

JOURNEY FROM SOCIAL WORKER TO A SARPANCH

Name : Smt. Tapeshwari Singh
Age : 38 Years
Education : 10th Class
W/O : Sh. Kundal Singh
Caste Category : Schedule Tribe (ST)
Caste Name : Kanvor

CHHATTISGARH

Chhattisgarh as a state gained its recognition in the year 2000 and carved out from the north eastern part of Madhya Pradesh. Located in the heart of India, it shares its border with Uttar Pradesh to the north, Madhya Pradesh to the west, Maharashtra to the south-west, Jharkhand to the north-east, Orissa to the east, and north-west, and Andhra Pradesh. Chhattisgarh is the 17th most populous state in India with a total population of 25.5 million and extends to an area of 135,198.5 km². Raipur as the district headquarters, Chhattisgarh state consists of 27 districts. There has been a consistent rise in the state's economy due to growth in agriculture

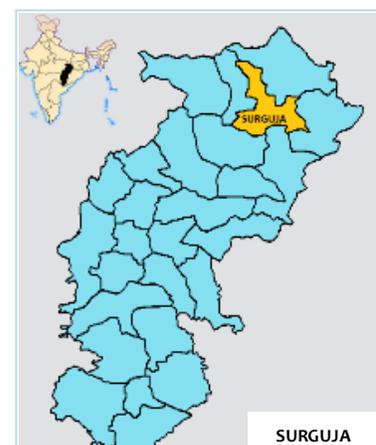
SURGUJA DISTRICT

Surguja District is located in the northern part of the Chhattisgarh state and headquarter is Ambikapur. As per 2011 census, the district constitutes a total population of 2,361,329 with a density of 150 inhabitants per square kilometer. (<https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/chhattisgarh.html>). It has a sex ratio of 976 females per 100 males and the literacy rates at 61.16%. The Schedule Caste constitutes for 4.9% while Scheduled Tribes form 55.1% of the total population in Surguja. Coming to the

and industrial production. It is richly endowed with natural resources like minerals and forests. Some important minerals found are bauxite, dolomite, tin, lime, granite, gold, diamond, iron-ore, coal etc. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes together form 50% of the states total population and one of the states recognized under Schedule V of the Constitution due to higher proportion of Scheduled Tribes in the demography accounting for about 10% of the STs in India. The Scheduled Castes form 11.6% of the total population.

(<https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/chhattisgarh.html>)

livelihood component, 53.9 % of the workers are engaged in employment or earning for six months whereas 46.1% of the workforce is involved in marginal work. The main occupation is



agriculture whereby of 1,155,807 workers engaged in Main Work, 316,824 were cultivators (owner or co-owner) while 168,037 were Agricultural labourer.

(<http://www.censusindia.co.in/district/surguja-district-chhattisgarh-401>).

A majority of the tribal population are illiterate and poor. Their source of livelihood is limited and dependent upon forests and agriculture. They have small landholdings and most of the people work as daily labor or migrate to other

states for work. Small and kachha houses are dominant in the village arenas and in poor conditions. Tribal community is still dependent upon moneylenders for meeting any exigencies and social liabilities (Kispotta, 2014). The asset formation confines to limited and the basic infrastructure facilities do not meet the standards. During rainy season the connectivity and transport system becomes poor in the rural zones and during summer season, there is a scarcity of drinking water.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE - SURGUJA

| INDICATORS | SURGUJA | CHHATTISGARH | INDIA |
|-------------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|
| POPULATION | 2,359,886 | 25,545,198 | 1,210,854,997 |
| SEX RATIO | 978 | 991 | 940 |
| SC POPULATION | 4.9% | 12.28% | 16.63% |
| ST POPULATION | 55.1% | 30.62% | 8.63% |
| LITERACY RATE (%) | 60.01% | 70.28% | 74.04% |
| MALE | 1,193,129 | 12,832,895 | 623,724,248 |
| FEMALE | 1,166,757 | 12,712,303 | 586,469,174 |

CENSUS 2011

Women in Chhattisgarh state play a major role in the domestic household as well as livelihood systems. They form the major agricultural workers and work in each and every aspects of crop production, preservation and storage. Apart from crop weeding and manuring, they also take care of post-harvest and storage operations. In urban Chhattisgarh they can be seen as mine workers in open cast dolomite,

iron ore and bauxite mines. But the situation becomes more complex when it comes to their presence in the social and political arena. Male authority and dominance are quite common in social and cultural space. They lack political representation in traditional social decision making structures and not sufficiently integrated in decision making mechanism at the community level.

