

# POLITICAL PROFILE AND PERCEPTION OF WOMEN PANCHAYAT REPRESENTATIVES IN THE POST 73<sup>RD</sup> AMENDMENT SCENARIO: A CASE STUDY OF KHURDA DISTRICT OF ODISHA

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**Abstract:** *The Constitution of India through the preamble, the fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles of state policy reflects the principle of gender equality. The constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Several action plans have been initiated by the government which will translate the objective of empowering women into concrete action and measurable goals.*

*One significant step taken by the Govt. of India in this direction is implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act. Through this Act, after Part VIII of the constitution, some provisions have been inserted. Accordingly Art 243 D states that not less than one third of the total number of seats shall be reserved for women (including scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women) During the Chief Minister Ship of Biju Pattnaik 33.3 % of reservation for women was made in 1992 PRI elections in Odisha. In 2011 the reservation for women was further extended to fifty percent.*

**Key words:** 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, Women Empowerment, Reservation, Political Empowerment, etc

## Introduction:

In the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act there is provision for the mandatory reservation of seats not only for the women but also for the SCs and STs. The reservation for women is again not only for membership of the Panchayat Raj institutions at all levels but also as regards the office of chairpersons by rotation. This is a revolutionary step. Political empowerment of women is both a symbol and source of social change. In most cases, assessments of the political status of women take into consideration external indices such as their voting behaviour, their representation in political parties, the consideration whether they are electoral candidates and / or hold public offices (Acharya – 2009-10)

The present study addresses the changing political status of rural women in the political process in India. The study is confined to the involvement of rural women in the working of Gram panchayats. It measures the extent of woman's participation in the rural politics. Through this study, the political background of women PRI representatives has been thoroughly examined. In the political field, the variables which have been examined are (1) year of entry into politics (2) age of first entry into politics (3) involvement of family members in politics (4) source of inspiration for joining politics (5) idea about gram panchayat (6) source of idea about gram panchayat (7) interest to contest election for another term (8) impact of family background and financial status on election (9) support from groups in functioning as representatives.

## Methodology:

This paper is the result of analysis of data collected from mainly Primary sources and partly from secondary sources for the sake of a doctoral work. With the help of a structured schedule and personal interview primary data have been collected. The respondents are elected Women Sarpanch and women ward members of Gram panchayat of sample blocks of Baliana, Chilika and Jatani in the district of Khurda. The number of sample respondents comprising of sarpanchs and ward members is 136. In depth interview of some representatives of panchayat samitis and gram panchayats has been conducted during the period from May 2014 to Feb 2015. Their perception and awareness really matters towards the effective functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions strengthened under the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment.

### 1. Elected from General seats or Reserved seats for women

The political background of a person influences his behaviour and participation in policy making process. Hence the political profile of respondents is considered as crucial with a view to understand the status of women representatives. The study investigated the following aspects of their political careers; involvement of family members in politics, age of entering active politics and motivating factors etc.

Table 1 Post - Reserved for women / General

| Sl No | Block   | Elected from Reserved seats |        | Elected from Un-reserved / General seats |        | Total |       |
|-------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|--|--------|-------|-------|
| 1     | Baliana | 42                          | (84.0) | 8  | (16.0) | 50    | (100) |
| 2     | Chilika | 45                          | (97.8) | 1  | (2.2)  | 46    | (100) |
| 3     | Jatani  | 35                          | (87.5) | 5  | (12.5) | 40    | (100) |
| Total |         | 122                         | (89.7) | 14                                       | (10.3) | 136   | (100) |

With regard to political back background, from study it has found that out of 136 respondents 122 (89.7%) respondents belong to reserved category and 14 (10.3%) belong to general category. It implies that women are not contesting from reserved seats only but also from un-reserved seats.

## 2. Entry into politics:

Experience moulds one's efficiency and contributes to one's maturity. To have an idea about experience of women PRI representatives, the following data have been collected from them.

