

Socio-Political Empowerment of Dalits Leadership in District Panipat in 2016 Panchayat Elections

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ABSTRACT:

India is a country of villages as more than 65 percent of the population resides in the villages. In these villages local power structure is dominated by agriculturalist upper castes. Dalits which is count as lower castes having about 20 percent share in the population of Haryana, but their representation is less than their share of population in every field except Panchayati Raj Institutions. In panchayats they could not play vital role due to the pressure of caste politics. This paper is a part of my Thesis Entitled “Emerging Patterns of Leadership in Haryana Panchayati Raj: A case study of District Panipat”, which is awarded in 2020 by CCSU, Meerut. This study attempted to find out that what types of Dalits Leadership is emerging after 2016 Panchayat election in Haryana. The study specifically concentrated on looking the socio-economic and political background and to know about the awareness & Knowledgeability (about the Panchayati Raj Act-1993, Haryana Panchayati Raj-1994 and Haryana Panchayati Raj Amendment Act-2015) of elected 11 Dalits Sarpanches (7 man & 4 women) of all six blocks of District Panipat of Haryana state. In this paper researcher was also want to know the vision of the respondents about national issues and their role in Panchayat. The experience has exposed that most of the sarpanches were young, and all of them were educated & elected as a Sarpanch on first time. However, the study has found that although all the Sarpanches were educated but have not sufficient knowledge and not aware about their power, function and rules of panchayati raj. This Paper is an attempt to find out the impact of educational qualifications implemented in Haryana to contest the Panchayati elections. It is also trying to find out that what types of Dalits Leadership is emerging in Haryana Panchayats after 2016 election.

Keywords: Dalits, Leadership, Local Self-Government, Socio-Economic, Panchayati Raj Institution, Sarpanch, Social Welfare Schemes, Scheduled Castes, Development Programme, Panchayati Raj-Act, Knowledge, Awareness and Gram Panchayat.

Introduction

The old Panchayati Raj System, setup in 1959, had failed to empower the Dalits as it did not endow with for reservations for them. Instead, it had made provision for a system of cooption which enabled the Dalits to get only a nominal share at the grassroots level. The consciousness of this fact had made the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, to provide for satisfactory representation to the Dalits in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) through the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill which he had moved in the Lok Sabha in 1989. But this Bill, which had been passed by the Lok Sabha by two-thirds majority, could not be passed in the Rajya Sabha. However, his objective of empowerment of Dalits got realized in 1992 when the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Bill was passed and became an Act in 1993. This Act was implemented by all the States through the conformity legislations in 1994. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provides for the reservation of membership and offices to the Dalits in proportion to their share in the population at all the three levels of the PRIs- the Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad.

However the gram panchayat was very powerful in ancient India. Its head was called Gramini. He used to be assisted by five panches. They enjoyed great respect and were known as Panch Parmeshwar¹. But the British also started creating statutory panchayats after the

recommendations of the Royal Commission on Decentralization (1909)². Such Panchayats were created in Haryana region (then a part of Punjab Province) by the Punjab Village Panchayats Act-1912³. Attempts were made to strengthen these by the Punjab Village Panchayat Act -1921 and by the Punjab Village Panchayats Act (1939)⁴. After the independence of India, the government of Punjab enacted Punjab Gram Panchayat Act (1953) for creating on the Gram Panchayats elected on the basis of the universal adult franchise. Although the task of rural development had been assigned under the Community Development Programme. The Gram Panchayat was to be assisted by a Panchayat Secretary⁵. It was the recognition of the failure of the Community Development Programme that led to the appointment of Balwantrai Mehta Committee in 1957, for finding out its causes and for suggesting the ways and means to strengthen it Panchayati Raj Institutions setup in 1959, on the recommendations of Balwantrai Mehta committee, had failed to empower the weaker sections, as dalits were not getting reservation in these institutions. Instead, there was a provision for a system of cooption which enabled the dalits to get only a nominal representation at local level.