PANCHAYAT SYSTEM

The year 1992 passed a new amendment in the Indian Constitution whereby 73rd amendment gave a constitutional mandate for democratically elected Panchayats at the Village, district and intermediate levels in the whole country with provisions for (a) regular elections, powers, resources, (b) for representation of hitherto socially and politically marginalized sections of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women. This led to the evolution of a third tier of constitutionally guaranteed stratum of government. The 73rd amendment has mandated representation of at least one-third women through election instead of the earlier taken one or two women nominated by government or co-opted by the pre-dominantly influential, powerful male membership/ leadership of the panchayats. The reservation tends to at least one-third membership and chairpersons positions in Panchayats at all the three levels. Further the reservation stands at not only in the total membership but also within those reserved for the SC/ST thus providing for women's reservation across castes and class. Thus all Panchayats at every level will have at least one-third women members and at least

one-third of the Panchayats at each level-district to village will be headed by women chairpersons. (Buch, 2000)

This mandated legislation has thus legitimated the entry of women in a critical mass in mainstream politics at the grassroots level in the whole country and has created political space for women across caste and class. Their representation in the political structure has fostered power in people for use in their own lives, their own communities and in their own society. This is nothing but empowerment through participation in decision making. Through this legislation women will acquire due recognition on par with men to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity. According to the Document on Women's Development (1985) women's role in the political process has virtually remain unchanged since independence. This led to their life left on the periphery of political life. With the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act it provides an opportunity for the women to ventilate their grievances and to take active part in in decision making process at the local level.

PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM IN INDIA

Panchayati Raj System in India was accorded constitutional status through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) 1992 which mandates for setting up the system as follows

1. Establishment of a three-tier structure (village Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti or intermediate level Panchayat and ZilaParishad or district level Panchayat).

2. Establishment of Gram Sabha (village assembly) at the village level consisting of all adult members of the village as appears in the electoral rolls.
3. Regular elections to Panchayats every five years.
4. Proportionate seat reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) / Scheduled Tribes (STs).

5. Reservation of not less than 1/3 seats for women.
6. Constitution of State Finance Commissions to recommend measures to improve the finances of Panchayats.
7. Constitution of State Election Commission (SEC).

The 1992 Constitutional amendment seeks to give panchayats a new meaning and a fresh lease of life. The basic features of the amendment are as follows:

- A. Article 243G defines panchayats as institutions of self-government meaning that they have the autonomy and power to govern in an exclusive area of jurisdiction.
- B. The amendment defines the role of panchayats as instruments of economic development and social justice. Incidentally, earlier there was confusion about the role of panchayats. Thus this clarification through constitutional amendment is significant.
- C. The amendment requires States to hold panchayat elections through the State Election Commission at regular intervals of five years. If a State Government dissolves a panchayat before the expiry of its full term, it is mandatory on the part of the State Government concerned, to hold election

within six months from the date of dissolution.

- D. The Act provides for the reservation of one-third seats and posts of chairpersons for women and weaker sections, i.e., Scheduled Caste (SC) Scheduled Tribe (ST).
- E. According to the provisions of the Constitutional amendment the State Government shall constitute State Finance Commission, which will review the financial position and recommend the principles for fund devolution on PRIs and the distribution of funds between the State Government and the PRIs. (Datta, 2009)

The Act also envisages empowered Panchayats as institutions of self-government at the village level who would be capable of

- Planning and executing village level public works and their maintenance.
- Ensuring welfare of the people at the village level including health, education, communal harmony, social justice particularly towards eradication of gender and caste-based discrimination, dispute resolution, welfare of children especially of girl children.
- The Constitution envisages the Gram Sabhas (GS) as the Parliament of the people at the grass-root level to which the Gram Panchayats (GP) are solely accountable.

BASIC STATISTICS CONCERNING PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM IN CHHATTISGARH

After the formation of Chhattisgarh the first elections to the three levels of Panchayats were held in January 2005. The nomenclatures used for the three levels of Panchayats in Chhattisgarh under the Panchayat Raj Adhiniyam 1993 are as follows:

NAME & LEVEL OF THREE TIER PANCHAYAT SYSTEM

| LEVEL OF PANCHAYAT | NAME USED |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| DISTRICT PANCHAYAT | ZILLA PANCHAYAT |

| | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| INTERMEDIATE PANCHAYAT | JANPAD PANCHAYAT |
| VILLAGE PANCHAYAT | GRAM PANCHAYAT |

