

**Public Deliberation and Palli Sabha in Odisha: A Case Study of Burupada Panchayat of Ganjam District**

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**Abstract**

The complexities of modern world demand that democracy cannot simply be a matter of procedures. There is a need to give opportunities to people to participate in decision making process through public deliberation. The present paper seeks to reveal how public deliberation is working in spite of structural inequalities deep rooted in rural Odisha especially in Burupada panchayat of Ganjam district. This paper examines how far participation of rural people through discussion in Palli Sabha has strengthened the social justice, political equality.

**Key Words-** Democracy, Public deliberation, Structural inequalities, Palli Sabha

**Introduction**

The idea that ordinary people should have an opportunity to participate in important decision making process is as old as democracy. A great deal of recent democratic political theory has revolved around the concept of democratic deliberation. It is true that the formal procedural aggregative model of democracy has failed to evolve an inclusive policy which could ensure the inclusion of the historically, socially and culturally excluded groups in the decision making process. The complexities of modern world demand that democracy cannot simply be a matter of procedures. There is a need to invoke the old idea of 'civic virtue' in modern democracies. Around 1990 the theory of democracy took a definite deliberative turn that had given rise to deliberative democracy which argues for public deliberation and civic engagement. Prior to that turn, the democratic ideal was seen mainly in terms of aggregation of preferences or interests

into collective decisions through devices such as voting and representations. Under public deliberation, the essence of democratic legitimacy should be sought instead in the ability of all individuals subject to a collective decision to engage in authentic deliberation about the decision. These individuals should accept the decision only if it could be justified to them convincing terms. The idea that legitimate govt. should embody the "will of the people" has a long history and appears in many variants. As the beneficiary of this rich heritage, the concept of public deliberation that has emerged in the last few decades specially after the growth of Deliberative Democracy represent an exciting development in political theory. Broadly defined public deliberation refers to the idea that legitimate law making issues from the discussion of citizens. As a normative account of legitimacy, public deliberation invokes ideas of rational legislation, participatory politics and civic self-

governance. In short it represents an idea of political autonomy based on the practical reasoning of citizens. "Deliberation to address social challenges in health, science, education and the environment are proliferating around the globe. Deliberative processes have been used, for example, to strengthen local government and civil society in Bolivia, promote growth and sustainability in Perth, Australia and advise health ministers in Canada on new health technologies" (Blacksher, Diebel, Forest, Goold and Abelson, 2012: 14). In its most general usage, public deliberation refers to a form of public discussion that seeks collective solutions to different challenges. The term public refers to ordinary people with an emphasis on the inclusion of groups whose voices are marginalized in political processes and in daily life. This feature of deliberation reflects both a belief in citizen's abilities to understand and communicate about complex social issues and a view of citizens as equal participants in civil life.

The Constitution of India has been specified some cardinal objective viz. justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity for success of democracy. At the same time the preamble of Indian constitution states that the constitution derives its authority from the people of India because democracy means rule of people and the ultimate authority should be vested with the people. Therefore, we can conclude here that the sources of all power in a democratic country are people centric, thus they must have direct share in decision making processes. Though one of the greatest factor for the success of democracy is participation of the people in the affairs of the state, the inequalities and

injustice prevailing in the Indian societies are the obstacles to achieve the political participation of the community. The Constitution of India has provided many provisions to address structural inequalities, injustice etc. prevailing in Indian societies. Notwithstanding to all constitutional provisions, people have been suffering from inequalities, injustice because of many valid reasons. India has representative form of government where the only direct political participation people have is "voting". In Aggregative model of democracies voting is the only means through which public communicate their demands and supports to the political system by their elected representatives. The elected representatives impose their goals and preferences upon the public whereas the public should determine their own preferences and the duty of the elected representatives are to work according to the decision of the public. The best one is in which the political system is transparent and fulfills all the needs, desires and requirements of public. So we should have platform where people can directly participate in decision making process without any obstacles. Firstly I want to throw light on the conceptual understanding of public deliberation.