The realization of this fact had made the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, to provide for adequate representation to the Dalits in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. However, his objective of empowerment of Dalits got realized in 1992 when the 73rd Constitutional Amendment

- 1 A.K. Majumdar and Bhanwar Singh, Historical and Conceptual Development of Panchayati Raj, Radha Publication, New Delhi, 1997, p1
- 2 Dalia Goswami, Evolution of Panchayati Raj in Haryana, (Unpublished Dissertation), Department of History, Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra, 1999, p12
- 3 Ibid, p15
- 4 Report of the Study Team on Panchayati Raj in Punjab, Government of Punjab, Chandigarh, 1966, cited from Harbhagwan Bhatla, Panchayati Raj and Political Parties, An empirical study at Grass Root level in Haryana, Nirmal Book Agency, Kurukshetra, 1994, pp20-35
- 5 Dalia Goswami, p 31

Bill was passed. The Bill became an Act in 1993 and was implemented by all the States through the conformity legislations in 1994. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provides for the reservation of membership and offices to the Dalits in proportion to their share in the population at the Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad levels⁶.

This is an attempt to study “Socio-Political Empowerment of Dalits Leadership in District Panipat in 2016 Panchayat elections”. Dalits, who constitute one-fifth of its population, have not been able to get their due share in development due to their relative social, educational, cultural and economic backwardness in comparison with the backward and the dominant castes. Moreover,

there has emerged a sharp divide among the two major Dalit castes- the Chamar’s & the Balmikis (SC and deprived SC)- which has prevented them from joining hands for competing with the dominant castes in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Furthermore, the coalition between the Dalits and the backward castes is also conspicuous by its absence in Haryana. It is also pertinent to mention that the State has been notorious for numerous instances of atrocities on the Dalits which received wide publicity in the print and the electronic media. In this context, it is pertinent to mention that, as many as four Panchayati Raj elections have been held in the State in 1994, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2016 since the implementation of this Act in 1994. However, this study is confined only to the Dalits Sarpanches of the Gram Panchayats.

Dalits Sarpanches in Gram Panchayats of Haryana in last five elections

Sr. No	Year of Election	Total Sarpanches	Dalits Sarpanch	Percentage	Dalits Women Sarpanch
1.	1994	5958	1199	20.12%	419
2	2000	6032	1213	20.10%	408
3.	2005	6187	1262	20.39%	446
4.	2010	6083	1232	20.25%	432
5.	2016	6193	1278	20.63%	455

(Source: Compiled from ‘The Statistical Abstracts of Haryana, Government of Haryana, Chandigarh, & Report of State Election Commission 1994, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2016)

As evident from the data, there was a quantum jump in the share of the Dalits in the offices of Sarpanch in 1994 elections. They were able to get more than one-fifth posts in these. This could happen only in those few cases where the factionalism was very acute in the dominant castes. Although, there were minor fluctuations in 2000, 2005 and 2010 elections, the share of Dalits remained near one-fifth in all of them. This leads us to the question as to

how far the Dalits have been really empowered as a result of their enhanced representation. In the election of 2016 percentage of elected Dalits Sarpanches was increased from 419 in 1994 to 455 in Panchayats election 2016. However, the enhanced representation has not resulted in the enhancement of the empowerment of Dalits. The Sarpanches covered in the study found it difficult to perform their role in an effective manner. The attitude of the Panches and other influential

6 Ranbir Singh and Anuja Thaper, Challenging task of Empowering Dalits in the Panchayats of Haryana, Panchayati Raj Update, Institution of Social Sciences, Vol-XXI, No-4, April-2014

persons from the dominant castes and the officials was generally obstructive. Some of them did try to assert their authorities in spite of heavy odds⁷.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has included in the Indian Constitution Eleven Schedule which contains as many as 29 subjects⁸. The Panchayati Raj Institutions have been given the responsibility of making and implementing the plans of economic development and social justice on those of the subjects listed in the Eleven Schedule. As a result Panchayati Raj leadership has been given an important work in the process of decentralized planning. The above stated formulation is the rationale behind the decision to study “Socio-Political Empowerment of Dalits Leadership in District Panipat in 2016 Panchayat elections.” Since the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act (1994) has given to the Gram Panchayats of the state, all the subjects listed in the Eleven Schedule and the Government of Haryana has also given to the institutions of Gram Sabha the responsibility to making annual development plans under the guidance of Gram Panchayat. Besides, the fact that the Gram Panchayat has not only to implement Centrally sponsored schemes government but also to implement Social Welfare Programme of the government of Haryana has further enhanced the importance of the Gram Panchayats in general and Sarpanches in particular.

