals developed their taste for those goods and services which are available in the market. They lost taste for the local products. Traditional economy is in the pathetic condition in the tribal area. In the local politics Khoshiyas have effective and large political participation as compare to the Domangs and *chamangs*. Formal power structures are dominated by the Khoshiyas. Their participation is effective and they enjoy better status in the formal institutions as compare to the chomangs and domangs. Lower caste maneuver by the *khoshiyas* in the local institutions also.

### Socio-Economic Background of the Respondents

Personal information age, education, marital status, family structure together helps to understand the socio-cultural set up of the society as well as its orientation towards the political institutions. Out of all 5% respondents were in the age group between 18-30, 33% between 30-40, maximum 37% in the age group between 40-50 and 25% above the fifty years. Age profile of the respondents indicates middle age respondents were the maximum to respond. In this age people have time for the community and other extra family affairs. Although women is marginalized in the political arena still women respondents were more as compare to their male counterpart in the area. Women community is more active as voters in all the elections in the last two decades. Women voter turnout considerably increased in election from national level to the local bodies in all the states in the last two decades. 50% reservation in the year 2015 gave momentum to the women empowerment in the local politics. Women try to chase every opportunity to express her. The same trend is shown in the tribal of the other states. With the constitutional status to the PRIs, these institutions have become effective institutions. Their organization, perception and the seriousness of the society is reflected through composition of the PRIs. Rural

society demand educated leadership so education has become an important qualification for acquiring leadership in modern society. Out of total respondents only 15 per cent were illiterate, 9 per cent were having educational level up to the primary, 21 per cent up to middle, 32 per cent were having qualification up to matriculation and 27 per cent did 10+2, 3 per cent were graduates, 2 per cent were post graduates. In the tribals also education is considered to be important for the personal and over all development of the society. Educated people are more active in the social and political life. At least 93% people are at the working literacy stage. They can understand and respond as the Gram Sabha members in the meetings. Marriage as an institution in the Indian society brings considerable change in one's life. Social life is also determined by marital status. Everybody gets more involved in the family life after marriage. In addition to the enhanced role women particularly get freedom for the social interaction. They develop confidence to be exposed to the social issues. 93% of the respondents were married and the rest were the unmarried. In general, in mainstream women are less open and take less part in the social and political activities specially the unmarried women. In the tribal society it is observed women enjoy more freedom they have less social constrains as compare to the common women of the Indian society. Numerical data indicates higher number of the married respondents is evidence of the younger age group's may be more involved in their personal affairs in the tribal society and they do not find time for social and political life. Women in the area are not much enthusiastic to join the power game in the society. Their political aspirations to be part of the rural power structures are not very high. Their participation is confined to vote and attend the Gram Sabha meetings according to their interest. Existing trend indicates they are interested in the basic political participation being member of the community. They may not be ready at present to bear the responsibility of the leadership.

### **Assessment of Understanding of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and Pesa Act**

73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment is the landmark step in the constitutional history of India as well as in the deepening of the democracy. Amendment is based on the concept of the mass participation in the political processes; those have direct effect on their life. To achieve the goal of the 'good governance' it is important that tribal community of the country should know their rights and duties being part of the political community under the PESA Act 1996. PESA provides extensive powers to the tribal communities to manage their affairs according to their own system within the purview of the Indian Constitution. Under the PESA Act Gram Sabha can use its powers effectively to resolve the tribal issues regarding the Land Acquisition, Minor Forest Product (MFP) and protection of the ecological balance in the remote areas. In the era of the open economies it is one the most important issue to make the tribal aware and intact their society from the non-tribals. Empowerment in the above fields' has great importance for them. More than 60% of the respondents did not know about the PESA. Inference on the basis of the response is that the tribals' have little knowledge about the initiatives of the government in the form of the PESA Act 1996. It can cause misutilisation of the powers by the PRIs and local bureaucracy.

### **Role of the Gram Sabha**

Gram Sabha is the legislative organ of the village Panchayat. Ideally this institution is the most effective media of direct democracy. In Millennium Goals of the UNO 'good governance' is an important issue. It stands mainly for the mass participation in the decision making, accountability and transparency. Gram Sabha can strengthen the process of good governance. Periodical meetings of the Gram Sabha to deliberate on the development issues, to audit the Panchayat's function can be fruitful if the institution perform its duties religiously and people have faith in its effectiveness. When they were asked about the role of Gram Sabha in the development activities, 75 per cent people responded it has positive role, 7 per cent had negative view and 18 per cent had no opinion. Participation is a wide term that comprises involvement. Participation here is a process through which people directly participate in the decision making, implementation and evaluation at the grassroots level. 57 per cent of the respondents opined that they participate in the Gram Sabha, 43 per cent respondents responded not attended the meeting regularly. During the meetings of the Gram Sabha they discuss development issues (construction of community hall, construction of PHC, construction of Bus Stand, initiative regarding employment generation programmes, awareness about PESA Act, awareness about Forest Right Act, creating opportunities for agriculture produce, expansion of pasture land, renovation of anganwadi in the locality, review of the budgets, selection of beneficiaries, sanitation and identification of IRDP families for development programmes). Gram Sabha proceedings indicate community orientation towards the development.