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PANCHAYAT REPRESENTATIVES AT EACH LEVEL

| LEVEL OF PANCHAYAT | NUMBER |
|--------------------|--------|
| ZILLA PANCHAYAT | 16 |
| JANPAD PANCHAYAT | 146 |
| GRAM PANCHAYAT | 9139 |
| TOTAL | 9301 |

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GRAM PANCHAYAT

Gram Panchayat is responsible for effective implementation and care for the following basic amenities like

1. Drinking Water
2. Roads
3. Bridges & culverts
4. Maintenance of Community Assets
5. Fairs & festivals
6. Health & cleanliness
7. Public Distribution System
8. Social Welfare

Following table shows the statistical representation of representatives from all the categories in the year 2006-07 at the Gram Panchayat level

GRAM PANCHAYAT

| | NUMBER OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| | GENERAL | SC | ST | TOTAL | WOMEN |
| TOTAL NUMBER OF WARD MEMBERS | 71010 | 16336 | 60084 | 147430 | 49763 |
| TOTAL NO. OF SARPANCHAS | 3488 | 864 | 5468 | 9820 | 3382 |
| GRAND TOTAL OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES | 74498 | 17200 | 65552 | 157250 | 53045 |
| PERCENTAGE | 47.4 | 10.9 | 41.7 | 100 | 33.7 |

STATISTICAL DATA OF GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH 2006-07

JANPAD PANCHAYAT

Janpad Panchayat needs to carry out their activities from the funds available in Janpat Panchayat Fund under Section 50. Their important functions comprises for:

1. Agriculture
2. Social Forestry
3. Animal Husbandry
4. Fisheries
5. Public Health
6. Adult Education
7. Communication
8. Cottage Industries
9. Women & Child Development
10. Social Welfare
11. Family Welfare
12. Fairs & Festivals

The table below represents the number of elected ward representatives at the Janpad Panchayat level for the year 2006-2007.

JANPAD PANCHAYAT

| | NUMBER OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | GENERAL | SC | ST | TOTAL | WOMEN |
| TOTAL NUMBER OF Elected WARD MEMBERS | 1362 | 305 | 1164 | 2831 | 954 |
| PERCENTAGE | 48.1 | 10.8 | 41.1 | 100 | 33.7 |

STATISTICAL DATA OF GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH 2006-07

ZILLA PANCHAYAT

Under Section 52, the function of the Zilla Panchayat comprises consolidation of Panchayat plans and preparation of plans for the socio-economic development and social justice for the districts. It enclaves coordination and monitoring of the Gram Panchayat and Janpad Panchayat and implementing schemes allocated by the Centre or the State Government at the block and village level. Section 53 also provides that the State Government can increase or rescind any of the powers allocated to the Panchayat. Following table represents the number of elected ward representatives at the Zilla Panchayat level for the year 2006-07

ZILLA PANCHAYAT

| | NUMBER OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | GENERAL | SC | ST | TOTAL | WOMEN |
| TOTAL NUMBER OF Elected WARD MEMBERS | 153 | 35 | 117 | 305 | 954 |
| PERCENTAGE | 48.1 | 10.8 | 41.1 | 100 | 33.7 |

STATISTICAL DATA OF GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH 2006-07

Separate Budget heads are created for each level of Panchayat towards allocation of funds as per their functions and level of involvement. Funds are transmitted through state government treasury to Zilla panchayat, which then allocates funds to the other levels of Panchayat. Sections 74, 75, 76, 77 and 80 also provides for imposition of taxes and fees by the Panchayat for the work involving construction of roads and bridges etc.

FAMILY BACKGROUND of SMT. TAPESWARI SINGH

Smt. Tapeswari Singh comes from a very poor family and a tribal. With 6 members in her family she has to take care of her mother-in-law along with husband and three sons. All her sons are studying in Bilaspur city. Agriculture being the main source of livelihood for her family, Tapeswari also needs to help her husband in agricultural field work. With a meagre land holding and absence of proper irrigation facilities in the field, it is very difficult to continue farming all throughout the year and thus the agricultural earnings are not susceptible

to manage the family expenses. So her husband has to work outside as agri-labour to earn an additional income.

Tapeswari has been very strong mentally since her childhood days. Despite a number of constraints and scarcity of money, she was able to complete her matriculation since she holds the belief that education constitutes an important part in a human beings life. For this reason she did sent all her sons to Bilaspur city for a good educational upbringing.

CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES ADOPTED

Working as a part time social worker Smt. Tapeswari Singh holds all the knowledge and a passion to do something for the society. Despite a number of constraints she is always available for the people who come in large numbers with their problems. She always aspires for a society with fewer disputes and wishes the disputes could be settled by mutual consent. There was a disparity in context to the government scheme benefits towards the weaker sections of the society like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna not being allocated to the ST/SC people, no toilets being constructed for them. Smt. Tapeswari aspired to fight for the weaker sections of the society and make them access to the government benefits allocated for them. She felt that there is lack of knowledge among the

village women of their rights and mostly men occupy the decision making roles and follow traditional male thought patterns that relegate women to a secondary status and give them little say in decision making process. There is a need to imbibe leadership skills and capacities among women which would enable and empower them to combat the violence against themselves. The gender equality being poor in her village sought reconstruction of the patriarchal and country's archaic system through altering and influencing the opinions of the people. Under the leadership of male Sarpanch she was fully aware of the corruption and favoritism that used to prevail. The panchayat system used to work inefficiently and women's voice were not heard. With a formidable

patience and relentless passion she was determined to change the socio-economic profile of her village. Aware of the women's pathetic condition in her village she was waiting for an opportunity whereby she could make a considerable change in breaking down the barriers of women's low levels of mobility, seclusion, gender division of labor etc. In the year 2010 she filed her nomination to contest Panchayat elections. Smt. Tapeswari Singh was fully capable of augmenting the resources and their priorities in utilizing them once she becomes a Sarpanch.

Keeping the focal point of becoming a Sarpanch, she mobilized women's group and started training them on women's rights by collating her experiences and knowledge followed by open discussion forums. Her discussions and trainings covered subjects on the women's rights and the legal mechanism available for providing justice to victims. She trained important members of the groups who then became an integral members disseminating similar knowledge to all other members. Her case studies and issues were kept specific to the region and to the capacity of the group. Male members constituting an integral part of the society were her second target. She was continuously involved in building male partnerships and changing the community opinions through open discussions and presenting at various conferences. She formed rural youth associations to sensitize rural women and men and encouraged them to be active in her mission towards women's rights against violence. Mass mobilization and support from men at all levels brought her to the forefront strengthening her will to win the Panchayat elections

Despite her lack of political experience and influence she was determined to succeed. In this

regard she started approaching the women networks and other forums. Her supporters also helped in campaigning for her by taking her agenda to villages. One of the important steps was assisting women who were victims of the domestic violence, social intolerance and economic injustice who acted as mere pressure groups and lobbied with relevant administrative bodies, legal, social and political institutions to earn Tapeswari Singh the name and fame required to win the election.

She also faced a circumstance where how men do not really want women to come up in the politics since it would divide their political share and power which they holds exclusively and individually. These men set different norms for women's public contacts with other men and for their own interaction. This was not only at the village level but also visible in the block level with comparatively more educated and economically better off representatives. At the village level and among the economically, socially, educationally weaker sections of the society the trend for her was sharing and supportive substantiating that "women in lower strata exercise more rights than their men grant them ideologically, and men of the educated strata concede their women ideologically more rights than the latter can actually exercise". Her campaign was also active in addressing the issues of poverty reduction and access to information which was instrumental in identifying and solving the problems of Below Poverty Line demography.

Finally she won the election and aftermath she had been elected consecutive twice as Sarpanch. Now she is serving the Panchayat as Sarpanch for the second time.

Achievements

Once gaining the leadership of Sarpanch her first motive was the representation of women in the Gram Panchayat meetings. So she ensured that the women representatives at the meeting was 100% including the weaker sections of the society. To give wings to her dreams of the socio-economic development of the village, she put forward the initiatives like improvisation of basic amenities like health, sanitation, social security, education and rural infrastructure like rural housing, transportation systems etc. At the Panchayat meetings among all the members present the financial and strategical planning were undertaken towards building of roads and bridge towards connectivity of the village. To ensure adequate funding she approached the Block level administrators and Collector of the district towards its fulfillment. She was not a women to play a secondary role in the governance structure and the society and surrender to the injunctions of the male Panchayat leaders. She refused to accept the infringement of her rights to act as a secondary member in the Panchayat system. Once the road and bridge construction were accomplished, Smt. Tapeswari was aware of the government schemes benefits not reaching to the needy. She used the platform of Gram Panchayat meetings to address the issue of providing shelters to the weaker sections of her village under the Pradhan Mantri Gram AwaasYojna. Her leadership and indomitable will was helpful in construction of 60 houses under the above government scheme. Her village was suffering from contagious diseases affecting the children also. During the rainy season the condition went worse. She and her team carried out a survey on sanitational measures in the village. On analyzing the results she found that village people were unaware of the proper sanitational