Even in the Gram Panchayat has further been made Sarpanch-centric because he/she is elected directly by the members of Gram Sabha

for a term of five years. He/ She can neither be removed by the members of Gram Panchayat nor by the members of the Gram Sabha by passing a No-Confidence Motion against him/her. Only the Director of the Panchayats of Government of Haryana can remove him/her for the acts of omission and commission and the Deputy Commissioner can suspend him/her for the same reasons. Beside that as it may the study of “Socially and politically empowerment of Dalits Leadership in District Panipat after 2016 Panchayats election has assumed an added importance after the prescription of minimum educational qualifications as well as certain disqualifications for contesting panchayat elections⁹.

The concept of Panchayati Raj

Panchayati raj is not a new concept; it subsisted from the Vedic period itself in India. The meaning of Panchayat its formation and functions is from, Panch + Ayat. The word Panchayat derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Panchen’ and ‘Ayatanam’. The Sanskrit word ‘Panchen’ means five members¹⁰.

“It is considered as an institution of rural local self-government, as a nursery to train the rural leadership, as a mechanism of rural development and ideas to realize genuine democracy at the village level”¹¹. Ziauddin define Panchayati Raj as “an idea which is to bring the decision –making authority nearer to the people”.¹² It helps to encourage rural masses for participatory

7 Ranbir Singh, ‘Grassroots Democracy in Haryana: Some Field Observations’, The Grassroots Governance Journal, Vol. IV, No.1, 2006)

8 Anuja Thapar, “New Panchayati Raj System and Women Empowerment, the Experience”, Dialogue, Volume- 15, No.2, October-December, 2013, p172

9 The Tribune, Chandigarh, 12 August 2015, p1

10 R.V. Jather, Evolution of Panchayati Raj in India, Bhatkal Book International, Bombay, 1964, p3

11 Hugh Tinker, Foundation of Local Self-Government in India, Pakistan and Burma, Lalvani Publishing house, Bombay, 1967, p19. cited in Nikunjata Dutta, op.cit, p3.

12 Edward Gait, History of Assam, ABH Publisher, Guwahati, 2008, p244

democracy and emergence of democratic and active leadership at grass-root level and brings the decision making authorities nearer to the people.

Literature Reviewed

Singh and Thapar (2014)¹³, conclude that SCs Sarpanches share in panchayats has shown a quantum jump in Haryana panchayats election since 1994, and this could be made possible only due to the reservation. However, the enhanced representation has not resulted in the enhancement of the empowerment of weaker sections. They conclude that the dalits have not been politically empowered, and have not been consulted in the decision making.

Abrol (2015)¹⁴, concluded in his study that Haryana Panchayati Raj Amendment Act, 2015 is the violation of right to contest the panchayats election for Scheduled Castes, Women and Poor class, which is given by the constitution. He also concludes that the literacy rate in the 21 districts of Haryana is less than half and the condition debarred these SCs and Women of rural areas to contesting the panchayats elections.

In 2017 Kesale¹⁵, observed in his study entitled, “Selected Experiences of the use of the Village Assembly in the Governance at the Grassroots levels in Ludewa District Council in Tanzania” He found in his study that the village assembly influence on local government about promotion of accountability, participation and transparency after reform campaign began by Tanzania government and influence on village assembly depend on situation of the villages. He

revealed that the influence of the village assembly higher, where members of village assembly are active participants, have highly educated and aware on village issues.

An overview of the survey of existing literature on the concerned topic revealed that it continues to remain inadequate for the understanding of the problem. Above, studies are rather superficial and lack in-depth analysis.

Methodology

A Purposive and Random Sampling designed to collect the primary data from 33% sample of Dalits sarpanches in district Panipat. Total number of our respondents in this research paper are 11 included 4 female and seven male Sarpanches, The entire selected representative who were available and were easily within reach, have been interviewed. Primary and Secondary data were used. The Primary data was collected with the help of personally administered interview schedule from the elected Dalits Sarpanches in 2016 elections.