### **Public Deliberation: A Conceptual Understanding**

Public deliberation is a process which implies people can directly participate in policy making process through discussion and dialogue in order to reach consensus. Aggregative model of democracy implies that voting is the main source of legitimacy. The only means to get involved in politics is voting, yet voting behaviors of people are

often influenced by many factors viz. caste, gender, class, hunger, poverty, education, regionalism, communalism, nepotism etc. So it is very handy on the parts of politicians to change the minds of voters whichever way they want by disregarding the wishes and needs of the people. Within that fixed period voters have nothing to do. The representatives make laws, policies; decisions which are ultimately applied to the people, but people do not have any sharing and role in the decisions making process. The role and the significance of the people are soon become delimited after the election, and they remained nothing but mere manipulating tools in the hands of insalubrious politics. Therefore power sharing has been an obvious choice in a country, and every one whether poor or rich, male or female, lower caste or upper caste, educated or uneducated must have a valid and appropriate role in decision making process over reasonable discussions and public deliberations. Therefore people need atmosphere which will be conducive for them to take part in discussion, deliberation for practice of decision making that is above the mere aggregative model of democracy. The public deliberation reject the narrow conception of participation that is only depicts one's preferences. The concurrence between free and equal participation has been persisted as a crucial facet for the open practice of deliberation, as ultimately this consensus makes the course of participation exclusive and independent vis-à-vis the aggressive democratic model.

The significant development in democratic theory has been achieved in the last twenty years, which is largely recognized and

comes to the forefront with the functioning dynamism of deliberative democracy (Cohen, 1997). Now deliberative model of democracy has stretched its significance in the modern western political philosophy and has been thrived effectively to mark a dexterous rank within myriad characterizations of democracy. The role of public deliberation has become more relevant after the postwar periods, especially when it begins to debunk and eliminate the aggressive model of democracy, which has been delimiting the scope of democracy with election and vote right activities. While public deliberation believes in standardizing the democratic model by ameliorating the public cognizance and political perspective of the citizens. "The essence of democracy itself is now widely taken to be deliberation, as opposed to voting, interest aggregation, constitutional rights, or even self-government. The deliberative turn represents a renewed concern with the authenticity of democracy: the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic, and engaged by competent citizens" (Dryzek, 2000: 1)

Democracy in the view of Shyla Benhabib, is best understood is a model for organizing the collective and public exercise of power in the major institutions of a society on the basis of the principle that decision affecting the well-being of a collectivity can be viewed as the outcome of a procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals (Benhabib, 1996: 68 ). "According to the deliberative model of democracy, it is necessary condition for attaining legitimacy and rationality with regard to collective decision making processes in a polity, that the institutions of this polity are so arranged that what is considered in the common interest of all results from processes of

collective deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals"(Shyla Benhabib, 1996: 69). As Iris Marion Young said "Through the process of public discussion with a plurality of differently opinioned and situated others, people often gain new information, learn of different experiences of their collective problems, or find that their own initial opinions are founded on prejudice or ignorance, or that they have misunderstood the relation of their own interests to others" (Young, 2000: 26). Young has been underscored four regulating standards that are prudently connected in the deliberative model, viz. inclusion, political equality, reasonableness and publicity (Young, 2004).

Here we can say that Public deliberation gives right to direct participation to people in decisions making process which are ultimately applied on them. Public deliberation is a platform where everyone has rights to express his/her preferences. Deliberative platforms are designed to give more importance to the inputs of people. For public deliberation we need some prerequisite to make it a successful one. Therefore public deliberation needs equality, mutual respect, inclusion, equality of opportunity, informed citizens etc. Pluralism is the basic essence of Indian societies. So in a pluralist society it is very difficult to bring all the people together and make public deliberation successful. Despite of pluralism India has implemented public deliberation in the form of Gram Sabha and Palli Sabha which was instituted in 1992 as a part of 73rd amendment to the Constitution. How does India, with its Pluralism in society, inequality, illiteracy sustain a healthy public

deliberation ? We argue that deliberation in India has taken equality and social inclusion as one of its objective, rather than a precondition, that is deliberative institutions have served as a medium by which communities and people have to assert their dignity and demand their social equality, Backed by state policies aimed at inclusion, these institutions have become mechanism by which to empower those who have been historically sidelined from politics (Parthasarathy and Rao, 2017: 3). In this context I want to examine how and where public deliberation works in Odisha through which people can directly participate in the decision making process. How does it work despite the structural inequalities deep rooted in societies of Odisha? The only institutions where public deliberation is working in Odisha are Palli Sabha and Gram Sabha. At the outset I want to throw light on evolution of Local Self Government in Odisha which is an instrument for direct participation of people in India.