measures to be adopted like washing of hands before eating, defecating in the open, non-usage of mosquito nets etc. on analyzing the results she initiated building of individual toilets and community toilets in the village. Under her leadership, 172 individual toilets were constructed. Her next target was the efficient implementation of Public Distribution Scheme and Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The village was allocated into a number of zones and simultaneously individual teams were assigned to effectively implement the PDS so that it reaches to the required demography on time. All the government schools were allocated sufficient funds to ensure every child have the access to Mid-Day Meals with required amount of nutrition. Under her leadership family disputes and conflicts, land disputes, land distribution, employment and assistance about basic needs were kept at the forefront of Panchayat meeting and healthily resolved. Women cited modes of assistance in filling forms, forwarding applications, submitting memoranda negotiations with government and other officials, reporting to police, increasing the budget etc. It was under her leadership that additional resources were generated through livelihoods, sanitational measures, employment generation etc.

Major Highlights of her good work

- It was under her leadership that weaker sections were able to reap benefits through division of Panchayats. Specific Panchayat representatives were located to take care of the benefits and rights of the ST/SC demography.
- Village Tunga underwent a considerable change when she opened FPS in the village.

- Public Distribution Scheme was successfully operated and with integrity under her guidance and headship. All the villagers could benefit of the honest implementation of the PDS by Smt. Tapeswari Singh. She successfully operate the PDS in her Panchayat
- Village Tunga was in dire need of a bridge since during the rainy season people had to face a lot of difficulties in networking to other places. It was Tapeswari who negotiated with the Government officials and other agencies to build up a connecting bridge. Building was constructed for Panchyat Office
- The sanitational measures being poor, village was reeling under many diseases which played havoc during the rainy season. People used to defecate in the open. There was no awareness about the sanitation benefits among the people. She undertook the initiative in building individual toilets and community toilets in the villages which could be accessible by all. In all 172 Toilets were constructed for the weaker sections of the people.
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Public Distribution Scheme wasn't operating at the required efficiency. There was lack of planning, strategizing the scheme and implementing it at the grassroot level. To address such issue 8 community based groups were formed and these groups were to operationalize the schemes. This not only sufficed the system to run smoothly but also generated employment for the unemployed and unskilled youths involved.
- Even if Government has planned various benefiting schemes for the poor and weaker sections of the society but the benefits were left at the structural level itself. It wasn't able to reach to the needy. Smt. Tapeswari Singh ensured the governmental benefits to reach to the required masses and similarly ParadhanMantriAwaasYojna was one such example. This yojna brought more than 50 households under the umbrella where 60 houses were constructed as per the policies and guidelines.
- Earlier Gram Sabha Meetings used to be held with no prior information to the villages and usually dominated by the male patriarchal system of governance. No women members were present at the meeting and their voice wasn't heard. Similarly their hope and aspirations were shattered in the meetings. After Smt. Tapeswari Singh came into power as Sarpanch she ensured that Gram Sabha Meetings are held at regular intervals with full attendance of the members. Women's problems and struggles were discussed in the meeting and accordingly efforts were made to resolve their issues with minimal time frame.

LESSONS LEARNT

When she first took the office she had a very low knowledge regarding her job responsibility as a Sarpanch. But after five years in office, she speaks and reasons for why she shouldn't be elected for a second term. Smt.

Tapeswari exploded a number of myths related to women's participation in Political structures like their disinterest in politics, passivity, non-participation in local political institutions, proxyism by their male heads and supporting

only to the well-off sections if entering Panchayats. There lies a myth that only the well to do upper strata women will come through reservations, only the powerful politicians enter the institutions to reserve the seats for them. Women who have entered the panchayats are only proxy and namesake members. They do not participate in the panchayats. Defying all the odds Smt. Singhis a representative of reservations, specific powers & responsibilities, regular Panchayat Meetings, taking care of the attendance of representatives at the meetings, attendance of women representatives,

augmenting the resources of Panchayats, raising additional resources and deliverance of all the developmental schemes.

Most of the community members do have a positive opinion about Smt. Tapeswari and hope that under her leadership corruption and favoritism will be reduced. Some of course have negative opinion that she is incapable, non-cooperative, do not seek cooperation of higher level politicians and development functionaries, do not get any cooperation of other members, and they are illiterate, etc.

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