FINDING OF THE STUDY:

1. Age groups of the Respondents

Young age group of a leader plays a vital role in local or national politics. It has a great impact on the behavior patterns of the members of society .Since the Sarpanch are required to play role in the exercise of the regulatory powers and functions that has been assigned to the sarpanch or Gram Panchayat by the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act-1994. As we saw in above figure that

- 13 Ranbir Singh and Anju Thapar, “Challenging task of Empowering Dalits in the Panchayat of Haryana” Panchayati Raj Update ,Institute of Social Sciences,Vol.XXI,No-4, April 2014,pp 1,6
- 14 V.B Abrol, “Panchayat Chunao me Ummidwari per Shart, ek Loktantra Virodhi Kadam”, Panchayati Raj Update, Institute of Social Sciences, Vol. IX, No- 7, July 2016, pp 1,5.
- 15 Anosisye Mwandulusya Kesale,Selected Experiences of the use of the Village Assembly in the Governance at the Grassroots levels in Ludewa District Council in Tanzania, Journal of Public Administration and Governance, ISSN-2161-7104,Vol-7,No-2,2017,p1-11

at present time that majority (54.54 percent) of young Dalits Sarpanches between the age of 21-35 and dominated the local level leadership. One third of the total found between the age of 36-50 (Middle Age) and only a few were above the age of 50 years. We can conclude that present leadership of the local self government in the hand of youth.

2. Qualifications of the Respondents-

Education plays a vital role in decision making and educated person think reasonable the problems. Educational qualification make mandatory for everyone who want to contest the Panchayat Election since 2015. About one – third dalits sarpanch are 10th pass about 1/10 are B.A.pass and same figure are M.A.It is trhe sign of that Dalit leadership also highly educated at local level. Eduction enrich the knoweldge of a person and capable him/her to handle the obstaclein her /his pathway of development works ar local level.

3. Income and occupation of the Respondents

Economic background of a leaderhas have been linked with the probablity to getting political status and influences the attitude of a leader towards various economic stratums. Occupation is an important fector for influencing the local leadership. In present agriculture is the main occupation of the rural society. The data coolected for present study clearly indicates that Two-third sarpanches have less then 2 Lakh per annual.But about one-third Dalits Sarpanch have their own agriculture land up to 5 Acres. It means that DalitsLeadership have becoming socially and economially sound.Although about 50 percent Dalits sarpanches are related to labour occupation but they are educated and play active role in Gram Panchayat.The researcher found in this study that, about 75 percent Dalit sarpanch

play great extent role in decision making while one/fifth not play any role in decision making in Gram sabha and Gram Panchayat.Seventy Five percent sarpanch accepted that there are a great differnceh between the role of Genral and SC women sarpanches.

4. Political Background of the Respondents

Political background of candidates affects her/his attitude, orientation and performance of his/her role as a leader. As a matter of fact, local politics awards political parties an opportunity to strengthen their foothold and open new possibility to satisfy the political ambition of their local leadership at grassroots level. Data collected from the respondents cleared that majority of them accepted that they have no membership of any National or Local Parties. But a good shine that 45% dalits sarpanches have personal political affiliation out of them 40% from BJP and same figure from Congress and remaining from INLD the regional party. This indicates that political awareness is increased among the Dalits Leaders.

5. Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings

Gram Panchayat meeting shall be held at least twice in a month and Minimum five meetings of Gram Sabha may be held in a one year at a public place by the Sarpanch, but mostly meetings are not called and only formalities are fulfilled. In this researcher found that 74% Dalits Sarpanches called the Gram Sabha and Panchayat meetings while about 15% respondents called these meetings and participated themselves. Only four percent called these meeting once in a while and mostly participated by their family members.

6. Dalits Sarpanches role in Decision Making

Before 1993 dalits sarpanches have merely a nominal share in rural politics and only one

dalits male panch have been co-opted in case no dalits representative was elected. Women representation has mostly been insignificant due to male dominant culture in rural India. If a sarpanch is active, educated and works without biasness may be able to solve the problems related to proceedings and socio-economic development works in the village and able to take the cooperation from villager. On the basis of analysis it may be concluded that 72.72 percent respondents play to great extent role in Gram Panchayats while 63.63 percent female respondents play no role. This affect may be due to the prescriptions of educational qualification and it may be able to breakdown the shackles of castism in rural India. Till date they are away from play a large role in decision making in Gram Panchayat.