Table 2 Respondent's year of entry into politics

| Sl No | Block    | 2002 |     | 2007 |        | 2012 |        | Total     |
|-------|----------|------|-----|------|--------|------|--------|-----------|
| 1     | Balianta | 0    | (0) | 6    | (12.0) | 44   | (88.0) | 50 (100)  |
| 2     | Chilika  | 0    | (0) | 3    | (6.5)  | 43   | (93.5) | 46 (100)  |
| 3     | Jatani   | 0    | (0) | 4    | (10.0) | 36   | (90.0) | 40 (100)  |
| Total |          | 0    | (0) | 13   | (9.6)  | 123  | (90.4) | 136 (100) |

It has also been found that 90.4 % of respondents have entered politics in the year 2012 and only 9.6 % of respondents have entered in 2007. No respondent has prior experience before 2007. In 2007, 12 % of respondents in Balianta, 10 % in Jatani and 6.5 % in Chilika have entered into politics.

From interaction with respondents, it is revealed that when the post of sarpanch becomes reserved for woman the villagers and the family members put pressure upon a women ward member to contest election for second time even if the post of ward member is meant for a general candidate. So that their candidate will get an opportunity to be a sarpanch. Otherwise in case of de-reservation women are not usually inclined to contest election.

## 3. Evincing First interest in Politics:

Age plays an important role in every body's life, as with the passage of time one learns various things from society and becomes an experienced one. The age factor plays crucial role in gathering knowledge and experience. So, the question to respondents regarding their age when they have developed their initial interest in politics was included in the schedule. The table 3 depicts the age when the respondents were first interested in politics.

Table 3 Age when first interested in Politics

| Sl No | Block    | Age             |       |               |        |               |        |               |        |                    |       | Total    |
|-------|----------|-----------------|-------|---------------|--------|---------------|--------|---------------|--------|--------------------|-------|----------|
|       |          | Within 30 Years |       | 31 - 40 years |        | 41 - 50 years |        | 51 - 60 Years |        | 61 and above years |       |          |
| 1     | Balianta | 0               | (0.0) | 25            | (50.0) | 13            | (26.0) | 12            | (24.0) | 0                  | (0.0) | 50 (100) |
| 2     | Chilika  | 0               | (0.0) | 22            | (47.8) | 14            | (30.4) | 10            | (21.7) | 0                  | (0.0) | 46 (100) |
| 3     | Jatani   | 0               | (0.0) | 19            | (47.5) | 10            | (25.0) | 11            | (27.5) | 0                  | (0.0) | 40 (100) |
| Total |          | 0               | (0.0) | 66            | (48.5) | 37            | (27.2) | 33            | (24.3) | 0                  | (0.0) | 136(100) |

From the analysis it has been observed that maximum number of respondents have shown their first interest in politics when they were in the age group of 31-40. Balianta block shows the highest number of youth representation i.e. 50 %. Chilika (47.8 %) and Jatani (47.5%) represent close competition with each other in the age group of 31-40. This is a positive sign. One interesting observation is that nobody has shown interest in joining politics prior to age of 30 and after attaining the age of 61. One lady respondent points out that because of social milieu the villagers prefer to elect middle aged women.

## 4. Involvement of family in politics

To assess the nature of influence of the family members on the political career of the respondents the specific question whether anyone of their family members was elected to the Panchayat bodies / urban bodies / Assembly was asked. Table 4 provides information about involvement of family members in politics. From study it has been found that the family members of the respondents, who answered yes to this question, were elected to only panchayat bodies.

Table4. Involvement of family in politics.

| Was any one of your family members elected to Gram Panchayat? |          |     |        |     |        |  |  |  |  |       |           |  |
|---|----------|-----|--------|-----|--------|--|--|--|--|-------|-----------|--|
| Sl No   | Block    | Yes |        | No  |        |  |  |  |  | Total |           |  |
| 1   | Balianta | 12  | (24.0) | 38  | (76.0) |  |  |  |  |       | 50 (100)  |  |
| 2   | Chilika  | 5   | (10.9) | 41  | (89.1) |  |  |  |  |       | 46 (100)  |  |
| 3   | Jatani   | 8   | (20.0) | 32  | (80.0) |  |  |  |  |       | 40 (100)  |  |
| Total   |          | 25  | (18.4) | 111 | (81.6) |  |  |  |  |       | 136 (100) |  |

Balianta represents highest number of respondents i.e. 24 % who have some family members elected to panchayat bodies earlier and Chilika represents least number of respondents having political background i.e. 10.9 %.