### **Brief Evolution Process of Panchayati Raj in Odisha**

Since ancient ages, the self governing institutions were there in Odisha. From Vedic period to till date local villagers have been participating in the decision making process. In the ancient time Sabhas were the Instrument through which people were directly participating in the affairs of villages. Villages were more or less self reliant units<sup>1</sup>. Mathew summarizes "that the important characteristics of these panchayats were (during ancient period) that they had been the pivot of administration, the centre of social life, an important economic force

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and, above all, a focus of social solidarity” (Mathew, 1994:34).

Odisha enacted first legislation the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act, 1948 for functioning of Gram Panchayat in the State. In the year 1950-1951, 500 Gram Panchayats were set up in different areas of the State. Again in 1959, the Orissa Zilla Parishad and Orissa Panchayat Samiti Act were enacted in order to enhance the strength of Local Self

Government at the district and intermediate level of Odisha. These two milestones introduced the founding stone of three tier Local Self Government in Odisha which. In the year 1961, three-tier system of PRIs was established in the State covering the entire village. In 1969 the Zilla Parishads were abolished. In 1991 The Zilla Parishad Act was enacted in the State to revive the Zilla Parishads which were abolished in 1969

**Table No.-1**

SL.NO.	YEAR	STATUS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS		
		GRAM PANCHAYTS	PANCHAYAT SAMITIS	ZILLA PARISHADS
1	1961	2350	214	13
2	1963	2350	304	13
3	1966-67	3826	307	X
4	1983-84	4391	314	X
5	1991-92	5263	314	13
6	1997-98	5263	314	30
7	2000-02	6234	314	30
8	2002-12	6236	314	30

(The growth chart of Panchayats after 1961.X indicates the abolition of Zilla Parishads)

**Source:** Dept. of Panchayati Raj, Govt. of Odisha.

### **Palli Sabha**

The constitutional provision of the Palli Sabha has been guaranteed by the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act - 1964. The members of the Palli Sabha meet each in the

month of February. All the registered voters reside in the area of Palli Sabha are the members of Palli Sabha. Quorum is the minimum number of members that required remaining present in the meeting of Palli

Sabha, before it can transact any business. It is the one-tenth of the total number of the Palli Sabha members which remains a fundamental necessity to uphold and implement any measures of the administrations; and what also remains highly noteworthy here that among the existing or present members in the Palli Sabha meeting one-tenth member should be women. So all the decisions and policy executions have to be passed through these provisions and the majority of the Palli Sabha members should also try to remain present in its meetings.

Palli Sabha is the lowest tier of Gram Panchayat. This is the only platform by which people can directly participate to control the decision making process. Democratic decision making process needs equal participation of all strata of people whether rich or poor, lower caste or upper caste, male or female etc. This paper will reveal how do each section of people participate in decision making process in Palli Sabha, whether the views of all are respected or not, whether respect is given to women or not etc in Burupada Panchayat of Ganjam district.

**Methodology**

The present paper is based on empirical study conducted in Burupada Panchayat of Ganjam district of Odisha. Random sampling was taken to select respondents. All the categories have been covered in the respondents. 50 respondents have been taken.

**Profile of the Burupada Panchayat**

Burupada Panchayat has 2 villages (Burupada & Podingi) and 8,899 of total population as per 2011 census. As per 2011 census out of 8,899, the Schedule Caste population is 2,134 (23.98%) and Schedule Tribe population is nil and General population is 6,765(76.01%). As per the available data, SC category is the lowest present caste group in comparison to general population at Burupada Panchayat. This detail is as per the data received and is presented in a broader sense. Further in the next paragraph, a detail micrometer data is available followed by data and facts which is collected from the 2 villages (Burupada & Podingi) under Burupada Panchayat of Hinjili block.