7. Knowledge about 1993 Act, Haryana Panchayati Raj Act- 1994 and amended in 2015 of the Respondents

The Seventy Third Constitutional Amendment Act-1993 is the edifice of the new system of Panchayati Raj, which is supposed to be given new lease of life to the Panchayat. It was very discouraging to find from the data that only one-third of the Dalits Sarpanche claimed knowledge on the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act-1993 while data about the awareness of Haryana Panchayati Raj Act-1994, indicates that 54.54 percent Dalits sarpanches know about the features of this Act. It was very interesting to find out that 90.90 percent Dalits leaders found aware about the Haryana Panchayati Raj Amendment Act-2015, because Haryana Government implemented education qualification for every post of Panchayati Raj Institution. It is also assumed that educated person should discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad.

8. Awareness about National and Social Issues

About three-fourth dalits sarpanches have knowledge about Central Sponsored schemes of India and State welfare program. All respondents know about “Beti Bachao and Beti Pado” campaign of Government of India. Ninety percent respondent wants reservation for women in Lok-Sabha. It may be the affect of education that about 2/3 dalits sarpanches accepted that reservation should be based on the caste and economic basis both, only 1/3 respond that it should be basis on caste only. Maximum respondents accepted that B.A. should be the minimum educational qualifications to contest the Lok-Sabha and Rajya Sabha elections.

Conclusion

On the basis of primary data received by questionnaire may be concluded that, All Dalits sarpanches are elected in first time and have no past experiences of leadership and also no family members are elected in Panchayati Raj System before 2106 elections. No one elected from the open seats it means that the caste system is continuously dominated the rural power structure. But strong part of this analysis is that all are educated beyond the essential educational qualifications. Total four percent sarpanches of Haryana elected unanimously but data cleared that not a single Dalits sarpanh elected unanimously in district Panipat. There is no doubt that two-third majority of the dalit sarpanches working properly but the dark part is that dalits women sarpanches not properly working due to their social status. About 50% respondents’s role in Gram Panchayats was very impressive. Dalits sarpanches in Panipat district, found very active as; Panki Rani from Simla Moullana got best Sarpanche awards from D.C

Panipat. She has completed her M.A. English and B.Ed. She Called & participated every Gram Sabha & Gram Panchayat meetings themselves. Sarpanch from Badouli and some other dalits sarpanches have been facing the corruption charges. Sarpanch of Gram Panchayat Nara of Matlauda Block, Shri. Suraj Bhan found very active due to his working style. Sarpanch of Gram Panchayat, Puther Mrs. Nirmala Devi accepted that she have no knowledge about proceedings and other issues of Panchayati Raj and her role of sarpanch play by her Husband in practical. Sarpanche from Namunda Village Panchayt have the same position of Nirmala. Mr. Jai Kumar ,Sarpanch of Village Panchayat Goela Khera of Bapoli Block found that he has good Knowledge of Panchayati Raj Act. But the dominant class of the village make barrier in the way of panchayat working. Poonam Devi, Sarpanch of Kurad of Sanouli Khurd Block also accepted that she has no role in decision making in Gram Panchayat.

Although historically excluded groups and communities are now included in these decision-making bodies (more than 660,000 elected members, i.e. 22.5%, in the rural and urban local bodies are from Dalits. The dominant castes see panchayats as one of the tools for the dalits sarpanches to assert their rights. The prevailing trend is to weaken and destroy these instruments. It is evident that the upper castes that have been controlling the affairs of the village and the local community are yet to reconcile to the empowerment of Dalits. Panchayat-related caste violence and fake corruption cases registered

continues increased and has become a part of the social reality today.

Even after coming to positions of power, elected educated Dalit representatives are restricted in effective exercise of their leadership; they do not get the power and status they deserve. This conquest is doubly so in the case of women Dalit sarpanch. In several cases, the presence of a Dalits sarpanch has greatly contributed to the participation of greater numbers of the Dalits community in gram sabha meetings.

The mass media, communication technology and spatial educated leadership in Haryana have broken the isolation of villages. Incidents even in remote village panchayats are grabbing the national limelight. It is rightly said by George Mathew, in his paper 'Panchayats: hope for dalit rights' that, "In states and regions which have witnessed strong social movements, Dalit panchayat leaders have begun to assert their constitutional rights and the dominant castes have begun to accept these changes, though grudgingly. It holds out hope for the future."

Suggestions

They suggested that to enhance Dalits leadership, providing the special training in digital and communication skill to the members including gram panchayat sarpanches. Strong campaigns should be made by the Haryana Institute of Rural Development and Progressive Panchayats should be rewarded by the government.