**5. Source of inspiration for joining politics:**

A successful democracy needs active citizens. At the same time owing to several constraints citizens become indolent. Some develop more interest in politics because of their education, family back ground and influence of political leaders. In order to know their source of inspiration, the respondents were asked ‘What was your source of inspiration for entering into politics?’

Table 5, Source of inspiration for joining politics

| Sl No | Block   | Joined Politics |                      |                   |           |                      |              |  |  |  | Total     |
|-------|---------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------|----------------------|--------------|--|--|--|-----------|
|       |         | Own Interest    | Encouraged by family | By party / leader | Political | By Village community | Other reason |  |  |  |           |
| 1     | Baliana | 15 (30.00)      | 8 (16.00)            | 3 (6.00)          |           | 24 (48.00)           | 0 (0.00)     |  |  |  | 50 (100)  |
| 2     | Chilika | 2 (4.35)        | 5 (10.87)            | 2 (4.35)          |           | 37 (80.43)           | 0 (0.00)     |  |  |  | 46 (100)  |
| 3     | Jatani  | 5 (12.50)       | 16 (40.00)           | 1 (2.50)          |           | 18 (45.00)           | 0 (0.00)     |  |  |  | 40 (100)  |
| Total |         | 22 (16.18)      | 29 (21.32)           | 6 (4.41)          |           | 79 (58.09)           | 0 (0.00)     |  |  |  | 136 (100) |

An analysis of the study shows that village community is the major source of inspiration for entering into panchayat bodies. About 80.43 % of Chilika has entered politics because of support by village community. In Baliana block 30 % of respondents have entered because of their own interest. Regarding encouragement of family members Jatani shows highest representation (40 %). Political parties and leaders seem to play less influential role in encouraging respondents to join politics.

It is worthy of note that Chilika Block being the least developed socio economically and inhabited by highest percentage of SCs displays the village community as the predominant persuasive factor in motivating the women candidates to contest.

**6. Idea about Gram panchayat:**

Women representatives have been often criticised as ‘proxy candidates’. In order to know the actual fact, whether they have any idea about gram panchayat prior to their election or they have merely become representatives as a result of reservation the following question was put to them.

Table 6. Did you have any idea about gram panchayat before being elected as representative?

| Sl No | GP      | Yes        |  | No      |  | Total     |
|-------|---------|------------|--|---------|--|-----------|
| 1     | Baliana | 50 (100.0) |  | 0 (0.0) |  | 50 (100)  |
| 2     | Chilika | 43 (93.5)  |  | 3 (6.5) |  | 46 (100)  |
| 3     | Jatani  | 39 (97.5)  |  | 1 (2.5) |  | 40 (100)  |
| Total |         | 132 (97.1) |  | 4 (2.9) |  | 136 (100) |

The above table and figure reveals that Baliana represents most conscious women PRI members, as 100% respondents have idea about gram panchayat before being elected as representatives. Next follows Jatani block with 97.5 % and Chilika with 93.5 % respondents who had idea about gram panchayat prior to their election. In Chilika 6.5 % of respondents which is highest among all three and in Jatani 2.5 % of respondents which is least among all the three have no idea about gram panchayat prior to their election.

**7. Source of Idea about Gram panchayat**

To be educated and conscious is the need of every active citizen in a democratic form of government. Various factors contribute towards citizens’ consciousness. In order to know that factor; the respondents were asked a follow up to the earlier question, “Did you have any idea about gram panchayat before being elected as representative? If yes, what is your source of idea?”