**Table no.-2 Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents**

TOTAL	MALE		FEMALE		PANCHAYAT MEMBER	
50	24		22		4	
<b>PERCENTAGE</b>	48.0%		44.0%		8.0%	
	SC	OC	SC	OC	SC	OC
	11	13	12	10	2	2
<b>PERCENTAGE</b>	45.8%	54.2%	54.5%	45.5%	50.0%	50.0%

The entire data as being presented is taken from a total of 50 respondents. Out of which Male count was 24(48.0%), female count

was 22(44.0%) & Panchayat member count was 4(8.0%). Out of the 24 Male respondents Schedule caste count was 11(45.8%) & other caste constitutes of 13

members (54.2%). Further bifurcating the female respondents Schedule caste count was 12(54.5%) & other caste constitutes of 10 members (45.5%). Out of the 4

Panchayat member respondents 2 were Schedule caste count & 2 were into other caste group. Out of 4 members 2 were male members and 2 were female members.

**Table no.-3 Educational qualification of respondent**

Educational qualification		UNDERMATRIC		MATRICULATION		INTERMEDIATE		GRADUATE & ABOVE	
MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMLAE	MALE	FEMALE
26	24	4	6	7	5	9	8	6	5
<b>TOTAL-50</b>		10		12		17		11	
<b>PERCENTAGE</b>		20%		24%		34%		22%	

Bifurcating the Respondents according to their educational qualification, it was found that, out of 50 respondents, under matriculation count was 10 which is 20% of the total Respondent count. Similarly Number of matriculate count was 12, Intermediate count was 17, Graduate and above count was 11 which is 24, 34 and 22% simultaneously of the total respondent count. The survey reveals that all respondents are literate while the number of male literates is more than female literates. The field study reveals, the main cause of

the low percentage of female literacy is that the girls get married in the early age between 17 to 20. The main motive behind the girl's parents are to educate their daughters is to get a good groom. But it is very interesting to reveal that while interacting with them I found that even though they all are literates, most of the female members are unaware about the benefits of Palli Sabha and do not know how to communicate their preferences with the Panchayat members.

**Table no.-4 Employment scenario**

NO OF RESPONDENT	Agriculture & Farming	Small Business	SHG	Daily Wages	Govt. servant	No work	Politics
<b>TOTAL SC RESPONDENT-25</b>	09	05	02	02	03	02	02
<b>TOTAL OC RESPONDENT-25</b>	05	08	01	02	06	01	02
<b>TOTAL-50</b>	14	13	03	04	09	03	04
<b>TOTAL PERCENTAGE</b>	28%	26%	6%	8%	18%	6%	8%

From the field above table shows the respondent according to their Employment status, it was found that Out of 50 respondents, maximum number of people were engaged with agriculture, small business and government services which are

28%, 26%, 18% respectively. The study reveals that only 6% of respondents were not engaged with any work. Almost all respondents are self dependent. They said though they are engaged with works, income is not sufficient for their family.

**Table No.-5 Palli Sabha attendance**

<b>FREQUENCY OF ATTENDANCE</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>NEVER</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>TOTAL SC RESPONDENT-25</b>	08	32%	12	48%	05	20%
<b>TOTAL OC RESPONDENT-25</b>	10	40%	09	36%	06	24%
<b>Total-50</b>	18		21		11	
<b>Total(%)</b>	36%		42%		22%	

From the field above table shows the respondent according to their Employment status, it was found that Out of 50 respondents, 36% of respondents attend the

proceedings of Palli Sabha always and 42% go for the meetings sometimes. 22% respondents said they have never been to Palli Sabha.