According to the HPPR Act Notification, 1997 in the tribal areas, meeting of the Gram Sabha will be held regularly to decide the various development plans and other development activities. In the beginning four meetings were mandatory. Now the government has notified minimum six meetings of the Gram Sabha per annum to be made mandatory. On certain occasions more meetings can also be called.

### **Perception Regarding the Institution of Panchayat**

Panchayat is the executive body of the Gram Sabha at the village level. Almost for the last two decades Panchayats are working according to their Constitutional status. In the tribal areas the system is working for more than a decade. Community has the feel for this institution.

65 per cent of the respondents were fully satisfied with the role of Panchayat. In the development of their village, majority of the respondents believed that the role of Panchayat in development of the village. After independence governments interventions in the development activities evolved a system where the officials had

more responsibility and power. People developed dependence on the State machinery and took little interest in managing their own affairs. These developments led to the bureaucratic hegemony. It's difficult to deconstruct it till today. 41 per cent of the respondents think that state/district bureaucracy is still dominating the whole scenario of PRIs, 39 per cent of the respondents think that state/districts bureaucracy is not dominating the whole scenario of PRIs, 20 per cent of the respondents did not express their opinion on either side.

### **Grass roots Politics and Political Parties**

With the introduction of New Panchayati Raj political parties' intervention at the grassroot level reached the climax. Party leaders have direct linkage with local leaders. Electoral linkage, voting patterns of the different election marked relevance of the local election to the state and national politics. Majority of the respondents opined party politics shifted to the village level. Masses have direct linkages with the political leaders. Political socialization has also been affected. In the tribal area parties in the state have started membership drives. One third of the respondent;s families are associated with the parties. Mass participation in the politics in the rural and tribal areas enhanced tremendously in the last two decades. Participation in the election campaigns (state and nation), attendance in the party meetings, rising voter turnout and women participation in the politics indicate effectiveness of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and PESA Act 1996. Representative democratic system of the country reached at the grassroot level elected bodies.

### **Findings**

- The age wise analysis of the women leaders shows that middle age group has dominance over the Panchayat raj leadership.
- Education wise analysis shows that matric and plus two level women are in majority.
- It is found encouraging that elected women leaders not only attend the PRIs meetings but the majority of them also raise the questions regarding development programmes, projects and financial auditing etc. and suggest measures to improve the development activities.
- Tribal women actively participating in PRIs after 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment but they also faced a lot of hurdles in PRIs.

### **Suggestions**

1. Efforts should be made to involve rural women in Gram Sabha meetings. Do away with the provision of quorum of meeting of Gram Sabha.
2. Village wise and ward wise Gram Sabha should be encouraged
3. Education is an important variable of women empowerment Panchayati Raj Institutions. Therefore, the first and foremost step for empowering women is the removal of illiteracy among them. There should be a provision to fix at least some minimum education qualification for the candidates willing to contest the election. E-literacy should be popularised among the women folk in villages
4. Facilitate exchange programme for Panchayats women representatives inside and outside the country.
5. Reservation for women in PRIs should be continuously of two terms i.e. ten years, so that they prove their capabilities.

### **Conclusion**

The picture which has emerged after two decades of implementation new Panchayati raj is not very satisfactory. NO doubt Panchayati raj has become a major channel of popular participation in the process of development and political empowerment of women. But at the present time PRIs have also is a new place of bone of contention therefore deprived sections including women have not empowered in real sense. In the tribal Kinnaur after the implementation of PESA Act 1996 gradual changes are taking place. Reservation for the marginalized section provided opportunities to the women and SC in the tribal community. Social change is gradual its impact is visible in the role performance of the local institutions. Patriarchy, caste and class have strong influence on leadership psyche of area. Community in the Gram Sabha discusses developmental issues and shows their concerns although they have little knowledge regarding the procedural aspect of the local governance. Tribal women are satisfied with their social and economic empowerment and by nature she has little interest in the political power. However, the extent of their participation in all activities depend on a number of factors such as family, social conventions, cultural rituals etc. Women have to face numerous problems because the basic attitude towards them remains unchanged. In order to strength PRIs it is essentials to aware people for their rights and duties so the dream of women empowerment can be fulfilled

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