Table 7 Source of Idea about Gram panchayat

| Sl No/Block | Media     | Political meetings | Parents  | Spouse    | In-laws | Children | Any other | Not Known | Total     |
|-------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Baliana  | 9 (18.0)  | 15 (30.0)          | 5 (10.0) | 12 (24.0) | 2 (4.0) | 5 (10.0) | 2 (4.0)   | 0 (0.0)   | 50 (100)  |
| 2. Chilika  | 7 (15.2)  | 13 (28.3)          | 2 (4.3)  | 14 (30.4) | 3 (6.5) | 4 (8.7)  | 0 (0.0)   | 3 (6.5)   | 46 (100)  |
| 3. Jatani   | 4 (10.0)  | 14 (35.0)          | 3 (7.5)  | 11 (27.5) | 1 (2.5) | 4 (10.0) | 2 (5.0)   | 1 (2.5)   | 40 (100)  |
| Total       | 20 (14.7) | 42 (30.9)          | 10 (7.4) | 37 (27.2) | 6 (4.4) | 13 (9.6) | 4 (2.9)   | 4 (2.9)   | 136 (100) |

An analysis of the above table shows that 18 % respondents of Baliana, 15.2 % of Chilika and 10 % of Jatani have got idea about gram panchayat from media. 30 % respondents of Baliana, 35 % of Jatani and 28.3 % of Chilika have acquired knowledge through political meetings. 10 % respondents of Baliana, 7.5 % of Jatani and 4.3 % of Chilika have got idea about gram panchayat from their parents. 30.4 % of Chilika, 27.5 % of Jatani and 24 % respondents of Baliana have got idea about gram panchayat from their spouse. 6.5 % of Chilika, 4 % of Baliana and 2.5 % respondents of Jatani have got idea about gram panchayat from their in-laws. Baliana and Jatani shares same percentage i.e. 10 % each in getting idea from their children. 8.7 % respondents of Chilika have got idea from their children. 4 % of respondents of Baliana block and 5 % from Jatani block have got idea from their educational institutions during their student career. Chilika displays low level of political consciousness but family ties contributed to political ideas about Gram Panchayats is found to be higher than the other two blocks.

**8. Interested to contest election for another term:**

Generally, the woman representatives were persuaded by their male folk of the family with the support of villagers to contest election. The study also throws light on whether women representatives are interested to contest elections a second or third time.

Table 8 Do you want to contest election for another term?

| Sl No | Block    | Election for another term |        |    |        |       |       |
|-------|----------|---------------------------|--------|----|--------|-------|-------|
|       |          | Yes                       |        | No |        | Total |       |
| 1     | Balianta | 42                        | (84.0) | 8  | (16.0) | 50    | (100) |
| 2     | Chilika  | 21                        | (45.6) | 25 | (54.4) | 46    | (100) |
| 3     | Jatani   | 28                        | (70.0) | 12 | (30.0) | 40    | (100) |
| Total |          | 91                        | (66.9) | 45 | (33.1) | 136   | (100) |

The study reveals that 84 % from Balianta block, 70 % from Jatani and 45.6 % from Chilika are interested to contest election for another term. 54.4 % from Chilika, 30 % from Jatani and 16 % from Balianta block are not interested to contest election for another term. The reasons they have attributed are lack of time, lack of their skill and lack of support from village community as well as from bureaucracy. Again Chilika as expected displays least interest among the PRI representative to contest for the next term.

**9. Interest in election after De-reservation of post:**

There are varieties of factors that may inhibit a woman from re-contesting an election. It is a common knowledge that due to rotation of reserved seats women elected earlier cannot contest election second time. The study also tries to ascertain whether because of the de-reservation of that particular seat the woman representatives feel constrained in contesting election for a general seat or not. The following table answers this question.

Table9. If your post gets de-reserved will you be interested to contest election with male counterpart?

| Sl No | GP       | If your post gets de-reserved will you be interested to contest election with male counterpart? |        |    |        |       |       |
|-------|----------|---|--------|----|--------|-------|-------|
|       |          | Yes   |        | No |        | Total |       |
| 1     | Balianta | 39  | (78.0) | 11 | (22.0) | 50    | (100) |
| 2     | Chilika  | 19  | (41.3) | 27 | (58.7) | 46    | (100) |
| 3     | Jatani   | 25  | (62.5) | 15 | (37.5) | 40    | (100) |
| Total |          | 83  | (61.0) | 53 | (39.0) | 136   | (100) |

A few number of respondents has dropped idea of contesting election due to de-reservation of seats. In Balianta 78 % of respondents, in Jatani 62.5 % and in Chilika 41.3 % are still interested to contest election even if their seats get de-reserved. This adds a feather to the cap of Panchayati Raj system, since it is clear that PRI representatives are interested in contesting election in spite of hurdles like de-reservation of seats or posts.