**Table No.-6 Number\_of beneficiaries under Palli Sabha**

<b>CATEGORY OF RESPONDENT</b>	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>NEVER</b>
<b>TOTAL NO OF SC-25</b>	NIL	15	10
<b>TOTAL NO OF OC-25</b>	05	16	04
<b>TOTAL-50</b>	05	31	14
<b>TOTAL PERCENTAGE</b>	10%	62%	28%

Further bifurcating the Respondent based on the beneficiary at Palli Sabha, it was found that out of 50 respondents 10% have never

received any benefits from Palli Sabha discussion and it is interesting within 10% there were no SC members. This present study reveals most of the SC are not getting benefits.



**Table No.-7 Factors responsible for non-attendance of respondent**

Factors responsible for nonattendance	Gender	Caste	Class	Health	Poverty	Unwillingness	Corruption	Lack of time	Lack of information
Male respondent-24	01	03	03	01	04	02	06	04	00
Female respondent-22	06	02	01	01	03	02	-	06	01
Members of Panchayat-04	-	-	-	-	-	03	-	01	-
<b>Total</b>	07	05	04	02	07	07	06	11	01
<b>Total Percentage</b>	14%	10%	08%	4%	14%	14%	12%	22%	02%

Now while contrasting towards the non-attendance of 50 people at Palli Sabha, it was found that there were various reasons for non attendance which the respondents highlighted. Bifurcating the reasons non-attendance of respondents were categorized into different segment. According to respondents the main cause behind their non attendance in Palli Sabha is Lack of time

which is 22%. After that gender, poverty, unwillingness are also responsible for non attendance 14%, 14% and 14% respectively. One thing I noticed during my field visit corruption was serious matter for people's indifferent attitude. Of course caste was also a factor for some people generally for SC people.

**Table No. - 8 Consultation to anyone while in decision making**

CATEGORY OF RESPONDENT	YES	NO
TOTAL NO. OF FEMALE-24	20	04
TOTAL NO. OF MALE-26	5	21
TOTAL-50	25	25
TOTAL PERCENTAGE	50%	50%

When the questions were asked about consulting with anyone on decision making matter 50% revealed 50% admitted to have consultation and 50% did not consult anyone in decision making matter. Although percentage of yes and no are same still if we see the table percentage of female members regarding consultation with someone is more than male members. During my field visit I have found women were mere puppets in the hands of their husbands and even the lady Sarapanch was not an exceptional in this case. Without the permission of any elderly male member of their house they were not allowed to interact with me also.

### **Findings**

From the above findings of the study it is found that In Burupada Panchayat other caste people are more dominant in the proceedings of Palli Sabha than SC people. In spite of the aims of 73rd Constitutional Amendment, social justice and economic development in rural Odisha have not been achieved our expectations yet. Despite of exclusive provisions for political empowerment of women, the conditions of women are still underneath. Proxy representation is there and women participation have been influenced by their male family members. It is an idea that education helps people to express their opinions in a reasonable way and to actively participate in the discourse of Palli Sabha but the present study discloses despite of high percentage of literacy rate the people are unaware of their rights, duties, benefits of political deliberation and participation. So here we can say that education would not help anyone until and unless people are conscious about their own capacity and ability. The main objective of democratic decentralization is corruption free

administration which can ensure active participation of rural people in decision making process irrespective of structural inequalities. From the study it is found that the dream will take many more years to become a reality.

### **Recommendations**

1. Steps should be taken to change patriarchy mind set of society to elevate the position of women
2. Political awareness programmes must be taken in Panchayat and block level.
3. Gender sensitization programmes should be held in rural areas.
4. Rules, regulation and provisions of Palli Sabha in particular and Panchayats in general should be taught to rural people.
5. Initiatives should be taken by the government to check corruption so that rural people get the benefits of different public policies.
6. Steps must be taken to motivate people to take part in village affairs

### **Conclusion**

Public deliberation is meant for participation of people in the decision making process through discussion. In spite of various limitations and shortcomings it is true that with the advent of public deliberation the participation of rural people in the decision making process has been increased. Day by day the distance intensity among various caste groups are falling off. 73rd Constitutional Amendment has been an instrument to establish social justice, political equality and economic development in rural India in general and in rural Odisha in particular. The scenario of rural Odisha is changing towards a better future.

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