**10. Influence of family background and financial status on election:**

While indentifying out the factors influencing election of representatives, their family background and financial status would be considered as the important factors. Her leadership and representation in governance to a large extent is determined by her family background. It is found that women from sound family background work with greater enthusiasm and vigour. The importance of family background and financial status on one's election to panchayat bodies has been reflected below.

Table10. Do you feel that family background and financial status of a candidate influence one's election to panchayat bodies?

| Sl No | Block    | Do you feel that family background and financial status of a candidate influence one's election to panchayat bodies? |        |    |        |       |       |
|-------|----------|--|--------|----|--------|-------|-------|
|       |          | Yes  |        | No |        | Total |       |
| 1     | Balianta | 26   | (52.0) | 24 | (48.0) | 50    | (100) |
| 2     | Chilika  | 37   | (80.4) | 9  | (19.6) | 46    | (100) |
| 3     | Jatani   | 32   | (80.0) | 8  | (20.0) | 40    | (100) |
| Total |          | 95   | (69.9) | 41 | (30.1) | 136   | (100) |

Analysis of the above table reveals that 80.4 % of respondents of Chilika block identify family background and financial status as determinant of one's election which is followed by Jatani with 80 %. 52% respondents of Balianta block holding this as important factor and 48 % do not agree on this point. 20 % respondents from Jatani block and 19.6 % of Chilika replied in the negative.

These findings can be compared with the one specified in Acharya's Value Orientation of the Legislative Elite (2008). He has made the point that money and muscle power has been identified by the legislator respondents to be the most important factor in Odisha. One respondent who was a Cabinet Minister has been quoted in the above work as saying that 'candidate who gave maximum amount of money on the night before election would be victorious.'

**11. Support from groups in functioning as representatives:**

Only laws, plans and policies are not enough to bring women into political process. Women will be able to gain power only when the society will begin respect and accept her contribution. In order to be successful representatives women PRI members, need support from all sections of society. To ascertain the type of support they get from the society respondents were asked the following question.

Table 11. Which group / groups in your village give you maximum support for functioning as representatives?

| Sl No | GP       | Male |        | Female |        | Total |       |
|-------|----------|------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1     | Balianta | 26   | (52.0) | 24     | (48.0) | 50    | (100) |
| 2     | Chilika  | 27   | (58.7) | 19     | (41.3) | 46    | (100) |
| 3     | Jatani   | 23   | (57.5) | 17     | (42.5) | 40    | (100) |
| Total |          | 76   | (55.9) | 60     | (44.1) | 136   | (100) |

The above table reveals that in Chilika 58.7 % of respondents have got support from male community. In Jatani block 57.5 % and in Balianta 52 % of respondents have got support from male members. In Balianta 48 % of respondents are depending upon support from female groups whereas for Jatani and Chilika it is 42.5 % and 41.3 % respectively. It is worth noting that the female PRI functionaries of each of the three blocks identify male community as their main support base of effective functioning as representatives.

#### Conclusion:

The political profile of women PRI members of the study area i.e. Khurda shows that they have evinced interest in politics in the age group of 31-40. A preponderant majority of the respondents in found to have entered into politics in the year 2012. A preponderant majority is also found to be first generation politicians of the three sample blocks, Chilika being socio-economically backward, political consciousness is found to be low. Their family (spouse, children) has found to be stronger in that area as transmitter of political information and hence can be characterised as political mobiliser more than in the other two blocks. Money and family influence and not muscle power is found to be the major determinant of voting behaviour at the grass roots level.

From political point of view, they are conscious about their back ground and they are showing interest to be involved in politics despite de-reservation of their seats in next election. It is positive sign of rural women being empowered politically. Though an encouraging number of women representatives are from non-political back ground, they are apparently ambitious and assertive. It is certain that after constitutional amendment, a large number of women have come to occupy leadership position in the panchayats. This is a major advancement in the process of empowerment of rural women and in due course of time as awareness level among women will increase they will come to play their due role successfully and effectively.

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